

Inter-cultural Bible Reading Experience between *Buenas Nuevas*, Bolivia and Rogate [Agape] Bible Study Group in Pekanbaru Indonesia

NOTE: the exchange was conducted via e-mail and not through bible4all.org website due to difficulties in using the website. Rogate (Indonesia) group leader asked our group (Bolivia) to post their part of the dialogue on the website.

Group profile (*Buenas Nuevas* [BN] Bolivia):

Hello!

We are the Bible study group from a church called *Buenas Nuevas* in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. *Buenas Nuevas* means Good News. Bolivia is located in the heart of South America and Santa Cruz is the most important city in the eastern part of the country.



Various parts of Bolivia have their own distinct cultures and customs. There are three main areas in the country: *Altiplano* (high plateau of the Andes), the valleys, and *El Oriente* (eastern lowlands). Santa Cruz has people from all over Bolivia because of migration. The differences between these regions can be seen in such simple things as clothing and food. The traditional clothing of Santa Cruz is very simple linen white or khaki loosely fitting shirt and trousers for men and white dress for women though few wear these types of clothes except in a special celebrations. Many traditional customs of Santa Cruz are disappearing because of migration from other parts of the country.

The climate in Santa Cruz is usually hot and very humid, especially in the summer. This kind of climate makes the society more open and expressive than in the cold mountain regions of the west. There people tend to be more reserved and closed. People here in Santa Cruz also talk about two main groups that exist in Bolivia – *camba* (people from Santa Cruz region) and *colla* (people from the mountains or ‘west’). There are great cultural differences between these two groups and people do not always get along. *Buenas Nuevas* church reflects the multiculturalism of Santa Cruz and has a number of different cultural groups in it.

Buenas Nuevas church is a traditional and conservative evangelical church. This means that we sing hymns accompanied by harmonica and piano and not *alabanzas* or worship songs. *Alabanzas* are worship songs usually accompanied by guitar, keyboard, drums, and often loud singing, clapping, and dancing. Most Bolivian evangelical churches sing *alabanzas* but we prefer hymns. Our church was started 38 years ago by the parents of Brother Rurik and few other brothers and sisters. There was a need to start a church of this denomination in Santa Cruz. The church started in a house and moved to its current location about 25 years ago.

We love our church and have a dream that one day the church would be full of people. Now we have 120 members and about 85 people attend on Sunday morning service. In the recent years we have had some problems with getting more new members. It could be our conservatism but we believe that we have something pure that is worth holding on to – traditional doctrine and faith in the Bible as the Word of God.



We have also gone through some very difficult experiences as a church in the past year. Our Pastor Elia died and shortly after that the wife of one of the elders died. We loved pastor Elia - he was very straightforward in the Word. We are now praying and looking for a pastor and meanwhile the elders are in charge.

Our dream is to have a pastor who can lead the congregation, and fill the church without compromising the doctrine. Unlike in some other churches here in Bolivia where people need to sign a commitment to the church, in *Buenas Nuevas* we want to serve out of love and not make people sign papers or make people do things.

This is what we say about our church and why we come here: “I come to the church because I love the Lord and want to come here and be part of the fellowship.” “I come here for hymns and meditations.” “I listened to Christian radio and wanted to find a good church. I started praying and then came here – the church is not too loud or rowdy.” “I come here because the teaching is focused on the Bible and not people’s ideas like in many other churches. This is my church and my second home.”

Buenas Nuevas church is very Bible focused. We teach children to sing songs and memorize the Bible. We believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is important to base beliefs and doctrine in the Bible. Bible gives direction on how to act and live.

Our church is mostly middle class but about 10% of the people are poor and nobody is very wealthy. Most people in the church live by day or by month.

People participating in the study:

Brother Dyk (not in the picture) is 54 years old and married to Margarita. He has three adult children. Dyk is electrician and a soldier. He is one of the four elders of the church and teaches in Sunday school. His hobbies are reading, bonsai trees, fishing, and hunting.

Sister Martha is 61 years old and married. She has three children and works by making handicrafts.

beth, Martha



Brother José is 40 years old and married to sister Mayorling. They have two boys. He has been in the Buenas Nuevas church for 1.5 years. He works in a private multinational company. He says that he has strong and traditional character.

Sister Mayorling is 38 years old and married to José. They have two boys. She is an auditor by profession.

Sister Elizabeth is 50 years old and originally from the city of Tarija (southern

Bolivia). She has one son but does not have work at the moment.

Sister Olga is 62 years old and married. She was born in Santa Cruz and works in the family real-estate company with her husband Jorge. She has five children

Brother Rurik is 37 years old and married to Carmen. He has a master's degree in Business administration. He likes to play football.

Sister Carmen is 25 years old and married to Rurik. She has a master's degree in public relations and works in a pharmaceutical company. Her hobbies are cooking and eating.

Brother Esa (not in in the picture) is 36 years old and married to Mia. He has two children. Esa is from Finland (Europe) and doing research for his doctorate and working as a missionary in Bolivia. Esa likes to play sports and learn new cultures and languages.

We are eager to hear from your group,

Buenas Nuevas church

Bible study of John 20:1-18 with transcription and summary (BN, Bolivia)

Introduction:

Introduction and prayer was given by brother Dyk

Brother Esa explains that tonight we will only read John 20:1-18 and we will have a dialogue about the passage. Esa asks if everybody is in agreement that we will record the study and then will put in the internet site to be shared with the partner group. Everyone agrees and the study begins.

The participants are first asked to read the text individually in silence and after that sister Olga reads the text using Reina-Valera translation (similar to KJV in English) which most of the evangelical churches use in Bolivia.

The study:

Brother Esa: (after Olga has finished reading the text) thank you sister – John chapter 20. What is this text about? (silence) What are your thoughts, what happens in this passage?

Sister Olga: about the resurrection

Esa: yes, it is about resurrection

Brother Dyk: but it does not say that he rose...

Esa: it does not...what does it say?

