the ecumenist

a journal of theology, culture and society

Vol. 38 No. 4 ▪ Fall 2001

Critical Theology in the Lutheran Tradition

The Lutheran Church has become a world-wide community. Today Lutheran congregations exist in Latin America, Africa and Asia. This is a development that is shared by all the classical Christian Churches: they have become international communities made up of congregations representing different cultures and living in different historical contexts. Since classical theology has been created in the Western academic tradition, it is not surprising that Christians belonging to non-Western cultures have raised critical questions and demand that their own theological reflections be taken seriously. Excluded from the Western academic tradition were also women and low-status sectors of the population. Today their voices are being heard in the Churches.

The place were the theological debate among Lutherans is fostered is the World Lutheran Federation (WLF). A recent book published by the WLF, called *Justification in the World's Context,*[1] is a collection of papers given at a Consultation held in 1988 at Wittenberg, to which were invited Lutheran theologians from all parts of the world. This book offers an excellent introduction to the theological debates in the Lutheran community.

Inspired by Luther

What these theologians share is the desire to be faithful to Luther's grasp of the Christian message that has produced a turning point in European history. Yet they complain that the subsequent Lutheran tradition has overemphasized justification by faith of the individual and thus fostered a certain spiritual individualism that bracketed concern for justice in society. Still, these theologians praise Luther as a reformer, innovator and genius who continues to inspire them.

What in particular do the critical theologians admire about Luther? They argue that Luther understood

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the spiritual anguish of people in the late medieval Church. He offered a critical analysis of the dominant religious culture of his day and then proclaimed the Christian message of God's saving Word to the malaise experienced by ordinary believers. "Justification by faith" delivered people from their guilt feelings, their anxieties, and their restless search for spiritual peace through repeated devotions, sacred routines and frequent pilgrimages. That Christians are saved by faith was taught by the Apostle Paul and recognized in the Christian tradition, yet in the absence of sermons on the gratuity of faith, the Pauline message had been largely forgotten in the popular Catholicism of the late Middle Ages. "Justification by faith" made people feel free – free to follow boldly and joyfully in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

Because of his pastoral concern, Luther created a contextual theology. He did not explore Christian teachings to enhance their rational intelligibility as was done by the scholastics; instead he focused on the existential issue of the historical moment and read the Scriptures to find in them God's saving Word for the present situation. Here is a quotation from Luther that is widely appreciated.

> If I profess with the loudest voice and the clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing him. The loyalty of the soldier is proven where the battle rages; struggling on other battlefields is mere flight.[2]

There is a second aspect of Luther's mission that the critical theologians admire. He swam against the stream, he challenged the authorities, he risked his personal safety for the sake of truth. According to Walter Altmann, a Lutheran theologian from Brazil, the biblical passage, "I will speak of your decrees before kings and shall not be put to shame,"(Ps 119:46) was important for Luther in his struggle with the emperor. This passage, Altmann argues, confirms "the public character of Christian faith" (p. 117).

That the Gospel has public meaning is crucially important for this Brazilian theologian. The troubling condition that Luther faced was people's spiritual anxieties and the domination of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, yet the troubling condition that Latin American Christians face is, according to Altmann, the exclusion of ever growing sectors of the population from the resources of life (pp. 122-124). The entire continent is caught in a global economic system that increasingly disrupts society and condemns ever greater numbers of people to live in body- and soul-destroying destitution. What is the public meaning of "justification by faith" in the present situation of social apartheid?

Wanda Deifelt, another Brazilian theologian present at the Wittenberg Consultation, reports that the Lutheran congregations in Brazil, largely derived from German immigrants, are proud of their Lutheran heritage, their discipline and hard work, and the financial success achieved over the years. For this reason, she argues, these congregations are profoundly conservative. For them the Gospel has no critical public meaning. When members of these congregations experience unemployment or get into financial difficulties, they are often too embarrassed to show their face at Sunday worship. Poverty is seen by them as something shameful. In this context, a truly Lutheran theology, she argues, must confront the issue of poverty which the world and the devil are presently attacking and speak the liberating word of justification – God making us just, God condemning the sin of the society and freeing us, though undeserving, to stand and work against injustice. To preach this message means swimming against the stream, challenging the authorities, and in many cases risking personal safety for the sake of truth (p. 33).

Luther remains the source of inspiration because he developed a contextual theology attentive to people's suffering and defended his non-conformist interpretation of the Gospel with boldness, risking the anger of the authorities.

Diverse Interpretations

Studying the theological debates in the Lutheran Church makes the Catholic reader give a smile of recognition. Why? Because these debates have their exact parallel within the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, all Christian Churches that constitute world-wide communities find themselves challenged by Christian voices that represent experiences and reflections belonging to different cultures and different historical locations.

In the book *Justification in the World's Context* I find six different theological approaches, all of them claiming fidelity to the Lutheran tradition.

1. There are conservative theologians who reject the idea that Christian teaching must be *relevant*. Christian

teaching must be *true*, i.e. in conformity with the divinely revealed Scriptures. Adjusting the Christian message to suit the circumstances is a temptation that must be overcome. According to German theologian Uwe Rieske-Braun, "The Lutheran understanding of justification is jeopardized if the question regarding consequences and relevance is raised first.... The Protestant faith experiences God's unconditional promise beyond all human action and capability and beyond the criteria of demonstrable relevance: this is the proprium of *sola fide*" (p. 200). The same author acknowledges his opposition to the globalization of the free market economy and its devastating consequences for growing sectors of the world population, yet he does not see why this historical situation should affect the understanding of "justification by faith."

2. There are progressive German and North American theologians who hold that theology must exercise a critical function in society. The proclamation of the Gospel must be relevant. Since the Word of God judges the world, they are convinced that "justification by faith" has a public meaning in our day. They argue convincingly that in industrial capitalism, people are compelled to work hard and reach out for success, and in doing so tend to evaluate themselves and others in terms of their material achievements. People give their best energies to their business or their career, yet they are always restless, out of breath, and unsure about themselves. Here "justification by faith" has a liberating message: people are accepted and embraced by God independently of their achievements or the lack of them. The Christian message frees people in capitalist society from anxiety. The American theologian David Tiede argues that the Christian life guided by the Lutheran message is counter-cultural, at odds with the mainstream, rescuing people from frantic striving and competitiveness, giving them peace, and making them content with work that renders a service to society (pp. 103-116).

This position has a certain affinity with the thought of Paul Tillich, a Lutheran theologian himself, who, over half a century ago, offered a new interpretation of justification. According to Tillich, the anxiety over sin and the fear of God's wrath that characterized medieval culture no longer represent the deeply troubling experiences characteristic of modern society, namely the meaninglessness of life. The liberating power of faith in today's world, Tillich proposed, is the communication of meaning and orientation, the unmerited gift of becoming a participant in God's redemptive design for the world.

Yet, as we shall see, Lutheran theologians from Latin America argue that this interpretation of justification is not without its problems. It may be suitable in middle-class societies where the majority of people have enough to eat and a roof over their head, but it is unsuitable in the impoverished regions of the Third World.

3. Joseph Ngah, an African Lutheran, representing a theological current on his continent, insists that God's promise of salvation includes the rescue of people from all enemies of life – from sin, from death, from evil powers, from deprivation, from injustice. For African Lutherans, justification by faith has a social meaning: it is the faithful acknowledgment of God's merciful condescension to be in solidarity with people, despite their unworthiness. Justification means liberation (pp. 133-138). Ramathate Dolamo, a Lutheran theologian from the Republic of South Africa, also insists that justification by faith is a human rights issue and announces liberation (pp. 125-132).

4. Gnana Robinson, a Lutheran from Asia, expressed his dissatisfaction with a non-contextual understanding of the Lutheran principles, *sola fide*, *solus Christus* and *sola scriptura*. These principles were formulated to guide a reform movement in the late medieval Church where popular piety encouraged by the hierarchy relied on devotional practices, venerated innumerable saints and remained ignorant of the Bible. In Asia the context is entirely different. Christians, a tiny minority, find themselves surrounded by people of other religions, whose spirituality and holiness are often impressive. Christians cannot possibly look upon these religious people whose humility is often quite evident as if they were outside of God's love and foolishly trusted in their own powers. To interpret "justification by faith" contextually means that God acts gratuitously and mercifully in all of humanity and that, for this reason, Asian Christians believing in Christ as *salvator mundi* must have an open attitude towards the religions of their neighbours (pp. 139-154).

