

The Law and Promise Hermeneutic in a Postmodern Context

The main reason Ed, Marie, and I were in South Africa two weeks ago was the International Association of Mission Studies conference. Every three or four years missionaries, professors and students of missiology and other interested persons from around the world gather to learn from each other about Christian mission that's happening around the globe. IAMS is an ecumenical group that got started in the early 70s with Europeans, for the most part, but has since attracted folks from every continent.

The theme of this year's conference held at Hammanskraal outside of Pretoria was "Reflecting Jesus Christ: Crucified and Living in a Broken World." We participated in exposure groups, plenary sessions and mission study groups all of which focussed on this theme.

Today I'd like to share my experience of the mission study group I participated in. Our topic was "Bible in Mission: Rediscovering Christ Crucified and Living: Biblical Hermeneutics" which was led by Dr. Teresa Okure of Nigeria. As we began our work together, Dr. Okure emphasized two points. First, the Bible and its reading is life in ever changing social locations and these changing locations make different readings of the same text, even by the same reader, not only possible but inevitable. Secondly, because the goal of Christian mission (according to Dr. Okure) is "to gather into one God's scattered children", readings of the Bible in mission would need to foster individual and community building in multi-cultural social locations.

We started our work together, after introductions, by looking at the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-12 with the intention of getting to several other parables (we never did). Dr. Okure encouraged us to share or develop new ways of reading from different perspectives and social locations. Being a highly educated group, the first go-round showed, primarily, where or what we had studied: historical-critical method, narrative models of interpretation, etc. As we became more comfortable with each other, a multiplicity of "readings" began to emerge. We realized that social location is a complex set of circumstances that include ethnicity, language, geography, denomination, confessional stance, generational concerns, education, economics and a host of other factors that we kept peeling back, looking for a center to stand on together.

It was a frustrating experience in some ways and, at times, acrimonious. Having fifteen leaders in a room, even when they agree on the subject matter is difficult enough, since all fifteen are used to being in charge. When they don't all agree and yet feel passionately about the subject, the atmosphere can get a bit heated. At dinner after one such session, Ed and I talked about whether or not the law and promise hermeneutic that we both espouse had any place in this postmodern cacophony. Was this Lutheran way of viewing Scripture and the world merely a relic of "Enlightenment hegemonic thinking?" Over brai (that's Afrikaans for bar-b-q) and beer (how can you do Lutheran theology without beer?) seven statements emerged that pulled our far-ranging discussions into a law and promise framework.

Since the next session was our last day together and each mission study group was responsible to come up with a short report for the plenary about our efforts, I offered these seven statements as a starting point for this report. After much debate and some small changes in wording, the group accepted the statements as our report to the plenary with the inclusion of an

introductory paragraph to highlight our methodological process.

So, after all that, I offer to you the report of the Bible in Mission group:

Through our reflection on the parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:1-23, we discovered the rich variety of our backgrounds which helps us learn from each other as well as disagree about our own interpretations of the text. Difficulties emerged in struggling with the pain of life and our differences in approaching the text. However, even these difficulties (semantic, cultural and confessional) helped us learn from one another (even through our own resistance) and offered us an exciting and life giving experience of interacting with other Christians. As a result of all this, we offer seven statements for reflection on Bible study in an ecumenical, multi-cultural context:

- 1. Reflecting Jesus Christ: Crucified and Living is also an axiom for doing Bible study.*
- 2. RJCCCL (his life, message, cross and resurrection) is a fundamental criterion for understanding various interpretations of Biblical texts.*
- 3. Among Christians there is diversity about what constitutes responsible (and less-than-responsible) interpretation of Biblical texts. Part of this responsibility is being accountable to "the other."*
- 4. These differences, however, need not discourage us. For the NT itself illustrates how this criterion was used by the authors of the texts of the NT. So ecumenical, multi-cultural study of this criterion as used in the NT is promising. This applies both to the use made of OT texts in NT documents, and to the interpretation of Jesus himself by NT authors.*
- 5. NT authors lived in a multi-cultural world, as we do, and*

had to discover how the proclamation of the crucified and living Lord takes root and grows within the rich variety of humankind.

- 6. Because the crucified and living Christ heals humankind's brokenness with God, therefore the power of this truth through the movement of the Holy Spirit in our lives empowers Christ's people to daring ventures as "wounded healers" in our own broken world(s) today.*
- 7. Christian unity as the crucified and living Christ's wounded healers is not cultural uniformity. The liturgical, ecclesial, pastoral, educational, etc. practices of churches in various parts of the world will be culturally sensitive as they center their lives around Christ, crucified and living, in their own mission(s) to the broken world.*

Robin J. Morgan

18 Feb 2000

What Kind of Fool am I? A Reflection on the Same-Sex Marriage Debate

Dear Folks,

I'm back from South Africa and will begin telling you about our trip next week, but today we have a wonderful piece from Marie Failinger of Hamline University. Here's her bio in her own words:

"I'm a Valpo grad (B.A. 1973, J.D. 1976), practiced law in Legal Aid In Indiana (Indianapolis and Evansville) for 5 years, taught at Valpo's legal aid clinic before going to Indianapolis, and for the last 16 years I've taught law at Hamline University School of Law—I teach ethics, law and religion, constitutional law, criminal law, civil rights, etc. I'm a single mom of two (adopted) kids, now teenagers; we're an interracial family, as they're African American and I'm German American. I was one of Ed's students in my freshman year, which is how I got involved with Crossings, and I've got an article about to come out about Justice William Rehnquist (a Lutheran), entitled, 'The Justice Who Wouldn't Be Lutheran,' part of a set of work on Lutherans and law. [This piece is] inspired by Rev. John Priest and friends, who wrote a little now-lost? booklet called 'What Kind of Foolishness is This' at Valparaiso University, circa 1970."

One thing before Marie's piece. Some(all?) of you received a message through the Crossings e-mail list that started out "Many of our members earning 5-figure incomes per week after only 10 weeks". Now any of you who are acquainted with the practical realities of theologians today know that making a 5-figure income per week doing theology is a RARE occurrence and those of you acquainted with Crossings know that when we talk money, we are inclined to straightforward begging rather than get rich quick schemes. What I'm trying to say is that someone from the outside got into our e-mail list and sent that message. We think we've remedied the problem and apologize for any inconvenience and/or confusion.

Peace and Joy,
Robin

What Kind of Fool am I?

A Reflection on the Same-Sex Marriage Debate

In December, 1999, Vermont's highest court ruled that its state constitution is violated by Vermont marriage law which permits people of opposite sexes, but not people of the same sex, to marry. (*Baker v. State of Vermont*, 1999 WL 1211709 (December 20, 1999)). Rather than suggesting that Vermont is required to extend legal marriage to same-sex couples, however, the court found that extending similar legal protections to same-sex couples would be constitutionally sufficient. The Vermont Supreme Court follows the highest courts of two other states – Hawaii and Alaska – who found constitutional violations in their states' opposite-sex marriage laws, but whose rulings were overturned by the unusual act of constitutional amendment by the people of each state. The furor in Hawaii resulted in a rare Congressional domestic relations law, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which allows states that object to same-sex marriages to refuse "full faith and credit" to such marriages legally contracted in other states, something which is not true with most other state-recognized marriages.

Thus, the debate about same-sex marriage is no longer academic (in both senses of the word) but has been joined in the legal and political arenas, where real people make public decisions profoundly affecting other real people. It is, in short, a debate that American Christians cannot avoid, as those who are created to be part of this world, and who have obligation as citizens in political structures which they themselves co-create.

Lutherans and others from similar traditions are particularly swept into the discussion because it puts into question our understanding of one means of God's protecting and sustaining work – called an "order of creation" or "Creator's Ordainings" –

that we call marriage or the family. Gay and lesbian couples who hope to legally marry find themselves at the eye of the this maelstrom of uncertain meaning, but our culture and our religious community often like to forget that they simply represent the question, they do not contain it – that swirling mass holds within it singles, unmarried heterosexual couples, indeed married couples themselves, and children, those in households and those orphaned.

In fact, the same-sex marriage debate calls into question what we might mean when we talk about humans as co-creators with God – a theological position which at once embraces human freedom and limitation, which imposes human responsibility in a context where our own right-doing and wrong-doing are mysteriously commingled with the creating and preserving work of Another who is beyond recognition, much less understanding.

We can daily see the ways in which law protects and sustains in the “ord(a)inance” of marriage. In the most direct sense, at least in our time, criminal law can stop spouses from battering their vulnerable partners, sometimes imprisoning them when it cannot deter them with the threat of jail, denounce them into remorse, or force them into treatment. Husbands cannot simply desert their wives when they grow bored, imagining that their wives can be justly discarded as so much trash (nor wives their husbands). The law at least ameliorates such abandonment, preserving some modicum of economic support, ordering the threads of relationship that must be sustained for the children, and announcing (admittedly with lessening volume) some social disapproval for such faithlessness. Law sustains commitment that may not dependably rely on human love as it is tested by human anger, competition, greed, resentment, neglect. People stay, not so much as they used to, but still they stay through the difficult times, in part because the law makes their separation more difficult. Law sustains human community through fairness

and consideration of need as well: property is equitably shared by divorcing partners by law rather than their choice in many cases, so when a professionally degreed spouse leaves her supporter behind, she may have to make good on his past sustenance; or a disabled spouse may be protected from the streets by a maintenance award. In short, law curbs the temptation to abuse one's power, a temptation perhaps never greater than toward a vulnerable spouse.

Yet, law participates in creation as well. In marriage law, to make a couple is to make a new world of human responsibility. Law does not simply give a sign about the goodness of intimate human community, it signals duties of a newly created couple toward the world and the world's duties to recognize and support the family, as well as the duties imposed between spouses. Just as such a legally protected relationship constrains behavior, it frees as well: two people who are (at least greatly) liberated from the profound anxiety of protecting their emotional, social and economic security by the law's promise (as well as their partner's) are liberated for work in the world, whether in their extended families or among the strangers with whom they work and play and share a community.

By exclusion, however, law can also signal the lack of protection, of sustenance, and perhaps most importantly, of respect for the gifts of love and commitment that make such inter-responsibility with the world possible. The condemnations signaled by marriage law indeed may force gay and lesbian people to ask themselves often, "am I a plain fool, a damn fool, or a fool of God?" Again, it is a question they share with singles, those committed to those who cannot/will not marry them, and those in socially disfavored marriages (once and still interracial couples, perhaps abused spouses these days, etc.) though the law presses the issue more clearly for them by announcing them to be "fools and damn fools." This is a question

which marriage, recognized by church and law, relieves “standard” married couples from asking, at least as respects their relationship, even though they perhaps SHOULD ask such a question, as Christians.

Let me unpack what I mean by my foolish distinction. Most Christians have traditionally recognized some relationship between what is often called the “natural world” and those structures, including law, which impose normative responsibilities on human beings as part of that “natural world.” The range of understandings is wide; some virtually assume that the natural IS the normative; on the other extreme, some believe that the natural world limits our duties very little, and human morality is largely a matter of human choice informed by God’s Word.

Lutherans, I think, stand somewhat in their usual difficult position: what is “natural” at least in the sense of what “most people” see or experience is not automatically and thoroughly good because sin is pervasive in our given world. Indeed, the way in which we see and feel and come to equate it with what is “natural” and what others see and feel (beyond our comprehension) as “unnatural” is itself sinful, arrogating to ourselves the task of deciding which of God’s creations is deviant. (And never so much as in sexuality, in our time.) Yet, the connection between the good work of God in the natural world and what is good for human beings remains close – our world is, after all, given to us as well as made by us, who ourselves embody both givenness and freedom, both adoration and arrogance. Similarly, as God is the God of history, today and tomorrow are both discontinuous and continuous; creation can both disrupt the previous moment and embellish it, and we never quite know when disruption is of God, and when it is our own sinful making, anymore than we know when our attempts to tinker with our world rather than to remake its radical evil are cowardice and not

loving prudence.

For Christians in human relationships, this difficulty thus poses the foolish-questions. Luther opined that, for the most part, law and rulers should be obeyed by mere mortals, even when they were unjust, unless the Gospel itself were at risk. If he were of this age, as a man curious about science, I could see him describing law and the law of the family in particular as a membrane holding in a cell of floating human emotion and action. Burst the membrane, and what keeps the cell viable (able to build up the body of which it is a part) crashes into destruction.

Yet, at times, Luther seemed to think that divine grace in history would bring us heroes, whose God-calling was precisely to go beyond law, people whose defiance of law would testify to and act out the unpredictable will of the hidden God. Now, his hero-image brings us too much out of the world: the hero as contemporary people imagine him is one not like ourselves, who sees more clearly, who acts more courageously, who is able to leap tall buildings at a single bound. He is male in virtue, even when he comes disguised as a woman, a Joan of Arc. We look up to him; we wish we could be like him.