Dyk: it is about the evidence that he resurrected...that he wants to show to church...

Esa: yes...

Dyk: and the other thing is...inside the tomb things are organized...and the other thing that I paid attention to is that they do not recognize Christ...

Esa: yes, yes...

Dyk: it may be because their eyes were full of tears...brother...because when somebody is crying it is difficult to discern well...

Esa: may be...

Dyk: what is this about...it's about resurrection but it does not say that he resurrected...

Esa: the text does not say that, does it? Yes...

Esa: ...(silence)...and others...what do you think about this passage? ...are there other things that you have seen here...or things that have touched you?...*(silence continues)*...or something that you specifically do not understand...or...?

Brother Rurik: How is it that the other disciple is not named...?

Esa: ...yes, who is the other disciple and why is s/he not named?

Rurik: it is not named...it is the one who writes...

Dyk: it is John

Esa: the one who writes does not name himself...

Dyk: yes...

Esa: *(silence)* here we have Peter and John perhaps...

Dyk: what gets my attention is that it says here...wait since I am ascending...that I ascend to my Father...and do not touch me, he says...

Esa: yes...

Olga: it says so because he has to first live...

Dyk: yes...here is the detail...he should not be touched...

Esa: this is difficult...

Dyk: Why does it say, 'do not touch me...?'

Rurik: and it says that he is about to ascend to my Father and to my God...

Dyk: ...and it says 'and go to my brothers'...closely in another gospel it say servant but here brothers...

Rurik: ...and also when Mary saw him and recognizes him she says Raboni...

Dyk: it means Rabbi...

Esa: yes, yes...usually it can be said so...look at verse 16 "She turned toward him and cried out "Rabboni!"...so it is not the same as Rabbi...it is something different, is it not?

Silence...

Esa: What role would you have played if you had been within this story? ...*(silence)*... is there a person that you can identify with in this passage? *(Silence)*... let's say we have here Mary Magdalene, Peter, the other disciple... and also Jesus and the angels...*(silence)*...

Dyk: there are other things...Mary sees the angels and Peter and John do not see them...

Esa: yes, it is so... why?

Brother Jose: they do not see them...

Dyk: yes but Mary is outside but the disciples enter the tomb first...I think that Mary was outside but he inside...and then Mary entered...

Esa: what do you think...why do the angels only appear to Mary and not to the disciples?

Silence...

Rurik: in chapter...verse ten the disciples returned to their own...so Mary did not see them and stayed alone...

Esa: if we, for example, look at the text...it is Mary who first returns to the tomb...early in the morning...then she enters the tomb, right? "and she saw the stone taken away from the tomb"... "and then she ran and went to Simon..."

Dyk: so she did not enter...

Esa: it seems that she did not enter and... why did she suddenly leave the tomb? What do you think?...(silence)...so it seems that she comes to the tomb, saw that the stone and been taken away and then she takes off...(silence)...

Esa: it is possible...Mary comes to the tomb when it is still dark and saw that the stone had been taken away...and who had taken away the stone?

Dyk: he has resurrected...

Esa: but Mary does not know it yet, right?

Dyk: yes...

Esa: perhaps she was afraid...because who could move a stone of that size? In those days...let's look a bit history...people went into tombs at times to rob them...and perhaps she was afraid...and that is why she did not enter the tomb...and then she takes off and tells the disciples to let them know and then they start to run toward the tomb to see what had happened. Peter and the other disciples come to the tomb...have you noticed in verse 4-6 where it says that they run together but the other disciple arrives first...

Olga: so...the other disciple arrives first before Peter...

Esa: yes...and when he arrives to the tomb...

Dyk: he did not enter...

Esa: he did not enter...there are many strange things, right? Then Peter enters...and what says, for example verse 5?

Olga: "He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in ..."

Esa: so it is...and then...

Olga: He saw the linen lying there...

Rurik: it is as if...

Esa: we can see here that here John or the other disciple...in verse seven speaks about the grave clothes...quite a bit about the linen and grave clothes, "as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. ⁸ Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed." And why did the other disciple believe? For seeing the grave clothes but Peter did not, right? What do you think?

Olga: brother, I am confused; explain to me who returned with these linens?

Esa: yes

Dyk: surely for the way they were placed...it must be for that reason...could be that he sees the opening and it is empty.

Esa: must be so...

Dyk: because he had gone through all...it must be so because there is no other explanation...because when Lazarus rose he came out with everything...

Esa: yes...that is very well observed...remember when Lazarus came out of the tomb...

Dyk: he came out wrapped...with the wrapping...

Esa: but here we can observe that there is no body...only grave clothes are left...

Esa: the wrapping stays alone...

Olga: what do the angels mean? One at the feet and the other at the head...

Esa: what do the angels mean?

Dyk: angels are messengers...they have come to explain to Mary...

Esa: to communicate to Mary...yes...

Dyk: I think that the placement of angels is not important...but tell me if I am wrong...

Rurik: and in verse 8 it says that "...the other disciple had come first to the tomb; he saw and believed" what did he believe? Was he speaking that he believed Mary or...?

Esa: what did he believe?

Dyk: that he was resurrected...that he was raised...that is what he believed...he believed it because...

Olga: but brother said that it may be that Mary...

Dyk: Mary had to go again to see that he was resurrected...she did not yet believe...but the other one believed for seeing the strips of linen...

Esa: hmm...this is how I see it...if Mary had left after having seen that the tomb was open and that the stone was moved...maybe she thought that the chief priests or thieves had robbed the body of Jesus Christ...but we can see that the author wants to show that the priests or thieves had not robbed the body. Had that happened the linen would not have stayed so well placed...it is kind of like evidence that the body of Jesus was raised...from this perspective also look at the place of the angels: one at the feet and the other at the head...this shows that God is in control...it speaks about resurrection...God is in control and the thieves have not robbed the body of Jesus. This is one way of explaining the place of the angels. It's like the angels are around the linen to demonstrate that God is in control and it is He who has done it...the thieves or the priests have not robbed...grave robbing was common in those days...so say some scholars about this passage...

