

# Justification – An Eastern Orthodox Perspective

Colleagues,

One of our dear students in the Lutheran School of Theology here in St. Louis—call it LST-STL—is Richard Leigh. By trade a health-care worker, and now in his mid-years infected with the “rabies of theology,” he’s become a theological omnivore. He’s all over the map, not only in the courses he’s consuming, but also in his wide-ranging surveillance of the theological marketplace when he’s not in class. He gleans all sorts of stuff and forwards some of it to me. At a recent LST-STL get-together I told him that I was going to use one of his recent discoveries for this week’s ThTh 139. I asked him how I should introduce him to y’all. Here’s what he said:

*“I like to think of myself as a white blood cell in the Body of Christ, flowing around interstitially, so to speak, picking up all kinds of things; off to school now learning to be a macrophage equipped to communicate with every cell for diagnosis and appropriate response for that body’s continued (improved?) health and well-being.” Sometimes it looks like the Body of Christ has an autoimmune disorder—where the macrophages don’t recognize cells of the same body as such, but as intruders from the outside. A little improved communication cell-to-cell seems in order here, so, that is largely what I’m about.*

*“Or, I could be characterized as a bee ‘accidentally’ cross-pollinating the trees in God’s garden as (s)he searches out the pure nectar of the word.”*

Here's some recent nectar he found recently. I don't know who the original author is.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

---

*Ed,*

*I thought you might be interested in this Eastern Orthodox treatment of Justification. It is in two parts. This is the first part. The next one is to follow.* Richard

## **PART I**

**Saturday, July 8, 2000**

**Great-Martyr Prokopios of Caesarea in Palestine**

**Readings for the Day: Epistle: Romans 3:26-4:3**

**Gospel: St. Matthew 7:24-8:4**

Apostolic Teaching XVIII

CHRISTIAN FAITH: Romans 3:26-4:3 (include vss. 3:21-25), especially vs. 31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."

Frederica Mathews-Greene, Orthodox columnist, author, and Khouriya (Presbytera), was once confronted on a talk show with the popular and vague cliché that "all religious beliefs are equally valid, all are fundamentally the same." To this modern, relativist view of "faith," she gave a straightforward and Orthodox Christian response: "Many faiths, not just ours, hold quite specific doctrines, and stand at firm disagreement with each other."

In today's reading, St. Paul reveals precisely why Mathews-Greene objected so bluntly to this modernist platitude that would merge all types of faith into a single, superficial,

religious pluralism. Observe the Apostle's certainty concerning the faith he proclaims: that his faith centers on Jesus (vs. 26), that Orthodox Faith aims to bring those who affirm it into the single, existing, right relationship with God which faith in the Mosaic Law never can achieve (vss. 27,28), and that Christian faith places the Mosaic Law on a new and true foundation (vs. 31).

First, the Apostle teaches a Faith that is "content specific," doctrine that points to the Lord Jesus exclusively as the One Who is worthy of all devotion, worship and commitment (vs. 26). Of course there is more to Orthodox Christianity than "faith in Jesus," than some general belief in the Person of the Lord. The Christian also unequivocally recognizes the universal presence of sin in all men (vs. 23). The ready recognition of the ubiquity of sin further enables Christians to extend faith to Jesus' death as a redemptive act of God's grace, by which the Faithful are freed from sin and death (vs. 24). Also, to assure that the Lord's death not be taken as an isolated event, the Apostle links faith to the redemption which the Lord's death achieved, presenting Christ's Passion as a propitiatory sacrifice achieved by His blood (vs. 25).

The Apostle specifically holds up the redemptive death of the Lord as the Type of all sacrifices for sins provided under the Mosaic Law, these being antitypes through which God, in His forbearance, passed "over the sins that were previously committed" under that Law (vs. 25). St. Paul draws out this specific connection to show that faith in the death of the Lord is faith in the righteousness of God Who justifies "the one who has faith in Jesus" (vs. 26).

Second, Christian faith is reliance upon "the law of faith" for relationship with God (vs. 27). The "law of faith" states that "...a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law"

(vs. 28). Justification is understood as an act which sets right a relationship. The propitiatory sacrifice of Christ has set aright the relationship between mankind and God.

St. Paul repeatedly connects God's justifying action in the Lord Jesus' death to faith in order to emphasize that each Christian must accept the Lord's death as a gift for himself. Observe: to accept the Lord's death does away with trust in one's own good deeds, since God has accomplished our justification. God calls upon all men to respond in faith to Him, to trust Him, to love Him, and to serve Him. Any one may do this, be he Jew or Gentile (vss. 29,30).

In conclusion, St. Paul rejects the idea that "the law of faith" does away with the Law of God. Rather, Christian Faith "establishes the law" (vs. 31). How? As we express our praise and thanksgiving in loving response to God's redemption and justification by delighting to do His law from our hearts. Christian life is the true way to rejoice in what God has done for us in Christ Jesus, and places the Law on its correct faith foundation and not on any trust in our own works. To trust in what God has done turns the Law into a vehicle for loving God and all men.

The way of Thy commandments have I run, when Thou didst enlarge my heart. (Ps. 118:32)

---

## **PART II**

**Sunday, July 9, 2000**

**Hieromartyr Pankratios, Bishop of Taormina**

**Readings for the Day: Epistle: Romans 5:1-10 (Tone**

## 2) Gospel: St. Matthew 6:22-33

Apostolic Teaching XIX

JUSTIFICATION: Romans 5:1-10, especially vss. 8, 9, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more, then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."

We spoke yesterday of the indissoluble bond between God's gracious justification and our urgent need to receive that justification in faith which trusts, loves and serves God. Justification is another way of speaking of God's great work, the great Mystery of our Redemption. The great justifying God has abolished the might of death, bestowing incorruptibility on the dead, and making it possible for us to cry out, "Wherefore, O Lord, Giver of life, glory to Thee!"

Today's reading complements yesterday's reading, for in today's verses St. Paul elaborates on justification, describing in detail what God has achieved. Like a heavenly gemologist, St. Paul takes out his greatest prize and turns it this way and that to reveal one brilliant facet after another. He discloses at least eight wondrous ramifications of God's justifying action in Christ.

1. "...having been justified by faith, we have peace with God..." (vs. 1). By His Cross and Resurrection, Christ ended the need to resist God. The Lord's pronouncement of "Peace" to the disciples bears all the riches that are packed in the Hebrew word "Shalom" (Jn. 20:19,21): healing, restoration, contentedness, well-being, the end of all disturbance and opposition. Being justified, we have peace. Wherefore to the God of Peace let us cry, "Glory to Thee!"
2. We stand in an utterly new relationship with God our Savior and Lord, a new mode of existence. Yes, we even

“have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (vs. 2). Let us understand! In the core of our being, we are not in disgrace but in grace, not unforgiven but forgiven, not lost but found, not at enmity but at peace with God. He has justified, and we have access to His grace so that we can be forgiven, healed and made alive. Praise Thy God, O Zion!