As contemporary Christians, we might instead look to the fool as Luther's world-disrupting character, the one who both knows and does not know that (s)he violates accepted practices and norms. The fool at times seems to live in the world oblivious to the "average Joe's" common sense of that world's biological or socially constructed "natural" rhythms. At other times, the fool is painfully aware of the disjunctions between his/her actions and the expectations of the world. The fool goes blithely on without seeing how the world sees him/her, but then in a moment of disclosure is fully, agonizingly aware of how (s)he is seen. AS the fool grows older and wiser, (s)he is not at the mercy of

difference, but wryly seeks to challenge the world with riddles. One riddle is the fool him/herself: neither male nor female, both at once; costumed to hide sexuality or boldly distort it, costumed to hide a self that can be captured in notions of "natural," to universalize or obscure race, bodily form, even facial features and expressions. God's fool hides more than discloses, both in appearance and in speech, song and riddle. Those of us who imagine ourselves to be "normal" look down on the fool, and find ourselves fooled in our condescension; the fool exposes our very pretensions precisely in his/her participation in the most mundane moments, the fart or the "splat", even though we want very much to see the fool as exotic, unworldly. We find ourselves outsmarted, both by what is disclosed and by what is hidden, made foolish ourselves in our attempt to expose the hidden in the fool's riddles and in our attempts to hide what embarrasses us about the fool's presence. The fool shows up when we least expect, when his/her presence is least desired, when we are least ready to listen to the fool's counsel. The fool stays when we are most irritated with him/her—as well as when no one else will stay with us.

And so the question of foolishness. "Am I a plain fool?" a man or woman must ask, when a loving commitment is not secured by law and social approval. Am I one who simply cannot see that I love in a way that puts me at risk of harm, for no good reason, out of sync with the "natural" order of things designed to secure individual persons? "Am I a damn fool?" as society says I am — is my foolishness, my inability to live the family life that the world around me calls "normal" (as simultaneously "ought" and "is") in fact the sinful hubris of defiance against the living structures God has given us to protect and sustain us? "Or am I a fool for God?" Do I, as the fool, expose the very pretensions of humanity to know what God has in store for human beings. Do I upset the apple cart, the awful idolatry in

humanity's sure belief that in the "natural" we see God, when we only see is the shadow God has left behind as God races to hide in our future.

To be unremittingly uncertain about which kind of fool one is may perhaps be theologically a good place to live. But it is a tough, crushing and lonely place, perhaps more than human beings can bear day by day by day. And in part for this, perhaps, our Wise Nurturer gave marriage, to make it possible for at least some of us not to have to bear the weight of this question every, every day. Which has to bring Christians to ask, should we demand by law that some of us – gay and lesbian couples, and all whom the law leaves out of the "ord(a)inance" of marriage – bear the crushing burden of this foolish question for us all?

Marie Failing
Hamline Law School

Lutheran Theology and Chinese Religion

Colleagues,

Here is the second sample of Lutheran Theology tossed our way by a Singapore sling.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Pastor Martin Yee
Paper for Lutheran Distinctives Course
Singapore, August 1999

Upon reflections on what I learned from the Lutheran Distinctive course, below are what I perceived are some important pastoral applications for my parishioners who came from Chinese ethical and religious backgrounds.

I need to be constantly aware that Christians from Chinese Confucian backgrounds are often tempted to set up a code of ethical conduct, a lists of rights and wrongs for our fellow Christians to follow and abide with so that they are acceptable to God. They treat the Bible as a manual for Christian conduct and ethics, and judge others according to our own legalistic interpretation of it. On the extreme they may cast doubt on the salvation of others or pronounce them “back-slided” based on such criteria. The irony is that they may then be preaching the law without the gospel.

Chinese Christians habitually look to the Bible for rules to follow rather than to hear the gospel through it. This is because their parents often quote from Chinese classics as norms and rules for life. In China in the past the Imperial exams for scholars were based on these classics, their understanding and practice. This is similar to the Jew who searched the Torah for rules to follow and even expanded on them until they had thousands of regulations.

They may also accentuate this problem by running to their pastors and asking “Can I do this and that,” just as in the Analects and other classics where Confucius often taught morals and ethics through answers to his students. They treat their pastors thus as Chinese sages of the past who used to dispense such advice. Pastors are therefore tempted to “dig” into their

Bible feverishly hoping to give a definitive biblical yes or no. Otherwise they may be perceived to be Biblically ignorant. But the danger is that they may end up wresting scriptures out of context to do so. In the Lutheran understanding, God gave the Christians freedom. They are responsible for their own action, that is, what they do with their freedom. The role of the pastor is to provide discernment through his wider and deeper knowledge of scriptures and church traditions.

Since that is the case, I ask myself, is there any place or role for Confucian ethics and Chinese traditions in the life of Christians who are saved by God from the Chinese culture? For the Lutheran understanding there is. Such ethics can contribute towards the first use of the law – the “civil” use. They can help to preserve and organize the community in the face of sin. The Confucian Law of Reciprocity, Concept of Correspondence, Doctrine of the Mean, and sincerity can all contribute positively to preserving peace and harmony. But they must be used with proper discernment and must not hinder or destroy the proclamation of the Gospel. They may be of some use in promoting Christian sanctification.

I need to teach [my parishioners] that philosophies, ethical and religious practices, on their own do not save. This is because of two important reasons: firstly, the law despite being the perfect eternal will of God cannot save. So how can anything devised and deduced by man save? Secondly, only God, the Giver of the law, the Creator, can save his creatures. Man cannot save himself. If he thinks he can, he is trying to play God’s role. So let God be God. Indeed Paul has an apt warning in Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy.” Luther in his commentary on Galatians noted that “There were many excellent men among the pagans of old, men who never heard of justification. They lived moral lives. But that fact did not justify them.”

In fact, man has an idolatrous tendency, to violate the First commandment—You shall have no other gods before me—leading to the notion that he can somehow contribute something to save himself, to put himself in God's role. This is the initial great sin committed by Lucifer, of exalting self in the place of God. On this point, Luther wrote in his Large Catechism “..the trust and faith of the heart alone makes both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God... If anyone boasts of great learning, wisdom, power,...he also has a god, but not the one true God.”

Another implication of the law pertains to the Chinese religious practices for personal survival and self-realization. It must be realized that such practices ultimately bring death instead of survival or self-realization. They are like the law which brings death on its own, without the gospel. The law kills not so much because it is law but that no one can fulfill its righteous demands. Chinese religious values and practices can also potentially kill because they cannot satisfy the wrath and demands of the Holy God against sin and atone for it.

Paul wrote “for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” Luther explains in his sermon on 2 Corinthians 3:4-11, that “the spirit gives life...is naught else but the holy Gospel, a message of healing and salvation.... It wrests the saddened heart out of the jaws of death and hell, as it were, and transports it to the certain hope of eternal life.” Another story in the Gospel also illustrates this fact in an interesting manner in Mark 2:1-13. A paralytic was brought by his four kind friends to Jesus for healing. But because of the huge crowd they could not get anywhere near him. They concocted an ingenious scheme to dig an opening in the roof above Jesus and gingerly lowered him down on an improvised stretcher. Such great faith!

But what was the first thing Jesus said to the paralytic man? For a Confucianist the answer should be "Be healed!" This is what the man needs now in this life here on earth. But contrary to Confucian thinking, Jesus said to the paralytic "Son, your sins are forgiven" after which Jesus healed him. Thus the Gospel has the power to remove the fear of damnation. When people are not fearful anymore they have the power to serve. It represents a paradigm shift to the Chinese. They need to know that true religion is not about following a way or path to a goal of self-realization or immortality. Such paths will inevitably lead to death. True religion is about what God has done through Christ for us.

Confucianism as a philosophy and ethical system is basically man-centered. It is for the cultivation and realization of the human nature and supposedly innate goodness in man. From the perspective of the law there are two major problems: firstly, the law convinces us that we are not to depend and not able to depend on our self-effort for personal survival. Let God be God. We cannot save ourselves. Secondly, Confucianism assumes that human nature is basically good and that all are born alike until they acquire knowledge. But that contradicts what the law reveals about us. We are born sinners and by nature sinful and unclean. We need not acquire any knowledge to sin, we are sinners from the start. The Formula of Concord, Epitome Art.1.8 points out, "original sin is not a slight corruption of human nature, but is so deep a corruption that nothing sound or uncorrupted has survived in man's body or soul."

Another shortcoming of practicing Confucianism is that one may unwittingly underestimate the magnitude of sin in God's sight. Luther in his commentary on Galatians 1:4 noted:

"How may we obtain remission of our sins? Paul answers: 'The man who is named Jesus Christ and the Son of God gave himself

for our sins.’ For if our sins could be removed by our own efforts, what need was there for the Son of God to be given for them? Since Christ was given for our sins it stands to reason that they cannot be put away by our own efforts. This sentence also defines our sins as great, so great, in fact, that the whole world could not make amends for a single sin. The greatness of the ransom, Christ, the Son of God, indicates this. The vicious character of sin is brought out by the words ‘who gave himself for our sins.’ So vicious is sin that only the sacrifice of Christ could atone for sin. When we reflect that the one little word ‘sin’ embraces the whole kingdom of Satan, and that it includes everything that is horrible, we have reason to tremble. But we are careless. We make light of sin. We think that by some little work or merit we can dismiss sin. This passage, then, bears out the fact that all men are sold under sin. Sin is an exacting despot who can be vanquished by no created power, but by the sovereign power of Jesus Christ alone.”

However I think a Christian in his Christian freedom can practice some of the Confucian principles but with discernment. But a Christian cannot accept the basic assumptions of this philosophy.

But I need to assure my parishioners that the gospel is indeed good news to the Chinese as well as to people of other cultures. They can pass this good news to their non-Christian Chinese friends. Why is this so? First of all, a system of philosophy that stresses self-realization, morality and ethical behavior can often lead to anxiety, guilt and fear. Questions that inevitably arise in such a system—Have I done enough to fulfill the requirements of a moral person? Have I done what is actually required? These are always questions that are hard to answer by anyone, at any point in time. A sense of anxiety and guilt

always lurks around the corner. There is a fear of retribution from the Ultimate "tien" [Chinese term for "heaven," and thus "God"]. Sometimes when sicknesses and natural disasters arise—which are not uncommon in China—they can be wrongly interpreted as punishment for moral lapses or lack of ethical sincerity and neglected rituals. The gospel on the other hand promises God's forgiveness. All that is needed is a joyous confident trust in a God who saves.

As Luther puts it so beautifully in his 1520 treatise on The Freedom of a Christian: "Here we have a most pleasing vision (Ephesians 5:31-32) not only of communion but of a blessed struggle and victory and salvation and redemption. Christ is God and man in one person. He has neither sinned, nor died, and is not condemned, and he cannot sin, die or be condemned; his righteousness, life and salvation are unconquerable, eternal and omnipotent. By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's. As a matter of fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were his own, and as if he himself had sinned; he suffered, died, and descended into hell that he might overcome them all. Now, since it was such a one who did this, and death and hell could not swallow him up, these were necessarily swallowed up by him in a mighty duel; for his righteousness is greater than all the sins of men, his life is stronger than death, his salvation more invincible than hell. Thus the believing soul, by means of its faith, is free in Christ, its bridegroom, free from all sins, secure against death and hell, and is endowed with eternal righteousness, life, and salvation of Christ its bridegroom."

I can also help my parishioners in their interaction with other Chinese philosophies and religions. One of Confucius' and also Mencius' concerns was the deterioration of morality and order in the society of their time, which they sought to rectify. Both [God's] law and Confucianists too identify the root of the

problem as located in individual human beings. Confucianists sought to cultivate the individuals' moral character and realize the innate goodness in them with the help of community rituals. It is self-realization and man's effort. The gospel on the other hand provides the solution from outside of man—from God for him. Firstly, the promise of God's forgiveness through Christ to the individual and secondly, to the community by setting each person free to serve God and to serve one another in love, peace and harmony. Confucius emphasized harmony and order in the family. The gospel promised harmony and reconciliation in the family when Christ rules in their hearts and minds (Eph. 5).

The quest by Chinese Taoists to be in harmony with nature and the Ultimate "tien" often resulted in their being disengaged from society at large so that they could be in harmony with nature. The gospel on the other hand promises reconciliation with the Creator of nature. This harmony with God has already been achieved by the atonement of Christ. All people need is to receive this saving act of God. Their concept of "wu-wei" [=inaction] ironically is indeed appropriate if applied to their own self-effort with respect to God. If only it means "let God be God." But sadly their idea is to flow with the Tao's way rather than the way of God. Taoism teaches people to empty their mind of selfish desires and to be in harmony with the Tao. The gospel however showed that love, motivated and empowered by faith (Galatians 5:6) and the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) fulfills the demand of the law and frees us from selfish desires.

For the Chinese Buddhist the gospel promises eternal life and not the extinction of life. It puts away the belief in the almost endless cycles of rebirth and sufferings, and instead to believe in only one life – this life. Buddhism started because of an Indian prince's concern with sufferings. The gospel promises the cessation of sufferings, that "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain..." (Revelations 21:4).

All these are possible because of what Christ has done for us. The Buddhist is also concerned with karma – the law of cause and effects of sin. The gospel promises that Jesus has already taken all the curses of sin upon Himself. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13). The good news to Buddhists is that they can have true enlightenment in Christ, for in Christ God has revealed Himself. Jesus himself is “The Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6).

Finally, the gospel is good news to Chinese Confucianists, Taoists and Buddhists as they can cease from their toilsome labor of emptying their minds, flowing with the way of the Tao, physical exercises, meditation, breath control, following ethical and religious rites for personal survival and self-realization. The gospel promises that all has been completed and accomplished for survival, for salvation, for them by Christ. If only they can hear the words of Jesus “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30). Justification is through faith alone, apart from any works. Soli Deo Gloria. Amen.

