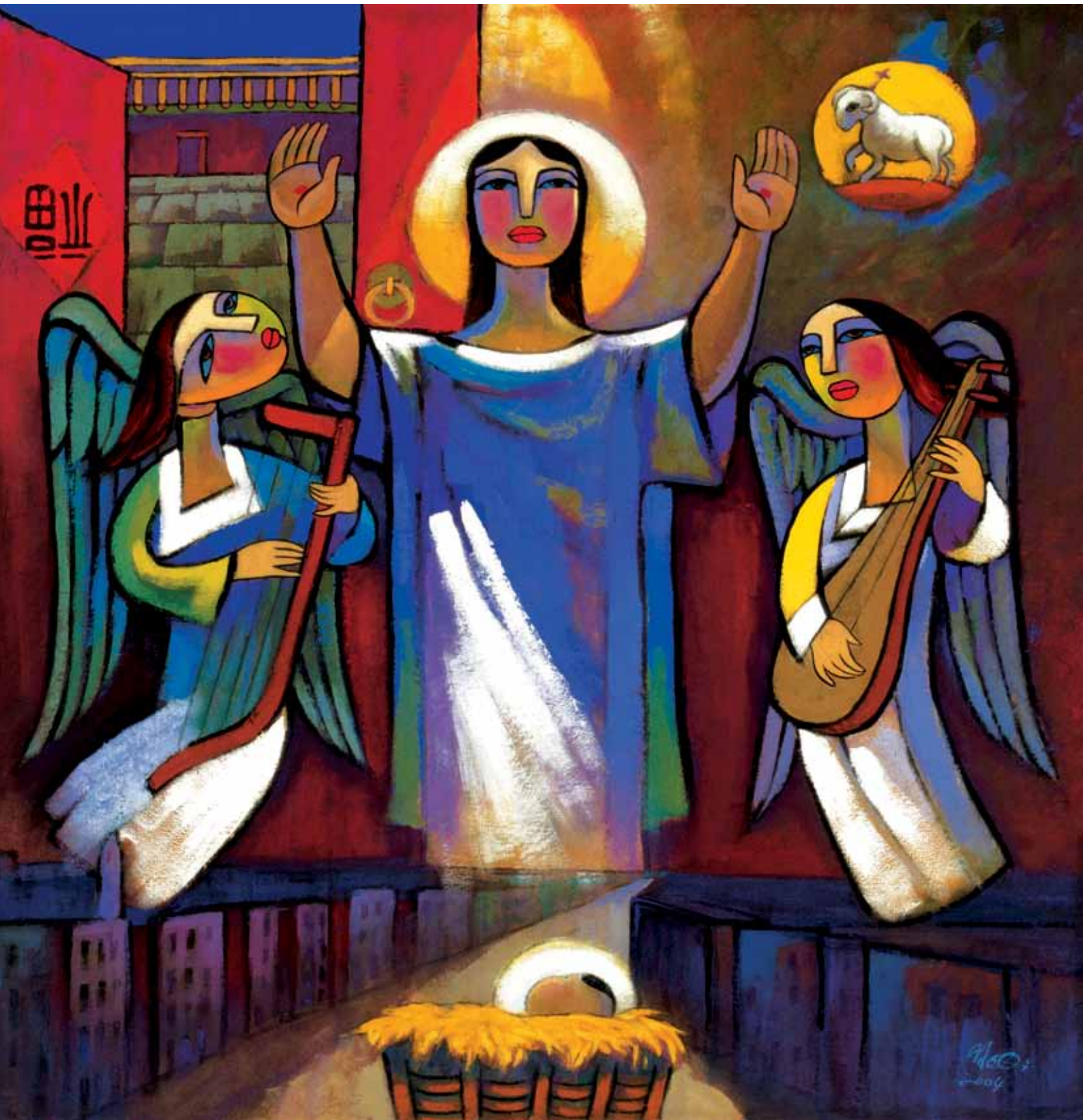




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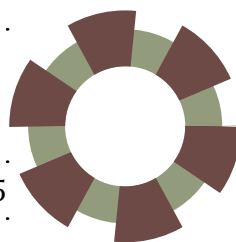
MISSIONROUNDTABLE

THE OCCASIONAL BULLETIN OF OMF INTERNATIONAL MISSION RESEARCH



Christ Meets Culture

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Cover picture: "Messiah" by He Qi © 2014. All rights reserved. www.heqiart.com

The cover art, painted by the contemporary Chinese Christian artist He Qi (何琦), investigates traditional Christian themes (the Lamb of God, the Door, and the Way) in a distinctly Chinese fashion. Note the use of the upside down 福 ("blessing") next to the open door and the position of Jesus as the child in the manger and resurrected Lord in conjunction with the road (道). The play on the Chinese words for "upside down", "to arrive", and "road" can be interpreted to mean that blessings have come through the arrival of Jesus who is the Way. Jesus brings blessings to us individually as we open the door of our hearts to him and to our societies as he dwells in our midst and demonstrates the way we should go. The angels who attended his birth and resurrection remind us that he deserves eternal worship.

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Editorial

Walter McConnell

The last issue of *Mission Round Table* addressed the issue of identity—who am I in my relationship with others and with Jesus Christ. Shaped by many forces, our identity is substantially moulded by the culture(s) in which we were raised and where we live and work. This is true whether we are monocultural or have been significantly impacted by the majority or minority cultures around us. And though it is not accurate to think of missionaries solely as cross-cultural workers since the *missio dei* reaches to people from within and without our cultures, we are cultural workers, sharing the message of Jesus Christ so that it can be understood by people of culture, no matter where they are found.

Many evangelical Christians are, as the opening article suggests, suspicious of culture—particularly popular culture. This is due to its often corrupting influences on the Christian life. By interacting with the biblical text and contemporary scholarship, Paul Woods lays foundations for thinking about culture and our place in it. Of supreme importance is the realization that God communicates with humanity through cultural means, as can be seen in the Scriptures that emerged from and the Son of God who lived in a specific cultural context. Our job as crossers of culture who carry Christ's message is not so much to reproduce a "Christian culture" as it is to allow the gospel to act as salt and light as it transforms and redeems the cultures where we work.

The OMF International Daniel Team was formed to help missionaries develop in their understanding of language, culture, and worldview. Toward this end they have produced two of our articles. "How I lived Among You" promotes living an "incarnational lifestyle" after the model of Jesus and the Apostle Paul who gave up many things for the benefit of others and challenges us to consider what we should give up for the joy that is before us. "Incarnation and Transformation" invites us to examine our own culture along with the culture of the people with whom we work so that we can more humbly and effectively communicate with them. While uncovering aspects of the gospel story that are "immediate good news" may prove attractive to a people, we must never forget that a much broader acceptance of the story is essential before a culture can be transformed.

Two articles have been included to orient us to current and historical approaches to culture. Susan Chapman presents "Three Models of Culture" to help missionaries think through cultural issues they confront. My review of H. Richard Niebuhr's classic, *Christ and Culture*, is an entry point into a formidable conversation on how Christians respond to the culture in which they live and work.

The importance of applying our thinking about culture to concrete examples stands out in Brian Powell's "Perceptions of Christ in Manobo Culture" and Ruth Page's "When Beauty Isn't ..." The first demonstrates that dangerous misunderstandings can arise when a people's worldview attaches greatly different meanings to standard Christian symbols. The second is a more personal realization that though certain aspects of a receiving culture may look good from the outside, further reflection reveals that physical beauty may conceal spiritual decay.

While Hudson Taylor was not the first missionary to put on Chinese clothes when he travelled to preach the gospel, his experience of the way it removed impediments associated with foreigners spurred him on to suggest that

.....

The *missio dei* reaches to people from within and without our cultures, we are cultural workers, sharing the message of Jesus Christ so that it can be understood by people of culture, no matter where they are found.

.....

others adopt the practice and to make it a policy of the CIM. The basic principles that led to this policy are discussed in two articles written by J. Hudson Taylor and D. E. Hoste that distinguish between the key principles of identifying with the people and removing obstacles to the gospel and cultural issues—like wardrobe—that may change with time and place.

Upcoming issues will consider the story that is the gospel and the journey of faith that leads to Jesus. In January 2016 we will look at how gospel story-telling, orality, and the promise of narrative theology impact the missionary task. In May we will turn our focus to the issues people face as they think about following Jesus and how that journey continues through life. I would appreciate hearing from anyone who has an idea for a paper on one of these topics. Please send a brief description or a proposed article that examines the topic from a biblical or missiological standpoint or gives an example of how it is played out in life and ministry. Photographers or visual artists who can illustrate the topics are similarly invited to contact the editor with their ideas.



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✦ The Sound of One Hand Clapping? Scriptural Perspectives on Faith Engaging with Culture

Whether at home or on the mission field, evangelical Christians are challenged by the cultural milieu in which they live and minister. We are purveyors of truth interacting with societies which espouse narratives other than the Christian one, alternative ways of looking at and being in the world. As these stories are located in culture, this article seeks to explore the relation between gospel and culture.

The evangelical movement has been suspicious of culture and has sometimes even demonised it. There are good reasons to be careful as we interact with the ethnic and religious cultures around us, and God's people lose their gospel fragrance if they uncritically accept values and influences from the milieu in which they find themselves. Yet, the history, training, and practices of evangelical missions suggest that assimilation has not been our main challenge. The opposite is usually the problem—hence my use of the phrase, “the sound of one hand clapping” from a Zen *koan*. Now, the emergence of non-western theologians and the crisis of the western church have drawn new attention to our struggle with culture.

Some parts of the church have displayed an “intolerance of complexity,” neglecting to see the relationship between gospel and culture in nuanced terms. Further, rather than meditating on the Scriptures and the world it addresses for themselves—*doing* theology—Christians have relied on pastors, authors, and other “public Christians” to tell them what to do. When Christians dutifully imbibe reductionist ideas from authority figures the problem is compounded.

During my conversion from scientific atheism at university, I was stunned when a brother sincerely told me that I was not to smoke, drink, or dance. I understood biblical teaching on righteous behaviour, and believed that smoking is a bad idea and drinking to excess is foolish, but the blanket ban on alcohol and dancing left me confused. How did these prohibitions mesh with Christ's redemptive work?

A quarter of a century later I heard a distinguished pastor and theologian lament that in his part of the world church people are not to go to the theatre. As he put it, “you put your fiddle away after conversion.” Then consider two Regent College students in the video *Between a Shoe and the Roof*.² An Australian confessed that until recently her view was simply: “culture bad, Bible good”—what was there to think about? A young pastor from Japan felt like a foreigner in his own country as there simply is no Japanese Christianity that he knows of. He was therefore pleased to discover that Kenyan believers have a Christianity of their own. I personally remember the “before-and-after” of a tribal baptismal service in Thailand. The *before* pictures showed proud young people in ethnic dress; in the *after* picture the same people now looked rather stiff in Western garb. The men wore white suits and ties while the young ladies sported pretty dresses of a suitably conservative length. Truly, the old had gone and the new had come!

While too many Christians have bought into the so-called “sacred-secular divide,” it is encouraging that more and more are recognising the need for critical interaction with culture. The Lausanne Movement has produced the paper, “Redeeming the Arts: The Restoration of the Arts to God's Creational Intention.”³ Similarly, the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity's “Imagine Project” and Regent College's “ReFrame” both provide useful biblical and theological bases for cultural engagement.⁴

Scholars have traced the origins of the problem. In a brief history of evangelicalism, Os Guinness notes John Nelson Darby's pessimistic attitudes to society led him to develop his system of dispensations.⁵ After the American civil war, the South was a willing recipient of the negative attitude to the world central to Darby's theological edifice. A pervasive pessimism and the expectation of the Lord's return led to an emphasis on saving souls which many would applaud; however, for many this effectively became the gospel. This “firefighter's theology” led to the neglect of discipleship and the challenging and reinvigorating of life and culture through the gospel.⁶

For Guinness, although attitudes to culture and the world need re-examining, a more basic challenge is people's view of the mind itself.⁷ Engaging with the world depends on engaging with the mind. We are to love God with *all of our mind*, reminds Guinness. He critiques pietism's emphasis on the inward and personal as retreating from the world, and quotes Bonhoeffer's description of pre-war German pietists as an "escapist church."⁸ More significant for modern evangelicalism are Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday, whose hostility to the mind was matched by their antipathy towards theology itself.

In his book *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture*, William Romanowski takes us through the history of the church's opposition to popular culture, mentioning the American church's hostility to films and contemporary music, and Charles Finney's savage indictment of "Byron, Scott, Shakespeare and a host of triflers and blasphemers of God." He notes that Finney further railed, "I cannot believe the person who has ever known the love of God can relish a secular novel."⁹ Some of these attitudes persist. Romanowski recalls the sad case of evangelical singer Amy Grant, whose first foray into so-called secular music led to a backlash from many Christians, including removal of her music from many religious broadcasters in the United States.¹⁰ He concedes that recently attitudes have changed somewhat, but fears that antipathy has now fragmented into a mixture of opposition and unquestioning acceptance.

Romanowski discusses the variety of viewpoints that modern evangelicals have toward contemporary culture. Some definitely espouse a strongly separatist position, avoiding television, not watching films, and setting up faith-based schools, while others advocate engagement with varying degrees of redemptive intentionality.¹¹ Unquestioningly accepting the sacred-secular divide, some Christians write off culture as irredeemable because of the Fall. Separating religious matters (proclaiming the faith and public worship) from the rest of our human existence is both arbitrary and theologically ill informed.

Vanhoozer begins *Everyday Theology* by urging Christians to "read culture."¹² He quotes an old professor as advocating the application of Scripture to all of life, and laments that, while seminary students are taught to carry out exegesis of the Bible, no such training is provided for culture. If church ministers are not encouraged to perform such an important task, it is hardly surprising that ordinary believers do not know if, how, and where to begin.

It is worth noting that theory and praxis on the mission field have often been more progressive, perhaps because cross-cultural mission confronts the missionary with an alien culture with which he or she must deal. Many in the evangelical camp are now open to contextualisation, and are familiar with the work of Nicholls, Hiebert, Kraft, and Hwa, as well as Luzbetak and Bevans of the Roman Catholic tradition.¹³ The orality movement is another example of constructive engagement with local cultures.¹⁴

A biblical orientation to humanity's role in the creation and redemption of culture

While I cannot give an exhaustive treatment of the biblical mandate for cultural creation, maintenance, and redemption, I can present biblical bookends from Genesis and Revelation, and place a few items from intervening books on the shelf.

The beginning of the Scriptures contains the so-called cultural mandate—our commission to rule and steward the earth as God's regents. Humanity was designed and called to multiply, as a part of but also apart from nature, shaping our environment in an on-going and unfolding use of mind and body.

Romanowski and Wright agree that God's assessment of each phase of the creation as "good" conveys the sense of being fit for purpose but not finished; there is always more to do.¹⁵ Humankind was placed into a good world, but in order to work, develop, and improve it. Various forms of human endeavour, beginning with crude cave paintings found in Indonesia and France, and

continuing with theology, philosophy, intercontinental videoconferencing, brain surgery, and supersonic flight are evidence of this.

This "working of the creation" is tied up with our role as God's image bearers, a stewarding domination of the planet, the responsibility to interact with creation according to our unique relationship with the Creator, and the associated cultivation of the life of the mind. We are sub-creators, doing in our finite way something of what God has done and continues to do. We cannot create *ex nihilo*—we rearrange the stuff that he has made, and our creativity goes beyond the physical into society, science, and the arts. All have a role to play—the creation and redemption of culture is not restricted to specialists, or missionaries, or even Christians.

We now move to the re-creation and restoration described in Revelation. There are different theological takes on the book, but for me the best way to grasp the responsibility conferred on us by the text is to think of the Apocalypse as mostly now *and* future.

