

**Special One Hundredth Edition**

# *Our Living Foundation*

[Http://www.livingfoundation.proboards.com](http://www.livingfoundation.proboards.com)

*This special one-hundredth edition begins a new approach, a new look, and a new editor, Robin Morgan.*

### **Lately, the word religion has taken a beating.**

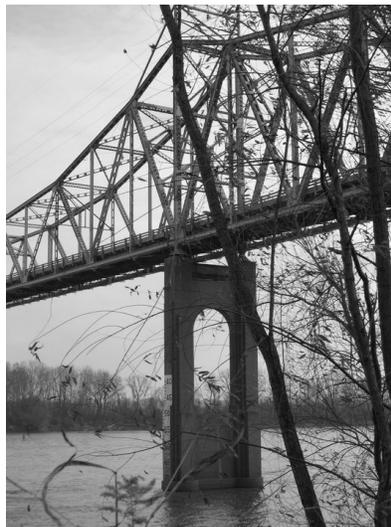
The word is tied to devastating memories for many: being publicly excluded for being divorced or for being a woman with a call to leadership, being sexually abused by clergy. The word religion is also tightly wound in the snarl of public debates that tip easily and quickly into violence: gay rights, abortion, the so-called clash of civilizations between the West and Islam.

For these and other reasons, many people have abandoned the word religion and its “equally evil” twin, theology. These words have been swept aside in the rush to distance ourselves from anything that might exacerbate the pain caused by the actions of many religionists. This reaction is understandable, these words can be dangerous and powerful. Nonetheless, the issues and the search for meaning that used to be wrapped in those words still provoke us. The thoughts and feelings about the meaning of our lives that niggle in the back of our minds and hearts as we wait in traffic won’t go away.

So we’ve shifted our need to understand life to another word -- spirituality. Unlike theology, which means study of God, spirituality revolves around our personal experiences of the divine. Spirituality is a softer word,

a word we can better control. Using the word spirituality as our lodestar creates a kaleidoscope of ideas that never clash because each of us has our own. We turn the kaleidoscope one way, then another, creating a spiritual image with bits and pieces from a whole range of religious thoughts and practices around the world. No one can challenge us because our spirituality is unique.

Yet something is missing. Though our attempts to connect with the deeper realities of life through such spiritualities are sincere, what are the foundations that support our beliefs and actions? When the wind shifts, when a crack in the kaleidoscope allows bits of ideas to spill out on the floor and break, how will our spirituality carry us through hard times? How will it provide the glue that holds our lives together?



Those of us who have been part of the Crossings Community for some time are convinced that the theology we’ve been taught provides a living foundation for us. These foundational beliefs don’t substitute for our experiences, but rather these foundational beliefs, our study of God, supports and clarifies

those experiences. This theological foundation doesn’t automatically eliminate all the components of the spiritualities people are exploring today. Instead, this foundation provides clarity and structure that distinguishes beliefs and practices that are genuinely life-giving and divinely connected from those that are not.

Number 100 from The Crossings Community

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First, this foundation is grounded in our individual relationship with the Creator of the Universe through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit -- a unique relationship that touches and sustains the depths of our being. Second, we are connected to each other and the rest of the world in love, manifest through our actions on behalf of the good of all creation. These are bold claims we are willing to make because of the God-given strength and power we've experienced in a myriad of life situations.

I think of this living foundation in my life like the pilings that hold up a bridge. Much of the time I'm unaware of the steel and concrete that support the roadbed on which I travel day after day. I take them for granted. However, no matter how well maintained the roadbed may be -- how new the asphalt, how perfectly lined the lanes -- if the pilings aren't solid, the bridge isn't trustworthy.

Yet the pilings don't easily attract our attention. They're not sexy, they don't make for a catchy sound byte or elevator speech. They take time to build and the people waiting impatiently to get across the river often feel like nothing is happening as the foundations are being laid. Even so, a roadbed without the pilings isn't a bridge, it's a death sentence.

