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## Theology, Athletics, and Job Hunting

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### Choosing a Discipline

[1] In my early teens, almost thirty years ago, the in thing was athletics and I became a devout admirer and reasonable practitioner. As many young athletes I dreamed of excelling in an athletic discipline. Nevertheless, and again as in most cases, first I had to figure out what my particular strengths are, and then choose the discipline accordingly. There are different kinds of speed, elasticity, endurance and physical predisposition which always enter the computation. It is true that many sprinters are good long jumpers, and that most athletes in technical disciplines are initially good at all kinds of throws, but most sprinters and throwers have to specialise in one discipline. It is also true that, with age, seasoned short-distance runners move to middle distances. After a year I decided that my chances for glory lay in long jump. I also ran 60 meter and 100 meter sprint, and 4 x 60 and 4 x 100 relays. I just about tried triple jump, high jump, and short hurdles.

[2] What does this sports autobiographical introduction have to do with the topic implied in the title of the essay? What is its connection with finding a job in theological education and in the Christian domain in general? It is true that sport terminology is prominent in Paul, but this biblical topic, however dear and close to my mental concept, will be left aside. I will return to the imagery of the above paragraph in due course with the hope that its application as an analogical key may provide helpful hermeneutic insight.

[3] This essay is a case study in searching for a job. It is illustrative and incidental in that it describes one person's quest for employment. It is not representative for two reasons. One is that the writer is not an average North American (or British) recent doctor or a theological educator. The other reason why the essay might not be representative is because the writer does not geographically reside in either North America or the UK and does not have access

to a network of informal contacts or to formal networks important to this process. Thus the essay is neither comprehensive in scope nor exhaustive in addressing all relevant social, educational, doctrinal, denominational, and other factors that might conceivably be relevant.

[4] The aim of the essay is primarily to amuse. Secondly, the writer hopes that readers involved in the same or similar search might be stimulated in a heuristic manner and might develop further ideas appropriate for themselves. Finally, a personal cathartic experience of the exercise of writing the essay should not be overlooked either.

### **Long Jump and Short-Distance Running**

[5] It all started about a year ago. My employment was coming to its end. It happened sooner than I expected and in circumstances which did not allow time for making preparations for the next step. The timing was unfortunate. Nobody starts to look for a job at the end of April by her or his design. The jobs for the coming academic year starting in the coming September/October are already taken, and few advertised openings remain. It is a plain fact that there is little time for the woodenly structured and potentially carefully scrutinised search process, followed by interviews and the offer of contract (if it happens). However, even if this is done with speed, most applicants cannot move to take the post in such a short time.

[6] Once I started actively looking, I looked wherever I could. I contacted a number of friends, acquaintances, former fellow doctoral students, and colleagues and co-workers, perhaps some forty of them, and this personal approach brought some interesting ideas and I followed up a few of them. I checked Christian and non-Christian papers and magazines for job opportunities, but the most fruitful source was the Internet. After several weeks of searching I was satisfied that I had found all web-sites that were to be found. I bookmarked appropriate sites and ordered them according to the frequency and intervals in which they updated their data: daily, weekly or monthly. There are some which seem erratic and unpredictable, and I had to check those every once in a while in order not to miss deadlines.

[7] As for duration I considered all options, from the not-so-attractive one or two-year positions through the very acceptable three or four-year posts to the tenure track positions. Geographically I considered first English-speaking countries: USA, Canada, the United Kingdom (and actually all of its constituent parts: England, Scotland, Wales, N. Ireland), Republic of Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and even a country in Oceania. Although English is chronologically not my first language, I could boast B.A. in English language and literature, a professional qualification to teach English in my country, a TOEFL score of almost 100% years ago, some twenty theological books translated from English, Master's degree and a Ph.D. completed in English speaking countries, publications in English, work in institutions in which English was the language of instruction and administration, lecturing, preaching, and correspondence in English. As if considering English-speaking countries was not enough, I expanded my horizon to English-speaking institutions in non-English speaking countries: Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Finally, I kept one eye on certain countries in the region of Southeast Europe (Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia) where I could make use of my native language. In all I reckon that I applied for at least eighty sundry positions.