In Revelation 5 the Lamb is proclaimed worthy of worship because of his redemptive action, yet a text so focused on his glory carefully records that he purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation (Rev 5:9). The four groupings suggest culture and identity. Significantly, the redeemed are not extracted from their culture or deculturised. In the next verse Christians are said to be "a kingdom and priests to serve our God"; this diverse group remain in and represent their cultures, mediating between God and the world. Christ relates to his people within their ethnic and cultural identity, and they serve and worship him from within it. The redemptive process does not deny culture, but refines and preserves it—indeed Romanowski talks of the "continuity between this life and the new life to come."¹⁶

Something similar is found in Rev 7:9, where the same four elements are used to describe the multitude from every "nation, tribe, people and language." Redeemed people with heritage and belonging stand before the throne and the Lamb, acknowledging his

We can think of culture as two closely connected parts. One is the visible or tangible, including behaviour and practices consciously and unconsciously passed from one generation to the next. The other is the underlying system of values and standards which affects and determines behaviour—the worldview.

rule. Their bleached robes represent holiness and righteousness, and the palm branches godly wholeness and well-being, all embodied in cultures.

Revelation tells us yet more about the redemption of human culture and endeavour. Different eschatologies notwithstanding, the final outcome in Revelation 21 is a *renewed* heavens and earth. This is not a completely new one, but one that is redeemed and restored. In a majestic reprise of the incarnation, God makes his dwelling with humanity, with those who embody his image in ethnicity and culture, in a closeness illustrated by the metaphor of husband and wife. His embrace of us includes our culture, a vital part of our identity. Yet as before, this is not without redemptive filtration and the rejection of sinful dross, and ultimately God is behind the renewal of everything (21:5), and he does judge and purge (21:6-8).

The holy city is a picture of majesty, beauty, and completeness. God is its light; the Father and the Son its temple. In Rev 21:24, the kings of the earth will bring our human splendour into it, as representative heads of human social and political groupings. Verse 26 talks about the glory and honour of the nations; the best of humanity is accepted while the products of our rebellion and sinfulness are not (21:27). Romanowski summarises it thus: “human labor and culture are redeemed, restored in meaning and purpose in the New Jerusalem, the peaceful City of God.”¹⁷ Similar ideas are found in Moltmann and Wright.¹⁸ For the Orthodox, this process is inaugurated and justified by the incarnation of Christ. Archbishop Harkianakis writes:

The entire creation was called to glorification of the Redeemer. So no material element is any

longer profane, but rather through proper spiritual use becomes an expression of the new order of reality, namely of the recreated new world. Colours, light, wood and whatever other material could lose its gravity and proclaim the event of salvation, becoming a precious vessel in the service of Church worship.¹⁹

Genesis and Revelation give us two bookends, the beginning and consummation of human endeavour. And yet Revelation is not a simple undoing of the Fall and a return to Eden. Much has happened between the covers of the Bible. Humankind has not returned to its pre-Fall state; rather, through individual and collective human creativity we have taken the created order and our minds to new heights. We have indeed interacted with what was created good but not finished, even if humanity’s influence is rather mixed.

Before exploring the notion of culture, we should consider one more section of Scripture. The Christ hymn of Colossians 1 is important to theologian of film Romanowski. Colossians 1:16 states boldly that “things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” This speaks to Romanowski of Christ’s supremacy over the cosmos and the church. Everything comes within Christ’s scope, and as someone who works with film, Romanowski stresses that this includes “ideas, emotions, and imagination” as well as science.²⁰ He then supplements this by adding “the Father will reconcile all things to himself through Christ” (Col 1:19).

I would add a comment on Paul’s doxology in Romans 11:36: “For from him and through him and for him

are all things. To him be the glory for ever!” All things—including human endeavour—ultimately have their origin and consummation in him. Additionally, we ascribe glory to Christ because he is the Alpha and Omega of our human creativity. The narrative goes on to clarify that sinful elements of human culture which oppose and ridicule God do not glorify him. Also, Colossians 1 and Romans 11 show that Christ is supreme *first* over the world and *then* over the church. The order is significant; he truly is *the cosmic Christ*, not in the diminished sense sometimes associated with that term, as if he is supreme “out there” but irrelevant to the individual lives of men and women, but because of his unrivalled, majestic supremacy over *everything*.

What is culture?

Having looked at God’s commission to us to create and re-create, we need to consider what we mean by *culture*. We are not only tasked to create utilitarian tools and objects for survival. Indeed, even in so-called primitive or ancient societies, functional, everyday objects often manifest great beauty and creativity in their form and decoration.

We can think of *culture* as two closely connected parts. One is the visible or tangible, including behaviour and practices consciously and unconsciously passed from one generation to the next. The other is the underlying system of values and standards which affects and determines behaviour—the *worldview*. We can think of it through the English *wh-* question words: *what* we know and believe and *why*. *How* concerns the way we approach problems and process information. *When* and *who* refer to appropriate behaviour and interaction within social systems.

Most people take these integrated systems of behaviours and motivations as givens and rarely question them. Culture helps us make sense of and interact with the world by breaking it down into chunks, and gives us standards for appropriate behaviour and sanctions for problematic conduct, according to patterns passed down by our forebears. Cultures are shared and dynamic frameworks, providing identity and requiring loyalty. Anyone who has served cross-culturally knows

that cultures do not necessarily have to make sense. They contain illogicalities, inconsistencies, paradoxes, and even contradictions. But they are also generative in that they employ processes and yield products even though they may come across as odd to the outsider.

This communal aspect is important for Romanowski, who mentions Geertz's idea of "systems of shared meanings."²¹ The film theologian also goes beyond high culture; his interests and concern are broader than literature, fine wine, classical music, and oil paintings. I am reminded of the McKinsey organisation's idea of culture as "the way we do things around here."²² We are to engage with the broad sweep of contemporary culture in our own society and on the mission field, bringing Christian thought into dialogue with the stuff and praxis of everyday life.

In a broad sweep across human cultural endeavour, Romanowski mentions material or functional culture (such as the wheel) but quickly moves to aspects more germane to his own field. This transition is important; even our not so distant past life was relatively simple and most cultural products focused on survival and basic needs. But although we continue to produce material culture, which is often glocal in character, most modern cultural output is software rather than hardware: today's cultural endeavour is about the mind. Our cultural traditions, social mores, philosophies, controversies, and reflections on all of these are far more difficult to categorise and analyse than our material objects. Also, their power is much greater, and this is where battle is joined for Christians. The softwares of human society influence and direct individuals, groups, and even whole nations. When Paul talks about transforming rather than conforming (Rom 12), he is referring to the age-old struggle between the absolute and total truth of the Christian gospel and the relative and partial truth claims of human wisdom and philosophies.

The world of the mind contains effectively limitless possibilities for the imagination. This is what we should expect, as our minds were created for us to function as God's

image on earth.²³ We must learn about culture by reading texts. Texts represent meaning within a particular culture, and thus can include rituals, arts, events, and so on. In addition, Gerbner reminds us that today the most influential messages are delivered not by traditional sources such as family, school, and communities, but electronically by trans-national media empires.²⁴ Apart from theological considerations, the sheer scale of this influence requires our attention.

All cultures have value even though they are fallen. Cultures have developed outside of God's direct interaction with them, though somehow under his restraining or upholding grace. He has revealed himself to different groups at different times, and although there is no culture with a privileged position, some cultures have been affected more by the gospel than others. Those from cultures with an arguably stronger Christian heritage must work in partnerships of humility and respect with those for whom the gospel is newer, to see shared wisdom adapted and adopted.

Having explored culture and the biblical mandate for the church's involvement in it, it is necessary to look a little deeper into Scripture to see how the community of faith has done this in the past. To do this, the next two sections will focus first on how the Bible itself has made use of cultural concepts from the Ancient Near East (ANE) and the Mediterranean of the first century, and then on how the people of God have negotiated and influenced culture.

The Bible's use of culture

God interacts with humankind through the medium of culture. God's use of human language and culture are part of his tailoring of his message to make it suitable and appropriate for limited human minds. Since this is a vast subject we can only briefly consider a few examples from the Old and New Testaments.

The creation and flood stories of Genesis provide a unique account of the origins of the universe. The central figure is a God who just is, brings order out of chaos, and creates

all forms of life by fiat. Much ink has been spilt exploring similarities and differences between the Genesis story and other ANE creation stories such as the Enuma Elish, Atrahasis, and Gilgamesh. Although some scholars repudiate any sense of dependency of Genesis on other creation and flood myths, it does seem that the various stories have a basic form even if the details differ. For us, living long after the stories first circulated and informed by a scientific worldview, the similarities and differences between the biblical and other ANE stories may not appear particularly salient. Since the Judaeo-Christian creation story looks similar to the others, it is made accessible and meaningful to all. Yet for ancient peoples in a polytheistic region, Genesis would have been polemical and distinctive; the differences would have enabled it to undermine would-be competitors. There are no fighting gods; the sun and moon are not the objects of worship; clear differences exist between the flood narratives of the Hebrews and neighbouring peoples.²⁵

Less controversial are the OT covenant forms. When God establishes a covenant with Israel he borrows ideas already in use in the region.²⁶ The use of familiar forms marks a significant affirmation of and investment in culture, and the written forms in the Hebrew Scriptures would have made instant sense to the people.

Others have compared parts of the OT law and the Code of Hammurabi. De Vaux argues that to varying extents the two law codes developed from some common source material.²⁷ Matthews and Benjamin provide extensive comparisons between OT law and the Code of Hammurabi, the Ur-Nammu code, and the Hittite Law Code.²⁸ Instone-Brewer finds commonalities between the wording of Jewish, Egyptian, and Babylonian marriage contracts.²⁹ It appears that existing moral and social teaching was adopted, but also adapted, by the divine and human authors of Scripture. Truth about God and his interaction with people is mediated through cultural forms of the day, and in the case of the creation and flood even the "enemy camp" is raided to facilitate communication. Many OT words and ideas seem strange to us, which is what

When the gospel encounters a culture, the aim is not conformity to a system in a book or an existing foreign culture, but instead that the gospel acts throughout that culture like salt and light, transforming and redeeming values and behaviour.

happens when God speaks an eternal, unchanging message into a specific cultural context. Someone has said rather provocatively that the Bible was written *for* us but *not to* us.

In the NT, Jesus' parables built on concepts from everyday life, and the use of agricultural ideas is no accident. I have explored elsewhere Jesus' working as a carpenter at the centre of village life, hearing and then using local issues and gossip to convey deep spiritual truths.³⁰ As John sought to make sense of Jesus for Gentile readers he took the bold step of describing his Jewish Messiah as the (Greek) *logos* (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Rev 19:13).

The Epistles of Paul are replete with imagery from the cultures in which he preached. He uses themes relating to warfare and the military, buildings, agriculture, seafaring, and business.³¹ To this list I add sport (running and training) and the Roman Empire (1 Thess 4:17; Col 2:15).

Finally, *Father* and *Son* are human universals used to communicate Trinitarian relationships. But to what extent does the father-son dyad actually explain how the two members of the Trinity relate to each other? God the Father is not the father of the Son as I am father to either of my sons, and God the Son is not the son of the Father as I am the son to my father. The *Father* and *Son* metaphors bring insight into the nature of the triune God, but they are far from exhaustive.

Judging and redeeming culture

A biblical perspective on culture enables the missionary to do in his or her context what has been established as a precedent in Scripture. Modern crossers of cultural borders are set free to take risks as did our more illustrious forebears. Partnerships between outsiders and local believers

allow the gospel to speak into and refresh local cultures, affirming some of it, and challenging that which is contrary to God's revealed character and standards. This is an exercise in hermeneutics, a bridging of the chasm between a universal gospel expressed in cultures (Hebrew, first century Hellenic, and that of the missionary) and the receiving culture—a mixed bag of good and evil.

Chris Wright looks at the interface between God's message and Israel's cultural and moral life as the Israelite faith was applied into an animistic and pagan context. He derives three broad attitudes.³² The first is *Acceptance and affirmation*, of which family, loyalty, community, and morality are examples. Next comes *Rejection and prohibition*, applied to cultic prostitution, the occult, and child sacrifice. Finally comes the more nuanced *Toleration with control*, adopted for polygamy, divorce, and slavery. This "developing theological critique" was used for behaviours which did not meet God's ideal standard.³³ Note that while marriage was designed as between one man and one woman, polygamy was tolerated in a way that idolatry was not. There are broadly similar attitudes in the strategy of Daniel and his fellow exiles in Babylon. Detailed analyses are beyond the scope of this paper, but some of these ideas would remind us of the work of Niebuhr, Carson, and Bevens.³⁴ Application of any of these frameworks needs to be done on the basis of research and understanding and together with members of the host culture.

Vanhoozer argues passionately that theology must study not only God himself but also contemporary culture.³⁵ Apart from understanding how to live out our faith, we need to grasp how our lives impact that faith. There are echoes here of Stott's "double

listening," itself congruent with Barth's exhortation to read the newspaper as well as the Bible, with the latter as a lens. The interplay between the two texts—and categorising them neatly as sacred and profane, divine and human, prescriptive and descriptive, is a risky dichotomisation—is vital for transformative Christian ministry.

I hold that there is no such thing as "Christian culture"; we cannot distil from the pages of the Bible a blueprint for what we should produce in mission work. There is no platonic *form* of Christian culture located in heaven. Yet, the ethical and moral values of Christianity *are* supra-cultural. When the gospel encounters a culture, the aim is not conformity to a system in a book or an existing foreign culture, but instead that the gospel acts throughout that culture like salt and light, transforming and redeeming values and behaviour. Rather than replacing cultures wholesale or entering into trench warfare between culture and church, Christians are free to apply something like Wright's approach described above. It is highly significant that as the early church begins to cross cultural barriers, the pivotal meeting in Jerusalem does not specify what Gentile Christianity should be. The Jerusalem Council does not require the Gentiles to be circumcised or follow the law, urging them simply to avoid food sacrifice to idols, sexual immorality, meat from strangled animals, and blood (Acts 15:19-20)—four "thou shalt nots" and no "thou shalt". It is remarkable how *little* this statement says.

Under God's sovereignty, specific issues were addressed later by Paul and others on a case-by-case basis in the Epistles. Paul's classic exhortation to the Romans requires them to be different, beginning with the mind, but does not tell them what to do (Rom 12:2). The rest of the chapter focuses on motivations such as grace and love rather than specific conduct, but the Romans were to do the hard work themselves. In modern "evangelical-speak" we might call this *discipleship*, but it must be done in context and in creative tension with culture, and here the reader is pointed to Song Minho's very helpful article in a previous MRT.³⁶ I am reminded of Andrew Walls' observation that

theology is created when Christianity crosses cultural boundaries. Implied in all of this are faith and courage to accept that the Christianisation of a culture may bring unexpected results. Hopefully it *will*!

Singapore theologian Simon Chan discusses culture as a lens for viewing the doctrine of the Trinity.³⁷ For him, the primarily egalitarian view that westerners have of the Trinity is culturally driven, and he claims that many from Confucian traditions view the generation of the Son by the Father and the procession of the Spirit from the Father as justifying hierarchical social structures. This is helpful in two ways. First, we see how cultural persuasion may affect theology, and second, we learn that both egalitarian and hierarchical views of society are compatible with Scripture. One size does not fit all.

We need the wisdom of God's people through time and space. We neglect our historical heritage and ever-increasing diversity at our peril, and so, bringing our local conversation between Scripture and culture into the broad *multilogue* (as opposed to *dialogue*) of the church universal can inform our praxis while keeping us within a broad but orthodox theological space.

In an age of increasing diversity, we are faced as never before with the need for critical engagement of gospel and culture. The justification and precedents are there in Scripture and it is high time that we recovered the practice of bringing faith to bear on culture in critical and constructive ways. We need to hear the joyful sound of two hands clapping together. 🌟

NOTES

¹ Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Hourglass, 1994), 42.

² *Between a Shoe and the Roof: A Documentary about the Global Church and our Place in it*, produced by Thera Knighton-Fitt and Melanie Brown (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2015).

³ Lausanne Movement, "Redeeming the Arts: The Restoration of the Arts to God's Creational Intention," <http://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-46> (accessed 15 August 2015).

