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Doing Theology

In this issue . . .

From the Editor

By Laurie D. Bailey

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In the 1990's in America, it was popular among young people to wear bracelets inscribed with the letters WWJD—What would Jesus do?, a reminder to frame their questions and determine their actions in reference to their faith in Christ; to look at the circumstances and events of their lives in light of the biblical story; to consciously bring their faith to decisions about everyday life. I do not know how well these young people were equipped to do the work of theological reflection. The question that often came to my mind was "How do you know what Jesus would do?" But regardless of their skill level, the important fact was that at least some of them desired to consider the mundane acts of life in light of the gospel. They had appropriated for themselves the task of doing theology.

Doing theology is the work of Church. It does not come easy. We would often prefer to ask "what works?" rather than labor through a process of identifying the issues at stake, seeing where the biblical story intersects with ours, and working out its implications for our daily lives. The task can be fraught with conflict. Yet it is a skill we must sharpen within our faith communities if we are to hold together the knowing and doing of Christian faith.

In this issue we begin to explore the matter of doing theology as a central task of the church. These two articles present important perspectives coming out of very different contexts. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier defines and discusses a model for doing theology in the local church. She draws her examples from Latino/a community. Parush R. Parushev discusses how the narrative thinking of Eastern mind and the logical thinking of the Western mind produce different approaches to doing theology. He develops his thesis in the context of theological education in Eastern Europe.

With this issue we also introduce a new department. *Continuing the Conversation* will provide ongoing discussion on the themes of previous issues. Here is an opportunity to continue to develop and refine our thinking on important issues. In this first *Conversation*, Gary Fujino writes on the role of ethnic identity in approaching reconciliation. His context is missions in Japan.

About the Editor

Laurie D. Bailey, Ph.D. is editor of *Common Ground Journal.* She has over 20 years experience as a Christian educator in two Illinois churches, and enjoys acting as a bridge between the academic community and the church through consulting and freelance editing. She lives in Park Ridge, Illinois and has three grown children.

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Doing Theology

By Elizabeth Conde-Frazier

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“Doing theology” is a necessary process for maintaining the relevancy of our Christian faith in different cultural and historical contexts. This essay will define what it means to “do theology” and show the connection between the church’s mission and the task of doing theology. The Hispanic community of which I am a part and have ministered in as pastor, scholar and teacher, with its particular history and socio-cultural identity, will serve as an illustration of how a community of faith engages in this theological task. I will end by giving an example of a teaching method for involving a group of pastors, scholars and lay leaders in this endeavor.

What is Doing Theology?

The definition of the word theology is usually broken down into the two Greek terms, *theo* (God) and *logos* (word), so that theology is discourse about God. Christian theology is the discourse about the content of the faith and its implications for life. The discourse takes place as the people of God seek to understand the revelation

of God in their daily experiences. Their witness to the faith is the point of departure for this discourse. The task of theology is to relate the central contents of the faith with the tradition of the church and the context of the present. It is a matter of asking and answering questions pertinent to one's experience of God in relevant ways to one's culture and entire historical and communal journey of faith. This is why one theology does not necessarily fit all. Different communities ask different questions.

For example, Asian communities find themselves needing to relate their Christian faith to the majority thought systems of Confucianism and Buddhism. In order for them to witness to their neighbors they must find ways for their Christian understandings to dialogue in significant ways with other faiths. This has been true since the beginning of Christianity. As the story of Jesus spread beyond Judea to the greater Palestinian region, the followers of Jesus needed to relate their faith to other systems of thought and culture, to other religions and gods in order to show what was distinctive about their understandings. This sometimes meant speaking about their faith in terms that could relate to other frameworks of thought. This continues to happen today.

The foundational elements of Christian theology are not in question here. These have been proven over and over throughout the generations by different communities of faithful followers as they too have sought to find the meaning of Christianity for their time and people. What we are referring to are the ways in which theology engages the public issues of today. For example: How should we, as Christians in the United States, relate to our nation's corporate responsibility for practices and policies that exploit and impoverish so many across the globe?

Revelation is foundational to our conversation about the knowledge of God through the faith. It entails not only the transmission of a body of knowledge, but the self-disclosure of God within history, which has its climax in Jesus of Nazareth. This understanding of revelation implies the combination of a cognitive knowledge of God (doctrines) alongside a personal relationship of God with humanity in the everyday life.

The Hispanic American Context

For Hispanics in the United States there are a number of experiences that shape the questions we ask when we pray, study the Bible or talk about our faith to one another. These questions come first of all from the oppressive content of our past and present history. The context that has shaped Hispanic/Latino/a theology has been the experiences of conquest, colonialism, migration and biculturalism. The history of Hispanic Americans has included the military aggression of North Atlantic nations, leaving whole peoples economically and politically powerless. This history of conquest and colonialism has contributed to a history of migration. The hardships of migration cause us to ask questions about whether or not to follow unjust laws that transgress the biblical witness. These questions shape an ethic of dignity and justice.

One can not always count on the benefits and rights of the host country while being unable to anticipate what the next day will bring. This gives rise to questions dealing with the issues of the rich and poor. In Latin America the missionaries taught us that to leave our idol worship (Catholicism) would mean blessing from God in the

material realm of our lives. What should we believe now that we are Protestants but continue to experience lack of access to employment and decent education due to discrimination?

The phenomenon of biculturalism is the result of an encounter between the Native American, African peoples and the European. Superimposed on the first encounter is the second between the Anglo American and Latin American peoples. The resulting peoples from these cultural/political encounters are a *mestizo* group who belong to both and to neither.[1] One speaks both languages but speaks neither with the sophistication and proficiency of the parent cultures. Although interpreted as a cultural-linguistic deficiency, it is really a bicultural identity. The future of such a people lies in the affirmation of their double identity rather than in isolation or assimilation. Young people especially wonder if Jesus can relate to their *mestizo* reality. To explore the details of the human nature of Jesus as one who was also a *mestizo* in his time speaking a combination language—Aramaic, comparable to Spanglish today—is a way of finding a Jesus who can identify with their identity issues.

The very realities of such a context confront us with the limits of our traditions continuously. This challenges one to raise questions about one's personal experiences in light of the scriptures. This questioning becomes an intuitive reflection in one's life. When these reflections are shared communally it becomes a doing of theology.

The process entails expanding the tradition while also affirming it. We transmit or hand down what we affirm in the tradition while at the same time, we critique it in order to bring new life to it. When we renew the tradition we use it not only to invoke the past but to see what it reveals about the present and the future. The tradition then interprets present experience, "the past speaks to the present for the sake of the future," (Boys 1989, 20) thus creating a dialectic between the three. The tradition then becomes a living tradition that fosters liberation. The tradition is renewed in order to help us live our relationship with God and neighbor.

Among the goals of this theological task, Orlando Costas posits that one must "challenge the Hispanic stereotypes in the Americas and overcome stigmatization" and one must "enable the Hispanic church to hear God's word in the periphery of North America so as to reinterpret the faith from an Hispanic perspective" (Costas 1990, 43). This is vital for creating an oppositional epistemology to that of the colonizer's. Through the layers of colonization, Latinos/as have been made to see themselves through the eyes of the colonizer. They have been made to participate in the making of themselves into the image the colonizer has devised. They have been induced to collude in their own subjected formation as other and voiceless. This image has devalued their culture, language and religion. A new narrative has been introduced, a discourse of devaluation that is employed to silence Latinos/as.

Doing Theology and the Redeeming of Postcolonial Images

In order to redeem the image of their identity, Latinos/as must find the sites of their self-expression. Some of these are found in the folk wisdom, various art forms, stories and theological refection. These are the narratives that hold the possibilities to over-ride the devaluation because in and through them the people speak for

themselves and retell their story from their own perspective. Through these mediums the people can go from the confused understanding of themselves created by the colonizer to the knowledge of their own insights found in their stories, even stories of suffering (pathos). These move the imagination and aspiration of the people beyond the control of the colonizer.

For the colonized to find this self-understanding is only one half of what needs to take place. The colonized and colonizers are joined to each other through a narrative that distorts their relationship. Is there a narrative that holds enough power to demythologize the myth of superiority and inferiority that binds them?

The story of the incarnation is where God's story encounters ours. In this story the lowly are exalted and the exalted are brought down. In Jesus, God divests Godself from power and becomes a servant. The interpretation of the significance of this can be read in the *Magnificat*:

> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly, he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:52-53 NRSV)

Colonialism creates an identity crisis for both the colonizer and the colonized. The first suffers from power over and the latter suffers from subjugation. The principle of the incarnation brings them both to the place where they can think of themselves "with sober judgment" (Romans 12:5).

Alongside the biblical story are the stories we each bring. Anderson and Foley remind us that storytelling contributes to the creation and maintenance of human communities as we find the common themes in our individual stories (Anderson and Foley 1998a, 18). When we acknowledge God's presence in our daily living then God's story and ours intertwine. "Such weaving is ultimately transformative and life giving" (Anderson and Foley 1998b, 40).

