

The logo for "Cross Currents" features a stylized orange cross symbol to the left of the words "Cross" and "Currents" stacked vertically in a bold, dark brown sans-serif font.

Two Tables

Let me share with you a rerun of a column I penned almost four decades ago.

Yesterday in a packed restaurant I ate a schizophrenic meal.

On one side of me were three ladies. When they came in, I was impressed by the way the younger two strongly but lovingly assisted the wee, wobbly gray-haired woman with them. Was she their mother or grandmother? I wondered.

As I ate almost elbow to elbow with them, I could not keep from hearing the spate of hells and damns and s.o.b.'s that issued from their table.

They weren't angry. This was obviously their normal way of conversing—especially for the youngest of the three, a mannish 40-year-old who sat and sipped a massive goblet of beer and seemed unaware that the cut of her severe black dress plunged recklessly toward her navel.

On the other side of me dined two pastor friends, one of them bordering on obesity and doing his best that day to cross the border. They ordered rather loudly and, when their salads appeared, gave thanks to God in a timbre that made me uncomfortable.

Somehow the profanity of the ladies seemed less offensive to me than the preachers' pretentious praying. (Am I a pagan?)

Talking in tones that invaded every other conversation in the cafe, the clergymen proceeded to consume roasted colleague for lunch. Telling tale after tale, they catalogued the sins of their fellow-pastors and found fault with most of the policies of their fellowship.

After 40 minutes of "going over the brethren," the fat preacher wheezed a chuckle and asked his companion, "Have we covered all the gossip yet?"

Evidently not. He immediately brought up another pastor's name and, in lurid detail, started confessing that man's sins.

Meanwhile, with divided attention, I heard the three ladies visiting, still speaking with mild profanities, but expressing evident feelings of affection for one another. The details of the conversation I overheard at that table were positive, constructive, good-spirited comments about life in general and about their friends in particular.

Had Jesus walked into the cafe that day, which of the two tables do you think he would have joined?

By Gene Shelburne