

## Pluralist Culture and Truth

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Mennonites are a “people of the Book.” In every Mennonite home across Canada you will find a Bible; in many homes it is the most read book. Muslims are also a people of Scripture. Whenever they gather for worship, Muslims recite or read the Qur’an. Both Mennonites and Muslims believe that God reveals truth in various ways, but especially through the Scriptures. However, both Mennonites and Muslims live in a pluralist world; multitudes around the world do not base their lives on any notions of revealed truth. Especially in a pluralist democracy, decisions are based upon the votes of the people and the decisions of their elected representatives, and not necessarily on God’s revelation of truth. This means that democratic decisions and commitments to revealed truth can be in collision. This is true in Iran; it also the reality in North America.

What are the theological/philosophical foundations for pluralist culture, and how can we be committed to truth in a pluralist or modernist society? These are the two questions that this essay explores. First I will comment on two stories that illustrate the issues: those of Lithuania Christian College in Lithuania, and Shebelli Secondary School in Somalia.

For the last four years I have served at Lithuania Christian College as professor of theology and for three years as academic dean. This college began as an English language institute eleven years ago just as Lithuania was confronting the Soviet Union in a struggle for freedom and independence. The college began because of the vision of key parliamentary leaders in the confrontation with the Soviet system. At their request they met with Otonas Balciunus, a Lithuania Free Christian Church leader, and several of his Mennonite Brethren international associates. With Soviet tanks surrounding the Parliament building where they met, these leaders urged their guests to establish a Christian university in Lithuania. “Why?” asked Otonas and his associates. The Lithuanians responded, “Because we believe that the Christian gospel as understood by the Protestant free churches encourages people to develop healthy pluralist democracy. That spirit respects the dignity and

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freedom of each person and encourages people to develop personal responsibility and integrity. We want a democratic pluralist culture; that is why we need a Christian university that will equip future leaders to embrace democratic pluralist values.”

Today, that college has an enrollment of 600 students from a dozen countries, and its graduates are emerging as leaders in the development of democratic pluralist cultures in Lithuania and other countries of Eastern Europe. Is there a contradiction between the Christian faith that confesses that truth is revealed and the development of a pluralist democratic culture? Pluralist democracy is not the Christian faith. Yet, is there something about the Biblical vision of the dignity and freedom of the person as a being created in God’s own image and one whom God loves that encourages and nurtures values essential to a healthy pluralist democracy?

The founding parents of Lithuania Christian College believed that atheistic or naturalistic philosophies such as Nazism, Marxism, and Darwinian evolutionary theory, when applied to human development, are destructive to the well-being of the person. In contrast, they contended that Biblical faith is a foundation (some said the only true foundation) for authentic commitment to respect for human life, freedom, and dignity. Were they correct in their conviction that Biblical faith plants the seed in a culture that in time encourages the development of pluralist democracy?

The development in Lithuania is similar to my experience in Muslim Somalia, where for ten years (1963-73) I was involved in developing Somalia Mennonite Mission schools. In monocultural Islamic Somalia, schools operated by a Christian/Mennonite mission were rather remarkable. Yet students from across the nation pled to come to our schools. I do not think it was that we taught subjects such as mathematics better than the Islamic government schools, but rather it was the spirit of free inquiry and respect for the person that was such a powerful magnet. Students often commented that in our schools they could challenge a teacher, and she would commend them for creative thinking!

Although nearly thirty years ago the Soviet revolution in Somalia insisted that all Mennonite schools be turned over to the government, even today Somalis often refer to the graduates of our schools as “Mennonites.” We ask what they mean, since most of our graduates are practicing Muslims and only a few have become Christians. The answer we hear is that in the midst of clan divisions that have divided Somalia in recent years, graduates of the

Mennonite schools have a different spirit. They respect and appreciate diversity. They participate in their clans but seek to build understandings and respect that transcend clan or religious differences. In the clan conflicts that have torn the Somali nation apart, graduates of the Mennonite Mission schools encourage reconciliation and a commitment to pluralist multi-clan society.