This newsletter is one way to take some time to look at your foundations. We offer a way to look at the Bible and life through the lens of law and promise theology, what we've learned to be the two pilings of our foundation. These two aspects of our foundation are then broken down into the six steps of the Crossings method to help us see where the cracks in our roadbed might be and help us realign our lives inside our relationship with God, with one another, with ourselves.

Of course, as anyone who has lived more than a few minutes knows, no life follows a convenient linear progression from step one through step six. Situations in my life tend to look more like the tangle of cords behind my TV, DVD, Wii and cable box. As well thought out and organized as the six steps of the Crossings method are, to apply the depth of understandings this theological foundation can offer us, we need help.

We need others who are walking the same journey, though a few steps ahead.

I didn't grow up in a world that recognized the significance of theological foundations. So when I first came across this way of looking at life as an adult, I knew, on a gut level, it had something I wanted, but I also knew that I had no clue, initially, what was going on.

It took time -- time for study, time for experience -- to understand the significance of having a foundation that stays put even when everything around me is spinning in chaos.

Now, over twenty years later, looking back on the process the Lord has used to shape my world around theology of the cross embedded in law and promise

theology, I see how important it has been to have individuals who were willing to walk next to me as my vision cleared and I began to see that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the center of the universe, not me. We need each other as companions on the journey -- sometimes as teachers, often as listeners, always as fellow travelers looking for meaning and trying to make sense of the craziness around us.

Starting with this 100th issue of the Crossings newsletter I'd like to propose a way for us to relate not only our experiences, but our thoughts as well. I'd like to have a conversation with you about this living foundation we have in Crossings.

**This newsletter is one way to take some time to look at your foundations.**

To do this, I need to hear your stories. What part of the tangle of your life could use a bit of clarity, could use some help in figuring out what's life-giving and divinely connected? Is there some particular event or circumstance in your life that you'd like to "cross" with a biblical text? Are there aspects of your spirituality that are so clear when you're alone, but don't seem to "translate" into the struggles of your day-to-day life? Whether you want your name and picture included with your story or you want to remain anonymous is completely up to you. Either way, I'd like to share my stories and hear yours. God willing, we'll find our foundations strengthened, we'll find some clarity about our relationships with God, with each other, with ourselves.



Another part of the way we'll explore together is by looking at the context of the biblical stories. Context questions from this time of year might be: what was the sociopolitical climate of the Christmas story? What would've been the physical realities of riding a donkey to Bethlehem 2,000 years ago while you're nine months pregnant? Were they really in a manger? Who were the wise men? Why was Christmas moved to December? Many knowledgeable and experienced folks are part of the Crossings community and they will be happy to help us out if we end up down a blind alley. Or maybe we'll just sit and pray in the alley for a while. Not all questions have ready answers.

My email address is robinjmorgan@hotmail.com. We have a forum specifically set aside for these explorations at livingfoundation.proboards.com. Please join the conversation. My guiding principle for these discussions is a quote from the writer, George Eliot:

*Oh the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person: having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but to pour them all out, just as they are chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping and then with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away.*

With the rest of this newsletter I'm going to set the stage for our conversations. First, I'll "ground" a biblical story in the Crossings method, adding some historical context. Then I'll "cross" an experience from my own life with the story and see what happens. I've picked a biblical story that's used as part of worship services at this time of year. It's got potential for questions like -- Does God still talk to people today the way God supposedly did 2,000 years ago? or Why do bad things happen to innocent people? Not sound bite questions, neither easily nor quickly answerable questions, but questions that can help us probe our foundations.

