Cecil Thompson

Omega Graduate School

Dr. Cathie Hughes & Dr. Curtis McClane

November 14, 2023

1. **Introduction**. At Omega Graduate School, students in the DPhil/PhD program are expected to demonstrate an appropriately high level of scholarship, educational maturity, and an ample array of the skills needed to be able to make contextual adjustment in the application of their professional backgrounds and callings, through the mechanism of Christian missiology, toward the goal of bringing about positive social change into communities anywhere.

To that end, this course, LDR 810-42 Cross Cultural Dynamics, is invaluable in the way that it lays down the groundwork for the exchange of positive ethnographic qualities across cultures for human advancement. As such, this course forms the connective tissue between the main body of OGS courses, in the area of Christology, on one hand, and in that of research and applied sociology, with emphasis on community building, on the other hand. For that reason, I would like to see SR 968 Sociological Methodology moved up to Core 3 where it would serve as a proper logical prerequisite-course for LDR 810-42 Cross Cultural Dynamics, which is at present, being offered in Core 5, but which, I think, would be more properly situated in Core 4, just prior to LDR 801 Ethics in a Global Society.

At the inception, in order to get the course up and running, the professor used the residency component to lay out the schema while giving meaning to the course in the way she expects it to unfold for us through the four assignments. This segment of the course, now delivered through the “distance learning” venue, serves the introductory purpose just as well as the traditional on-site residency component would have without the added logistical nightmare, especially for students with serious health issues, or handicapping conditions.

The intent of LDR 810 is pretty much spelled out in its title—“Cross Cultural Dynamics.” For, in that title lies the précis of how one could best utilize “cultural intelligence” and “language adjustment” to turn an otherwise culturally infertile ground into a rich responsive soil, fit for the transplantation of new progressive ideas and cultural growth.

1. **Personal Growth**. From the residency week of this course (LDR 810 42), it became clear that one of the pieces of instruction being imparted was the idea that students are expected to come to the knowledge that one of the most important test for the viability of a research topic is for the would-be researcher to be able to establish that when something really big happens to cause disruption, behind it there will always be an equally big reason for the disruption. And with that, I had long ago settled it in my mind that surely God was not really worried that man’s Tower-project would eventually allow him to breach the gates of heaven.

Therefore,prior to this course, I used to think of God’s decision to disrupt mankind’s “Tower of Babel” project as simply God’s way of putting man’s uppity behavior in check. But now, I am beginning to see that, even though the Tower-story is felt by some not to have actually occurred, God’s “most” important reason for putting it into the mind of the writer (Moses), was because it was meant to serve as an important exemplum for mankind, going forward.

While working my way through the assignments, in LDR 810 42, I had a couple of eureka moments in which I was able to see, for the first time, that, in addition to the fact that God was making a point about man’s overreach through the action He had taken in the “Tower of Babel” story, God was making the more important point that, along with the gifts He had given to man, were also guardrails of self-restraint. The first point is that man, who alone among all of God’s earthly creations, was given the unique gift of a God-like “creativity”—which is a part of the reflected image of God’s nature in man—must also realize that he, too, may at times need to shackle some of the God-like qualities he possesses. Secondly, God had given man alone the gift of a high-level “language” that is, itself, a catalytic force second to none. Thirdly, God had created in man an incredible potency to achieve and excel at whatever he elects to do whenever he comes together as a “social unit” (as a society) with a common tongue. So that, when a large group of people (a society) with highly specialized skills, who also possesses a common language, chooses to use the creative aspect of God’s nature in him, man’s potential to achieve anything is infinite.

The whole world had the same language and the same words….

The Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the people had built. The Lord said: If now while they are one people and all have the same language, they have started to do this, nothing they presume to do, will be out of their reach (Genesis 11: 1-6 NAB).

When we contemplate God’s revelatory statement about the nature of man, here, in this biblical text, we have to reckon with the fact that man’s ability to accomplish anything, even the impossible, through “language”, is not a truth that is just lately echoed, perhaps unwittingly, by writers like Mary Shelly in her creation of an independent-thinking *Frankenstein* monster, but it is an ancient truth that was long ago stated in the Bible with a particular *telos* in mind. The reason is that in the “Tower” story, God is being instructive about whether man, like Himself, should consider that sometimes it may be necessary for him (man) to harness the creative God-nature that resides in him. In the 1940s, it was Oppenheimer’s assemblage of a society of specialists who spoke the common language of E=MC2.

Today, almost entirely out of the power of language, man is at that place where he is having to reassess the need to “fragment” the language of his twenty-first century “Tower of Babel” project—the computer language of artificial intelligence (AI). God’s decision to separate mankind into separate smaller social units by the means of language “fragmentation” is instructive. The question is, did man even get the lesson God had sent him through the Tower story about his (man’s) need to restrain AI?

Essentially, language has always been the “Holy Grail” of everything. Language was very probably the “unitary principle” of everything that Albert Einstein spent his last days searching for in vain. And here, too, the core principle in “Cross Cultural Dynamics” is language.

1. **Reflective Entry**. I worked out of the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) for thirty years, from September 1981 to July 2011. During that time, I taught three years of high school English under my New York State English teacher-certification. For the remaining twenty-seven years, I taught Mathematics under my state high school certification in that subject. At a certain point during my tenure as a math teacher, in the city, it was expected that I would study some form of computer science so that I would be better positioned to help prime students for entry into the rapidly advancing age of computer technology. I did a few courses in the computer science. I studied the languages of Logo, Basic, and Pascal.