This interweaving becomes part of the doing of theology in the Latino/a community. This makes the doing of theology not a purely academic task but includes the voices of those who have been silenced by the oppressive experiences aforementioned. Where can one find the theology of the people? Is there a place from where they speak? It is found in *lo cotidiano* - the everyday, and is told in our stories of faith, *testimonios*.[2]

Testimonios as the People's Theology

Testimonios are public faith stories. They are a shared religious knowing that is found in the everyday life. The stories are shared as part of the worship. It is part of the *kerygma*. Harold Recinos points out that "popular religious testimony invites hearers to a new experience of the sacred" (Recinos 2001, 123). Latinos/as bring the totality of their being to the story; feelings, fears, doubts, questions of faith and meaning, experience, celebration and commitment. *Testimonios* are stories as a meaning making ritual of the people seeking and sharing together a process of understanding God's mystery and grace in their lives. They are sharing the content of their prayers and the struggles of their suffering. The stories lead a person to a decision that is based on the new understanding of God and their life of faith. This

understanding comes from the experience with God and transforms the person. The *testimonio* is the story of the places where the divine touches our lives. It is the transcendent in the immanent.

In their article about laity speaking about religious knowing, Margaret Crain and Jack Seymour define such talk as “a people’s theology.” They describe it as “a theology that comes from the people, in the language of the people, and in the service of people” (Crain and Seymour 1997, 43).[3]

In the Latino/a Protestant context *testimonios* are informed by the scriptures, the tradition and experience. Most North American theologians understand experience to refer to a private level of religious life and are therefore suspect of experience as a source of theology. In the Latino/a experience however, experience is not a private apprehension of God in an intimate part of our lives because any such claim is placed under the judgment of the community’s understanding of experiences which has been developed through the generations of the community’s life of faith (González 2001,68-69).

This community scrutiny of experience takes place as the *testimonio* is shared during some form of public worship. Following the story, the pastor as teacher facilitates a moment of discernment as a critical theological reflection. During this reflection the pastor comments on the interpretive process of the witness and how it draws from and affirms the scriptural witness. It may be possible that the tradition is challenged by the *testimonio* in which case, the questions, challenges and possibilities that it opens are pointed out. This may be further discussed in the sermon. On some occasions, the interpretation may reflect a distortion of the communal faith experience or the scriptures. This is corrected with care and sensitivity for the one proclaiming it through his/her story. The pastor may return to the story taken into account in order to clarify. Parallels between the faith story and the biblical story are made. This process of public discernment expands the understanding of experience.

As he speaks about the doing of theology of Asian Pentecostals, Wonsuk Ma also identifies testimony as the place where the laity “formulate their personal theological interpretation of daily experiences with God” while also taking an active part in the construction of a wider Pentecostal theology (Ma http://www.apts.edu/ajps/98-1/98-1-wansukma.htm). The doing of theology is a means by which the immanent aspect of a seemingly unreachable, abstracted God embedded in doctrines is brought forth afresh. It narrows the distance between God and us (Ma http://www.apts.edu/ajps/98-1/98-1-wansukma.htm).

Teología en Conjunto: Doing Theology as a Collaborative Process

The sharing of *testimonios* is a communal process. We do theology because of, for and with others with whom we participate in the struggles of everyday life. In this everyday life can be seen the struggle for justice or liberation. Those with whom we engage in the struggle are our primary community of accountability.

In the Latino/a community, examples of this can be seen as scholars, pastors and laity, teachers and students came together for two days to discuss the distinctives of a Hispanic Protestant theology in a collaborative way. This method of doing

theology, this *teología en conjunto,* demonstrates the integration and intimacy involved in doing theology in the Hispanic American community.[4]

Because the context the church responds to is complex, one of the dimensions of this theological task is to understand the sociohistorical context, “the relationships between ethnicity, class, race and other social factors that give meaning and future to our communities” (Rodriguez and Otero 1995, 16). Theology is an integral part of the church’s witness of faith and of how her understanding of the gospel is an important resource in how she addresses the challenges of her present reality. This connects the doing of theology to the mission of the church. Theologian Orlando Costas says of this connection:

> The mission of the church gives birth to theology in the measure that it produces a faithful and obedient missionary community for whom the ‘search for meaning’ (Anselm) becomes a perpetual vocation. There can be no Christian theology without the church. (Costas 1986, 10) [5]

Our theological reflection is therefore related to our ministry in the church or our *pastoral* (pastoral praxis). Scholars cannot speak of theology without the insights and guidance of the pastors and lay leaders. Scholars writing theology are accountable to the community of faith. The veracity of the witness of God in the midst of the community is discerned by all.

Doing Theology and the Church's Mission

As the church lives incarnationally, walking alongside the people of the community where she is located, she shares in the pain and brokenness of her neighbors. From this suffering will come deep felt questions about the nature of her faith and mission. She asks questions about unemployment, AIDS, immigration and other places of brokenness and pain as well as the places of success and how we must reflect on the responsibilities and temptations of these achievements in the light of the gospel. This is the content of our faith. It will at times show forth the disjunctions that exist between the context and the theology of the church. This tension provides an opportunity to return to the sources of authority and to re-read the biblical story with new perspective and critical mind.

It is the leading of the Holy Spirit that takes the present beliefs and leads one into questions about the existing understandings of faith and mission, pointing to their limits. This is the work of critiquing the tradition. The Holy Spirit then empowers the community to move to new truth by illuminating and discerning the scriptures for resourcing the community. It does this by looking at new possibilities for the life and mission of the church. This is the work of deepening and expanding the tradition or theology. It is through the pneumatological dependency that the possibilities for new theological discourses are opened and the leaders may discover new ways of being faithful.

A Teaching Method for Doing Theology

Let us look at a teaching method for doing this that can be carried out with a group of pastors, lay leaders and theologians. The following is an example that I have

used in my own teaching.[6]

Church leaders, both lay and clergy are invited to reflect on three areas: the personal, the ministerial and the interaction between the church and the community. While this reflection takes place notes are taken on newsprint. We begin the discussion with the lived experiences of persons. The participants identify themselves by telling the country where they came from, how long they have been here and what were their reasons for coming. They also identify the denomination they belong to and their particular role in the ministry.

Then they speak of their daily experiences beginning with their first reactions upon arrival in the United States. They identify how life has changed for them; family roles and routines, their frustrations and disappointments and how they have overcome these. They speak about language and the education of their children, finding employment, housing, their hopes and dreams and how these have been redefined since they first arrived. Persons are then invited to analyze the list of things they have mentioned. What do they see in it? What categories emerge for them? What issues are prevalent? What creates this situation? What forces do they see operating? What does this say about all of our lives?

This procedure is repeated with the second area, the ministry. Now persons are asked to share their goals and tasks of ministry along with frustrations and conflicts experienced and the strategies they have used to overcome. When they examine this area they discuss the theology that informs their ministry, the causes of their frustrations and conflicts and reasons for the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of their strategies.

The next step is to correlate the two areas. What does one have to do with the other? How do they inform and affect each other if at all? What areas of personal experience are addressed by the ministry and why? What areas are not addressed and why not?

Finally, we discuss the interaction between the congregation and the community and ask persons to describe the communities in which they minister and the relationship the congregation has with the community. What are the needs they see in the community? How do the ministries of the congregation engage the community either directly or indirectly? What sources inform the nature of this involvement? How do they think the community sees the congregation in its midst? If they have a community ministry, they are asked to describe how this came about and what the ministry entails. How do both, the members of the congregation and the community participate in the program? In what ways has this ministry impacted the life of the community?[7] What other congregations are in the community? What is the relationship between these? Are there any ministerial alliances or associations and what are the purposes of these? How do these relate to the issues of the community?

One more time, we correlate all the areas discussed and ask questions that guide persons in making links between the three. We may ask: How does the congregation see its ministry in relationship to these issues?[8] How does our theology address these? Are there biblical passages that address these areas? As we examine these passages, do they take us beyond the parameters of our theology? What resources and/or skills do we need? What picture of ministry

emerges as we look at this? What new models are we creating?

This method identifies the sociopolitical and economic issues in the present experience of persons. The questions facilitate the naming and analysis of these. This part of the process also points out how the ministry of the church relates to the dimensions identified. Discussion and further analysis of this area lead to a re-reading of the scriptures and re-appropriations of them for the purpose of re-defining the practice of ministry. This is a communal process of discernment whereby participants seek how the scriptures address their context and informs their concept of mission. It raises the need to create a permanent space for continuous reflection and planning not only as separate bodies, but as united congregations grouped according to local geographic areas. This grouping provides the opportunity to work out of a common base on systemic issues in their communities such as, adequate housing and quality education. This commonality is based not only on the issues but on the foundations of their faith such as the centrality of scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit.

This is a hermeneutical process where questions lead us to reflect and to interpret. They are geared to finding not only meaning, but places between our experiences and the scriptures which reveal to us the will of God. They point out the places of congruence and contradiction between reality, the world and the Christian faith and praxis.

The task of the teacher/theologian using this method is to facilitate a critique of the tradition in order to help persons come to their own solutions or new interpretations for dealing with the issues identified. Dividing the participants into smaller groups to discuss assigned biblical passages in light of the issues identified usually, generates new interpretations as well as alternatives for engaging these through new ministerial alternatives. A new authority emerges from the people as they define what they believe the Holy Spirit is illuminating about the church's mission.