Olga: it says here in v. 9 brother, "Because they had not yet understood the Scripture that it was necessary that he would raise from the dead"

Esa: exactly...it was necessary, right?

Dyk: the Holy Spirit had not yet come and that's why they did not yet understand

Rurik: they did not believe...

Dyk: they did not yet have the Holy Spirit that gave them understanding...

Esa: yes... and then...Mary was outside crying and saw the angels...then in v. 13 "and they said to her, why do you cry?" why do the angels ask these questions?

Olga: that he would return with them...that is how I understand it...that is how I more or less understand it...that he would return with them...

Esa: yes...

Dyk: in other words...

Olga: that he would return with them...

Dyk: that there are no reasons to wail...rather there should be joyful...like they say to you rejoice, do not cry, right?

Olga: because he lives...

Dyk: because he lives...so do not cry...rejoice...

Esa: that's right...

Dyk: that is how I see it, right? Why do you cry when he is risen?

Olga: He is with us now... but it says here in nine 'because they had not yet understood the Scripture that it was necessary that he would raise from the dead'

Esa: they had not yet understood the prophetic aspect of the Scripture...about the resurrection of Jesus Crist.

Rurik: the disciples believed but not yet...

Esa: we have the other disciple who believed for seeing the well placed linens...but Peter did not believe yet...and Mary is confused and crying...even though she sees the angels she says "...they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have placed Him"... so what is Mary focusing on? It seems that her spiritual eyes have not yet opened, right? She really does not understand what has happened, right?

Sister Mayorling: she wanted to know why...why have they taken him away?

Olga: brother, in verse 17 it says "Jesus said to her, Mary"

Esa: Jesus Christ is next to her...but she does not understand. She does not know who it is...she did not recognize Jesus Crist...

Olga: but says here "she turned around and said Raboni"

Esa: but look at verse 15 "Jesus said to her: women why do you cry? Who are you looking for? She, thinking that it was the gardener...she said: Sir, if you have taken him away, tell where you have put him and I will take him" and then what does it say?

Olga: Jesus said to her: do not touch me because I have not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brothers and tell them. I will ascend to my Father and your Father and my God and your God."

Esa: one question for everybody...have you ever had a situation in your life when Jesus has been right next to you...but you did not recognize him? A situation when Jesus is right here (shows next to him with his arm) but you are looking at other direction...and he calls your name...and tells you why are you crying?

Dyk: hmm...so...

Esa: That's what the passage refers to, right? I have my situation...my eyes are on my problems or I am sad...but Jesus is on my side...

Olga: He is at my side...

Esa: That is how it is like sometimes...

Dyk: We forget...

Esa: Have you had a situation like this?

Mayorling: so it's about knowing that the Lord is with us...that's what it means?

Esa: Could be...

Dyk: More than anything, I would say that we forget...because of problems, difficulties...most of the time we think that we are alone though it is not so. God is always here. I remember one situation...this afternoon I was thinking about this problem...I could've been burned...and died...one possible accident. I remember when God protected me and God was here...many years ago.

Esa: yes

Dyk: There was a gas station where I used to play...a gas station with a pump...and there was a motorcycle there. And it was placed like this...there in the tank. And I saw a documentary about an accident where a person burned like this...

Esa: Yes

Dyk: I was thinking about this and God said when I was praying...or that God...I realized this. I was 18 years old when this happened and now I am 54 years old...and that God protected me.

Esa: Yes...so it is...

Dyk: it is like the gasoline burned (he talks details about the gasoline)

Olga: so we can see that there is a God who is powerful

Dyk: God is protecting even when one does not know it...even when we have gone away from God...

Olga: God has a purpose for our life

Esa: Do others have similar experiences? That God was with you and you...yes sister...

Sister Carmen: When I lived with my brother...we only had two rooms...and there were computer cables on the floor. We did not realize that it had rained at night...but when we woke up the next day the water was up to knees. And in that desperate moment we take our things...shoes were swimming and there were sticks all over...and then we remembered that the cables were there...and thank God nothing happened.

Esa: God had protected you, right? Other experiences that you want to share...

Olga: brother, I want to...

Esa: yes sister

Olga: it was in...when an airplane fell on the stadium...in the *calle independencia* [local street]...what year was it?

Dyk: it was 1976...

Olga: about that time...and I left on a small bus and I felt that I needed a jacket...and I left with my clothing and all with my sister-in-law and we came to the place where the cables were...cables that are called high voltage cables...on the ground and...brother...about 20 people had died when they had stepped on the cables and had walked over them. It was a horrible sight...burned, burned and people burned alive...and we had walked over those cables with my sister-in-law...and we reached these creatures and we brought them to a medical center and saved them. And people had stepped on the cables and had been electrocuted...died and electrocuted...and when I went and saw how people were crying because there were the people...because they had been waiting for kerosene there...

Dyk: there was a gas station there...

Olga: and there were many poor families with their children...and see what a tragedy it was brother...and also there had been boys walking from school and there was going to be more tragedy. There was a group of students playing ball and a plane went down brother...and the plane broke into two hitting a swimming pool...and many young people died who were playing. And brother I want to say that I stepped on those cables and all...in order to reach those people and nothing happened to us...

Esa: How terrible...

Olga: and why did it explode? Because the airplane carried fuel...

Esa: yes

Olga: it was a plane that was going to USA...

Dyk: airplane of fuel...

Olga: and the mothers were crying and shouting...

(participants discuss more details about the airplane)

Esa: it is almost time to finish...one more question...how does this text speak to us? (silence) is there something we need to do? Does it encourage us or strengthen us? We have more questions and we can continue next week... are there things that have touched you or something that God has spoken to you into your heart through this word? Is there something we should do as a church or as individuals? (silence) I think that we are in agreement that Jesus Christ is next to us all the time even though we are looking the other way...and sometimes we forget. He is with us even though our understanding is not perfect...even though Mary does not understand; Jesus Christ has not left her but is next to her encouraging and asking her and then he says "Mary" – he calls her name...Jesus Christ also calls us by name...each one of us...and he is next to each one of us even though we are at times confused. I have been confused many times but Jesus Christ has never left or abandoned me...that is how the passage speaks to me...He is at my side...

