

CROSSINGS

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MOTOR SPIRIT

motor spirit, *noun*, chiefly British, a volatile liquid used as a fuel in internal-combustion engines, specifically: GASOLINE, PETROL.

Several of our gospel readings and sermons the last few months were about the “bread of life.” But if bread is not the “staff of life” any longer, do we need to shore up the metaphor? As grocery stores shrink the shelf space for Wonder Bread (and other brands), they are installing pumps to offer another staple: gasoline.

One day recently, as my car was being “filled with the (motor) spirit,” I turned my eyes away from their usual resting place (where it shows what I will pay) and began reading the rest of what is written on the pump. (Grandma Benson used to pour breakfast cereal into a china serving bowl to prevent us from reading the box during breakfast. You see, I never learned.)

I was astonished. The pump was plastered from head to toe with instructions, cautions, warnings, reminders, instructions, verifications, warrants for claims, measurements, certifications of measurements, requirements, restrictions, names of authorities, legal notices, caveats, seals of institutions, taboos, judgments, etc.



All law.

No gospel.

No appreciation of the potency which was being sucked from underground into the tank of my 2011 Ford Escape after having been pumped from Earth, conducted by pipes to shipyards to be poured into ships, thence eventually through refineries, by trucks, back underground into tanks and finally up through a pump to enable me to go to work, home, to the ballgame, make visits, and, eventually, back to the gas station. Wherever I

might choose to go.

The pump did not solicit my thanks or praise, but was blazoned entirely with words of law. (The pump offered a brief “Thank you” for my patronage, but that did not seem sincere.)

What did all those words say about the motor spirit which would empower my life for the next several days?

First of all, “Members only.” Put your card here, and it has to be one of these. The contents were legally specified, and the authorities cited. I was warned “Never” and asked to “Always” do certain things in a set way. If I fit in the legally described category of a handicapped person, the store promised to meet their obligation to assist me. All of this would only take place within certain hours. Not before, not after. (Go away!)



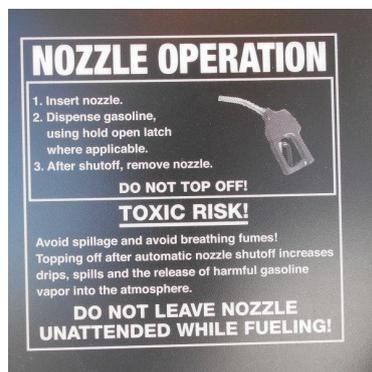
I was told that smoking was taboo, using the law's circle/diagonal icon. I was instructed in the proper way to hold the pump, how to insert the nozzle, what not to do when it finished pumping. "Toxic risk!" was announced, alerting me to the seriousness of what I was doing. "Do not leave nozzle unattended while fueling." As though I might.

The precise quantity of fuel I was taking was scrupulously measured, as was the amount of money they would take from me in exchange—a fair exchange, no fudging. Authorities had recently

verified the justice of those measurements and calculations: the Department of Code Enforcement Indianapolis, Gregory A. Ballard, Mayor, had conducted a "Weights and Measures Inspection." Just last year! I could relax. But if I wanted to challenge it, there was a number I could call, although how likely was a barefoot pilgrim like me to know better than the spinning instrument which had been calibrated according to Hoyle.

So many imperatives, not only positive but negative! "Turn off." "Never allow children to . . ." "Press." "Insert." "Dispense." "Remove." "Avoid." "Do not top off!" "Do not leave nozzle unattended." "Tap your horn." "Place." "Keep." "Fill." Etc. I had never before realized that when I pumped gas I was engaged in so much obedience!

Authorities swarmed, as I pumped motor spirit into my motor vehicle. I have no idea who "CATLOW ICVN" is, but I stand in "fear" of VSTAFLEX, because they promise to have made a good pump, hose, and coaxial



hose assembly. I guess. I don't know. But somebody thought it necessary to write all that where I (or someone) could read it.

The most prominent word? "WARNING." Why did I get the feeling that the threat of death was close by, even in this quotidian activity?

I replaced the nozzle, got in my car, and as I turned a key it sprang to life. I started moving.

In many ways, my experience at the pump was no different from that of any other driver who pulled up to the tank that day. In another way, it was altogether different, because I lead a double life. I am subject to all those useful legal strictures, and yet not. Totally entitled (by virtue



of my membership and bank account balance) to what I took, and yet not. Something more was at work, even in so mundane a part of my life. Something hard to put my finger on.

