

Crossing the Kidney Market – With Law and Promise

Colleagues,

I recently sent on to you Paul Tambyah's request for Crossings counsel on new legislation in Singapore that seeks to regulate the sale of human body parts. Nine of you have already responded, all of it good stuff. So I'm going to pick and choose for today's ThTh posting the one that explicitly takes Tambyah's issue through the classic Crossings paradigm. Jeff Anderson takes the standard six steps of diagnosis and prognosis and at each step follows John 8:1-11 as his GROUNDING text. Then he does a super analysis in TRACKING the reality of human organs as a marketable commodity, and then concludes with CROSSING the Biblical text and the body-parts "text" with each other. I've already sent this on to Paul, and now it comes to you.

When I asked him for permission to pass it on to you, he not only said Yes but added this "very Lutheran" sentence: "I tried (without saying it explicitly) to lay out the difference between our hunger for a Lutheran 'Ethic' and the authentic Lutheran contribution of an 'Ethos.'"

That may sound like "insider trading" among egghead theologians. It is, however, linked to the Augsburg Aha! about Christian ethics. What sinners need is not rules and regulations on how to "do the right thing," but how to become "right" people. That means the quality of our life (that's what ethos means) needs to be changed by the gospel of forgiveness. When our ethos is "right," then our actions (ethics) come out "right" too. Jesus said it more simply: A good tree brings forth good fruit. The gospel is all about creating good trees. And their fruits will follow.

Peace & Joy!
Ed Schroeder

Dear Ed,

Paul Tambyah's "mine field" could be crossed with John 8:1-11 to make it a "fertile field" for Christian Ethics. Here are some thoughts:

When I considered the "selling of body parts" I thought immediately of Jesus and the woman "taken in adultery" in the Gospel of John. Although it is not clear from the text, I have always understood her to be a prostitute, that is, one who sells her body, or parts of it, for cash.

In both scenarios, folks turn to the legal system (Mosaic Law or Singapore Law) to solve the problem. Perhaps by crossing Jesus' encounter in John 8 with Paul Tambyah's encounter in Singapore, we can find a field, fertile with real Law and, hence, real Good News.

Jeff Anderson

BODY PARTS FOR SALE.

Step 1. For Sale, Body Parts – At Odds with One's Self. "...a woman taken in adultery."

- A. My first reaction is: "'How terrible.'" To sell your body (the prostitute), or a part of your body (the Singapore poor) is a sign of inner disintegration. The seller is destroying her own self.
- B. An enlightened observer would add: "How terrible also for the buyer." The buyers are corrupting their own humanity

and demeaning themselves by grasping for transient straws of life by using the other's body/body parts as an object for their own satisfaction.

Step 2. For Sale, Body Parts – At Odds with One's Community. "THEY brought to him ..."

- A. The deeper problem indicts the community (i.e. THEY). THEY, the community, have rules permitting and regulating the traffic in human flesh. THEY believe that "the law of Singapore" like "the law of Moses" can manage this class of mercantile transactions. How kosher!
- B. But beyond the legal issue, a sensitive observer might raise other diagnostic questions: Why is the seller selling his own body in the first place? Is it to have the cash to live another day? Or to put food on the table for her child? Or to buy a few sticks to burn and keep warm? Here we observe a wrenching breakdown of the core "body" in society, the family. Why hasn't the seller's family taken her in and warmed and fed her? Why haven't friends helped her with her dear child?
- C. The tragedy of selling bodies and body parts comes about because the basic societal bodies, community and family, have abandoned their brother and sister. So each is reduced to selling his or her own body or body-parts.
- D. Can our predicament be any worse than that? Yes, it can. Perhaps that is why Jesus doodles in the sand. I think he is giving the body of critics some space to do some theological thinking, and perhaps to come to their senses. They don't.

Step 3. For Sale, Body Parts – At Odds with God. "Let him who is without sin among you"

- A. Don't you just wish this were Jesus' clever way to zap the scribes and Pharisees who had brought the woman to him? So

do I. But I think Jesus' words target a wider audience. Jesus' critique encompasses all four groups in our little tableau: the sellers of bodies/body-parts, the buyers of bodies/body-parts, the body of law and its proponents (Singapore and Moses and the Pharisees), and the silent or absent bodies of community and family. All four were jockeying for position, trying to turn a practice of human degradation into something that would give them a little breathing room to live. But the very debate over these ugly undertakings shows them all (us all) to be enemies of God. They are on the wrong side of the God of Life.

B. The individual human bodies of the buyers as well as the bodies of the sellers were already dying one cell at a time, or one organ at a time, or one more roll in the hay at a time. The communities/organizations/families (collective bodies, all) were dying one more argument at a time, or one more excuse at a time, or one more stoning at a time. Jesus' invitation: "Let him who is without sin among you ..." unmasks them all. They are as good as dead under the gaze of God. Those who are clever try to escape the wrath of God by ducking out quietly. But all of them are withering under God's curse.

Step 4. A New Body – The Body of Jesus – laid down for you. "Neither do I condemn you."

A little twist here. Jesus' non-condemnation is different from the accusers'. The accusers halted their condemnation because they were trembling before God's wrath. Jesus withholds condemnation because he would lay down his body, and all its parts, in a holy way, for her. He was on the way to his glory, being lifted on the cross to endure God's wrath for the sin of the world. Romans is too good to pass up here: "Therefore," says Paul, "there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." What a stunningly different way to use one's

body/body-parts. No more buying or selling of body parts, no more stoning or killing or defending of human bodies. Instead, as Jesus says in the other Gospels: "This is my body, given for you." This human body, the dying body of God, becomes a gift for the world and finally stops condemnation in its tracks.

Step 5. A New Body – The Body of Christ in the World – a new community. "Go."

- A. That is almost too simple: Go! Go and do what? Sin no more? That is what NOT to do. But what TO DO? Wouldn't it be nice to have some rules – like Singapore or like Moses – to tell us what to do? Whoops, there we are, back in the old mode again, looking for relief by concretizing good and evil in a code.
- B. Part of the diagnosis we saw earlier on was that the buyers and sellers of bodies were locked out of community; and the communities of family and the legal body politic were lethally muddled in defensiveness and self-justification.
- C. Jesus unveils a new community. We call it the body of Christ. It welcomes all sinners. Yet we ask, what do you do in this new body? What is your Ethic? "Go," Jesus says. This is not rocket science, but it still puzzles us anew. Just go, and be what you are. Once you have the God-problem tended to, the rest flows from your being. Go, be my community. You are the community befriended and favored by God. Try that on for size. See where that takes you.

Step 6. A New Body – The Body of Jesus for the World – giving away body parts. I've seen it!

- A. I have seen the body of Christ, alive in a dying world. I have seen a community where people with failing body parts could go to be loved and cherished. I saw this in a

beautiful old nunnery, where the aging sisters took in the suffering and the dying and loved them, and prayed for them, and fed them, and held them. This kind of Christian community generated what we know today as the hospice movement. I've seen it with my own eyes: bodies loved, rather than exploited.

B. My second vision may be a little crazy. It grows out of our amazing ability to give dying people new organs. We cringe at a poor man selling his kidney to get money, but our hearts are warmed by the man who will give up a kidney to save his twin sister. What if the body of Christ were a community where members could sign up to donate organs to non-relatives, even to strangers. Not to sell them, mind you, but to give their body parts as a gift so that another might live. As I say, that is a little crazy. But it might just happen in the body of Christ. It is just an inkling of what might transpire when the fear of death is conquered, and the grasping for more is sated, and the cloud of wrath is laid to rest. Have you ever had a vision like that? Tell us about it.