

C is for “*Claritas Carnitas.*”

We all need mottos. I settled upon the above motto for myself back in my earnest thirties, as a sort of vision statement. I have never been as clear as I would like to be, or as loving as I ought, but at least I put it out there. I had a motto to live by.

I was influenced in part by a letter to the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, to whose weekly airmail edition Christine and I subscribed while in Papua New Guinea from 1975-1982. (Bishop Stephen Neill kindly put us on to this; he had done so as a missionary in India.)

Let me share verbatim a letter published in the February 14, 1982 edition, entitled by the editor “Making it clear”:

May I add an item of testimony to your statement that my old colleague, Lord Ritchie-Calder’s concern was “to present science to the broad public in language they understood. A few years ago, reviewing for the Christian Science Monitor a book by Jacquetta Hawkes interpreting ancient civilizations, I recalled an occasion when Ritchie-Calder, then a young reporter, interviewed Lord Rutherford on some notable scientific breakthrough he had made. Ritchie, taking a shorthand note, got a little out of his depth. He asked Rutherford if he would explain in simpler language. Rutherford took umbrage, whereupon Ritchie, summoning up his Scottish courage, tossed his notebook over to the great man and asked, “Can you read that?”

Art by
Richard
Caemmerer



“No, of course not,” replied Rutherford rather testily. “Nor can my readers,” said Ritchie. “I have a duty to translate that shorthand into language they can understand—and I suggest, Sir, that if your discovery affects the life of a single human being you have a similar duty to me.”

Rutherford took the point, in fact it seems that it made a deep impression.

After my review appeared from Santa Barbara, there came a letter from Ritchie.

*“How marvelous,” he wrote, “that you remember that business with Rutherford so long ago. But I don’t think you know the end of the story. Some time after it happened Rutherford had to address a group of distinguished physics lecturers and I was flattered to receive from him an advance copy of his text and a letter asking if I thought he’d made his message clear enough. He had, but later I heard that at some point he had departed from the text, and told his audience of scientists, ‘If you can’t explain to the charwoman scrubbing your laboratory floor what you are doing, you don’t **know** what you are doing.’”*

Ronald Harker, Grassington, North Yorkshire.

The clipping is pinned to the wall of my study. I am often chastened by its message. Does the message of the Gospel “affect the life of a single human being”? If I can’t make it clear to my congregation, do I even know what I am saying?

R is for Reductionism.

Ed Schroeder was reproached, back in my seminary days, for promoting a species of “Law-Gospel Reductionism.” He defended himself by taking apart the word “reductionism” to say yes, he was trying to “lead” people “back” to the Gospel. From where they had strayed, to the detriment of the church’s life in every respect.

Mottos “reduce.” Slogans, even the “law-gospel distinction” slogan, reduce. One hopes that when reduction is going on, though, we are being led back to the center. Because if the center holds, the “Christ crucified” center of 1 Corinthians 1, then all the other voices can smoothly flow along their way.

The proper distinguishing of law and gospel, law and promise, is the focus of the Crossings Community. We try to get at the heart of the matter, for the benefit of the life of God’s people. We do not despair of systematic theology, or of Scripture. (I once heard a Lutheran systematic theologian publicly declare himself a “fraud,” since systematic theology is really impossible any more.) Theology is a little like a Zip-loc bag. If you don’t get the two sides lined up to start with, it doesn’t matter how many times you run your thumb and forefinger up and down the top of the bag, it won’t close. Systematic theology says, get it lined up to start with. Then and only then will you achieve *claritas*.

O is for *Omnia vincit amor*.

Mottos, the better ones, get spread around a lot. I like “*Omnia vincit amor*”—“Love conquers all.” Pretty theologically astute, even if it originates in Virgil (who wrote not “good news” but “good odes.”). Love does

indeed conquer all, if by love we mean the love of God. Some Pelagians in the Oklahoma state legislature took all the grace out of the phrase when they concocted their state motto “*Labor vincit omnia*”—“Work conquers all.” Ouch. (Full disclosure: My maternal grandfather failed as a farmer in Oklahoma, so he sold the plow and entered seminary.)