5. Lutheran women theologians also emphasized the contextuality of theological reflection (pp. 73-102). Since the social locations of men and women are different and since the role assigned to women by society excludes them from positions of public responsibility, women must develop an understanding of the Christian message that speaks to their historical situation. Christian women agree with the non-Western theological voices that classical theology inherited from the past does not constitute universal truth. Despite its depth and

brilliance, classical theology represents the viewpoint of a particular culture and a particular class within that culture. Justification by faith frees the believing community from this problematic one-sidedness.

Lutheran Liberation Theology

6. We have already met the Brazilians, Walter Altmann and Wanda Deifelt, who represented the sixth theological approach at the Wittenberg Consultation. They were supported by other Latin American theologians present.[3] All of them interpreted the meaning of justification by faith in a historical situation where the majority of people find themselves excluded from society. As Catholic liberation theologians reread the Catholic tradition to find in it support for "the preferential option for the poor" and the divine promise of "integral liberation," so Lutheran liberation theologians reread the Lutheran tradition to support their solidarity with the excluded and affirm the liberating power of justification by faith. What does it mean in Latin America to proclaim Christ as *salvator mundi*?

Because they offer a novel reading of the Lutheran tradition, Latin American theologians are critical of the teaching monopoly of the European and, more especially, the German Lutheran Church. In particular, they criticize the passive interpretation of "justification by faith," occasionally offered by German theologians, suggesting that in the act of faith believers only receive and do not give anything in return. They are also critical of a narrow understanding of the so-called "two-kingdoms doctrine," which Lutherans have used at certain periods to separate the spiritual from the worldly realm and thus remain indifferent to social injustice and the suffering of its victims. The Latin American Lutherans insist that justification by faith frees believers to become disciples of Christ and with him extend their solidarity to the excluded.

Latin American Lutherans, we hear from Ekkehard Heise (p. 203), have developed their own theology of liberation. Best known in English is Walter Altmann's book *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). Harder to find is *Justification and Justice: A Meeting of Lutheran Theologians of the Americas* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985). Guiellermo Hansen from Argentina and Victor Westhelle from Brazil have written dissertations that develop a Lutheran theology of liberation. There are other names. Needless to say, these Lutherans are in dialogue with other Christian theologians in Latin America, Catholic and Protestant. They admire the Catholic contribution. They greatly respect the book *The Amnesty of Grace: Justification by Faith from a Latin American Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993) written by the Latin American Protestant theologian, Elsa Tamez.

How do Lutherans in Europe and the United States react to this novel manner of reading the Gospel? Some theologians at the Wittenberg Consultation were uncomfortable with liberation theology. Others argued that Lutheran liberation theology may be suitable for Latin America, but did not fit the condition of the Church in the industrialized world where the majority of people are integral members of society. As we saw above, some progressive Lutheran theologians in the North, in particular Reinhard Höppner and David Tiede (pp. 27-32, 103-116), developed a counter-cultural Lutheran theology for life in capitalist countries, a theology that rescues Christians from the frantic race of competition and achievement and offers them the peace of Christ. But is it enough to allow Latin Americans to have their theology of liberation? Are not our societies linked to theirs? Do we not belong to the same global system?

Several papers at the Wittenberg Consultation dealt with the globalization of the free market economy (pp. 43-72). While the authors appreciate the increase of global communication in the field of culture and religion – the WLF itself is a child of globalization – they all point to the damaging consequences of the globalization of the unregulated market: the widening gap between rich and poor, increasing social apartheid in the South and even in the industrialized North, the threat to the natural environment, and the undermining of traditional cultures and their religious inheritance. They repudiate the neo-liberal ideology which claims that leaving the production and distribution of goods to market forces alone will be of benefit for the whole of humanity. According to these authors, the rich countries of the North and the poor countries of the South belong to the same global system that enriches the industrialized centres of the world at the expense of the outlying regions.

How should Christians react to this state of affairs? A practical alternative is at this point not available. Many Christians live in anguish. While there is no way to change the entire system, Christians in quest of discipleship often support community development and the social economy at the grass roots as alternative forms of economic development. They also try to make public

opinion more aware of society's structural injustices. Here are the words of one young Lutheran woman, Cynthia Moe-Lobda.

> Two dimensions have shaped my personal vocation and my work. One is my vocation as a Lutheran. A theologically formative event occurred at a point in my early adulthood when justification by grace through faith became so real to me that I felt as though it saved my life. God's unconditional love became the home out of which I work. A second formative event was my experience as a missionary in Central America and subsequent Central American work in the USA. I have been seared by this experience, by encountering tortured people and realizing that my government supported the torturers, and by encountering deadly poverty and realizing that it was linked to the global economic order by which middle- and upper-strata North Americans benefit. I cannot escape knowing these things. I can only go deeper into them and understand them as parts of my call, though they torment me. Now in reading Luther, I ask myself what neighbour-love means in a world in which our affluence spells death for many global neighbours.[4]

Status confessionis?

Status confessionis is an expression in the Lutheran tradition that refers to a situation in which the Church that wants to remain faithful to Christ must say No to a given proposal. Not to say No would imply a betrayal of Christ. In the 16th century the proposals to be thus rejected were doctrinal. In its Confessions the Lutheran Church repudiated as unbiblical certain doctrines of the Catholic Church. Yet in 1936, when Hitler forced the German Lutheran Church to exclude from the ministry pastors of Jewish or half-Jewish origin, a small group of Lutheran pastors formed the so-called Confessing Church and declared a *status confessionis*. They regarded the demand of the German government contrary to biblical teaching. To remain faithful to Christ, they argued, the Church had to say No to Hitler's proposal. Since the larger Lutheran Church did not say No, the small Confessing Church regarded itself as the only true Church in Germany. We note that the Confessing Church did not criticize Hitler's political policies: it only repudiated Hitler's right to interfere in the life of the Church. This reticence corresponded to the narrow two-kingdoms doctrine of German Lutherans at the time.

In 1977 the World Lutheran Federation (WLF) assembled at Dar-es-Salaam was obliged to deal with the practice of apartheid in the South African Lutheran Churches.[5] Since Christians are one in Jesus Christ, the Church must say No to a separation based on race in its eucharistic worship. Was this a *status confessionis*? At first, the assembly thought of condemning apartheid at the Lord's Table without criticizing the secular apartheid in South African society. Yet this seemed inconsistent. What is the use of uniting black and white believers in the Church's worship, when they are prevented by law from having a cup of tea together at a nearby café? This argument broke down the easy separation between the spiritual and the secular realm. Here is a paragraph of the final document.

> Under normal circumstances Christians may have different opinions in political questions. However, political and social systems may become so perverted and oppressive that it is consistent with the confession to reject them and work for changes. We especially appeal to our white member churches in South Africa to recognize that the situation in southern Africa constitutes a *status confessionis*. This means that, on the basis of faith and in order to manifest the unity of the church, churches would publicly and unequivocally reject the existing apartheid system.[6]

This proclamation of the *status confessionis* led to the excommunication of the Lutheran Churches in South Africa.

In the middle eighties, Ulrich Duchrow with a group of theological colleagues decided to examine the damaging effects of the emerging neo-liberal, international economic order in the light of the New Testament doctrine of Christ's body. Here is what they concluded.

> The northern industrial societies are growing steadily richer at the expense of the majority of the people in the countries supplying the raw materials, who are becoming steadily poorer. In ecclesiological terms, this means that Christians and their Churches in the "North" enjoy their growing (or at least protected) prosperity in part at least at the expense of Christians and their Churches in the countries supplying the raw

materials. If we as a Church are truly the body of Christ, then this body is divided among active thieves, passive beneficiaries and deprived victims.[7]

Does this situation place the Church in a *status confessionis*? Is the Church faithful to Christ obliged to say No to the neo-liberal economic system that creates an exploitative dynamic within Christ's body itself? Should a Church that refuses to pronounce this No be excommunicated? This is the provocative debate that Ulrich Duchrow and his associates introduced in the Lutheran Church and the World Council of Churches.