A Pastor's Accountability in Church Growth

Colleagues,

When we were in Indonesia last year, we visited Steve Haggmark and Nancy Johnson at the Satya Wacana Christian

University in Salatiga on the island of Java. They're a husband-and-wife team on the theology faculty there. Their roots are in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Besides these full-time jobs, they have other callings.

Steve, for example, regularly flies over to Singapore to help out in the theological education of pastors in the Lutheran churches of Malaysia and Singapore. His course is called "Lutheran Distinctives," an item hard to find in the "generic Protestant" seminaries the students attend. Steve showed us two term papers from the 1999 class. We have permission to pass them on to you. You'll get one this week, and one next Thursday.

Peace & Joy! Ed Schroeder

Pastor Soh Guan Kheng
Queenstown Lutheran Church (English Ministries)
Paper for Lutheran Distinctives Course
15 August 1999

Using the Lutheran Hermeneutic on the Issue of A Pastor's Accountability in Church Growth

Introduction

The issue being addressed in this brief paper came up during the very recent Vision and Plans Sharing Meeting of the Lutheran Church in Singapore, held on 14 August 1999. At this meeting, Bishop [so-and-so] presented a document outlining his vision for our church. In a nutshell, he proposed that over the next 5 years, the Lutheran Church in Singapore should grow to 6000 members (from the current 3000), have 40 co-workers (from the current 20), reach 10 congregations (from the current 7) and have 2 Social Work Centres (from the current 0).

In the course of the discussion, a lay leader asked: "Who would

be accountable if the targets were not met?" He wanted to know what would happen if a church did not grow at the targeted rate from year to year. Would that pastor be called up and questioned? Would he be required to explain the situation and propose a solution? What would be done about the situation? This question raised the issue of a Pastor's accountability for church growth. Is the Pastor accountable for church growth? Should he be given 3 chances to succeed before being asked to leave, or before his year-end bonus is cut? This question set me thinking – how do I apply the Lutheran hermeneutic to this issue?

The person who asked the question is a highly regarded leader in his congregation, and is one of their lay preachers. He is also a professional in the financial field, and likely to be holding a senior position in his company. It was abundantly clear that his desire was for our church to grow. But I felt that his approach to the issue of church growth and pastoral accountability came more from a management rather than a ministry point of view. In this sense, this lay leader was representative of many of our lay leaders who have a tremendous passion for the church and for its growth, but view its success very much in modern management terms. Simplistically put, the orientation is very much towards the tasks and goals, and if targets are not met, then heads have to roll.

In my "gut" I knew that he was speaking law, and thus unknowingly seeking a system that instills fear. Yet I know that the gospel frees us to serve in confidence and not fear. I wanted to correct such a view. Thus I began to formulate a reply based on the Lutheran hermeneutic, and to seek to present it as an encouragement rather than as criticism. This paper expands and documents my attempt.

The Lutheran Hermeneutic

Formulating such a reply needs to begin with an understanding of what the Lutheran way of interpreting Scripture and spiritual life is, that is, what is the Lutheran hermeneutic? It is essentially this: the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, apart from works of the law (Eph. 2:8-9). This is the central doctrine of the Lutheran Church, it is a gospel-centered doctrine, and we interpret all matters of faith and life based on this doctrine. This doctrine makes a clear and definite distinction between law and gospel. The gospel is free of charge, it is entirely by God's grace, and it is wholly God's action for us in Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. The law requires our work, our obedience, and our will. The gospel frees us from our sin to live as God's children. The law only points to our sin, shows our bondage to sin, but cannot free us – its chief purpose is to drive us to Christ that we might live in the freedom He promises.

In interpreting Scripture, this hermeneutic directs us to discern between what describes God's action, and what prescribes our action. It also insists that we keep justification and sanctification separate, so that we do not allow anything in the realm of sanctification to be made a requirement or a sign of justification. Thus when we interpret Paul, for example, much of what he teaches in his epistles are exhortations to his audience on how to live as free children of God. And when we read the Gospel proclamations of Jesus, they are announcing the good news that people might believe (that is, trust and not doubt), and not asking the people to make decisions about their faith and salvation.

In understanding ministry, this hermeneutic emphasizes our Christian freedom as people who are justified by faith in Christ, and who should therefore not be made to doubt the grace of God upon them because of the prescription of certain rules or laws that judge our faith or growth in faith. In other words, we

would think in terms of how to free people from fear so that they serve in confidence (gospel), and not how to bind people with rules and/or signs upon which they will be judged, so that they serve out of fear (law). I kept this freedom-from-fear as God's children concept clear in the formulation of my reply.

The Lutheran View of the Church

I felt that an understanding of how this Lutheran hermeneutic affects our view of the church was very important to my reply, because the role of a Pastor is inseparably linked to how we view the church. Gritsch and Jensen in their book "Lutheranism," page 124, called the church "A creature of the gospel." This is an apt description – the Church is a creation of the gospel. If we see the gospel of justification by faith as our basic hermeneutic, then we will realize that if there is no gospel, there will be no Church. Indeed if the gospel is not preached and God is not trusted, there will be no Christian Church.

Therefore the Church, in Lutheran understanding, is the assembly of those who are justified by faith, and where the gospel is preached and the sacraments are rightly administered according to the word of Christ. Essentially we define the Church by its function. The Church exists and grows because people continually come to believe in God through the preaching of the gospel. Its members live out their Christian freedom by willingly fulfilling the great commission, so that more may come to hear and believe. The Church continually seeks to build trust in God by its proclamation of the gospel through word, sacraments and Christian living.

Based on this understanding that the Church exists because of the gospel, then church growth occurs also because of the gospel. God does the growing. The Christian is responsible for the preaching as a freed child of God, serving and obeying his or her Heavenly Father. The Christian is the instrument, not the

cause, of church growth. The Pastor of a local church is therefore the one called by God to “feed the flock” with the faithful preaching and teaching of the word. He is the one called to the priestly office, and thereby to lead in the giving of God’s word and sacrament, and to lead in the worship life of the people. He is the one called to equip the saints through the word and sacrament, assuring them of God’s faithful presence according to His promises, and so to build up trust and maturity in the members’ walk with God. He is one called to remind the people to be faithful, and as they are faithful in the gospel, they are free to trust God for the growth of the church. He is the one called to remind the people that while the church is a worldly institution, it is created and judged by its gracious and holy God, and not by how the world judges its own institutions.

With this in mind, I drafted a chart comparing a church and a business. I chose this comparison because it addressed the mindset that tended to assess a church from a professional business point of view. They wanted the church to be successful and the Pastors to be accountable, but the understanding of success and accountability tended to be based on what could be measurable. The chart, which was an attempt to apply the Lutheran hermeneutic to this issue, is as follows:

	CHURCH Created by God	BUSINESS Created by man
Reason for Being	Great Commission	Profit, provide jobs
Growth	Given by God	Achieved by man
Message	Gospel, Word of God	Products, services
Leader	Shepherd, feeding, freeing	CEO, selling, controlling

Mode	Preaching, teaching, ministry	Rules, prescriptions, targets
Motivation	Freedom in Christ	Fear of failure
Evaluation	Faithfulness	Profits, sales, figures
Earthly reward	Support, trust, development	Incentives, disincentives
Eternal reward	Eternal life in heaven	None

Such a comparison helped me to see and garner a few vital points with which I could formulate a reply. The points are as follows:

The church's success is not found in how well it "sells" a product, but how it faithfully builds trust and confidence in Christ. This is because success in salvation is 100% God's work. Man can do nothing to save himself. But success in sanctification is the result of how we live out our Christian freedom. Thus, success for the church is faithfulness, not the number of conversions per annum. Once we are saved, we are then free to live our lives in a blessed relationship with God, and to enjoy life as intended and designed by God. The law that we live under [Ed: oops!] as God's people is the law that preserves security, order and fullness of joy in community. This is true freedom, for freedom without limits is chaos. The gospel is not a product, but it is a message of God's grace. Thus we do not 'sell' the gospel and seek to get people to decided to 'buy' it by making a 'prayer of faith.' Instead, we announce the good news, we proclaim it, so that doubts and ignorance about God are undone, and faith in God springs forth in response to the utter trustworthiness of Christ.

The Pastor's role is primarily in preaching, teaching and administering the sacraments. These are to show our freedom in Christ, and inspire us to faithfulness in the Lord, and to witness to Him. He is to feed, and not to lead campaigns. He is to lead people towards proclamation as God's free children, and

not towards bondage to the tyranny of profit or results.

The evaluation of a church's success, and a Pastor's success, is therefore less measurable. It cannot be assessed based on dollars and cents, number of converts per year, or average attendance per month. But its assessment may be viewed more in terms of the availability of good teaching and preaching, the provision of ways for members to grow in fellowship and discernment according to God's word, the willingness of members to serve actively in various ministries, their excitement to share the gospel, their support for the Pastor in how they avail themselves to meet his needs, and so forth. I believe that as we are faithful, the Lord will give growth, as He did to Peter and the apostles in New Testament times.

Conclusion.

Thus I rose to speak when the opportunity came. My intention was encouragement. My context was the discussion on the topic of Christian Education for the Lutheran Church in Singapore. In essence, I called for the inclusion of Lutheran Distinctives in our content and approach to Christian Education. My explanation was that the Lutheran way of looking at things can help us make a great contribution to Christian life and witness in Singapore. My example was that with the blessing of the Lutheran way of interpretation, we would learn that:

1. the church was not a business
2. the gospel was not a product
3. the Pastor was not a CEO or sales manager
4. the function of a church was not sales but proclamation
5. the numbers are not an instrument of judgment that bind us, but ways of guidance, evaluation and encouragement that free us
6. the motivation for Christians was not fear of failure or

loss of reward, but Christian freedom

7. the success of a church was not profit (or even conversions), but faithfulness

8. My point was that if we have Lutheran Distinctives as part of our Christian Education, we would be blessed with a perspective that would free us to serve in the great confidence that we have in Christ our Lord.

May the Lord bless our beloved Lutheran Church in Singapore

CHRISTOLOGICAL DIFFICULTIES AT IAMS 10; Some Thoughts about IAMS 10

Edward H. Schroeder

[An Evaluation of the International Association for Mission
Studies Conference in Pretoria, South Africa, January 21-28,
2000]

Part I. Looking for Christology at IAMS 10

It seems to me that we had trouble reflecting on Christology at IAMS #10 – January 21-28 in Pretoria, South Africa. Our trouble was not that we got into arguments about the person and work of Christ. I don't recall that sort of thing happening at all. Our

trouble with Christology at IAMS 10 was that it never got much attention at all—no forthright head-on discussions—at least not in our plenary sessions.

That is doubly strange when you consider that the theme banner facing us from behind the podium each day of our assembly was REFLECTING JESUS CHRIST: CRUCIFIED AND LIVING IN A BROKEN WORLD. Today's broken world [hereafter TBW] got almost all of our attention; Jesus Christ Crucified and Living [hereafter JCCL] hardly any at all. JCCL received nowhere near the specific analytic and programmatic attention that TBW did. Is that significant? I think so.

Klaus Schaefer had told us in his preparatory essay, published in MISSION STUDIES [32. XVI- 2. p. 179f] that the planning committee intended the term “reflecting” to be a pun with double meaning. First of all “to engage in thinking, discussing, debating, theological reasoning.” Let's call that “reflecting-T” (for thinking). “But [reflecting] also hints at the image of a mirror in which something is reflected.” Call that “reflecting-M” (for mirror). If you don't engage in reflecting-T about Christ crucified and living, how can you do reflecting-M to TBW? Only when the image in the mirror is itself clear can it be reflected to some other person or place.

That saddens me for more than one reason. Least important is this one: A number of us at IAMS 9 in Buenos Aires (and even before at IAMS 8) had observed that differing versions/visions of the person and work of Christ regularly surfaced at IAMS gatherings. Often they appeared to be crucial (no surprise) to our debates. So why not address Christology head-on at the next gathering of the association? What better time than at the nexus of the second and third millennia? So having learned of the theme for IAMS 10, I bought my air-ticket and was smiling as I checked in at the Hamanskraal campus. But the smile faded.

This is not to say that I was somber or morose for those 8 days. Not at all. For all 200-plus of us attending from some 50 nations, I'm sure, these were days of joy and gladness. The face-to-face exchanges with dear people, the seminar sessions and Bible studies, the exposure experiences, the mealtime conversations and Kaffee-klatsches, the laughter, even the steady stream of announcements from both Willem and Klaus—all that made IAMS 10 a blessing.

But I don't "count it ALL joy." For I was anticipating that Christology, the JCCL, would get equal time with TBW at our gathering. But it did not, and that signals the second sadness. It's not sadness because MY wishes went unfulfilled, as though I'm now pouting because I didn't get my way. I think the whole conference suffered because of this real absence. IAMS 10 didn't get as close to the goal as we could have, because of this Christological neglect. Stated bluntly: Our reflecting-M in today's broken world could have been better, much better, if our reflecting-T on JCCL had gotten equal billing. How so?

First I wish to take a look at Klaus's preliminary paper, and then listen again to the papers presented to us in the plenary sessions. My question is simply this: what did we indeed hear about JCCL?