Nomadic Islamic Somalia and agricultural post-Soviet Lithuania are tremendously different societies; yet in both settings Christian/Mennonite education nurtured a respect for pluralistic culture and personal differences. And this contribution to encouraging a pluralist culture was exceedingly attractive to many. Is there something within a Mennonite understanding of the Christian gospel that encourages the development of pluralist cultures and societies? On the other hand, what is an Iranian Muslim approach to pluralist culture? This present paper does not address that question. (For a thoughtful statement on Iranian Islam as it relates to pluralist culture, see Ali Shari'ati, *On the Sociology of Islam*.) This paper explores a Mennonite/Anabaptist approach to pluralist cultures, but I hope it will invite a response or critique from Muslim colleagues in this dialogue.

### **The Pluralist Challenge**

Democracy can only function if there is a respect for differences. In my neighborhood in Pennsylvania there are Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Mormons, and secularists. Most never go to church. The secularists do not believe that God reveals truth. The Muslims and Christians do believe in revealed truth, but the truth they believe in is quite different. The Muslims believe that the revealed Qur'an is the final authority; the Christians confess that Jesus the Messiah as revealed in the Biblical scriptures is the fullest revelation of truth. There are at least eight church buildings in my pluralist community, and every Sunday most are filled with worshippers who gather as congregations and then scatter again into the community where they live and work.

That we are a pluralist society challenges beliefs in universal revealed truth. Many of the sermons preached in the churches on Sunday are intended to help equip believers to be faithful in the face of challenges they experience at work and where they live. Here are three ways that believers in revealed truth experience that challenge.

*First, those who believe in revealed truth disagree about what the truth is.* A little over a year ago I was involved in six dialogues with a Muslim

theologian, Shabir Ally, in the United Kingdom; five of the events were in universities. At the beginning of each evening he provided “proofs” that the Qur’an is the final and authoritative revelation from God. Thereafter, he dismissed as corruption anything I said that was based upon the Bible and diverged from the Qur’an. The dialogue was quite difficult because our assumptions about the foundations for truth were so different. Recognizing such difficulties, many in our pluralistic world simply assume that any notions about revealed truth are nonsense.

In Western societies people ask, “How can we believe that truth is revealed by God when there is no agreement about what that truth is?” Many Western university students conclude that, since believers in revelation disagree, “Let’s just assume that there is no such thing as revelation.” That notion pervades modern Western societies. In fact, as far as I could discern, the only people who came to the well-advertised dialogues in the United Kingdom were evangelical Christians and Muslim students. The secularists did not bother to attend. Agnosticism and unbelief in revelation prevails within pluralist Western societies.

*Second, there is a fear that those who believe in revealed truth will impose that truth on others who do not believe.* Democracy is about freedom and respect. It involves a debate about values. But if a person claims that he knows the truth, perhaps he will try to force that truth upon others. That concern has been part of the American experience right from the beginning of European settlements in the New World.

The Pilgrims left England to find religious freedom in the New World. In 1620 their ships landed at Plymouth Rock, and these settlers, members of the Reformed Puritan tradition, developed the Massachusetts Bay Colony. They wanted the colony’s laws to be in accordance with God’s revealed truth. However, the Baptist Christians who joined the settlement had another tradition. The Puritan settlers in Massachusetts denied the Baptists freedom to worship according to their beliefs. Consequently the Baptists had to leave Massachusetts and settled in Rhode Island.

That event is one reason that in the United States separation of church and state is so important. Ever since that experience nearly 400 years ago, the Baptists, like the Mennonites, have always worked for the separation of the two. When the state establishes a religion, or favors one religion, that means minorities are at a disadvantage. There is a deep conviction among

groups like the Mennonites that no government should take upon itself the authority to impose religion on anyone. And that is a widespread concern within American society as a whole. A person should be free to believe, but not free to force others to believe. The same is true of the government; no government has the authority to determine what a person should believe, for God has created each of us with the freedom to choose what we will believe; God even frees us to be atheists.

However, in a democracy, it is not an easy road to confess the truth but not force it upon others. Abortion is an example of the difficulties. I suppose that all the churches and all Muslim and Jewish communities in the United States and Canada teach that abortion is contrary to God's will. This is not a matter, the churches and the mosques insist, that one can vote about. Even if most people favor abortion, that does not change the truth — abortion is a destruction of human life and therefore sin. Christians and Muslims agree that you can't vote on that! This is revealed truth. However, can and should the churches and mosques impose that commitment upon society as a whole? In the United States for the last several decades this issue has caused a raging debate in every presidential election.