Olga: He is our protection...

Rurik: sometimes in the simplest things, for example, if I want to stop a mini-bus and it did not stop, one rebels for arriving late but one does not know if the mini-bus would have had an accident. In simple things that happen to us...and maybe later on we understand.

Olga: this is what we do not consider...

Esa: and we can see here that the angels already knew and God knew what had happened to Jesus...Mary had not understood but Jesus still appeared to her but not to the disciples, right? Only to Mary...a woman... a sister...are there other things that we can take from this passage?

Rurik: it's a passage about faith...

Esa: a passage about faith; in what sense?

Rurik: basically, we have to have faith in the promises that have been written...

Esa: and few verses further Jesus Christ appears to all of the disciples but Thomas. He is not there and wants more evidence...this passage is about faith and encourages us to have faith...

Mayorling: I have understood and learned from this passage that the Lord is next to us...the same promise is for our time as well. I did not see it before but now I realize it that Lord is on our side...

Dyk: for me...that Christ is raised, it is a fact...it is so for God and also for me...and all of us have been raised with Christ. It is a fact to me. It happened and it is certain...

Esa: so it talks about Christian hope...

Dyk: I did not think about it that way but it is about hope...to me it is as if it had already happened

Jose: why did Mary not recognize Jesus?

Esa: it is interesting...he thinks that it is the gardener... what do you think?

Dyk: it may be because of the tears...cannot see well...and it is also early...

Esa: she was crying...

Dyk: crying and full of tears...that's why she did not recognize...

Esa: in chapters 18 and 19 it says that Mary had seen the crucifixion of Jesus...so Mary thought that it had all ended...Mary did not understand, neither did disciples, that Jesus had taught about the resurrection...but Jesus did not reject them or try to find other disciples...he stayed with the disciples and first appeared to a women...Mary Magdalene...anything else you want to share...

Rurik: in verse 17 it also says that it is important to take the message to others...

Esa: so it says...

Rurik: He has resurrected...

Olga: as children of God we have to give good news to others because it is His command. That is what the Lord wants to say to us and that we are going to speak His word to all creatures that do not know...

Esa: yes...

Dyk: we as believers need to say that He is resurrected...because many times, I for example one time asked my neighbor in my neighborhood: Do you believe in Christ? He said certainly, as one is supposed to believe, and then I asked him if he believes that Jesus has resurrected and he said that this not.

Esa: yes...

Dyk: that means that he does not believe...

Esa: maybe he had heard...

Dyk: yes he only believes culturally...so we as believers have to give evidence that Christ has really resurrected and that we have also been resurrected with Him. We have to demonstrate new life, this change, a new birth. He who was dead now is resurrected and has transformed us...there has been a transformation in us...

Esa: it is so...

Dyk: we should do it...

Esa: are there other things or shall we finish? Ok brother, you can pray...

Rurik: Father God, we want to thank you for the life that you have given to us and who are present here tonight...thank you for this opportunity that we can have this study. Thank you Lord that you help us study, have a dialogue and see the different viewpoints of your word and understand more of your word. Thank you blessed God that you love us forever and that we have seen things that we have not seen first or second time we have read this passage. Thank you for the life of the brother and of all of us that have participated...and we want to give over this meeting into your hands and we also pray that in the next meeting we can learn new things. Thank you once more for health and understanding and help us put into practice the things that we have learned...in precious name of Jesus we pray...Amen.

Rogate [Agape] Bible Study Group in Pekanbaru, Indonesia
Bible study of John 20:1-18

1. Preface

The members of Agape Bible Study Group meet in every two weeks in the house of the members. Normally our meeting consists of Bible Study, Prayer, Discussion, and Singing. After the Bible Study it is continued to have light meal or snack and friendly conversation. The meeting is conducted from house to house. This means that every member has a chance to host the meeting. Normally our meeting is attended by 12-16 adult members and 5-7 children. Usually children just keep quiet during the discussion but they actively join the prayer and the singing.

1. Pastor Batara: Our Bible Study for tonight is taken from John 20:1-18 and let us read the passage one person one verse. (...Reading the Passage...)

From our reading we know that the passage contains the resurrection of Jesus which is indicated by the empty tomb (John 20:1-9) and the appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-18). It is clear that Jesus was put into the tomb when he died after the crucifixion on the cross. And now on the third day, his tomb was empty. The point of question among his disciples is who took his body? Nobody takes Jesus' body because his body was not stolen; rather, he was raised by God the Father. This means that we believe in Jesus who lives, the Lord who is not died. He is the Lord who is able to hear our prayer, and who loves to help us. In short, he is the winning Lord. Now, let's discuss this text as usual so that we obtain the message for the sake of our faith, love, and hope.

2. Ms Purba: Based on the verse 1 it is said that it was still dark, in the morning, when Mary Magdalene went to the tomb of Jesus where she saw the tomb had been removed. Is this the reason why at the moment in our place many believers visit the cemeteries in the morning, still dark, around 04.00 o'clock when we celebrate the day of Jesus' resurrection every year?
3. Pastor Batara: Yes, you are exactly right. What we do on the day of Jesus' resurrection every year is based on what Mary and other disciples did when they visited the tomb of Jesus. In the cemetery we conduct the service: singing, prayer, and listening to the sermon extended by the Pastors. By visiting the cemetery we are reminded of our death as well as

of our resurrection. So, being believers we are not fear of death any more. This means that our death is not the end of life but it is the bridge into the eternal life.