Who is Ulrich Duchrow? He is a well-known German Lutheran scholar, the author of an important study on the two-kingdoms doctrine and the Christian responsibility for the world in the Lutheran tradition.[8] In this book he demonstrates that the doctrine of the two kingdoms was formulated in the German Lutheran Church in the 19th century and does not fully represent Luther's own teaching on the relationship between church and society. While Luther made a clear separation between church and secular society, he simply took for granted that the Gospel also contained a message addressed to the social order. In Duchrow's subsequent book, *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue for the Churches*,[9] he made the proposal that the present, misery-creating economic system affecting the lives of a growing majority creates for the Church a *status confessionis*. At the Wittenberg Consultation, this proposal was supported by Arturo Blatezky from Argentina (p. 190) and Ramathate Dolamo from South Africa (p. 130).

That the economic globalization creates a *status confessionis* for the Church has not been accepted by many Lutherans. What has been widely acknowledged nonetheless is that the Church must be critical of the neo-liberal orientation of the present-day economy. But to say that congregations that do not agree with this should be excommunicated seems excessive to most. Today the Lutheran Church in company with the other Christian Churches has learnt to defend certain principles of economic justice in the name of Christ and to repudiate the dominant trend toward the globalization of the free market. An example of this evolution is the joint statement of the Canadian Churches, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, on the occasion of the Summit of the Americas held in Quebec in April 2001. Here is a paragraph from their statement.

> As communities of faith in Canada, linked with our brothers and sisters of faith throughout the Americas, we call upon you [participants of the Summit] to create not simply a trade agreement, but a framework for a more neighbourly economy. We believe that the following critical policy points need your urgent attention. Conform any new agreement to the human rights standards in the UN covenants. Protect and promote the inherent right of Aboriginal peoples in the Americas. Cancel paralysing national debts. Enhance food security and the security of agricultural communities. Preserve the integrity of publicly funded health and education services. Do not let patents, or trade-related intellectual property rights, block access to public goods like life-saving medicines.

The joint statement made by the leaders of the Churches demonstrates that critical theology has not been without effects.

Gregory Baum

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[1] Wolfgang Greive, ed., *Justification in the World's Context* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2000). The page references to this book shall be given in parentheses in the text.

[2] Quoted by David Tiede, in *Justification in the World's Context*, 103.

[3] Arturo Blatezky (pp. 187-192) and Ekkehard Heise (203-208).

[4] Quoted in Karen Bloomquist and John Stumme, eds., *The Promise of Lutheran Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 153.

[5] This story is told by Ulrich Duchrow in his *Global Economy: A Confessional Issue for the Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987), 47.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ulrich Duchrow, *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1970 [2nd ed. 1980]).

[9] See note 5.

A Father's Reflections on the Future of Ecumenism

The morning of my daughter's wedding day dawned auspiciously. Sunny, but not too bright. Warm, but not too hot. A perfect day for the re-enactment of the wedding feast at Cana. Thankfully all went well at our version of the Cana wedding feast.

In the days just after her wedding, I found myself in a reflective stance about the passing of time, about my difficulties adjusting to the increasing individualism and consumerism of life in my homeland after living in Central America, and about the future of a religious faith long held dear.

My daughter had elected a wedding service outside the traditional Catholic faith of her parents and grandparents because the Church would not welcome her friends to the wedding Communion – the last thing it seemed to me this beleaguered institution needs now, an almost self-destructive pushing away of the next generation in their tender moments of rites of passage.

When I look around here in the North I see the old religious structures rapidly melting away, like a late spring iceflow in a southern sea. The old orders. The old schools and hospitals. The old familiarity with the "faith of our fathers" (and our mothers!).

Demographic developments to the contrary in the impoverished countries of Africa and Latin America will not save the old order. Quebec, Poland and Ireland show the inability of a static, defensive formulation of Catholic tradition to withstand the challenges of the rapidly changing culture.

Very few pastors in the North see the current evaporation of religious vocations as positive. Yet, among these few are some pastors of long and wide experience, who see in the accelerating collapse of old institutions, old rigidities and old exclusions, the birth of a new, more open faith.

Beneath the current institutional rubble, there are, I believe, timeless treasures. I was encouraged in this view the week after my daughter's wedding when *The Ecumenist* reached my Nova Scotia mailbox. Gregory Baum's reminder to Gary Wills [*The Ecumenist* 38:2, 17] of the importance of the social teachings concerning the "option for the poor" and "the priority of labour" seemed as a compass needle.

This summer the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta declared obesity among American young people an epidemic. How ironic and how sad: the children of the rich and powerful in the North are dying of overweight and inaction, while the children of the poor in the South die from starvation and overwork in wretched sweatshops to make corporate brands. Surely, this cannot be allowed to continue!

In his review of *Postmodern Welfare* by Peter Leonard, in this same issue, Baum writes eloquently: "His hope is based on an ethical passion, on the deep conviction that humans belong to one another and are responsible for one another and that to shrug one's shoulders in regard to the fate of others is a betrayal of oneself. Christians hold that in a hidden way God has something to do with such ethical passion."

In that same spirit of openness and hope, I look to the continued development of ecumenism in this new millennium. I call for an ecumenism that includes the current Christian-Jewish and Christian-Buddhist dialogues and moved beyond Cardinal Ratzinger's unfortunate description of Islam. Out and beyond – to the bold catholic spirit of Bartholomé de Las Casas, to an ecumenism that includes in the dialogue not only other faiths, but other species, other forms of consciousness, artificial intelligence and sensibilities that are being born everyday around us.

When I finished reading the Spring 2001 issue of *The Ecumenist*, I left the reading both grateful and nourished. But since the collapse of traditional religious influence in our children's lives, superficial materialism is absorbed by many as the only available perspective. I feel that my children are being given stones to eat! I ask forgiveness for my concerns as a father and grandfather: my children have full stomachs but hungry hearts! I hope they too will find the nourishment they need in the growth of a planet-wide ecumenism that will inspire brave acts of justice and serve God's coming reign.

Brian Joseph

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The Buddhist Call to *imitatio Christi*

> "It is time Christians were judged more by their likeness to Christ than their notions of Christ."
>
> —*William Penn*

In a recently published book entitled *Buddhists Talk about Jesus; Christians Talk about the Buddha,* Buddhist professor José Ignacio Cabezón made this observation:

> I consider my Christian brothers and sisters fortunate, and I rejoice in the fact that they have at the very core of their tradition – in the very life of their founder – such a clear and superb model of what it means to be a socially responsible person, a person of integrity, in the world. We Buddhists have a great deal to learn from this aspect of the life of Jesus. (Cabezón, p. 20)

Cabezón's admiration for Jesus as an example of passionate social responsibility stems from more than the fact that Cabezón himself was a Cuban Catholic before he became a Buddhist monk as a young adult. He speaks, I think, for quite a large number of contemporary Buddhists, and not only those who come from Christian backgrounds. One also finds similar admiration for Jesus Christ in the talks and writings of such Asian Buddhists as Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet, and Thich Nhat Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist peace activist. What I shall explore in this article is why Buddhists often turn to Jesus as an example – perhaps the best available example – of the principles and values that lie at the heart of Buddhist theory and practice.

The Christ and the Buddha Contrasted

Cabezón offers a few reasons why Buddhists looking for a model of responsible social action might turn to Christ more readily than to the Buddha.

> Unlike Jesus, the Buddha was not a peasant; his followers seem to have been principally middle- and upper-class men and women, as was his principal audience; and his criticisms were primarily directed at the Brahmanical religious beliefs and practices prevalent in his day, not at the social structures that marginalized and oppressed men and women in ancient India. (Cabezón, p. 19)

As Cabezón and many others have noted, the Buddha's primary concerns were not with social and economic inequities, but with what he saw as the fundamental impossibility of lasting happiness in a mind dominated by longings and aversions. His solution to the problem of human misery was to go to work at changing the deeply embedded habits of thought that drive us to strive to find and keep what we find agreeable and to eliminate and prevent the recurrence of what we find disagreeable. Nearly all his solutions were psychological in nature rather than sociological. The traditional story of the Buddha's life portrays him as born into a wealthy and socially influential family – later hagiography portrays him as a prince. The Buddha's wealth and social prominence are key elements in his story for the important reason that he failed to find lasting happiness in them. He found lasting contentment, according to the standard story, only when he renounced all interest in wealth, influence and reputation and took up a life of material simplicity. In canonical accounts he is portrayed as being most contented when living deep in the wilderness, far away not only from kings and merchants and his biological kin, but also from his own disciples, whom he likens to boisterous and slightly troublesome children! The Buddha, in other words, is traditionally depicted by Buddhists as a perfect model of renunciation, of retreat from the irremediable and irreparable world of animals, men and gods.

