
Dialogue

Volume 2 Issue 1 *Strength for the church's journey into wholeness in Christ* January 2000

The subject: The New Humanity

Thanks to all the writers who have offered their wisdom, opinions and care to stimulate our discussion this quarter. As you read these thoughts, we hope you'll let God broaden your horizon to see all the people he loves and see all the ways you could love them. We are convinced that God's heart is open to everyone and the way to eternity is free. But how to make that all important connection — that's the question.

Can the Rich and the Poor Co-exist in the Kingdom of God?

The answer to the question above seems simple, right? But upon deeper consideration it only begs further questions and demands clarification.

Here are a few questions that arise: What IS the distinction between rich and poor? Is it as simple as economic difference? Can we divorce issues of gender and race from class? How would Jesus reflect on the fact that the richest one percent of the American population owns 40 percent of our nation's wealth? And most importantly, why didn't your fourth grade Sunday school teacher avail to you the theories of Karl Marx?

Marx advocated a "rising up of the people" in an era when there



was a clear division between those who had and those who had not. It is unlikely that Marx ever envisioned the "people" consisting of a brotherhood of wide-eyed college students and broad shouldered unionists gathering together to protest in the face of the World Trade Organization, kicking in windows of the local Banana Republic store in Seattle. Today the wall that divides the rich and the poor is less clear, and becoming even more blurred with the advent of a technologically driven society.

The "Digital Divide" has been hailed by some as the new defining barrier between rich and poor in a country that anxiously awaits the next technological advancement, be it a new operating system from Windows or a really cool version of

Doom. The disparity between those who have access to the information highway and those who don't is increasing as quickly as Bill Gates' net worth. The poor and the working class, who can't afford personal computers, find themselves on the outside looking in at an economy that is flourishing via technology. However, it is oversimplified to believe that future class wars will be fought only on the battlefields of computer literacy. The distinction between the classes encompasses issues of economics intertwined with a multitude of social issues, including gender and race.

It is impossible to enter into a debate about classism without defining just exactly who is rich and who is poor. Is it the single mother of two, flipping burgers at McDonalds who is poor? In a developing country someone making \$16,000 a year is practically aristocracy. According to Marxist theory it seems that a middle manager at Microsoft making \$100,000 a year is just as 'poor' because s/he is dispensable, in that s/he does not own the means of production. However, in a class war would this middle manager and McDonalds mother join as equals in the oppressed proletariat to fight against the capitalist powers that become increasingly rich through their labors? It is astounding that in the United States 500 individuals, most likely all white males, control two thousand billion dollars in business assets. In reality, most people believe that they have a clear definition of who the 'poor' are, drawn from a vague interpretation of an apparent 'culture of poverty.' However, defining this culture is seemingly implausible, as one attempts

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to sort through the myriad of gender, race and other socioeconomic issues.

In Jesus Christ our exhaustive intellectual efforts to make sense of classism are subverted, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" Galatians 3:28, NIV. When the Kingdom of God is realized in its fullness will there be distinctions between the rich and the poor? Justice demands that there will be no poor in Heaven; therefore, our call as the Church in the Kingdom as it is now is to be working toward eradicating these distinctions.

Settling for reconciliation between the classes maintains the social order that now exists between rich and poor. It is not enough just for everyone to get along – we must cry out for justice. The Biblical model for the body of Christ is to ensure that everyone is sustained equally, "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as they had need" Acts 2:44-45, NIV.

Back to the initial question, can the rich and the poor co-exist in the Kingdom of God? The answer is an unequivocal "No!" We as a Church must labor so that "justice rolls on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" Amos 5:24, NIV.

Pam Rowen and Bob Herzog

Interview: A Transcultural Christian

A part of *Circle of Hope*, now, Jen Thuma grew up in Zambia, southern Africa. She lived there from age 1 to 3 and then again from age 8 to 15. Her father was a doctor with the Brethren in Christ world missions and grew up in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Her grandmother was a missionary kid from India. Transcultural Christianity has been the norm for the Thuma family. The following interview investigates her experiences as such a person.

How is it different being a Christian in Zambia as compared to being a Christian in the US.?