[8] The most logical option for employment to consider, and the first area to probe, was teaching. This is where my athletic predispositions were strongest. As with temporal and geographic considerations, I spread my net wide. The only ones that I excluded right away were the Ivy League academic institutions; I was fully cognisant of my limitations. Apart from those, I targeted just about all possible potential employers, irrespective of whether they were a Christian or a secular institution. That means that I considered colleges, seminaries, and universities. As for confessional affiliation, I considered denominational institutions, those loosely affiliated with the founder denomination, inter-denominational, and non-denominational ones, as well as ecumenical outfits. Within the Christian theological range - which I tend to describe in gradual progression from fundamentalist, conservative, evangelical, "centre-left," liberal (the series of designations which some purists might find too unsophisticated but which for me adequately and simply reflect relevant distinctions) - initially I excluded none.

[9] The primary area of teaching in which I was interested, the one in which, as in long jump years ago, I could demonstrate best results and expect best prospects and results, was New Testament. My C.V. included a Ph.D. from a reputable institution and famous supervisor, doctoral dissertation published in a prestigious series and a few other publications, and experience in teaching, supervision, curriculum development, and research. I was short-listed several times, but never reached the finals. Although most of the positions I applied for were full-time positions, I also applied for a small number of adjunct positions which presupposed a certain geographic location combined with limited travelling. There were also a few tutor/mentor positions over the internet mostly, but not exclusively, for institutions in the States, where the trend of on-line education is spreading among theological institutions. However, the one successful shot I had was with a British institution who accepted me as their adjunct mentor of New Testament and related subjects. My joy was short-lived though: apparently there were no applicants for "my" subjects for that academic year!

[10] As time progressed I identified a few other areas which seemed worth pursuing. One was missions/missiology. I spoke with a famous missions scholar and asked for ideas. On another occasion I applied, and was short-listed, for a mission and evangelism position. In the application I pointed to the fact that I have had first-hand experience in missions from the receiving end, know the region fairly well, have published an article on missions, and am able theologically to reflect on the topic. I also expressed strong conviction that I could refocus and that my possible transfer to the area of missions might be a fruitful and stimulating one. On one particular occasion a then colleague of mine, a missions specialist, had applied for the same position as I, but I was short-listed and he was not. Needless to say, I had to deal with guilt feelings. In any case, this discipline was a dark horse in a race, and I took it as such. An interesting vacancy for a regional manager for a large mission organisation combined an attractive concoction, among others, of experience of living abroad, international mission work experience, cross-cultural communication.

[11] There were openings which announced that the ability to teach other subjects would be an asset. If they wanted a generalist, they would get a generalist! My offering included disciplines such as general linguistics, translation and teaching a language (I speak a few Slavic languages and understand a few more), English and American literature (I had to interrupt my second Master's in Literature due to moving out of the country), general

humanities, including Greco-Roman culture and history (these were the background stuff of my doctoral dissertation), general Bible subjects, assorted practical theology interests, some sociology (I have flirted with social-scientific approach to the study of the Bible ever since my doctoral studies), and all garnished with wide interdisciplinary interests. First hand experience in Communist and Post-communist Europe was a bonus. I behaved like a top quality international sprinter, to revert to the athletic metaphor, who can do a 60 meter dash, 100 meter, 200 meter and often 400 meter. Or a hurdler (100 meter, 400 meter) who can also do straight sprint and make excellent results.

