

Notes in lieu of minutes

Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting No. 9

Held on 14 May 2003
at Canadian Mennonite University

This meeting centered on personal and ecclesial experiences/approaches to inter-religious dialogue.

In the first part of the meeting, participants shared a personal experience with and/or insight of other religions.

As background reading, participants were asked to read two documents: the Vatican document, "Dialogue and Proclamation," and a paper by George R. Brunk, a professor at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia, entitled "The Exclusiveness of Jesus Christ." There were overview presentations of the two documents by **Luis Melo** in the first instance and by **Helmut Harder** in the second instance, and then group discussion of the issues that emerged.

The evening closed with a worship service, "Harvesting the Gifts of the Spirit and Blessing," led by **Luis Melo**.

Note about these brief minutes

The group's usual secretary, **Richard Lebrun**, was absent from this meeting. According to **Helmut Harder's** recollection, it was decided, or something that happened by default, minutes were not produced for this meeting since the discussion had been rather wide-ranging and participants had the two papers in hand.

The Vatican document, "Dialogue and Proclamation," is easily available on the Vatican website.

See attachment 1 for an overview of Brunk's paper.

Attachment 1

The Exclusiveness of Jesus Christ

Overview of a paper by George Brunk

Introduction, pp. 1-2

This paper presents a finely nuanced treatment of the topic, “The Exclusiveness of Jesus Christ.” In the introduction, Brunk makes some careful distinctions:

- exclusive is not simply the opposite of inclusive
- Jesus Christ is different from “Christianity”
- Claiming exclusiveness for Jesus Christ does not is not the same as shutting out another or disassociating with others.

The present state of the question, pp. 2-6

Ours is an age of tolerance, relativism, pluralism. Emphasis on these as positive, makes a virtue of tolerance and a vice of exclusiveness. We have all been influenced by this spirit of our age.

Mennonite faith and theology is sometimes attracted to tolerance, since Anabaptist-Mennonite theological principles of voluntarism, free will, and a church free from political control have contributed in the West to this modern spirit of our age.

The claims of Scripture for the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ, pp. 6-17

Scripture leads us to reconsider the question and to open ourselves to a more complex answer.

We see that Scripture makes exclusive claims for Jesus the Christ. But on the level of speculation (or systematization), the Scriptures in their historical expression do not draw a precise line “between truth and non-truth, between salvation and damnation” (p.6).

For example, Jesus says, “He who is not against us, is for us” [Although he also says the reverse, “He who is not with me is against me.” (See commentary on this, p.7, para 1-2)]

The claim of Jesus

Jesus makes exclusive claims (John 14:6). But he also hesitated to spell out personal claims to exclusiveness, as this would lead to a misunderstanding of his claims, and to an easy identification with political and material aspirations.

How do we understand this dynamic in Jesus’ self-presentation?

- Jesus teachings make the claim that a person’s ultimate destiny with God is linked

to their response to Jesus (Mark 8:38)

- Jesus claims an absolute link with the Father, the one who delivers to his hearers what the Father has commissioned him to deliver. (Matt 11:27) He is the mediator for God himself (Mark 9:37).
- The kingdom of God is present in the person of Jesus (Luke 17:21).
- Response to Jesus changes the person and the person's situation (repentance). This applies not only to the ungodly, but to the religious as well.
- In Jesus all are summoned to step into a new kingdom reality not possible before (Luke 13:5) .
- Salvation in Jesus supersedes all previous modes of salvation—the former modes (e.g. salvation by the law, salvation by blood-lineage) are taken up into something greater.

The claims of the early church concerning Jesus exclusiveness

- The early church understood the meaning of Jesus' life to be relevant for universal history. How does his particularity and his universality come together? The resurrection claim concerning Jesus combines with the monotheistic belief in one God, coming from the Old Testament leads to a view of oneness in human experience in the sense that all people come from the one source (the Creator) and have their common destiny in this God. (p. 13)
- But this does not imply absolute negativity toward other religions (e.g. Paul at Athens). Rather, God is presented as patient, indulgent, and gracious (13f).
- Regarding salvation and the judgment connected to it, biblical writers believe in the separation of the righteous and the wicked, but they refrain from judgment, leaving that to God; and they do not simply equate salvation along the lines & the covenant people while "the nations" are assigned to judgment. (Acts 10:34-35) In the end, all hinges on the mercy of God, which is the heart of the proclamation of salvation.
- What of Acts 4:12 - that there is salvation in no other for there is no other name known to the human race by which we must be saved? Brunk sees this statement not as referring to an intrinsic logic of reality, but as a summons to all now to faith in Jesus, and as a call to believers to be involved in the grand design of the Lord of history. (15f.) It is both a call to covenant renewal for those who consider themselves 'of the faith,' and an invitation to others to join covenant history/community. (cf. Deut. 29)
- The issue remains as something of a *scandal*, i.e. *skandalon* (stumbling block): How does the exclusive claim of Christ (no other name) relate to the universal religious experience of humankind? (anyone who fears God is acceptable). (p. 16) John's prologue deals with the same issue - How does one project backward in time and outward in space from the exclusive revelation of God in Jesus Christ to all penultimate salvation? Paul deals with the same issue when he says that one

the one hand the Gentiles may be excused because they have the law- written on their hearts (Rom 2:15) and that all are under the power of sin (3:9), and therefore objects of the liberating grace of God.

In summary, ... (p. 17).

The implications for the church's practice of mission, pp. 17-23

What are the implications for believers today?

- The claim to exclusivity comes from one who is humble in spirit and filled with moral integrity.
- Our acceptance of his invitation to made in faith, 'without unambiguous proof' (p. 18) that we will be vindicated I.e. we ride on a promise (his coming again) and we bank on a miracle (the incarnation and the resurrection).
- We move in faith between the particular and tile universal. God's revelation is given in a particular historical context. At the same time, God's revelation makes a universal claim. There is a particular and a universal history, of salvation – a double perspective, a double co-existence.
- There is a kind of 'ugly ditch' that easily opens up ... (p. 19).
- Our task is to live creatively with the tension between the finality of Christ and the finitude of the church.
- Faithful practice entails 1) a self-understanding that is apostolic; 2) a stance that is mediatorial; and 3) a style that is irenic.
- This means, on the one hand, that we not give in to that kind of exclusiveness that invites to superiority, the abuse of power, playing God in the world. And on the other hand, that we not give in to a sense of inferiority that is ashamed to be associated with anything claiming exclusiveness, and thus withdraw from witness and mission, and even from pursuit of the way, the troth, and the life that Jesus Christ promises.
- The followers of Jesus Christ are called to share this truth, this way, this life, with all people, and without passing judgment on the value of their faiths or the question of their eternal destiny (apart from self-evident wickedness). Always remember the irony of a finite people bearing a final message. "The scandal of Christ's exclusiveness is to be embraced with faithfulness, humbly but joyfully" (p. 23).