

“RESPONSE PAPER TO JORGE JULCA AND GIFT MTUKWA”

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Gift Mtukwa and Jorge Julca are Nazarene scholars from diverse contexts who address the common theme of Christology and Mission.

Review

The undercurrent of these papers is that our identity is formed by the identity of the cruciform, living Jesus. As such, we do everything that we do (especially mission) “in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col.3:17). This is the foundation for all conceptual notions. The Christology described by both authors includes challenging implications individually and collectively as we live into God’s mission.

Mtukwa reminds us that as Jesus’ disciples we do not start a mission (or build the kingdom) rather, we continue to live into the *missio Dei*, which Jesus started. Drawing from 1 Thessalonians 2, Mtukwa describes a cruciform life for disciples. He states that Paul understood that to proclaim Jesus “who suffered, died and rose from the dead involves suffering on the part of Jesus’ followers. In similar manner, Julca states, “Jesus’ missionary model is linked intimately with the definition of his person. That is, there is an inseparable link between his *identity* (who Jesus is) and his *mission* (how he came to this world and why)”. For Julca, answering the question about who Jesus is, is an existential and inescapable need in every disciple of Christ’s life, because it links us with His model of mission.

Common to both papers is a Christology that forms the mission of the church. Their approaches, however, are distinct from one another. Mtukwa works from an exegesis of 1 Thess. 2:1-12 to draw attention to the nature of Jesus and sequentially the nature and methods of the disciples of Jesus who would follow Him as apprentices. Mtukwa stresses the moral life of the messenger and the self-less focus on Jesus ministry that includes suffering as a model for

mission. Mtukwa's dialog partners outside of scripture are notable commentaries and sources that connect directly to Paul's missionary perspective in I Thess. 2. Mtukwa gives us an implicit perspective of this Christology in his context of Africa as he describes the implications of his exegesis. For the most part, however, his sources are British and American.

Julca uses a framework for missiology that includes Jesus' incarnation, His crucifixion and death, and His resurrection. This paper gives us a perspective of Christology through a Latin-American lens. Julca's primary dialog partners include Latin-American theologians and missiologists. Julca describes how historical and contextual elements of Latin-America have shaped perceptions of Jesus in art, theology and practice. The contextual elements include conquest, Roman Catholicism and marginalization

In the section of Julca's paper related to the crucifixion, he shares Mtukwa's thesis. Julca states that the demands of the cross of Christ are directly related to the radical call of Christian discipleship that includes sacrifice, service and suffering. Quoting Tozer, Julca states "God offers life, but not an improved life. The life he offers is new life that is born of death. It is a life that is possible only from the other side of the cross. Whoever wants to possess it has to go through the cross ... "

Mtukwa as well as Julca, point out the challenging image of cruciform discipleship in their contexts where prosperity gospel and self-aggrandizement ministry is prominent. Additionally, colonialism and conquest are common challenges within both contexts that continue to make missions in the cruciform path of Jesus a necessity for authentic witness.

Conclusion

I approach a critique of these papers acknowledging the contribution that both authors make to a discussion of missiology in the Church of the Nazarene. This is a current discussion that is greatly needed. I am grateful for the responsible scholarship that is the backbone of these papers.

Context is vital for this discussion of Christology. All theology (and I would add missiology) is ultimately contextual. A robust, Wesleyan theology (and missiology) occurs as the diverse theological voices of the church listen to one another and as each interconnected part expresses theology that is re-birthed within their own context.

There has been a significant shift in the Christian faith, including the Church of the Nazarene, during the last century that includes the demographic move away from historic centers in Europe and North America. All indications are that this move toward the majority world will continue with great implications for the Church of the Nazarene. For many years the guiding mission goal has been for the church to become self-supporting, self-propagating and self-governing. Missiologists such as Paul Heibert have argued for a fourth self that includes self-theologizing. I would nuance theologizing to include self (contextual) missiology to this as well. As the Church continues to grow in the majority world, this is an increasing need for all of us. Without contextual perspectives, the Church of the Nazarene will be nothing more than a western model of a colonializing church.

Mtukwa as well as Julca are exceptional Nazarene scholars who are well versed in African and Latin-American contextual theology. They bring a unique perspective of theology that strengthens all of us and makes our Wesleyan theology a biblical and historical faith that is expressed from a variety of contexts. This discussion would have been even stronger if Mtukwa had contextualized the dialog with African theologians such as Mbiti, Pobe, Nyamiti and many

others that he is more familiar with than I am who express an African Christology. How does such a view impact our hermeneutical task and how do we understand our historical/theological role as it is interpreted in new places? This is perhaps one of the most important questions that we have before us as a denomination.

A second and equally important point of conclusion is related to the missiological implications of these papers. Mtukwa and Julca have given us a sharp challenge that is vital in our current global context in which mission strategy is too often driven by managerial practices and church growth. The cruciform description in scripture that is expressed by both authors raise important questions for missionaries in a world where the future of missions will be to the most complex and perilous places on the globe. These places are not solely defined by geo-political boundaries but rather a movement to the least and the lost and to those where there is little or no gospel witness.

A cruciform perspective echoes what we see in some missionaries but is worthy of further writing and discussion that impacts our future practices for all missions. I would add that this incarnational model of cruciform discipleship is daunting for those who have become accustomed to short-term models of “voluntourism”. If, however, we live into God’s story that these authors have indicated, we can’t help but follow Jesus who is drawing us into His mission.