3. Standing in this new relationship, let us “rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (vs. 2). By justifying us, God establishes the possibility that we may draw upon His grace: “Though I should walk in the midst of affliction, Thou shalt quicken me; against the wrath of mine enemies hast Thou stretched forth Thy hands, and Thy right hand hath saved me” (Ps. 137:7 LXX). Yes, we may “glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character, and character, hope” (vss. 3,4), and our “hope does not disappoint” (vs. 5)!
4. Let us look into the depths of our heart. What do we see? Cease looking only at the fear, the failure, the sin, and recrimination. You are justified. “...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (vs. 5). O Thou Lover of mankind, glory to Thee!
5. More wondrous yet, the life-giving Spirit does not stand outside and say, “I love you.” We are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit “in” our hearts. The earnest of the pure and undefiled Spirit dwells within us. O heavenly King, take up Thine abode in us, cleanse us, and save us!
6. “...having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (vs. 9). “So let sinners perish from before the face of God but let the righteous rejoice.” O Lord Who has justified us, save us from all tribulation, wrath, danger and necessity!
7. Do you now understand that to be justified means: “we were

reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (vs. 10)? The Lord Jesus' death is peace, rejoicing, hope, the love of God, the gift of the Spirit, salvation from wrath. With all that I am, O Lord, I cry, glory to Thee!

8. Justified, "we shall be saved by His life" (vs. 10). Eternal life is extended to us. O Christ, Thou hast verily made us a true promise, that Thou shalt be with us to the end of time; a promise to which we believers hold, an anchor for our hopes, as we sing rejoicing.

To enroll send email to: [orthodoxdynamis-subscribe@onelist.com](mailto:orthodoxdynamis-subscribe@onelist.com)

---

## Salvation. What is it Really?

Colleagues, A couple of you tweaked me a bit for last week's claim (ThTh 137) that in New Testament usage, the verb 'to save' was regularly in the future tense. One of you called my attention to many NT references where that verb is present tense or even past perfect. Thus the NT also says that for Christ-confessors salvation is already a done deal. You told me: "Salvation as future is unquestionably correct, if we are discussing Paul's glossary in Romans. Look especially to Rom. 5:9-10. However, 1 Cor. 1:18 speaks in the present tense, 'those who are being saved.' Ephesians 2:6,8 speaks in the perfect tense, 'y'all have been and continue to be saved (and presumably will continue for all eternity to be saved) by grace.' Titus 3:5 speaks of God in the aorist, 'God has saved us' through baptism. Let Mt. 9:22 exemplify the numerous times Jesus says, 'your faith has saved and continues to save you.'" Another respondent reminded me of the umpteen places in the Lutheran confessions where the same is true, and where the term "salvation" is used

as a synonym for nearly all of the NT metaphors for the Good News, all of which are present realities: justification, reconciliation, adoption, gift of the Spirit, liberation, heirs of eternal life, peace with God, forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil. And then concluded: "If salvation is to be reconciled to God, have we not been given it? If salvation is forgiveness of sin, have we not been given it? If salvation is to be adopted as God's children and to be inheritors of eternal life, have we not already been adopted? Have we not already inherited eternal life by Christ's 'Last Will and Testament' going into effect at his death?" Some thoughts in response—

1. My mentioning "salvation as future" was almost a throw-away line in last week's posting. The topic under discussion was Mark Heim's thesis about different salvations offered in different religions. Buddhist Nirvana is something else than the end-of-the-line that the Christian Gospel offers. And then, as an aside, I remembered a Seminex NT colleague who used to call our attention to Paul's use of "salvation" as a specific term for the good news at the end of the line.
2. Of course, Paul and other NT writers link it to the additional good news metaphors [and the Lutheran confessors follow suit]—justification, reconciliation, etc. in that laundry list above. But in terms of its linguistic specificity it signals rescue from God's own critique, an evaluation not complete until the last day, when God's final judgment occurs. The beginning of the Gospel is what God is doing for us in Christ. Salvation strictly speaking is a term for the good news at the end. In Romans 5:9f it comes out like this: "Now that we have been justified by his blood, we will be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we



were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life." Note that the big terms, reconciliation as well as justification, are already a done deal. But the grand finale is not yet. "Wrath of God" in 5:9 is Paul's term for that final exam, God's operation "in the final analysis." The term wrath doesn't signal God's crankiness, but God's final No to sinners. For sinners it is indeed punitive judgment, and that's not good news. For sinners to survive that final settlement is Good News indeed. Call it salvation. Christ is the grounds for any and all who survive that exam, just as Christ is the grounds for all of those other good news terms. He is the one who makes it all happen—from beginning to end. But the end is not yet.

3. When Paul finishes by saying "we will be saved by his life," he's linking salvation to resurrection, first of all Christ's resurrection and from that one ours as well. Salvation and our final resurrection get close to being synonyms. Surviving the final settlement and finally overcoming death—especially the "second" death—are two sides of the same coin. To locate all of that in the future is not to minimize its present impact. One of you said: "It is more of a comfort to my conscience to trust the promise that in Christ I have passed the final exam than to hope I will." Doesn't such sentiment downgrade the value of hope in the Good News? It seems to me that "hope" in the NT is also a good-news word, if you will, a "future-tense" noun. So "to hope that I will pass the final exam" is not second-class comfort. It's first-class, state of the art. Christian hope is faith-in-Christ focused on the future. It signals that what I'm trusting as valid for me now will continue to be valid from here to the end of the line—and even beyond. Hope for salvation is as solidly Gospel as faith is for justification. But

hope's focus is up ahead. The end of the line is not yet. That's not necessarily a downer. It's just a fact.

4. Back to the many NT metaphors for the benefits of Christ. Even though they often get bunched together in Christian parlance, each has its distinctive focus. Some even more than one. Reconciliation (in Rom. 5 above) is enemies becoming friends. [In 2 Corinthians 5 reconciliation bears a second image, that of a commercial term, getting accounts to balance.] Freedom is prisoners having their shackles broken. Adoption is orphans getting parents. Forgiveness is folks getting their debts cleared up. Peace is restoration of rightness in all relationships—with God, with self, with others, with the world. Justification is sinners getting the justice they deserve and still coming out alive from the court room—and even more, from the gallows. Salvation strictly speaking is the good news of Christ for the end of the line, when every nemesis, especially the “last enemy,” the last critique is nullified. Well then, what about all those NT salvation references that seem so here and now?
5. In its OT rootage salvation is a health/healing term. That gets explicit in the NT healing that Jesus does, where we frequently hear his closing words: “Your faith has saved you (or healed you.)” In all those instances the Greek term is the same, “soozein.” Why English translations sometimes render it as “heal” and sometimes as “save” in these healing stories, is not clear to me. But even so this side of the resurrection, no one's healing is complete. Even Lazarus' resurrection in John's gospel didn't render him death-proof. Full healing, final healing, is up ahead in the final resurrection when our mortality itself is healed. If the pay-off for sin is death, as God said, then trumping death is full healing, healing in the final analysis. Call it salvation.