This is similar to when Jesus taught and said, "You have heard that it was said to those in ancient times" and he would state the ancient teaching. Then he would add, "But I say to you," and a deeper understanding of the teaching was given. This deeper understanding caused much crisis and inner conflict and also overturned the existing authorities and status quo. It was a way of enabling reconciliation and justice. It was a way of starting a dialogue in our very souls, with each other and with the entities of society. In this case, the authority of Jesus is heard in the voices of those participating in the process of discernment.

Silence also plays a positive and powerful role in the dialogue. This is not the silence of oppression and repression, but of contemplation of the implications of the new. It is a silence that listens with the purpose of discerning and decision making. Silence occurs when we sit at the side of the pool and the angel has stirred up its waters (the places of conflict stirred up). We may resist by simply remaining at the side of the pool paralyzed by our fears or desires to be comfortable; however, we also know that if we jump in, healing will come. Silence occurs as we are convinced by the Spirit in the midst of the dialogue. This method can be expanded if one is working with a group for a longer term by using case studies to facilitate the discussion along with social analysis.

Conclusion

The doing of theology is a necessary for strengthening the witness of the church. It requires the participation of all in the body of Christ. The gifts of scholar, teacher, pastor and laity are needed as together we make the mission of the church and its explanation of her faith relevant to her time.

End Notes

[1] The *mestizo* does not fit into the categories of either of the parent groups. The *mestizo* is both an insider and an outsider understanding both, while having a closeness and a distance at the same time with both. For further reading see Virgil Elizondo, “Mestizaje as a Locus of Theological Reflection,” in *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*. Ed. Allan Figueroa Deck (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 104-123. Also see Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999). For alternative terms such as *mulatez* and *sato*, see Loida I Martell-Otero, “Of Satos and Saints: Salvation from the Periphery,” *Perspectivas* (Summer 2001): 8-9.

[2] For an explanation of *lo cotidiano* see María Pilar Aquino, “Theological Method in U.S. Latino/a Theology,” in *From the heart of our people: Latino/a explorations in Catholic systematic theology.* ed. Miguel Díaz and Orlando Espín. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 39.

[3] The authors take this definition from the Transformation Center of South Africa. See Lesutho Maseru, “Work for Justice,” *Southern Africa: Transfomation Resource Center.* No. 28 (August 1985).

[4] The fruit of that gathering is the book *Teología en Conjunto: A Collaborative Theology.* by José David Rodríguez and Loida Martell-Otero (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). Other gatherings have also taken place in similar fashion. Two documents representing this communal theological task are: Daniel Rodríguez-Díaz and David Cortés-Fuentes, eds. *Hidden Stories: Unveiling the History of the Latino church.* (Decature, GA: Asociación para la Educación Teológica Hispana.1994) and Pablo Jimenéz, ed. *Lumbrera a Nuestro Camino* (Miami: Editorial Caribe, 1994).

[5] The English in the text is my translation. “La misión da nacimiento a la teología a la medida en que produce una comunidad misionera fiel y obediente para quien la ‘búsqueda por el entendimiento’ (Anselmo) se convierte en una vocación perenne. No hay una iglesia auténtica sin misión así como tampoco puede haber una verdadera telología cristiana sin iglesia.”

[6] For further reading on this transformative method and how it relates to Bible Institutes see Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Hispanic Bible Institutes: Their Mission, Educational Philosophy and Pedagogy.* Scranton, PA: Scranton University Press, forthcoming.

[7] There are congregations that have programs for vocational training where the resources are combined but the decisions are made by the congregation. Others have arts programs where there is a more equal partnership in the planning and

creating. After school centers or recreational centers usually have a board of directors which reflects participation and decision making as a partnership.

[8] Some of the common issues that emerge are discrimination, racism, and housing problems. The most discussed issues are problems in the schools attended by their children and immigration laws.

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About the Author

Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Religious Education at Claremont School of Theology where she integrates the discipline of religious education with theology, spirituality and the social sciences. She also teaches at the Latin American Bible Institute in La Puente, and has taught in Kazakhstan. She has written on multicultural issues, Hispanic theological education and the spirituality of the scholar. Her scholarly passions involve her in doing participatory action research with communities working on justice issues. She is an ordained American Baptist minister with over ten years of experience in the local church.

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East and West: A Theological Conversation

By Parush R. Parushev [1]

Parushev, Parush R. 2000. East and West: A Theological Conversation. In *Common Ground Journal.* Issue: 1 (2). ISSN: 15479129. URL: http://www.commonground journal.org. Keywords: differential thinking, Eastern European.

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There is an unusual institution in the USA. It is a college that offers Christian education in Russian, predominantly for the large Russian-speaking immigrant population from the Former Soviet Union and some the Central and Eastern European countries.[2] When I was studying in the USA I was asked to teach a course there on critical thinking. At first everything looked fairly routine. It is a basic American college course. However, in former communist countries this kind of course is 'foreign'. In the communist period the purpose of communication was not to clarify someone's point of view but instead to convey the demands of ideology. There was only one right way of thinking. Why should one bother to evaluate the wrong one?

In Eastern European evangelical thinking there is a somewhat similar kind of approach to be found. The connotation of the word 'critical' is often a negative one. For evangelicals to be critical in their thinking is sometimes associated with being destructive. Yet the Western concept of thinking critically is that in so doing serious attempts are being made to understand the other's point of view and to express oneself clearly. No Baptist would, I imagine, want to disagree with that.

I began my class on critical thinking with enthusiasm. It was enjoyable. I have rarely had such committed listeners. I used a biblical story, an apologetic piece of writing from C. S. Lewis and a sermon as the basis for my teaching and for discussion. A method of analysis, which Glen Stassen has developed, was my guide in the first part of my teaching. He has argued for his position in a series of essays.[3] It is an integrative approach that helpfully analyses narrative and mental pictures and attempts to understand holistic communication. It seeks to discern the driving forces behind the narrative. I thought that the students might have a hard time getting into the multi-dimensional character of this approach, but they grasped it easily and

applied it to the texts we studied.

On the other hand, when I came later in the course to use the more traditional Western method of logical analysis of texts, as set out by Nancey Murphy for example,[4] the tests taken by the students showed that in this case my students, although they had discussed well, had missed the point. It struck me then that the Eastern European culture is still predominantly a narrative one. How can you dissect a narrative or story by hard logic? It hit home to me that in the East we are thinking ‘stories’. We want to enter into the stories. We think differently.

In what follows I will try to look more closely at these two different approaches to critical evaluation of one's modes of discourse, and especially theological discourse. I will name them ‘integrative’ and ‘differential’. As a way of expression, as I see it, the integrative approach fits well a story-bound mind-set. I will call it ‘Eastern’ or ‘Oriental’. The differential approach tries to seek ways to get to grips with the logical nature of the discourse. Built upon modes of philosophical scientific reasoning, it seeks precision of definition and meaning in communication. It reveals the rationality embedded in the narrative. As a way of expression it is appealing to the rational logical mind-set. I will call it ‘Western’ or ‘scholastic’.

I believe both of these approaches have their place in theological education. Indeed I consider the two approaches complementary. Each of them is both a critical tool (I use critical in a positive sense) and a mode of expression. Each of them appeals to different mind-sets. And in this they represent different mental languages with a different grammar. In the current situation among Baptists, among other evangelicals and within the wider Christian community in Europe, we should learn to appreciate not only our different traditions – East and West - but also the different mental languages we use to communicate with each other. Without recognition of and appreciation for our different ways of expression, there will always be a domination of one supposedly right way of theological thinking, writing, communicating and expressing. Consequently, all other ways are then regarded as defective, underdeveloped, secondary, and less than perfect. This is to our loss.

The Integrative Approach: Thinking Narrative, Thinking Eastern

What lies beneath our neatly and carefully chosen styles of reasoning in the West, and how might the East give us a different perspective? Let us illustrate this perspective first of all, using the example of the field of ethics, an area of theology in which I have a particular interest. Something is missing in moral discourse, as Glen Stassen has argued.[5] By abstracting a single mode of moral discourse - situationist, legalist, principlist are some common approaches - and by arguing the pros and the cons of the approach, the participants in the conversation lose sight of the moral purpose of the conversation altogether. Behind the trees, the forest is not seen. The remedy is an integral approach.

In a series of published and unpublished essays, Stassen, as I have indicated, has tried tirelessly and I believe persuasively to demonstrate that there are some more substantial elements of moral discourse than are found in this way of reasoning alone. In an article published about twenty years ago, he named his method ‘Critical Variables in Christian Social Ethics’. We can apply what he argued to a wide range of theological work.

What this method of Stassen's encourages is the attempt to look at the text or speech as a whole, seeking to engage with its specific ways of expression, its convictions, passions, loyalties, interests and fears. The text is seen to have formative power. The challenge – which is in line with Eastern thinking – is to see the writer or the speaker as a whole human character (with his or her own integrity or particular interests) and not as a reasoning mind alone. In other words we are forced to seek for the wider narrative behind the reasoning. The narrative has a formative power too. The text and the author's narrative are internally connected. This integrated approach is very similar to the way that the narrative theologians and ethicists like James W McClendon and others do their theologizing.[6]

There is in fact a logical flow underneath Stassen's structure. The underlying logic he uses is simple. Our way of reasoning is rooted in our convictions. They are formed by and expressed in a permanent exchange with the community of the 'like us' (say, fellow-Baptists) and on the other hand the 'not like us' (say, Christians of another tradition or non-believers). Our reasoning is essentially affected by how we perceive the two groups and how we find the fine balance of our interests and loyalties in relation to the two.