The model of humanity at its best presented by the Buddha, one of the standard epithets of whom is "best of all who walk on two feet," is clearly a far cry from the model presented by the poor and socially marginalized rabbi who chases money-changers from the temple, who cares for the afflicted, who heals the sick and even raises the dead, and who preaches to the multitudes with an eloquence that moves the hearts of all who become acquainted with his words. It is not difficult to see, then, why many Buddhists seeking a model of social activism

would turn not to the Buddha but to the Christ. What remains to be explained is why Buddhists who have unwaveringly pursued Buddhist practice might seek a model of social activism rather than remaining content to withdraw far from the madding crowd into the remote wilderness.

Dwelling in Divine Qualities

The social context in which the Buddha taught was an Indian society that provided two main approaches to religion: following a domestic life of carrying out prescribed familial obligations and social duties, or withdrawing from society and living as a mendicant recluse. The Buddha himself exemplifies the latter approach. Those who chose the former approach often carried out their duties in the hopes of being reborn into the realm of the gods, the chief of whom was the creator god Brahma. A common hope during the time of the Buddha was to see Brahma face to face. Those pursuing the domestic life might hope to meet Brahma in the afterlife, while many ascetic recluses hoped to see Brahma in this very life. When the Buddha was asked how he proposed to help people come face-to-face with Brahma, he met the question with a question of his own: "What are the qualities that Brahma has by which you will know you are in his presence?" The reply given was that Brahma is characterized by unconditional love, compassion, joy and serenity. The Buddha then proposed that a better thing than admiring those qualities in Brahma would be to develop those qualities in oneself. He then set forth a series of spiritual exercises aimed at helping the practitioner cultivate a heart of love, compassion, joy and serenity. The exercises, in some form or another, are to be found in nearly every particular Buddhist sect and school that has arisen during the 2500-year history of the religion. For many Buddhists these spiritual exercises, called the divine abodes or dwelling with Brahma (*brahma-vihara*), are the core of their religious practice.

About half a millennium after the Buddha walked the earth, a family of schools arose that are collectively referred to as Mahayana, which literally means the great way of going. The heart of the Mahayana orientation is a conviction that individual happiness is impossible as long as any being anywhere in the universe is still afflicted with suffering, and therefore one will never be at ease until all living beings are at ease. The immediate goal of Mahayana Buddhist practice, therefore, is to work at alleviating the suffering of living beings, not only the suffering that arises ultimately as a consequence of radical desires and aversions, but also the suffering that arises more immediately from natural calamity and from economic imbalances, various forms of despotism and other manifestations of human cruelty and negligence. One who dedicates himself or herself to the task of relieving all beings from their suffering is called a bodhisattva. It is said in the canonical texts describing the bodhisattva's path that there is nothing a bodhisattva would not give up, and there is no hardship a bodhisattva would not take on, in order to help others be liberated from their misery.

The Century of New Religions

Perhaps not surprisingly, the rule has been throughout most of Buddhist history that Buddhists have tended to worship bodhisattvas rather than to strive to become bodhisattvas themselves. As a result, they have often learned to be content with merely admiring the alleviation of suffering rather than actually getting down to the often unpleasant work and risky business of opposing the wealthy and powerful when their pursuit of their goals delivers others into affliction. It may well be that the motivation to struggle on behalf of those who are socially and economically afflicted has been undermined by the nearly ubiquitous Buddhist conviction that ultimately renunciation of the world is the best solution for everyone; this may lead to putting more energy into helping the poor achieve lasting satisfaction by renouncing their desire for economic equity than into helping them achieve the temporary satisfaction of living safely and comfortably.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed an explosion of new religious movements in East Asia, especially in Korea and Japan. Some of these movements, such as Won Buddhism in Korea, consider themselves to be Buddhist reform movements. Others, such as Tenrikyo in Japan, consider themselves to be entirely new religions. Still others, such as Chondogyo in Korea and Subud in Indonesia, see themselves as syncretistic religions that draw upon numerous traditional religions without favouring any one. Although the reasons for this phenomenon are too complex to state briefly, it can safely be said that an important factor in this rapid growth of new religions has been a general feeling that institutionalized Buddhism in Asia has become too doctrinally complex and rigid, too rooted in old ways of thinking, too barrenly formalistic, too other-worldly and

inaccessible and therefore too indifferent to both the worldly and the spiritual needs of ordinary people. The new religions, in contrast, have typically included a strong component of social engagement and political activism. The majority of these new religions have been based in some way on the Buddhist bodhisattva ideal – not the bodhisattva as an object of worship, but the bodhisattva as an example that human beings can strive, however imperfectly, to imitate. Many of these new religions have also imitated some of the organizational structures of Christian groups doing such charitable work in Asia as founding and maintaining hospitals, orphanages, educational facilities and shelters for the homeless. This sort of work, it has seemed to many Asians, is true bodhisattva work. It is being done by people who strive to imitate Christ. And from this observation it is not a very big step to begin seeing Christ as a bodhisattva, a being who spent his whole life helping the afflicted and then ultimately gave up his own life to save all humanity from the suffering consequent of its own innate sinfulness. Many of the new religions have had sufficient doctrinal flexibility and freedom from an obsession with purism that they can easily draw inspiration from the visionary dreams of many of the world's major religions without becoming worried by the theological nightmares that such apparently casual mixing of religious myths and archetypes might entail for philosophers and scholastics. Perhaps one of the most important consequences of these new religions has been the effect they have had on the already established religions such as Buddhism. Slowly but steadily, Buddhists in Asia have had to admit that they have much to learn from these vital, fast-growing new religions and their deep commitment to making the world a better place by striving for economic justice, equality in opportunities for all peoples and environmental integrity.

Buddhism in the Modern West

As Buddhism has found additional homes for itself outside Asia during the past half century, it has taken a bewildering variety of forms. Some European, North American and antipodean converts to Buddhism have chosen to stay as close as possible to the institutional and liturgical forms of the specific Asian traditions of Buddhism they have adopted. This imitation has often been so slavish as to result in Western Buddhists adopting Asian dress, eating a predominately Asian diet, adopting Asian names and doing many of their rituals in Asian languages that they can understand only imperfectly if at all. Other Western converts have striven to let their internal lives be governed as much as possible by what they see as the essential teachings of Buddhism while remaining externally as much like other Westerners as conscience will allow. In parallel with these differences in attitude towards external forms, there is also a significant difference in attitudes among Western Buddhists on the question of how much involvement in the affairs of the world it is wise to have. Some have insisted that Buddhism is essentially a religion of renunciation and withdrawal from all worldly concerns, while others have taken the spiritual exercises of the *brahma-viharas* (the divine abodes described above) and the bodhisattva ideal as an invitation to become fully engaged in the never-ending struggle for social, political and economic justice. These latter Buddhists often embrace a form of Buddhism that has benefited from the lessons taught by the new religions that have placed a stronger emphasis on practical matters and on action than on doctrinal consistency or purity.

Closing Remarks

In what has been said so far, I have tried to show why many socially engaged Buddhists have come to see Jesus Christ as a source of unparalleled inspiration. It should be clear that those Buddhists who admire Christ have usually appropriated Christ as a bodhisattva; that is, they have made sense of the story of Christ in a way that makes sense within a Buddhist framework. What remains to be seen is why a Western person would convert to Buddhism and then turn to a Buddhist version of Christ rather than remaining on less exotic and arguably more accessible ground with one of the standard Christian versions of Christ. Needless to say, there is no single answer to this question. An answer that is commonly cited, however, is that many Westerners are attracted to Buddhism for what they perceive to be a relatively non-dogmatic and non-authoritarian spiritual path that offers effective and transformative practices without demanding adherence to a system of particular beliefs.

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The Legacy of Residential Schools as a Legitimation Crisis for Christian Ethics

From roughly 1880 until the 1960s, various church organizations in Canada ran residential schools for First Nations children under the auspices of the federal government.[1]

These children, some as young as six years old, were removed from the care of their parents, sometimes to locations hundreds of miles away, to be schooled in a foreign way and language, and frequently subjected to harsh discipline, poor food, long hours of manual labour, unhygienic living conditions and sometimes sexual abuse. Those who survived generally emerged without adequate education, unable to fit into the society from which they came or for which their education was intended to prepare them. Rather than helping the children who attended, residential schools typically afflicted most with low self-esteem and left them poorly prepared for adult life. Some former students are grateful for the education, love and care they received at these schools. Residential schools also helped produce able First Nations leaders determined to resist assimilation and defend their peoples' sovereignty. Law suits by some former students are currently raising serious financial difficulties for some church organizations that were involved.