4. Ms Desri: From this text it is clear that it was Mary Magdalene, a woman, who first visited Jesus' tomb. This means that a woman has played an important role in finding out Jesus' resurrection. The same in the Church, we can see that women are also actively involved in ministry. Being the family of God, we are as the children of God, men or women, have been given spiritual gifts to carry out the ministry. My point is why in our culture, that is Batak culture, the women still keep silence? When we have cultural functions we can see that only men who have the rights to speak. How should we face this reality?
5. Mr Siregar: I think we should follow the reality wisely. In terms of culture, it has been regulated by our ancestors that women keep quite. As far as I observe, it is okay. I think, our ancestors must have the reasons for that. It is their wisdom that we should follow. While in the Church, both men and women are welcomed to do their ministry because the Lord gives the permission for the growth of the Church. So, let's follow each part according to its own regulation.
6. Ms Gultom: In my opinion, 20 years ago our Church does not have any woman Pastor or woman Elders. All the ministers were men. But now we have both male and female ministers in our Church. This means that there is a change even though I do not know the reason for the change. So, my point is what is good for our society right now. Is it still good for us to see the women as passive participants, just listeners, in any our cultural function? I invite our Pastor to give his opinion on this issue.
7. Pastor Batara: Culture and Church is different. But in our daily life, yes it is true, we follow both the voice of Church and the voice of our Culture. Being the members of the Church, we always follow the voice of the head of the Church, that is Lord Jesus Christ. So, in the Church we do not follow the expectation of human beings but the expectation of God. Our obedience to God's voice is always based on our understanding. In the past, we thought that it was right only for men to carry out the ministry. But now, our understanding has developed in which we see that it is also right theologically for women to involve in Jesus' ministry. While in our culture, I also agree with the involvement of women to participate actively in speaking and in making the decisions. The point is have we been ready to accept that? If we have not been ready yet. We need to discuss this in our society.

8. Mr. Aritonang: When I read verse 9 it is said that the disciples still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. What does this mean in our daily life as believers? Is it possible to follow Jesus but at the same time we do not understand some of his words?
9. Mr. Pakpahan: It is true that the passage tells the story how the disciples were confusing when they did not see the body of Jesus in the tomb. Both Peter and the other disciple (verse 3) were running to the tomb to prove the report they received from Mary Magdalene. Even, Mary cried and told the angels in the tomb, “They have taken my Lord and I do not know where they have put him” (verse 13). So, since the beginning the disciples were not aware of Jesus’ resurrection.
10. Mr. Napitupulu: The same, it is still not easy for other religious followers to understand that we believe in Jesus who was raised from the death. They always repond, “how come is it that Jesus had died and then was raised”?.
11. Ms Hutagalung: Yeah, from the passage, at the end in verse 18, Mary obviously tells the disciples that she has seen the Lord Jesus Christ. This means that Jesus has spoken to Mary in the tomb that he is alive. Further, Jesus who tells her, “ Go to my brothers and tell them, “ I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (verse 17). So, it was Mary who was first asked to tell the story that Jesus has been raised and he will return to God our Father. It is amazing, isn’t it? Woman is the first proclaimer who saw that Jesus’ tomb was empty, and she also the first preacher who preached that Jesus was alive.
12. Ms Desri: Please see, why mary who was asked by Jesus to tell about his resurrection? Look at verse 10, “Then the disciples went back to their homes, but Mary stood outside the tomb crying”. Mary was the only one who kept remaining in the tomb. She was a woman but she had courage to be alone in the cemetery. Compared to our present time now, most people do not have enough courage to be alone in the cemetery because people are scared of ghosts. But Mary, she was crying in the tomb for she was so sad. In her sadness, Jesus came and talked to her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for” (verse 15).
13. Pastor Batara: Yeah.., we have come to understand that it is not easy to understand the resurrection of Jesus. Even, the disciples at that time did not understand that reality. So, in the inability of the disciples to understand of Jesus’ resurrection, they went home and Mary

cried, it is Jesus himself who explains to Mary and other disciples that He was arised and is alive. This means that our Lord is a loving Lord who helps us to understand who he is. From our ability it is difficult to understand God. That is why Jesus was sent into this world to be with human beings and lived out as human beings so that humans beings understand him. If the Lord has declared himself that he is returning to his Father in heaven it would be clear to us that he is coming from heaven.

It is our faith affirmation that Jesus was raised. He loves his children, men and women equally. Paul said that in Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

So, let's close our discussion by prayer.

Response I: BN, Bolivia to Rogate, Indonesia

Dear partner group (Agape Bible Study Group),

Thank you very much for your commentary on John 20:1-18. We read your report and noticed many interesting aspects as well as some differences compared to our reading report.

To facilitate the discussion on your reading report we reread the passage (John 20:1-18) and we reminded ourselves of the main points in our own commentary of the passage. Then we distributed photocopies of your commentary and read and discussed your report.

Here are some of the aspects of our discussion: first, many of us were trying to imagine what life is like in Indonesia, since only one of us had visited Indonesia (and that was 20 years ago). One brother imagined that most people are covered from head to toe since Indonesia has such a large Muslim population. Perhaps this is why there is so much emphasis on Mary and women in your reading report. To another person in our group, the focus on this one aspect (Mary) seemed like you have not gone very deep in your analysis whereas another person in our group thought that you are concentrating on one aspect of the text because of your particular concern on women. It also seems that it was the women in your group who spoke the most and desire liberation. You also say that Jesus gave the responsibility to talk about the resurrection to Mary and in this we agree with you. It is the responsibility of all believers to talk about the resurrection of Jesus.

One of our group members felt that there are no similarities between us and you. He stated that you have a different culture and different values and we cannot talk about you. That you cannot think the same way as we do. We have equality between men and women. You do not value women and hold women as second class citizens. He also added that what comes to resurrection, it is a clear-cut issue. There cannot be any variation regarding it. Participation to the ministry may vary – for example, you may not value the attitude of Mary Magdalene or other women. However, in the text we can see the fact that has happened – the most important thing is that Jesus had died and now is resurrected. That is the central message of the text.