### Decathlon

[12] But only the decathletes cross narrow confines of rigid disciplines. So, and still in the academic arena, I built on my varied experience and applied for some administrative and executive positions: registrar, academic dean, director of student services, director of international programmes, principal, rector, director of house of studies, deputy warden. I could appeal to my experience of designing, overseeing, and directing academic programmes, international fellowships programmes, work as liaison with a UK university validating a course of study. I had carried various institutional administrative duties which involved interaction with students, international contacts, organisation of visits by visiting lecturers and research scholars, communication, staff oversight, drafting reports and proposals, editing, decision making, co-operation on budget preparation and strategic planning, organising, leading and assisting with conferences, deputising. I also had direct responsibility for library administration, staffing and annual budget, as well as overall oversight of acquisitions. Part of my experience included involvement in international bodies, which helped me to become acquainted with issues of scholarships, accreditation, registration, validation in European post-communist countries, and developments in idiosyncratic national legislatures. I had ample opportunity for international academic contacts and have developed a network of contacts in theological institutions in this area. For several institutions experience with students whose first language was not English was important.

[13] Academic teaching and administrative and executive openings, like jumps and sprints, are just some disciplines I tackled. Another discipline, and still in the academic theological realm, was the area of post-doctoral research fellowships in Bible, New Testament, or Theology. I found out that there is a variety of them on offer, but often there would be requirements which could not be overcome. Among them were age limit, especially upper ("not older than 30 years of age", for example), holding a permanent post at an academic institution in a certain country, being a citizen of a certain country or countries, being a young and promising scholar or being a seasoned, experienced scholar of international renown.

[14] A breakthrough in applying for these fellowships happened as I realised that it is sometimes beneficial to exercise creativity by not only combining areas such as theology and literature, but also linguistics, semantics, sociology, history, missions, ethnic studies. In an interesting different development I also applied for several fiction-writing fellowships. This initiative stemmed partly from my educational background in literature, but to a larger degree with my years-old inclination to express myself in writing non-technical, fiction literature.

[15] Any decathlete has favourite disciplines, disliked disciplines, and those in between. From the very beginning I cautiously entertained the possibility of investigating the

possibility of pastoral ministry. I had been ordained in my denomination and for one year had served as a pastor in a church with about one hundred and twenty members. My ministry involved preaching on Sundays and teaching on weekdays, overall oversight of all church services, and leading youth meetings. In addition I was involved in church administration, presided over the church board meetings, and provided pastoral care through visitation. So now, in addition to sounding out my own home denomination, to this purpose I contacted two international, let us call them associations, of congregations who I knew of. In addition, I contacted five or six different denominational personnel departments in two English-speaking countries and enquired about options. Some denominations which I contacted were close to my denominational background, some quite far. Most contacts were made through people I personally knew as I deemed that I would receive a better hearing. This proved only partially true. Some denominational officers whom I contacted without having had previous personal acquaintance proved more cordial or forthcoming. On the whole replies ranged from cautious "we will see and let you know," to the elaborate description of the procedure followed by an inexplicable silence, to the suggestion to contact them in a year or two, to raising the question of compatibility of several theological issues with their respective theology and practice, to a friendly reply that the person was working through the denominational machinery and will contact me if and when funds are secured.

[16] I did not apply to many individual churches because I have had no experience with non-denominational churches. I broke this policy once after having read a job description that I thought corresponded remarkably closely with my abilities, experience, and ministerial aims. In a cordial reply I was informed that the search process was already at an advanced stage. The only two other times when I actually applied for a pastoral position concerned two large international and interdenominational churches in two different countries. Both supplied elaborate church profiles and painfully detailed anatomy of the person they were looking for. I was amused to note that both of those had had the same search two years previously.

### Changing the Sport?

[17] From time to time an athlete decides to cross disciplines in a dramatic way. This may be for some personal aim and benefit such as when a marathon runner stoops down to a 1500 meter race to test his or her speed (as opposed to sheer endurance), although sometimes the only party which gains anything appears to be the spectators. In my one year season of job hunting there were a few competitions when I did exactly this. For instance, a world famous publisher of renowned encyclopaedias once advertised for consultants, but they never replied to my application. A friend pointed me in the direction of the position of editor of a significant Christian newspaper, and after a while I warmed up to the idea sufficiently to be willing to apply for it.