6. What I should have done before launching on this excursus was to consult the newly published authority par excellence for such matters: Frederick W. Danker's "A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature," 3rd edition, just off the press from University of Chicago Press, 2000. [Go to your favorite book-seller to get your own copy. \$85 for 1108 double-columned pp.] All the more so should I have done this since our condominium is but two floors away from Fred and Lois Danker's dwelling in the same building here in St. Louis. Besides that we have our own autographed copy. Well, "Fred says" (p 986) in NT usage "salvation, with focus on transcendent aspects . . . is found only in connection with Jesus Christ as Savior. This salvation makes itself known and felt in the present, but will be completely disclosed in the future." So it's already on the scene, but not the whole ball of wax. The final exam is still outstanding and comes under the rubric of salvation's "complete disclosure in the future." Mindful of that full disclosure yet to come Paul tells the Romans (13:11) in the old lectionary text for Advent I: "Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed."
7. One way Bob Bertram used to talk about this at Seminex was to note that in the NT Gospels sinners were offered a chance to "scoop" God's final judgment awaiting them at the end of the line. How? By trusting Jesus. It goes something like this: Jesus comes as friend of sinners, and on the cross gets treated as sinner par excellence. He gets the final "wages" due to sinners: death and God-forsakenness all in one package. The synoptic Gospels with their references to earthquake, eclipse, even corpses coming out of the tombs on Good Friday, are signalling that some sort of judgment day is happening here. It's a

proleptic (ahead of time) apocalypse before the final one. Jesus undergoes judgment day in his body on the tree. But since (as even the Roman centurion divined) “surely, this was God’s son,” for himself Jesus is no candidate for judgment day. So he’s enduring judgment day for others, for “real” sinners, and doing it willingly. Throughout his ministry he offers sinners the sweet swap: his judgment day in exchange for our own. Faith in him makes the swap effective. In one sense Christ-trusting sinners already have their own judgment day behind them and they are already home free. But there is still a “final” judgment day up ahead. Salvation still has one chapter to go. Christ-trusters have no Angst as that day moves toward them. For that final judgment will only ratify that their trust was indeed true. But it hasn’t happened yet. So Christ-trusters lift up their heads when any apocalyptic signals appear. Fundamental to the faith is that salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

---

## Responses to Non-Western Theology

Colleagues,

Several responses have come in to last week’s posting (ThTh 136). Two of you called my attention to S. Mark Heim’s

article in last week's issue [January 17, 2001] of CHRISTIAN CENTURY: "The pluralism of religious ends: Dreams fulfilled." I don't subscribe to CC any longer, so I went to the library to read it. There I also found Heim's sequel in this week's issue [January 24]: "A trinitarian view of religious pluralism. God's diversity."

Response #1

Here's what one of you told me:

*"Heim talks about different religions having differing goals (versus the old 'all roads lead to Chicago' idea). I like what he says to some extent. His last couple of lines are intriguing: 'My interest in the hypothesis of multiple religious ends is grounded in part in the way that it validates particularistic Christian confession, but as such the hypothesis also supports those in other religious traditions who are committed to the distinctive truth of their confession. I believe that the true order for religious diversity is rooted in the triune God of Christian confession.' The article is very abstract and I'll need to read it again to pick up details. I assume it's out of his new book: THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES: A TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGION."*

So far respondent #1.

A few years ago I reviewed—in the journal MISSIOLOGY [XXV, No.2. April 1997]—Heim's "big bang" book where he trotted out the thesis that in differing world religions we have offers for different salvations (note the plural "s"). Buddhism's Nirvana is not "fellowship with the Triune God."

I can't remember if I ever posted that review on this listserve. [I'm saying those first three words more often these days.] My quick check of the Crossings webpage showed no sign of it in prior postings. So I'll post it below as the main text for this week's ThTh. For Thursday postings in the days ahead we can take a closer look at Heim's latest work.

## Response #2

that Avery Dulles, S.J. (who just got a cardinal's cap from John Paul II) also said something about different salvations. Here's the text I received:

*The other response that came my way about Heim's CC article went on to say "Some months ago Avery Dulles had a review of JDDJ [= the Roman Catholic – Lutheran "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification"] in the journal FIRST THINGS, in which he helpfully pointed out that what is at work in Rome and Luther are two systems of salvation. He could also say that Luther is not Rome. But he seemed to leave the door open for further discussion, since they need not be incompatible. I have long thought that there is a semantic difference between Lutherans and Rome. We Lutherans are SAVED (justified, but still short of being sanctified into exerting sanctified effort) by grace through faith; Catholics are SAVED (expanded notion of being justified to include also being sanctified into exerting sanctified effort) also by grace through faith. Whether it is more than a semantic difference is the problem which I am not systematically clever enough to solve."*

So far respondent #2.

I may not be clever enough to solve that question either. But Dulles may indeed be talking semantics. Like this: For Luther the term salvation covers just so much territory; for Rome it covers that much and more. Nevertheless it is a tease to wonder if Heim's thesis about different salvations also applies to different options among Christians. Might Dulles also be hinting that the salvation announced in Lutheran "Augsburg" catholicism is not the same as that in Roman Catholicism? If you wind up at different destinations when you get to the end of the salvation line, then it is "more than a semantic difference."

And that reminds me of an episode earlier this week. I was

one of two Bible study guides for an ecumenical event attended by a hundred-plus folks, most of them Roman Catholics. In the discussion someone mentioned JDDJ, which prompted a woman to ask: "What is this justification business? I've been a Catholic all my life and I think this is the first time I ever heard that word." My RC colleague at the podium said: "This one's for you, Ed." So I took it. I think my opening words were "I thought you'd never ask. I wish Lutherans would too." Most of you can guess what followed.

So what is salvation really? That is the question. Even among Christians. Even among Christians wearing the same name tags. When respondent #2 above talks about "being saved," I recall that Seminex colleague Ed Krentz badgered us in those days to be more precise when talking about salvation. For one simple reason: in New Testament usage, the verb "to save" was regularly in the future tense. So that if someone asked you on the street corner: Are you saved? the best NT answer was: Not yet; but I trust that I will be. Salvation, said Krentz, was the NT term for the event at the end. Redemption now, yes, Justification now, yes. Atonement now, yes. Reconciliation now, yes. But, as Peter preached to his Pentecost congregation: "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord Jesus [now] SHALL BE SAVED when the Day of the Lord comes." Salvation is the NT term for surviving the final judgment, passing the Final Exam. Just as Christians have not yet been resurrected from the dead, but they trust it will be so, so also salvation. It is the event at the end.