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⁵ Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, 65.

⁶ Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, 66.

⁷ Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, 18–19.

⁸ Guinness, *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*, 35.

⁹ William D. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), 29, quoting Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Knopf, 1963), 94.

¹⁰ Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open*, 34.

¹¹ Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open*, 44.

¹² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "What is Everyday Theology?" in *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 15.

¹³ Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2003); Paul Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11 (1987): 104–12; Charles Kraft, "Contextualization of Theology," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 14 (1978): 31–36; Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas: The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Oxford: Regnum, 2014); Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, American Society of Missiology Series, No 12 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

¹⁴ International Orality Network, <http://www.orality.net/> (accessed 20 August 2015).

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¹⁶ Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open*, 53.

¹⁷ Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open*, 53.

¹⁸ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1967), 5; N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007).

¹⁹ Stylianos Harkianakis, "The Icon in Orthodox Spirituality," *Phronema* 4 (1989): 8.

²⁰ Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open*, 46.

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²² McKinsey and Company, "Accessing Cultural Compatibility: A McKinsey Perspective on getting Practical about Culture in M&A," www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/dotcom/client_service/organization/pdfs/775084 mm culture 2

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²⁴ George Gerbner, *The Electronic Storyteller: Television and the Cultivation of Values*, DVD (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 2002).

²⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975): 327–342; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987); David T. Tsumura, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood: An Introduction," in *I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, Sources for Biblical and Theological Study, Vol. 4, ed. Richard S. Hess and David T. Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 27–57.

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²⁷ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1980), 147.

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²⁹ David Instone-Brewer, "Deuteronomy 24:1–4 and the Origin of the Jewish Divorce Certificate," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 49 (1998): 230–243.

³⁰ Paul Woods, "Looking, Learning, and Living," in *Global Mission: Reflections and Case Studies in Contextualization for the Whole Church*, ed. Rose Dowsett (Pasadena: William Carey, 2011), 25–31.

³¹ Walter A. Butcher, "The Metaphors of St. Paul," *Baptist Quarterly* 9 (1939): 484–487.

³² Christopher Wright, *Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 174–187.

³³ Wright, *Living as the People of God*, 175.

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³⁶ Song Minho, "Contextualization and Discipleship: Closing the Gap between Theory and Practice," *Mission Round Table* 1 (April 2005): 14–17.

³⁷ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 51.

✧ How I Lived Among You: A Theology of Incarnational Ministry

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oversee Daniel Learning (language, culture with worldview learning) in OMF. They set culture and language learning policies and give general oversight to the organization's Daniel learning programs and people. T. E. and his family have served in Southeast Asia for ten years. Besides working with an unreached minority group, T. E. also gives support to language and culture learners.

“You know how I lived among you”

One of the most emotionally moving scenes from the ministry of the Apostle Paul is recorded in Acts 20, where the elders from Ephesus have come to see Paul as he makes his way to Jerusalem. Their reunion includes personal reflection and prayers accompanied by tears and heartfelt embraces. His parting words begin with a reference to his ministry in Ephesus:

You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me... (Acts 20:18–19)

As you read this, consider where you are on your journey of ministry. Are you just beginning or nearing the end? Are you dreaming of and preparing for cross-cultural ministry or somewhere in the middle? No matter where we find ourselves, we all hope to be able to say something like this at the close of our sojourn among the people to whom God has called and sent us.

The text indicates that Paul had an extremely focused ministry that was remembered by the Ephesians as they looked back to his way of life while he was with them. Similar actions are revealed in some of Paul's letters to the other congregations he planted. “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the Gospel of God but our lives as well” (1 Thess 2:8). “Our boast is this ... that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity” (2 Cor 1:12). Paul's reference to his ministry is extremely personal. He not only spoke the message of

salvation to them; he also lived in such a way that bore witness to that salvation and gave credibility to the words that he spoke.

Incarnation: the what and the how of God's saving action

Prior to Jesus' life on earth, God had, according to Hebrews 1, spoken to us “at many times and in various ways,” but the climax of God's movement towards humanity came in the person of Jesus, when God became human. This is the Incarnation (referring to the whole story: his birth, life, death, and resurrection). It is, in the words of Darrell Guder, “the central event and fact of salvation history, and the central content of the Christian message.”¹ As one author put it, “The Good News of the Kingdom came in the person of Jesus, who embodied all he proclaimed. Therefore, the incarnation is the crux of the mission of God.”² This is the link between the message and the mission. Incarnation is both the “what” and the “how” of God's saving action. It describes the salvation event and the way in which God's purposes are accomplished.

There has been widespread recognition across various Christian traditions that the incarnation is fundamental for Christian mission. In the words of John Stott, “all authentic mission is incarnational mission.”³ Guder describes it as the “understanding and practice of Christian witness that is rooted in and shaped by the life, ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”⁴ He sees Jesus as the *messenger*, the *message* itself, and the *model* for us to follow. While its importance is unquestionable, the exact nature of incarnational ministry has not been so easily agreed upon.⁵ The purpose

here is not to assert one particular understanding of incarnational ministry, but to be a catalyst for thoughtful reflection on our own ministry.

Have this mind

At the core of incarnational ministry is humility. It is that mindset that Paul spoke of to the Philippians when he called them to count others more significant than themselves and to look not only to their own interests but to the interests of others. His reference point was the Christ Hymn, a summary of the incarnation:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:5–11)

Missionary activity may be described in many ways, but it is certainly this: counting others as more significant than oneself and looking to their interests instead of just one's own. Just as Paul urged his readers to look to Jesus' incarnation and imitate the humility of Christ, we can use this as our baseline for formulating our approach to ministry.

The Willowbank Report on gospel and culture considers the importance of this Philippians 2 passage for cross-cultural ministry.⁶ The self-humbling of Christ began in his mind—and it is this perspective that we are to have as well. From there we are led to two verbs that indicate the action resulting from the mindset of Christ. First, he emptied himself. Next, he humbled himself. In emptying himself, Jesus renounced status, independence, and

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immunity. In humbling himself, he identified with us to the point of death in our place. There is identification without loss of identity, though, as he never ceased to be God. As stated in the Lausanne Covenant, "Christ's evangelists must humbly seek to empty themselves of all but their personal authenticity."⁷ Emptying ourselves does not mean that we lose our identity or cease to be who we are. For us to have a ministry that is incarnational, we will have to embrace this mindset and the humility that was evidenced in the incarnation.

Incarnational ministry

In the book *Appropriate Christianity*, Dean Gilliland discusses the incarnation not as a single model to follow, but as a matrix or a grid by which various approaches could be evaluated.⁸ This approach leaves room for various models to develop, while providing a means for determining their value and usefulness. Gilliland further discusses implications of the incarnation and offers three guidelines by which a missionary can gauge the extent to which he or she is working in the way and manner of the incarnation. They are as follows:

- Bring self-inclinations under control
- Connect to deepest needs of the people
- Reach into every aspect of life

Bring self-inclinations under control

Bringing self-inclinations under control begins with having the mind of Christ spoken of in Philippians 2. As we let go of our assumptions and biases, we become free to explore

the riches of the host culture. Undoubtedly we encounter aspects of the host culture that we are unable to embrace, but this should be on the basis of conviction rather than culture. Simultaneously, we can protect host people from us imposing our home culture's worldview on them. While we do hope to see worldviews transformed, our goal is to see host people develop a worldview it is in line with God's Kingdom while still firmly rooted in the soil of their culture. This requires discipline, patience, and a great deal of self-awareness.

One aspect of missionary humility called for by the Willowbank Report is the humility to understand and appreciate our host people. This calls for true dialogue, listening sensitively in order to understand. We should not assume that we have all the answers, or that our only role is to teach. We have much to learn from our host people, but we will not be able to without humility.⁹ In earlier stages it will often be the willingness to accept our incompetence in nearly every social situation. During this process of learning there are countless opportunities for our egos to be bruised. We can choose whether we will continue the journey or abort the process by ridiculing the culture, avoiding certain settings, and withdrawing so that we are not humiliated. Strangely enough, we can take this route while continuing to "learn the language" and "prepare for ministry," simultaneously chipping away at the foundation for incarnational ministry.

Every human community has a multitude of unspoken rules about when to speak (and about what),

We continue to explore aspects of the culture, to increase our understanding and to relate to people more appropriately. This impacts both what we seek to communicate and how we attempt to communicate it. Not only is our grasp of the culture forever incomplete, but the culture itself is dynamic and always changing. Therefore, the process never ends.

when to be silent, where to go for what, what to call things, when to smile, what to praise, what to despise, and so on. Children of the community internalize these rules as they grow, often simply through imitation or by means of a disapproving parental stare. For the stranger, who has learned other rules and cannot rely on the locals, who are scarcely aware of their own habits, to foresee and explain all of his likely mistakes, there are daily reminders of not belonging, of being an outsider who does not quite fit in.¹⁰

One worker remembers repeated frustrations and fears over being taken advantage of when it came to money. During a field conference one year, the speaker challenged the workers to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Many characteristics of Jesus were discussed, and one was about being taken advantage of. Jesus allowed people to take advantage of him (to get a free lunch, for example). From that day forward, that man's attitude experienced a significant shift. Instead of avoiding situations in which he feared he would be charged too much money or getting angry when it happened, he experienced such encounters as part of the process of being conformed more and more to his Lord and saw this as one step in the journey of bringing the Good News to his host people.

Further down the road, this humility must remain in order to bring our self-inclinations under control and minister incarnationally. It enables us to remain teachable and open to learning throughout our time among our host

people. The period for learning does not finish after two years so that we can get on with talking. We continue to explore aspects of the culture, to increase our understanding and to relate to people more appropriately. This impacts both what we seek to communicate and how we attempt to communicate it. Not only is our grasp of the culture forever incomplete, but the culture itself is dynamic and always changing. Therefore, the process never ends.

Every stage of the journey can be viewed in relation to our own spiritual growth. We can see intercultural learning as nurturing our own discipleship. First, we evaluate our own ability to suspend judgment, tolerate ambiguity, and act graciously in the face of the unexpected. These areas provide us with opportunities to grow in showing grace, trusting our heavenly Father, and loving our neighbor. "Such prominent New Testament themes such as the tendency to judge others, humility, and the value that we place on others as compared to ourselves become directly relevant," says David Smith. He continues:

We easily rush to interpreting differences in moral terms (a different relationship to time becomes laziness, more direct forms of speech become arrogance, protracted silences become sullenness, indirectness becomes avoiding the issue, and so on). Learning to spot my own judgmental reactions to cultural others, cautioning myself to put them back on the shelf (perhaps through conscious self-talk: "Wait a minute, don't be so hasty!"), and suspending judgment for long

enough to really find out what is going on are disciplines that offer a very practical training in not judging others.¹¹

This process is neither quick nor easy and often leads us (repeatedly) to frustration and embarrassment. Instead of viewing this as a necessary evil to be overcome as quickly as possible, Greg Thomson encourages workers to understand and embrace this as part of God's plan and process. The barriers of language and culture serve to humble the messengers, so that the end result is that the treasure continues to be displayed in weak vessels (2 Cor 4:7).¹² This way it is clear that it is God, not we, who is the treasure. As Charles Kraft says, "The message of the true God hardly ever comes in impressive vehicles."¹³

Connect to the deepest needs of the people

According to Kraft, the supreme description of Jesus' ministry "is not that he spoke to us but that he lived among us."¹⁴ This is, of course, a reference to John's Gospel and the imagery of the eternal Word becoming flesh and making his dwelling among us. Jesus' life among us was not casual and disinterested but intimate and involved at the deepest level.

This involves conscious effort before, during, and after every interaction with our host people. David Smith describes this in *Learning from the Stranger*.¹⁵ The more we learn about our host people before we interact with them, the more we increase our chances of being a blessing to them. During periods of interaction, we work to listen well, to respond considerately, and to be a loving presence. Afterwards, we find ways to integrate what we have learned into our own identity. In this way, every interaction with our host people provides an opportunity for us to grow in our ability to understand and connect with their deepest needs.

Understanding and responding to the needs of our host people raises the issue of felt needs. Felt needs arise due to specific historical circumstances and events, so they are always specific to the context. They are often, in the words of Brian Galloway, "the amplifier that God uses to begin a process

that ends in conversion.”¹⁶ Failure to address such needs can result in a people becoming or remaining closed to the gospel. Another negative effect can be syncretism, as people believe in Jesus but continue to address their felt needs in traditional ways. Galloway points out that in almost every encounter Jesus had with people, he first addressed a felt need. When we seek to understand and respond to life issues and felt needs as indicated by the people themselves, then we are on the path toward understanding the ways they live and think. This has implications for the ways we go about our learning. It points to the importance of learning in community and in everyday contexts. We should learn from both observation and dialogue in natural settings, and not be satisfied to simply try to collect information on a set list of topics.

For us to connect to our host people’s deepest needs, we will have to work hard to cultivate close relationships. Otherwise we cannot know their needs, nor can we go about responding to them appropriately. So we strive for a ministry like Paul described in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, in which our love for a people leads to us sharing both the gospel of God and our lives as well. This is not easy, however.

After several years in a Southeast Asian country, one family moved to another city to start a new work. As they had come to understand more and more of the social dynamics at work they decided that a new work identity would open more doors for true relationships and friendships with their host people. In two previous locations within the country, the family had been known as missionaries. While this gave them the role of respected religious teachers with a high status in the former situation, it closed most doors to connecting with the new people. A fresh start was necessary if they were to really relate to the host people. They also realized that the one time of the week that most of the host people were out and available was Sunday mornings. They challenged their team to rearrange their time for worship so that they could be out connecting with people at this appropriate time.

For us to connect to our host people’s deepest needs, we will have to work hard to cultivate close relationships. Otherwise we cannot know their needs, nor can we go about responding to them appropriately. So we strive for a ministry like Paul described in 1 Thessalonians 2:8, in which our love for a people leads to us sharing both the gospel of God and our lives as well.

Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz state that “the most difficult step for many missionaries and urban church planters ... to take is to rearrange our lives. Jesus rearranged his life for us, and it is imperative that we rearrange our lives for the people he died for.”¹⁷ This is precisely what it will take in order to develop the sort of deep relationships that are needed to connect with people’s deepest needs.

Reach into every aspect of life

The final implication is to reach into every aspect of life. There is no compartment of human existence that is to remain untouched by God. In helping people learn language and culture, Greg and Angela Thomson encourage workers not to “learn the language” but to “discover a new world as it is known and shared” by our host people.¹⁸ They understand that language and culture (often combined into a single word, *languaculture*¹⁹) are not just a matter of vocabulary and grammar or festivals and artifacts. Instead, language and culture are the experience of the world that is shared by a given people—and it is every portion of their shared life together that is to be touched by God. The greater the cultural distance between

the worker and the host people, the greater the likelihood that there are aspects of the host people that the gospel needs to reach that the worker has not had to wrestle with as they will have to. No doubt many workers have felt unprepared for issues dealing with and questions about curses, spirits, and ancestors that he had never had to consider in his home culture.

As guests, we are hardly aware of all the effects that God intends to bring about in the lives and culture of our host people. This presses us towards a never-ending process of learning and of being transformed before their eyes in ways that are meaningful to them. In Guder’s words, “Incarnational witness embodies God’s love as revealed in Christ and taught by Christ.... the gospel is never a disembodied message. Rather, it is always a demonstrated message. It is the evidence that witnesses give as they live out their obedience to Christ, evidence on the basis of which others will make decisions.”²⁰ This is why he refers to incarnational ministry as *being*, *doing*, and *saying* the good news.²¹

According to Kraft, the messenger is more than the vehicle of the message. In his words, “We are

As guests, we are hardly aware of all the effects that God intends to bring about in the lives and culture of our host people. This presses us towards a never-ending process of learning and of being transformed before their eyes, in ways that are meaningful to them.