Let us examine the implications of this approach for theological education. First, it is important to compare theological discourse with ordinary discourse. In our everyday communication we do not normally reason. Instead we share opinions. We usually share them with close associates - partners or listeners in an ongoing dialogue. As a rule we do not give reasons for these opinions. They are implicitly 'out there' in the narrative of the form of life we share with others: family, church, wider community, and whoever else may happen to be part of our lives at any given time. This sense of the discourse taking place within the community is important for Eastern thinking. Theological education is best done in relationship with others.

There are times, in such relationships, when we want to persuade others of something we believe is right, wrong or important. Rightly or perhaps sometimes wrongly, we appeal to rules or principles that are familiar to, or can be accepted by the community we are addressing. Our agenda is to convince. More often than not we run into objections to our agenda. Strong feelings are then not enough to persuade. What we need are more widely accepted concepts, which can act as a foundation. This is closer to the world of theological discourse. Rules, if they were agreed upon, would help. Yet it is impossible to force every human situation into a rule. Even worse, two or more rule claims can seem to conflict, and what then?[7] An example in the field of ethics is the desire on the part of those who adhere to a pacifist position, on the grounds that this is what Christ taught and showed, to hold together the principles of abstaining from force and yet protecting the defenseless from oppression.

Formative Convictions

Using Stassen's approach to such questions, there is a remedy - go deeper. A person should not be content with a set of rules but should find truly formative convictions. The way forward is an appeal to a higher court: to principles. Look to the overarching principles that the rules are based on and try to work the contradiction out on this level. Yet in theological discourse this procedure is not

always straightforward. I have mentioned the question of force. There are the classical examples of the two principlist attitudes and responses toward war and conflict - those of pacifism and the just war theory.[8] Even with John Howard Yoder's twenty-nine different modifications of the pacifist position, those theologians who hold to this position still cannot reconcile their views with the equally theologically serious proponents of just war.[9]

Cardinal disagreements cut to the very heart of who we are as people and as Christian believers. They call for argumentation out of a person's formative convictions. And it is not easy. As I have argued, in everyday conversation we are often not engaged at any depth in such discourse. Yet when we come into the world of theology we are called to discuss opinions, rules and principles in which others and we believe. In the intellectual marketplace of ideas in the world, and even in the world of a seminary, we trade on such opinions. We have a euphemism for this: growing in understanding. In fact this growth can be very painful.

Opinions about commonplace matters such as, for example, taste in dress, are not formative in their nature. Cardinal beliefs, or formative convictions, on the other hand, as James W McClendon aptly observes, 'are less readily expressed but more tenaciously held. It takes a long time to discover my own convictions, but when I do [if at all], I have discovered ... myself'.[10] Convictions are about who we (individually or communally) are. This is not detached analysis. We are entering deeply into the story of the person.

One reason why it normally takes so long to discover one's convictions is that they are gradually formed by shared life - the narrative, tradition, customs and habits of the community to which we are committed. This communal tradition is central to Eastern life. There is an unconscious formation as well as a conscious embracing of values. But the point for our argument here is that this is a holistic formation. The contextual nature of convictions formed by community makes them subtle and invisible, unless they are forcefully called out by a moral or theological crisis. Genuine membership in a community means just this: willingly shared convictions. Those who develop in such a way as to reject the beliefs of the community have the tension of being subversive in their own context or alternatively have to move to another community. The bonded community – such as a church - holds formative convictions. Conversely, a stranger does not hold these convictions and if the stranger disregards our convictions, the stranger is an enemy. If he or she is ready to accept them then we are willing to consider him or her for admission to friendship and membership on a personal or communal level.

In the framework of a tradition and community our personal stories form our convictions and the stories are expressed in our convictions. For successful communication we ought to share a story, not only propositions.[11] This has serious implications for the way that we undertake theological study. It is in fact a more demanding approach than the mere sharing of opinions. It means that in a theological community such as a church or seminary we bring our convictions to the shared community experience and we also seek to understand the convictions of those to whom we listen or whose writings we read.

Expressing Our Convictions

I agree with James McClendon that convictions are the key for discovering others and myself. Understanding convictions is a serious business. I would further argue that the major value of Stassen's integrative approach to critical thinking is that as we use it we are enabled to do exactly this: to discover our convictions and to express them. The integrative method is about expressing convictions. We may think of Stassen's different modes of discourse as different levels of expression. In fact, immediate judgments or opinions are precisely that: gutsy beliefs that one speaks out. The insiders of the convictional community, of course, easily comprehend them. They are, however, unintelligible for the outsiders unless they are explained. Working out principles is a conscious attempt to understand one's convictions by contrast with those of others expressed in the intellectual marketplace. It is this task which theological study seeks to help us to do more effectively. This is part of the task of evangelism and mission, and biblical theology is always missiological.

Stassen is particularly interested in Christian ethical discourse. His set of convictions include beliefs about the being of God, human nature, the way in which Christians can grow more Christ-like and live out God's love and justice, their conversion as justification and their growth as sanctification, and the mission they have as God's people to the world. Let me try to expound the same set in terms of the more general enterprise of theological study, bearing in mind the tension between Eastern and Western thought.[12]

Our convictions are intimately related to our perception of ultimate reality, not simply to a logical set of theological propositions. The philosophers perhaps would call it world-view, but in the Eastern view it is also a story of God and his work in the world. Here we are drawn to the overarching biblical story. Then we move from the bigger story to the existential self. How does this belief matter to me? What is the nature of my life as a human being and how does conversion affect that life? What is human purpose, and what is human sin? How can I relate to the ultimate reality through my sense of calling? Can I grow in understanding and communication with God through my theological study? Is there a moral dimension to the study of the Bible? How do convictions about the justification of sinners and the sanctification of believers relate to study of biblical texts? The integrated approach asks such questions. They are really about 'why' this study is done.

I have said that theology should be missiological. We should be able to express our convictions to the world. We are social creatures and are part of wider society: believers who are often called to live in a hostile context. Our grasp of who God is will demand of us some ordering of our relationships with fellow humans in the community. What is the nature of the mission of my community to the communities around us and to the world at large?

Mission and Integration in the World

If theological education has to be integrative and communal, as in Eastern thinking, it has to reflect on the relations with insiders and outsiders. How do we perceive the world around? This is what mission is about. The perception of the situation often begins in the Eastern European mind by defining the *threat*. Where does the danger to one's moral or social well being come from? Given the history of the Christian faith in communist countries, the idea of threat is a very real one. Nonetheless,

there must be a move beyond the fear of threat to looking at society and seeing what are the prospects for a person's (or a community's) mission advance in the face of the challenges? This is the task of missiology. This is a call for openness.

The next step is to evaluate the *authority* in community or society at large: its location, legitimacy and limits. What are the powers in the community's structure? What should be our relationship to that authority in terms of our mission? Closely related to the question of authority are the questions of the desirability and speed of the presumably needed *social change* in the community. This is part of holistic mission thinking and is a huge issue for the current situation in Eastern Europe. How far and how soon should one go for change? How can we bring about the needed changes? We may see how issues in political philosophy can surface at these points and in fact they ought to be taken into consideration.

As Stassen points out,[13] there is a strong correlation between the perception of the threat and our convictions about human nature, between perceptions of authority and our understanding of love and justice in society, and between integrity and our beliefs in justification and sanctification. Convictions matter. Perception of the threats, appeals to the authority and meditation on the possibilities for social change do not happen in a vacuum. They are based on information. Here is where theological study has a role: a seminary should be a place that encourages communication between people. Exchange of information is crucial for the proper functioning of a family, a church and a political community. Otherwise we can deal in half-truths, caricature and even lies. A key question to ask, then, is 'What is the *integrity* of a person, institution or community in dealing with information?'

The issue about *information integrity* rounds out the perception of our dealing with our own people or with outsiders. At the same time it opens a whole new issue of ultimate loyalties. Information is critical. Information is power. In the information age in which we live it is at the heart of any person's performance and of the functioning of society as well. The question of information integrity grows in importance as never before in today's globalized world. Authentic mission must practice this principle. It must seek to tell the Christian story with integrity.

Yet here there is a problem. Modernity's illusion of detached objectivity has gone. Even for scientific inquiry, truth is a matter of current conventions in the guild.[14] For the Christian believer, however, truth as revealed in Jesus Christ is the foundation. The truth is not to be distorted. A highly revered teacher of mine once gave me the following definition of gossip. He said that gossip is information with questionable integrity or partial truth.[15] How do we walk the narrow path between the Scylla of truth-telling with integrity and the Charybdis of personal and community biases? Stassen's answer is by walking in repentance, loyalty and trust. We do not find truth simply by academic study. We find it in a person: Jesus Christ. We also find it in other people. The Bulgarians have a saying: 'Tell me who are your friends and I will tell you who you are.' These friends can be helpful if they engage with us in integrative discourse and enable us to grow. They can be destructive if all they do is affirm our prejudices. Reinhold Niebuhr rightly warns us not to trust a group's agenda alone. Groups are always biased to the group's own interests.[16] This is why there is room for genuine debate in an evangelical theological context. It does not undermine mission.