[18] In this regard I tried to make a case for competence in my first language. This included numerous translations, teaching experience, competence in several languages and linguistics, and weight of an earned Ph.D. that could be utilized as analogical proof of academic competence. There were three interesting lecturer/instructor positions which also involved competence in regional literature or literatures. A somewhat related and most intriguing position was associate director at a centre for literary translation.

[19] An interesting vacancy came to my attention in which an organization advertised for a person with ecumenical and interfaith sensitivity, theological awareness, social concern, intercultural experience, international exposure, administrative abilities, and more. The job description was equally vague and flexible, and appeared worth a shot. Although the organization had specific goals and aims, it was made clear that the employed person would be expected to take initiative and develop the job description according to his or her strengths and interests. The two of us short-listed candidates were invited for a several day orientation crowned with the formal interview. I was declared overqualified.

[20] A small number of desperate and/or extremely gifted athletes leave track and field in favor of another sport, such as basketball, football, or another. The reverse is also true: some have successful careers in one sport before they switch to an athletic discipline in which they achieve their greatest results. I have been able to identify a few positions which would have involved such a radical transfer. The key term there was acquaintance with, experience in, a geographic region. For example, the position of a country representative for an international non-governmental organization might conceivably utilise much already existing experience. A certain non-governmental organization advertised for an executive director in its European headquarters. This East European focus appeared in differing incarnations: one was in administering lectureships and fellowships for a large grant-giving institution.

[21] In conversations with friends two other areas of possible employment crystallised. They were certainly within the orbit of the already delineated territory. One was chaplaincy and another involved various library positions. After recurring vacancies and repeated reflection, I decided against pursuing these two areas. In my mind chaplaincies seemed extremely culture bound and denominationally outlined (or on the other hand ecumenically infinitely broad). I was more inclined towards the library but I considered the lack of any formal qualification an insurmountable obstacle.

### Races and Competitions

[22] Once there was an urgent ad for pastoral vacancies in a remote part of North America. In a moment of desperation I sent an enquiry email and the reply came almost immediately. It contained a vivid description of two village congregations looking for a pastor and ended with a question what is the earliest I could be on the North American continent. Despite the apparently great urgency of the situation I decided that grizzly-hunting was not my hobby.

[23] An institution geographically very distant from my place of residence short-listed me and the issue of interview came up. Paying a plane ticket half way across the earth was very expensive, so the search committee decided on a phone interview. After considerable negotiations we found a mutually acceptable time for it. Being a "morning type" certainly helped in this important conversation that took place (and time!) between four and five in the morning according to my time. At one time, after a prompt exchange of emails, forms and documents, correspondence with an institution suddenly and inexplicably went dead. I re-sent my message once and again, and even sent a letter by regular mail. Then after over a month an email came from the institution's registrar informing me that due to civil disturbances she and most faculty had left the country and were in exile in a neighbouring country waiting for the political situation to calm down. This certainly affected the search process, and I could understand that. In a show of well-meaning magnanimity I sent the

registrar a compassionate message referring to my own experience in teaching in a war zone for three years. This instance also reminded me of another place to which I had applied two years earlier. Despite what I thought was a pleasant, polite and well-written application, the search committee never responded. When half a year later I read that the region was struck by a (moderate) earthquake, I had to fight an un-Christian feeling of conviction about the inevitability of divine justice.

[24] Once I applied by email for a three-year post-doctoral interdisciplinary fellowship, sent proposals for two projects (one combining theology and literature and the other theology and linguistics) at a prominent university. The next day, the Head of the Department replied saying that the faculty had already had a meeting and were excited about the proposals and were willing to support the application. However, after checking with the institutional administration the Head found out that there was a stipulation that the awardee should be no more than a certain number of years from the awarding of the Ph.D. Neither the internet nor the hard copy announcement had contained the stipulation but the disappointed and apologetic Head could not do anything about it.