I don't think it's different being a Christian in Zambia; I think the Bible's pretty clear about what our roles are. We're supposed to love each other, love our enemies, and let the Spirit guide us. The difference is in how it's played out. In different cultures Christianity gets expressed in different ways. For example, when the early BIC missionaries came to Africa one of the

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first things they tried to do was dress the native villagers like the missionaries themselves were dressed because it was "modest." The villagers, in their [the missionaries] minds, were indecently dressed. In reality the people of Africa were dressed appropriately for their climate and life. The women didn't need long skirts to get caught in the fire! The missionaries could only see it through the eyes of their own culture.

Here's another example of a difference that's even more relevant to today that I remember from being there. Polygamy is very, very common in Zambia. One of the deacons had two wives and this became an issue. And what do you do as a Christian after you have 5 wives? Do you divorce 4 of them? But does having more than one

wife make them any less a Christian?

Do you think it's even relevant to discuss these similarities and differences or do you think it's more productive to discuss that we're all under one Authority and one Kingdom of God?

I don't think the answer is that simple. It's not a matter of similarities and differences because focusing on that puts huge walls up between people. But it is important to be aware of the differences in cultures. In our American culture we expect people to be aware of our culture and we're offended if they're not observant of it. I think we need to be sensitive to those in other countries to the best of our abilities as well.

When we say we're under one Authority and Kingdom of God, that's all very true, but we need to make sure that we're saying the same thing. Making sure what you're meaning is getting across as well as just what you're saying. I see that there is a problem with cultural views getting in the way of communication – not just country to country but also

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Dialogue

WHY? This quarterly journal is a gift to everyone who wishes to be a part of the ongoing dialogue we share in Christ that forms us and deepens us as a real church. Whether you just arrived or have been with us from the beginning, we want you to be part of the conversation and an informed member of the team. We hope you will work with us to build a safe place to experience and share the love of Jesus Christ. Dialogue is a crucial part of that.

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person to person. Even people who haven't been out of the state are in mini cultures of their own. I think that it's important for us to somehow either by education or sheer willingness to be able to see out of our own culture...either in America or just in our own family.

In Zambia there wasn't segregation or apartheid but it was unique to see others integrating into the life and culture of the local people. The Brethren in Christ church was intentionally good at that. When leaders and members of our church would get together it was a very mixed group. There were people from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Europeans, Americans. We were all Christians and spent time together and shared and there was



really no distinction made.

[Here's a look at Zambia for you. It's always nice to know more than your own geography if you want to be transcultural!]

How has the life of Jesus impacted your love for other nations of the world? In what ways?

As a whole I can say that life with Jesus as shown in the Bible and the life of my family has impacted my love for other nations. Observation about how Jesus crossed boundaries stands out to me. I'm thinking about when he spoke to women, when he talked to Samaritans and interacted with people across the Sea of Galilee. All three of those were not ac-

ceptable to interact with according to his culture and he stepped over the boundaries, showing what was right.

Anna James

A Road to Understanding

For over a year now I have been talking to one of our pastors, Rod White, about the possibility of participating in the Damascus Road process. The Damascus Road is a training process designed to help organizations develop the biblical background and analytical skills necessary to detect and fight institutional racism. Rod became a team member about a year ago as a member of the MCC East Coast Board. At that time our cell was trying to focus on the issue of racism and it seemed like the training might fit.

Now the time has come to form a team that will go through two intense training times over the next six months. While I'm sure there will be a tremendous amount of personal growth, the desire is that the team gain skills to become a resource, enabling Circle of Hope to continue its efforts in being an anti-racist environment.

I entered this process still coming to grips with my own understanding of race. As a black American who grew up with many upper middle class advantages I have found it, at times, very difficult to get in touch with the pain associated with the effects of institutional racism. But as my understanding grows I find it easier to identify with the pain and to see how easy it is to just buy into the system as it stands. It has also become clear how hard it is to separate the issues of race from class. I look forward to learning more about these

issues and how I can play a role in what Jesus is doing to tear down that stronghold. The team format is particularly exciting to me in that you will have a group of brothers and sisters you are committed to, to work on these issues.

As we return from the times of training I am curious how we will be received. Will we be used as a resource? Will we just be another group clamoring for limited attention spans? Will people still not even understand that the issue of racism is one that not only Circle of Hope *wants* to take seriously, but that the Body of Christ *needs* to take seriously and therefore just blow us off?