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SS is for *Spero, er, Sparrow*.

One of my favorite mottos is that of John Henry Cardinal Newman: “*Dum Spiro Spero*.” “So long as I breathe, I hope.” At least I always thought it was Newman’s. Googling “*dum spiro spero*,” I see it attributed not to Newman, but to St. Andrew! It’s also the motto of South Carolina, the Kingdom of Sarawak, and Burstow Park House. And Dillons, Thompsons, Youngs, and who knows all else.

Dum Spiro Spero. While I breathe, I have hope. And since we may reasonably assume that Emily Dickinson knew Latin, she

would have known to pronounce that last word like “sparrow.” Across the language bridge they are homonyms. Where else do you think she got the idea for her poem:

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

I is for *In Vino Veritas*.

A good motto, I think, for a liturgist.

Harvard University, you know, has the simple word “*Veritas*” on its coat of arms. But that is a truncation of its actual motto, “*Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae*”: “Truth, for Christ and the Church.” Makes me sorry I went to the University of Chicago, which proclaims “*Crescat scientia vita excolatur*”—“Let knowledge increase from more to more, and so shall human life flourish,” one florid translation reads.

Perhaps we should send all our children to Duquesne University? “*Spiritus est qui vivificat*,” “It is the Spirit that gives life.” By quoting the second half of 2 Corinthians 3:6 do they imply the first? It says there “For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Wouldn’t you love to study English lit at a school like that!

N? Sorry for that extra “n.” Up top, I wrote *Carnitas*, but I meant *Caritas*. Sorry for the confusion. *Caritas*, as in the Taizé chant “*Ubi Caritas et amor*,” “Where there is love, God is there.”

My motto, my reduction of my vocation to a couple words, is not “Clarity and small or shredded pieces of crisp roast pork, eaten as a snack, used as a filling for burritos, etc.,” but “Clarity and Love.”

Although, come to think of it, as we approach the festival of the **incarnation** of our Lord, the remembrance of God taking on human flesh, this might be worth considering. Was it not for **clarity**, for the purpose of revealing the mystery of God’s will for the world, that Christ became a human? “For he is our peace; in his **flesh** he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, the hostility . . .” (Ephesians 2:14) Was it not for the purpose of making one thing perfectly clear that Jesus died on the cross for all of us? Something which no power and no wisdom could make clear?

And I know that the Spanish “*carnitas*” is plural, but are we not all, together, “his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all”? (Ephesians 1:23)

So, take it either way. I’m starting to like “*Claritas, Carnitas*.”

G is for God.

God of carnage? Whoa.

At January’s seminar in Belleville we’ll actually be viewing the movie “Carnage.” Original French title was “*Le Dieu de Carnage*,” “The God of Carnage.”

We will watch critically as two couples attempt to patch their world back up but only succeed in tearing it down (“This has been the worst day of my life”). One of them actually asserts that he “believes” in “the god of carnage.” Initial cordiality is strained, snaps, and is smashed, as they try to do justice in a certain circumstance of life.

How does the God who becomes incarnate deal with the god of carnage?

S is for slipups.

Remember the *Reader’s Digest* feature, “Your Slip is Showing”? Of course you don’t. Do they even publish *Reader’s Digest* any more? We bought a judo jacket for our young son at a shop in Lae, Papua New Guinea. The label inside was supposed to say “martial arts,” but read “marital arts.”

Oh, if the trouble in the world was only a matter of typos and misunderstandings and slipups. Then, perhaps, labor or even negotiation would conquer all. But it isn’t. And it won’t. To solve the world’s deep problems will require the Word of God, made clear and made available.

To help us help each other with this mission, please consider joining us for the Seminar in January. And send us a gift in the enclosed envelope.

You and I have a lovely Gospel, a treasure in clay vessels, which affects the life of everyone in the world.

Help us help make it clear.

We thank you.