KLAUS SCHAEFER

Klaus's paper [MISSION STUDIES 32] picked up on the term "reflecting" in 2 Cor. 3, telling us that this term in Paul's own mission theology "has influenced the formulation of the conference theme and illuminates the intentions of the conference planners." (182) So the planners wanted us to attend to "the interrelatedness of Christological and missiological reflection . . . in 2 Cor 2:14 – 7:4" when we came to Pretoria. Klaus gets even more specific: "...this style of reflection,

moving from the Christological vision to the perception of missionary praxis, and from missionary praxis to the vision of Christ, makes 2 Corinthians a stimulating document for our conference.”

Too bad we didn’t follow the conference planners’ lead to spend time, plenary time, on “such intertwined Christological and missiological reflection” offered here. Did we ever take a serious look at 2 Cor. at all?

Klaus traces what’s offered in these Christology-cum-missiology chapters of 2 Corinthians. I see him highlighting three items.

1. The notes Paul merging the (seemingly opposite) terms, glory and cross, into his claim for the “glory of the theology of the cross.” In my words I hear Klaus showing that in the cross of Christ the “glow” central to God’s own glow-ry was “reconciling the world unto himself.” This cruciform glory generates reconciliation between us and God, says Paul, and that in turn generates our own “ministry of reconciliation [call it mission] our “beseeching you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” It’s not just that Christ and mission are linked; it’s Christ’s cross and mission that are the correlates here. Wouldn’t this theological assertion have given us a boost at IAMS 10? I think so.

2. Klaus also shows us Paul correlating the crucified and living Christ not first of all with the “broken world.” Perhaps to our surprise, Paul draws no parallel between Christ’s suffering and its mirror image in TBW. Instead Paul correlates JCCL with his own broken life as a missionary. Klaus cites the classic words (2 Cor 4:8-110: “Afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so

that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in our bodies. For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

It's not that the missionary is the one who holds the mirror and seeks to get JCCL's reflection projected over to the broken world. Rather the missionary in person is the mirror "so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh." The biography of the missionary mimes the missionary's message: Christ crucified and living gets mirrored in the missionary's own personal Good Fridays and Easters.

3. Granted, I have extended these two points above a bit beyond where Klaus takes them in his very brief 7-page essay. But I do not think I've taken them beyond his (or St. Paul's) intent. It is now, after offering us these two anchor points, that Klaus links this Christology to TBW. Both the original JCCL in the person of Jesus AND its mirror image in the apostle now get linked to TBW. By being third in the sequence of the reflecting-T process, reflecting-M comes with God's promise that "everything" in TBW is a candidate for becoming "a new creation." That is St. Paul's claim. The truth is in the details—how the sequence holds together and why it works.

We would have benefitted by devoting some of our time at Hammanskraal doing "Mission Studies" on these topics. Here are some thoughts about such benefits:

A. From #1

The primal locus of the reconciliation that comes with JCCL is not reconciliation between peoples, but between people and God. Thus the prime focus for the human brokenness which JCCL alleviates is humanity's God-problem. It's not the problem people have believing in God at all—sometimes called today's

problem—but the problem they have because on their own they are NOT reconciled with God. There's enmity between the two parties. The enmity is bilateral. The enmity is lethal. That's what Paul claims. Granted that claim was disputed in his day, in the two millennia that have passed since then, and in our day as well.

But suppose that Paul is right, that this genuinely IS the God-problem manifest in today's broken world as well. Then that problem has to be addressed when IAMS gathers every 4 years for missiological deliberation. Did any of that happen at IAMS 10? Not much. It was the world's intramural brokenness that got most of our attention, and therefore also intramural reconciliation got prime time—often articulated in today's p.c. terms “peace and justice.” However, when people's peace-and-justice with God is neglected (or even worse, taken for granted) in order to attend to peace-and-justice with one another, the latter, Paul would say, is a lost cause.

B. From#2

IAMS 10 would have gained from our hearing one another do what Paul does in showing how “my very missionary-biography mimes my mission-message.” We did have speakers—I'm thinking of folks reporting from the TRC—who did that. But we all would have gained if the Christ-connection of these biographies was not left to our imaginations, but made explicit for us, so that we too could improve our own miming of the message in our life and work. When the missionary's own life mirrors the message, Paul claimed, reflection-M happens. Wouldn't it have been profitable, maybe even fun, to do reflection-T on that thesis? And maybe even have a laboratory for doing some practice in mirroring?

C.

Might we not also have profited by doing some reflection -T on the sequence of our process: not jumping to TBW before we had done our Christological homework? One of the dangers of starting right away with TBW—often with the untested assumption that “we all know about JCCL and now we’ve got to get to the really tough item, TBW”—is how we appropriate TBW. We do not approach TBW on its own terms. Post-modernity has shown us that “appropriating anything on its own terms” is not really possible. We do all our appropriating through a variety of ad hoc lenses already at hand. We are always envisioning our world(s) through some (or several) set(s) of lenses.

Christian theologians, like everyone else, need regular lens-check-ups as they do their work. What better place for missiologists to do just that than at IAMS 10! In our particular case we would have done well to check out the lenses we’d brought along with us to Hammanskraal, doing so—as the planning committee proposed—by checking our own lenses with the JCCL-lenses proposed in 2 Corinthians. We might even have been daring and tried to construct a consensus model of what those lenses look like in 2 Cor.

Then, but not until then, we move on to use them to bring TBW into focus. Granted, such focusing is only instrumental to help us see TBW the way God sees it and then in our work of reflecting-M in that world. But without focusing, both the seeing and the reflecting-M are blurred. Having done our homework on the lenses we would have had more fruitful results, I think, on our TBW agenda. Wouldn’t that have incited even more Hallelujahs at Hammanskraal? I think so.

Part II. CHRISTOLOGY IN THE PLENARY

PAPERS AT IAMS X

I. A. J. V. CHANDRAKANTHAN “Proclaiming the Crucified Christ in a Broken World: An Asian Perspective”

The printed text of AJVC’s paper that I brought home from IAMS 10 does not fully match the notes I took while he was speaking—and that in two significant places.

1. My notes record considerable time devoted to six distinct images in St. Paul’s christology. In the printed text that’s all condensed to one single sentence.
2. Fully half of the printed text carries the title: “A Broken World: Glimpses of a War Experience.” It is the author’s jeremiad on the civil war in Sri Lanka, illustrated with his own first-hand experience of holocaust-like horrors inflicted on the Tamil community there. The data are dreadful. However I don’t remember hearing any of that in his plenary presentation. Did it happen or am I having a “senior moment?”

The six Pauline metaphors for Christology that AJVC gave us were powerful, and could have been foundational for plenary work on JCCL. This high Christology is the best resource Christians have for crossing over to the broken world so frightfully reported in the last half of the paper. But that did not happen in the paper, nor in the subsequent discussion we had. Yet these christology items are too good to go to waste. So I’ll try my own hand at making some linkages below.

In a private conversation afterwards, reported by Fritz Frei, Chandrakanthan offered this summary:

C. Jesus Christ, crucified and living in our world via Word, sacrament and in reality, is for Paul the content of life and

proclamation. Despite the scandalous humiliation associated with this mode of death Paul sees Jesus' crucifixion as the historical source of God's redemptive intervention. The apostle strives relentlessly to mediate this mystery by taking every facet of daily life he can imagine and using it for this purpose. From cultic life he presents the cross as expiation; from economics it is God's new covenant (new contract for exchange of goods and services); from political life it's ransom; from daily street life it's Shalom, God's new greeting of peace to people; from the courtroom it's righteousness and justification; from the realm of personal relations it's reconciliation. In this way Paul portrays this action of God as inexpressible, yet genuine rescue, linked then with the invitation to proclaim this "good news" to the ends of the earth.

D. In the context of the socio-religious and political spectrum of Asia this crucified brokenness of God is evident among his people and in the current realities of every stratum of daily life. Frightful is the brokenness manifest in the never-ending conflict between Singhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka. Over 60,000 Tamilian civilians, mostly women and children, have died in the mayhem. And all the while the official church keeps its distance, observing this unending crucifixion in much the same way as the onlookers who stood back and watched the events of Mt. Calvary. Sri Lanka symbolizes Asia's brokenness in most brutal fashion. Only a genuine church of the poor and powerless, the weak and the bleeding, will have the courage to take up this daily cross, to carry the sign of the cross and point prophetically to a hopeful future in the power of God and the Spirit of Christ. The church is called to identify the sins of the world, for which the poor carry the burden. The God of the Bible is on their side. The church is commissioned to discover her calling as community in Christ by constantly seeking

reconciliation between the powers that divide. In taking her place at the side of the poor and helpless, the church makes God's constant and concrete presence visible and palpable in their midst. The mission of the Asiatic church is rooted here. Here is the place to be disciples of Christ.

Comment:

where and how does Chandrakanthan connect paragraphs A and B? Para A is solid JCCL. Para B is grim TBW. But do the twain meet other than in the fact of crucifixion in each one? Not really. There's not much good news in noting that Jesus was crucified and, sure enough, Tamilians are being crucified too. But Paul's high Christology of the crucified Lord and the myriad Tamil crosses could be crossed theologically with one another, couldn't they? So that the former would be a resource for coping with the latter. Perhaps something like this:

5. In all six of Paul's metaphors for portraying the cross of Christ, the agenda is humankind's "God-problem." Not our problem in believing in God, but our conflict with God. Every one of the metaphors conveys "good news" because it remedies a prior "bad news" situation. Christ's cross is (cultic) expiation because it removes barriers blocking access to God. It is new covenant, God's new personal contract wherein God "remembers our sins no more." It is political in liberating slaves from alien owners into God's own realm of mercy-management. It is Shalom in restoring rectitude in personal relations between God and humans. It is forensic courtroom stuff in that "the accuser has been thrown out" of the divine court since the "blood of the Lamb" has been entered into the record on behalf of the (otherwise rightfully) accused.

6. It is reconciliation, as Paul calls it in II Cor 5, but not to be understood as two parties once at odds now becoming friends again. Instead Paul is using reconciliation as a

commercial metaphor [like reconciling your checkbook with the bank's statement], which Luther liked to call the "froehlicher Wechsel." Joyful transfer, a fantastic exchange, a sweet swap. It's all about exchanging assets and liabilities—Christ's assets for our liabilities. In Christ's crucifixion our liabilities move to his account with all the consequences which that entails, and Christ's assets are transferred to us with all the benefits thereunto appertaining. In Paul's own words: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses [i.e., the law's kind of commerce] against them." Instead "for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin [i.e., our liabilities transferred to one who had none such on his own] so that in him we might become the righteousness of God [i.e., Christ's assets transferred to us (former) sinners]."

7. JCCL solves the God-problem of the human race. In I Cor 3 Paul speaks of it as freedom. "Where the Spirit of the Lord [Christ] is, there is freedom." (v.17) Christ-trusters, Christ-connected sinners, are free from any god-problem. They now "have confidence toward God through Christ." [I Cor 3:4] Run this freedom through the metaphors AJVC offered us: Free from barricaded access to God (cultic); from God's trespass-counting (commercial); from alien owners (political); from accusation before the divine bench (forensic); from other negatives now replaced by God's mercy-management in relating to us. This God-freedom is new grounding, new rooting to nourish other freedoms. Initially my own internal freedom—in the heart. Call it faith, namely, the confidence that the God-freedom just described is indeed true about me. Consequently I don't need to keep focusing on my God-connection, but can devote my energies elsewhere, for example, to TBW.

8. Which is what AJVC does. He agonizes that in a country so full of religion as Sri Lanka— Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim and Christian—people committed to these religions have no

significant effect on the “apocalypse now” unfolding there. Paul would wonder whether any of the four groups mentioned, Christians included, are free enough to do what AJVC pleads for. Apart from what might be said for the other groups, Christians—if they indeed are the silent observers AJVC portrays—are the ones who have forgotten JCCL. They need to be diagnosed, not first of all for their defective ethics, but for their defective faith. If the fruits are bad, says Jesus, the tree is sick. You don’t tell the tree to bear good fruit. You first have to re-root it, re-root it into JCCL. Faith before ethics. Otherwise you get no Christian ethics at all.

9. In NT language the opposite of faith is fear. Who knows what all the things are that bystander Christians in Sri Lanka fear? From my distance I can only guess: fear of ridicule, fear of criticism, fear of repercussions on family, fear of getting killed myself, fear of doing the wrong thing despite my best intentions, fear of getting in trouble with my own tribal associates, and more. When Christians are under diagnosis of such inaction, the root fear is that JCCL can’t sustain me, won’t sustain me, when I do indeed confront any or all of the above.

10. When fear spreads its tentacles around the heart, freedom dies. And for folks like that, as Paul tells the Galatians, slavery has returned to subvert the “freedom wherewith Christ has set us free.” For such cases, it’s back to square one. The putative Christians need to be evangelized again—at the base, at their own roots. The God-connection—both good and new—brought by JCCL must be re-established. If it is not, freedom for Christ’s kind of courageous word and action in TBW will never happen. Fear will (continue to) carry the day, and mayhem multiply. When Jesus tells the panic-stricken father (Mark 5:36): “Fear not, only believe,” he is articulating this very axiom. Fear is un-faith in JCCL. It barricades acts of freedom. Trusting JCCL is

freedom. ["Jesus means Freedom," E. Kaesemann once titled one of his books.] Faith-grounded freedom mobilizes folks formerly fearful for acts of freedom, the acts that AJVC calls for in the face of the slaughter in Sri Lanka.