*Matthew 2: 13-23*

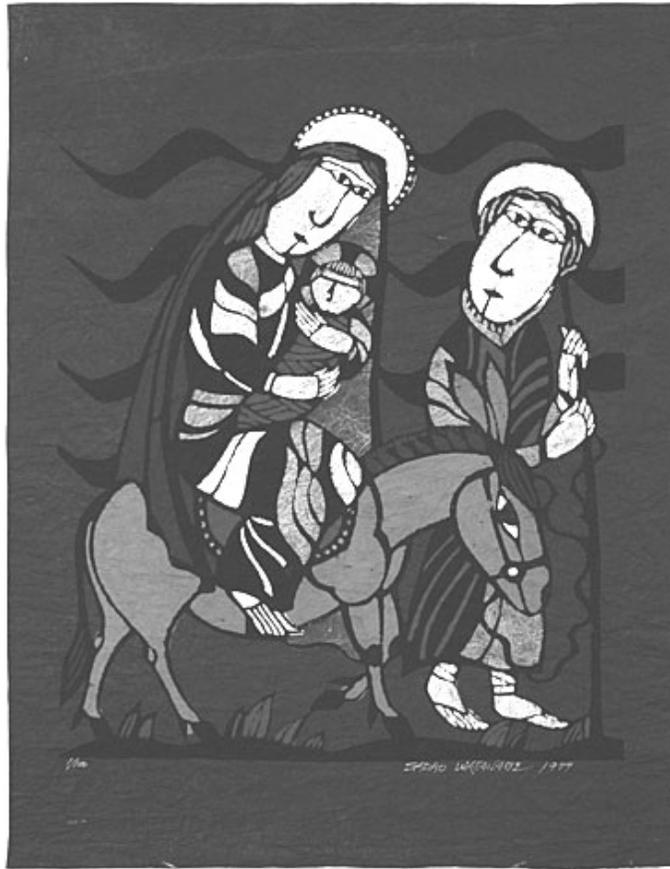
*Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'*

*When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:*

*A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'*

*When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his*

*father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean.'*



*The Flight into Egypt  
Sadao Watanabe*

## Background of the Text

I want to start with two ideas that will be helpful regardless of the biblical story we look at. First, remember that we're walking into the middle of a long, passionate conversation about a library of books written over thousands of years. Don't let yourself be overwhelmed by the enormity of trying to understand it all. We just jump in where we are and begin with what's in front of us.

**Ultimately, this whole enterprise is about being in relationship with God and being part of what God is doing in the world.**

One way to get our toes wet is by sitting with the text and listening to it. Ask God to open the text for you. Read it a time or two, maybe even out loud. Notice what word or phrase from the text jumps out at you as you read. If you're alone, sit for a few moments and think about the significance of the phrase that struck your imagination or what questions it raises for you. If you're in a group, share with each other what you heard, what thoughts and feelings it raises. Some people call this process Dwelling in the Word or African Bible Study. Its ancient name is *Lectio Divina*.

The second idea becomes apparent as we do the first. Interacting with the Bible isn't ultimately about finding what we need to fix our problem *du jour*. Yes, many of us start there, but to stop there is to lose out on the possibilities that God has prepared for us. Though the Crossings method uses the language of medical analysis -- diagnosis and prognosis -- a prescription for what ails us is only the beginning.

Ultimately, this whole enterprise is about being in relationship with God and being part of what God is doing in the world. When we work on the biblical text, the biblical text is also working on us. God's living word is moving in our lives not only to strengthen us, but also to challenge and energize us to be part of God's action in the world. This is a relationship and relationships have interactions that go both ways. Both partners listen, both partners speak, both partners act. It's no different with God.

Once we've given ourselves time to "steep" in the text, we move on to look at the story from other vantage

points. Some context questions may have arisen as we looked at the text. Who was Herod and why did he have the power to kill small children? What had gone on before that Herod realized he'd been tricked by the wise men? Herod (also Herod the Great) was the "client king" [CK] of Israel on behalf of the Roman Empire. A CK was a native ruler from one of the eastern provinces who reigned only at Rome's behest. He was dependent on Rome and thus served Rome's interests, but also understood the people and culture of the region. With a CK, the Romans didn't have to deal with the day-to-day in these outer provinces, as long as the CK kept the people in check and the tax money flowing. Herod was made "King of the Jews" by the Roman senate in 40 BCE.