At the conclusion of Stassen's reflections on method, his advice is to detect biases

in ourselves and in others and to try to correct them. ‘The name for this process of character-correction is repentance.’[17] This is a central theme in Christian mission. To stress the life-changing nature of conversion is to espouse an ethic of virtue. But is this realistic? Will it work?

I grew up in a supposedly atheistic country officially (politically and ideologically) committed to humanist Marxist ideals. Even we were taught in our childhood the ‘magic’ word ‘please’, if you want to achieve something. ‘Please’ is OK for a child. Every child is vulnerable, self-protective and self-centered. ‘Please’ helps you to get easily from peers and adults. ‘Please’ is a self-centered politeness. Unfortunately, many of us never grew to adulthood. Adulthood is about caring, giving, sharing, benevolence, and charity. To be Christian is to be a fully developed human being. ‘Please forgive me’ is the adult’s expression of being sorry for not doing any one of or all of the above. The childish one word ‘please’ must grow to a twelve-word apology, to repentance.

- I did wrong! (I know I’ve made a mess, I’ve hurt you)
- I am sorry! (I do apologize. I did not mean that)
- I love you! (I care about you. I appreciate you)
- Please forgive me! (I will try to correct how I listen, understand, and act)

And even that is not enough for mature adulthood. Adulthood is also about facing misdeeds and confronting them.

- You did wrong! (I am offended. I feel resentment)
- You should apologize! (I am sorry to tell you that, but I have to)
- You are loved! (I still love you. I care enough for you to tell you that)
- You are forgiven! (Let us talk, pray together and be reconcile)

Such caring repentance[18] is a proper way out of fear, resentment and hostility. The way to build and sustain a genuine friendship, family, community, and whatever else, is by change, commitment and nurture. This is integrative mission. To understand a person's reasoning one must ‘hear’ a person's full story. Unveiling the Christian story and the stories of others in a way that reveals their inner character, not simply logical argument, is, I believe, the great value of the integrative method.

Differential Thinking: Thinking Logical—Thinking Western

The integrative method answers the question, ‘Why?’ Why does a person take up a pen or take more direct action and go through the pain to express concerns or plea for a cause? First and foremost it is about motivations. We now look at the differential method. Because this is the well-known Western approach it will be dealt with more briefly. My purpose is comparison.

Differential method, as I understand it, answers the question, ‘What?’ What is the particular logic that the person is arguing with? It is about argumentation. As a critical tool, differential method examines the foundations for my argumentation - the grounds - and the strength of the connections of these foundations with my affirmations - the claims. As a way of expression, it necessarily presupposes common ground with the reader. But what are the foundations of, let us say, Jesus'

parables? The only ground I can come up with is the common convention of the time, which was to tell parables. This way of thinking, then, may not always get us very far. Nonetheless, it has great importance. Nancey Murphy's book on *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* is, in my view, the best reference book on the art of differential method in reasoning. Building upon Stephen Toulmin's analysis of the uses of arguments in philosophy of science,[19] she goes far beyond that to show the relevance of this method to almost every subject on the theological curriculum as well.

As a scientist by training, I see some analogy between the differential approach in ethics and deductive line of reasoning in science.[20] Any claim is constantly refined by careful examination of the appropriate grounds and by looking for the loopholes in the line of argumentation through rebuttals and qualifications. And yet the differential method is pretty much a child of the modern scientific age: it assumes that to understand you must atomize. This logical method is set out in Murphy's description of Toulmin's method.[21] I will now examine this briefly.

Steps in Logic

The first step is to define the main claim[22] or claims of a person's treatise or speech. What is he or she arguing for? The claim is the major point on which the work as a whole hangs. A simple example would be a written work with one major claim. In the field of biblical studies such a claim was made when it was argued that a new perspective, beyond that of Luther, was needed on Paul or James. Next, we need to find the evidence for the person's claim. The claim arises from certain stated or assumed presuppositions. These are the grounds. It seems simple, but normally there is a chain, or better a tree-like branching complex structure of logical steps that hopefully bring us from the grounds to the author's claims. In a book with a clear goal, there is a definite attempt on the part of the author to move the reader from the known and accepted (the grounds) to the less known or new (the claims) arising from and supported by the known.

There are two observations to be made here. The first is that the degree of care taken by the author to define the grounds speaks much about the intended readers. As with the integrative method, the implicit grounds presuppose close communities with well-defined convictions about the subject of the work. The second observation is that there is no Jack-of-all-trades treatise. Each author addresses a specific audience. Part of the value of the differential method is in helping to evaluate an author's clarity in defining his or her audience.

Let me use an analogy. The line of argument can be compared with a bridge between the grounds and the claim or claims. As with regular bridges, there are some limits on the weight of the vehicles allowed to pass over the bridge without destroying it. How much weight should be allowed depends on the strength of the structure. Two issues are involved here. One possibility is to strengthen the structure for the purpose of increasing the weight. The other is to measure the strength of the existing structure and keep the weight at that level.

If we turn to the logic of argumentation, the strengthening of the connection between the grounds and the claim is achieved by adding credibility to it. In short, the author adds some kind of general observations – warrants - to guarantee that

the grounds of the chosen sort should be used to support the claim. We may look on the warrants as some overarching rules or concepts for making arguments of this type. The warrants are the pillars of our imaginative bridge. If the distance to be traveled from one bank to the other is short, it may not be necessary to have any support for the structure. Its strength is self evident (the warrant is implicit). And there is not much of a gain for the traveler either. But what should one say about huge bridges? They do need support, but they offer such a gain!

Now, the pillars do not stand alone as a series of unsupported columns. They themselves are supported by some kind of foundation. The foundation underneath the warrants in argumentation is called backing. The backing is the support structure of our imaginative bridge if the warrant is disputed and needs a defense. To back a warrant is to root it in observations, experience, authority, and tradition. For evangelical theological study this warrant is the biblical story, with its witness to Christ. We may also ask whether a narrated experience of an individual or community can also back some warrants? I am sure it can and it should.

The other possibility is not to strengthen the bridge (in the case of the biblical claims we say this is not possible), but to measure it properly and mark the allowed weight for the existing structure. The name for the strength of the connection between the grounds and the claim is the qualifier. These qualifiers help us to move from the iron logic of deductive reasoning to the more mundane and productive logic of probability. We know that the biblical story is the ground from which we argue, but we do not know that all our deductions are right. The qualifiers are the ‘load limit’ signs on our bridge.

We have to admit that we are living in an age of doubt and questioning of any authority. It may be a reason to lament and yet on the other hand it may very well be a good reason for rejoicing. Why not free the mind? This brings us to the last element of the differential method - the rebuttals. As Nancey Murphy defines it, ‘rebuttal (or potential rebuttal) is the part of the argument that acknowledges where and how the argument may lead to a wrong conclusion’.[23] By its nature, rebuttal is a critical tool. It can sometimes be a mechanism of the author's self-defense. It is a conscious search for the loopholes built into the argument. Most often it is the critic’s approach to demolish an argument by questioning its grounds or warrants. The rebuttal is the ‘wrong way’ sign on the bridge.

This stage is not at all easy. We become defensive. As with the group loyalties and interests in the integrative method, we are, unfortunately, more readily prepared to see the speck in the other’s (perhaps often the author’s) eye than the log in our own. Logic is not always as objective as it claims. Perhaps one great contribution that seminary education can play is that it helps those being equipped to look at themselves and others in a different way. Such understanding can be a huge help to our ministries.

Conclusion

This article has set out two different approaches that govern the ways we think, study and relate to those around us. It has relevance to all areas of life and especially to the encounters between East and West. In the European Baptist context we need help to understand our differing traditions. What seems like a

powerful story to one person can seem like an illogical set of statements to another. There is much more involved in the differential approach within theological education than has been set out here.[24] It is often the approach, which is assumed to be the right one. This article has attempted to argue for the richness of the integrative approach, with special reference to seminary education in Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East, as one that takes very seriously questions of narrative, conviction and mission. Such issues are, of course, of concern to Baptists in every part of Europe. Ultimately East and West need not be in conflict. The conversation between us is a vital one. We complement one another.

End Notes

[1] Much of this material has been read and corrected by Dr Glen H Stassen to whom I express my deep gratitude. My heart-felt appreciation goes to Dr Ian Randall for the fine work of editing and careful shaping of the final version of this paper. I am in debt to Dr James Wm McClendon, Jr, Dr Nancey Murphy, Dr James Bradley, Dr Michael L Westmoreland-White and my students for their inspirations, constructive criticism and encouragement.

[2] It is an emerging preferred designation for the former communist countries of Europe and Central Asia based on results of an electronic survey (Mark Elliot, “What to Call ‘It’” ()*East-West Church and Ministry Report*, Vol. 8, No2 (Spring 2000), Part IV).

[3] “A Social Theory Model for Religious Social Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics,* Vol. 5 (Spring, 1977); “Editorial Notes,” *Ibid,* 1-7; “Critical Variables in Christian Social Ethics,” in Paul D Simmons, ed., *Issues in Christian Ethics,* a *Festschrift* honoring Dr Henlee Barnette, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1980, pp. 57-76); “The Nature of Christian Moral Norms,” in ET 501: Christian Ethics, Reading Packet, Unpublished (Fuller Theological Seminary, Fall 1999), chapter 3 from the forthcoming book from InterVarsity Press by David Gushee and Glen Stassen, *Christian Ethics as Following Jesus*; “A Four-Dimensional, Holistic Ethics of Character,” Faculty Address, Unpublished (Pasadena, Fuller Theological Seminary, June 1999).