11. Here once more the sequence is important. To get Christians moved to the courageous (and dangerous!) ethics of discipleship, you first have to check the faith factor. AJVC emphasized Paul's fascination with the term "power" (dynamis) for Christ's significance: the cross is the power of God for salvation. Faith in Christ makes that power my own and that generates the freedom for us to enter TBW as Christ's field representatives. "Lord, increase our faith," is step one for any act of Christian freedom. Though we are justified by this faith alone, says Paul, it never remains "alone," but moves directly into TBW as faith active in love.

12. I can't imagine that there aren't such free-by-faith Christ-followers working in TBW of Sri Lanka. But their number may be small, vastly smaller than the official Christian population of the land. But even if I lived there, I'd be ignorant of the actual situation, for faith's freedom is often hidden. That doesn't mean it's absent. It just can't be photographed. You can't tell by looking whose heart is free, whose is fear-full. It can be faked, although when one's own life is at stake, faked Christian freedom usually fades. Yet faith's kind of freedom pops up in surprising places. Sometimes (most times?) it shows up as "widow's mite" events, where the poor and oppressed themselves give away their lives in words and acts grounded in Christ's "Fear not, only believe."

13. But what is that, someone may say, among so many fear-driven folks, the ones who seem to run the show in Sri Lanka? Granted, fear is perhaps the most powerful force that drives human history in both its macro- and micro-formats. And faith's kind

of freedom—also freedom from fear—cannot be legislated, any more than faith itself (trusting Christ) can be coerced. For those who do not, will not, live by such faith—and that includes putative Christians—Paul suggests here and there in his epistles that God has another “system” in place. In that system God works to keep the old creation from totally blowing apart. God gets a modicum of equity and caring done in human society even when fear-filled humans are the only agents God has to implement the program. Paul talks about the law [n.b., not the Gospel] inscribed in human hearts, which he interprets as a plus for common life in our fallen world. He also speaks of the godly coercion exercised by Caesar’s “sword.” Paul does not think he’s thereby promoting violence. His logic is that a sinner’s self-interest will more often than not constrain him to do what’s right in civil society and get a reward, rather than to do what’s wrong and have to pay for it. How this might be linked to TBW in Sri Lanka is another essay for which I am patently incompetent. Besides, such considerations go beyond the assignment to link JCCL with TBW using the Christological models AJVC gave us. That is what I sought to do above.

II. PAULO SUESS “The Gratuitousness of the Presence of Christ in the Broken World of the Poor of Latin America”

Paulo’s title already signals the Christology he proposes. He wants to show us that Christ is present, present in his explicit gratuitousness [freely bestowed gift-giving], in the broken world of the poor in Latin America. [Hereafter L.A.] Though he offers no separate Christological section—as AJVC did with his survey of Paul’s christological images—this Christology permeates his paper. The 500-year long crucifixion of Latin America’s indigenous peoples is the same reality we have in the crucifixion of Jesus. Not just similar (as AJVC saw in the

Tamilian crucifixions in Sri Lanka), but all of the same piece. That sameness is more than just the identical suffering, injustice, agony in both parties. In both we have the same redemptive, revelatory, salvific resources, the same good news. At least for L.A. the gospel is an ellipse. Its two centers are JCCL and the corollary messianic power of Amerindian suffering peoples.

Put that way it does sound radical. Does the christology of 2 Corinthians 5 invite us to add Amerindians into the claim that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself"? Are the "poor and the Other" co-redeemers with Jesus for the life of the world? Statements from Paulo sound like that. E.g., "The poor and Others...give rise, not only to new inculturations of traditional christology, but to NEW CHRISTOLOGICAL THEOLOGIES." "The poor...the Others...ARE God with us, Emmanuel, Jesus Christ crucified and living amongst us." "The poor, those excluded, migrants and indigenous peoples [are] bearers of the good news of The Way." There is a "link between the PRESENCE of the Lord and the life of the poor." "Jesus Christ [is] present in the penury . . . of the poor and the Others." He can designate it the "latest linking of [God's] Third Covenant, a universal, historical and eschatological covenant of the poor and the Others."

That is forthright speech. In Pretoria we never got around to checking it, to raising the question: Paulo, is it true? What are your grounds, your foundations, for this "new christological theology?" How "new" is it when laid alongside "traditional christology?" The animating agony that moves Paulo in this paper is clear. It is today's "new" world, the market economy of global capitalism. Its consequences for the people he lives and works with is their never-ending crucifixion, a crucifixion that already has a 500-year history. The Pilates, Herods and centurions were the European conquistadors and all too often the

church's agents who accompanied them. So the polarities in his paper are the crucified and the crucifiers, the victims and the criminals.

When JCCL is brought into the discussion, it is no surprise that the crucified are close to JCCL, and the criminals nowhere near. Yet Paulo would like to bring them (us) nearer to the original JCCL. That entails bringing them nearer to the currently crucified. I sense that this is his strategy: To show us the full-Christic reality—messianic, salvific—in the currently crucified, so that we might thereby see aright what the original JCCL really was and still is.

Not surprisingly, Luke 4 is his grounding text. From the outset this has been the “canon within the canon” for Latin American liberation theology. Here Jesus appropriates for himself Israel's ancient Jubilee proclamation. Says Paulo: “Jesus takes this unrealized goal [i.e., scant evidence that it ever happened in Israel's history] and makes it the programmatic announcement of his life.” His argument to support this rests on three key terms: gratuitousness (sharing), closeness (incarnation, inculturation), and universality (non-exclusion, going beyond the boundaries of blood and race).

I'm not sure what gratuitousness all means in Portuguese. The signals I hear in Paulo's use of it as an English term are that creation is gift-laden and God is fundamentally a gift-giver. The resources for life on the planet are freebies. When they are commoditized, bought and sold, claimed by owners, have a market price placed upon them—that's already diabolic, in the literal meaning of the term: smashing them to smithereens. That brings chaos into the divine plan. Creation in all its parts is freely given, freely received, and therefore freely to be given further. Call it sharing. So also God's last great act of gratuitousness, the cross, where God's own son is shared for the

life of the world.

Closeness is the antithesis of separation, “us vs. them” indifference and exclusion. It signals “proximity of the poor/0thers.” Paulo is intent to “make a distinction between ‘poor’ and ‘0thers’.” Though “poverty is very near to otherness,” Otherness is a cultural term, not an economic one. In Latin America (or anywhere else for that matter) poverty does not energize for action or for survival. “Thanks to their cultures – and not their poverty – people live and survive, repel death, reproduce, and celebrate their life. It was not because of their poverty that the indigenous peoples of L.A. survived 500 years of colonization, but because of their otherness.”

Although the culture of the colonizers was death for the indigenous peoples, they survive to this day. Why? There is power in their “otherness,” power enough to hold back the juggernaut of the colonial culture that sought to kill it. This cultural otherness–alterity is Paulo’s fancy term–has persisted throughout millennia–not just the past 500 years–in Latin American peoples. For Paulo this becomes an indigenous “gospel.” He links it to God’s own “otherness,” the core of which, as we’ve seen above, is gratuitousness. From there is it but a small step to put it right alongside its mirror image in JCCL. Result: the elliptical christology of JCCL plus Amerindian suffering servants. These two centers together ground his hope that even in the face of the global market octopus, all is not lost. A transformed society of gratuitousness can yet come to pass.

What does this mean for missiologists? Paulo calls missiologists to reflective thinking (reflect-T) on these realities so that our craft can become (reflect-M) mirrors reflecting “the perspective of the Kingdom and the presence of the Lord in

history . . .to TBW of the poor in L.A.” “Missiology is involved in the struggle to save the memory of the poor/0thers,” not for reasons of nostalgia lest they be forgotten, but for the power they offer for the “transformation of our societies.” The cultural alterity native to Latin America is “the gratuitousness of the presence of Christ in the broken world of the poor in L.A.” We must not only cherish it, but appropriate it for our own discipleship. Not only do “we” not need to bring JCCL to “them;” we need to receive the JCCL they still have to supplant the erroneous conquest-christologies so common among us. This leads Paulo to call for “Indian Theologies in L.A. . . . with their own missiology.” They are “protagonists” for the rest of us to learn about “missiological exogamy,” the antithesis of missiology practiced as “ecclesiocentric incest.” For the missiological establishment [IAMS?] “this exogamy—the seeking of a bride outside one’s own tribe, not in the New York or Tokyo stock market, but in the midst of the poor and the 0thers—is not an optional attitude, but a command of the Lord.” Paulo could hardly make that more explicit.

Universality signals what the word catholic meant in the ancient creeds, if I read this paper aright. God’s gratuitous project for the world is one where everybody plays. Christ majored in making the outsiders insiders. So the poor/0thers are not just add-ons, they are first-string players. Gratuitousness is God’s alternative globalization venture to counter totalitarianisms of all times. In our day that means the “restrictive and ‘exclusive’ [economic] globalization” now encircling the planet. Paulo’s is not a call to “integrate” these outsiders into the ideology of market-globalism, but to replace it with the “missiology of the poor/0ther.” “The mutilated life of the poor, the excluded and the 0thers provides a constant indicator that social relations as a whole must be changed.” “Jesus Christ [is] present in the penury . . . of the poor and the 0thers.” Because

the poor and Others are planet-wide already, and in Paulo's perspective intrinsically Christic by definition he designates this universality as God's "Third Covenant, a universal, historical and eschatological covenant of the poor and the Others."

Comment:

Paulo proposes his Christic ellipse as a sample of the "new christological theologies" arising from the poor and the Other. He deems it new in contrast to "traditional christologies." That invites us to take the "old" ones and compare and contrast. The old ones in my seminary days 50 years ago were said to be three-fold:

- . Christ as victor over the principalities and powers (Irenaeus)
- A. Christ as substitutionary satisfaction (Anselm)
- B. Christ as moral example (Abelard).

Anselm: Christ's Substitutionary Satisfaction

Paulo by-passes Anselm entirely. For Anselm the playing field for the work of Christ is the fractured relationship between God and humankind, all humans. Paulo doesn't show JCCL to be the power that restores sinners to fellowship with God. In what he has given us here there is no "God-problem" bedeviling humanity. Concerning the poor/Others of L.A. he speaks not a word of their need to be reconciled to God. The folks who are in trouble with God and do need reconciling are those crucifying them. Yet they too do not need JCCL to alter their lethal relationship with God. Rather JCCL is primarily pedagogical—to show them, teach them, reveal to them, that God is not an oppressor, and neither

should they be. And if they/we cannot see this in the N.T. or in the praxis of the church, he will help us see JCCL in the crucified poor/0thers of L.A.

There are elements of Irenaeus' Christus Victor and of Abelard's moral example, I think, in Paulo's proposal, but they are distinctively nuanced.

Irenaeus: Christus Victor

Christ and his cross are paradigmatic for Paulo as God's victory over all the oppressions that humans inflict on fellow-humans. Jesus' resurrection is the ultimate ground for that confidence. Just how is not clearly spelled out other than that Easter is the last word in the story and Good Friday is not. But Irenaeus' Christus Victor had a different agenda. It was not human oppressors with whom he contended. For Irenaeus Christ was victorious over trans-human oppressors, big ones. Before these oppressors the whole human race is powerless. They are the unholy trinity of sin, death and the devil.

Paulo doesn't discuss them either in his occasional references to traditional Christology, nor in the one he proposes, the two-centered ellipse. Now it may be that he works with a "realized soteriology," the notion that since Christ's Good Friday and Easter is now past history, those mega-oppressors are indeed defeated, and thus of little consequence any more, "no big deal." The oppressors still vexing humanity, possibly the fallout of these ancient tyrants, are fellow-humans and the structures of crucifixion they devise. Paulo might be saying that these present and active oppressors haven't yet heard, or don't believe, that the unholy trinity has been undone. So they continue in service (and servitude) to these primal oppressors—even though they are effectively passe'—and thus human oppression continues.

Not so Irenaeus. He read the NT to be saying that though JCCL has tossed them out of the heavenly courtroom, these mega-oppressors were still at work on earth. All people die, Hitlers happen. What is already true in heaven needs yet to be made true on earth. Here on earth, yes in Latin America, the unholy trinity (not just its human devotees) still rages. Until Christ conquers these mega-oppressors in the hearts of those tyrannized by them, or in the hearts of their willing followers, people-to-people oppression won't go away. Coping with earthly oppressors and ignoring the mega-ones is symptom-therapy, a band-aid on the boil, a plaster over the cancer.

Anselm: Christ as Moral Exemplar

Much of Paulo's proposal has links to Abelard's Christology. But again "with a twist." For the most part Abelard's agenda was ethics, to get Christians to live and act like Christ's disciples. For that, of course, the Master himself is the prime exemplar. So "model your life according to his" is Abelard's proposal. He was a human and he could do it, so can you. God's goal for fallen humanity is restoring them to righteousness. That is the fundamental reason why God sent Jesus. As moral example he goes all the way to the cross, suffering for others, trusting God all the way. Human lives modelled after his will conclude as his did. Easter victory will be ours as well. That's Abelard simplified, I grant, but not distorted.

Paulo too does parallel modelling, but his universe is not at all calm as Abelard thought his was. Paulo's world is in turmoil, terrible turmoil. The "bad guys" are not just doing bad things and needing a moral exemplar. It's a lot worse than that. Nowadays they've got the whole world in their hands. Not only are they crucifying the poor and the Others in that world, they are crucifying the planet itself. Paulo's paralleling focuses on the cross, Christ's and that of the poor/Others. They mirror-

image each other. Yet the latter do not

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need the former as source or power to do what they are already doing. Already as they confront their crucifiers they are living life gratuitously—even before the gospel of JCCL ever gets to them. If/when JCCL does get reflected to them it is confirmation of the universality of what they are doing. Both are allied to God by the fact of their suffering, since God ["by definition" in liberation theology] makes a preferential option for the poor. Because both have God on their side their ultimate victory is assured. But is Jesus really necessary in Paulo's christology for bringing Good News (something good, and something new) that is not already there in the L.A. culture of the poor/0thers? That is the question.

