

RESPONSE TO DIANE LECLERC AND DICK EUGENIO
Daniel Gomis, Africa Region

“Who do you say I am?” Jesus’s question to His disciples is a call to witness. The apostle Peter’s answer- inspired by God- is timeless and has become a universal tenet of the Christian faith but it also had contextual elements. These contextual elements have surely been already explored and discussed by theologians. Asking the same question to members of the Church of the Nazarene in the 21st century will also contain both universal and contextual elements.

In her response to this question, Diane Leclerc brilliantly unveils the thread of humility through the person of Jesus and the major phases of His ministry-Baptism, Temptation, Crucifixion and Resurrection- as the universal element and love for the poor and the oppressed as the contextual one. As she aptly summarized it: “...Jesus’ humanness reveals the humility of God” and “...Jesus experienced God-forsakenness and can empathize with the Godforsaken.”

Dick Eugenio’s response to Jesus’s question is explored through the theme of obedience- from Jesus’s incarnation to His resurrection- as universal element, and the proposed contextual element is that “...Christ-likeness needs to be made faithful to the Trinitarian identity of Jesus-Christ.”

I understand the question “Who do you say I am” asked by Jesus to His disciples at any time of history as meaning: “How relevant am I for you today, in your context and in your everyday reality?” It is a question of finding the balance between the universal and the contextual elements of the life and person of Jesus.

Diane Leclerc affirms that “True worship is the worship of the true God. But who is the true God? The God whose essential characteristic is love, is also essentially humble, as revealed in the humanity of Jesus the Christ.”

Humility seems to be the most shared ethical value among various cultures. However, a “humble God” sound like an oxymoron for many of those living in Gospel resistant areas and in fear-power worldview cultures. Those living in fear-power cultures would rather view God has a powerful and omnipotent protector who sent His Son to destroy the works of the evil one. God will still have the essential characteristic of love but will also be a Mighty Warrior.

“What does it mean to be an obedient child of the Father and to depend on the Holy Spirit as a human today?” Eugenio’s pertinent question- put in the context of fear-power worldview cultures and of people living in dire poverty and survival mode -will have a different interpretation and application.

For some, it will mean escapism i.e. running away from reality, “...this Christianity puts great stress on not being influenced by what you see or feel around you. Ignore your situation; you must rather believe what the Bible says.”¹ And Gifford, author of *Ghana’s New Christianity* mentions a hymn written by a West-African composer with the following words: “I’m not moved by what I see, Alleluia/I’m not moved by what I hear, Alleluia/I’m not moved by my circumstances, Alleluia/I’m only moved by the Word of God, Alleluia.” Obedience in this context means being content with one’s situation because it was ordained by God and “seeking first God’s Kingdom” while waiting for the rapture.

¹ *Ghana’s New Christianity. Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy.* Paul Gifford. Indiana University Press, 2004. P.71.

In Gospel resistant areas where Islam is a majority religion, the concept of sin as guilt is almost non-existent, as explained by missiologist Lamin Sanneh in his autobiography: “We grew up without feeling the need to pass judgment on other people’s chances of salvation. In fact, we didn’t worry much about our own chances... In my language, the concept of guilt as a moral disposition is non-existent, whereas shame as a social breach is well known.”²

I personally remember seeing a Christian tract explaining salvation with the picture of a hand stamping on a paper the word: Paid! It was explaining how my sins were paid by the death of Jesus on the Cross. I started to share that perspective of salvation without really relating in anyway with it. I intellectually understood that I was saved but my fear/power and honor/shame cultural background – which needed simple and practical answers to my everyday struggles – did not.

How can one then apply Eugenio’s following question: “What does imitation of Christ mean in relation to Jesus ‘challenge that we must be born of the Spirit (John 3:5-7)’ in a shame and honor worldview culture?”

The Church of the Nazarene in Africa will continue to be sharing the Good News in the next decade in these two major worldviews: Fear/Power and Honor/Shame. Honor and Shame is the cultural worldview of 65% of the world and 90% of the unreached. And according to a Lausanne Global Analysis; “Western culture is becoming more shame-oriented. However, Western Christianity emphasizes legal aspects of salvation such as forgiveness of sins and innocence. Mission in Western contexts must offer biblical solutions to people who say, ‘Even if I am innocent, I cannot lift my head, for I am full of shame’ (Job 10:15).”³

² *Summoned from the Margin. Homecoming of an Africa.* Lamin Sanneh. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2012.

³ <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lga/2017-03/the-good-news-for-honor-shame-cultures?>

The challenge is to reexamine or rediscover our Wesleyan doctrine of Holiness especially on our perspective on prevenient grace, sin, salvation, Holy Spirit and sanctification in view of these worldviews.

Leclerc gives an interesting venue for exploration in her definition of sanctification as being "...the very renewal of the image of God in us." It will be helpful to not only explain the functioning of our renewal in the image of God in us but also to expand it to a holistic renewal- mind, body, soul and its impact on our direct context. The focus needs to be on inward transformation resulting in an outward impact and presence and relevance in our world.

"Jesus' dependent relationship to the Holy Spirit, in essence, is not different from His obedient relationship to the Father. At the core of both relationships is the *kenosis* of Jesus." (Eugenio). This statement describing the "Trinitarian interdependence" is vividly painted in the Gethsemane episode which "...portrays Jesus' genuine struggle toward full obedience." However, the "Trinitarian interdependence" has one human being- Jesus- in it, who represents our humanness and express it when He told Peter and the two sons of Zebedee: "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." (Matt. 26:38. It is an invitation to be part of his mourning but also to enter into the "Trinitarian interdependence." It is an invitation to us, the less human to come and become fully human in Him as Leclerc beautifully put it: "Holiness has positive content, namely love. We were created to love. *When we love as God designed, we are holy, and fully human*" (italics mine).

"My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work" (John 4:34). In my view, these words of our Lord capture the description of His nature and mission expressed by Diane Leclerc as humility and by Dick Eugenio as obedience in their papers.

I am very pleased to see our Church addressing the pivotal question of the identity of Jesus in such a time as this. As a Church, we as Wesleyan-holiness people have a contribution to make in the larger body of Christ in bringing the optimism of grace in discussion with our cultures, our cities and in the major injustices of our world.

The world needs to hear what we believe: Christ Jesus is Victor over sin (either because of guilt, shame or fear), over Satan, over death and as Leclerc put it: “We can live a new life in the power of the Spirit in the here - should it be in the streets of Soweto, in the jungle of the Amazon River, in the skyscraper of Singapore or in the suburbs of Kansas City- and now.