Another member of our group pointed out that there seems to be two different opinions about the role and value of women within your group. It seems that among your group, one brother says that traditional roles and customs regarding women should be followed. On the other hand there are others, particularly the pastor, who says that the old ways need to change and to some extent have. Also, that there needs to be equality because we are one in Christ. That is how it seems to be after we read your commentary. This is very interesting that there are two different opinions in your group and it seems that it is a woman in your group who raises this question. And evidently she wants to have a discussion regarding this issue.

A lady in our group commented that it seems that in your commentary there is a lot of focus on the culture and then also on the Word of God in the latter part. She said that cultures pass away with people, and so do women, but the Word of God remains forever. It seems that the male disciples in the text still doubted but that Mary had believed even as she was crying since she had seen the grave clothes nicely folded. A lady in your reading report says that Mary was alone --- and she also says that women stay quiet in their culture but here we can see that Mary was the first evangelist.

Another of our group members was surprised that you have not commented on many things in the text, such as the angels and other things that we have discussed in our study.

Finally, it seems from your reading report that your church has opened ministries to women but the participation of the women is limited in the society.

To conclude, we have some questions to you so that we can understand you and your report better. Perhaps you can answer some of the questions and clarify for us some things in your commentary:

QUESTIONS:

1. Do the women have place within the church to minister? If so, what are the ministries available to women? What roles are permitted to women in society?
2. Are there differences in opinion regarding the place of women in ministry as it seems in your commentary?
3. Are all who are part of your Bible study group Christians or are some unsure of their faith? Are Bible study members new Christians or been Christians for a long time?
4. What is the social status of all or most members of the study group? Or how are you situated in the Indonesian society?
5. Are you (or other Christians in Indonesia) facing persecution for the sake of your faith in Christ?
6. What does the word 'Bekanbaru' means? The name of the place or something else?

In Christ,

Buenas Nuevas church group

Response I: Rogate, Indonesia to BN, Bolivia

Dear brothers and Sisters,

First of all, thanks a lot for your response on our Bible Study discussion. We have read and discussed your response. In the following, we would like to answer your questions.

1. Yes, the women have the place to do ministry in our Church, that is, the Indonesian Christian Church. This is the Batak Lutheran Church in which its head office in North Sumatera, Indonesia. Its members are around 300,000 persons and most of them are Batak tribe. Our Church started women ministry around 25 years ago in which women are ordained as Pastors and elders. This means that women can do Holy Communion, Baptism, Pastoral Ministry, and so on. Women also can become the Bishop in our Church. So, in terms of ministry there is no difference between man and woman in our Church.

In society, women in Indonesia also have the same right with men. We used to have a woman President, that is, Ms. Megawati, 2001-2004. Now we have women as minister, governor, regent, legislator, prosecutor, and so on.

However, in the cultural functions, according to Batak Culture, women are not allowed to speak out. They just keep silence. The same in the families, the roles of women in many cases still below their husbands. It is the husband who is regarded as the head of the family, and all his dependent members, wife and children, are submitted to him.

2. We have no differences regarding the role of women in ministry. What we would like to say is that if in Church we are able to share the responsibilities, women and men, why in our cultural functions and in our households we are not able to share the equal status. Women still feel that in the households they just follow their husbands' decisions that make them frustrated because many husbands are not good in terms of behaviors in our society.
3. All of us in our Bible Study group are Christian since our childhood. By coming to Bible Study Group it is an indication that the members are good people who wants to know the Scripture deeper. But we need to let you know that the outsiders, especially the Westerns, say that the Batak Christians follow two sources in their life, that is, the Gospel as the voice of God, and the *Adat*, customary laws, as the voice of the Batak culture. We live under these two voices, and that is the fact of our obedience.

In addition, we would like to inform you that the Gospel brought by the German missionaries to the Batak land in Sumatera in 1861. This means that Christianity in our tribe is still 150 years.

4. Regarding the social status of our group, we can say that we are just ordinary citizens. Two of us are bus drivers, three of us are small business man, three of us are teachers in the primary school, one of is lecturer at the university, one of us is a labor. Five persons from 16 members are university graduates, and the rest just finished high school.
5. Being Christian in Pekanbaru which is dominantly Moslem city we would like to say that physically we are not persecuted but mentally and psychologically we are persecuted. This is the reasons: It is really difficult to build a Church building in our place. We have to ask permission from the society surrounding and usually no Moslem people will give the permission. In short many Christian have to build their Church buildings without permission. This situation has brought many conflicts between Christian and Moslem in our place. Another persecution is that in our work we are always ignored and avoided in increasing our positions because our religion is Christian. So, mentally we are full of depression in our work because only the Moslem friends who are promoted to higher positions.
6. Pekanbaru is a city in Sumatera. It is the capital of Riau province. The meaning of Pekanbaru is New Market.

In the following, I would like to mention several impressions from our members to your response on our report.

1. One brother in our group said that seemingly most of you never go out from your country especially to Asia. This is indicated by the fact that you asked our situation living in Moslem country. You are living as majority Christian in your country but we live as minority Christian in Indonesia. How is it living as a majority in Bolivia? Do you have any difficulties to practice your faith?
2. One woman in our group asks the question about the role of woman in ministry in your Church and society. How is it? In addition, in the household, who is the head, woman or man?
3. Another brother said that you tend to look at us as a primitive people. Is that true? The reason is because you asked about our faith for being Christian in your question no 3.
4. Another woman in our group said that your response is clear in terms of gender. The brothers in your group seem to be difficult in understanding the suffering of women in our

place. But the woman in your group is able to share her sympathy and understanding to our struggles in Pekanbaru. She said that “the cultures pass away with people, and so do women, but the Word of God remains forever.”

5. What is the meaning of Buenas Nuevas?

Finally, thanks again brothers and sisters in Bolivia. Our prayer is always with you.

Yours cordially in Christ,

Rogate Bible Study Group in Pekanbaru.