[The six Christology metaphors AJVC showed us above do not all easily fit into the three models just discussed. E.g., Paul's picture from the marketplace of the "sweet swap"—ownership exchange of our sins for Christ's righteousness—correlates to none of the above.]

Summary.

Since Paulo is our new IAMS president, there's a possibility that we can recoup the conversation we missed at Hammanskraal. If so, I'd suggest pursuing two questions—one on TBW in L.A., the other on God's gratuitousness in JCCL in the N.T.

3. Put bluntly, Paulo, are L.A. poor/0thers sinners? That may sound crass, but it's a fundamental Christian issue. Do they on their own have a God-problem diagnostically distinct from the oppression-problem that undeniably tortures them? In the Reformation rhetoric of the Augsburg Confession (1530) sin is described as the malady of the human race "since the time of

Adam.” Its specs are that humans are “without fear of God, without trust in God,” and—in place of these two real absences—that sinners live their lives “incurved into themselves.” If L.A. poor/Other ipso facto already replicate what JCCL represents, how did they get rid of that primal malady?

4. In discussing Paulo’s christology—elliptical, as I read it—we need to hear more about the reality of those two centers. My question: Is God’s gratuitousness at one center the same thing as God’s gratuitousness at the other? I hear the N.T. witness saying no, i.e., that there is something new, brand new, in the gratuitousness coming our way in the Christ-center of the ellipse. Whereas the gift-giving coming from the other center is a grace that obligates the receivers, God’s gift-giving in Christ runs on a new formula—“scandalously” new—a gift-giving that liberates but does not obligate at all. It even liberates us from failed obligations that pile up from our gift-receiving at that other center day in and day out throughout our lives.

So we need to ask:

what changed, what was different in our world after Good Friday/Easter happened? The changes signaled by Paul’s 6 soteriological metaphors, the ones AJVC showed us above, are cosmic. They are all changes for the good. They all signal changes in a sinner’s God- problem. In Christ God deals with sinners differently, precisely at the point of what they’ve been doing on the receiving end of all that primordial gratuitousness. I didn’t find Paulo following his apostolic namesake in attending to the God-problem we humans have. Maybe he’s done it elsewhere—after all you can’t say everything in 9 pages—but then we need to have it connected here. And that second center, the poor/Other. What gives them parallel status to God’s gratuitousness in JCCL? What gives their crucifixions power—both for themselves, and for others?

I'm writing this on Good Friday. Three crucifixions are in the Gospel text for the day. Only one is intrinsically salvific. Of the two men to the right and left of the center figure one does come into the orbit of that salvation. But he wasn't there at the outset just by being on a cross. His dying takes on saving value by virtue of his eleventh-hour appeal to the central figure and the response he receives. In this transaction the salvific power flows in only one direction. The man on the other cross dies disconnected to Christ. His crucifixion does have meaning, but it is not salvific. Rather it is "the just sentence of condemnation" for one who "does not fear God." He receives "due reward for his deeds." One dies with his God-problem healed, the other not.

"Bringing humanity into the presence of the Lord," a definition Paulo offers for mission, is not automatically good news. The result could be "just reward for one's deeds." Even entering the presence of Christ crucified is not ipso facto good news apart from the transaction reported in the first case. Can we extrapolate from this crucifixion paradigm that until the God-problem gets "fixed" in both oppressors and oppressed, God's just sentence and due reward for deeds is what all participants can expect? With no faith-connection to the One in the center on Good Friday, how can anyone's crucifixion replace fear with freedom, greed with gratuitousness, estrangement with closeness, self-incurvature with universality, anywhere in human society?

III. TINYIKO SAM MALULEKE "Christ Crucified Among African Cross Bearers"

Tinyiko's presentation was one of two shorter papers presented as last-minute fill-ins for the plenary lecture spot left vacant when Isabel Phiri was unable to come to the conference. In the copy I brought home ("unedited draft") he devotes most of the

text to surveying the scene of African Christianity today and only launches into Christology. But that christological excursus strikes a note not heard in the first two papers. It might even contradict them on the subject of the linkage between the crucifixion of Jesus and the crucifixion of peoples in Sri Lanka and L.A.

Although African Christians draw strength in corollating their suffering with Christ crucified, Tinyiko says, they are quick to note the difference between the two. There is identification, but that is “only one half of the story. The other half is an emphasis on his ‘otherness’ and his ‘difference’ from us.” So it is yes, and then yes but. He cites Setiloane’s poem to show the identification, the Yes:

“Yet for us it is when he is on the cross,
This Jesus of Nazareth, with holed hands
and open side, like a beast of sacrifice:
when he is stripped, naked like us,
Browned and sweating water and blood
in the heat of the sun,
Yet silent,
That we cannot resist him.”

The “but no” Tinyiko finds documented in “many sermons and songs.” Even “when he is stripped, naked like us,” the same Christian confessors say “There is ‘no one like him.’” Tinyiko continues: “Africans affirm that human beings fail much too often, especially in the face of temptations and calamities, but [as the popular hymn says] Jesus never fails. African Christians realize “that human beings do not and cannot adequately match Jesus in the glory of his brokenness.” Citing Miroslav Volf he goes on to say: “The suffering of Christ cannot be totally and exclusively taken over by the poor Such a total take-over would be contrary to the self-giving grace of the Crucified

God, which is at the very heart of the Christian faith.”

Is this not a clear “contra” to the first two plenary presentations, especially to Paulo’s? So the stage was set for substantive debate on fundamental Christology, but we never got around to it.

Much of the rest of Tinyiko’s paper chronicles the “brokenness of Africa,” the scarcity of hope, and the contradictions present in the “massive Christian presence on the continent.” Yet he does not conclude in hopelessness. Only after confessing our brokenness, he says, “can we come to appreciate the reality and worth of Jesus’ brokenness for ourselves.” That double action, penitential confession and Gospel-grounded faith, leads him to his final sentence. “In this way we may be able to reflect something of both the death and the resurrection of Christ.”

There’s a solid assertion for further discussion: the practice of confession and absolution as one way to reflect JCCL in TBW. Isn’t that what Tinyiko is actually proposing? I think so.

PHILOMENA N. MWAURA

presented the companion paper to Tinyiko’s. I never got a printed copy of it and my notes are insufficient. To compensate I offer the paragraph from the “Listening Committee’s Report” presented in our closing session. Philomena’s “presentation related to the meaning of brokenness for women in Africa. We were introduced to the amazing contradiction that although women are marginalized in society and suffer injustice, sometimes through dehumanizing laws of traditional culture, these are the persons who respond with joy and enthusiasm to the message of the crucified Christ in whose brokenness peoples’ hurts, desperations, fears, anxieties and struggles have found meaning. Healing has spurred hope and a yearning for the joys to be experienced in the resurrection. It remains a paradox that the

church has been an instrument of liberation and entrapment of women at the same time as it has ignored certain sectors of the very group it claims to speak for. It is not surprising then that women are drawn to African Independent Churches where the value of life is emphasized and the gifts of women are received.”

These were the major plenary papers. We did have one more plenary presentation, the presidential address from CHUN CHAE OK, “Mission in a New Millennium.” She too spoke to christological matters and I’ll review her words here in my closing paragraphs.

CHUN CHAE OK

Chun Chae’s call for new missiology in the new millennium gave gentle critique of missiologies past. Granting that “full consensus on the definition of missions” among our IAMS membership “is difficult,” she nevertheless offered her proposal, “start[ing] where my context challenges me.” Two patent pieces of her own context are that she is an Asian and a woman. She did not pointedly chastise missiologies past—and missions too—for being so Eurocentric and a mostly male club. Yet what she offered for the future made it perfectly clear.

0. Mission in the new millennium must move to full and equal presence of the womanly half of the human race, even if it were not true that women comprise more than half of the worldwide church.

1. The same holds true for Asian inclusion, the continent where half of all the world’s billions live. The numbers present at IAMS 10 did not reflect either of these two facts of life.

Most pointed, though gentle, oh so gentle, was Chun Chae’s critique of us missiologists. Though committed to reflecting JCCL in and into TBW, the first candidate for working on the

reflection-M agenda is in the person and life of the missiologist. That, she reminded us, was Paul's own paradigm. In his own biographical crucifixions and resurrections on the mission ramparts he mirrored the very message he was promoting. Citing Asian missiologists she spoke of "misrepresentations of the gospel in different aspects of mission work." Her focus was not on policy or strategy issues, but "misrepresentations of the gospel . . . deeply rooted in the very lives of mission- promoting people." The brokenness of TBW is not just "over there," but in us too. Mirroring JCCL into that brokenness in us amounts to repentance and absolution. Tinyiko above concluded on the same theme.

The "new" items for missiology in the new millennium are:

2. "The missionary movement is in the South."
3. It's not mission TO today's broken world, but the people from TBW, "the very poor people are [the] missionary people."
4. "It is new that transforming mission is to be begun within mission leadership." She calls us to "a shift of missionary reflection from intellectual discipline to inner transformation of the reflectors." To play on Pogo's famous line, she's telling us: "We have met the problem and it is us."

That could be a wide, very wide, critique. To move away from the Western ethos of the Enlightenment [reflecting-T] to "a longing to be changed within ourselves with newness of life and with honest evaluation of our prejudice on different situations and persons, greediness for comfortable living, popularity, and recognition." That's repentance again. Her call entails "reflecting-T" on defects both in ourselves and in our own linkage to JCCL, so that we ourselves be rightly re-rooted. From which could indeed come the "reflecting-M" that is at the center of Christ's mission to the world.

In earlier days of my seminary teaching in the USA, we debated the wisdom (even the ethics) of inflicting the Enlightenment on our grad students coming from Asia and Africa. The exegetes carried the day, so we continued to do it. The reasons were: you can't just pretend it never happened; the western world is shaped by it, so "they" have got to know it. Many of those students "knew their Bible" better than some of us profs did, but we thought we were doing the right thing. Nowadays there is even more reason to question such a policy, especially in the West, where post-modernism pooh-poohs the Enlightenment. So Chun Chae may not be calling for the impossible. Granted she mentions neither the Enlightenment nor Post-modernism, but her words in the paragraphs above are not just an aside, a minor point, in her presidential address. She concludes the paragraph: "I understand that this kind of newness is the core of mission in the new millennium."

Her address concludes with her list of the component parts for Mission in a New Millennium. Mission is cooperation, is women and youth involvement, is restoration, is celebrating and sharing life, is living the gospel, is evangelism and local church, is unity and unification, is reconciliation. Two of these bear on the project I'm engaged in here. One relates to the subject just discussed above. In "Mission as living the gospel" she speaks to "the real problem . . . the gap between words and acts in mission leadership." That's the problem of missionaries themselves being reflectors-M of JCCL in whatever world, broken or otherwise, that they serve.

From Mission as living the gospel she segues to her most explicit christological statements. Actually they are more Christ-confessional statements. Alongside a citation from John Stott critiquing modernity [sc. the Enlightenment] and postmodernity, she says: "Whether in east or west, south or north, there must be a simple statement of who Christ is in His

unique role in salvation history – crucified and resurrected for the salvation of human beings as revealed in the scriptures.” Both missionaries and missiologists “are challenged to go back afresh to the Scriptures . . .to grasp the core of the gospel in the heap of cultural and religious data.”

Mission is evangelism, “sharing the spirituality of the cross and resurrection.” In the context of Asia’s ancient and new religions, she “call[s] to return to biblical pattern of mission. In the East there is no greater attraction and meaning for people of other values and faiths than the person of Jesus Christ and His redemptive work. In old religions, treasures of teaching are found for moral and ethical living. The need is to behold the glory of the Lord.”

Chun Chae gives her understanding of that Lord and Christ in her final paragraph, “Mission as reconciliation.” She reviews the reconciliation theology (the “sweet swap”) of 2 Cor. 5, the text we’ve examined before way back at the beginning with Klaus Schaefer’s pre-conference essay. “God was in Christ reconciling the world” means that “The cross of Christ is unique. He died for our sins. He died in our place. God in his amazing love substituted himself for us, being our sin and dying our death.”

Mindful of humanity’s “God-problem” she counsels us “not to minimize sin and true guilt. Sin is a rebellion against God.” Its remedy? “In the cross God made reconciliation.” How does that reconciliation become ours? “By his grace alone, on the ground of Christ crucified alone, through faith alone.” What does the life of those reconciled look like? “A change so radical that no imagery can do it justice except death and resurrection with Christ, dying the old life of self-centeredness, and rising to a new life of burning love for others.” That’s Chun Chae’s proposal for a new millennium of reflecting-T on JCCL and her encouragement for our reflecting-M

in TBW.

Conclusion.