I think there are yet many unanswered questions, but there is hope inherent in being part of something bigger than yourself that you know Jesus is excited about. I look for healing, reconciliation, increased knowledge, and righteous anger to spring from this and inform and impact how we go about being a Circle of Hope for ALL people.

Dave Valentine



Participants in the Martin Luther King Day of Service, January 17, 2000.

Where Are the Angry White Christians?

Conrad Moore spoke vulnerably and forcefully at worship on January 16. His story of his life as a black man in Philadelphia was heartbreaking. It was probably shocking to some people who are generally blinded to the reality that so many people experience in the U.S. I was glad an “angry black male” (as he called himself) was willing to speak to us.

But one of my African American friends wrote me an e-mail that made me wonder whether it was such a great event after all. My friend reminded me again about how tiresome it is for black people to not only bear the burden of racism, but to bear the burden of undoing it. The sin of racism, is not a black problem, it is a white problem.

Say all you want about how *everyone* is prejudiced and how the problem is a *human* problem. But the fact is, white people invented and preserved the American brand of racism that infects every thing we are and do in this country. Whites have the privileges racism created and whites have the power to keep their privileges or “share” them. They still run all the institutions and still blindly think everything is mostly fine — because it is mostly fine for them. Especially in the church, where we glowingly talk of love and justice, racism is a so-called white person’s problem.

We hear a lot about angry white males these days, who are feeling the threat of their privilege eroding as people of color take advantages of legal changes that have been made in the last 30 years. But we don’t hear about angry white Christians furious that people of color, especially the ancestors of slaves, do not receive justice. Like Conrad Moore implied in his speech to us, people of color are

more likely to hear frustration that the “problem” is still coming up — “Why don’t you just get over it!”

Where are the angry white Christians?

Well, I am one. I don’t know if I am as angry as my e-mailing friend would like, or if I am willing to start talking about how angry is angry enough. But I am angry about racism. I have dedicated three years of training through the Plowshares Institute and Damascus Road to try and figure out how to do proactive things that can undo racism. But I am still angry. I thought I’d take the bait of my friend and come out about it.

The Bible says, “Be angry but do not sin.” I’m working on that. If I’m sinning, here, you let me know. But here are a few of the reasons I am angry about racism.

1) I am tired of being called white. I am a healthy dose of native American, for one thing. But I don’t much like that some people invented a racial distinction called “white” to use as a social tool and then fit me into it. I don’t liked being lumped together like that. I am a Christian, not white. So stop calling me that. You can dump black and yellow and brown, while you are at it, as far as I’m concerned.

2) I am mad and embarrassed that the church is still so segregated. People tell me that it is a matter of culture and taste, but I still think it is sin. I think Circle of Hope is mostly white because the so-called white people in it can’t bother themselves to make relationships across lines that aren’t “comfortable” for them and the black people in town feel like they’ll lose their soul if they connect with “whites.” Both sides are substantially conformed to the racist, sinful construct that was imposed on us all by people who did not care about Jesus.

3) I am angry that I live in a city and area that still reacts to race first. I know from my own experience that, on the street, being

white is an advantage. My son and I have both been stopped by the police for driving around in black areas of the city, and I hardly know any black male who has not been stopped for being black. We all profile. The main threat one of my friends says, is not being pulled over for a DUI it is being pulled over for a DWB — driving while black.

4) I’m angry that I have so many friends that roll their eyes when I start getting mad about racism. They are tired of people being “politically correct.” I’m angry that mere political correctness has stolen the fire of righteousness when it comes to racism. I couldn’t care less about politics — that’s just a tool to use to foment justice. I care about righteousness flowing like a river through my church and city. Please don’t dismiss me like I’m a Democrat, or something. God needs a lot more than a Democrat!

5) There were some die-hard abolitionists in the UK and the USA in the first half of the 1800’s who hounded their governments until they abolished slavery. Most of them were Christians. Martin Luther King and others in the Civil Rights Movement were mainly motivated by Jesus, too. So what is up with the Christians of today? Are we under the illusion that everything is fine — no matter the facts? Or are we under the bondage of the domination system so completely that we can’t even see what is happening? Surely we can’t just be so unspiritual that all we care about is whether our personal economics are doing OK! I’m a lonely, anachronistic, angry abolitionist.