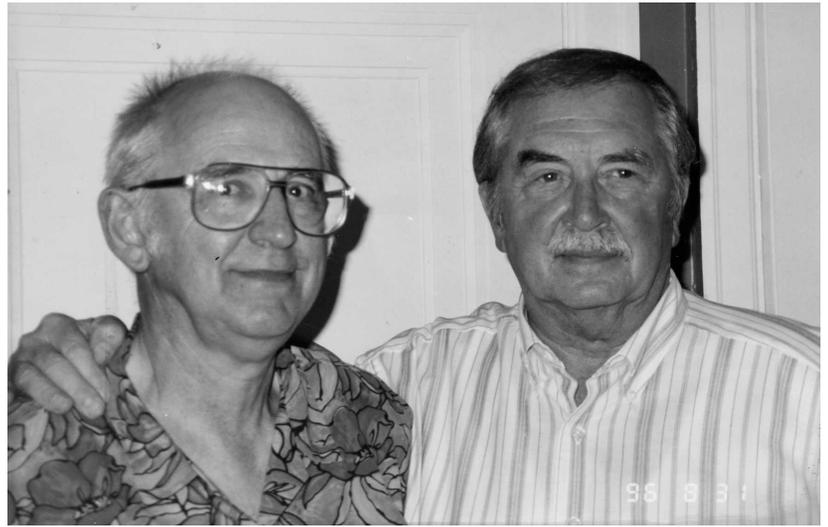
Marcus Felde

S is for Succession

Succession planning is the way a movement strives to sustain the vitality of its mission for future generations. The Crossings Board of Directors has initiated actions to do this for the Crossings Community by establishing the **Bertram-Schroeder Crossings Legacy Fund** through the Lutheran Community Foundation.

What is the purpose of this fund?

The Endowment Fund provides the Crossings Community with additional annual income to further the mission Robert W. Bertram and Edward H. Schroeder initiated when they founded the Crossings Community. Believing that the art of properly distinguishing law and gospel is the key to understanding what God is doing in the world, Crossings mission is to make that art a useful skill to the everyday Christians in both the interpretation of Scripture and the living out of Christian vocation in the world.



Crossings founders, Edward Schroeder and Robert Bertram

Who decides how distributions will be spent? What is your criteria?:

The Board of Directors of Crossings will direct and allocate the funds toward the following objectives: (1) scholarships for seminarians and first-call pastors to attend Crossings Conferences and Seminars free, (2) new research projects for the purposes of producing publications relevant to the Crossings mission, (3) bringing third-world speakers and participants to Crossings conferences and events, 4) sending Crossings teachers to teach Crossings theology/courses at home and around the globe, and 5) the eventual subsidizing of a full-time Executive Director.

Why is it important to give to the endowment fund and how can people give?

The practice of properly distinguishing law and gospel in both biblical interpretation and understanding Christian vocation is an underdeveloped skill today and Crossings is one organization that is dedicated to addressing that deficit head on. Those who wish to contribute to this effort may do so by contributing to the Bertram-Schroeder Crossings Legacy Fund in one or more of the following ways: 1) Cash gifts through Check, Money Order or Appreciated Securities; 2) Estate gifts through Wills, Bequests, various types of Trusts and Life Insurance plans; 3) Make plans through your financial planner to give in your own creative ways.

When Bob Bertram and Ed Schroeder began The Crossings Community, Inc., it was initially envisioned as a way for Ed Schroeder to continue to do his work of teaching: teaching “The Art” of distinguishing Law and Gospel as a useful skill for helping the everyday Christian to interpret Scripture and to live out their Christian vocation in the world. Through the regular giving of generous donors, like you, Ed had an income, and like a modern day St. Paul, journeyed near and far teaching “The Art.” What we the recipients of “The Art” learned when Ed retired was that the teaching work of Crossings wasn’t done. Therefore, over the years, the Board of Directors (along with the help of many others) picked up that work by utilizing the internet and hosting seminars and conferences. But the future of Crossings, we believe, needs, once again, a more intentional lead director and a more direct outreach ministry--and that takes funding. No one knows better than you how valuable “The Art” is for interpreting Scripture and living out our Christian vocation in the world. Contributing to the Bertram-Schroeder Crossings Legacy Fund is one way you can participate in the succession planning of Crossings.

Steven C. Kuhl