Well, all of that is another item for more discussion. It'll probably surface if/when we take a look at Heim's recent work. Herewith the book review on his debut volume.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

---

# **SALVATIONS: TRUTH AND DIFFERENCE IN RELIGION**

**By S. Mark Heim**

**Faith Meets Faith Series (no number)**

**Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books**

**1995, x, 242 pp., paper.**

The very first word in this book's title "Salvations"—in the plural—telegraphs Heim's message. Different religions are proposing different salvations. The pluralist perspective (many religions = many different ways to salvation) is currently popular in academic study of religion. It cheerfully grants that there are many religious roads going up the mountain to salvation. But Heim calls our attention to the fact that in this widely accepted pluralism the salvation at the end of these many roads is seen to be the same salvation. No pluralism there.

"Why not?" he asks. Why not many different mountain tops? Why not a pluralism of salvations? Buddhist Nirvana is not really the same salvation that Christians call communion with the triune God. What Hinduism offers at the end of the line is not what Christians call eternal life. So what would that mean for Christians in inter-religious dialogue if we started with the premise that the salvation at the end of the road is different in different religions? Each religion might well have its own distinctive "mountain top."

Heim proposes here a Christian theology of religions that grants, yea welcomes, a pluralism of mountain peaks too. That's the import of the word "difference" in the book's title. Salvations are not all the same. With the other key word in his title, the term "truth," Heim wants to acknowledge that Buddhism may well be the true way to Nirvana, but Christian salvation is something else. Christianity is the true way to communion with the triune God, but that's not Nirvana, nor is it what Islam offers as salvation.



He wants a “more pluralistic” pluralism. To get there he begins with penetrating critiques of today’s “big three” pluralist models, each done in a distinctive way. John Hick proposes a pluralism grounded in philosophy. W.C.Smith’s is existentialist, and Paul Knitter builds his on liberation theology. Despite their discrete profiles, all three bear the marks of being 20th century “Western” constructions. They build on the Enlightenment mythos for the meta-theologies (the larger picture in which each seeks to incorporate all religions) they offer. So they are vulnerable to post-modernism’s critique that every meta-theology is marred by the vested interests of a particular culture, or class, or individual. So Hick, Smith, and Knitter are each adding one more proposal in today’s multi-cultural supermarket of religious options. At root they are three additional brands added to the pluralism of possibilities on today’s religion shelves.

Heim’s “more pluralistic” model draws on the “orientational pluralism” proposed by Nicholas Rescher in the field of philosophy. Philosophy today is just as plagued by pluralism as religion is. Rescher says: It’s because of the perspective each philosopher has right from the start. If you stand here—from this perspective—and look at reality, you’ll get a picture that looks like this. If you stand somewhere else, thus taking a different perspective, you’ll get a different picture. Rescher does not anticipate that you could put all the perspectives together and get the complete picture. Facets may be combined, but not perspectives. “Perspectives are one (at a time) to a customer.” When philosophers assert a thesis, they are also commending that we adopt the orientation, the perspective they have, which makes that claim sound true.

Heim applies this to religion. What he gains from that, he claims, is a better pluralism. Better in that it 1) doesn’t add another religion package to the already overloaded shelves, but

is a definitely Christian Trinitarian proposal for acknowledging “truth and difference” in other religions—all the way to the salvation they propose at the end of the road, 2) offers better impetus for religious dialogue by supporting the “one and only” testimony of various traditions, 3) doesn’t leave religion immune to critique and challenge (an immunity, Heim says, no religion deserves), and 4) offers better prospects for the “practical and ethical goals of [current] pluralist theologies.”

Heim is professor of theology at Andover Newton Theological Seminary in Boston and has done extensive studies of religious movements in India and Asian Christianity. Thus his case for plurality of salvations has been tested in the dialogue world he lives and works in. His claim that his is a Christian proposal startles at first, but he argues it cogently and persuasively—though seldom ever with nickel words! Anyone claiming to offer something “better” than Hick, Smith or Knitter is saying a mouthful. Thus his book is a must for missiologists.

This reviewer’s question is one from inside the camp of Christian dialogue partners. Let’s admit that there are many “paths” among Christian denominations, and maybe even different salvations—or at least different labels for the salvation at the end of those paths that different Christians talk about. Then why pick “communion with the Triune God” as the name tag at the top where the paths meet? Why not some more basic, more original, term from the Christian scriptures themselves, such as forgiveness (the synoptic Gospels), or reconciliation (Paul), or the life that lasts (John)?

Heim chooses “community with the Trinity.” From the doctrine of the Trinity he zeroes in on “plenitude,” fullness, which gives him a Christian umbrella, he says, for friendly approach to other religions. This fullness of God, overflowing fullness, leads to Christ’s incarnation, of course, God’s openness to

everything in the world—even our religions. But there Heim stops, as though Christ's incarnation, the event of Bethlehem, was the grande finale of the salvation Christians talk about. He doesn't actually utilize (or maybe even need?) Christ's cross and resurrection. Wouldn't Heim's "better" pluralism be better yet with a "better" Christian salvation, one that included, yea "needed," a crucified and risen Messiah? I think so.

---

## **Non-Western Theology, Part 2 – The Stress in Letting the “Kids” Grow Up**

Colleagues:

Last week's posting on non-western theology reminded me that a few months ago (September 2000) the Vatican generated a bit of a brouhaha with its Declaration on Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue titled "Dominus Iesus" [Lord Jesus]. Non-Roman Christian communities were reminded of their inadequate claim to being fully "church," and world religions beyond the Christian faith didn't get very friendly treatment either.

In the ensuing damage control Rome said "Dominus Iesus" was intended as an in-house document, and that it was speaking primarily to Third-world Roman theologians who had gone beyond the pale in their efforts to link the Christian faith to local contexts and cultures. Granted that as the Gospel has expanded into non-Western worlds, the chances for heresy, syncretism, false gospels, and what-not has also expanded. At root it is no different from the era when the Gospel moved from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and on into the rest of

the world. In those early centuries (and also in the subsequent ones in the West) heresy, syncretism, false gospels, and what-not also abounded.

The 16th century Reformation arose from such a state of affairs in late Medieval Europe. Then as now the issue was: which contextualized gospel – Rome's or the Reformulators' – was the genuine one. The Roman church at that time sought to cope with the Lutheran "heresy" in much the same way that "Dominus Iesus" does—decreeing it to be a no-no and calling for obedience because "Rome has spoken; the case is closed." It didn't work then, and most likely it won't work now. The Reformation-era confessors proposed another way to deal with heresy—not coercion but conversation—allowing the "best" Gospel to win by articulating its own winsome power of persuasion.