Following the pattern from Philippians 2 and embracing the mind of Christ, we find the power to empty ourselves of aspects of our culture in order to identify with our host culture. It is a part of the incarnational process to let go of values and practices that are not necessarily reflections of biblical values within the host culture.

thoroughly involved in what we seek to communicate.”²² The act of communicating is not something that ceases when we close our mouths; it extends far beyond what we typically think of as non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, nods, etc.). In Kraft’s words, “Any behavior that is observed is interpreted ... and therefore ... is communication.”²³

If this is true, then our lives never stop communicating. This means that workers who minister incarnationally seek to contextualize their very life, not just their presentation of the gospel or their expression of church. This is why we take seriously considerations such as housing, clothing, food, and schedules. Everything we do and are communicates something to our host people. With this in mind, do we consider carefully and often enough what our lives are communicating?

One worker is surrounded by ethnic groups who are primarily oral communicators. He was struck by the fact that people are working to learn their languages but then try to communicate with them in ways that are largely literate and heavily dependent on the written word. He recognized that an oral approach to ministry that emphasizes storytelling is an aspect of an incarnational ministry among his host people. They must consider not only what they communicate, but how they communicate it.

On the path towards incarnational ministry, a worker examines the values of his or her home culture in light of the biblical message and the values of the host culture. Following the pattern

from Philippians 2 and embracing the mind of Christ, we find the power to empty ourselves of aspects of our culture in order to identify with our host culture. It is a part of the incarnational process to let go of values and practices that are not necessarily reflections of biblical values within the host culture.

But what about ...

Some have reservations about incarnational ministry, often on theological grounds. They may be uneasy with the use of the word “incarnational,” claiming that it should be reserved only to refer to the once-and-for-all event in which God became man in Jesus. This is, of course, a valid argument. Jesus was not the first of many incarnations. The act of the Divine becoming human was unique to him alone. What we are after is not incarnation itself, but guidelines or implications for our ministry, out of which various models can develop. Guder maintains the importance of the adjective *incarnational*, by which we refer to mission in which “the communication of the gospel is appropriate to its content.”²⁴ He says, “The adjective ‘incarnational’ draws attention to the way God acts in the incarnation for us and our salvation. It emphasizes the congruence between God’s *message* and *method*.”²⁵ In this way, the message of a God who moves toward people is communicated in a way that fits the message.

Others object to the term because of the ways that it has been used to refer *only* to having a ministry of presence. They equate it with statements like “live the good news *rather than* preach the good news,” or “be” rather than “tell.” By now it is clear that this

is an unfair assessment of what we are calling for. It is the “being” *and* “telling” that creates the necessary congruence. Incarnational ministry need not be reduced to lifestyle without words. The calls for lifestyle and presence mean that the members of our host culture may “expect tangible signs of the transformation that Christians proclaim as a reality.”²⁶

Set a true example

Living a lifestyle that speaks to our host audience is no new priority for cross-cultural missionaries. It was the vision that Hudson Taylor cast for those who would join him in the work in China. He recognized that foreign elements that were unnecessarily imposed upon the missionary work hindered the development of indigenous churches. They wished to see Christians who were truly “Chinese in every sense of the word.” For this to happen, an incarnational ministry was needed. “If we really desire to see the Chinese such as we have described, let us as far as possible set before them a true example: let us in everything un sinful become Chinese, that by all things we may save some.”²⁷ He goes on to speak of both language and culture. This was what they did, even as it led to being ridiculed by other missionaries. It was so essential to the fulfillment of the vision that those who refused were asked to resign. Though our focus has broadened, we still aim to see East Asians transformed by God within their own cultural context. We still need to aim for an incarnational ministry that will produce indigenous, biblical church movements.

Our faith is incarnational, and incarnation must always involve cultural specificity. When the word became flesh, he didn’t become generic flesh. We never meet generalized humanity; we only meet humanity under the specific conditions of a particular time and space.²⁸

With these words, Andrew Walls calls us to allow the presence of Christ to be translated into local terms—to allow the Word to become flesh again under the conditions of the time and place to which we are sent.

The incarnation, says Darrell Guder, summarizes the “*what*” of the gospel, is rooted in the “*why*,” and also provides the “*how*” of gospel witness.²⁹ God’s incarnating dynamic provides the ultimate foundation for our service, Jesus sets the pattern for mission, and the presence and power of the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit supplies the enabling power that we need.

We began by thinking about Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. In order to have this sort of farewell with our host people someday, we have to repeatedly embrace a Philippians 2 attitude of humility. Of course, there will be many challenges and obstacles to doing so, but there is also a great joy in store. In fact, the joy on the other end is twofold: joy for those who willingly empty and humble themselves and joy for those who experience the presence and power of Christ through the self-emptying servants whose lives point beyond themselves to the One who sent them.

Reflection questions

1. What would you like to be able to say to your focus people at the end of your time among them?
2. How would you summarize the importance of the incarnation for ministry?
3. Think about your present or future ministry and write a goal pertaining to each of the following.
 - a. Bring self-inclinations under control
 - b. Connect to deepest needs of the people
 - c. Reach into every aspect of life 

NOTES

¹ Darrell L. Guder, *Be My Witnesses: The Church’s Mission, Message and Messengers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 24.

² Ross Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh: Toward an Incarnational Missiology*, American Society of Missiology Dissertation Series (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004), 58.

³ John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 358, quoted in Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 59.

⁴ Darrell L. Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), xii.

God’s incarnating dynamic provides the ultimate foundation for our service, Jesus sets the pattern for mission, and the presence and power of the risen Christ through the Holy Spirit supplies the enabling power that we need.

⁵ For a more thorough discussion on various understandings of incarnational ministry see Dean S. Gilliland, “The Incarnation as a Matrix for Appropriate Theologies,” in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles Kraft (Pasadena: William Carey, 2005), 493–520 and Ross Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*.

⁶ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization and Willowbank Consultation on Gospel and Culture, *The Willowbank Report: Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture* (Wheaton: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978), <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/73-lop-2.html> (accessed 15 July 2015).

⁷ Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, *The Lausanne Covenant*, paragraph 10, <http://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant> (accessed 30 July 2015).

⁸ Gilliland, “The Incarnation.”

⁹ See the important article by Donald N. Larson, “The Viable Missionary: Learner, Trader, Storyteller,” *Missiology* 6 (April 1978): 155–163, reprinted in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, 3rd ed., ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey, 1999), 438–443.

¹⁰ David Smith, *Learning from the Stranger: Christian Faith and Cultural Diversity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 16.

¹¹ Smith, *Learning from the Stranger*, 116.

¹² Greg Thomson, *Introduction to the Redemptive Dimension* (Greg Thomson and SIL International, 2008).

¹³ Charles Kraft, *Communication Theory for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 13.

¹⁴ Kraft, *Communication Theory*, 41.

¹⁵ Smith, *Learning from the Stranger*, 106.

¹⁶ Brian K. Galloway, *Traveling Down Their Road: A Workbook for Discovering a People’s Worldview* (Brian K. Galloway, 2006), 12.

¹⁷ Harvie Conn and Manuel Ortiz, *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City and the People of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 335.

¹⁸ For Greg Thomson’s material see Growing Participant Approach, <https://growingparticipantapproach.wordpress.com/> (accessed 31 July 2015).

¹⁹ This term is used throughout Thomson’s materials and was first used by Michael Agar in *Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation* (New York: Morrow, 1994).

²⁰ Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, 39.

²¹ See Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness and Be My Witnesses*.

²² Kraft, *Communication Theory*, 43.

²³ Kraft, *Communication Theory*, 53.

²⁴ Darrell L. Guder, “Incarnation and the Church’s Evangelistic Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 83 (1994): 420.

²⁵ Guder, “Incarnation and the Church’s Evangelistic Mission,” 420.

²⁶ Langmead, *The Word Made Flesh*, 286.

²⁷ A. J. Broomhall, *Survivor’s Pact*, Hudson Taylor and China’s Open Century. Book Four (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton and OMF, 1984), 355–356.

²⁸ Andrew Walls, “Andrew Walls: An Exciting Period in Christian History,” Faith and Leadership, <http://www.faithandleadership.com/multimedia/andrew-walls-exciting-period-christian-history> (accessed 15 July 2015).

²⁹ Guder, *The Incarnation and the Church’s Witness*, xii.

The joy on the other end is twofold: joy for those who willingly empty and humble themselves and joy for those who experience the presence and power of Christ through the self-emptying servants whose lives point beyond themselves to the One who sent them.

➤ Incarnation and Transformation

T. E. and the OMF International Daniel team

oversee Daniel Learning (language, culture with worldview learning) in OMF. They set culture and language learning policies and give general oversight to the organization's Daniel learning programs and people. T. E. and his family have served in Southeast Asia for ten years. Besides working with an unreached minority group, T. E. also gives support to language and culture learners.

Titus watched the events from a recent wedding and listened as a host person described what was taking place. The families of the bride and groom knelt on the floor around a short table and began to lift it up into the air together. As they lifted it for the first time, she said, "And they'll do this three times." Sure enough, they lowered the table to the floor and then did the same thing twice more. Titus asked her how she knew they would do it three times and she said, "You know, it's like so many of the spirit practices. We just do them three times." She listed several other practices that involve the spiritual realm and the pattern of doing things three times then finished by commenting that she wasn't sure why.

Titus returned home that day thinking about this, wondering if this would lead somewhere. *What did the people understand about the importance of doing this three times? Were there things that believers from this culture could do three times to honor the Triune God? Would such a suggestion feel threatening to them or would it be a way to retain a cultural practice but give it new meaning? What are the values and assumptions that the people have in this scenario and how can they be transformed by God?*

Though there are many valuable ways of describing worldview, it will be taken here to mean *the underlying values and assumptions of a culture*.¹ For a worldview to be transformed, these cultural values and assumptions will come increasingly into line with the values and assumptions of God's kingdom. How does this happen? Where does it begin? Instead of jumping straight to description and analysis of the host culture, our emphasis begins with a look at ourselves. Only after we rightly understand ourselves can we focus on knowing our host people and seeing transformation take place.

Knowing ourselves

It has been claimed that culture exists by comparison.² Anything we interpret about another culture is to some degree a comparison. For this reason, understanding another culture begins with cultivating self-awareness. What is the worldview of my home culture? In other words, what are the values and assumptions that I begin with? We all come from somewhere, which means we bring with us values and assumptions from that context. This is neither good nor bad; it just is.

But to move on from there we are invited on a journey of humility—a journey of developing an incarnational presence among our host people. To do this, we examine our home culture's values in light of the biblical message *and* the values of the host culture. Following the pattern set forth in Philippians 2 and embracing the mind of Christ, we find the power to empty ourselves of certain aspects of our culture in order to identify with our host culture. It is a part of the incarnational process to let go of values and practices that are not necessarily reflections of biblical values within the host culture. For transformation to occur, we walk with individuals or communities as they enter into the same process.

Knowing our host people

It is common to use the image of an iceberg when describing culture. If worldview is the deep-level of culture—the level of values and assumptions that underlie the rest—then the values and assumptions themselves are invisible. We cannot simply interpret what we observe. We have to discover the values and assumptions that are shared by our host people and that result in those aspects of life that are seen (behaviors, interpretations of events, etc.).

Because of the inseparability of language and culture, we can't ignore the importance of learning the culture *through the language*. Learning about or describing the host culture in our home language will result in a certain amount of *distortion*. We should be careful to not overlook this. In the words of David Hesselgrave, "If one wants to communicate Christ to a people, he must know them. The key to that knowledge always has been, and always will be, the language."³

There is no short-cut to this level of understanding. Perhaps it is similar to a married couple who has spent enough time together to predict how the other will respond in a given situation. Over time they have come to know "what makes the other one tick." They understand what will be important to the other or how they will interpret something. While we want this type of understanding of our host culture, it does not come without time spent with people and a willingness (and ability) to listen to them. Learning the stories of individual people and the stories that are important to the culture is an important part of this.

One couple came to work with an animistic people group. They read about the host people and talked with others who worked with them. They also learned about animistic cultures in a more broad sense. What they learned led them to understand this group primarily as being fearful of evil spirits. But as they spent more and more time with the people they began to learn more *from* the people, rather than simply *about* the people. They learned that interpreting what they observed as being only about fear, was incomplete. The element of fear may have been there, but there were also elements of care for ancestors, familial obligations, group connectedness, and others that the workers had initially overlooked. Even when we are aware of a dynamic that the people themselves are not, we must discover what they understand themselves to be doing or experiencing in order to dialogue effectively about it. Being careful not to "understand" our host people too soon can help us as we come to know them deeply. In fact, the very curiosity and desire to know more can also be a gift to the people as a cross-cultural worker might try to understand something

Even when we are aware of a dynamic that the people themselves are not, we must discover what they understand themselves to be doing or experiencing in order to effectively dialogue about it. Being careful not to "understand" our host people too soon can help us as we come to know them deeply.

that the host people themselves take for granted. This is one of the ways that we bring what Smith and Carvill have named "the gift of the stranger."⁴

Immediate good news and unfolding the whole story

Cultures often have an awareness or orientation toward a particular effect of the Fall: for example, a given worldview might be most in tune to guilt, shame, or fear.⁵ As we understand more deeply the worldview of the culture, we ask the question, "What is the gospel in this context?" or more specifically, "Which aspects of the gospel are the immediate good news?" Our job is not to convince others that they are guilty, but to find out how they are most aware of the effects of sin and introduce them to how the gospel speaks to those effects. For example, if the worldview is more oriented toward shame and broken relationships, then we identify and share biblical stories that show how Jesus sets us free from such shame and restores relationships.

Worldview awareness informs our communication of the gospel so that we can direct people to the *immediate good news* in their context. It also helps us to focus on a systematic approach to see deep level values and assumptions touched. We need to find the immediate good news, but we do not stop there. Rather, we start from there and explore the rest, over time, so that the process carries on "until the whole story has been unfolded and the whole person has been transformed." This echoes Paul Hiebert's description of worldview transformation as both a *point* (conversion) and a *process* (ongoing deep discipling).⁶

Many ethnic groups in Asia live life with a keen awareness of spiritual beings. Workers among one group

in particular have found that the *immediate good news* relates to fear, especially in regard to spirits. As they have shared that immediate good news with people, some have found freedom from fear of spirits by turning to Jesus. The *point* of worldview transformation has begun, but there is much left to be done in the *process* of deep discipling. For example, some have embraced the truth of God as the Creator of the universe, Jesus as their Savior, and the Holy Spirit as God's presence indwelling them now. However, there is a tendency to attribute to God the same characteristics of the spirits (viewing him as a stronger or maybe even nicer version of the spirits). The invisible assumptions and values are challenged and changed as they walk with God and grow as disciples.

Seeking appropriate change

David Bosch asserted that the primary agents of this process are not the cross-cultural workers but the Holy Spirit and the local converts (especially the laity).⁷ Does that mean we have no role at all? Of course not, but it is a call for humility and sensitivity. As we look at the practices of the host culture, can we separate those that are contrary to God and his kingdom from those that are simply contrary to our own cultural values or practices? If not, we may be on the path to what Wayne Dye identifies as people "confessing things about which they feel no guilt" and never repenting "of the things which most trouble their conscience."⁸

What about assumptions? One worker was telling stories from the Bible to host people and commonly found himself surprised by their responses to what they were hearing. For example, upon hearing the stories of Jesus' life and death, one man reflected that Jesus died at a very young age. Yet, he believed from the stories

that Jesus had done no wrong. The invisible assumptions of worldview automatically set to work and he announced that Jesus must have some terrible ancestors. He went on to describe the popular belief in karma and explained that if a person does not receive all that they deserve for their deeds, then it will be carried over to a future generation. Jesus' extreme suffering and humiliation at a young age, with a spotless record, could only be explained in this way.

Only through ongoing exposure to and growing understanding of the biblical story will a person develop new assumptions about God and life. People's concepts of God and reality and their values are updated and renewed over time. We are to walk with them through that process, so we need God to give us creativity and wisdom for both our life and our message. We will also need patience as we allow these changes to take place gradually over time.