Response II: BN, Bolivia to Rogate, Indonesia

Dear brothers and sisters in Pekanbaru Indonesia,

Thank you for responding to our questions. It has helped us understand your group and experience better. As you mentioned in your response, we have little or no experience of Asia. This is also why it is very difficult for us to understand and imagine what it is like to live in your culture.

We would also like to start by clarifying one important thing. We do not see you as primitive nor was it our intention to doubt the truthfulness of your commitment to Christ. Our intention was to inquire whether the group members are new Christians or mature Christians. We now understand that.

Another aspect that was at first difficult to understand was your commentary on social status. This is because in Bolivia if somebody is ‘ordinary’ or considered ‘ordinary people’, it often means that they are living at the edges of the society. Nevertheless, by reading about the professions and education of your group members it became clear that this is not the case. It seems to us that you have people from various social classes and some are well educated with university degrees.

Response to your questions:

Living in a country where there is Christian majority: we do not experience persecution or discrimination because of our faith in Jesus Christ. Although some older members of the group remember the time (about 30-40 years ago) when protestant Christians were harassed by Catholic majority, this is not the case anymore. We can openly worship, build churches, and talk about Jesus even in our work places. Some within the group thought it is possible that the current religious freedom may be limited sometime in the near future. However, right now we are enjoying full freedom to worship. This is why it is also difficult to understand your situation in Indonesia. Some of us were very sad to hear about the persecution that you are experiencing in your country. Discrimination in the work place and society must be depressing as you mentioned. Also, not being able to construct churches must be frustrating. One of the ladies in our group wanted to encourage you to spend as much time as possible in prayer and in the study of God’s Word. She said “much prayer – much power”.

Women in the church, society, the family: In our society women have freedom to participate in all functions and activities of life. However, as we understand from the Bible, there are certain limitations to women’s participation within the ministry of the church. For example in our church women can participate in all ministry roles except being pastors or elders. Women also do not practice pastoral ministry or minister the Eucharist. We see this as a clear biblical teaching based on for example 1 Tim 3:1-5 and Tit 1:5-9 (Tit 2:2-7 only refers to age and experience). In this aspect we are different from you. Also in our current study of Acts we have seen that Paul organized male elders for each church. Despite the fact that we have differences in this respect, we do see that you are sincere Christians because you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and He is the one who sees the heart above all.

We are also happy that women are able to participate in ministry within the church though there remain challenges within the society and cultural functions. One man in our group commented that it is great that women take responsibility so that men do not have the sole

responsibility and (he added jokingly) that then men are not the only ones to receive the blame when things go wrong.

It seems that the women hold lots of responsibility in your church and that there are more women than men in the church. Is it so? In our church we have a bit more women than men and one woman commented that women are generally more courageous than men. Some in our group also thought that the lack of men in your church may be partly because all ministry positions are open to women.

In regards to home, it seems that here in Bolivia women are more independent and have more freedom than the women in your culture. One member of the group told that for example when a visitor comes to their house his wife may tell him to go and buy a soda from the store for the visitors and he will do that. Nevertheless, we do hold that the man is the head of the household according to biblical teaching. However, we do not think that this means that the woman is tied down or has no place in societal functions or that she obeys all of the wishes of her husband. One man of the group also reminded of a passage in the Proverbs and other sections of the Bible which indicate that women have independence especially if the husband does not live a godly life.

Buenas nuevas means ‘good news’ and refers to the good news of the Gospel.

Thank you for your prayers and for this exchange that have helped us to understand how Christians live in Indonesia. We also have prayed for you especially that you would find strength and courage in the middle of your difficult situation in Indonesia.

Many blessings in Jesus Christ,

Buenas Nuevas group, Santa Cruz Bolivia.

Response II [and conclusion]: Rogate, Indonesia to BN, Bolivia

The Second Response to Buenas Nuevas Bible Study Group, Bolivia

Dear brothers and sisters in Buenas Nuevas group,

Warm greeting from the nice, developing, and hot city in Pekanbaru, Indonesia.

First of all, our group kindly asks your forgiveness for being late to send our response to the report of your Bible Study. Secondly, please apologize me personally for wrongly inform you regarding the name of our Bible Study Group. Our Bible Group name is Rogate; so it is not Agape. Agape is the name of our Church, while the name of our Bible Group is Rogate meaning “to pray”. On June 16, 2012 we will celebrate the birthday of Rogate group. It was established in 2002. This means that it has been 10 years old. We will go one day for retreat for celebrating Rogate group. The plan is we are going to the elephant’s conservation for the retreat which is surrounded by palm oil plantation. Please pray for us as Rogate members. We are so happy to have you our brothers and sisters who pray for us. In spite of the fact that we are minority in Indonesia, we have you as our family in God who pray for us, as we also pray for you always.

In the following I will write down our discussion on your report:

1. Before we discussed your report, we read first the text John 20:1-18 twice. One sister in our group said that you did the Bible Study very good. The reason is that after you explored the text you also applied the message of the text for the daily life. Especially, some of you shared their horrible experiences and how God was with them. The sister confessed that your experiences have comforted her in her personal struggles.
2. One brother said that you mention how Jesus prohibited his disciples not to touch him because Jesus does not to the Father yet. However, you do not discuss why Jesus says so to his disciples. It seems to this brother that Jesus is not the real Jesus. Is that the reason why we are not allowed to touch or to communicate with spirits of our ancestors? Or is there other reason?
3. One sister in our group said that you mention in your discussion that the thieves might rob the body of Jesus Christ. This information is quite new to her. She just wants to know what is the purpose of stealing the body of the death people at that time? Is that for magic business as happened in Indonesia or for sold?
4. Another brother comments on your report that it is important to tell others that Jesus was resurrected. Dyk, for example, gives an example how he asked his neighborhood about his belief in Jesus’ resurrection. This brother said that it is easy to ask such question among

the Christian brothers. However, it is really difficult to ask such question to non-Christian friends in Indonesia. He agrees that for being Christians we should share the good news about Christ. Many Christians have been physically attacked for witnessing Christ in Indonesia. Do you have any suggestion what should we do in telling non-Christians about the resurrection of Jesus?