Where are the angry, so-called white, called-by-God-to-love-and-truth Christians?

Rod White

[This is a reprint of most of our brochure that is regularly available

The New Humanity

at the Info Site.]

Circle of Hope's Ongoing Dialogue on Diversity.

We are using this statement to help us think and talk about the challenging vision God has given us for being a diverse church: reconciled, of all races, cultures and ethnicities. It's not our last word. It's a reflection of our ongoing process.

THE POSSIBLE DREAM

We envision a diverse church because we hear the Spirit of God calling to us to be one: calling personally, through the scripture, and through the events of our time. God wants us to be part of the **new humanity** that has been created in Jesus Christ. Where Jesus reigns, a new kind of people are formed whose allegiance to Christ transcends their differences. They are a people in which the only thing that matters is that **“Christ is all and is in all.”**

That's what it says in the Bible:

- When people are **one in Christ**, other ways we define our identities are not primary. *Galatians 3:28-9*
- The **reconciliation** Christ achieved between all who believe and God is the basis for removing the barriers of hostility between people. *Ephesians 2:14-19*
- The new self Christians put on finds a home in **“Christ culture.”** *Colossians 3:9-11*
- Since we have a **common Father**, we should love one another. *1 John 4:7*
- Jesus commissions us to reach out to “all identifiable groups of people.” *Matthew 28:19-20*.
- We are called to embrace “the stranger.” *Exodus 12:49/Matthew 25:35/Hebrews 13:2*
- All people are made in God's image. None

are superior or inferior. *Gen. 1:26/Ps. 8:4-6/Romans 3:23*.

- God reveals himself by making unity from diversity. *1 Corinthians 12:12-13/Ephesians 4:12-13/John 17*.
- A church that excludes people on grounds apart from allegiance to Jesus makes a mockery of God. *James 2:1-12/Acts 10:34-6*

It won't be easy...

We are building the **new humanity** in our cells, and demonstrating it in our worship times and efforts to serve. This is not always an easy assignment; we know the effort requires a lot from each of us. But we want God to have His way with us, and to bring light to the world through us. We believe God's dream of a new humanity will be realized...

- **If we can stick with a long process.** We need endurance and patience to build relationships based on Christ and to overcome the wounds of prejudice, paternalism, mistrust and systemic racism.
- **If we can keep changing.** We need commitment to the goal of building a new humanity even when new understanding requires responses that may feel uncomfortable.
- **If we can keep asking the hard questions.** We need to stay conscious and keep evaluating, because any living organism, even the body of Christ, tends to revert to familiar patterns.
- **If a “critical mass” believes it must.** Many people must be able to answer: “Why are we building a diverse cell?” and “Why are our worship times so eclectic in style?” or any of many questions that need to be asked. One typical answer will be: “We intentionally go against the divided ways of our society because a diverse church fully represents the kingdom of God! We are part of the transcultural, transnational body of Christ! **We are a circle of hope in Jesus Christ open to all people, a safe place to experience, share and express God's love.**”

But we are determined to

do what it takes.

To be the new humanity takes...

- **Commitment to telling people the good news of Jesus Christ.** People have to know Jesus for real change to happen, and they need to know everything about Him.
- **Commitment to relationships.** That means overcoming accumulated barriers, making persistent efforts, getting beyond the inevitable conflicts.
- **Intentionality.** Racial reconciliation, especially, will not happen on its own. We need to keep working at it with God.
- **Sincerity.** Vulnerability and honesty breed trust.
- **Sensitivity.** Practicing good listening and seeking mutual understanding minimize the threat of change and of having big ideas.
- **Interdependence.** We not only need one another because we are called by God to be one in Christ, we need one another's gifts and struggles to be fully ourselves in Christ.
- **Sacrifice.** Selflessness breeds love. On a personal level, caring for another before oneself takes time and effort. What's more, on a public level, demanding that the domination system become just is never popular; it may require getting into trouble.
- **Outdoing one another in showing honor.** Showing honor empowers another person (or group or race) to lay aside anger and blame in order to create a relationship of trust. Justice grows best in a field of mutual repentance and forgiveness.
- **Constant prayer.** The whole idea takes a miracle!