One of the important lessons of the Incarnation is that God is not afraid of the particulars of human life and culture. He became one of us and journeyed with his disciples through the messy process of seeing their values and assumptions about life become more like his. Now, with the help of his Spirit, we are to continue that work with our host people, humbly being present with them and creatively seeking to help them live out a faithful expression of love for Jesus within their culture.

Do we want to aim for a deep transformation resulting in a worldview that glorifies God but remains recognizable as belonging to that particular culture and able to address the most pressing issues for that culture? Then let us diligently explore the deep and invisible level of

the culture, while remembering the interplay between our host culture and values of God's Kingdom.⁹

Below are some exercises for considering the values of the host culture and for reflecting on the way that cultural values might be transformed and renewed.

Know Yourself: Can you describe a situation in which self-awareness has helped you to not challenge or judge something in the host culture that you would have in your home culture? What are some home culture values that you have laid aside to become part of the host culture?

Know Your Host People: What are some of the commonly found themes or heroes in host stories? What might this show about what's important to them? Describe a time you've experienced something and host people interpreted what happened differently than you did. Do dialogue research to learn about the values of your host people especially in regards to topics that will affect the way the good news is shared. Topics for consideration include guilt, shame, fear, the supernatural world, leadership, decision making, life cycles, and rituals.

Immediate Good News: What might the immediate good news in your host context relate to? What is the importance of guilt, shame, and fear in your host context?

Seeking appropriate change:

1. Consider important terms and their interpretations in your home and host culture, then also consider the biblical usage and interpretation of the same terms (for example: love, sin, honor, etc.). What differences do you find in their interpretations?

2. What are some things that are valued in both home and host culture but are expressed differently (e.g., respecting one's elders, showing hospitality, caring for family, etc.)?
3. Select some culture values (e.g., avoid shaming someone even if I have to lie, honoring ancestors) and propose a new expression for it that has been impacted by the good news. 🌀

NOTES

¹ Thinking of worldview in this way connects it to the invisible part of a culture that is then reflected in observable ways through many different subsystems of a particular culture. For other approaches to or discussions of worldview, consider works by Paul G. Hiebert, Emily A. Schultz and Robert H. Lavenda, Louis J. Luzbetak, Charles H. Kraft, and Sherwood Lingenfelter.

² For example, Geert Hofstede, "National Culture," <http://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html> (accessed 16 July 2015) and Michael Agar, "Culture: Can you take it anywhere?" *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5 (June 2006): 1-12, http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/5_2/pdf/agar.pdf (accessed 16 June 2015).

³ David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 355.

⁴ Barbara Carvill and David I. Smith, *The Gift of the Stranger: Faith, Hospitality and Foreign Language Learning* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). See also David I. Smith, *Learning from the Stranger: Christian Faith and Cultural Diversity* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁵ Roland Muller, *Honor and Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Xlibris, 2000), 17-19.

⁶ Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 310.

⁷ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 453.

⁸ Wayne Dye, "Toward a Cross-Cultural Definition of Sin," *Missiology* 4 (January 1976): 27-29.

⁹ To fully address this idea would require a new article (or more than one). Readers are strongly encouraged to consider the reflection exercises along with a group of colleagues. The three questions under the heading "Seeking Appropriate Change" specifically relate to this: key terms and their interpretations, common values with different behavioral expressions, and cultural values for which a new behavior can be developed.

People's concepts of God and reality and their values are updated and renewed over time. We are to walk with them through that process, so we need God to give us creativity and wisdom for both our life and our message.



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✦ Three Models of Culture¹

Culture is defined as “a complex, integrated coping mechanism,”² consisting of “language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artefacts, technical processes, and values.”³ Another way of describing culture is the “learned ideas, beliefs, feelings, values and institutions by which a group of people order their lives and interpret their experience and which give them an identity distinct from other groups.”⁴

Many explanations and models of culture have been proposed since anthropology emerged as a science in the second half of the eighteenth century. In this article, three current models will be explained and assessed, with the aim of both understanding these tools and determining their usefulness and limitations in practical application.

Assumptions behind cultural models

Before looking at the main models of culture, it is helpful to clarify some underlying assumptions. Wilson provides a framework in his description of several elements of a biblical perspective on culture.⁵ First, *the Bible transcends cultural particularity*. Key aspects of biblical anthropology apply to all cultures, namely that people are created in God’s image, people are fallen and sinful, people in Christ are redeemed and transformed, and the people of God are the new humanity. These biblical truths regarding all people are foundational for healthy interaction between cultures. I currently live in a small townhouse complex with eight nationalities represented among the thirty units. Not surprisingly, this leads to numerous misunderstandings and at times major disagreements. Without a biblical perspective on cultural particularity as outlined above, cross-cultural relationships are destined to a cycle of misunderstanding and disagreement.

Second, *the Bible does not major on cultural particularity*. For example, cultural particularity is irrelevant to inclusion in the new humanity in Christ—all are able to access the grace of God in Jesus Christ as stated in Rom 4:9–12, 16–18 (cf. 3:29–30), Gal 3:26–29; Eph 2:11, 14–18; and Col 3:11. This is also shown by the lack of focus on cultural differences in the biblical narrative. Such distinctions are acknowledged as they arise, but are only highlighted as they pertain to the main story line of the Bible.⁶ In the early church, the exaltation of both Greek and Jewish cultures is rejected (for example in Acts 10, 15 and 17).⁷

Wilson’s third element is that *the Bible recognises people as cultural beings*. Culture forms the framework in which God’s story unfolds. Through the whole breadth of Scripture, it is clear that almost all human thought and behaviour is culturally shaped, and also that culture is not neutral, but biased towards sin. God therefore specifically commands his people to actively teach truth to others as a part of everyday life, as part of culture. This is clear under both the Old and New Covenants. In Deuteronomy, the Israelites are commanded to teach the words of the LORD “diligently to your children,” and to “talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise” (Deut 4:7). Jesus commanded the disciples to teach all nations “to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20) and Paul instructed the Christians in Colossae to “walk in him (that is, Jesus Christ)” (Col 2:6–7). Such cultural integration and transmission of the truth is integral to righteous living. Because the Bible naturally recognises culture without majoring on it, the cultural nuances in the biblical narrative are often missed until we, as readers, develop an element of cultural awareness. Such awareness often comes through personal cross-cultural experience. It was only as I began to live in a non-industrialised,

The human constitution is universal. All of us are emotive, have an ability to reason, and share the physical characteristics of human bodies. This universality is described, explained, and acted out in social relationships in very distinctive ways according to culture.

agricultural society that I noticed the many agricultural references in the biblical accounts. Similarly, the nuances of multi-lingual situations in Scripture were only personally noted once I had lived in comparable multi-lingual settings myself.⁸

Fourth, while marginalising the differences in culture, *the Bible affirms cultural diversity*. From the beginning, God had commanded mankind to fill the earth. This is clear in his commands to Adam and Eve in Gen 1:28, and again to Noah and his family in Gen 9:1. God's intervention at the tower of Babel, while frustrating human pride and excessive ambition, achieved God's creational purpose of filling the earth, "including ethnic diversification and, therefore, by implication cultural and linguistic diversity."⁹ Affirmation of such diversity is most obvious in the New Testament, as the infant church wrestles with how to apply the truth of the gospel in a variety of cultural situations.

The fifth and sixth elements of a biblical perspective on culture relate to the universality of humanity and the distinctiveness of cultural customs, rituals, and artefacts. *The human constitution is universal*. All of us are emotive, have an ability to reason, and share the physical characteristics of human bodies. This universality is described, explained, and acted out in social relationships in very distinctive ways according to culture. As Wilson describes it, *social relations are culturally particular*. In other words, the culturally-based descriptions found in Scripture are undergirded by principles that are applicable to all cultures. For example, principles of marriage as a lifelong,

exclusive agreement between a man and a woman undergird the many descriptions, prescriptions, and proscriptions in Scripture regarding marriage.

An example of the seventh element can be seen in Romans 14: *the gospel is contravened by insensitivity to cultural particularity*. Differences in culture are not the "main thing" in the salvation story, but ignoring them, or being inconsiderate, is shown in Scripture to be totally out of sync with God's heart for all people. This final element, building on the other six, is crucial in communicating the good news across cultures. It was not understood nor practiced by the Christian colonising powers of the last few centuries, and unfortunately

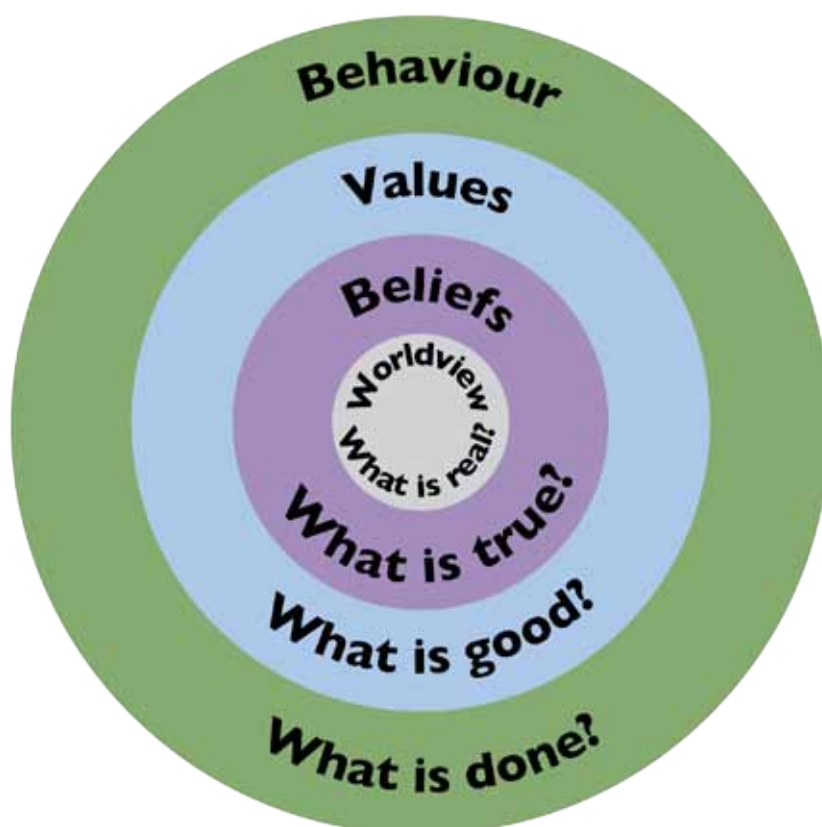
to this day some Christian workers sideline such sensitivity in the pursuit of expediency.

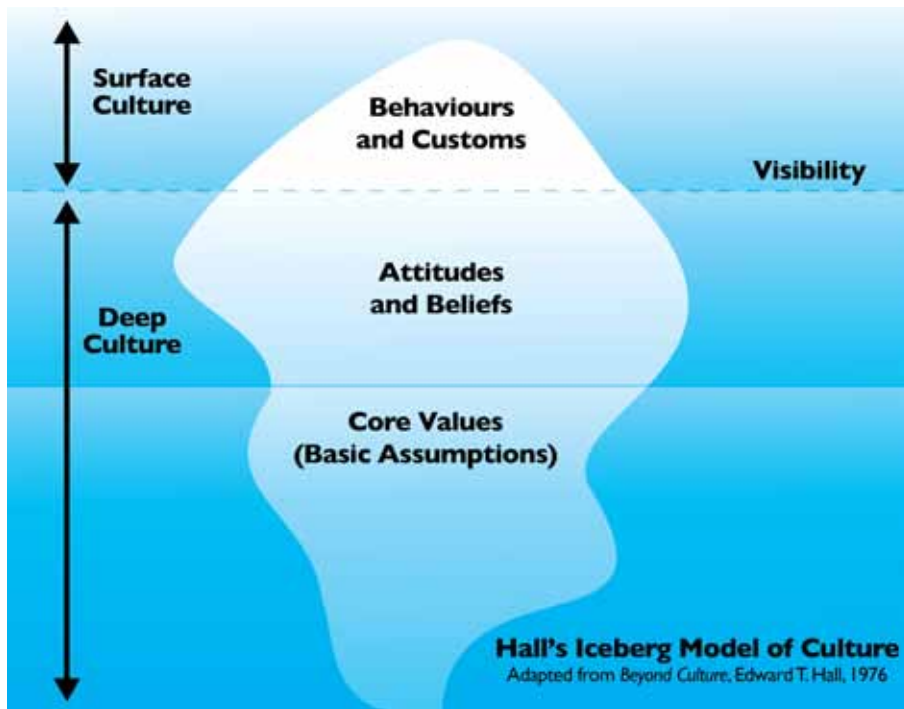
With these elements in mind, we now turn to common models used to explain how different parts of culture fit and relate together.¹⁰ Of the various models presented, two major images emerge, the "bullseye" or "onion layer" approach, and the "levels of culture" or "three dimensional" approach.¹¹

Bullseye model

Hofstede, Kwast, and Berney use the concept of a bullseye or onion to explain culture.¹² The main thrust of their argument is that as one moves towards the centre of the diagram, the descriptions of culture are deeper and more intuitive. In Kwast's model, each layer—behaviour, values, beliefs, and worldview—answers a question. Behaviour informs "what is done." Values show "what is good or best." Beliefs display "what is true," and the core worldview demonstrates "what is real."

This model is useful in understanding the distinction between observable behaviours and the values and beliefs underlying them.¹³ Entirely different behaviours may stem from





shared beliefs and values. I lived for many years in the tribal areas of the Southern Philippines and observed that the culturally appropriate behavior for good listening is for the listener to look off into the distance in order to minimize distraction. At times, in a formal teaching situation, this meant the very intent listener turned her back on the speaker at the front of the room. In stark contrast to this behaviour, while growing up in Australia, I have many memories of being told by an elder, “Look at me when I am talking to you. Give me your full attention.” Both cultures value listening, but the resulting behaviours are very different. This can be termed “same value, different action.”

Along with “same value, different action,” this model of culture helps explain situations of “same action, different value”; where two cultures have entirely different values and beliefs underlying a common behaviour. For example, in Australia, pursed lips, pointing ahead, are an informal “blown kiss” expressing affection, while in the Philippines it is a convenient way to point to an object without giving offence.¹⁴ Kwast’s model also helpfully distinguishes between behaviour,

values, beliefs, and worldview. This distinction must be kept in mind when communicating the gospel, as conversion is not a change in behaviour such as attending church or wearing more conservative clothes. It is also not simply a change in value or belief—for example, that it is good to be with Christians, or to believe that God is all-powerful. When talking in terms of Kwast’s model, Christian conversion is a seismic shift in worldview, a change in what is ultimately real. Kwast notes that missionaries are regularly “disappointed by the lack of genuine change their efforts produce” and points to a failure to effectively address worldview as the root cause.¹⁵

The presuppositions of this model are that there is no difference between stated and real beliefs. What is “said to be believed” is what is “really believed.” Yet, in areas of the world with non-direct communication and

high-context cultures, what is stated explicitly as belief is often fairly far from the actual underlying belief.¹⁶ In such situations the model is problematic. Another limitation is that the core is ultimately related to thought processes. In this way it presents itself as a cognitive “Western” model.

Levels of culture model

Nicholls, Schein, Hesselgrave, and Turner refer to “levels of culture.”¹⁷ This was initially described in terms of an iceberg by Hall in 1976.¹⁸ The main thrust of this model is that the top layer is clearly observable,¹⁹ while the lower layer is hidden, sometimes even to the people themselves as unconscious assumptions.²⁰ For example, I grew up in a cultural environment where casual, informal clothing was customarily worn, showing the value of informal and frank relationships. One of the items at the base of my cultural iceberg was the basic assumption that authenticity is of ultimate importance, even more so than the potential of offending others. I only became aware of these aspects of my worldview through a cycle of interaction with other cultures and personal reflection.

This example highlights the usefulness of this model. It clearly communicates that the deeper aspects of culture can only be observed and understood through intentionally observing surface behaviours and asking questions for the purpose of reflection.