Some IAMS colleagues, responding to Part I of my IAMS review, suggest that our conferences are not the venue for the Christological conversations—and likely conflicts—I said I’d hoped for. So I should be grateful for the small blessings. I am grateful—and a number of the blessings were not small at all! Nevertheless I recommend to the planners for IAMS XI that they brainstorm possibilities for a program architecture that would open doors for such things. Vis-a-vis the past conference, one mechanical modification might be to have papers from plenary presenters in our hands before the assembly gathers. Then we could use plenary program time for face-to-face conversations between the authors of those papers. Grant, for the moment, that my lengthy review above is partially on target. Then a plenum discussion between the principals would concretely ask Paulo to argue his “new christology” vis-a-vis Klaus holding forth his reading of Paul’s christology, with AJVC’s and Philomena and Tinyiko making the case for their Asian and African christologies—and Chun Chae asking them all to consider the value of her Asian and womanly christology with its patently evangelical contours.

The way I’ve just proposed it is clumsy, but the project is worth trying, isn’t it? Where else in the Christian world do such foundational debates take place? If mission-minded folks can’t do it, who can? Besides, we’re all friends, not just IAMS members. Better yet, we’re sisters and brothers members of an even Larger Network, committed to a Planetary Project.

Edward H. Schroeder
St. Louis, Missouri USA

[CHRISTOLOGICALDIFFICULTIESATIAMS10 \(PDF\)](#)

“Gospel Basics For Adults” – A curriculum for new members

Colleagues,

If things are going according to plan, we your editors are in South Africa on this Thursday participating in the Tenth Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies. Before we left the USA, we put 3 pieces into the pipeline to supply you with ThTh postings for the three Thursdays we'll both be gone. Then Robin will be back, d.v., and ThTh 87 should come your way “live.” Marie and I are staying a while longer doing other chores in South Africa, Malawi, Kenya, and concluding with a few days of homecoming at our 1995 workplace, the Mekane Yesus Seminary in Ethiopia. Ash Wednesday is our due date back home.

Today's posting is from the same source as was ThTh 82 a couple weeks ago, namely, the newsletter of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Mukwonago, Wisconsin. Tucked back among the inside pages of THE OLIVE LEAF (January 2000) we found this buried treasure, a sample of Pastor Steve Kuhl's curriculum for New Members and Inquirers. Here Steve seeks to do law/promise theology in parish education without fudging. See for yourself.

Peace & Joy! Ed

GOSPEL BASICS FOR ADULTS

Course II – LIVING ROOTS: A BASIC SUMMARY OF THE

CHRISTIAN FAITH

“Gospel Basics” is the name of the four-course curriculum we developed for our New Member and Inquirer class. But it’s not for new members only. Everyone is invited! On Thursday, December 2, we finished Course I, “Jesus: The New Way.” In that seven-session course, participants received an overview of the life and mission of Jesus as the Messiah in light of its historical setting and in response to our skeptical age.

Course II, “Living Roots,” is a seven-session course that will be held on Thursday nights in January and February. The aim of the course is to give a basic summary of the Christian faith, organized around the Apostles’ Creed and informed by Luther’s Large and Small Catechisms. The breakdown of the sessions is as follows:

1. What’s It All About? Focusing on Genesis 1-2 (the two creation stories) and Luther’s explanation of the First Article of the Creed, we will begin to develop the basic world view of the Christian faith, the world as God “intended” it to be. Here we will explore what it means to say that God is the Creator and ruler of the world and Humankind is God’s steward, created in the Image of God.
2. What Went Wrong? Part I. The world as God “intended” it, however, is not the world we live in. Something went wrong, and any honest description of Creation must take this state of affairs into account. Therefore, by focusing on Genesis 3 and Luther’s explanation of the Ten Commandments, we will further develop our basic Christian world view by identifying life as we know it as a “life under God’s judgment” or a “life under law.” The reality of human sin and God’s judgment upon it radically alters what it means to live in a world created by God and our calling to be God’s stewards.

3. What Went Wrong? Part II. A continuation of the previous session, focusing primarily on the meaning of the Ten Commandments as a symbolic description of how the various relationships in which we live are all lived under God's judgment.
 4. What's the Alternative? (Two Sessions) The heart of the Christian Faith is that God has provided an alternative to "life under law," namely, a "life under mercy" through faith in Jesus Christ. Drawing on Biblical materials (especially II Cor. 3:4-18) and Luther's Large Catechism explanation of the Second Article of the Creed, we will show how this "alternative life-style," (the new covenant, the new creation) first promised to Abraham and fulfilled in Christ, became a live option for all.
 5. What a Difference!!! These two sessions will focus on how "what-Christ-accomplished-once-and-for-all" becomes ours personally and concretely, namely, the work of the Holy Spirit. Drawing on Biblical materials and Luther's Large Catechism explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, we will see how the church, the word and sacraments, faith, the forgiveness of sins, the Christian life, and our final hope, are all bound up together as the work of the Spirit among us.
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Postmodernism and truth: a theological perspective

When Ed came back from Bali/Australia/New Zealand he brought with him an article by Bruce Hamill, a Presbyterian minister

in Darfield, NZ, called "Postmodernism and truth: a theological perspective" from the journal "Stimulus" (vol.5, no. 1, Feb 1997). It's a interesting article, but a bit long for THTH, so I'm taking the liberty of offering you some of the "nuggets" from it. I think a basic understanding of postmodernism and how the ideas it propounds effect us today will help any Christian speak more confidently about their faith.

Peace,

Robin

P.S. Here's a quick comment from Ed before I get to Hamill. "Even if Bruce here is a bit more Barthian than we THTH editors are (see his final two sentences below), he's a long-time THTH receiver and has the floor for today. Marie and I had a great kaffee-klatsch at the Hamill home last October. It transpired with an art-print of 'Barth's church,' the cathedral in Basel, on the wall before us. Might that be ominous? Did I cave in? Not really. Here's why: although 'kaffee-klatsch' does not appear in any of the standard lists of the means of grace, Luther comes close to saying so. His Smalcald Articles go so far as to call such a conversational venue one of God's channels for the Gospel. That pertains, of course, if/when the klatschers themselves are in the Christian Koinonia. That Bruce resides inside that Koinonia the paragraphs below amply demonstrate."

Hamill begins by defining postmodernism – an important word in many academic circles these days. One of the basic ideas of postmodernism is that most everything we know, we know through language. Since we don't all understand language in exactly the same way, our grasp of the knowledge of reality is fluid – it shifts with the social context in which we find ourselves. What comes to my mind when someone says "cat" probably isn't exactly what comes to your mind and so this imprecision of language leaves us with gaps in our communication as well as our respective perceptions of reality.

What postmodernists say is the result of this contingent sense of reality is that there is only “your truth” or “my truth”, no TRUTH. What a community accepts as true is only what is agreed upon by the majority of folks (or folks with power) – it doesn’t have anything to do with truth that is true for anybody, anywhere, anytime.

Hamill asserts that this view of life isn’t really about accepting that we might all learn pieces of truth from each other that we can’t see from our own perspective, but rather it’s about rejecting the idea of truth altogether. Much of postmodernist work has been deconstruction – tearing down structures of knowledge that have been built in the last four hundred years or so to explain reality.

Hamill offers a Christian alternative between the absolutism of modernist empirical knowledge and the absolutism of postmodernist anti-knowledge. He uses the linguistic ideas of two philosophers – Wittgenstein and Polanyi – combined with the personalist tradition of classical trinitarian theology to make his points. (don’t get nervous, I’ll explain this stuff).

Wittgenstein says that language isn’t merely a clear cut one-for-one relationship between an object and the symbol which represents it (the furry four-legged creature who sleeps on your bed and the word cat, for example), but also includes the way in which we use the word in community. We have rules about the way words are used that make a word’s function more complex than just the naming of an object.

Polanyi takes this idea a step further and says that this word-oriented, rule-governed perception of the world also can’t be separated from non-linguistic knowing – petting the four legged creature, hearing it purr, cleaning up the hair balls. Taken together, Wittgenstein and Polanyi offer a dynamic view of

language. Language is what we use to understand the world.

This view differs from the static view of the traditionalists (modernist empirical knowledge) who conceive of language as impersonal and the meaning of terms as fixed. In other words, language means something in and of itself without any interaction with the speaker or hearer.

Hamill says that by focusing on the language itself, whether its absolute fixed capacity to name truth or its absolute inability to name truth, is to misuse language. He says, especially using Wittgenstein and Polanyi's insights, that language itself cannot be the focus of attention. "We use language to see with, rather than to look at and to compare it with the world." Language is the lens we look through to see other things, so if we are focusing on the lens itself, we won't be able to see anything else.

He goes on. "We might say that the term 'true' applies to language when that language (properly used) allows truth to happen." Truth is what happens when people "involved with the language and practices of the community" interact with one another. Hamill says that "the correct response to the postmodern relativizing question 'Whose truth?' when it is asked of someone who makes a sincere truth claim is; 'My truth – and what do you think?'" It's in the interaction between language users where the possibility for truth lies.

Hamill closes his article by drawing his argument specifically to Jesus Christ. He says that "Jesus' self-identification with 'the truth' about God (according to John's Gospel) is consonant with the relational and personal account of linguistic truth as an event of disclosure." We learn about the triune God by knowing Jesus. "Jesus permits us to dwell in him and find access to the Father." We can't keep the concept of truth locked in

analytical propositions or throw out altogether language's ability to facilitate truth. "Theological truth relies wholly on the self-authenticating truth of God in the revelation of Jesus Christ as the place where humanity and God meet. It relies on the one who is himself God's concrete claim on humanity and therefore on language (correctly understood) and truth."

Living with Two Calendars

Colleagues,

For this Festival Day, the Epiphany of our Lord, also Christmas Day for Eastern Orthodox Christians, we pass along this gem from THE OLIVE LEAF, monthly newsletter of Mt. Olive Evangelical Luth. Church, Mukwonago, Wisconsin. Rather epiphanic itself, it shows forth the parish theology you can encounter at Mt. Olive under the pastoring of Steven Kuhl. Steve also some collateral callings, one of which is serving as President of The Crossings Community. Here he alerts his parishioners—and now our readership—to the two calendars Christians have for Y2K.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

LIVING WITH TWO CALENDARS IN A.D. 2000

The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus – January 1, 2000

Thoughts for Beginning the New Year

By Steven C. Kuhl

Calendars are a key ingredient in our lives. They help us to mark time and to organize life. They help us to set priorities and to remember what is important. Therefore, not everyone's calendar is the same. Nothing reminds us more of that than New Years.

For example, at the very time our secular calendar calls us to focus on the "wishful promise" of a new year (January 1, New Years Day), the Christian (liturgical) calendar calls us to focus on the "hopeful promise" of the child whose birth we celebrated eight days earlier on Christmas. Just how different the focus is between the liturgical calendar and the secular calendar is evident from the strange and obscure event we as Christians observe on that day (January 1): "The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus." So strange is this observance that hardly anyone notices it. But you do!

The promise that the secular calendar presents is that of a world looking into an uncertain, nameless future, the identity of which is simply an impersonal number: "2000." The uncertainty in it all (this year anyway) is symbolized vividly by the acronym "Y2K." Never mind that the "2K" (2000) has its roots in marking the coming of the Christ, inaccurate though it may be. (Most scholars think Jesus was born around what would now be marked as 6 to 4 B.C.) That origin, for all practical purposes, has been lost. By contrast, the promise that the Christian calendar presents is that of a Church looking at a certain, named person and his accomplishments: "Jesus." Now the point is not to ignore one calendar for the sake of the other. As Christians we journey into "two times or futures," so to speak: the uncertain future of 2000 and the certain future of Jesus Christ. The point is to distinguish what each calendar promises and, then, to let the hopeful promise of Jesus take priority

over the wishful promise of 2000.

The first task is to distinguish what each calendar promises. Frankly, with regard to the secular calendar no hopeful answer can be given. That's because, in part, it comes to us anonymously. It gives no hint, no indication, of what it will bring. In and of itself, the secular calendar places us, not even into our own hands, but into the hands of "Fate." True, when observed over the long haul, even "Fate" reveals something about the direction it is taking us-though we naturally hate to think about it, and usually don't. Fate's future is ominous, foreboding, foreshadowing evil. It is often said that "the only certain things in life are death and taxes." That saying is not just the grumbling of a cynic, but the summation of the world's collective wisdom concerning "Fate," a wisdom which is also echoed in the Bible. "The Preacher," also known as [the O.T. book of] Ecclesiastes, summarizes this worldly wisdom with these familiar words: "Vanity of vanities ... all is vanity!" (Eccl 1:2) ["Vanitas" is the Latin word for emptiness.]

But for those who know and believe the biblical account, more can be said about this reality called "Fate." "Fate" itself, even as the writer of Ecclesiastes also knew, is in the hands of God. (Eccl 12:13-14) Strange as it may sound, it is true. "Fate" is the world's unenlightened description of the reign of God in ordinary history. It is an "unenlightened" description because it lacks God's vantage point, the interpretive Word. It is a description of the "reign of God in ordinary history" because it is a description, not of God as he rules through Christ Jesus, but God as he rules lawfully through a fallen, selfish steward, sinful humanity, "using one sinner to punish another," as Luther summarized it. Ironically, by placing "Fate" in the hands of divine providence, the Bible does not make it any less ominous, but only more certain – and foreboding – in the long haul.