Even insiders are telling Rome that "Dominus Iesus" was a mistake. One such is the Missionswissenschaftliches Institut – Missio [MWI] in Aachen, Germany. Its English name is "Institute of Missiology Missio." By virtue of my own dabbling in missiology I know some folks at MWI and so I'm on their mailing list. MWI is one of the cutting-edge RC agencies for mission research. Below is what they posted last October.

Peace & Joy!

Ed Schroeder

---

**From: Institute of Missiology – Missio Aachen,  
October 2000**

**Subject: Declaration to "Dominus Iesus"**

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

You are all aware that the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith of the Catholic Church, under the guidance of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger has published on September 5th of this year a Declaration on Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue. The

Declaration is titled: "Dominus Iesus – On the Unicity [= uniqueness] and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church". You must also be aware of the many different reactions it has caused worldwide.

We at the Institute of Missiology Missio e.V. (MWI) in Aachen-Germany have been dealing during the last 30 years with the issues of contextual theologies, interreligious dialogue in different cultural and geographic contexts, as well as with theology of religions. During these years we were able to establish a wide network of relationships with our partner theologians in the South and with quite a good number of theological institutions. This network enables us to document the different developments in theological thinking in the Universal Church and to make available the results to scholars all over the world.

The present declaration (see attachment) of the MWI takes up only that part of the Roman Declaration which deals with interreligious dialogue and theology of religions (the wider ecumenism), but not with intra-Christian ecumenism. May I ask you to take note of this declaration and – if you are publisher of a journal – to publish it.

Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Josef Estermann, Director  
Institute of Missiology Missio

---

## ***Statement of the Institute of Missiology Missio regarding "Dominus Iesus"***

*For nearly thirty years the Institute of Missiology Missio in*

Aachen has been following the emergence of contextual and inculturated theological reflection within the Churches in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania. This has been done by publications like the bibliography "Theology in Context" and the "Yearbook of Contextual Theologies." With these publications we have tried to document the theological work done and to foster dialogue among these theologians themselves and with their colleagues in Europe and North America. During these years we have been privileged to assist in the training of young students who specialize in the various theological and philosophical fields, to help in the build-up of theological institutions and to become partners in their theological reflections.

It is out of this longstanding relationship of partnership and friendship that we feel obliged to defend their freedom and their right to do original theological research within their contexts by making use of the cultural and religious heritage and applying new theological methods in the process. It is our impression that the recently published declaration "Dominus Iesus" by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) is not doing justice to the serious theological reflection done, especially by theologians from Asia, but also from the other continents, in the fields of christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology and theology of religions.

This is not to deny that in the process of taking up the new challenges posed by religious pluralism there have been theories advanced which are deficient and not fully compatible with Catholic tradition. The intention, therefore, to "set forth again the doctrine of the Catholic faith in these areas," and "to refute specific positions that are erroneous or ambiguous" which is the professed aim of the document "Dominus Iesus," is generally justified. But even if one acknowledges the real danger e.g., of religious relativism and false

positions regarding the salvific value of other religious faiths and the place of the founders of these religions within the history of salvation, there remains the question, whether the language employed by the CDF and the general accusations are appropriate, charitable and helpful in the present circumstances. The many negative reactions inside and outside the Catholic Church in response to the declaration show that the content and the language employed has hurt the feelings of many and been the cause for many misgivings and misunderstandings.

1. The public character of statements by Roman dicasteries [= the canon law term for courts adjudicating debates within the church] regarding other religionsThe assumption that statements by a Roman dicastery are only intended for internal information within the Church is contradicted when the publication of such a document is accompanied by public presentation in a news conference and coverage in the international press and other media throughout the world. When the saying is true that "There can be no peace in the world unless there is peace among the religions," then statements referring to other religions and their "value" have to be considered not only according to theological tenets found in Catholic tradition of old, but must be considered in today's context of the worldwide efforts to reduce tensions and of religious pluralism where many Catholic Churches, especially in Asia, find themselves as minorities in the midst of religious traditions which are proud and conscious of their spiritual and religious heritage and which resent very much to be looked down on by a Catholic faith claiming absolute superiority over all other traditions.

The vast political and ideological implications of the

declaration "Dominus Iesus" in many countries of Asia and elsewhere, where Christian minorities are under attack, obviously have not been sufficiently taken into account. In India, the media stated that the Vatican declaration on Christ's uniqueness threatens interreligious dialogue and communal peace in the country. The journalists accuse the Catholic Church of using "double talk" when on the one hand the Catholic Church is presenting itself as having basically changed its attitude and theology towards the other religions, which should not be seen purely as a device to readjust the missionary strategy of old to the changed conditions of today. The way the present pope makes it a custom to meet with the members of other religions, wherever he goes during his many pastoral visits and the policy of sending greetings to the major feasts of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the many local encounters and dialogues in different parts of the world, seem to give credence to this new attitude towards the other religions. The confession of guilt at the beginning of Lent and the many impressive gestures by John Paul II during his visit to Israel were recognized and appreciated worldwide.

The content and the tone of the recent Roman document, however, seem on the other hand to belie all these initiatives and claims to having changed, because it presents the Christian claim to absolute truth and fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ and the unique position of the Roman Catholic Church in such an absolutist way that dialogue becomes impossible.

2. Legitimacy of plurality in theological reflection within the World Church  
The issue at stake with the document of the CDF is whether the great plurality in the content and



methodology in theological reflection, which has developed in recent years, can be considered to be a legitimate expression of the emergence of a World Church since Vatican II. There is a general agreement that the development of the Catholic Church into a true world Church can be considered to be the specific characteristic significance of Vatican II in the history of the Catholic Church which exists as a communion of local Churches, engaged in dialogue with different cultural and religious traditions and secular ideologies and which respond in their own way to the theological and philosophical problems in their contexts. The present conflict with the forces of the world-wide globalization in the fields of economy, trade, information technology and other fields there poses the challenge for the Churches in different regions to preserve the authenticity of local traditions and regional diversity, not the least in being Church. When looking for answers in Divine revelation to these questions, they will also have recourse to the sources and resources of the cultural and religious traditions of their particular contexts.

The richness of the Catholic Church in the past and present consists in the ability to accommodate the variety, plurality and diversity of the many traditions within the unity of one Church. When Vatican II opened the way to celebrate the divine liturgy in the many vernacular languages, this was an acknowledgment of the fact that the Paschal mystery can and has to be expressed in the language of the people celebrating it. In the field of theology, too, there was the realization that no longer only one form of Catholic theology should be normative for all theological reflection within the different regions of the Catholic Church. The ensuing

boom in the development of contextual and inculturated theologies like the different forms of Liberation Theologies, firstly in Latin America and then in other continents as well, the emergence of African forms of inculturated theologies and the many contributions by Asian theologians show a remarkable richness and fertility of theological reflection.

