

Reflections on "The Mediator"

by John M. Nielson

We were riding along the Australian Highway headed north along the Sunshine coast. Crossing the road in front of us was a bridge that was going nowhere. No road led to it from either side. It just sat there over the road – absolutely useless.

The story, as John Smith explained it to us, is that when they built the highway, they built the bridge. But for some reason, they built it in the wrong place.

There are other bridges in my life --

Bridges that evoke warm memories

Like that covered bridge in Waterville, Vermont. It crosses the North Branch that flows behind the Mann homestead where I was born. In the shadow of that bridge, my great Uncle George had his knife factory and my cousin now has her gift shop. Under that bridge is the old swimming hole. My Summertime walks to baseball games in my cousins' meadow or my Wintertime walks to skate on my cousins' pond or my Springtime walks to go trout fishing in the brook -- all took me across that bridge. And when our son proposed to Amy, they were standing at that old covered bridge. Such warm memories!

Bridges that evince strong symbolism

Like the one on the campus of APNTS. It's a hilly campus. From the end of that bridge, there are almost 150 steps to climb to our apartment -- outside -- in 95 degree heat and 90% humidity. And on the other side of the bridge -- more stairs. Under the bridge is a polluted little stream. In the dry season, there is barely a trickle. In the rainy season, it can rise 7 feet and become a raging torrent, carrying with it the pieces of the lives and the homes of people who live above the campus. The bridge is much more functional than attractive. But it is the only way to get from one side of campus to the other. That's why it has become such a strong symbol to me.

In the early days of this Seminary, a text was selected and incorporated into the Seminary Seal. It was a deceptively simple statement from Paul to his protegee Timothy. "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 2:5, NIV)

Deceptively simple, I say, because in two broad strokes it contradicts all other belief systems and proclaims the supremacy of Christ Jesus.

That is a profound message for the Region served by Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary.

“There is one God” -- not the millions of gods of the Hindu pantheon -- not the many gods of wood, mountain, stream, and stone of the animistic religions.

“There is one God” and He is the Creator God who has revealed Himself in history, in scripture, and in Jesus of Nazareth - the Christ.

And there is “one mediator between God and men.” It is not Mohammed. It is not Krishna. It is not Buddha. It is not our ancestors. It is not the Dali Lama. It is not Mary and the Saints. It is “the man Christ Jesus.”

That verse is a particularly relevant one for another reason. In the Asian context, many cultures rely on a mediator for the resolution of conflicts. There is, therefore, a predisposition to understand the role that Christ plays in reconciling us to the Father.

The Seminary also chose a motto -- “Bridging Cultures for Christ”. That motto carries forth the same theme. A mediator is a bridge.

Jesus is our Bridge to the Father -- the Bridge between what we are and what He wants to make of us -- the Bridge between our sinfulness and God’s holiness.

He is also the Bridge (and again the only bridge) that can cross the chasm between cultures. The Seminary Hymn proclaims that

*In Christ there is no east or west;
In Him no south or north
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.*

-John Oxenham

It is only as Christ bridges the differences among us that we can live as a community on our campus.

Here we live -- students and faculty and staff -- from Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, India, Thailand, Zimbabwe, U.S.A., Taiwan, Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Australia, New Zealand, Samoa -- singing the campus hymn

*“In Christ there is no East or West
In Him no South or North
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.”*

Only in His love can this international community find koinonia. Only in His mission can we find a common purpose. Only in His presence can the differences that separate us be bridged. Only in His name can we bridge the cultures of the Pacific with love. **He** is the Bridge.

After our chapel service one morning, a female student from the mountains of Papua New Guinea and a female student from a city of Korea -- dark skin and sallow, jungle and city, north and south, Pidgin and Korean, Christians, met on the bridge, joined hands, and walked off to English class together. Such rich symbolism!!

But not only are cultures bridged in Christ, we must involve ourselves in bridging cultures for Christ. As alumni leave APNTS, they must become bridges between their own culture and the other cultures of this Region. They must even help to bridge the differences within their own culture. But more importantly, they must bridge the distance between the culture of their birth and the culture of the Kingdom of God. In so doing, they will participate in the mission and work of Christ Himself.

Bridges that exact real commitment

I remember watching Sesame Street years ago with my children. One of the segments showed all kinds of bridges -- railroad bridges, foot bridges, steel bridges, stone bridges, small bridges, large bridges, even stepping stones across a stream. What I remember is the final statement -- the moral -- of the piece. "Sometimes, if you want to get somewhere, you have to build a bridge." I remember Jesus using a water pot as a bridge to a Samaritan woman, using Andrew as a bridge to Peter, using a parable as a bridge to the people, using a towel as a bridge from selfishness to servanthood, using a manger and a cross as bridges between God and humankind.

There are so many situations in which chasms remain uncrossed because there is no bridge. Husbands separated from wives, parents who can't speak to children, neighbors who think fences improve their relationship, political parties who can't find common ground, generations who think "the gap" was meant to be, sinners who won't come into the church and saints who won't leave it.

Maybe the statement could be amended to read, "Sometimes, if you want to get somewhere, you have to BE a bridge."

That's the rest of what Paul said to Timothy. Just as Paul was to share the ministry of Christ by being a bridge to the Gentiles, so all of us are called to build and to be bridges on behalf of The Bridge. But as I once told my daughter, from my own uncomfortable experience: Bridges get walked on -- and that isn't fun! Bridges feel like they are suspended over nothingness, barely hanging on to both sides -- and that isn't secure! But without bridges, we would never get from

here to there, we would never cross the chasms that divide, and we would never unite what would otherwise be eternally separated.

“The Mediator.” It is more than the name of this journal. It is the role of Christ. And while it is uniquely his, he calls us to share that task with him. Mediators. Bridges. That is also the role of faculty members – of those who have contributed to this journal. That is what God calls us all to be. So we must each accept the risks of being a bridge. We must lay down our lives so our students can cross from uncertainty to confidence, from spiritual adolescence to maturity, from incompetence to ability, from ignorance to wisdom, from who they are to what God can make of them.

But sitting there across that highway in Australia is a very different bridge. It looks like a bridge, but no one can cross it. It hangs on to nothing, so it connects nothing. There it stands as a tribute to someone’s misreading of the plans, as a symbol of someone’s haste and waste, as a warning of what we become if we refuse the risk of responsibilities, as a witness to the fact that a bridge that doesn’t connect is worthless!

We at this seminary are called to be bridges for men and women so they can walk with confidence into the unknown of tomorrow with the best of their heritage, to change their world – by the power of the Spirit – shaping it into the likeness of the Kingdom of our God and of his Christ.

Somewhere along that pathway, they also will come to a chasm. Perhaps when they come to it, they too will lay down their lives, barely hanging on to both sides, clinging to the past with their toes and to the future with their fingernails, stretched to the limit over the dangers and the nothingness, accepting the insecurity and the pain, letting others walk on them into the Kingdom of God! Then, and only then, will we know that we have accomplished the mission God has given us.

The Role of Christianity in the Modernization of Japan

by Hitoshi Fukue

A rationale for our research into the role of Christianity in the modernization of Japan may sound rather dubious since the Christian population has been very small. In the eyes of the political leaders who attempted modernization of Japan on the basis of Western technology and military, the Christian minority must have seemed rather insignificant. However the impetus to explore the matter comes from the fact that Protestantism was introduced to Japan just at a time when the society was radically moving from a traditional feudal system which had alienated itself from the rest of the world for nearly 250 years to a