As leader of Israel, he entertained the Magi (the wise men) when they came from the East following a star to the birthplace of the new King of the Jews. Herod listened to their story and told them to stop by on their way home to let him know where the new king lived, so he could also go and worship him. However, in a dream, the wise men were told to go home by another route and so ignored Herod's request/demand, leaving the area after seeing Jesus without returning to Herod.

**When we work on the biblical text, the biblical text is also working on us.**

Hearing that another King of the Jews had just been born, no doubt made Herod nervous and the fact that the Magi didn't come back and tell him what was going on infuriated him. Could a king foretold in the stars take precedence over a king made by Rome? Considering Rome's military might, one wouldn't think so, but Herod was taking no chances. He was a man jealous of his position, even to the point of having a large portion of his family killed to eliminate possible usurpers to his throne. Though there is no extra-biblical corroboration about the slaughter of the infants in Matthew 2, it's far from inconceivable that he demanded it be done. Killing some children in an obscure village would have been well within the realm of possibility for Herod.

So, here we have Joseph, on one hand, believing a dream as God's will for his family and their safety. He gets up in the middle of the night to move to a

new country -- all because of this dream. On the other hand, we have Herod, definitely a villain by anybody's definition -- a murderer of his own family and the infants of Bethlehem. Using the Crossings method, these are the D-1: Initial Diagnosis options in the text.

I have a hard time seeing how this has much to do with my life. After all, I'm not a murderer, but neither am I somebody who is willing to move to a new country on the strength of a dream. Is that what God expects of me? Because I'm having a hard time figuring this out just by looking at the surface of this text, I sit with it a bit, let my mind drift. I remember what colleagues, friends and scholars have talked about when we had a text like this. One particular idea that rises to the top is that Matthew, in general, talks about authority. Who's in charge -- who calls the shots?

Now we're getting closer to my life. Joseph heard God's voice in his dream and acted on what he heard for the benefit of his family. Herod, obviously, knew he had power, courtesy of Rome, and he used that power to further his career. He would have known the

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Herod believed in the power of Rome, more than he believed in the power of God.

Oh dear, now we're getting almost too close to my life and we've also moved on to D-2: Advanced Diagnosis. We've moved from actions to the heart. Why we do what we do? I'm not a murderer, but there are certainly times when I choose to believe other than God's power in my life. I want to get ahead and I'm not averse to using what worldly power I have to get what I want, irrespective of what God may be telling me. Keeping busy and putting a pious face on my will is my usual M.O.

The next two steps, D-3: Final Diagnosis and P-1: Initial Prognosis, are where the crunch comes and make this whole process difficult for us, but also are where God's power can transform our lives. You may have noticed that all the sentences in the first two steps had human subjects -- I want, Herod knew he had power

from Rome, I choose. God was, at best, the object of the sentence.

In the next two steps the tables turn, and God becomes the subject of the sentence. Remember, we're talking relationship here -- both partners talk, both partners listen, both partners act. God's not thrilled when we walk away from the relationship. We may slam the door in God's face, but then we hear the lock click on the other side. God put us into God's creation, gave us each other and this amazing habitat.

**As tough as D-3 is to hear about, we understand being judged.**

I don't think it's too much of a stretch to say we've made quite a mess of what we've been given. Even our best efforts to fix things end up with halfhearted results and hardhearted consequences. A roadbed without pilings isn't a bridge, it's a death sentence.