[4] N Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994).

[5] Stassen, ‘A Social Theory Model’, pp. 9-38.

[6] Michael Westmoreland-White comes to a similar conclusion. In his dissertation he writes, ‘Stassen's concern with ‘ground-of-meaning’ beliefs is similar to McClendon's focus on an individual or community's ‘convictions’, beliefs so basic and deep that they are not easily changed and cannot be changed at all without significantly changing the individual or community in question,’ “Incarnational Discipleship: The Ethics of Clarence Jordan, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dorothy Day,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Louisville, KY: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, May 1995, chapter 1, note 97).

[7] For a fine principlist discussion on conflicting human rights see David Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights*

Tradition (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1979).

[8] On the nature of the debate see Glen H Stassen, *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

[9] See his *Nevertheless: The Varieties and Shortcomings of Religious Pacifism,* rev. and expanded ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992); Ralph B Potter, Jr, *War and Moral Discourse* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969) and Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994).

[10] J W McClendon, *Systematic Theology:Ethics. Volume I* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), p.22.

[11] At a recent international conference in Prague (August 9-11, 2000) on "Religious Liberty and the Ideology of the State," sponsored by the Becket Fund and Becket Institute and co-sponsored by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a series of very instructive examples of the power of a story to (design) form public opinion was given. A repetitive telling of a plausible but not necessarily correct story may form public opinion and become a meta-narrative, within the framework of which any other story is measured and (dis)charged. All three forms of abuse of the state's power in relation to public religious beliefs are based on use of such formative (false) meta-narratives. It is equally true for state imposed atheism, state imposed religion and state imposed secularism (as Kevin J Hasson, the President of the Becket Institute, listed them). Francis Cardinal George of Chicago reminded the audience how a repetition of a plausible scientific account of the Enlightenment turned it into the epistemology of the twentieth century secular society and is used by the secular state as a weapon against any form of public religious epistemology. Dr Jean Bethke Elshtain observed a similar development in liberal democracy. According to her account, a retelling of the story of how early liberalism (e.g. of John Locke) saved religion from its bloodcurdling excesses in Europe by imposing 'toleration' turned to a grand-liberal meta-narrative in the twentieth century. It allowed for liberal monism (along John Rawls line of reasoning) virtually to cancel out any explicit reference to religious commitment and belief in the secular civic idiom of the public square. It forced religious experience into the most inner-private quarters of society's life. As Dr Mary Ann Glendon pointed out, not telling the full story of the origins of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (which she tells beautifully) has made it an easy target for ill intended attempts to subvert it as a slogan of the Western liberal Enlightenment.

[12] The variables or the conviction set in Stassen's method are based on the social theory of Talcott Parsons and the research on key variables by Ralph Potter of Harvard and by Stassen himself.

[13] "Critical Variables," 69.

[14] Analyzing the works of W V O Quine, Thomas Kuhn, Imre Lakatos, Theo Meyering and Alasdair MacIntyre, Nancey Murphy comes to the conclusion that in epistemology or philosophy of science 'the most that can be claimed is that sometimes one can use one's own tradition-dependent standards of rationality to argue cogently in a public forum for one's own tradition. This leaves room for some

competing theories, research programs, traditions ... ' *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspectives on Science, Religion, and Ethics*, (Boulder, CO: West-view Press, 1997, 62).

[15] Quoted by memory from a private conversation with academician Ljubomir Illiev, the former President of the Union of the Bulgarian Mathematicians and Former Vice President of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

[16] *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics,* A Touchstone Book Series (New York et al., NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995, originally published by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1932, passim).

[17] "Critical Variables," 74. Cf. McClendon, *Ethics,* ch. 8.

[18] There is a series of books on caring forgiveness and reconciliation written by Dr David Augsburger at Fuller Theological Seminary. The title of one of them can be a metaphor for the issues of my concern, *Caring Enough To Forgive, Caring Enough Not To Forgive.*

[19] Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument,* a reprint (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993, first published in 1958) and Stephan Toulmin, Richard Rieke and Allen Janik, *An Introduction to Reasoning* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1978).

[20] As Edward Hallett Carr points out, hypothetical reasoning was first introduced by French engineer and mathematician Henri Poincaré in his *Le Science et l'hypothesé,* published in Paris in 1902. It 'started a revolution in scientific thinking'. See his book *What is History?* (Vantage Books, A Division of Random House, 1961, 73). It is widely believed that Carl Hempel in his *Philosophy of Natural Science* (Englewood, Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996) first articulated the concept of hypothetico-deductive reasoning in philosophy of science. On the concept of hypothetico-deductive reasoning, see Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion*, chap. 4.

[21] Extracted from her book *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* and her lecture on Writing Workshop at Fuller Theological Seminary.

[22] Here and further I will use the terms, describing the nature of the differential method, as they are introduced by Toulmin and defined by Murphy.

[23] Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion*, p. 36.

[24] For elaborated applications see Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion*, passim.

About the Author

Parush R. Parushev, M.Div., Ph.D., is Academic Dean and Director of Applied Theology at International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague, Czech Republic. He also serves as a faculty member at BEBI, Sofia, Bulgaria and visiting professor in applied theology at BST, Wroclaw, Poland. His academic achievements include BS/MS, Ph.D. in Applied Mathematics (St. Petersburg, Russia); Senior research fellow, former head of Mechatronics Systems Department of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; Corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Science & Arts; MDiv (SBTS), Ph.D. (ABD) in Theology (Pasadena, USA). He is a member of the AAR/SBL, Society of Christian Philosophers and SSEOE in the USA; Fellow of Acton Institute, USA; and a member of the editorial boards of the *JEBS* and *IBTS Occasional Publications Series.* He is an ordained Baptist Minister.

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Continuing the Conversation: Starting Points—Crafting Reconciliation Through Identity

By Gary Fujino

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Pogo gazes through a pair of binoculars in the famous cartoon strip. He is staring at his own reflection in a mirror and exclaims, “we have seen the enemy, and he is us!” Dr. Paul Hiebert quotes this well-known axiom to illustrate the need for reconciliation in oneself as well as toward ‘the Other.’ On the heels of the tragic September 11th attacks, he spoke to the 2001 *Ted Ward Consultation* stressing that, for the sake of identity and identification, “we must meet one another on the level of our common humanity”(personal notes, 9/14/01).

“We have seen the enemy, and he is us.” These words point to the dual themes I wish to examine for doing a theology of reconciliation in a cross-cultural context. First, we will look broadly at the recognition of oneself in ‘the Other’ from cultural perspectives. Secondly, we will theologically explore the possibility of reconciliation taking place between differing parties or cultures through this self-realization. This paper *starts* from points of difference in identity and aims for unity through it. I call this crafting reconciliation through mutual recognition of the other’s identity.

The Reality of Differences in Identity

The act of loving those who are ‘different’, or of even simply ‘getting along’, can be a challenge since we as human beings tend to first judge based upon surface dissimilarities. Many would rather begin from that which is held in common sometimes ignoring even avoiding differences. But this can minimize the other’s identity and lead to an amelioration or denial of differences rather than actually dealing with real problems. Often, not until one truly looks within and sees the ‘them’ in oneself is one able to validly admit ‘the Other’ as indeed being one of ‘us.’ This is

Hiebert's contention as he quotes the Pogo cartoon above. Despite initial appearances or apparent differences, we find that such persons are not merely *like* us, they *are* us as fellow human beings. 'Us' vs. 'them' is often a perception or forced distinction, where 'otherness' can become more an issue of political, economic or religious expediency than of anything else.

Yet it cannot be denied that actual differences do exist between individuals and, by extension, between cultures or sub-cultures within societies as well. In terms of my own Japanese ethnicity, Dorinne Kondo (1990) and Jane Bachnik (1994) have helped me to combine their ideas of a "shifting identity" with my idea of "crafting reconciliation" through a fluid self-recognition. I will elaborate on this later. Romanucci-Ross describes ethnicity as a "self-perceived group" (1995, 18), more than being based upon "common lineage." Thus, ethnicity is always made and remade, especially by politicians "a subjective sense of continuity and belonging" (1995, 25). In today's world, it is now in ethnicity where identity is founded for so many. It is in such variegation that the process of reconciliation and forgiveness may also begin.

Identity As Seen Through Fredrik Barth's *Ethnic Boundaries*

At the beginning of his classic introduction to "the problems of ethnic groups and their persistence", Fredrik Barth points out that mere geographical and social diversity are not adequate explanations for explaining why cultural diversity remains, in spite of attempts at integration. This is because "boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them" (Barth 1969, 9) and also because "stable, persisting, and often vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries…frequently based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic statuses" (1969,10). Later, he goes on to observe that cultural boundaries persist against any perceived benefits that could be gained from assimilation. In the end Barth says that what ultimately effects the change or even loss of such boundaries is "how well the other, with whom one interacts and to whom one is compared, manage to perform, and what alternative identities and sets of standards are available to the individual" (1969, 25).