3. *Orthodoxy and/or Orthopraxis* The Vatican document lacks completely any reference to the poor and the “fundamental option for the poor” which have shaped so much of the theological reflection and concrete action within the Churches of the so-called Third World during the last decades. The stress on the purely doctrinal and dogmatic aspects of the Christian faith results in a presentation of the Good News brought by Jesus of Nazareth which is devoid of any reference and relevance for the concrete lives of the faithful. Did Jesus Christ really only come into this world to claim to be the “only saviour”, to bring the “fullness of revelation” and to entrust solely the Roman Catholic Church with the legacy of a “*depositum fidei*” [faith-deposit], understood in the terms of Papal infallibility?

In Asian theology we find an approach to divine revelation which is shaped by a sense of the sacred, filled with a spirit of awe when confronted with the divine mystery and respectful of the many manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit in the sacred writings, rituals and traditions of the other religions. Asian Christians consider the values and teachings contained in these religions to be part and parcel of their own religious and cultural tradition. They do not want to break the communion with their ancestors but understand their own decision to accept Jesus Christ as their

saviour as continuation of a spiritual bond with the world of their ancestors and not as a total break with a past which has to be discarded, because it is in contradiction to basic Christian tenets of faith.

In the preparation and holding of the Asian Synod in Rome in 1998 the Asian bishops witnessed to the specific Asian approach to evangelization, interreligious dialogue and being minority Churches amidst religious pluralism. They expounded the "gradual way" of presenting Jesus Christ in Asian garb by showing him as preaching in parables, healing the sick and bringing the Good News to the poor and outcast in order to enter into dialogue with members of other faiths. To confess Jesus Christ as the only saviour will then constitute the end of a conversion process with the help of the Spirit as faith statement within the believing community of the Church.

4. *Danger of a new rites controversy?* The Roman document gives the impression that the richness of theological pluralism is seen solely as a threat to theological orthodoxy and faithfulness to Catholic tradition. On the one hand the document admits that religious pluralism, the problem of the theological function of other religions, their sacred scriptures and the place of the founders of these religions constitute new areas of theological research and a wide field for fresh theological reflection. But at the same time the document seems to refute nearly all theological advances made during the last 30 years by theologians in Asia, Africa and Latin America as incompatible with Catholic orthodoxy.

The sweeping condemnations of the reflections and writings by many theologians in Asia and elsewhere in the fields of christology, pneumatology, revelation and

*ecclesiology hurt and discourage the many theologians who have been working for years in contact and dialogue with the religious leaders and the religious traditions in their countries. The sharp distinction between "theological faith" as response to divine revelation, solely to be found in the Christian tradition, and "belief" as response to human religious experiences, found in all other religions, is endangering a meaningful interreligious dialogue and hurts the feeling of the believers in all other religions.*

- 5. Plea for more dialogue and exchange* With this statement we would like to make a call to a renewed discussion among theologians, local and regional bishop conferences as well as with the dicasteria of the Roman Curia to explore the "vast field" of open fundamental questions in the fields of interreligious dialogue, christology, ecclesiology and pneumatology. There is an urgent need to find new ways to safeguard the freedom of theological research in response to the different cultural, religious and socio-economic contexts and at the same time to respect the duty of the magisterium [= Rome's doctrinal monitors] to critically evaluate the results of this theological reflection in order to preserve the unity in concordance with the faith tradition within the world Church. The MWI will continue making efforts in fostering and inspiring intercultural exchange.

*Aachen, October 2000*

"P.S. For visual samples of non-western Christian theology GO to the webpage of the Asian Christian Art Association [www.asianchristianart.org](http://www.asianchristianart.org) and enjoy."

Cheers!

# Samplings from Non-Western Christianity

Colleagues,

The second Thursday every month our local Lutheran Professional Church Workers Conference gathers for liturgy, program, business and lunch. This morning 30-some showed up. At lunch today one of my buddies commented positively about Thursday Theology, but couldn't resist the quip: "Some of them, Ed, are a bit long."

So in deference to such a "challenged" colleague I was going to post today one single page, the book review below. But then—Epiphanically via some Telstar in the sky—another item, unsolicited and authored by someone completely unknown to me, arrived in my in-basket. It fits the theme, so I'm adding it on. Thus all of you may share in my serendipity. [And you, brother "X" (you know who you are!), may stop reading wherever your energy expires.]

The book review is destined for *MISSIOLOGY*, the journal of the American Society of Missiology. Few of you on the listserve, I'm guessing, will see it there. Don't be scared off by the book's German title. Most of its chapters—and all of the review—are in English.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

---

## ITEM I: BOOK REVIEW

**"Christen und Gewuerze." Konfrontation und Interaktion kolonialer und indigener Christentumsvarianten**

**["Christians and Spices." Confrontation and Interaction between Colonial and Indigenous Varieties of Christianity]**

**Edited by Klaus Koschorke**

**Studies in the History of Christianity in the Non-Western World, Vol. 1**

**Goettingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht**

**1998, 298 pp., paper, 98 German marks [= approx. US\$50.00]**

"Christians and Spices. That's what we're looking for." So said Vasco da Gama's crew to the Arab merchants they met as they went ashore in India in 1498. That these Portuguese explorers were looking for spices is no surprise, but that they also expected to find Christians on location was unknown to this reviewer. And the story of their eventual encounter with the Thomas Christians (Syrian Orthodox) is one of the chapters in this book—including the episode of their initial thanksgiving mass celebrated in a Hindu temple. They thought it was a Christian church—even though the many arms on the statue of the Virgin did give them pause!

This volume contains the papers—eleven in English, eight in German—presented during the International Interdisciplinary Symposium "Christians and Spices" which took place in Freising, near Munich, 14-16 February, 1997. The theme, taken from the episode just mentioned, engendered wide-ranging discussion of the many different forms of interaction between indigenous Christians of the non-European world and the colonial Christianity of the west during the past five centuries. These

forms run the gamut from friendly co-existence to conflict, and in some cases attempted take-over by the colonial Christians to see to it that the locals be brought into line with correct [= European] Christianity. Such attempts regularly failed.

At the same time this volume serves to begin a new series of studies to be published on the history of Christianity in Asia, Oceania, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. The Christianity found in these parts of the world has played an increasingly significant role in the context of World Christianity. Its long history can no longer be regarded as a mere appendix to Western mission and church history. These essays document that with 16 case studies and then three concluding papers probing “overarching historical perspectives” that seek to link the case studies.

The essays are gems. Some of the case studies, e.g., the da Gama story, the Jesuits arriving in Ethiopia, portray slice-of-life encounters the Westerners had with Christian communities already on location when “they got off the boat.” Others examine what happened between indigenous Christian varieties (initially rooted in early western mission activity) and the main-line missionaries who came centuries later. The venues for these cases are indeed international. Besides India and Ethiopia already mentioned, there is 18th century Congo Christianity, several cases from Latin America (Bolivia, Brazil, Peru), the Taiping Christians in China, as well as studies focused on Uganda, “the Arab world,” Korea, Nigeria, Ceylon, and “Asian Christian Writings for the 16th – 18th centuries.” Abstracts for each essay are present—in German, English and Spanish.