*Third, there is a widespread notion that the only basis for knowing the truth is scientific investigation.* Many within North American society believe that since people cannot agree on revelation, then science should become our final authority. However, it is increasingly evident that science and objective investigation alone are not capable of revealing the meaning of human life and history. Furthermore, science that has no reference point in revelation has touched our world with a taste of hell: witness Nazism and Marxism. Neither could these ideologies be critiqued, because they were supposedly founded on the scientific truth of evolution (Nazism) or dialectical materialism (Marxism). As Christians we believe that it is only through revelation from God that we can ultimately know the truth about the meaning of human life.

I am not sure that my Muslim colleagues agree with these statements. Quite frequently Muslim theologians have told me that Islam is so rational that, even without revelation, one would come to the conclusions of Islam through objective investigation. However, as I understand it, this is different from the Christian understanding. On the one hand, Christians believe that the deception within humanity is so deep that on our own we do not find the truth. On the other, the nature of the Gospel is so surprising that one can only

receive the Gospel through revelation, both in Scripture and through the personal enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.

In Western societies the growing awareness that science cannot reveal ultimate truth means that many people choose to become agnostic; they assume that the truth about the meaning of human life and destiny cannot be known, unless it is to believe that we have no purpose, that we are only an advanced form of biological life. Yet both church and mosque give witness that there is a God who reveals the mystery of the meaning of human life and destiny. The challenge that faces both Christians and Muslims is this: How do we make that confession in the modern pluralist world in a way that our witness to the reality of revelation can be heard and understood?

### **The Church and Pluralist Culture**

The church as Jesus the Messiah envisaged it is a community of believers called out from other communities. It is a people who gather for worship, who serve God and witness in faithfulness, and who live within societies that might not be in any sense “Christianized.” It is a people from among the peoples, a people who are in the world, but who are a community for whom God is their ultimate authority (John 17: 11-18). Thus it is not surprising that the early church was a persecuted minority movement in vigorously pluralist and mostly polytheistic societies. The church had no political power, for it was a movement on the margins of society. In fact it was persecuted, not only in the Roman Empire but also in regions beyond the bounds of the Empire. For example, tradition tells us that the Apostle Thomas was martyred by Hindu Brahmins on a hill outside Madras.

Issues related to pluralism and truth were one reason for Roman persecution of Christians for much of the first 300 years of church history. The Roman emperors demanded that all citizens in the Empire venerate the genius of the Emperor. Christians would not do this, for they confessed that there is only one God and that Jesus is God’s Anointed One. The emperors did not object to Christians worshipping as they wanted to, but they could not condone their refusal to worship the genius of the Emperor. Occasionally the persecutions were horrendous, with the torture and death of thousands of believers.

Then in the early fourth century, Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity throughout the Empire. Later he went further, and took steps to favor Christianity as the state religion. He went to war against Persia, with

bishops marching with his armies to bless the soldiers as they went into battle. The Zoroastrian backlash in Persia against the Christians at that time was horrendous, and persecution greatly weakened the Persian church. The Western church became a church with political power, but the Eastern church suffered greatly as a consequence. Before Constantine, Christians refused to serve in the army, for they declared that all warfare was contrary to Christ; now “Christian” Roman soldiers were fighting Persia in the name of Christ with bishops praying for their success.

Nearly a century later Bishop Augustine in the Roman province of Numidia in North Africa began to write theologies about the church and political power. In *The City of God*, Augustine wrote that the church and the state are two kingdoms, the City of God and the City of Man. Since the church is the City of God and is eternal, then that city has ultimate authority over the state or City of Man. With that understanding, the church in the Western experience wielded great influence and power over the Empire and all European governments. One consequence was the crusades to take the “Holy Lands” from the Muslims. Another consequence was Western military conquest of some Eastern church regions to bring them back into the fold of the Western Catholic Church.

Augustine believed that people outside the true Mother Church, the Catholic Church, would be damned. So he wrote that the state must work with the church to “compel” those outside to come in. And he believed it was necessary to do whatever was required to prevent heretics from within the church to succeed in teaching or practicing their wrong teaching. This is an oversimplification of the issues, but in order to understand the approach of the Western church to pluralism for over a thousand years after Constantine, it is necessary to know something about Augustine’s theology of the church and state and the approach to pluralism.