Although written over three decades ago, the essay was prescient of today's postmodernist trends. For example, Barth criticizes Narroll's (1964) definition of an ethnic group as being biologically self-perpetuating, sharing fundamental cultural values, which communicates and interacts and which has an identifiable membership (Barth 1969, 10ff.). While admitting that the definition "serves the purposes" for most the part, Barth also pointedly highlights the fact that such an "ideal type model of recurring empirical form" actually "implies a preconceived view" of such groups (1969, 11). This perspective weakens some of the empirical modernism that was at the core of older anthropology, and suggests a need for de-constructing and de-essentializing such former viewpoints. He stresses that while they are important to take into account, such characteristics are primarily "an implication or result" of ethnic groups rather than of what actually defines them (op. cit.). It is "the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (1969, 15, emphasis his). This relational theory of ethnicity[1] allows for a culture to change on the inside, i.e., with the passage of time or because of circumstantial internal shifts yet, at the same time, keep intact the boundaries between itself and what is outside.[2] This also underlines the reality of difference

between groups but not for the purpose of exclusion, rather, to highlight the need for mutual understanding and appreciation of the other's position.

Furthermore, the identity that is constructed is not merely that of "an ethnic group." Barth also allows for multivocality of meaning *within* an ethnic group through a multiplicity of self-identities. In identifying another as a member of the same ethnic group the "criteria for evaluation and judgment" are shared. Moreover, "there is between them a potential for diversification and expansion of their social relationship to cover eventually all different sectors and domains of activity" (1969, 15). One could say that the *status* and *role* of individuals within that ethnic group and how these are played out in society figure prominently in how ethnic boundaries are established and perpetuated.

Distinguishing between the divergent subcultures inside of a given ethnic group or, as he defines it, "variations between members", is an important distinction. The issue of stratification within a group is raised by this idea. In acknowledging such differences, Barth underlines the fact that his concern is not so much "to perfect a typology, but to discover the processes that bring about such clustering" (1969, 29) of variations. Thus, he also allows for wide variance between members such that even though people within their *own* ethnic group would be wont to call "deviant" members, they are in fact still identifiable as members of that group[3] (cf. Barth 1969, 25, 27, 29-30).

I believe that recognizing these issues of ethnicity and of "ethnic boundaries", as Barth calls them, are integral to crafting reconciliation through the understanding of both individual and group identity. For example, by defining culturally the dynamic elements of conflict and how they interface in a given cross-cultural context, true forgiveness and reconciliation can begin to take place, since boundaries must often be crossed in order for conflict to be resolved.

The fact that "boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them" (Barth, 1969, 9), and that "vitally important social relations are maintained across such boundaries, and are frequently based precisely on the dichotomized ethnic statuses" (1969, 10) is often the sphere in which movement toward forgiveness must be realized. Thus, the place or places at which one begins in the restoration process, *based upon* the *locus* of the multi-vocal identities involved, can radically affect an outcome either positively and negatively. In other words, the point from which one situates identity or starts, the "starting point", will change, distract or empower the manner in which reconciliation to other parties across boundaries will take place. The starting point is the locus of one's identity.

Starting Points as the Basis for Identity

In her *Patterns of Culture*, Ruth Benedict asserted that there are often noticeable patterns and traits in a given culture: "within each culture there come into being characteristic purposes not necessarily shared by other types of society…Such patterning of culture cannot be ignored as if it were an unimportant detail" (1934, 42). Just as there are characteristics definitive to the life of an individual human being, which are unique to that person specifically, and one could ask the question, what would he or she look like? So, one could ask the same of a given culture, what would it look like? Some would be *predominantly* more gregarious, outspoken,

proactive, friendly and “bright”. Others, contrastively, would be *generally* more withdrawn, soft spoken or quiet, passive, seemingly distant and “dark.” On a continuum, there would also be every type of person (culture) in-between. Like a person, the patterns of a culture can help to define it. But which patterns? Which culture?

In more recent studies, Michael Rynkiewich (2002) correctly asserts that such monolithic descriptions are no longer applicable, since cultures themselves continue to be dynamic and changing, often composed of sub-cultures within sub-cultures. Even in terms of doing theology, the findings of classic works such as Niebuhr’s (1951), *Christ and Culture*, can no longer be directly applied to many of the fragmented, globalizing, postmodern societies of this third millennium. Rynkiewich says that, in reality, all cultures are contingent, constructed and contested (2002, 315-316). For example, there is no singular description for “American.” Concerning Americans of Asian descent, Kondo helpfully delineates the fact that the nomenclature for certain Americans is often hyphenated “but some of us would argue that leaving out the hyphen makes the term ‘Asian’ or ‘Japanese’ an adjective, rather than implying a half-and-half status…in the terms ‘Asian American’ or ‘Japanese American,’ the accent is on the ‘American’” (Kondo 1990, 309).

The need to recognize and acknowledge differing starting points is then augmented the more in relation to issues of identification and group belonging. This is because so much of what was once “public domain” or “common knowledge” within given cultures and societies have today become less distinctive, dissonant and disjointed on the one hand, or even more narrowed and essentialized on the other hand. The idea of a formerly united and accepted whole, although never actually there, has become less and less tolerated. What is emphasized now is identity, often defined by the locus of one’s sense of being. In other words, identity is seen more from where one sees it “starting” than from what it *shares* with others outside a given group. This is because, as with such similarities among people, like characteristics mark so many cultures yet in differing ways. So, a starting point, such as ethnicity, becomes then a ‘border crossing’ through which all interaction must occur. It is a boundary to be crossed.

Starting Points as Boundaries to be Crossed

What does a starting point look like as it relates to identity and, by application, to the crossing of boundaries between various cultures? A starting point can be a place on a continuum or in a cycle, the position from which something is begun; it can also be the beginning of movement from contrast to similarity, where one is not “majoring on minors” yet still acknowledging the legitimate variances of another’s identity; it means being willing to start from a point of difference, e.g. “This is who I am; take that into account as we begin”, etc. In many ways, the starting point can even become a primary basis for all interaction since how one starts can greatly influence how one will finish in a relationship, between cultures as well as between individuals. What do differences in starting points look like in practice?

From the perspective of the business world, Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner have done important work in finding out how management practices vary from country to country, even within the same multi-national corporation. Their research has discovered in the secular realm what this paper

argues for theologically, that is, “the principle was the same, but the starting point was different” (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998, 45). Their primary focus was studying Americans and Europeans in global companies but these comparisons could be applied missiologically to cultural and ethnic boundaries. One of their key findings was “*there is no inherent reason...why all nations should place equal weight on all values...*from studying different values priorities in different cultures come vital clues as to how we can better manage our own affairs.” (ibid. 197, emphasis theirs).

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner argue for “essential complementarity” without a need for “equal weight on all values.” This is the crux behind starting points. Their study found that a given group would *favor* universalist over particularist perspectives, or were *more* individual-centered than communitarian. But the core issue was not based upon the idea of ‘either/or.’ In fact, their findings evidenced that most of the cultures they studied shared almost all their values. The difference came in how a task was *started* or the *focus* taken. For example, Americans began with the “big picture”, working down to the details, whereas their European counterparts began with the details and worked toward a more holistic view. This eventually gave rise to conflict which inflamed both parties but for *different* reasons. Problems surfaced as certain values were weighted or stressed to the exclusion or belittlement of others.

This idea can also be applied to ethnicity and ethnic boundaries. The recognition of starting points is the beginning of being able to work together *despite* obvious and implicit variations – if those differences are recognized and engaged from the start. In other words, we can see ourselves in the other if we recognize *not* that the person is different from us but, rather, that the other person is essentially the *same* as us but *beginning* from a *different* starting point.

Exclusion and Embrace

My occupation is working as a missionary in the nation of Japan. Missionaries routinely live as “others” in the midst of another country or context. We know what it is to be excluded, to be foreigners and out of place in a land far from where we call “home.” In such a context, cross-cultural ministers regularly experience an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ relationship with the people whom they love and are trying to minister. By definition, we may unconsciously start from points which differ. But missionaries have also been culpable of placing those with whom they live and work into the category of the ‘other’, even as they live as the ‘other’ in the other’s land! An additional facet of this otherness I am speaking of belongs to my ethnic identity, ‘sansei’, which means third generation Japanese immigrant. Being of Japanese descent yet culturally Western in the land of my ancestors adds a whole different dimension to the otherness of being a ‘foreigner.’

Otherness itself is not an evil. But it can become such when ‘the Other’ becomes a construct against which one exalts oneself. Theologian Miroslav Volf calls this, ‘exclusion,’ a “sinful activity of reconfiguring the creation” (1997, 66ff.). Exclusion is the severing of ties to other persons, of not even recognizing their validity as human beings. The result is alienation, a formless void, an undoing of the creation. In plain language, we isolate ourselves from other persons and place ourselves above them. This becomes a philosophically justified idolatry, which can denigrate human

life, putting others as inferior to oneself; it eventually devolves into violence, murder and war, which Volf saw in his own war-torn homeland of Croatia. Exclusion is based upon emphasizing difference to the degree that sameness becomes the "litmus test" of relationship. This is wrong because then there is no room for difference, says Volf.[4]

How can this enmity be resolved? By 'embrace' or "making space for the 'other'" as he calls it. The old maxim said, "Jesus loved the whole world so much that he stretched out his arms and died." Here is embrace. The action begins with forgiving, moves toward forgetting, and is capped by running into the open arms of the Father. Without embrace, we will never allow ourselves to see anything but a 'them.' In tying humanity to the story of the Prodigal, he notes that "there is no coming to oneself without the memory of belonging" (Volf 1997, 158). It is the memory of having been a son of the Father that makes the errant child want to return ("repent"), even if it is as a hired servant. Having "un-sonned" himself, as Volf calls it, the Prodigal seeks again his sonship to the Father. But the fact that the son has *memory* of his departure is what allows him to return to that which he had willfully abandoned in the first place.