5. Another brother said that the reasons why Maria and other disciples did not believe that Jesus was resurrected when they arrived in the tomb was because the Holy Spirit does not come yet on them at that time. In short, Jesus dead, the Holy Spirit did not come yet; this means that there is no God with them. So, according to this brother that it was reasonable to the disciples that it was not easy for them to accept that Jesus is alive or resurrected. This brother kindly asks your comment on his opinion.

Impressions:

Rogate group are thankful for your fruitful discussion on John 20:1-18. We obtain valuable messages from your discussion. Especially we are touched by your finding that we are always forget that God is next to us at all times. When we face problems we tend to cry and look for help outside God. However, God knows our cry and problem, and he calls us by name. He is next to us. He is never far away from us.

You discussed the Bible Study constructively. However, one of brothers said that Dyk seems to be very active, as active as the Pastor. So, he thinks of Dyk might be the vice-Pastor or he might be an elder. On the other hand, another thus brother said that Jose is less active. He made speech only once. One sister kindly asks you: Is it true that in your group men is more active than women in making comments? In our group, women seems to be more active.

Finally, thank you very much for your sharing. God bless you all.

Pekanbaru, Indonesia, 29 May 2012.

Rogate Bible Study Group

Final Response: BN, Bolivia to Rogate, Indonesia

Many greetings and blessings from Santa Cruz, Bolivia and thank you very much for your reply and comments on our Bible study. We have learned many things through this exchange and we also appreciate all of your prayers on our behalf. We also want to assure that we will continue to pray for you. Your situation in Indonesia has reminded us of the many freedoms that we enjoy here in Bolivia and also that our brothers and sisters in Indonesia need much prayer.

As we reviewed the commentary that you made of our Bible study, we noticed many important things, and we also hope to answer some of your questions that you had. Here are some of the observations and comments:

It was interesting to note that you considered one of the important aspects of our study the fact that we not only studied the passage but also applied it to our lives. For us application is actually one of the most important parts of our Bible study – we study, we share, and we always try to apply it to our lives. Without application, the study does not touch our hearts and lives. That is why we consider it essential.

As to your question why Mary Magdalene was not allowed to touch Jesus according the passage, we had the following suggestions: One sister said that it was because Jesus had a glorified body after resurrection, not an ordinary body. Perhaps it was also because Jesus had just recently come out of the tomb and this changed later on when Thomas was allowed to touch Jesus; a brother commented that the text only says that Jesus has not yet ascended to the Father and that Thomas a few verses later is allowed to touch Jesus, so touching in itself cannot be the reason. Another brother mentioned that in the original language the phrase may mean ‘do not hold on’ instead of just touching. Mary and the disciples had a task to give witness to the resurrection so there was no time to stay holding on to Jesus. We all agreed that this is a difficult passage to interpret.

You also mentioned that we are eager to witness about the resurrection and that you would also like to learn more about how to witness. We all agreed that your situation is different from ours and also very difficult. It made us first of all reflect whether we would be witnessing about our faith with as much enthusiasm and courage if we lived in your situation. We also want to commend you for your desire to share Christ with others – we will continue to pray for you. Some brothers and sisters commented that it is a mark of a true believer to have faith in Christ in such difficult circumstances as you are living. This is something that truly touches our lives! One of the older brothers and sisters remember a time in Bolivia (about 40-50 years ago) when some Catholics used to throw rocks at protestant believers. They did share the gospel with others, neighbors and coworkers, but always trusting that the Lord will do His work – they just gave testimony. It was very difficult time and they said that prayer was the most important weapon that they had. This gave them courage and helped them stay strong. This is the way that the church grew and took form. Nevertheless, this kind of harassment did not last for a long time and we are now free to share Christ with others. One sister wanted to also remind that true prayer from the heart is the most important thing. Then there are other practical things that can be used in sharing the gospel, such handing out small tracts (small pocket-size papers with Bible verses and/or testimony). These tracts can be given to neighbors and coworkers and also help talk about Jesus’ resurrection. Also, it is possible to give Christian music CDs or tapes or clips from the internet. There are a lot of things how you can share Christ creatively and discreetly. There are also usually available Christian books for adults and children that can be used to share. There are probably also materials in the internet in your language.

As to your question whether men or women are more active in our meetings. Both men and women are active and share in our meetings and it probably depends on who is present and who wants to share. Generally it is quiet equal. Someone in your group also asked whether brother Dyk is a vice pastor. He is not a pastor but he is one of the elders in the church.

Finally, we would like to share few things about this exchange with you. One sister wanted to say first that keep walking the walk of faith and be strong in Christ. We will continue to pray for you. Another sister mentioned that we are all amazed how your small group has faith in Christ and that you want to have a prayer retreat. The sister also mentioned that it is probably 5 years since she attended a prayer retreat the last time. This is a great challenge for our church as well – to have more prayer retreats. She wanted to bless you, encourage you to stay strong and move forward in the strength of the Lord. We were also amazed that you have a desire to share Christ despite the difficult situation that you have in Indonesia. One brother reminded that it is during persecutions that true Christians are revealed from the false ones. He also said that church usually grows during times of persecution because it makes us pray and depend on the Lord more than usual.

We have also learned many things about your culture and the situation that you live in. It has opened our eyes to a different reality very different from ours. Though we have some doctrinal differences, in the most important aspects we believe the same thing. That faith in Christ saves us. One brother commented that there are reasons for different Christian denominations and beliefs. For example, here in Bolivia some groups like to play really loud music in their church services – they call it *alabanza* or worship music. In our church we play more traditional hymns and worship the Lord in a way that is more calm and quiet. We do not like such loud and expressive music. However, we are all Christians and believe in one Lord Jesus Christ and are therefore brothers.

Many blessings to you – Buenas Nuevas group, Santa Cruz, Bolivia