The legacy of residential schools also presents another type of crisis for Christian churches. The contradictions between the claims and intentions that led Christians to become involved in residential schools and the damage that resulted are so massive that several churches have issued apologies for what happened. Christians supported and ran residential schools with the intention of helping First Nations peoples. While some residential schools did some good, they are now seen to have wrought an overwhelming amount of harm to most of those whom they were intended to help. This undeniable conflict between the intentions with which Christians participated in residential schools and the results of their activity has created a legitimation crisis[2] for Christian ethics and reveals a danger that is present when Christian compassion reaches across cultural borders.

A Legitimation Crisis for Christian Ethics

Residential schools were born out of the coalescing of two broad concerns. One was the desire of the federal government to remove First Nations peoples as potential obstacles to the expansion of English-speaking society in Canada. The second was the kind of humanitarian concern shared by liberal Christians and progressive social activists that motivated campaigns to abolish slavery and child labour. Those sharing this second concern typically believed that Western culture was the way of the future and that First Nations peoples needed to become Westernized to survive. These two concerns flowed together in the conclusion that assimilation was the way to remove First Nations peoples as a source of potential social conflict and to alleviate the want that many First Nations communities suffered from in the late 1800s.[3] Working towards the assimilation of First Nations people was seen to be a moral responsibility of the government and church organizations, an act of mercy and a matter of Christian duty.

Many of those supporting or working in residential schools were dedicated Christians, acting out of love according to their best understanding,[4] who believed they were there for the benefit of First Nations children. It needs to be noted that this concern for First Nations peoples was extraordinary at the time. The majority of Canadians then were indifferent to the welfare of First Nations peoples and indisposed to act on their behalf. Those who did get involved in residential schools were often the Christian activists of their day, acting out of a sense of Christian compassion and responsibility exemplified in the parable of the Good Samaritan, that was "in principle, unlimited"[5] in its horizon, similar in this respect to the ethical outlook advocated by critical theology. They were guided in expressing their love by the cultural assumptions of their day, just as contemporary cultural assumptions inform the activities of Christian activists in the present. But the cultural assumptions of those running residential schools were typically racist, with the consequence that these generally well-intended projects did more harm than good. The residential

schools comprised "a bad system with many good people working in them."[6] Broadly speaking, they were a sin committed by saints often acting with the best of intentions. The evil caused by residential schools was not an accident. It followed from their intended purpose of assimilating First Nations children.

The humanitarian concern that arose in Western Europe in the 1800s and which expressed itself in the residential schools had a great but flawed insight. It recognized, as Jesus taught, that we are all neighbours to one another, no matter how "other" we may seem to be, and that having the means to help one another implies an obligation to do so. But this great extension of concern was deeply flawed in that it was intertwined with a cultural pride that led modern Western Christians and humanitarians to think that they knew what was best for others, without first having to understand or listen to them. This combination of concern and presumption gave this humanitarian concern a rather conflicted character. While it recognized the humanity of those who were "other" in seeing them as objects of Christian love, at the same time it denied their humanity in claiming to know what was best for them apart from consulting them. This lack of respect for First Nations peoples and cultures made residential schools inherently unjust.[7]

As non-Aboriginal givers presumed to know better than First Nations recipients what the recipients needed, their cultural pride typically perverted the education of First Nations children so that residential schools functioned as instruments of Western cultural imperialism. They were intended to equip students for life. Instead they frequently ham-strung their students with a sense of cultural and personal inferiority. This lack of respect for the culture and race of the students also led to a failure to restrain those who viewed them as objects to be transformed rather than as people who were there to learn. As a result some schools became places where the students suffered a host of abuses such as poor food and living conditions, brutal treatment and sexual abuse. This lack of respect effectively denied the presence of God's Spirit in First Nations culture and collective wisdom, and resulted in an educational system run by church organizations that contradicted one of the ten commandments.[8]

The result was a tragic legacy that reveals how compassion that reaches beyond cultural borders can be deeply flawed by the pride of the givers. This legacy shows how concern modelled on the parable of the Good Samaritan may unwittingly do more harm than good when it presumes to know what is best for the victim without consulting them. We find this ambiguity evident in the late 1700s, when Western humanitarian concern began to reach beyond its cultural borders to include people of other races and religions. The caring attitude of Christians and humanists assigned universal validity to their own cultural norms and assumptions that did not recognize "the otherness" of the others. The result was a destructive perversion of good intentions.

Canadian churches find themselves at present caught between the Christian imperative to care for all regardless of race or culture and a tragic legacy where such caring has caused great harm. If by legitimation crisis we are referring to a contradiction between the public discourse of an institution and its historical impact, then we must admit that the legacy of residential schools has created a legitimation crisis for the message of the Christian churches.

Overcoming the Crisis by Faith

Christian faith should not adopt the tragic view that any attempt to reach out to "others" beyond the bounds of one's own culture will inevitably end up in disaster. At the heart of the Christian message is an affirmation of hope that people, empowered and guided by the Word and the Spirit, can do what is good and just. Faith rules out the pessimism of inevitable failure. History records many examples of how compassion and humanitarian concern reaching out beyond cultural bounds have alleviated the suffering of others. In light of Christian faith in God's transforming presence, the painful legacy of residential schools should not simply be seen as a lesson teaching Christians their limits (though it is that too) but also as part of a cruciform process by which the culturally accepted notions held by those responsible for these schools are being relativized by God in favour of a higher, more inclusive righteousness. Christian identity is not rooted in ethical success. It grows instead out of faith in the transforming righteousness of God, which justifies the ungodly. Even in their greatest moments of success, Christians know themselves to be justified sinners, who need continual conversion to the meaning of God's righteousness in different contexts in order to do what is good. It belongs to the Church as a pilgrim people to remain open to this kind of re-thinking of its guiding concepts and notions,[9] even about something as basic as what it means to love. Christians are summoned by God to turn from falsifications in their consciousness to

a new understanding of themselves and the goals of Christian mission. This involves a certain dying to the old self and being born again to the new.

The legitimation crisis brought about by the legacy of residential schools cannot be resolved simply by more of the same acts of love that seek to benefit others according to one's own notions of truth and goodness, for this is what gave rise to residential schools in the first place. While there have been many calls for confession and repentance in response to this legacy, these calls must not be left vague and empty of content. Simply confessing the sinfulness of one's past despite good intentions leaves unanswered the question of how to act in the future. Repentance means "seeking to discover in what ways and why we took a wrong path that led to such a terrible result,"[10] and turning towards a different path in the future. Resolving this legitimation crisis requires maintaining the universal horizons of Christian social concern while seeking to guard against perpetrating the repression of other people's cultural identity. This means re-thinking the goals of Christian social ethics in cross-cultural contexts. This entails a certain conversion, a change in the churches' understanding of themselves and the goals of their social mission. Such rethinking has gone on in many Canadian churches for some time.

Listening to Those to Whom Help Is Extended

The shift that must take place in mission goals can be described as moving from an attitude oriented to successful action in helping "others," to an attitude which instead seeks first to reach a shared understanding with them, and then on the basis of this to pursue a jointly agreed upon course of action.[11] This shift of intention restores legitimacy to Christian compassion reaching across cultural boundaries. From recognizing "others" as objects of concern, Christians now acknowledge them as subjects, i.e. as agents in their own right, capable of making responsible decisions. With this shift the aid-receivers takes on a new responsibility in relation to the care shown to them. They move from being a passive recipient to gaining a voice and a greater measure of responsibility for determining their own future.

Theologically this change in mission goals implies the recognition that the Spirit works through different cultures and groups opening each up to the transcendent righteousness of God.[12] This recognition breaks up imperialistic cultural assumptions like those underlying residential schools. In recognizing the agency of the recipient, the giver recognizes the transcendence of the Spirit, and the Spirit's presence in other cultures and forms of knowledge. In the parable of the Good Samaritan there is no mention of dialogue with the victim, who was simply a passive recipient of the Good Samaritan's care. But in many of Jesus' encounters with people in need, he is described as first asking "What do you want?" before acting to help them (Mark 10:51). If it is at all possible, before Christians act to help those outside of their own culture (and even within), they should first seek a common understanding of what they need and how their needs are to be met. This does not rule out the risk that one's actions may cause harm. But it does bestow legitimacy on one's actions in the face of this risk. One no longer presumes to know what is best for the victim. Instead one acts out of an understanding and responsibility in the face of risk that is shared by both.