Herewith a bit more about one of the chapters. Its author is the only one I personally know, Martin Dreher, a Brazilian Lutheran. Dreher examines popular Catholicism and Pentecostalism in Brazil. “In Latin America, Pentecostalism is the major religious

phenomenon of the 20th century. Today, after its introduction in 1910 . . . it has won at least 20% of the Brazilian population and has been able to develop its own indigenous forms. It combines traditions from pre-columbian America, African religiosity and Brazilian popular Catholicism.” (214) When 19th and 20th century German and Italian immigrants brought authentic “Roman” catholicism to Brazil, there was no room left for such “folk-Catholicism.” Dreher shows how that oppression by the magisterial church, and the resistance it met in this folk piety, opened the gates for a symbiosis with Pentecostalism. Thus a religiosity that had become fundamental in Brazilian popular piety found a new channel for continuing its life—and is now booming.

For this reviewer CHRISTIANS AND SPICES opens a genuinely new frontier.

---

## **ITEM II: YESTERDAY’S EMAIL FROM INDIA (unedited text)**

*Dear and loving Rev. Edward H. Schroeder Greetings in our Lord’s matchless name.*

*I was born and brought up in an orthodox and prominent muslim family of India. I was a staunch muslim, studied Koran well and published books about Koran as its contents. But while studying in the university I was addicted on drugs and lost peace. Some of the Catholic brothers, who were studying for priesthood were my classmates. They advised me to believe Jesus as the Saviour. I denied and became violent towards them, because it was unimaginable for me to believe Jesus as the son of God and living God and also His crucifixion. But my Lord Jesus Himself showed me how and why He redeemed. And God has given me grace*



to accept Jesus as my Saviour and Lord. I suffered very many obstacles and persecutions from my own people. So I left home.

God filled me with His Holy Spirit and I'm preaching Gospel now and evangelising people, especially muslims.

From 31st Dec.evening to till 1st Jan. morning we had a full night prayer service at my residence. 142 people were participating. We together prayed to God to give salvation of Jesus for at least 2001 Muslim families during the year 2001 through our ministry. We also asked God to raise financial supporters and sponserers for us. Nobody is supporting us now, but God. I humbly request you to pray for us that God may send His Holy Spirit upon us to be a great witness among the Muslim world.

At any cost to win muslim world is our pledge in our Lord. We want to conduct Gospel conventions, personal and postal evangelism, correspondance courses, seekers conferences, training institutions, printing and publishing tracts and literature in different languages, establishing rehabilitation centres for those who will have persecutions and troubles and mentoring successors for this work. Please pray, ask your prayer partners to pray and if the Holy Spirit guides you please find some sponserers for this great task. Hope you will introduce all of your spiritual friends about me and our ministry.

Hereby I send you the model of a leaflet for Muslims. You may find mistakes, for my English is very poor. Hope you will correct and send it your friends also. If we get sponserers, we want to publish it in different languages. If you want to publish it in your journals, you are free to publish as it is.

Also if the Holy Spirit asks you to send some gifts or donations for this ministry, please send it in the account of

*"SALEM VOICE", A/c No. C&I 56 in the address of Bro. Paul Ciniraj Mohamed, Salem Voice, Baseelia, Devalokam (P.O), Kottayam, Kerala-686 038, INDIA. If anybody send foreign contributions, please send it in the account of Bro. Paul Ciniraj only.*

*Thanking you*

*Yours sincerely in our Lord  
Bro. Paul Ciniraj*

*Leaflet for Muslims: Show us the straight path (Koran 1:5)*

*"Ih'dina Sirathwal musthakim" is the fifth verse of the first Surah of the Glorious Koran and it means "Show us the straight path". There is a tradition saying that 'sirathwal musthakim' is a narrow bridge over hell to the heaven which made out of seven torn pieces of a hair. The righteous can pass over the bridge without any trials; but the wicked will go to hell.*

*A worldly man cannot pass over the narrow bridge. Jesus says in the Book of Injil (Gospel) that "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Mt 7:13-14). In the Koran also Allah gives warning to the mankind "Lo! they who deny our revelations and scorn them, for them the gates of Heaven will not be opened nor will they enter the garden until the camel goeth through the needle's eye" (Koran 7:40).*

*As in the Koran there is a Right Narrow Path to get into the Heaven.*

*The Koran says: "Allah created Adam out of mud, fashioned him*

and told the angels to fall and prostrate before the man. Iblis (Lucifer) did not obey. God degraded him. Still he asked God to reprieve till the day when the human beings are raised from the dead. It was granted. Then Iblis said to God that he will lurk in ambush of man on God's Right Path. Again he said that he will go upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right hands and from their left hands for God would not find most of them beholden" (Koran 7:10-17).

Mankind does not see the Right Narrow Path, because it is hidden by Iblis. Also he tries to lead them into wrong, broad and worldly ways. But the children of Abraham and Ishmael knows the broad path is not the right one to Heaven. So we pray to God to show us the Right Path.

Jesus said: "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able" (Lk 13:24). In the Scripture of Holy Bible, same Jesus declared : "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6).

The Koran says in 19:21 about Jesus as a revelation for mankind and a mercy from Allah, and it is a thing ordained.

Jesus destroyed the head of Iblis, and opened the narrow door of Heaven. He says: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). Also He has given grace for those who is born of God can overcome the world. Yes! It is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. (1Jn 5:4). But still it is very sad to say that Gospel is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God (2Cor 4:3-4).

*The Bible says in 1Tim 2:5 that there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. The Koran also says very clearly that Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near unto Allah (Koran 3:45). So we may keep our duty to Allah and obey Jesus (Koran 3:50; 43:61).*

*May Allah bless all of us to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven through the Right Narrow Path, which is Jesus, the Word of God (Kalimathullah ), the Spirit of God (Ruhullah) and the Messiah of God (Massihullah) who became ransom for many.*

*For more details please contact:  
Bro. Paul Siniraj Mohamed,  
Salem Voice, Baseelia, Devalokam,  
Kottayam-686 038, Kerala, INDIA  
E-mail: [siniraj@vsnl.com](mailto:siniraj@vsnl.com)*

---

## **Theology of Nature – Two Lutherans' Viewpoints**

Colleagues,

After a semester's leave-of-absence from ThTh postings my partner Robin Morgan is back. ThTh #134 is her theology-of-the-cross essay on one of today's hot topics: Eco-theology. These reflections arise from Robin's work this past semester in her PhD program at St. Louis University. As usual: comments welcomed.

Peace & Joy!