A consequence of all of this is that Europe became “Christendom.” Sometimes Christian armies used force, as in Lithuania, to compel the populace to be baptized. Dissent was not permitted within this European union of church and state systems. People who believed or taught anything contrary to the official church doctrine could be burned at the stake. Even Bibles were not permitted, because they might give people ideas different from official doctrine. The bishops and pope knew the truth, and the people were expected to follow the teachings and practices they proclaimed. Jews were harassed and sometimes persecuted, for they did not fit into a Christian Europe. There was

no place for pluralist societies.

Then in 1450 an event occurred that changed European Christendom forever: Johann Gutenberg printed an Italian translation of the Bible on his newly invented printing press! Within fifty years low cost translations of the Bible were available in many European languages; all this happened even though the official church was against circulating Bibles. People began Bible study groups in their own mother tongue.

As people studied the Scriptures, some like Martin Luther began to question some of the doctrines and practices of the Catholic church. With much struggle this finally led to the formation of the Protestant church, and so Europe began to experience Christian pluralism, with Catholic churches and Protestant churches. However, all the Protestant groups, such as the Reformed and Lutheran denominations, continued to work hand-in-hand with the state. If the government was Lutheran, then people in that state were also Lutheran; if the prince was Catholic, babies in that principality were baptized as Catholics.

However, in Zurich, Switzerland in 1525 a small Bible study group came to a different conclusion, namely that no government has the authority to determine what a person believes. Baptism as taught by Jesus and the New Testament church should be only for those who are adults and who have chosen to believe in Jesus the Messiah and follow him as true disciples. So they baptized each other. That was the beginning of the Anabaptist movement that eventually brought into being denominations such as the Mennonites and the Baptists.

By baptizing adults, Anabaptists were declaring that infants and children, who do not know what they believe, should not be baptized. Of course, if infants are not baptized, then the government cannot determine the faith of anyone. So in sixteenth-century Switzerland a movement began that soon spread to most countries in Europe wherein people were baptized as adults and only after confessing faith in Jesus the Messiah. Even though the Anabaptists were a small minority and severely persecuted by both Catholic and Protestant state church authorities, their insistence on adult baptism turned Europe upside down. As a minority movement, they shattered the state church system, and opened Europe to pluralistic cultures and religious freedom.

A century later the Enlightenment philosophers picked up Anabaptist themes of personal freedom and choice and applied them to the foundations for modern democracy. But it was the Anabaptists who had led the way. By



insisting on adult baptism they were blazing the way forward for the global commitments today to human rights, religious freedom, and pluralistic culture. The “powerless” and persecuted Anabaptists practiced freedom of religion within Christendom, thereby beginning the process that has resulted in transforming Christendom into societies where freedom to believe or not to believe is a deeply-held commitment.

The Anabaptists also respected the realities of international pluralism, and sought to build bridges of peace with peoples considered enemies of Western Europe. As the Anabaptist movement was beginning, Western Europe was locked in combat with the Ottomans under Suleyman the Magnificent; the Hungarians were defeated by the Ottoman Muslims and Vienna came under siege. Western Europe was terrified and mobilization for war prevailed, but the Anabaptists refused to join the war hysteria. One of their leaders, Michael Sattler, was tortured and killed because he was committed to sharing the Gospel with the Turks, but he would never kill a Turk, for they were loved of God. In a Europe fighting against Muslim invaders from the east, the Anabaptists refused to take the sword, for they believed it was contrary to the spirit and teachings of Jesus. Rather, their goal was to work for peace with the Turks. Thus the Anabaptists practiced a truth that inspired commitments to pluralist societies within Europe and trust-building efforts among nations.

### **Theological Foundations**

We will now briefly explore theological themes in the New Testament that have inspired the Mennonite Church’s approach to pluralistic culture and truth. I will focus on just one event in the life of Jesus the Messiah: his crucifixion and resurrection and the formation of the church. I acknowledge this is in divergence from the mainstream of Muslim teachings. Yet this event is so central to Anabaptist understandings of truth and pluralism that I will explore it with some care. Throughout the account I will insert a brief commentary on the significance of the incident for an Anabaptist perspective.

Jesus preached that the Kingdom of God is at hand. He became exceedingly famous after he fed 5,000 hungry men plus women and children by receiving a gift of five loaves and two fishes from a little boy and then breaking the bread and fishes, thereby miraculously multiplying this modest gift of food. This event happened near the Sea of Galilee, where a huge crowd had gathered to hear him teach. Thereafter the Galileans wanted to

make him their king; an army of Galilean Zealots would gladly have followed the command of Jesus.