As tough as D-3 is to hear about, we understand being judged. It happens to us every day. No matter what we do or don't do -- grades, employee evaluations, speeding tickets, overdrawn bank accounts -- it all reminds us that we are being held in the balance and found wanting. Unfortunately, it's at this point that many people walk away from a relationship with God. "I get enough of this crap all day, the last thing I need is some judge in the sky ready to whack me with a baseball bat if I turn the wrong way." However, if you've looked ahead at the rest of the Crossings method, you see we're only halfway through the story.

P-1 is the step that will take us all eternity to embrace and enjoy. This God who finds us wanting is also the God who wants to be in relationship with us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to be our Living Foundation. Jesus did for us what we can't do for ourselves, he is our bridge into the Father's heart. This step, this reality, is God's action for us, to reach across the chasm of our brokenness and draw us back to God's self. God through Jesus Christ is the Subject, we are the objects of God's love.

Will I trust what God has done for me through Jesus? This is the question at the heart of P-2: Advanced

*Printing and mailing this quarterly is paid for by your gifts, thank you. If you are a reader but not yet a giver, we can wait. When you are ready to be both, we won't object.*

Prognosis. This God-devised reality is so far outside the cost/benefit/ROI world we live in that the first few steps into trust can feel like walking off the bluff above the river without being able to see the bridge. Writing this newsletter has taken me much longer than I anticipated because it feels just this way -- taking steps out onto an invisible bridge. My trust is manifesting in action P-3: Final Prognosis, but not nearly as quickly as I'd originally planned.

Babysteps of trust have been the best I could do on most days because I'm doing something slightly different from previous editors -- I'm taking a risk based on my trust in Jesus to carry me through. Whether this new way of doing the newsletter works or doesn't, my bridge into the Father's heart is based on what Jesus did, not what I do or don't do.

Well, we jumped in and began with what was in front of us. If this way of looking at life appeals to you, I again invite you to join the conversation. robinjmorgan@hotmail.com or livingfoundation.proboards.com. Hope to hear from you soon.

Robin Morgan



# How is Jesus Good for You, Really?

## A Crossings "Cross-Training" Seminar

Jerome Burce, Edward Schroeder, Steven Kuhl, Ronald Neustadt, Marcus Felde, Steven Albertin & members of the Crossings writing team

January 23-25, 2011  
Belleville, Illinois  
(across river from St. Louis)

Tuition: \$150 (includes food and lodging)  
**Free for Seminary Students!**

Register: [www.crossings.org/conference/](http://www.crossings.org/conference/)  
Or call: 314-576-7357  
Or use enclosed donor envelope to send check

### Seminar Schedule

#### Sunday, Jan. 23

6:00 PM

Dinner

7:00 PM

**Introductory Address:** *Jerome Burce* Setting the Foundation: How Distinguishing God's Law and God's Gospel brings Jesus' Full Benefits to Bear on Real Lives in the Real World

#### Monday, Jan. 24

8:30 AM

Morning Prayer

9:00

**The Word Then (Grounding):** Using the Crossings 6-step method to reach a thorough hearing of a scriptural text. Spotlight: Matthew 4:18-23 *Steven Kuhl and Sabbathology tutors*

12:00

Lunch

1:30

**The World Now (Tracking):** Identifying how issues surfaced in the text make their appearance in the world today *Ronald Neustadt, Edward Schroeder and Sabbathology tutors*

4:00 – 5:30

**The Word for our World (Crossing):** Identifying how Jesus' benefits for people in the text are Jesus' benefits for people today. *Ronald Neustadt, Edward Schroeder and Sabbathology tutors*

6:30

Dinner

8:00

Worship

9:00

Wine and Cheese Reception

#### Tuesday, Jan. 25

8:00

Morning Prayer

8:15

**Crossing the Gospel of Matthew: Crucial Clues for Preachers and Hearers** *Jerome Burce*

9:30

**Crossings in Christian Conversation and Pastoral Practice** *Steven Albertin*

11:00

**The Art of Crossing Short Fiction as a Tool for Effective Bible Study** *Marcus Felde*

12:30

Closing Prayer