That this approach strengthens the legitimacy of compassionate action across cultural boundaries can be illustrated by the debate two decades ago that challenged the Taskforce on Churches and Corporate Responsibility in its opposition to apartheid. The Taskforce worked alongside other non-government organizations to get Canadian banks and multi-national corporations, such as Falconbridge and Alcan, to stop doing business in South Africa on the grounds that their investment there helped to perpetuate apartheid.[13] Critics of this strategy argued that divestment would create greater unemployment among poor black South Africans and thus damage the very people the Taskforce intended to help. What right did well-meaning Westerners have to push for actions that might jeopardize the limited income of blacks in South Africa? The members of the Taskforce defended the legitimacy of their actions by insisting that it was supported by organizations representing many black South African institutions, such as the South African Council of Churches and the South African Catholic Bishops Conference, as well as several black trade unions representing workers who would be affected by capital divestment. The members of the Taskforce did not claim to know better than the victims what was best for them: their actions were approved by those they intended to help. Of course, neither the Taskforce nor the local institutions knew whether economic pressure of this kind would hasten the collapse of apartheid, but here the helpers and those in need took the risk together. Because consultation and mutual agreement were totally

absent from the creation of residential schools, the project caused great human damage, ended in disgrace, and challenged the very credibility of Christian ethics. Universal solidarity may not be extended unilaterally; instead it demands dialogue, joint responsibility and shared risk-taking.

Donald Schweitzer

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[1] For academic histories of the residential schools, see J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) and John Milloy, *A National Crime* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1998). For recollections of the experiences of some former students, see Constance Deiter, *From Our Mothers' Arms* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1999).

[2] I have drawn this term from Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).

[3] John Webster Grant, *Moon of Wintertime* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 74-75, 85-86.

[4] Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision,* 308-309.

[5] Johann Baptist Metz, *Love's Strategy,* ed. John K. Downey (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 170.

[6] Archdeacon David Ashdown, as quoted by Michael Peers in his sermon at St. James Cathedral, Toronto, on September 24, 2000.

[7] Following Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (n.p.: Basic Books, 1983), 212-213.

[8] As Frank Oliver pointed out in 1908, one of the ten commandments is that children are to honour their father and mother, and yet the residential school system was designed to teach them to do otherwise; see Milloy, *A National Crime,* 28.

[9] Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations,* Vol. XII (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974), 93-94.

[10] Terry Anderson, "Lessons from the Residential Schools: Some Beginning Reflections," *Touchstone* Vol. 16 No. 2 (May 1998), 28.

[11] Jurgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 81.

[12] Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 155, 238-239.

[13] For this work of the Taskforce, see Renatte Pratt, *In Good Faith: Canadian Churches Against Apartheid* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).

Book Notes

(continued from page 19)

Nor do the essays discuss how the struggle for identity and recognition can strengthen the political efforts to make the United States into a more just society. To improve health care, create low-cost housing, raise the minimum wage, find support for community development, educate the police, change the laws on immigration, and many other social and political projects surely correspond to the aspirations of marginal groups and communities, including Black, Hispanic and Asian Americans. The authors do not ask themselves whether minority groups have common interests and whether by joining forces, possibly with other marginals, they could acquire the power to make significant changes in society.

A recent book by Stephen Hart, *Cultural Dilemmas of Progressive Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), offers an analysis of faith-based community development and advocacy projects at the grassroots level that improve people's living conditions and in doing so create a progressive political consciousness. We read, for instance, that since the mid-1990s the Workers Organizing Committee (WOC) in Portland, Oregon, has made efforts to help unorganized, low-income workers in the service industry, especially hotels, for example protecting them from raids by the Immigration and Naturalization Service or from the use of toxic chemicals by restaurants and hotels. WOC is a multicultural organization comprising Black, Hispanic and recent Asian immigrants. (See p. 183.) In his book, which is of great theological interest, Stephen Hart argues for the importance of relating the struggles for identity, freedom and recognition to the political effort of creating a more just society. Hart encourages faith-based communities active at the grass roots level to reflect on how their engagement could relate them to political decision-making at higher levels of American society.

Gregory Baum

Alexander Men: Ecumenist for the Twenty-first Century?

Orthodox bishop Seraphim Sigrist has written that Alexander Men ranks among those few Christians who, for their solid foundation in the Gospels and their own particular tradition, "can speak absolutely for all Christians."[1] In this article I ask to what extent this claim applies to Men's contributions as an ecumenist. Clearly, Men's approach to religious diversity can only be sketched here. However, as one whose writings are believed to anticipate a "Christianity for the Twenty-First Century,"[2] Men's thought on this question deserves special attention.

Alexander Men was born in 1935, in Moscow, to Vladimir Grigorevich Men and Elena Semenovna Zupersein, both Jews. He was secretly baptized, along with his mother, by Fr. Seraphim (Sergei Batiukov), and at age twelve was given the blessing to study the Scriptures and pursue ordination by his spiritual director Mother Maria (Skobtsova).[3] Both Fr. Seraphim and Mother Maria belonged to the Optina Pustyn tradition in Russian spirituality, and were members of the underground Russian Orthodox Church. An exceedingly gifted youth, Alexander took up the study of Russian religious thought, and as a young teenager even began to write a life of Christ. In university he studied biology, managing to study theology concurrently. In 1956 he married Natalia Grigorenko, and was ordained deacon in 1958. In 1960 he was ordained priest. From 1970 onwards he served in the parish of Novaia Derevnia, not far from Moscow. By the time he was murdered (most likely by the KGB) in September 1990, Men combined the work of parish priest with that of public speaker and Christian apologist. His published works include sermons, essays, public addresses, a multi-volume history of religion, and a life of Christ. Of special influence in Men's thought were the works of Vladimir Solovyov, whom Men referred to as his "real teacher."[4]

Attesting to Fr. Men's devotion as a pastor, Fr. Alexander Borisov writes:

> Father Alexander was lively, talented, cheerful, and witty, but at the same time a person of deep faith and sensitivity who could find the right word and tone of voice in the most complicated and delicate situation. . . . People received from him not only moral and spiritual support, as well as an abundant supply of energy, but rose above their own sins and weaknesses as they realized that this person did not judge you, but sympathized with you and loved you.[5]

Reconciliation within Difference

The gift of insight to which Fr. Borisov points was linked to a vocation which, at heart, was that of interpreter: sensitive to the world view, social status and vocation of any listener, Men sought to convey the words of Christ and the Church. Such a vision was Men's gift by virtue of his tangible link with that world-affirming Optina Pustyn tradition in Russian spirituality, which at its height served as a real bridge between the Russian Church and the Intelligentsia.[6] Thus, from the start, with mentors like Fr. Seraphim and Mother Maria, the attention of the young theologian was drawn to examples of an "open" form of Russian Orthodoxy as found, for example, in the *kenotic* hero Zossima, Alyosha's mentor in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Men came to understand his vocation as bound up with this tradition engaged in dialogue with society.[7]

Illustrative of Men's generous attitude in dialogue is an instance of formal dialogue with a Muslim leader, Mohammed Magumaev. At the outset, he seeks to put the two faiths represented on equal footing by telling the story of how a group of Muslims, out of respect for consecrated things, on one occasion restored an altar to its proper place after a Party committee removed it during their routine destruction of churches. Such a deed, Men points out, served to draw members of different faiths together in mutual respect. Second, he stresses an important point of contact: belief in a gracious God, which makes Muslims and Christians brothers and sisters because they have the same Father. Third, he articulates the Christian belief in Jesus as the God-man, but is quick to point out that he does not expect this doctrine to be acceptable to a Muslim. Finally, he calls for the kind of

tolerance which does not allow for indifference, and an earnest study of each other's traditions so that both faiths might be enhanced in the process.[8]

To a great extent, Men's attitude towards Christians of non-Orthodox traditions is motivated by the same hope for mutual enhancement. While he recognizes that divisions among Christians are a violation of Christ's will (John 10:16), he believes that "in the future this sin will be overcome not by a sense of superiority, pride, complacency or hatred, but rather through a spirit of brotherly love without which the Christian calling cannot be fulfilled (Matt. 5:23-24)," and calls on Christians to be "open to all that is valuable in all Christian denominations . . ."[9] Reflecting a pluralistic approach to the confessions, Men advocates a "strict ecumenism" whereby members of different traditions make no effort to win other Christians over to their denomination. Conversion from one confession to another, consequently, is discouraged, since that involves breaking Eucharistic fellowship, which is contrary to Christ's will.[10]