The Kingdom of God is concerned for people's well-being; the hungry were fed! However, the miracle-working Messiah did not feed them from nothing. He used the generous gift of food from a little boy in this miracle. Likewise today, God is concerned for the hungry and poor, and he needs our generosity to care for their needs. The truth of faith in a pluralistic world is demonstrated in the generosity of believers toward the poor. However, the Galileans believed that for the Kingdom of God to succeed on earth, it must be established and preserved through political and military power. Many people assume the same today.

Jesus refused the invitation to become king in Galilee, and thereafter resolutely set his face for Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). He told his disciples that when they arrived there the people would take the Son of Man and "mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him." On the third day he would rise again (Luke 18:32, 33). The disciples could not believe that this could be true, for they did not believe it was possible for the Messiah to suffer and be crucified. The Kingdom that the Messiah came to establish is created through suffering, not through military and political power. This reality is completely different from the assumptions of the religions of humankind and our political systems and nationalistic societies.

Finally the Messiah approached the Mount of Olives on the eastern borders of the city. He mounted a colt, and children began to follow him, shouting in great joy, "Hosanna!" As he approached the crest of the Mount, he stopped his colt and wept, because Jerusalem would not receive "what would bring you peace" (Luke 19:41).

Five centuries earlier the prophet Zechariah had written that the Messiah would ride into Jerusalem on a colt and "proclaim peace to the nations." His rule would extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zechariah 9:9-10).

The peace that the Messiah brought and proclaimed can only be received voluntarily. He wept because Jerusalem was rejecting his peace. I suppose that through the presence of his Spirit, he is weeping over Jerusalem today as he did 2,000 years ago. The mission of the Messiah was to establish the rule of God throughout the earth, but the rule and peace of God can only happen as people voluntarily accept the Messiah's rule. The Messiah proclaimed peace,

but he did not and does not force it upon anyone. The Kingdom of God is a gift offered but not a rule imposed. It extends throughout the earth and consists of people from every tribe and nation who voluntarily accept to enter it.

Jesus rode that colt down into Jerusalem with the throngs of children continuing their jubilant singing. He rode straight to the Jewish temple, where merchants were selling animals or grain that people needed to offer as sacrifices in their worship. The merchants were overcharging the people. The Messiah used a whip of grass and chased the merchants and cattle from the temple, declaring, “Is it not written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers” (Mark 11:17).

It seems that the location of these unjust merchants in the temple was in the court of nations, where non-Jewish Gentiles came to worship. By cleansing the temple of these merchants Jesus was making several things clear: (1) God wants justice. If we are committed to truth, then we need to join with God in confronting all injustice; (2) God wants everyone to be welcome to worship him. He is a pluralist God! It is totally contrary to God’s will to make the Gentiles feel unwelcome when they come to the temple of God; (3) The Messiah does not use violence against the merchants when he cleanses the temple. His only weapon is a whip of grasses which he uses on the cattle. In this act Jesus modeled a nonviolent approach in the struggle for justice in our pluralist and sometimes most unjust world.

The evening before his arrest and trial, Jesus ate the Jewish Passover meal with his disciples. He was aware that one of them, Judas, intended to betray him and had arranged with the authorities for Jesus’ arrest. Jesus arose from the table and took a basin of water and a towel and washed the feet of each disciple, including Judas, as a servant would do. Then the Messiah gave Judas a sop of bread dipped in broth to eat from Jesus’ own hands. After all this, Jesus said to him, “What you are about to do, do quickly” (John 13:27). Judas went out into the night to arrange to guide the soldiers on how they could secretly arrest Jesus.

This remarkable account is very significant in forming an Anabaptist understanding of how people committed to righteousness and truth should confront evil in pluralist cultures. We believe that the Messiah is the in-history revelation of the fullness of the truth of God. He is the Truth in human form. Yet when Judas decided to betray him, the Messiah washed his feet and gave him a sop of food from his own dish. He confronted his betrayer, Judas, with

the ghastly horror of what he planned to do while also reaching out in service, compassion, and love. Yet the Messiah freed Judas to go ahead with his diabolical plan. In this episode we see ultimate Truth and wickedness in confrontation. The only weapon the Messiah used was (1) confronting Judas with clear truth-telling, (2) extending acts of kindness and service, and (3) freeing Judas to choose his life direction, even the freedom to choose the road that leads to destruction.