The key presupposition of this model is that all of the observable parts of the culture are logically related to institutions, values, and assumptions from the lower levels. To a certain extent this is true, but human cultures have a tendency to be unpredictable.

The limitation of both the bullseye and levels of culture models is that the resulting picture of any particular culture, and of culture in general, is very clear and predictable.... Kwast concedes his model is “far too simple to explain the multitude of complex components and relationships that exist in every culture.”

The concept of the majority of culture being invisible, and only investigated and understood through what is visible, is extremely important to grasp.... It leads easily into a reflection process of “what did I see and what may have been underneath what I saw?”

The limitation of both the bullseye and levels of culture models is that the resulting picture of any particular culture, and of culture in general, is very clear and predictable. One section leads to another, and the result is foreseeable. Kwast concedes his model is “far too simple to explain the multitude of complex components and relationships that exist in every culture.”²¹

A third model

This brings us to a third model, championed by Wilson.²² It is based on the bullseye model with two major differences. Rather than picturing an onion or a bullseye, Wilson incorporates Lingenfelter’s likening of culture to a slot machine, where one is never entirely sure of the outcome.²³ His model is therefore a roulette wheel, “reminding us that culture is not static but always moving, changing” and that “culture has a bias.”²⁴

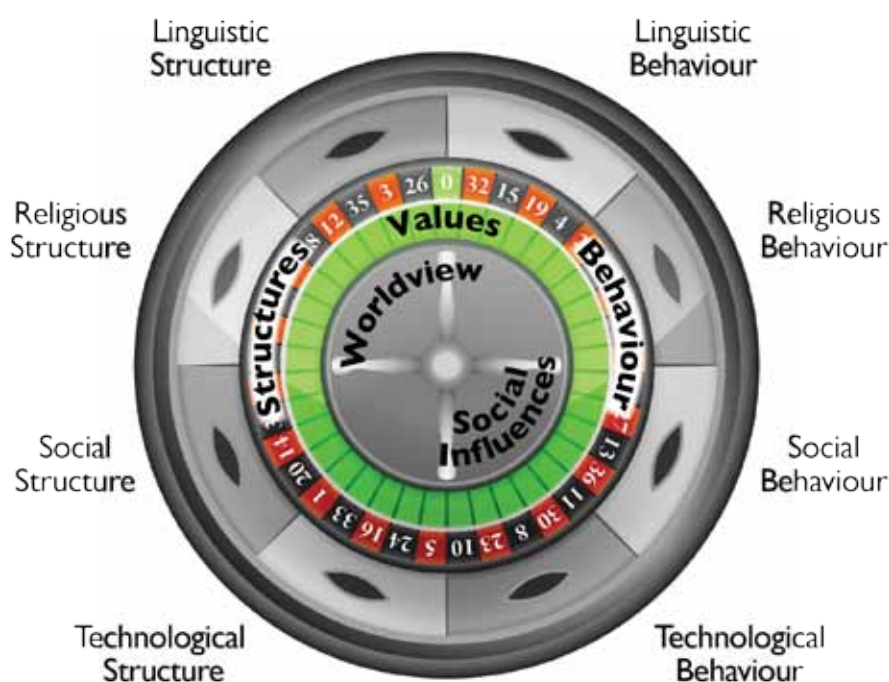
The second modification is the division of the whole roulette wheel into two sides. On the external ring, are “behaviour” and “structures,” with four outcomes per side. Because all behaviour occurs in an environment shaped by social and cultural forces, the structures and behaviour are assigned to the same level, rather than to alternate levels.²⁵ At the centre of the roulette wheel, beneath a ring of values, the two halves are termed “worldview” and “social influences.” Worldview relates to the cognitive core of culture, the beliefs and assumptions about reality, similar to the core of Kwast’s model. “Social influences” is the new element added to Wilson’s model. This refers to the socialising and enculturating process that shape reality, in acknowledgment that Western thought has given an exaggerated significance to reason and ideas, minimising or ignoring the importance of social influences.²⁶

The unique perspectives of Wilson’s model are its assets. None of the other models picture the bias in culture towards sin, or the ever-changing reality of culture, or highlight the importance of social influences alongside cognitive worldview. Yet these assets are also its liabilities. They complicate the model, which makes it confusing if it is used as an initial introduction to the concept of culture.

Conclusion

So, which of the three models of culture is most useful? I believe each has a role to play. The layers, or iceberg way of presenting culture is very helpful as an initial introduction to the whole topic of culture. The concept of the majority of culture being invisible, and only investigated and understood through what is visible, is extremely important to grasp. This model presents it well. It leads easily into a reflection process of “what did I see and what may have been underneath what I saw?” After accompanying friends on their first trips on public transport in the Philippines, I would refer them to the iceberg, and lead a discussion on what looked different from “home” and what may be under such differences.

The bullseye model is helpful in that it divides the unseen parts of culture into values, beliefs, and worldview. When walking alongside new cross-cultural workers as they assess their own culture and their host culture against a biblical worldview, I continually ask the question, “but why?” For example, when Ruth noticed that work almost came to a halt leading up to Christmas because of all of the Christmas parties held for various groups during work hours, I asked, “but why?” Why does this happen? It is because relationships and celebration are valued. Then follows another round of “but why?” Why are these things valued? Because of a belief that smooth interpersonal relationships are of utmost importance.



Building on these two common models, the roulette wheel is a helpful addition, showing the multifaceted nature of culture. The whole idea of a roulette wheel is a helpful reminder of the ambiguities and changes in culture. By explicitly showing social influences through all the layers of culture, it also counteracts the tendency to focus on culture as simply individual cognitive understanding. Although I find this model the most satisfying, it seems too complex for easy application, especially for those in the initial stages of cross-cultural work and life.

Each of these three models can be useful, and each has its limitations. It is wise for us to remember that all of them are simply tools. If we aim to understand, imbibe, and be able to feel “at-home” in a host culture, it is better to use any one rather than none. If the model of culture you use enables you to learn and interact at a deeper level, then it is a successful tool. 🍀

NOTES

¹ The information presented in this article has been influenced by lectures given by Mike Wilson during the course “Ministry in Culturally Diverse Contexts” at the Brisbane School of Theology in January 2015. All comments regarding the usefulness and limitation of the various models along with an assessment of the presuppositions behind them are my own.

² Charles H. Kraft, *Culture, Communication and Christianity: A Selection of Writings* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2001), 49.

³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper, 1951), 31.

⁴ Mike K. Wilson, “Biblical Perspectives” (lecture given in “Ministry in Culturally Diverse Contexts” course, Brisbane School of Theology, 19 January 2015). While the concepts are drawn from Wilson, the headings are mine.

⁵ Wilson, “Biblical Perspectives.”

⁶ This includes cultural differences between foreigners and the patriarchs, Joseph and his brothers, Moses and the Israelites, Israel in the land, and Israel in exile.

⁷ This also encompasses Wilson’s final element that cultural particularity is essential, though secondary, to human identity.

⁸ For example, Sennacherib’s siege of Jerusalem (Isa 36), Paul’s skillful use of languages in his defense (Acts 21), and the misunderstanding in Lystra (Acts 14).

⁹ Wilson, “Biblical Perspectives.”

¹⁰ These are distinct from models that

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describe the relation of Christianity and culture, or look at parts of culture in detail.

¹¹ These differ from models that describe various “types” of cultures, such as Lingenfelter’s Six Ways of Life. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

¹² Hofstede’s model differs from the other two in the naming of the “layers” and in the placing of a “tunnel” of practices from the outside through to the centre. Lloyd Kwast, “Understanding Culture,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, ed. Ralph Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena: William Carey, 1992), 11–15; G. Linwood Barney, “The Challenge of Anthropology to Current Missiology,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 5 (Oct 1981): 173; “The Core of Hofstede’s Onion Model,” <https://laofutze.wordpress.com/2013/09/13/the-core-of-hofstedes-onion-model/> (accessed 13 July 2015).

¹³ Mayers calls this the distinction between form and meaning. Marvin K. Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture: A Strategy for Crosscultural Evangelism*, Rev. and enl. ed. (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1987), 205.

¹⁴ In the Philippines, pointing with a finger is considered very rude. Pointing with lips and/or chin is very common.

¹⁵ Kwast, “Understanding Culture,” 11–15.

¹⁶ Anthropologist Edward T. Hall first introduced the concept of high-context and low-context cultures in the 1970s.

In low-context cultures, communication occurs principally through what is actually spoken, while in high-context cultures, a large part of communication occurs through the contextual cues, including dress, silence, body language, and the use of space. “Essentially, high-context communication involves implying a message through that which is not uttered.” Elizabeth Würtz, “Intercultural Communication on Web Sites: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Web Sites from High-Context Cultures and Low-Context Cultures,” *Journal of*

Computer-Mediated Communication 11 (2006): 274–299. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2006.tb00313.x/epdf> (accessed 13 July 2015).

¹⁷ Harold Turner, “Deep Mission to Deep Culture,” <http://www.gospel-culture.org.uk/> (accessed 13 July 2015); David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena: William Carey, 2000); Mike K. Wilson, “Models for Understanding Culture” (lecture given in “Ministry in Culturally Diverse Contexts” course, Brisbane School of Theology, 19 January 2015).

¹⁸ Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976).

¹⁹ Termed “observable behaviour and customs,” “artefacts and creations,” or the “technological layer” by Nicholls, Schein, and Hesselgrave respectively.

²⁰ Nicholls, Schein, and Hesselgrave saw the limitation of a simple two-layered approach and designed three or four layers to their model. The lower layer is termed “ideology, cosmology, worldview,” “basic assumptions,” or the “ideological layer” by Nicholls, Schein, and Hesselgrave respectively. The important aspect is that each layer builds on the one below it.

²¹ Kwast, “Understanding Culture,” 11–15.

²² Wilson, “Models for Understanding Culture.”

²³ Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 18.

²⁴ Wilson, “Models for Understanding Culture.”

²⁵ The eight slots that emerge from the behaviour and structure halves are Linguistic structure/behaviour, Religious structure/behaviour, Social structure/behaviour, and Technological structure/behaviour.

²⁶ Such an exaggerated significance on cognition is an example of social influences in action.



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✦ Reconsidering H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*

From the announcement of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to the withdrawal of the final missionaries in 1953, leaders of the China Inland Mission were faced with momentous decisions that ushered in a new paradigm for mission work. What should become of an organization with a sole focus on *inland* China when it could no longer operate within that country? Should it pass out of existence or be reorganized in a new form? Several major council meetings and repeated invitations from Church bodies in several different countries made it clear that the Overseas Missionary Fellowship of the China Inland Mission was needed. While it later appeared that the use of "overseas" meant that missionaries in this fellowship worked away from home, originally it indicated that they were working overseas from China among the "overseas Chinese". And even though the organization never lost its interest in the growth of the church in China, it realigned its ministry focus so that it could serve what were then called the "new fields".

While these great changes were taking place in missions, the theological world was introduced to a new book that challenged old thinking and practice and created a new paradigm for reflecting on the interplay between the Christian faith and human cultures. Based upon a lecture series given at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 1949, H. Richard Niebuhr's 1951 book *Christ and Culture* quickly became a staple in many a seminary classroom where several generations of theologians were educated. Though it is no longer read as frequently, it is still considered a classic and a touchstone that greatly impacted much subsequent work in this area.

The book begins by asserting that the interaction between Christ and culture is, as enunciated in the title of the first chapter, "The Enduring Problem"—a problem that extends to all peoples and all times. "Not only Jews but also Greeks and Romans, medievalists and moderns, Westerners and Orientals have rejected Christ because they saw in him a threat to their culture" (4).¹ There is just something about this man who teaches his followers to be more concerned about storing up treasures in heaven than in caring about what they should eat or drink or wear in this world—he's so counter cultural. And his talk of depending on God's grace instead of human effort is enough to make anyone who has tried to pull himself up by the bootstraps or earn his stripes fly into a rage because such inaction would inevitably hinder progress. And the fact that Christianity refuses to coexist with other religions but proclaims itself to be the only way to God is something the tolerant find truly intolerable.

Though Niebuhr recognizes that Jesus' counter-cultural tendencies often lead to his being rejected, he also acknowledges the supreme relevance of Jesus' question to the Pharisees, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" The Christ of evangelicalism is clearly not the same as the Christ of liberalism or the Christ of Mormonism. Though we derive much of our understanding of who he is from the same texts, we disagree in fundamental ways on the meaning of his life for us as individuals and for the world. According to Niebuhr, even though it is imperative that we state who we think Jesus is, all attempts to make clear his essence are bound to fail due to "the impossibility of stating adequately by means of concepts and propositions a principle which

presents itself in the form of a person” and because anything said about this person is related to “the particular standpoint in church history, and culture of the one who undertakes to describe him” (14). Thus, attempts to describe Christ as essentially love or hope or obedience or faith or humility or whatever are reductionistic and fail to describe adequately the person who is in reality much grander than any of our deliberations about him.

But it is not only our understanding of the person of Christ that requires deep reflection; our understanding of culture does too. Niebuhr identifies several ways Christians think about culture. For some, “culture is essentially Godless in the purely secular sense, as having neither positive nor negative relation to the God of Jesus Christ; for others it is Godless in the negative sense, as being anti-God or idolatrous; for others it seems solidly based on a natural, rational knowledge of God or His law” (30). These considerations should be rejected because Christians are all part of and contribute to culture. We are similarly cautioned against thinking of Christianity in terms of Western civilization to prevent the double problem of concluding that the faith cannot be transmitted to other cultures and that non-Western expressions of Christianity are impossible. Generally, Niebuhr sees culture as exhibiting the following characteristics: (1) it is social; (2) it evidences human achievement; (3) it is purposive—that is, designed to serve a good; (4) it is “concerned with the *temporal and material realization of values*” (36); and (5) it is a complex phenomenon concerned with many people, institutions, goals, interests, etc.

While culture has broadly identifiable characteristics, Christians through the centuries have expressed their experience of it in multiple ways. Niebuhr identifies five distinct yet interconnected explanations of how the Christian life can be lived in culture: (1) Christ against culture; (2) Christ of culture; (3) Christ above culture; (4) Christ and culture in paradox; and (5) Christ the transformer of culture. Helpfully, he acknowledges that although these approaches are

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distinct, no one perfectly conforms to any type. As they form the heart of his argument, we will consider them one by one.

Christ against culture

Niebuhr’s first category is arguably “the one that uncompromisingly affirms the sole authority of Christ over the Christian and resolutely rejects culture’s claims to loyalty” (45). Those who follow this position most faithfully do their utmost to remove themselves from culture, following the principle enunciated in 1 John 2:15: “Do not love the world or anything in the world” since the world is corrupted by sin and passing away. More importantly, since Jesus is Lord he is the only one to whom obedience is due. The bottom line is that, as a peculiar people, Christians should live like it. Representatives of this position include Tertullian, Tolstoy, Benedictine monastics, Mennonites, and Quakers. To these, Stackhouse adds Baptists, Christian Brethren, Pentecostals, and most fundamentalists.²

Christ of culture

At the far end of the Christ-culture spectrum are those who attempt to remove all conflicts between Jesus and society by identifying what they believe to be the highest moral and spiritual aspects of culture and proclaiming them truly Christian. Essentially, these “radical” Christians “take some fragment of the complex New Testament story and interpretation, call this the essential characteristic of Jesus, elaborate on it, and thus reconstruct their own mythical figure of the Lord” (109).

What remains is usually some form of the concept “The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man” (101) with humans existing much more in competition with physical nature than with structural or personal sin. This position has been championed by the early gnostics, Abelard in medieval times, John Locke and Thomas Jefferson in the early modern period, and the 19th century “Cultural-Protestants”, particularly Albrecht Ritschl.