Our lives are totally papered with requirements and certifications. How, exactly, shall we live? By all the stickers stuck to all the paraphernalia? What do we miss, if we think the law is all?

I don't want to finish this rambling reflection. At least, not until I get some more input. For that, I think the best thing might be the upcoming conference of the Crossings Community in Belleville, Illinois, on January 24-27, 2016, described below.

Marcus Felde, President of Crossings

Law, Gospel and the Holy Spirit: Discerning the Holy Spirit in the "Double Life" of the Christian

An Invitation to the Crossings Conference, January 24-27, 2016

Executive Director Steven Kuhl

It has been said that the Holy Spirit is the most neglected person in the Trinity. Maybe so. Recall the first draft of the Nicene Creed (325 A.D.) on the subject: "And we believe in the Holy Spirit." Period! But then, maybe not. In the heat of ensuing controversy, the Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.) discovered that much more needed to be said about the Holy Spirit for the sake of the gospel, giving us the third article of that creed as it stands today.

At the heart of the confession made by the councils of Nicaea and Constantinople concerning the work of the Holy Spirit is the term "Life-Giver," a term that boils down the New Testament's testimony concerning the Spirit, especially as given in the writings of Saints Paul and John. All subsequent reflection on the Holy Spirit wrestles

with that key insight. So shall we, at the 6th International Crossings Conference. Whet your appetite for the conference with these preliminary thoughts.

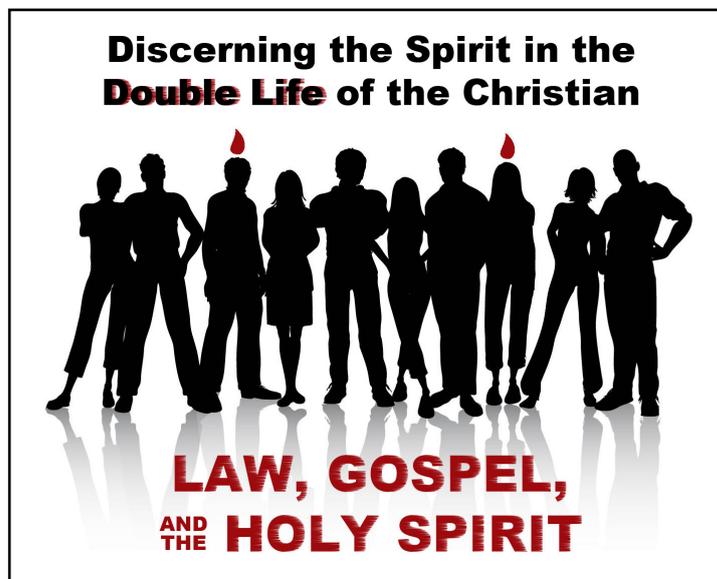
What is the nature of the “Life” that the Holy Spirit “gives”? It certainly is not the same as the life that God the Creator has given us in creation, the subject of the First Article of the Creed. (Call that “life” with a small “l.”) That life, as amazing as it is, has death as its end because sin has infected its core and God’s judgment has limited its days. Indeed, created life is life under God’s law because of sin -- and that stands in stark contrast to Life in the Spirit, which is life under God’s gospel!

And yet, the Life that the Holy Spirit gives us (call it “Life” with a capital “L”) is not divorced from our created life. Therefore, Spirit-given Life is, paradoxically, a kind of double life that both serves created life (helping it to be all that it can be) and subsumes created life into itself (bringing it to an end in the cross of Christ). This it does by engaging created life where our struggle with sin is most acute (initiating a life of repentance and forgiveness) and where the reality of death is most inevitable (inviting us to die not alone but in Christ). So, while created life ends, Spirit-given Life does not. Spirit-given Life is fundamentally Life beyond life, Life after death, “Life of the coming age,” as the Creed describes it.

Spirit-given Life is therefore qualitatively different from created life in that it is cross-shaped, sin-free, death-proof, and God-pleasing. It endures beyond the grave, beyond created life, because it is the divine Life that

Christ establishes and offers to the world in his death and resurrection, the subject of the Second Article of the Creed.