That same evening the Messiah took bread and broke it, sharing portions with each disciple, and he also took a cup of wine and shared it with them. As he did this he said, “This is my body given for you. . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:19, 20).

In these symbols, practiced in churches around the world, Jesus was proclaiming that in his crucifixion a new covenant community is created, the church, whose members are a forgiven people called to forgive, love, and suffer in the same spirit as the Messiah practiced. The church is people called by God to be a covenant community, a healing ministry within the nations among whom they are present. The broken bread and grape juice are symbols of life being birthed through suffering: broken bread, crushed grapes. That is the mission of the church, a community that gives itself in redemptive suffering love as the Messiah has exemplified.

That night Jesus was arrested, and the next day the Biblical accounts describe his beatings and then crucifixion between two thieves. Pilate, the Roman governor, had this taunting title placed above his head: Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. As Jesus was hanging on that cross dying, he cried out, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Christians believe that God was fully present in the Messiah crucified. In that cry of forgiveness as he died, all of us are invited into forgiveness. This is to say that the truth center of the universe is fully revealed in the vulnerable and forgiving embrace of the Messiah crucified. If this is true, then there is nothing imperialistic or coercive in the nature of the Kingdom of God. All earthly kingdoms use a variety of earthly power and control. But the power and control exercised by Jesus on the cross is the power of redemptive love. The vulnerable love revealed in the Messiah crucified is “healing for the nations” (Rev. 22:2). The church is called to confess and practice that kind of grace in its life and ministry among the nations.

Three days later, some women came to the tomb where they had buried Jesus, and found that it was empty. Two angels informed the astonished women that Jesus had arisen from the dead. Thereafter, for the next forty days, the resurrected Jesus appeared at least eleven times to a number of his disciples and followers. On one occasion he appeared to a gathering of 500 (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Then in a final appearance, he led his disciples to a hill and commanded them to wait in Jerusalem until receiving the Holy Spirit, who would empower them to be his witnesses throughout the world. The Messiah blessed them with his peace, and then ascended into heaven, where a cloud obscured him from their sight.

The resurrected Messiah left no relics behind. He left no plan for the church. He left only a promise that the Holy Spirit would come. All of this is to say that the universal church's only center is the Spirit of the risen Messiah who is present when believers meet together in worship. This reality gives the church remarkable diversity and flexibility. The universal church is a pluralist movement with no language, cultural, or geographical center.

Ten days after the Messiah's ascension, 120 disciples were gathered in prayer in an upper room in Jerusalem, at the Jewish Feast of Pentecost or First Fruit. Suddenly the Holy Spirit fell on them and they began to proclaim the "wonders of God." People came from across the city to see and hear what was happening. Those who gathered came from at least a dozen different nations; miraculously each person heard the gospel proclaimed in his/her own mother tongue. As the disciples preached, many believed, and by the end of the day they had baptized 3,000 people. This is the birthday of the church.

The many languages spoken when the church was born are the beginning of the church as a pluralist community. Anabaptist churches believe that God intends for the church to take deep root into the local culture as the Gospel becomes incarnated in language and cultural groups. This is a core reason for translating the Bible into local languages. It is also the reason that the church is an exceedingly diverse community, united in faith, but celebrating the richness of local culture. When a people embrace the Scriptures in their own language and culture, the Biblical message empowers them to challenge injustice in their own culture and to transform that which is not good. It also empowers them to critique the cultural imperialism of outsiders to their culture.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I will share a conversation with a high school principal in Kazakhstan. My wife and I were visiting her school in Aktobe, and told her that we were from Lithuania Christian College. Her immediate response was, “Oh! But we are afraid of religion.” We responded, “We are also afraid of religion. But the Messiah critiques all expressions of religion that are harmful to the well-being of people. We believe that God loves each person, and that we are also called to love and respect one another as people created in God’s image and to be committed to the dignity and well-being of each student.” “That is so wonderful!” she exclaimed. She promptly rang the bell, all classes were suspended, and students and teachers gathered for an assembly to hear more about Lithuania Christian College, where the goal is to live in submission to God as revealed in the Messiah, and to express his love to each student in such a way that each person’s freedom and dignity is respected.

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