



Christian Identity in a Pluralistic World

At a recent seminar the speaker highlighted the “rational, straight forward, dispassionate” style of his favorite journalist as an approach which was “credible” and “trustworthy.” This was contrasted with the emotionally charged, often spontaneous, reporting found in the media in some other parts of the world. How could it be, one American participant wondered, that Middle Easterners will easily believe that the American press is lying about events, but will accept accounts that are clearly irrational and emotional as true?

The question is one that cuts to the heart of cultural differences concerning what is credible “news” and may help us understand the problem Christians have in proclaiming the Good News. Since the Enlightenment the gold standard of truth in the West has been that which is objective, rational, and dispassionate. Westerners tend to see emotion, felt or expressed, as distorting the facts with mere impressions and reactions. We like our newscasters calm and in control of themselves and the news they convey.

This isn't the case in every culture. In many cultures being dispassionate is the same as

being disinterested. The dispassionate person, who is not engaged in the events and people around him or her, or who is pretending to be disengaged, is regarded with suspicion. Lack of an emotional reaction is regarded as a mask that hides a calculating and deceptive intent. It is not demeanor of a scientist, but of a poker player working out an elaborate bluff. (A word which means “lie” in most dialects of English.) From this perspective American reporting is doubly untrustworthy. In its continual focus on American events and people it betrays an essentially parochial view of the world. And in its lack of emotional engage-

(Continued on page 2)



Robert Hunt, Director of Global Theological Education

2005 - 2006 Immersion Courses

The Global Theological Education Program will be offering two immersion courses in the 2005 – 2006 School year.

Dr. Robert Hunt will offer a January Inter-term immersion course in Bethlehem and the Palestinian territories and Israel. This two week seminar and workshop will be hosted by the Dar al-Kalima Academy of the International Center of Bethlehem, and will explore Christian Theology in a Palestinian context including Muslim-Christian-Jewish relations.

During the Spring break Perkins faculty member Dr. Joerg Rieger and Intern Program staff member Isabel Docampo will offer an immersion course in the borderlands of Mexico and Arizona. Students will

visit both sides of the border, and will stay with families in Mexico as they engage in a theological exploration of the economic, political, and social challenges of this dynamic region.

The Mexican American Program will also be offering its annual Mexico Immersion, with a course in pastoral care to the aging led by Dr. David Maldonado. Students will spend two weeks learning along side seminary students in Mexico City as they experience more deeply the meaning of ministry in this unique cultural setting.

Altogether more than 45 students will participate in these immersion experiences, the largest number in the history of our program.

Local Ministry in a Global Context

(Continued from page 1)

ment it betrays an intent to hide facts that should lead conscientious and engaged persons to sorrow or outrage.

The different ways that cultures value passion and rationality, and the extent to which those outside the U.S. feel excluded from American concerns, will shape the ways that we as Christians can effectively engage in mission. We may be ready to quickly analyze the needs of a community and get to work solving them. But our partners in

Christ outside the U.S. may have other priorities.

In 2001 I took a work group to Vrbas, a small town in Serbia. Our hosts were only partially interested in having us help renovate an old church. They wanted us to understand and feel what it had been like to live through 10 years of civil war, part of which included being attacked by both Serb militias and NATO aircraft. More importantly they wanted us to form some genuine long-lasting relationships with them. They wanted to be part of our

world, and for us to remain part of theirs.

This last month I received a postcard and letter from the pastor of that church—which is now fully restored. The warm appreciation it expressed, and the prayers offered for our work team, reflect the real heart of mission: passion and commitment.

That is something that comes only with both an understanding of different cultures and life experiences, and a real engagement with Christians in those cultures.

Global Theological Education for Volunteers in Mission

Perkins School of Theology, through its Global Theological Education Program, is committed to providing resources for the spiritual and intellectual growth of lay persons and clergy committed to short term volunteer missions.

This fall the GTE program will launch a web site dedicated to providing Volunteers in Mission both personal and group resources for study and reflection on mission. Already a significant collection of formative mission documents is available online. Devotions are being added regularly, as are significant articles on Missiology.

Beginning in October of 2006 the Global Theological Education Program will offer "Hearts and Minds for Mission: an intensive seminar for lay mission volunteers." The seminar in 2006 will focus on the ways that volunteers in mission participate in restoration and healing as expressions of the missionary vocation of the church. This seminar is offered for short term mission volunteers, and to all those who wish to deepen their understanding of Christian mission and the missionary vocation. Perkins School of Theology faculty members will lead workshops focused on missionary spirituality, scriptural guidance for missionaries, and the theology and history of Christian missions. The seminar will begin on a Friday evening and conclude Saturday afternoon. Registration information will be available in February of 2006.

Southern Methodist University will not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, or veteran status. SMU's commitment to equal opportunity includes nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The Office of Institutional Access and Equity has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policies and may be contacted at Southern Methodist University, Dallas TX 75275; 214-768-3601, or by e-mail at nballard@mail.smu.edu

Travel Stipends Offered for GTE Immersion Courses.

In 2005 - 2006 the Perkins School of Theology and its Global Theological Education Program will offer over \$20,000 in travel stipends to the more than 35 students participating in immersion courses. For these students only a travel stipend makes it possible to participate in a cross-cultural immersion program.

The Global Theological Education Fund was initiated by Bishop David Lawson, now retired. It is sustained by the generous donations of individuals, Sunday school classes, and churches who understand the value and necessity of cross-cultural experience for the leadership of a church in mission. Your contribution would be welcomed, and will make it possible for students called to ministry and mission to receive the best possible training.

Contributions should be mailed care of Robert Hunt, Director of Global Theological Education. Checks should be made out to Perkins School of Theology.



SMU PERKINS
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Southern Methodist University
PO Box 750133
Dallas, TX 75275-0133
USA

*Preparing pastors for local ministry
in a global context*

Phone: 214-768-1374
Fax: 214-768-1042
E-mail: globaltheology@smu.edu
perkins.smu.edu