## Some Thoughts on Ecotheology

In a recent issue of the Christian Century (Dec. 13, 2000), H. Paul Santmire, an ELCA clergyman and long time ecojustice theologian, has the cover article "In God's Ecology: a Theology of Nature." Santmire's first book on ecojustice, "Brother Earth", came out in 1970 and he has been writing continuously about these critical issues of our time ever since (his book "The Travail of Nature" looks at the theme of creation in Christian theologians across the centuries and is still the standard text on the topic). This article comes in part from his most recent book, "Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology" (Augsburg, 2000). Here I'll summarize his article and then offer some reflections for further thought.

### SANTMIRE

Santmire begins by quoting Al Gore, who asked in his book, "Earth in Balance", "Why does it feel faintly heretical to a Christian to suppose that God is in us as human beings? Why do our children believe that the kingdom of God is up, somewhere in the ethereal reaches of space, far removed from this planet?" Santmire says that Gore expresses here the yearning of many Christians for resources in the faith that will equip them for engaging environmental issues. So Santmire's theological task is laid out.

He states that much of the Christian ecojustice writing of the last generation has evolved into two basic camps – the reconstructionists and the apologists. The reconstructionists believe that there are few resources within the historical

Christian tradition with which to engage environmental issues and so a “new edifice of thought must be designed from the ground up, with new foundations and new categories.” Matthew Fox, Thomas Berry, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Sallie McFague all fall into this category, according to Santmire.

The apologists, on the other hand, emphasize “the Christian faith’s positive ecological implications.” Good stewardship of the earth with all its God/human focus and ethical overtones is the center of the apologists’ work. “Their primary concern is for wise management of the resources of the earth for the sake of the people of the earth, especially ‘ecojustice’ for the poor.” Santmire cites Thomas Derr and Douglas John Hall along with the World Council of Churches in this camp.

Even though these two options are the main thrusts of Christian environmental theology today, Santmire says that there is a third option called revisionist. Initially springing from Joe Sittler’s address [“The Cosmic Christ”] to the World Council of Churches in New Delhi in 1961, this position stays within the classical Christian tradition defined by the ecumenical councils, but claims that a “Christ centered theology can address not only the redemption of humanity, but also the history of creation.” He includes James Nash, Terence Fretheim and Jurgen Moltmann here.

Santmire says that this revisionist position is biblical, christological, ecological and ecclesiological. Its christocentrism “will take on a more universal scope than it did in the works of the reformers and Barth, and will highlight, as Sittler did, the cosmic creational and salvific purposes of God with all things.”

According to Santmire, the revisionists see that “what the theology of justification by faith meant for a church in need of

reformation in the early sixteenth century is precisely what the theology of nature must mean for a church in need of reformation in the twenty first century.”

He goes on to propose nine areas for theological conversation, which expand the traditional God/human parameters of Protestant Christianity to include the rest of creation. Santmire concludes that conversation which takes into account these three principals, rather than the God/human focus we have held, will reshape the way we do theology and live as church in this time of global environmental crisis.

## **MORGAN**

I believe that before such triangular theological thinking can bear fruit, we need to delve more deeply into the God/human paradigm, which most ecojustice thinkers along with Santmire have criticized to one degree or another. In my opinion, there is still a strong current of dominating Christendom thinking here. Upon realizing that we’ve sinned, made a mess of much of the planet, we stand up and say, “By God, we will fix what we’ve broken and nobody better get in our way while we do it.”

One aspect of Christology that I believe has been neglected by the reconstructionists, apologists and revisionists is Christ as the Dependent One. [My exploration of Christ as the Dependent One is inspired by Robert W. Bertram’s article, “Christ(ening)” in *Currents in Theology and Mission* June 1991, 196-197]. Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity is the Son of God and as the Son is dependent on the Father. Not in a way that denies their co-equality as persons in the Trinity, but as “the One who depends” as Gregory of Nyssa says.

This dependence is something that none of us wants to think much about because it’s not particularly “godlike” in our normal pattern of thinking. “To depend” in our society is a much

maligned position to be in, and with good reason. Being dependent tends to leave one vulnerable and make one look weak. Not being in charge certainly can't be the way to go into such a critical situation as the ecojustice crisis of our time.

Yet he came as one of us. The Cosmic Christ is also the baby on Mary's lap, the man without a home, the bloodied stranger hanging on the tree. Maybe this is the way God allows us to fulfill that most primal human desire, to be like God. You want to be like Me? Here's the way. Appear weak, be vulnerable, depend on Me. This is how humans can be most godlike.

Maybe today, to address these ecological and justice issues, this is the godlike state we need to embrace. We're not talking about launching out for new lands to missionize and conquer. We're not talking about building empires or new Christian cultures. We're talking about turning around and cleaning up messes, our messes, many of which have been made in Jesus' name.

This is a different way of thinking about being church and it doesn't seem possible that we can even imagine doing such work without knowing and experiencing, as Santmire says, that God has dealt with radical evil through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Walking back into our own sin and cleaning up the mess, which is what ecojustice theologians are demanding, can't be done without God through Christ providing the way.

On our own, human beings are not sufficiently selfless to walk back into a home-grown crisis without shifting blame and demonizing something or someone else in the process. It is the radical forgiveness that comes to us freely through Christ which allows us to be honest enough to accept our part in the sin, and still be able to stay involved and begin rebuilding in new and just ways.

How can we live an interdependent life of mutual support with



the rest of the cosmos using the tools of hierarchical western culture to do the job? How can we be interdependent until we know how to depend?

The Dependent One isn't very attractive to us. Being small and vulnerable isn't what we're looking for – we can provide enough small and vulnerable of our own. But maybe it is this reality of our God, the Child-ness of our Lord that will help the church see where it needs to be in relation to the creation, in relation to each other and in relation to our Creator.

Radical depending implies a kind of trust on the part of the depender and trustworthiness on the part of the one depended on. That, again, tends to be outside the normal purview of human beings. Even stoked with all the optimism of the goodness and beauty of creation and our part in it, we are reluctant to let go of the comfort and power of western culture. Life in partnership with “the other,” whether people not like us or mountains or cockroaches, is profoundly counterintuitive.

What would such a partnership look like? Being interdependent doesn't include coming in and taking charge of cleaning up the mess we've made, the way we think it ought to be cleaned up. It's being willing to sit in the mess, listen and learn from those who've been messed up and together, step-by-step (sometimes backwards, sometimes forward, sometimes not moving at all) build a new way of being together.

There could be no war on poverty, war on drugs or war on whalers in such a partnership. These kinds of first strike, frontal assault tactics are the antithesis of interdependent, mutual support living. All of creation functioning together for the benefit of all is not possible by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We are not in charge. We are part of the cosmic history of our God who made us in God's own image and linked us

together with the rest of creation to behold God's glory and praise God's name. Our first love, the Dependent One with the scars in his hands, his feet and his side, is our savior and model for interdependent living.

Robin J. Morgan  
January 2001