[25] A prominent Christian magazine once carried an ad for an executive position in an educational institution. Although it was not a theological institution, it was a Christian institution and one I knew reasonably well. I sent the usual enquiry message, but nothing happened for over two months. Then the reply came from the chair of the search committee informing me that he had laid the paper aside, picked it up the previous day and remembered that he had not responded. In any case they had already appointed a person to the position. Soon afterwards there was another similar ad for a similar executive position in the same area in the same magazine. It looked perfectly attractive and normal, but the reply to my application disclosed a fluke: Regarding compensation, the institution is offering the position on a voluntary basis with a stipend for housing. Why did they not make that clear in the first place?

[26] Once I did receive a letter with a job offer. Here it is in its integral form: "Perhaps you have heard of me and my international campaign in the cause of temperance. Each year for the past fourteen years, I have made a global tour and delivered a series of sermons on the evils of drinking. On these tours I have been accompanied by my young friend and assistant, Clyde Lindstrom. Clyde, a young man of good family and excellent background, is a pathetic example of a life ruined by excessive indulgence in whiskey, women, and drugs. Clyde would appear with me at the lectures and sit at the platform, wheezing and staring at the audience through his blank, bloodshot eyes, sweating profusely, picking his nose, passing gas with great earnestness, belching loudly, and making obscene gestures, while I would point to him as an example of what overindulgence can do to a person. Last month, unfortunately, Clyde died. A mutual friend has given me your name as a person who is seeking employment. I wonder if you would be available to take Clyde's place on my next tour?" Who can be more sensitive and helpful than a colleague from the office next door who devised this prank?

### **Sport Gear and Equipment**

[27] I try to read the available documentation about the position carefully and learn as much as possible about the institution before actually sending materials in. This is not to say that I

have never sent an application just for ludic reasons, but even then I was determined to pursue it should by some miracle my application be met favourable reply. As a result there were a few instances when additional information ("position particulars") prompted me to give up. One such case was an ad for an executive position for a large international missions organisation with an extremely high salary. Interestingly, this was one occasion when I felt I could make it to the next round. Yet, in the end it was not for me.

[28] In principle I did not apply for positions with expired deadline for the submission of documents. Only later did I realise that in many cases, for various reasons, the institutions extend the period and often receive and consider even late applications. Most potential employers replied promptly or eventually, and some sent notes explaining that they would contact only the successfully short-listed candidates. In which case I had no suspicions about the death of communication between them and me.

[29] An essential element in job hunting, in addition to locating an opening, is sending an application and supporting materials. Many institutions send their own application forms and other materials. Often they prescribe the format of documents to be submitted. In addition, learned societies offer help in composing the dossier, and finally there are plenty of Internet sites, which offer useful guidance. Therefore I will not arrogate to be able to do better. However, I will relate some of my own experience with application materials.

[30] First comes the cover letter or letter of application. By use of narrative this letter elaborated and expanded on the information contained in the Curriculum Vitae. I have drafted three or four templates, and varied them according to the institution: "purely" academic, "denominational" applied academic, administrative/executive, and pastoral. In practice this meant that if applying for a position at a university department, I would omit pastoral experience, denominational involvement, membership in evangelical societies, leadership in the national student evangelical movement, and so on. An application for an executive seminary/college position would emphasise administrative experience and academic networks. In applying for a position particularly looking for an all-round candidate I would balance all and append a rather full bibliography of my publications to show the breadth of interests. More "churchy" applications would expand on the pastoral experience, and make much of the role of Dean of Students and later of experience as national denominational leader.

[31] The same principle of measured selectivity applies to composing the Curriculum Vitae. I found that the easiest way is to have as full a draft as possible, ever updated, from which I would excise irrelevant information and leave important material. For example, here I would always consider which, if any, of my hobbies would advance my case and improve my chances. I deeply suspected that reference to science fiction and film-watching would be detrimental in some contexts, so I often left it out. I also regularly omitted the reference to my membership in Mensa, which I do not consider a proof of anything anyway, in order to avoid the impression of being presumptuous or smug.