Goal Check 99-00

This is a regular feature of this letter. It's hard to dialogue without the facts! We adopted these goals in September of 1999. Every quarter we pray that you are interested enough to consider how we are doing (A copy of the 1999-2000 Strategy is available).

Network Goals

Plant our next congregation in a new neighborhood between Nov. 1999 and Feb. 2000.

Formation Team has generated their plan, two cells are connected and the work is being done for a March 5 worship-time launch.

Generate compassionate service through Circle Venture, in order to show God's loves in practical ways.

Worldly Goods closed. The Circle Venture Board refocused the agenda. MCC gave a two-year commitment to our Director, Chris Petersen.

Develop the teaching ministry of gifted teachers, inventing approaches that primarily use our cell system.

Plans began to develop. The women's retreat was beneficial.

Conduct an overnight spiritual retreat for everyone interested.

A team carried the ball under Annette Jeffrey's leadership.

Commission a Damascus Road anti-racism team.

Dave Valentine began to bring together a team of five, funds were allotted.

Improve office administration.

Hope Otter continued to serve. We developed a job description for a part-time Partner for Development and allotted funds.

Receive over \$120,000 to our Common Fund from local sources.

We are not on pace to receive that much money.

Provide Christian counseling at a reasonable cost through Circle Counseling, developing it within its limitations.

Our referral system continued to expand. Two new therapists considered working out of our office.

Organize a better system to distribute our Compassion Fund and connect people with other resources.

No new progress.

Center City Goals

Multiply all cells during the year.

One cell became three and we launched two others.

Find a new worship space for 200+ people that gives opportunity for concerts and other art events.

We continued the difficult search and zeroed in on possibilities.

Organize a means to create more opportunities for group prayer.

No notable progress.

Incorporate more of the arts and other diverse elements into our worship times.

Advent was full of art and diverse elements.

Organize worship leaders for better administration and planning.

No notable progress.

Equip and empower more women to lead.

A cell devoted to women continued. Women responded to calls for leadership. Women lead and spoke in worship times and cells.

Improve the quality of our outreach media.

Improvements were made to our web site. The New Humanity statement was redone.

Organize at least a quarterly event designed for introducing ourselves to people in Center City.

The Art Show sponsored by the John/Wayne Cell was successful.

Commission people willing to oversee our attention to environmental issues.

No notable progress.

Solidify the leaders and vision for our ministry to children.

Tracey Kohl agreed to lead a team of three, including Jen Thuma and Carrie Wood.

Organize a means to better reach teens.

No action.

Support the formation of healthy intentional community households.

No corporate action.

Northwest Goals

Maintain an ongoing intercessory prayer team specifically for the church plant.

This is happening.

Recruit and train the Germantown formation team.

Team was recruited and is working together.

Develop core group for the new congregation.

In progress.

Recruit new people through networking and friendship evangelism, especially from Germantown area.

Just beginning.

Rent an affordable place for worship and office space.

Research is being done, especially in the Germantown Ave. at Cheltenham area.

Purchase necessary office and church related supplies and equipment.

Joe's office was set up in his home.

Plan and hold first public worship.

Scheduled for March 5.

Educate and facilitate congregation's involvement with Circle Venture.

Talks underway. Plan calls for tutoring ministry.

Multiply to seven to ten cell groups.

Two groups connected to Northwest, so far.

Gather 100 plus regular attenders.

No attending, yet.

Develop a multi-ethnic worship team.

Contacts have been made.

Money

From October to December, 1999 we received approximately \$22,500 from local sources. If we extended that rate over the budget year for 2000 we would be \$30,000 short of our budgeted needs.

So how will we meet this challenge?

1) We think that people will keep becoming more committed to our ministry and share their resources.

2) We expect the Northwest congregation to raise about \$30,000.

3) We expect the Center City congregation to keep growing in number and capability.

4) We may have to use up all our savings or find other outside revenue.

Mostly — We believe: *God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.* 2 Cor. 9:8

It is exciting to see all God has done so far! Why wouldn't we trust Him for what is next?

YOUR GIVING STATEMENT FOR 1999 IS INCLUDED.