One of the most vivid examples of Fate enlightened by the Word is found in Isaiah 10. It was the “year of Assyria,” so to speak. Assyria had attacked and conquered the nation of Israel. But as Isaiah interprets this calamity of history, he sees it not as the work of blind fate, no matter how chaotic and irrational it may seem by human standards. Assyria’s rise to power is the judgment of God upon Israel for her business elites’ oppression and exploitation of the poor in her midst. (Is 10:1-2)

Nevertheless, Assyria’s rise to power is by no means a sign of God’s favor upon it, even though that power comes from God. Assyria is itself an arrogant, evil empire and only a momentary tool in God’s arsenal to rain judgment upon a sin-sick world. (Is 10:5-6) The day will come when Assyria, too, will pay the consequences for its evil. But only when God is done using it for his purposes. (Is 10:12) When the time is right God will raise up another scoundrel (the year of the Babylonians) to punish Assyria. (Is 13:1-22. See also Jer 25:1-14) This is the flow of history as the Word given to Isaiah interprets it. What looks like “Fate” is actually worse. It is the judgment of God upon a sinful world: God using one sinner to punish another. It is what we sometimes call “poetic justice,” that messy justice in which the only right outcome is that everyone is eventually proved wrong. (Pss 14:3; 53:3; Rom 3:10-11, 23; 11:32)

This is what the secular calendar by itself has to offer. People may party and wish for an Assyrian-like year. They may even get it. But they dare not be fooled. It offers no real and lasting hope. That’s why on New Year’s Day, the Christian calendar presents us with something different. It turns our attention to what seems to be an insignificant event, but which, in reality, is filled with real promise: “the Circumcision and Naming of Jesus.” The text for the day is the shortest for any day of the year, one verse, and reads: “After eight days had passed [from

his birth], it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.” (Lk 2:21)

Like all first century Jewish parents of newborn boys, Mary and Joseph had their son circumcised and named on the eighth day. This was not uncommon. But in the case of this child something profound and brand new is happening. Not just any child but the very Son of God is here being circumcised.

To understand the significance of this act we must understand the meaning of circumcision, at least as Jewish Christians, like Paul, came to see it. In Jesus’ day circumcision was not just a medical procedure or a mere naming ritual. It was an act of confession, an act that identified a person fully as a “Jew,” meaning, undeniably subject to the law of God. (Gal 5:2-6; Rom 2:1) This as Paul came to realize was not the good news. The only possible spiritual advantage (symbolized in the act of circumcision) that the Jews had over the gentiles, according to Paul, was that they knew their “Fate.” (Rom 3) Of course, as heirs of Abraham and Children of the Promise, they also knew – or should have known – that God promised to establish a means of salvation from this Fate. But that was not the purpose of circumcision. Circumcision was given by God, not as a sign of salvation, but of condemnation, as a sign of the need for a salvation yet to come. As such, Israel’s males carried in their bodies a sign of the Fate that naturally awaits the whole sinful world. Essentially, through circumcision, a child was being condemned, inserted consciously into the world of Fate, into the mix of human sin and divine judgment.

Now comes the big question. Why would Mary and Joseph have circumcised Jesus? What could have possibly driven them to place the sinless Son of God in the middle of human sin and God’s judgment . . . and not neutrally so . . . but in a way that

places him squarely on the side of humanity, the condemned? The answer is that they possessed hope – hope that this Child was One who could save people from the Fate created by their sin and God's judgment.

This hope is expressed by Mary and Joseph as they name their son "Jesus," a Hebrew name meaning "Yahweh is saving" his people. As the text makes clear, this hope, expressed in the naming of Jesus, was not wishful thinking. Rather, it was an act of faith: not blind faith, but faith in the Word of God as it came to Mary by God's angel before the child was conceived.

Of course, the full ramification of what Mary and Joseph did on the day of Jesus' circumcision was not seen until Good Friday, when Jesus, on the cross, bore the Fate of world: its sin, God's judgment and death. Nor was the Word of God's Promise concerning Jesus fulfilled until Easter, when Jesus burst from the tomb as savior, conquering sin, judgment and death. What Mary and Joseph could only hope for – in certain faith – we have seen: Jesus is the savior of the world.

And yet, faith is still an essential part of our life, too. For, although Jesus has been shown forth [= Epiphany] as savior – already! – in his resurrection, we still live in a fateful world and still await the fullness of his resurrection for ourselves in our time. For this reason we do not circumcise, but baptize. In Holy Baptism we are united, not to an anonymous future, but to Jesus Christ, crucified and raised. Although we still live in that anonymous time which at the moment is called 2000, like Mary and Joseph before us, we live in this time hopefully. For no matter what Fate throws at us in 2000 . . . whether it be weal or woe, gain or loss, health or sickness. . . Fate does not have the last word for those of us who are in Christ Jesus: the last Word to us from him is always forgiveness, salvation and resurrection – that is assured!

So, when I bid you Happy New Year, that is not wishful thinking. For I know who you are: a people who have the hopeful promise of Jesus guiding you all along the way. Only one thing, then, needs to become your resolve for the New Year. Keep in close, constant touch with the Word of Promise; worship every week; and rejoice with Christ's people . . . for therein lies the secret to a promising future. Happy New Year.

POSTSCRIPT: Follow-up Reports

In two recent postings—ThTh 77 & 79—we did a little hustling. One was a tincup extended for \$upport to assist your editors in getting to the international missiology conference in Pretoria, South Africa later this month. A dozen of you have responded, putting \$1800 into the cup. Many thanks.

The second was a Macedonian call for a college prof to teach Western Civilization this coming semester at the Lithuanian Christian College in Klaipeda, Lithuania. Two responses came—both from the same family! So in two days (Jan. 8) Dr. Albert E. Jabs AND daughter Krista K. Jabs fly out from South Carolina to teach at LCC. They've got chutzpah, these two. Classes start next week! Al just retired from many splended years of teaching at Shaw University in North Carolina. He's a member of the Board of Directors of Crossings. Now in just a few days he'll be in the classroom again with 160 LCC students in the required Western Civ course. Krista, a recent graduate from Florida State University, doubles the gift from the Jabs household. She will be teaching business and economics. Floriat Krista! Floriat Al!

As mission volunteers these two foot the bill themselves for this whole ball of wax. People desiring to partner with them in this venture can send tax-deductible gifts (check or money order payable to "Mennonite Brethren Mission Service International,

Jabs Support”) to: LCC NORTH AMERICAN OFFICE, 204 – 1520 McCallum Rd., Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada V2S 8A3.

THE JOB OF UN-CURSING THE WORLD

Edward H. Schroeder

[Youth Programs, Minneapolis, ALC, etc., Volume 13, n.d., pp. 13-16]

VOCATION IS MUCH MORE THAN WHAT I DO FOR A LIVING. IT IS THE FULL TIME CALLING OF GOD TO LIVE MY LIFE AS THOUGH IT WERE HIS LIFE. I HAVE A WHOLE RAFT OF VOCATIONS ALREADY BEFORE I EVER HAVE A JOB AND SO THE BUSINESS OF CHOOSING A VOCATION IS ONLY ONE OF MY VOCATIONS.

PROCEDURE

The method of presentation is a modified “What’s My Line” routine requiring a moderator, four “liners” and the audience as a panel. The moderator is responsible for introducing the topic, informing the audience of the way the “game” is played, and introducing the four “liners” as they appear. The program material which follows is a thorough guide for the moderator and “liners”, but requires that each study the suggestions and be prepared to carry out his presentation in his own words.

It is the “liners’ ” job to have people learn about their **vocation**, i.e., about the **caller**, the **callee** and the **calling** involved in the four Biblical characters whom they represent. It might add a note of suspense if the “liners” would try to hide their identity, at least in their speaking. (For an added note of interest to the League it might be well to have the “liners” costume like the people they are representing, though for the first of the four this might be difficult.) The identity of these callees is not important to the purpose of the presentation, so if it cannot be concealed not too much is lost. The four are Adam, Abraham, Jesus and Peter.

Each of the “liners” studies a piece of Biblical literature relating to a “calling” incident in the life of the man he is portraying, and from this each develops a short autobiographical story that he will tell to the audience. The simplest procedure would be to say something about the three parts: the **caller**, the **callee**, the **calling** and the changes that took place in any one of these three parts during the course of the episode related. The following suggestions for the “liners” will give help for their portrayals.

THE LINERS

ADAM

Study Genesis 2 and 3. Obviously God is the caller. He calls man (Adam) into existence. The **calling** consists of being the “image of God.” Most likely this word “image” means **mirror**. Man is to be a God-reflector. But when God calls man to account for his “reflecting” job the mirror is broken. The “liner” should use imagination and fantasy in living himself into Adam’s situation. For instance, he might say: “He called me to be a God-reflector. I wasn’t sure what that meant at first, but before long it

dawned on me. I should be reflecting the creator Himself to the rest of creation, especially human creation. When people meet me they should be reminded of God. Shortly after that a tragic incident happened, and before long God called on me again. Actually all He was doing was calling me to account, checking on how I was doing in my **calling**, in my God-reflecting business. And because I knew I was doing such a lousy job, I hid. As silly as it sounds, I tried to hide from the one who called me into life in the first place. Well, you can imagine what followed . . .

“Emphasis must be placed on the “cursed” world (Gen. 3:17) because the next three “liners” are all part of the calling to un-curse the world.

ABRAHAM

Read Genesis 12 to 17. Two aspects of Abraham’s **calling** are important here. One is that God called him to “forsake all and follow Him” (12:1). Important is the word **bless**, the opposite of curse, found in 12:2, 3. Not only is this a mere reversal of God’s verdict upon a single man, but upon all the families of the earth. And this takes place through Abraham and through his descendants. Mark this well: **through people the world gets uncursed!** God calls people into action to uncurse the world. All of this does not happen in the lifetime and calling of Abraham, but it is the beginning of a second kind of calling—not just the calling of the creator asking, “How are you doing as a God-reflector in My creation “but the calling to let God take hold of you again and re-shape your life (in Abraham’s case literally reshape it into a brand new pattern and thereby become a called agent for the eventual reshaping of other people’s lives). Abraham had only the haziest notion of what was all involved. But no matter. It doesn’t count how much you know of what the Caller has in mind, what counts is that you trust him. Remember

St. Paul's evaluation of Abraham in Romans 4—Abraham believed God and **that** was accounted as his righteousness. That is undoing the curse, un-cursing the world.

JESUS OF NAZARETH

Read Matthew 3:13–4:22, Jesus' baptism, temptation and His **calling** of his disciples, especially Peter who is the next and last speaker.

Points to be made here are the **call** to Sonship in the voice from the cloud at baptism. Here we see Jesus getting **called** to a particular kind of sonship, not the son of razzle-dazzle glory, but the Son of suffering and temptation. The point should be made that this calling subjects Jesus to the Temptation that immediately follows and that it is the Sonship that the tempter attacks ("If you are the Son of God . . ."). The tempter suggests a razzle-dazzle kind of sonship, but Jesus' sonship **calls for** something else. See Matthew 16:21; 17:22f; 20:17f, 26:1f.

PETER

Note the **calling** of Peter as related in Luke 5. Here Peter is first being called to account, "How are you doings" It results in his confession of failure. "Depart from me for I am a sinful man." Jesus stays and puts up with him as a sinful man (which, of course, is Jesus' calling).

After giving a picture of himself as Peter, then the "liner" retaining the role of Peter, should switch gears and start speaking to the audience about their calling (*The moderator might try to interrupt saying: "Say, that's my job." To which*

Peter responds, "I'm an apostle. What are you") Peter's address to the audience should be on the basis of his own letter, **I Peter**, which is the key text which this "liner" should study for his role. This is an important role, for Peter must make the point of connecting the work of Christ to the **callings** of the Christians in the audience. He might purposely switch to the plural, **callings**, and make a point of the switch.

The key passages of I Peter are 1:15; 2:9,21, 3:9. They work in nice progression. The Holy God has called us back to be holy people, to be like Him, to be God-reflectors 24 hours a day. He did this by **calling us** (Peter speaking this part should always address the audience as "you.") from darkness to light in the suffering of the Shepherd (2.21-25) So that "you" might be God's own people (just like Adam, all over again), God-reflectors to others. In 3:19 he says it: we are called to stop the normal "cursing game" that goes on. ("Curse" doesn't just mean saying bad words, but driving people away from God, as God drove Adam and Eve away from Paradise). We are called to bless, to bring the life and love and goodness of God back to the accursed lives of the people around us. Every place, then, that I have a connection of any kind with people is a place where I have a vocation, where God calls me to un-curse that piece of creation by the power of the death and resurrection of Christ.

MODERATOR: (*breaks in here or when Peter stops to catch a breath*) Are you finished?

PETER: "No, but I wrote two whole letters in the New Testament and you can read more about it there. So I'll stop for now."

DISCUSSION

Questions for discussion might now be asked from the audience, addressed to specific "liners" or to the issues they have

opened.

If little or nothing is forthcoming from the audience, some of the following might get it going.

1. Where does God call us in any way similar to the way any of the “liners” were called?

2. What are the varieties of **callings** we have even before we have a job?

3. How can or do we perform the one central calling of **uncursing the creation** in these callings?

4. When are we called upon to choose our lifetime work; how do I fulfill my one central calling right in this career-decision struggle? (Perhaps Abraham fits in here: trust God and don't get all “shook up” about your career-deciding problems. Remember, you don't have to see the total picture of your life if it is entrusted to God; He'll see to it.)

5. Are there some jobs and careers in our day that continue to curse the world instead of bless it?

6. How do specific careers actually un-curse the creation?

[THEJOB \(PDF\)](#)