[32] The names of referees followed the same rule of thumb. In addition to the inevitable last or current employer, I had a list of referees whom I asked to provide references according to the target institution. If the institution was in the UK, the choice of referees leaned towards the Brits. If it was in the States, I always included one or two Americans.



Denominational affiliation of the target institution sometimes favoured more referees from another background; to target institutions with international aspirations I sent names of referees from several countries; to some target institutions it is preferable to submit references from female referees, and so on. Some referees sent me copies of their references, but not all. In principle I would send copies of references which I wrote for other people to them, but I equally understand that a person asked to write a reference might feel freer to write if the object of his laud or otherwise will not see the reference. A few referees asked me for suggestions what to include, and only one of the people asked for a reference refused to provide it for me.

[33] Some institutions asked me to provide a personal statement of faith. Instead of writing my own document each time, I would append one relatively widely known statement and simply state that I am in agreement with it. This was usually sufficient, as far as I could tell. Occasionally I received a response from the institution that my theological background makes it unlikely that I would fit their theological framework.

[34] Institutional theological emphases and nuances crystallised and eventually developed into definite pointers or hindrances. I discovered, for instance, that a certain segment of potential employers required adherence to certain beliefs which I could not wholeheartedly support. For example, the Pre-millennial view is just one (although to me personally most likely) possible eschatological scenario among several. Further, I had lived among Pentecostals and charismatics long enough not to be able to subscribe to an absolute anticharismatic/cessationist view (although not myself a charismatic by any stretch of imagination). The brouhaha about inerrancy never succeeded in enchanting me sufficiently to convert to it (although I hold a high view of the Bible), and the divisions which this debate creates when exported from the North-American continent to other parts of the globe and imposed on unsuspected indigenous Christians put me off of it. However, for a while I considered that in order to get a job I might sign on the dotted line of agreement with various institutional doctrinal statements and then pretend to uphold them, but eventually managed to fight off the temptation.

[35] Another document that some institutions ask the applicant to sign is the "Lifestyle expectancy." In general, although some may disagree with the policy on philosophical grounds, I have had no major hesitancy in signing the contents of those documents. With one exception which took me some time to decide how to approach it with integrity. One among other social evils which faculty at some institutions are required to avoid is the consumption of alcohol. With all due respect to the cultural context, I devised what I considered to be a fair and honest comment. It went something like this: "Many European Christians maintain that the consumption of alcoholic beverages in moderation is a matter of personal decision and not incompatible with one's spirituality. I come from such a context." In this way I avoided saying that I will or will not drink alcohol if given the job; I just described my position. However, this attempt at being both clever and honest apparently failed to impress the search committees as I never heard from any of them afterwards.

[36] The philosophy of education and the integration of teaching/learning with faith was a concept that gave me considerable trouble. Interestingly enough, institutions, which required this document from me, were all from North America, and I still have to receive one request

from the United Kingdom, or another country for that matter. In the end I took an easy although perhaps longer and more tedious way out. I checked a dozen of these philosophies, condensed, collated, excised, summarised, generalised, specified, and arrived at a document, which expressed my views on the topic.

### Reflections about Results and Strategies

[37] An overwhelming number of my efforts have been fruitless. In a few cases the final score was a draw, that is, the process could not be completed. This most often happened due to unexpected and unforeseen financial constraints. Alternatively the need for additional paid staff was reconsidered on a philosophical basis.