Christ above culture

While the interplay between Christ and culture can be understood from the standpoint of either extreme stance, most Christians hold intermediary positions that recognize culture as something that comes from God yet is tainted by sin. The first of these seeks to discern what is good in culture through reason while recognizing that a full understanding of the good can only be found through biblical revelation and the Son of God. The “synthesist” sees God’s rule played out in Greek wisdom, Roman law, and other cultural developments, and seeks to articulate how it can be lived in the here and now. Though the position offers much, it founders on its attempt to institutionalize the faith according to a supreme cultural ideal while ignoring the reality that its understanding of history and God’s work in and through culture is tentative at best and constantly changes though time and place. This position is most closely tied to institutional Catholicism (including Anglo-Catholicism) and is best represented by Clement of Alexandria, Thomas Aquinas, and Pope Leo XIII.

So why should modern missionaries read this book? In part, so that we can more intelligently enter the conversation about Christ and culture. What do we mean when we preach Christ? What do our listeners hear when we speak of him? What is culture and how do we relate to it? What impact should we expect the gospel to have on a particular culture?

Christ and culture in paradox

The second mediating position is a “dualist” stance that radically distinguishes between God and humans and therefore emphasizes an unending conflict between Christ and culture, law and grace, wrath and mercy, revelation and reason. The paradox lies in the recognition that life is filled with inescapable contradictions that God uses to carry out his mysterious will. The Christian is “under law, and yet ... under ... grace; he is a sinner, and yet righteous; he believes, as a doubter; he has assurance of salvation, yet walks along the knife-edge of insecurity” (157). In a similar sense, the Christian is within culture and yet outside of it. While it is necessary to live out one’s life in society, the Christian recognizes the limits to culture and in the realms of religion allows Christ’s rule to have first place. To some extent, Paul could be said to uphold this position, as would Marcion, Martin Luther (who best exemplifies this type), Ernst Troeltsch, and Roger Williams.

Christ the transformer of culture

The final consideration of the interaction between Christ and culture reflects, according to Niebuhr, “the great central tradition of the church” (190) and can be discerned in the Gospel of John, Augustine of Hippo, Calvin, Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and the 19th century Anglican F. D. Maurice. This approach begins

with a positive assessment of culture since it is rooted in the creation which God pronounced to be “good”. However, since creation and culture were corrupted by sin they need to be transformed—converted—so they can fulfil God’s original intention. Since Christ is the Lord of all, Christians should actively strive to see all of culture converted so that it reflects God’s design and reign.

Christ and Culture and modern missions

This is not a book for the casual reader, and for several reasons. Many will be lost in a historical haze simply because they do not know the breadth and depth of their faith or who has articulated it in time. This is more a reflection on the state of our biblical and theological training than a criticism of Niebuhr. In an age that finds self-help books much more appealing than those requiring deep thought, not a few will struggle when they discover that *Christ and Culture* was not written to tell us *what* to think, but to teach us *how* to think. The way it develops categories that traverse Christian thought and provide guidelines for examining contemporary practice may prove perplexing to those who simply want to know, “But which approach is the *right* one? What difference does it make? And what should I *do*?” Those who are willing and able to think through difficult ideas will discover that groundwork is laid here that sets out parameters for evaluating our personal

and organizational approach to culture as well as the form of Christianity found in the countries where we work. Are we fixed to one of these categories? Or, if we combine ideas from several of them, which are they, how much emphasis do we give to each, and why? Or are other categories at play in our world, and if so what are they and how should we respond to them? These are questions that thoughtful readers should work through when they have completed their reading.

While Niebuhr’s categories give us guidelines for thinking about Christ and culture, many scholars have struggled with the book. On the fiftieth anniversary of its publication, George Marsden wrote, “I think Niebuhr’s analysis in its present form could be near the end of its usefulness,” and then proceeds to show that Niebuhr’s terms “Christ” and “culture” are inadequate and confusing and that the five categories developed are “not historically accurate” and should be supplemented.³ Similarly, Neuhaus reports that “While Niebuhr’s typology is suggestive and therefore useful, it is also seriously misleading on several scores. I confess that, after some years, I stopped using it in classroom teaching when I found that I was spending more time in arguing with Niebuhr than in being guided by him.”⁴

Does this scholarly assessment of the book suggest that we should pronounce the contents out of date and relegate it to the circular bin? While some may so conclude, its continued re-examination by many scholars lets us know that there is more here than casually meets the eye. Consider, for instance, the extensive engagement that D. A. Carson has proffered in *Christ and Culture Revisited* or the essays in *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture*.⁵ Niebuhr’s book is a classic, not because it is the final word on the subject but because it marks the beginning of a substantial conversation. The responses of Marsden, Neuhaus, Carson, and many others only make sense when read in reference to the original. Reading their thoughts on the subject ignorant of the original is like joining a deep and heated conversation or even picking up a detective novel in

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the middle. While you may pick up a lot, there is much—particularly in the wider context—that will be missed.

So why should modern missionaries read this book? In part, so that we can more intelligently enter the conversation about Christ and culture. What do we mean when we preach Christ? What do our listeners hear when we speak of him? What is culture and how do we relate to it? What impact should we expect the gospel to have on a particular culture? Even if we disagree with Niebuhr's answers he forces us to come up with answers of our own, answers that should not only make sense to us but also to the people we come to serve. This is a benefit that cannot be denied and should not be downplayed.

Christ and Culture can help us in another way, though it is doubtful that Niebuhr would have seen it in this light. Toward the beginning of the book we find the remarkable claim that people from radically disparate religious backgrounds, cultures, and times, “seem to be offended by the same elements in the gospel and employ similar arguments in defending their culture against it” (5). This counters the common expectation that various groups will find different aspects of gospel to be a stumbling block and lets us know that the main issues people find particularly abhorrent about the Christian faith are quite few. Since people mainly reject Christianity due to its otherworldliness, its rejection of works-righteousness, and its claim to be the only true religion, our defence of the faith can revolve around these issues no matter what cultural or religious groups we work with. The implications are huge.

Negatively, this lets us know that when we share the gospel with people of any culture, they will not be lining up to believe in Jesus. The Scriptures rightly describe the gospel as foolishness to those who are perishing, a stumbling block that they just can't avoid (1 Cor 1:18, 23). Or to seize upon another biblical image, followers of Christ give off the odor of death to those who are not being saved (2 Cor 2:15). No wonder people of all religious backgrounds take offense at the gospel. John Stott rightly reasoned

Whether our perception of Christ and culture is accurate or proves faulty, people can—and will—be saved through the preaching of the biblical gospel since the Holy Spirit uses it to bring rebels to repentance and regeneration.

that, “We are fooling ourselves if we imagine that we can ever make the authentic gospel popular . . . It's too simple in an age of rationalism; too narrow in an age of pluralism; too humiliating in an age of self-confidence; too demanding in an age of permissiveness; and too unpatriotic in an age of blind nationalism . . . What are we going to share with our friends? The authentic gospel or a gospel that has been corrupted in order to suit human pride?”⁶ The sad fact is, when Christ meets culture he is usually rejected.

But positive elements can also be discerned here too. Even where the gospel is found repugnant, it remains “the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16), the essential message for a world in need of God's grace. Whether our perception of Christ and culture is accurate or proves faulty, people can—and will—be saved through the preaching of the biblical gospel since the Holy Spirit uses it to bring rebels to repentance and regeneration. We receive a further benefit when we realize that since the gospel has a limited number of elements that prove offensive to the religious and irreligious, we are not required to learn a myriad arguments to defend the truth, but only a few that can be applied to what otherwise appear to be vastly different circumstances.

When Christ meets culture people are forced to make decisions about how they will face the future, about

how they will relate to God. This can produce a paradigm change that shakes individuals and societies to the very foundation as they discover what it means to become disciples of Jesus and live as members of his kingdom. ⚙

NOTES

¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975). All page numbers in parentheses are from the original edition rather than the fiftieth anniversary edition that contains added material (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001).

² John G. Stackhouse Jr., “In the World, but...,” *Christianity Today* (April 2002), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/april22/8.80.html> (accessed 26 August 2015). Stackhouse's review of *Christ and Culture* intentionally relates Niebuhr's categories to modern evangelicalism and shows where some of us fit in.

³ George Marsden, “Christianity and Cultures: Transforming Niebuhr's Categories,” *Insight* 115 (Fall 1999): 4–15. It should be noted that Niebuhr acknowledged that his categories were not exhaustive (230–231).

⁴ Richard John Neuhaus, “Christ without Culture,” in *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 144.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); Glen H. Stassen, D. M. Yeager, and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995).

⁶ John Stott, “The Crucial Decision,” *IFES Overview*, 1988/89, quoted in Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry: A Biography: The Later Years* (Downers Grove, IVP, 2001), 267.

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✦ Perceptions of Christ in Manobo Culture

This is a revised version of an essay I read on 7 March 2014 at the First Mindanao Theological Forum organized by Koinonia Theological Seminary Foundation, Inc. The original essay will be published as “Manobo Blood Sacrifice and Christ’s Death” in the conference volume, Christologies, Cultures and Religions: Portraits of Christ in the Philippines, edited by Pascal D. Bazzell and Aldrin Peñamora to be published by Asia Theological Association and OMF Lit., Philippines in 2016.

Many of us will know Don Richardson’s story of the “peace child”.¹ When the Richardsons began teaching the gospel to the Sawi people, they were shocked to discover that the Sawi totally misunderstood the message because the tribe valued treachery as a positive character trait, and thus revered Judas’ betrayal of Jesus as the pinnacle of this art. As we will see, the Sawi are not the only people to interpret our teaching about Christ in unexpected ways because they view it through their own cultural grid. If we are not careful to study the culture and worldview of the people where we work, we may be in danger of communicating “bad news” instead of “good news”. Such was the case amongst the Manobo people in the southern Philippines.

The bad “Good News”

“God is worse than the spirits, and Jesus wanted his followers to become demon possessed.” This is what a member of the Ata Manobo tribe of Davao-del-Norte might conclude upon learning about the Christian faith. In order for us to understand how they could arrive at such a warped understanding of the gospel, one has to delve into their culture and background.

Prior to the arrival of the Christian message in the 1960s, all Manobo people were animists. Living in the inland forests, they had never been reached either by Roman Catholicism which dominates the lowland peoples, or by Islam which was largely concentrated on the coastlands and particularly the Western areas of Mindanao island.

The Manobo believed in a myriad of spirits who dwelt in trees, rivers, rocks, and the air. These spirits, known as “*busow*”, were powerful enough to cause sickness, to give or withhold a good harvest, to bring rain or drought, to foretell the future, to give success in hunting, and to cause death. The Manobo people lived in fear of these spirits who were seen to be malevolently in search of blood to drink. The degree to which the *busow* crave blood means they are seen as the cause of all human sickness. Manobo people believe that if this blood-lust is not satisfied by the sacrifice of an animal, the spirits will cause the disease to progress so that the person dies and the *busow* can drink his or her blood.

In order to deal with these spirits, the Manobo people had spirit practitioners, known as “*bailan*” who were able to divine the cause of a sickness and prescribe the required remedy—usually an animal sacrifice of some sort—in order for the sick person to be healed. The *bailan* has his own guardian spirit, called a “*bantoy*” who tells the *bailan* what the cause of sickness is, who the perpetrator of a crime is, or when to plant in order to reap a good harvest. In return for this help, the *bailan* will offer a sacrifice to the *bantoy* every full moon. The *bailan* kills the animal—usually a pig—and drinks the blood himself, thereby feeding the *bantoy* and bringing protection for the clan for the following month. If for some reason the *bailan* is unable to sacrifice an animal, then usually someone from his or her clan will fall sick. In such cases, an additional sacrifice is required to appease the *bantoy*.

If a Manobo person were to break one of the innumerable taboos of daily life, then the *busow* would cause him to fall sick and the *bailan* would have to perform an animal sacrifice to appease the spirits. This heavy cost of keeping on the right side of the spirits meant that Manobo people lived their lives in fear, always trying to avoid upsetting the spirits or attracting their attention. Fear was, and is, the way of life for Manobo people.

Now, when missionaries came with the gospel, they told about the sacrifices in Old Testament worship. This of course generated much interest in the Manobo people because of its perceived similarity to their own system of sacrifice.² It was assumed that these sacrifices were required by God in the same way as the sacrifices were required by the *busow* in order to satisfy his craving for blood. God's requirement of a blood sacrifice to forgive the sin of the Israelites was seen as equivalent to the spirits' requirement of appeasement because of a broken taboo. However, it appeared to the Manobo that God's requirements were on an even grander scale than that of their *busow* because of the requirements of daily sacrifices, not just monthly ones.

When missionaries started to tell the New Testament stories and came to the death of Christ on the cross, then the distortion of the message was even greater. In the Manobo mind, God appeared to be far worse than their spirits, because his blood-lust did not stop at animal sacrifices or the death through illness of people, but stretched as far as the death of his own Son. What kind of God is so blood-thirsty that he would kill his own Son to satisfy his craving? When seen through this cultural grid, the biblical God appears to be far worse than the *busow*. If God did not baulk at the death of his own Son, then what is to stop him from killing anyone else? What protection can there be for ordinary people?

Furthermore, in Manobo tradition, most people want to keep the spirits at arms-length, and avoid as much involvement with them as possible. However, there are some who seek the spirits' help to gain power or knowledge. For instance, someone might want to become a *bailan* in order to be able to protect his clan from spirit attack and to gain respect and status in the tribe. To do this he or she would need to become possessed by a familiar spirit, or *bantoy*. Fierce warriors are also revered amongst the Manobo, and so a man wanting to become renowned as a fearsome fighter would also seek help from the spirits. In both these cases, a ceremony is required in which the one seeking help would perform a sacrifice and drink the blood of the

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sacrifice. For a prospective *bailan*, this would usually be a chicken or pig that is sacrificed, but in the case of the warrior, in order to be empowered by the warrior spirit called the *talabusow*, he was required to kill an enemy and then drink the blood and eat some of the heart or liver of the dead man. He would then become possessed by the spirit and become invincible in battle.

Following on from this practice and belief, most Manobo people are afraid of eating or drinking raw flesh or blood, and especially avoid human flesh or blood because they believe that if they consume it, even inadvertently, they will become possessed by an evil spirit.

So, when missionaries taught about the Last Supper, and then about Holy Communion in the church, confusion reigned supreme in the Manobo mind. If we eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus in the ceremony of Communion, then surely we will become possessed by an evil spirit. It thus appeared that Jesus was commanding his followers to become demon possessed. This misunderstanding naturally led to a great resistance amongst Manobo people to take part in Communion. Even today, after the church has been established amongst the Manobo for more than thirty years, there is a reluctance to conduct Communion services, and many congregations will not do so unless there is a visiting missionary or church leader who initiates the ceremony. The seriousness of this problem is illustrated by my recent experience of teaching a group of fifteen Manobo pastors and church leaders about Holy Communion and discovering that twelve of them had never even partaken of Communion, and none of them had ever conducted a Communion service!³

A contextualised response

The question then arises of how we can communicate the gospel to the

Manobo people without producing this appalling distortion of the truth in their minds.

It should be appreciated that even though the Manobo can easily misunderstand the gospel they are not predisposed to reject it. Many Manobo have been influenced by a prophecy given through a *bailan* two or three generations ago foretelling the coming of foreigners clutching a book which included instructions that they should not let go of the teaching of the book. Others were swayed by a lady *bailan* who is known to me who inquired of her *bantoy* about the teaching she was hearing about Jesus. Incomprehensibly, the spirit replied to her, “We spirits have power here on earth, but Jesus has power in heaven too, you should follow him.” As a result, she and her clan left the old ways and became Christians.