Inclusion and Completion

On the inter-faith level, however, conversion at some point is understood to be a given. As such, Men explains that "if the majority of my fellow Jews have not accepted Christianity, that is just the next chapter in the drama which is unfolding between God and the world."[11] According to an inclusivist approach to world religions, Men regards Christianity as the end or summit of all religious quests. In his introduction to the lecture which he delivered on the eve of his murder, he explains that

> the greatest thing in Christian spirituality is not negation, but affirmation, inclusion and completion. As the passion for salvation and deliverance from evil permeates Buddhism . . . so the thirst for, and indeed promise of, salvation is inherent in Christianity. Similarly, in Christianity one finds, as in Islam, absolute devotion to a God who is sovereign ruler of the cosmos and man's destiny, and the notion in Chinese thought that heaven ("T'ien") provides man with a compass in life, even in its details and various traditional nuances. Even the Brahman belief in diverse manifestations of the Divine, or the notion in pantheism that God is in all, and that He, like a mysterious force, permeates every drop, every atom of the universe (although it does not restrict the work of God to this all-encompassing presence), are to be found in Christianity.[12]

Illustrative of Men's inclusivism, too, is his allusion to Karl Rahner's notion of Christ's "anonymous" work among non-Christians.[13]

For Men, "[w]hen you do good, when you love, when you contemplate beauty, when you feel the fullness of life, the Kingdom of God is already touching you" in a secret and hidden way.[14]

Particularly compelling is Men's attention to the cosmic dimension of salvation. While fundamentally personal, salvation is not to be seen merely as a private, subjective experience. Rather, it is wider than "a personal route for someone on the way to perfection to achieve eternal bliss after their death."[15] Here the emphasis is on the divine, not human, initiative, for salvation is "the sanctification of the world, the victory over evil, darkness, over sin. But it is the victory of God."[16] Salvation embraces the world. For this reason Men draws our attention to John Chrysostom's concern for injustice and oppression,[17] as well as Mother Teresa's work among Calcutta's poor.[18] Men would agree with Lesslie Newbigin, who argues that as Christians we often abstract the human soul from the whole person's life by insisting on asking "What will happen to this person's soul after death?" instead of asking "What is the end which gives meaning to this person's story as part of God's whole story?"[19]

Within this wider context, Fr. Men is motivated to articulate the scandal of the Incarnation. He argues that the essence of Christianity

> is found in God-manhood, or the joining of the organic and temporal human spirit with that of the Eternal and Divine. It is found in the sanctification of the flesh, for the world and nature, which is the birthplace of the Son of Man as both man and God-man, was not cast away or degraded, but elevated to a new level and sanctified ever since the Son of Man took upon himself our joys and sufferings, our creation, our love and labour.[20]

While Men regards those ways in which Christianity fulfills or completes other belief systems as most important, he acknowledges that Christianity came as a challenge to many of them because "[s]omething new and tremendously powerful is manifest in Christianity. The newness is not just a doctrine, but the inrush of a different life into this, our daily lives."[21] Since Christ is the answer to the conjectures and approaches to God in every religion,[22] the Christian "centres his or her faith on

Jesus Christ by whom all is measured and evaluated."[23]

The approach to mission that flows from this view is, above all, a patient one. After all, Christianity has only taken its first steps. As Men explains,

> the task which Christ gave to the world cannot be accomplished by any one civilization or group of civilizations, for the Gospel ideal is only partially brought about as one civilization yields to another. That's why I think that the history of the Church *has only just begun*. We are still children, despite the ages that have gone by since Pentecost. After all, what are these two thousand years to God and to history?[24]

This notion that Christianity is only in its infancy is linked, I would suggest, to a *kenotic*, as opposed to rigorous or formalist, tradition to which Men is sympathetic. In his readings of C.S. Lewis, he found an echo of his own conviction that the rebirth of Christianity occurs "slowly, quietly, in very small groups of people."[25] And perhaps it is here, in this idea of quiet rebirth, that Men's reflections on religious and denominational diversity both come together and reveal their strength. In contexts of multiple faiths and world-views, the churches are reminded of their identity as a wandering people with no special or "most-favoured" status in the land. At the same time, faced with denominational pluralism, Christians emphasize what unites them as they see themselves primarily as members of nascent communities formed locally and spontaneously.

Unresolved Problems

But as compelling as Men's approach might be for many Christians as we seek unity in mission in the twenty-first century, some important questions nevertheless remain. Bearing in mind the concerns of those who prefer to remain agnostic regarding the precise relationship between salvation as understood by Christians and the *salvations* which adherents of other world religions understand their traditions to mediate, we might ask: Why must Christians regard Christianity primarily as the fulfillment of the great non-Christian religions, and not also stress those ways in which, as Men admits, Christianity presents a challenge to them?[26]

To his credit, Men recognizes that religion as such is a "mixed bag." So, while he takes a positive view of the various religious quests to which God responds by sending his Son, he points out elsewhere that religion can also be "terrible and wicked."[27] Perhaps this is why Men insists that "Christ offers us . . . Himself, not religion as a system of instructions, but as an experience of communion with Him who leads us to God Himself."[28] This being the case, might Christians not do better to emphasize discontinuity over continuity when relating communion with God through Jesus Christ to (for example) the Buddhist "passion for salvation and deliverance from evil"? Only in this way, it would appear, is salvation "in the Christian sense of that term...proclaimed as a real and attractive possibility for those who are presently outside the Christian community" (Alister McGrath).[29]

A second and related concern has to do with the notion that Christianity has only just begun. While C.S. Lewis, to whom Men referred on the question of the renewal of Christianity, questioned whether we could really know which Act of human history we are in,[30] Men would have us be confident that we are now in Act One. As such, Men suggests, civilizations have yet to come and go before the gospel ideal can be realized in history. Relevant here, of course, is Men's cosmology, according to which the coming of Christ is understood within an evolutionary conception of God's kingdom: referring to Teilhard de Chardin's cosmic Christology, Men speaks of the mystery of the Ascension as having to do with the fact that "the world's flesh has become Christ's flesh."[31] However, as with our (presumed) knowledge that Christianity lies at the summit of all the world religions, we must ask: From what vantage point are Christians able to determine which chapter of human history is being written, or perceive that the cosmos is now, through Christ, divine? Without wishing to claim, against Men, that the message of the Gospel primarily negates all the world's religions, that we are in the final Act of human history, and that God and the world are to be held firmly apart, I think that Men's affirmations, particularly when combined, can easily rob the Christian message of its urgency. For not only are the faithful of non-Christian traditions to be regarded as secret or "anonymous" Christians, but all of creation is implicitly Christ's body, while Jesus' coming in glory is, in all likelihood, merely the increasingly explicit form of that reality as one civilization gives way to another.

A third and final question brings us back to the question of Christian unity. Men's teaching is straightforward: he insists that the person who abandons his or her church fellowship "on the basis of personal taste,

information read in books, the shortcomings of the church, etc." is an enemy (wittingly or unwittingly) of Christ's work.[32] As Christians are therefore called to remain in Eucharistic fellowship with the churches into which they are baptized, formal unity safeguards the integrity of the denominations, while a deep or fundamental unity is acknowledged through "strict ecumenism."

It seems to me that Men runs the risk here of over-spiritualizing Christian unity, and of trivializing the real differences between the denominations. That is to say, behind the principle of "strict ecumenism" there could lie a radically pluralist view of the confessions which subordinates matters of truth or doctrine to liturgical and visible unity. Clearly, however, Christians throughout the centuries have been compelled to leave one fellowship or another for the sake of the Gospel. Can we suppose that they actually promoted discord?

So there is some question as to whether Alexander Men speaks "absolutely for all Christians," at least as an ecumenist. The concerns which I raise, however, do little to diminish his importance as a pastor, teacher, apologist and martyr. It is hoped that those whose lives have been touched by his life and ministry will continue to serve the cause of renewal in the Russian Orthodox Church, and that Christians of all confessions will be able to appreciate this remarkable Christian leader as his works become more accessible outside of Russia.