[38] My efforts have been fruitless as far as the ultimate goal of getting a full-time job is concerned. This fruitlessness reified itself in the form of letters (or in smaller degree emails) informing me of unsuccessful application. These usually contained several ingredients: references to a large number of highly qualified (able) applicants (strong field) which the search committee (panel, selection committee, nominating committee) received, the applicant's excellent (outstanding, impressive) credentials (expertise, experience, qualifications, skills, abilities), the advanced stage (after lengthy deliberation, serious consideration, examination, inspecting) of the search process (short-listing, decision about semi-finalists or finalists, interviews under way, extending an offer, acceptance of offer, actual appointment), statement of exclusion ("we are not proceeding with (pursuing) your application"; "I fear that you were not selected" is probably the most compassionate I received, followed by "I am sorry to disappoint you . . ."), expression of appreciation for interest in the position and institution, often an expression of appreciation for the effort involved in applying for the position and for patience during the search process, and finally a wish for success (luck) in further search (career, plans, tasks, calling). A blessing and a wish for fulfilment in ongoing or future ministry were optional. One message included a faith statement professing how I "must be a blessing to those I am currently teaching and pasturing." One institution even thanked me "for having enhanced their search." There were just a few notifications that added a personal note. Typically they fall in two categories: in some cases I had exchanged several messages with the contact person (sending additional information, clarifications or documents), and in other cases I shared the same denominational affiliation with the contact person.

[39] However, the process has been helpful in as much as it enabled me to attain a higher degree of experience and insight. The other benefit has been that it forced me to engage in reflection about what my realistic goals might be in this respect and what are my strengths and weaknesses. Also the extent and the limit of my theological flexibility became clearer to me.

[40] There are several important key developments that enter the game of job hunting. One is the careful monitoring of the policy of Equal Employment Opportunity in some countries. Unfortunately, the advertised preference for visible ethnic minorities, disabled, women, war veterans, nationals, and landed immigrants, diminish the prospects of outsiders. Moreover, the pressure on jobs is not lessened by the tendency away from tenured positions and towards the institution of adjunct lecturer.

[41] There may be further objective facts which negatively influence one's quest for a post in theological education. One is that the "markets" - North American, British, and ultimately just about any other English-speaking countries - are oversaturated with qualified individuals looking for a job in theology. Some advertised positions have attracted in excess of two hundred applications. The highest documented number of applicants for a position I have come across is 550! Related to this is the fact that interest in and possible pursuit of an international candidate, especially for a non-European institution, in a time when the market is overloaded with good candidates, implies additional travel costs. This may serve as a significant hindrance for some institutions.

[42] It must be admitted that surely I have been out-run and out-jumped fair and square on more than a few occasions. There must have been people with more narrowly specialized New Testament publications, superior teaching experience, administration in more prominent institutions, longer pastoral ministry, etc. Admittedly in my applications I have spread my abilities too thin and perhaps applied to some positions which I could not reasonably expect to get, or for which there were more and better qualified specialists.

[43] However, there has been this nagging idea that there might have been other factors involved. Several times previously I had been on the other side of search processes myself and am aware of sentiments and arguments. Some institutions may have preferred its own graduates. Some may have operated as an old boys' club where it was virtually impossible to break in. For some the choice of the applicant was related in an intricate way with the complex interplay involving donors, funds, denominational, or indeed interdenominational politics. Finally, I have also been tempted to entertain the notion that some institutions may have been inspired by the old New Testament adage: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" But surely these suspicions of inside games were totally unsubstantiated.

### So Where have I Ended Up?

[44] Up until now I have not managed to get a full-time job. This is extremely disappointing and frustrating, but not totally catastrophic. Several projects have materialized in the meantime which I have been able to tap. Some have been perhaps denigrating, or at least not up to the expectations of a Ph.D. For instance, in order to get a little income I accepted to do some typing. Other jobs have been even further removed from my areas of interest and competence. A friend of a friend undertook to study over the Internet. However, he was inexperienced in matters of a general educational/academic nature such as correspondence in English, and needed a mentor. In addition, his English left much to be desired, and he figured out that a competent English reader should read his essays after him and polish the style. The course of study is herbalism!