Therefore, when we ask “What is the nature of the Life that the Spirit gives?” the answer is simply “the Life of Christ,” a Life that springs forth



from the death and resurrection of Christ. Life in the Spirit and Life in Christ are one and the same. When we ask “What is the role of the Holy Spirit as Life-giver?” it is simply this: The Holy Spirit takes what is Christ’s (his Life) and gives it to us. This the Holy Spirit does always in conjunction with Word-and-Sacrament testimony to Christ. Through testimony and the Spirit, faith in Christ happens, making Christ the defining core of the Spirit-given Life. When faith happens, new Spirit-given impulses arise and Christ-like urges emerge which resist the flesh (the sinful desires that enslaved created life) and encourage the spirit (the love of Christ in all things). As Luther would describe it, the work of the Holy Spirit is to connect us to Christ by faith, initiating the “Happy Exchange” between Christ and us, so that what is sin and death in me might die with Christ and what is Life and Righteousness in Christ might become my own.

The double life that marks Christian Life in the Spirit has all the appearance of the mundane world -- or more precisely, of the cross, of the way Christ looked when he was in the world. We dare not be fooled or discouraged by that fact. For the evidence of it is in our very biographies as Christians (See 2 Corinthians 4-5). Spirit-given Life comes to us by testimony to the gospel through frail, fallible, believing human beings (who collectively are called the church) and it is lived out by us as frail, fallible, believing human beings in the rough and tumble of daily life (through our vocational deployment in the world).

Although no one single image can fully capture the dynamic relationship that exists between Life in the Spirit and life in this world, the image of hospice care-taking comes close. Like hospice care-taking, Life in the Spirit is a labor of love that seeks to make created life as good as it can be, knowing that it is ultimately marked for destruction. Life in the Spirit loves this world not for what might be gained from the world for itself -- for it already has all things through Spirit-given faith -- but for what it might give to the world: participation in the divine Life itself.

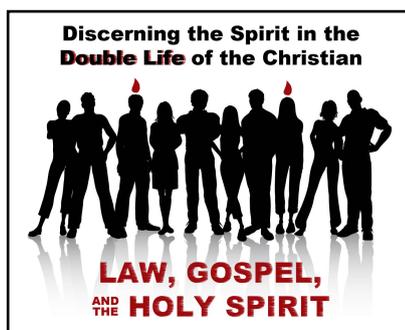
The hero of Nicaea, Athanasius, in his Life of Anthony, describes Life in the Spirit as nothing other than “faith and the sign of the Cross”: faith being our union with Christ, the sign of the cross being the appearance of that faith as Life subsuming life. Join us as conference presenters and participants grapple with The Challenge of Life in the Spirit. If the Holy Spirit has been a neglected or confusing piece in your self-understanding as a Christian, let this conference help change that.

steven kuhl

**Crossings
6th International
Conference**

January 24-27, 2016

FREE for all Seminarians
& First-time Attendees



Our Lady of the Snows

Belleville, Illinois
(across the river from St. Louis)

Register at:

www.crossings.org/conference

Call: 314-576-7357

PRE-CONFERENCE SCHEDULE (*Sunday evening through Monday afternoon*)

Sunday—January 24, 2016

Afternoon-6:00 pm Arrival and dinner on your own

7:00 pm **Marcus Felde**, "That Grace may Increase Thanksgiving: The Importance of Distinguishing the Gospel from Law"

Monday--January 25, 2016

TRACK ONE: What has the Church been saying about the Holy Spirit over the centuries?

Martin Lohrmann, "The Holy Spirit in the Lutheran Confessions"

Edward Schroeder, "The Holy Spirit in Elert's Systematics"

Steven Kuhl, "The Holy Spirit in the Age of Pentecostalism"

Gary Teske, "The Holy Spirit and the Unholy Spirits: Reflections on Mission in PNG Context"

TRACK TWO: Introduction to the Crossings Method

Steve Albertin, **Chris Repp**, and other members of the Crossings writing staff

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE (*Monday evening through Wednesday noon*)

Monday—January 25

7:00 pm **Jerry Burce**, Keynote Address: "The Spirit-given Challenge of the Double Life"

Tuesday—January 26

Steve Turnbull, "Launching the Double Life: Nicodemus and the Twice Born Person"

Amy Schifrin, "Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of the Congregation: The American Context"

Toppo Takamura, "Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of the Congregation: The Japanese Context"

Arndt Braaten, "Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of Christian Vocation: Faith and the Practice of Medicine"

7:15 pm Holy Communion (**Lori Cornell**, Preacher)

Wednesday—January 27

Jill Baumgaertner, "Discerning the Spirit in the Double Life of Christian Vocation: Faith and the Practice of Teaching"

Rob Saler, "The Double Life and the Publicly Engaged Church"

12:00 noon Conference concludes with Devotions

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