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[1] Bp. Seraphim Sigrist, in A. Men, *Awake to Life: Sermons from the Paschal (Easter) Cycle* (Torrance, California: Oakwood Publications, 1996), foreword.

[2] Alexander Men, *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century: The Prophetic Writings of Alexander Men*. Eds. E. Roberts and A. Shukman (New York: Continuum, 1996). Contains a select bibliography of Men's writings.

[3] See Men's "Pis'mo k E.N." [Letter to E.N.], in *Vokrug imeni Ottsa Aleksandra* (Moscow, 1993), 46ff.

[4] A. Men, *Kul'tura i dukhovnoe voskhozhdenie* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1992), 360. For an excellent basic biography of Men see Ann Shukman's introduction to *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century*, 1-25.

[5] A. Borisov, "Padshi v zemliu ne umret" ["What falls to the ground will not die"], *Pamyati protoiereia Aleksandra Menia* (Moscow: Rudomino, 1991), 45.

[6] See, for example, Leonard J. Stanton, *The Optina Pustyn Monastery in the Russian Literary Imagination: Iconic Vision in Works by Dostoevsky, Gogol, Tolstoy, and Others* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995).

[7] S. Averintsev refers to Men as "missionary to the Intelligentsia," in *I bylo utro... : vospominaniia ob ottse Aleksandre Mene* (Moscow: Vita-tsentr, 1992), 326.

[8] See Anastasia Andreeva, "Islam-Khristianstvo: Konfrontatsiia ili Dialog?" ["Islam-Christianity: Confrontation or Dialogue?], *Nauka i Religiia* 1994: 3, 36-39.

[9] A. Men, "A Credo for Today's Christian," in *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century*, 71.

[10] A. Men, "Pis'mo o ekumenisme" ["Letter on Ecumenism"], www.amen.org.ru/ecumenlet.html

[11] A. Men, *Kul'tura*, 362.

[12] A. Men, "Christianity", home.earthlink.net/~amenpage/christianity.htm

[13] A. Men, "Otvety na voprosy" ["Questions and Answers"], www.amen.org.ru/sermons/5q.html

[14] A. Men, "Christianity for the Twenty-First Century," in *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century*, 191.

[15] A. Men, "Two Understandings of Christianity," in *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century*, 156-7.

[16] "Christianity for the Twenty-First Century," 192.

[17] "Two Understandings of Christianity," 159.

[18] A. Men, *Svet vo t'me svetit* (Moscow: AO Vita-Tsentr, 1991), 169.

[19] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), 178-9.

[20] A. Men, "Christianity", home.earthlink.net/~amenpage/christianity.htm

[21] "Christianity for the Twenty-First Century," 180.

[22] A. Men, "Why Be a Christian," in *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century*, 32.

[23] "A Credo for Today's Christian," 69.

[24] *Kul'tura*, 362. Emphasis added.

[25] A. Men, "Faith and Its Enemies," in *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century*, 62.

[26] John Cobb Jr., for instance, prefers to affirm "nothing about the salvific value of other religions" and argues that "the truth and reality offered by other religious traditions are not well understood when they are regarded as aspects of what is more fully present in Jesus. They are often quite different." See "Being a Transformationist in a Pluralistic World," *The Christian Century* (August 10-17, 1994), 749. Similarly, Alister McGrath writes: "Christianity is the only religion to offer salvation *in the Christian sense of that term*." "A Particularist View: A Post-Enlightenment Approach," *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. Ed. D. Okholm and T. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 175.

[27] "Otvety na voprosy" [Questions and Answers], www.amen.org.ru/sermons/5q.html

[28] "Otvety na voprosy" [Questions and Answers], www.amen.org.ru/sermons/5q.html

[29] Alister McGrath, "A Particularist View," 175.

[30] C.S. Lewis, "Historicism," in *Fern Seed and Elephants* (Glasgow, 1975), 51-3.

[31] A. Men, *Mirovaia Dukhovnaia Kul'tura* (Moscow: A. Men Foundation, 1995), 190-91. Cf. P. Evdokimov: "'The Word was made flesh' means that God assumed human nature in its totality and with it the whole cosmos." *The Art of the Icon*. Trans. S. Bigham. (Redondo Beach, Calif.: Oakwood Press, 1990), 107.

[32] "Pis'mo o ekumenisme" ["Letter on Ecumenism"], www.amen.org.ru/ecumenlet.html

Book Notes

A Dream Unfinished: Theological Reflections on America from the Margins

Eleazar Fernandez and Fernando Segovia, eds.
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001,
292 pages

In the course of the last three decades the face of the United States has significantly changed. Projecting the future from present data reveals that the percentage of African, Hispanic and Asian Americans in the total population is steadily increasing. The prediction for the year 2050 is that only 52% of American citizens will be white and non-Hispanic. At present African, Hispanic and Asian Americans still belong to the margin of society and suffer the consequences. Yet their self-understanding is significantly changing. In the Churches this gives rise to new theological reflection. The present book is a collection of 13 essays written by African, Hispanic and Asian Christians (five women among them) exploring the meaning of God's Word for their community in the present situation. A substantial introduction by one of the editors, Fernando Segovia, examines the field of minority studies that is beginning to attract attention in the academy.

It is impossible to write a short review of this excellent volume, paying critical attention to each one of the essays. They are all interesting. In one way or another, they tell the historical drama of the authors' ethnocultural communities in a land that left room for them only at the bottom. The authors deal with the quest for identity and justice in the context of today's marginalization and offer a vision of an alternative future, a dream of what American society could become. While the authors speak to the members of their own Church, Black, Hispanic or Asian American, they address at the same time the wider Church in America in the hope that the historical drama of their communities will be better understood. The white Church, if one may use this expression, will have to learn to relativize itself and recognize the new partners.

In the essays I found much that was new to me. The texts written by Fernando Segovia provide introductions to fields of study with which theologians are rarely acquainted. In several essays mention is made of José Vasconselos, the author of a book published in 1925 that envisaged the emergence of *la raza cósmica*, a cosmic race, a form of humanity without racial barriers that encourages *mestizaje*, mixtures, and at the same time remains pluralistic, heir and preserver of many cultures. [See his book in English translation, *The Cosmic Race* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979).] Vasconselos was criticized at the time because he believed that this new humanity would emerge within the Hispanic world of Latin America where creative *mestizaje* had already begun. In *The Dream Unfinished* the authors ask themselves whether such a cosmic culture will be produced in the United States and whether the mixtures of peoples will be able to protect the pluralism of traditions.

Writing from a theological perspective some authors are critical of their own community, pointing to a degree of blindness. Miguel de la Torre offers a brilliant analysis of the Cuban community in Florida and Eleazar Fernandez challenges the dominant self-understanding of Filipino Americans. But because all authors trust that their community is blessed by God, they offer with great confidence their ideas for spiritual and cultural renewal.

The essays do not discuss the important but delicate issue of how the Black, Hispanic and Asian American communities relate to one another. Nothing is said of their conflicts or their co-operation. Through slavery and the subsequent segregation African Americans have been deeply wounded and still carry the heaviest weight of white racism so that many of them, especially the young, wonder whether integration and upward mobility are real possibilities for them. By comparison Hispanic and Asian Americans find it much easier to think of themselves as joining the mainstream of American society. In some situations, this difference creates resentment among African Americans and feelings of superiority among Hispanics and Asians. This is an issue theologians may well address.

(continues on page 14)

The Ecumenist: A Journal of Theology, Culture and Society is published quarterly by Novalis-Saint Paul University and is © Novalis 2001.

Editor: Gregory Baum – **Contributing editors:** M. Shawn Copeland, Lee Cormie, Charles Curran, Virgilio Elizondo, Marilyn Legge, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Harold Wells – **Design:** Gilles Lépine – **Layout:** Suzanne Latourelle, Christiane Lemire – **Copyeditor and Proofreader:** Nancy Keyes

Subscriptions: $15 (postage and taxes included). **To order:** Periodicals Dept., Novalis, 49 Front St. E., 2nd Floor, Toronto ON M5E 1B3

Tel: 1-800-387-7164 ext. 223 or (416) 363-3303 ext. 223 Fax: (416) 363-9409

ISSN: 0013-080X

Address editorial correspondence to: Novalis, Saint Paul University, 223 Main St., Ottawa ON K1S 1C4

We acknowledge the financial assistance of the Government of Canada, through the Publications Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

Printed in Canada