[45] A new translation into my first language needed a New Testament Greek scholar for final theological editing. It is managed by an international institution which does similar translations in other languages. As they conduct translations in other languages and need New Testament scholars on a regular basis to do the editing of back-translations, this paid activity has the promise of extending into the future. Another New Testament translation project is a regional enterprise aimed at producing the New Testament in Bosnian/Bosniac. The main problem is that there is no agreement about the name, let alone about the syntax

or lexicological distinctions of the language (or dialect) in contrast with the neighbouring Slavic languages.

[46] There are two Christian lexicons in the making that might make a significant contribution on the national scene. I have accepted to be the chief theological editor for one, and a major contributor (and a member of the editorial board) for the other.

[47] Having degrees in a foreign language and theology are an asset that I have been able to trade on as well. A mission agency working in the region has a need for some translating. The first, a booklet for a group Bible study, has been finished. The other two are more interesting. They are not ordinary Christian literature, and one is not a Christian book at all. This book, which I am particularly looking forward to as it will be a translation into English, should provide basic insights into the historical, cultural, religious, etc., peculiarities of the area where the mission works.

[48] The category "translation" at this point includes several other projects. One is a ghost-translation from English of two interesting secular books. Another is the translation into English of a section of the national Law about the registration of associations for an international Christian mission which needs to register its activity in the country. Still another idea related to translation, but in a reverse order, as it were, is to translate the text first, and then sell it to a publisher. Thus several years ago I obtained a copyright from a large Christian publisher to translate and publish a book. Due to my previously busy schedule I never accomplished it and might do it now. Further, there is a most delightful text which does not need a copyright and which is worth translating and publishing.

[49] Despite murky prospects about teaching in the country within the orbit of my natural Christian tradition, some adjunct teaching has miraculously materialized. It is in a theological institution which could justifiably be classed as exactly opposite to my theological background and convictions. However, the academic quality of the institution and its excellent reputation in the society and educational circles made it just too good to pass.

[50] The relative freedom from administrative commitments has enabled me to think about writing. The leading thought here is to write on what I want, not what I have been commissioned to write. Over the years I have had to put on the back burner numerous ideas which I am now retrieving and working over. Among them there is a wide variety, including travelogues for secular newspapers, "lighter" articles for Christian magazines, news-pieces, book reviews of short stories, novels, and scholarly books, more serious scholarly articles, literary reflections, editing a *Festschrift*, and writing a semi-autobiographical, semi-fictional book of reflections.

### **New Season of Meetings and Competitions**

[51] Some readers may be inclined to applaud. Others, overworked scholars and educators, may even be tempted to exercise envy for the perceived freedom to engage in projects of personal interest. Is it not most rewarding to be occupied with intellectual pursuits of one's own choice? But before these colleagues do so, just a word of warning: Most of these activities are one-time projects. Once they are completed, void comes and there are virtually no prospects of their continuation. There is no tenure in writing a series of articles. Translating a book is not a way to a sinecure.

[52] Even more serious is the fact that few of these activities bring immediate remuneration now when it is needed. For some this will happen at some indefinite time in the future, as deferred self-gratification, and some will eventually be relegated to the category *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. I undertake many projects knowing fully well that they may, but may not, bring remuneration, and many are outright voluntary larpurlartistic exercises. Only a few are tentative investments in the future: if I teach as adjunct for a semester or two, I might get paid for the second year of teaching. The fact of my ongoing existence is explainable only by reference to God's goodness and miraculous provision for me against all odds.

[53] Back to the athletic image: There is something deeply rewarding in the fact that one can be selected in the national theological team - and that not only as a generalist decathlete or even as the fourth member of the relay team, but as the representative in the discipline of specialization, New Testament in this case. Yet this is actually more a reflection on the national lack of choice than a reflection of international quality. That is why many athletes go to other countries which offer better conditions for training and for strong competitions. Those who stay suffer from lack of just about everything: international exposure, time to write, inability to stay in step with serious scholarship, money for books and scholarly journals.