The computer language of Logo was restricted almost entirely to the teaching of high school geometry. And, as I suspect, from ideas my daughter (an architect) shared with me, it may also have been used in more advanced ways in the fields of architecture and engineering.

The language of Basic, however, was taught to STEM and other high school students who showed special aptitude for computer science, in general. While Basic was taught as the stepstone to the more advanced computer languages like Pascal, Assembly language, Fortran, C, C+, etc., for college students majoring in computer science, it was truly a *bona fide* pathway into the world of artificial intelligence. By this fact, then, the language of Basic became the way to help provide high school students with a practical sense of how mathematics can be applied in real world situations.

I began to teach the students how to write simple programs in Basic and to integrate the appropriate formulas so that they can operate within the system of “machine language” commands like, “Go-to,” along with the use of “String variables” that would enable computers to solve problems and provide the results in English. The students were also taught to include in their programs appropriate “Sprites” that would pop up whenever the computer posted the correct solution.

For instance, I recall writing a program to find quadratic “roots”. What was amazing about it was that as soon as a quadratic equation was put into the program and was “run”, the computer would spit out the “exact” answers, regardless of whether or not the answers were “real”. In other words, there was no rounding-off of “irrational,” “complex,” or “imaginary” numbers. And, immediately upon the display of the solutions, we would see and hear a rocket blasting-off. That was definitely one small example of the demonstration of machine intelligence back then.

In effect, back in those days, math teachers were actually teaching high school students to have their computers translate human languages into their “machine language”, and then, respond back in the languages that formed the basis of their “reasoning”. What this means is that man has, for quite some time, been using “artificial intelligence”, only that, now that we have become more reliant upon it for many day-to- day activities, we have learned to take it for granted. Today, if I have the question, “Who was the first astronaut to orbit the earth?”, I might ask Google or Siri, “who” would then sort through immense shelves of data banks of information in a split second, to come up with, “Yuri Gagarin.”

So, when God decided to break up the human population into smaller cultural groups, by fragmenting the single language into multiple languages, He did so because of the danger man posed to God’s creation on earth when all humans spoke a common tongue. But was God also foreshadowing the dilemma lurking in the shadows of the creative destructive potential of AI? If man were to give AI a common tongue that would allow it to communicate with one another across cultures, what would happen then?

1. **Future Expectations**. I believe that the promise of the OGS doctoral program is that the student will succeed if he completes all the requirements over time. In my case, there are many drawbacks.  For programs such as the PhD/DPhil program at OGS, one needs good health and time. Although I have neither, I am determined to succeed. I can remember that in 2017, during the on-campus residency part of the program I got sick in one of Dr. Ward's classes and had to leave the room so as not to be completely disruptive. In recent years, I have passed out a few times but that has gotten less frequent, or I may even have gotten over that part of my illness altogether. I have not passed out since 2019. Despite the fact that I now have complications from a recent prostatectomy, and the ongoing issues with the multiple myeloma, I have had and still have very good medical care and I have come a long way. In addition to these facts, I am also doing overtime—in terms of age. I do not have the stamina I would like to have. I have tons of doctor appointments and I get Chemo once per month. But regardless, I believe that God wants me to complete this program and I will continue to put one foot in front of the other as long as He continues to pinch hit for me. Right now, I am permitted to go at a slower pace than the other students because I have on file an ADA exception with Dr. McClane.

After all,for several years, Michelangelo chiseled away at a chunk of stone, until one day he raised the mallet in his right hand, with no chisel in his left. He brought down the mallet and deliberately struck the right knee of the anatomically near perfect human shaped figure that stood there in place of the block of marble he began with. As he struck the piece he had just culled out of marble, he said the words, “Now speak!”

1. **Conclusion**. I found LDR 810 to be an invaluable course for students as they begin to move closer toward meeting the OGSs’ expectation by utilizing the tool of “language adjustment” in Christian missionary work through applied sociology. In this way, this course narrows the breadth of the student’s sense of direction and focus as he or she strives to remain on track to demonstrate the core Christian virtues, which are to

. . .preach the gospel to the poor; . . . to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, . . . recovering of sight to the blind [and], to set at liberty them that are bruised, [t]o preach the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19 KJV).

The Genesis story about mankind’s preoccupation with the building of a tower up to heaven, the subsequent action God took against it, and the reason God took the action He did, are generally thought to be an actual event that explains why the single culture of man was broken up into multiple-cultures with multiple languages and dispersed into different geographical locations around the world. What I can say is that, based on archeological evidence that I, myself, have personally seen, there was an actual “Tower of Babel” that had collapsed in ancient Babylon. And, while we might debate *ad nauseum* about all the valid reasons why God took the action He did, there is one undeniable message about how man’s God-given gift of unstoppable inventiveness could be man’s most deadly *hamartia*. Can you contemplate how a “Ping” from a tower, four thousand years ago could be a signal to twenty-first century man to tell him not to give AI a single language that spans all cultures over the length and breadth of the globe?

As a New York City high school teacher of mathematics, from 1981 to 2011, I taught two computer languages (Logo and Basic) to my students. Through the use of these languages, students were able to get the computers to solve mathematical problems up to the level of quadratic equations, as well as experience in a real sense the power of artificial intelligence at an elementary level.

I believe that language is the “unitary principle” that links everything and every event in the universe. If that is true, language must also be the cantilever that bridge the gap between and among cultures. Although I have been retired from teaching for more than a dozen years, an important part of what I have become is “teacher” who will continue the work at what I have been trained to do. The only difference, now, is that my having taken LDR 810 Cross Cultural Dynamics has given me a fresh new appreciation of the power of language. Further, having done this course has re-ignited my sense of Christian responsibility to those who are more needy than I.