Remembering and Identity in Christ

The book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament has "remembering" as one of its main themes. The imperative, 'remember', repeatedly implores the Israelites to call to mind their experience at the mountain before God (4:10); their slavery and the Exodus (5:15; 15:15); God's judgment upon Pharaoh (7:18); their rebellious wandering in the wilderness (8:2; 9:7); and many other events in their history. Themes of remembering can also be found in the New Testament, with the most prominent being the believer's act of remembrance through the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11: 23ff.). Memory and the act of remembering are the fundamental bases on top of which belonging, acceptance, forgiveness and reconciliation were built, both for the people of Israel as well as for the bride of Christ, His church.

Thus, as seen above, biblically, theologically and even culturally speaking, it is evident that we (I) cannot, as Christians, forgive or even start into understanding until we ourselves remember and are conscious of where we come from. This remembering includes heritage as well as faith. For myself personally, I must remember the fact that, as an ethnic Japanese, I have been and am still sometimes excluded on that basis. I must also remember that being excluded is, in a sense, a 'natural' part of missionary living. This does not mean that I do not also attempt to move into embrace. But I must keep at the fore that I am always a foreigner and alien or, the 'stranger,' as Volf calls it. I must also remember that I myself exclude and hurt others, sometimes consciously and intentionally but more often in ignorance – even if my acts of exclusion might occur without malicious intent. Lastly, I need to remember that I also hold allegiance to a nation which is often viewed as being imperialistic or neo-colonial by outsiders. Ironically, under such circumstances, I myself have been accused of being racist or ethnocentric simply by being "from America."

Still, at the end of the day, I am not, first, a Canadian (by birth), nor an American (by culture), nor even a Japanese-Canadian (in ethnicity) but a Christian (by faith). Specifically, I am a sansei-Christian. These two words, 'sansei' and 'Christian' are

not separable. Paul spoke of the believer's heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20). He counted all things as loss in view of "the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ" (Phil. 3:7). Yet, in the same chapter, neither did the apostle deny his ethnic identity.[5] He simply did not value it more than his standing in Christ. Volf cautions that "both distance and belonging are essential" (1997, 50) for the believer. 'Distance' does not mean fleeing a culture but living in it mindfully. 'Belonging' speaks of particularities, differences, by which "universality can be affirmed...*Their difference is internal to the culture*" (Volf 1994, 18f. in Volf 1997, 49, emphasis his). For Paul, the Jew from Tarsus, his ethnic and national identity were inextricably linked to who he was as a child of God. But it was in the recognition and appropriation under God of this identity by which he was later able to cross boundaries of all kinds. Paul's *whole* identity, ethnicity, faith, languages as well as citizenship, were found singly under his adoption into Christ.

Toward a "Uni-part" Christian Identity for Reconciliation

Primary identity is, therefore, intertwined with both *where* we were born (e.g., ethnically and nationally) as well as to *what* we were born into (e.g., our personal background and conversion experience). The Christian identity should be at the forefront but it cannot be separated from ethnic identity either. I call this "uni-part" because both identities are true in describing self and neither can be exclusive of the other. It is integrated, even shifting. This synthesis between the universal ("uni-") of Christian belief to the more particularistic ("-part") element of my ethnicity comprises who am I. Adding my Canadian passport, American cultural upbringing, and missionary role expands this even further.

It is within such a network of interlinked uni-part identities where reconciliation may begin. No two identities, no two believers are the same yet all proceed toward the heavenly goal with a soul empowered by belief in the Creator God. All are different, starting from various points yet within the same matrix, our humanity in Christ. It is this recognition of a shared framework, grounded in Christ yet literally coming toward the goal from different angles, which beckons the possibility of embrace, of forgiving and of reconciling with 'the Other.' When otherness is accepted the linkage of differences in both humanity and faith also become acknowledgeable. I speak here of reconciliation and forgiveness between Christians but the analogy would follow even between Christians and non-Christians since all share a common humanity. It is only the starting points which differ.

But being fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God does not erase national or ethnic identity. Salvation *enhances* it. It is evident in the Scripture that identity, even ethnicity, are retained in the afterlife (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). In this life, ethnicity can be used either to glorify God and the Body of Christ or used to exclude others and justify an idolatry of self and country. But, if Paul's life is an example, Christian conversion also does not homogenize or even amalgamate identity. God does not want every tribe and tongue and nation to become American when they believe. May it never be! No, conversion makes the distinctives which already exist (including national and ethnic identity) that much more distinctive, even as that same person stands within the global confines of a universal church.

Loving Our Enemies, Loving Ourselves

Theologically speaking, humankind not only had the capacity to become enemies of each other but were, in fact, 'God's enemies' (Rom. 5:9). All were at enmity with God Himself until the incarnated Christ showed humanity the way out, to reconciliation by His death and resurrection. It is here that the 'us/them' distinction must break down – at the foot of the Cross. It is here where Jesus' words in Matt. 5:44 and Luke 6:27, 35 of loving one's enemies and "those who hate you" become more than lip service.

Loving our enemies is something that can be done on the surface, only in public, if need be. But *praying* for our 'enemies' – with those who are different or with those whom we need to be reconciled – is a matter of the heart since can be done in private. This then becomes a livable reality only when, in the power of God's Spirit, we understand that these present day enemies – whoever they might be – are not merely *like* us, they *are* us, as Pogo found for himself. If we start here then wherever we come from, whatever our identity, as children of the King, we can come to our enemies not as a conqueror, or even as rescuer but, as Dr. Hiebert says, "one fallen sinner to another fallen sinner", begging forgiveness and mutually looking to God for deliverance. Here is where the beam must be removed from our own eye so that we may wipe another's speck. It is here that the death of an 'other' can diminish me because there is no 'us' vs. 'them'; it is, "only us" since, as Hiebert notes, we are "our others' keeper." (Hiebert 1995)

The Cross must be continually returned to *together* with 'the Other', or there will never be one 'us' – the true Church and a single humanity. It is only in looking out at others that we can see into ourselves. In recognizing our identity, we can begin to identify and reconcile with others. Yet, in the end, it is finally only by bowing before our King that we can truly become His slave and a servant of all, even to our enemies.

End Notes

[1] See the full description from the Online Dictionary of Anthropology at http://www.anthrobase.com/Dic/eng/pers/barth_fredrik.htm

[2] Personal conversation with Kelly Malone, PhD (3/31/04). My thanks to Dr. Malone for his insights here and for the paper overall.

[3] Barth expands on this saying, "I am therefore concerned primarily to show how, under varying circumstances, certain constellations of categorization and value orientation have a self-fulfilling character, how others will tend to be falsified by experience, while others again are incapable of consummation in the interaction. Ethnic boundaries can emerge and persist only in the former situation, whereas they should dissolve or be absent in the latter situations...Revision only takes place where the categorization is grossly inadequate—not merely because it is untrue in any objective sense, but because it is consistently unrewarding to act upon, within the domain where the actor makes it relevant" (1969, 30).

[4] According to Volf, the result of exclusion is "a world without the other" (1997, 57), a life centered on self. "For exclusion to happen, it suffices for the self simply to strive to guard the integrity of its territory, while granting the others – especially the

distant others – the full right to do whatever they please with the rest of the universe" (1997, 91). Thus, exclusion is less about keeping out others as it is on focusing on oneself and one's own like-patterned group.

[5] Paul's spiritual standing in Christ did not remove the fact that he was "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5). In fact, Paul's bi-cultural background with a Roman birthright as an ethnic Jew gave him a distinct advantage when he preached. In Acts, the record shows that Paul was as facile with presenting the gospel on Mars Hill among the Greeks as he was in the synagogues among the Jews. In fact, he was so articulate and able to contextualize the message that, rather than believing his message, people more often ridiculed him (17:32), worshipped him (Acts 14:11ff.), or tried to have him killed (Acts 14:19). In other words, Paul *got through* because he understood his audience so well. His rabbinic training under the great Gamaliel gave him a powerful edge in arguing *against* the merits of the Law in his epistle to the Romans. On the other hand, Paul's obvious knowledge of "pagan" classics allowed him to address the arguments of Epicurean, Stoic and Cretan philosophers of his day by their own terminology (Acts 17:18; Titus 1:12). All of the above comprised Paul's identity, which was characterized by so much more then mere belief and piety.

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About the Author

Gary Fujino is working on a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago. His research focus is examining the possible effects of culture on how the act of forgiveness takes place between individuals and groups. Gary has been based in Tokyo, Japan, as a missionary with the international Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention since 1996. He has enjoyed seventeen years of marriage with his wife, Lynn. Gary and Lynn have two boys and two girls, ages four through thirteen.

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