

**Assembly 2010, Calgary, Alberta**

**Background Reflections to: *Reclaiming Jesus™: Gladly wear the Name***

*<sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*  
Colossians 3: 15-17.

These three short verses deal with the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the church. Thanksgiving is the repeated sub-theme. The movement of the text can be compared to three movements of a musical composition, where each movement develops the musical motif, or theme. In these verses, each verse develops the theme of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in the Church, and incorporates a repeated sub-theme of thanksgiving, with individualized variations.

The first recipients of this letter were members of a new movement, a radically inclusive community, of slaves, masters, Greeks, Jews, males, and females. In keeping with the issues they encountered, the text touches on:

- 1) the internal life and experience of congregations;
- 2) the interweaving of instruction, mutual care, and worship;
- 3) experiencing all of life as being shaped and hallowed by the One whose name Christians bear – the “Jesus” brand.

Verse 15 invites deep reflection on the relationship of Christ’s peace to life in the body. This concept is elaborated in Ephesians 2:11-22, and receives lively and insightful treatment by Ralph Martin, in the commentary on Colossians and Ephesians in the Interpretation Series. Peace is to “rule” in our hearts as an umpire does in a baseball game. This peace is of Christ, not of our own thoughts or feelings. It is this Christly peace which helps us transcend our differences in ethnicity, traditions, interpretation, and application of Scripture. This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote about living as Christian communities who are one “in Christ.”

Verse 16 bears striking similarities to Ephesians 5:18-19. There we read, “Be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts.” We may well ponder the meaning of believers being filled with the Spirit and how this intersects with “having the word of Christ dwell in them richly.” Both the Spirit and word of Christ are meant to be part of our interaction with each other. We are to be at home with them in our conversation, even

in situations where the context of our work makes it difficult to speak about the name of Jesus.

Verse 17 echoes the opening salutation of this letter: “May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light” (Col 1:11-12). Ephesians 5:20 parallels this verse as the conclusion of a section renouncing pagan ways. Once again, this verse reminds us that it is in cultivating thankfulness that we are able both to speak and act in the *name* of the Lord Jesus.

As the discernment group reflected on these verses, it was the phrase “everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” that kept presenting itself as the provoking challenge to the church in our time and context.

### **What is that context?**

In today’s culture, we are surrounded with brand names for everything. From Levis to Coca-Cola, we live in a culture that has become accustomed to “saying many words with just one word.” We use brand names as metaphors in our language: “I’m a Mac and you’re a PC.” Birkenstocks paint a picture of a certain style of sandal; we’ve shortened that brand name to “Birks.” Even “No Name” is a brand. McFood has become synonymous with fast food, Coke with pop, Aspirin with ASA. Name = Identity = Brand.

But branding is not limited to products or services; people get branded, too. Mike Tenant, producer of the CBC radio program “Age of Persuasion,” says that our minds are psychologically wired to ‘brand’– and that we do it unconsciously. Our first impressions when we meet someone new are exercises in branding. CTV news watchers have branded anchorman Lloyd Robertson. Daytime TV fans have branded Oprah Winfrey. George Bush and Barack Obama have been branded by what we know about them. This is nothing new; historical figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Che Guevara, Menno Simons, and Dirk Philips have also been branded and have come to represent whole movements. But in today’s context where branding and advertising reach into our homes with “broad band” access, branding has been given greater force.

We live in an era where Christianity has been branded in many ways that do not match what we understand to be the biblical vision of healing and hope. In Mennonite Church Canada, we describe our church’s aspirations as three priorities: Forming a people of God; Becoming a Global Church; Growing Leaders for the Church.

No doubt we’ve heard people make the following comment regarding certain expressions of our Christian faith: “If that’s what Christianity is, then I don’t want anything to do with it.” A recent United Church of Canada study found that non-Christians perceived Christians as judgmental, arrogant, and unwilling to listen – descriptors that, for a significant portion of society, become the Christian “brand.”

Yet, Jesus continues to intrigue and inspire respect, even in secular circles. Ken Wilson, a Pastor in Ann Arbor, Michigan, was inspired to write the book, *Jesus Brand Spirituality*,

by the story of a church member who was asked by co-workers to describe the kind of Christianity she was into. She replied, “Jesus brand spirituality.” This term, writes Wilson, “...opened up an easy and useful conversation about faith in a setting that was decidedly secular.” He goes on to say, “The brutal facts are these: the Jesus brand has been sullied in the public perception of American culture, at least. Those of us who care about Jesus have to face that and do something about it. Because Jesus wants his religion back.” A recent film, *Lord, Save Us from Your Followers*, adds emphasis to Wilson’s reflection. What do we need to reclaim, from whom, and can we be bold enough to do it well?

Certainly, there are Christians to whom the above description applies; hence the discernment team chose the word “Reclaiming” in the tag line. The Christian brand requires reclamation from a host of humanly rationalized activities and actions that range from personal and individual to institutional and political. If we don’t tell our story well, others will tell it for us. How do we go about reclaiming terms like Christian and Christianity so that others associate it with ‘Jesus brand spirituality,’ with a moral and ethical standard that compares with nothing else on this earth? How can we Christians proclaim the ultimate good news of our faith, and our Lord, in an era that has become so cynical about Christianity?

Advice abounds all around us on how to reclaim our brand. Warnings abound in scripture, on what happens when we act recklessly with our Christian brand. One gem of wisdom, drawn from our selected text, is found in the word “name,” translated from the Greek word *Logos* – from which the modern word ‘logo’ is also derived. A logo is a “symbol designed for and used by a company or an organization as its special sign, e.g. in advertising and packaging” (Oxford Dictionary). We invite Mennonite Church Canada to reclaim this logo, this name, as we gather, worship, and discern in the name of the one whose logo we bear, ***Jesus, the Christ***.

Possible sub-themes for a series of sermons or workshops:

- Welcome to the Jesus Brand
- Living the Jesus Brand
- Owning the Jesus Brand
- Jesus: Identity Crisis
- Jesus and Brand Culture (or Jesus in Brand Culture)

By Elsie Rempel and Dan Dyck, based on reflections of the discernment team and Patty Friesen’s *Reclaiming Jesus*<sup>TM</sup>: *A five session study and prayer guide*, inspired by Colossians 3: 12-17 (© Mennonite Church Canada, 2009).