While these phenomena have impacted some, OMF members have principally used the chronological teaching course, which begins by teaching about the creation of the world from the Old Testament narratives, and progresses through to the New Testament about Jesus and the church. The Manobo village setting has enabled this teaching to be conducted in the form of regular story-telling sessions whilst people relax at the end of a day working in their fields. A skilled story-teller will point out both the similarities and the differences between the biblical practices of sacrifice and the Manobo traditions. The key point to be emphasised is that in the Bible, God is never described as eating or craving the blood of the sacrifices. Neither do the priests or people drink or taste the blood of sacrifices. In fact, God strictly prohibits the consumption of blood when he speaks to Noah in Genesis 9:4. Another passage that has been particularly helpful in this respect is the description of the first Passover in Exodus 12:23 where it says, “When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the

Whether we are explaining the gospel of Jesus to the Sawi or Manobo or any other people group, it is essential that we first have a clear understanding of the culture and worldview of the people so that we can communicate effectively. Otherwise, we may unknowingly be presenting not the “good news” that we intend, but some horrible distortion of that message, which may be received as very bad news indeed.

blood on the top and sides of the door frame and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.” A skillful story-teller will stress that the Lord is described as “seeing” the blood on the top and sides of the door frame, rather than eating it or drinking it.

Many Manobo people have come to a better understanding of Old Testament sacrifice in this manner, and hence have been able to grasp at least some measure of the significance of Christ’s death on the cross. It was not because God craved ever more blood, but because lifeblood had to be given in payment for sin, and there was no greater or better sacrifice available than the perfect sacrifice of Christ.⁴

There is still a difficulty when teaching about the Lord’s Supper, and about Jesus’ teaching that “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53), but if the story-teller can emphasise that Jesus was speaking metaphorically and that the bread and wine are only symbols or representations of Jesus’ body and blood, then the Manobo people can be brought to understand and to accept the sacrament without fear of demon possession.

A redemptive analogy

In the same way that Don Richardson found that there was a cultural practice of the Sawi people which he could use to help explain the truth of the gospel,

there is an aspect of Manobo culture which can help them to visualise what Christ did by his death.

Apart from the *bailan* who exercises some spiritual leadership in a Manobo clan, it is normal to have a political/martial chieftain called a *datu*. A *datu* will usually hold the allegiance of those living in his village, and possibly neighbouring villages. If one of his followers has a grievance against another person from within the village, then he would bring his case before the *datu* for resolution. If the feud is between people from different villages, then the *datu* of both will be involved. In a settlement, the accuser will bring his case, perhaps with witnesses to corroborate his complaint, then the accused will also speak his defence, again with witnesses to affirm his innocence. The *datu* will also ask questions of the two parties. After this he will deliberate or discuss with the other *datu*s present and will then pronounce his verdict. The settlement will usually require the guilty party to pay restitution in the form of animals, spears, knives, or other valued goods. In the case of a small offense, the payment may be as small as a single chicken, but in a larger case, such as murder or adultery, the *datu* could declare that the offender is deserving of death. However, in such a case, the offended party can demand payment of a horse or buffalo (or more) instead of killing the offender. When that happens, it is often the case that the offender does not have such a payment available, so the *datu* will make the payment on his behalf so that his follower can go free. This serves to strengthen the bond between chieftain and clan members by establishing a

debt of gratitude. If at some future date the chieftain requires a pig or horse to settle another case, then the redeemed offender will give it to the chieftain without question.

As a picture of our situation before God, this speaks volumes to Manobo people. They can easily see themselves as the offender being accused by Satan of having sinned. They cannot deny the accusation since there are witnesses to substantiate their guilt. The verdict is that they are deserving of death and they have no ransom to pay because the demand is a sinless life given in their stead. However, Jesus—as the *datu*—offers his own life in order to redeem the life of his follower. The offender then lives the rest of his life in grateful service to God.

The picture has limitations of course, since Jesus’ death was not a payment to Satan, nor was the flesh of Christ eaten by Satan’s cohort. However, it does speak strongly to Manobo people, and can be used as a helpful analogy in expounding the gospel.

This examination of the way cultural perceptions impact our presentation of the gospel goes to show that whether we are presenting Jesus to the Sawi or Manobo or any other people group, it is essential that we first have a clear understanding of their worldview so that we can communicate effectively. Otherwise, we may unknowingly be presenting not the “good news” that we intend, but some horrible distortion of that message, which may be received as very bad news indeed. ⚙

NOTES

¹ Don Richardson, *Peace Child*, 4th ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2005).

² This perceived similarity has led to problems of syncretism in some Manobo areas, since Bible stories have been used to authenticate the validity of their own sacrificial system as being time-honoured and God-given.

³ At the end of the teaching, we joyfully celebrated Communion together, using a simple cake made from cassava for the bread, and a red coloured drink made by boiling sweet potato leaves for the wine, since bread and wine or grape juice are not available locally.

⁴ Brian Powell, “Manobo Blood Sacrifice and Christ’s Death,” in *Christologies, Cultures and Religions: Portraits of Christ in the Philippines*, Pascal D. Bazzell and Aldrin Peñamora eds., to be published by Asia Theological Association and OMF Lit., Philippines in 2016.



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is from New Zealand and started as an “Apprentice” with OMF in 1992. After Bible College she returned to Japan where she served until 2010 when she transitioned to Singapore. She is now learning another language and culture in the Philippines and serving as Field Personnel Manager.

✦ When Beauty Isn’t

I had arranged to take two of our newly-arrived short-term workers on a cultural day out. Usually, short-term teams on the Japan Field were taken to a Buddhist temple and a Shinto shrine in central Tokyo so that they could observe firsthand the practice of religion in this country where the two religions happily coexist. We hoped that immersing the short-termers in the sights, smells, and sounds of idol worship would awaken their spirits to the spiritual plight of the people.

During their time of language study, the long-term workers also make similar visits to various places of worship as part of their cultural acquisition. We recognize that learning only the language is not enough—a good understanding of culture is essential to better minister to the people.

For the short-termers who don’t get the chance to study much language, the exposure to culture is often the primary way they gain insights into the hearts of the people.

These two particular short-termers had done a bit of research before coming and wanted to do a bit of extra cultural observation, and so I had agreed to accompany them for a day’s outing.

After meeting them at two train stations along the route, we continued on to Kamakura, a city that was once the seat of the Shogunate and is known for its religious sites and for beautiful scenery. We had planned to include both of these in our itinerary, and as we set out I was just as excited as the two new-comers as it was my first time to visit this area.

One of our first stops was the 1200-year-old Great Buddha. As we took time to observe the multitude of people coming and going,

we were filled with sadness that these people expected a bronze image—albeit a big one—to answer their prayers and bring health and happiness to their lives. Reflecting on this aspect of culture that seems so gentle yet holds them firmly in its metallic grasp, we took time to pray together that the eyes of the Japanese people would be opened to the gospel.

As we walked to our next destination, we continued to talk about aspects of religion in Japan. As Westerners, it is often difficult for us to understand the syncretism that is the norm here. For a Japanese however, there is no difficulty at all in claiming allegiance to both Buddhism and Shinto, for in their minds, the two religions serve different purposes. Shinto is primarily associated with birth rituals, and Buddhism with death rituals and the afterlife. Many today will add Christianity to the mix so that they can have a “white” wedding and a so-called “Christian” ceremony. “Religion” to the Japanese is not about “faith,” but about the purpose it fulfills in the life cycle. This is an important difference to keep in mind as we seek to share the good news. Of course there is much more to both religions, and a significant amount of blurring between the two, but for the sake of these short-termers, that distinction helps.

As the sun climbed overhead, we climbed a flight of steps leading to a bamboo garden that was recommended in a travel guide. Reaching the top, we were about to continue along the path when a lady sitting in a small wooden booth called out to us. This garden was connected to a temple and charged an admission fee that we didn’t know about! Before she would take our money, however, she thrust out a card with “Rules of the Temple” written across the top. Together we gathered beside the small booth and proceeded to read the instructions. We giggled at the interesting choice of English

It is so easy to take delight in gardens that are aesthetically pleasing, but when those gardens have been used as places for worshipping other gods, they lose their beauty in God's sight, and instead become detestable to him. How then can we delight in them? ... Our prayers for the people around us turned to prayers of confession for our own actions—our own eyes had been opened in answer to our prayers earlier in the day.

phrases, some of which we could work out, and others which totally mystified us. Two at the bottom, however, were very clear: "The fee you pay to enter goes to the upkeep of our religious work." The concluding request was that we worship the God of the temple during our visit. We looked at each other, as we each realized that although we wanted to see these famous gardens, we had no desire to fulfil either of those requirements.

We put our money back into our purses, turned around, and walked back down the steps. The steps were wide, and so we choose a shaded spot about half-way down where we sat to talk about what we had just read. All three of us were shocked at the realization that paying the entrance fee enabled them to do their "religious work." This was a tourist area—with visitors coming from all over Japan as well as from overseas. How many other Christian tourists had, like we had just a short time before, paid to see the Great Buddha and paid admission fees to visit any of a multitude of temples and shrines in order to see the beautiful gardens inside?

Is it OK to pay an entrance fee if it supports the propagation of another religion, we asked ourselves? Does it make any difference if it is for the

upkeep of the garden, maintenance, etc.? What did the local Japanese people think as they saw us visiting these places? Would they think that we are just like them, using each religion for its purpose in our lives? Should we be concerned about what they might think? We knew that there are different opinions about these questions, but what did we think?

As we reflected and prayed together, sitting on the steps leading to the entrance to the temple, one of the short-termers remembered something she had read recently, so we got our Bibles out and started searching for phrases about "sacred groves." Though this wasn't quite the right phrase, we managed to find what we were looking for. In Isaiah 1:29 it says, "You will be ashamed because of the sacred oaks in which you have delighted; you will be disgraced because of the gardens that you have chosen." In the first chapter of his book, Isaiah starts off with a grim picture of Israel, God's chosen nation, forsaking the God who has raised them (v 2). The sacrifices (v 11) and rituals (v 14) they perform and the prayers they pray (v 15) have become offensive in God's sight, despite the fact that the feasts and festivals were commanded by God earlier in Israel's history. The rebellion of God's people is obvious in Isaiah's description, and so too is

the offense that this rebellion brings to the Lord Almighty. As we considered these and other verses that we found during our search, we were challenged to consider our own actions. Were we delighting in things that displeased our God?

It is so easy to take delight in gardens that are aesthetically pleasing, but when those gardens have been used as places for worshipping other gods, they lose their beauty in God's sight, and instead become detestable to him. How then can we delight in them? We were ashamed of the fact that we had chosen to enjoy these gardens! Our prayers for the people around us turned to prayers of confession for our own actions—our own eyes had been opened in answer to our prayers earlier in the day.

We didn't visit any more temple gardens that day, and we didn't go into any shrine or temple that required us to pay admission. Instead we decided to follow a hiking trail over a hill. We were surprised to discover that the path passed through another large shrine, but as it was closed that day no one was sitting at the booth to collect our money. We rejoiced together at that evidence of God's work to spare us from having to do something that we had just learnt was offensive to him. We continued along the trail, and when we sensed an oppressive spiritual atmosphere, we decided to sing praises to our God. We sang of God's greatness and majesty; we sang of his power over all creation; we sang of his power over death through the cross; and we sang of his love for us. It was hard to sing at first, but it gave us strength to carry on, and we rejoiced at what we had learnt that day. We had learnt some cultural lessons, but we had also seen a glimpse of how our Almighty God viewed the culture we were observing. We had learned not just to pray for those who needed the gospel, but for our own eyes to be opened. We had seen God honoring our decision by somehow arranging it that the last shrine was closed so we could pass through without giving our money for the propagation of their religion. The biggest lesson we learnt though was that sometimes, things that are beautiful, aren't. 

We had learnt some cultural lessons, but we had also seen a glimpse of how our Almighty God viewed the culture we were observing. We had learned not just to pray for those who needed the gospel, but for our own eyes to be opened.

✦ CIM and Adapting to Chinese Culture

Most readers of *Mission Round Table* will be aware that 2015 marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of the China Inland Mission by James Hudson Taylor. From its beginning, the CIM exhibited a number of distinctive characteristics. It was interdenominational—drawing workers from a broad spectrum of Protestant Christianity. It was international—the first group of missionaries (the Lammermuir Party) consisted of people from England, Scotland, Ireland, and Switzerland. It attracted people from the working-class who did not necessarily have formal theological training or ordination and thus prevented competition with other societies since the needs of China were so great. It followed the “faith principle” of relying upon God to supply financial needs through prayer.¹ And it sought to identify with the people of China as much as was possible in order to remove barriers to the gospel.

The most distinctive mark of identifying with Chinese people was adopting Chinese clothes, a practice that was strongly promoted by Taylor due to his experience that it allowed him to blend into society more effectively. But while he advanced its use, Taylor did not innovate the practice. As early as the 16th century, Matteo Ricci and Michael Ruggieri adopted the clothing of Buddhist monks and then Confucian Mandarins as they travelled through China. Charles Gutzlaff was known to have worn native clothes while working in Siam before Taylor was born. This man, who instigated the founding of the Chinese Evangelisation Society—the first organization in which

Hudson Taylor served—and who Taylor himself often referred to as “the grandfather of the China Inland Mission”,² traversed much of China wearing Chinese clothes while preaching and distributing literature. The success of others convinced Taylor and his friend William Burdon that they should try it too, and thus it became a hallmark of early CIM work.

The following two articles, written by the first two CIM General Directors, place the wearing of Chinese clothes in context. Of utmost importance was the principle of, as the current OMF Handbook states it, “Identifying with the people and living an appropriate lifestyle.”³ If one can better identify with the people by sporting traditional costumes, she should by all means do so. However, when local fashion tastes evolve along with the culture, a change in attire may be required. The difficulty faced by missionaries today is to discern whether our choices regarding apparel or transportation or housing or technology or whatever are based upon our personal preferences or our desire to become all things to all men so that we might by all means win some for Christ.

Editor

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1 As Hudson Taylor put it, “God’s work done God’s way will not lack God’s supply.”

2 Howard and Geraldine Taylor, *Hudson Taylor In Early Years: The Growth of a Soul*, anniversary ed. (Singapore: OMF, 1988), opposite 88, caption to photo.

3 *OMF Handbook* (2015), 6.

The most distinctive mark of identifying with Chinese people was adopting Chinese clothes, a practice that was strongly promoted by Taylor due to his experience that it allowed him to blend into society more effectively.



James Hudson Taylor

founded the China Inland Mission in 1865 and served fifty-one years in China. He was known for his sensitivity to Chinese culture, zeal for evangelism, the establishment of the CIM as a non-denominational mission that accepted members from all protestant groups, including the working class and women.



D. E. Hoste

was the second General Director of the China Inland Mission. One of the Cambridge Seven, Hoste sailed for China in 1885 and eventually worked under Pastor Hsi at an opium refuge. Hoste is credited with making the Chinese churches apply the indigenous rules of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation.

On Becoming a Chinese to the Chinese¹

But as to work carried on at any considerable distance in the interior of such a nature as that which we contemplate, I am fully satisfied that the native dress is an absolute prerequisite. No foreign missionary to the best of my knowledge ever has, in European costume, carried on such a work: and my strong conviction is that at present no foreign missionary could do so. He might travel, almost anywhere under the protection of his passport; but quietly settling among the people, obtaining free, familiar, and unrestrained communication with them, conciliating their prejudices, attracting their esteem and confidence, and so living as to be examples to them of what Christian Chinese should be, require the adoption, not merely of their costume, but also of their habits to a very considerable extent . . . I have never heard of anyone who after having *bona fide* attempted to become a Chinese to the Chinese that he might gain the Chinese, either regretted the step he had taken or decided to abandon the course... In seeking the co-operation of fresh helpers it is for work in the interior that I desire it. Holding strongly the views just mentioned, I should wish all those who desire to help me... not to join a work to be so conducted unless prepared heartily and conscientiously to carry out its principles. I repeat, it is as helpers in a work already designed and in successful operation, and not as designers of a new work that I invite your co-operation.

Surely no follower of this meek and lowly One will be likely to conclude that it is “beneath the dignity of a Christian missionary” to seek identification with this poor people, that he may see them washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. Let us rather be imitators of Him (who washed His disciples’ feet).

We have to deal with a people whose prejudices in favour of their own customs and habits are the growth of centuries and millenniums. Nor are their preferences ill-founded. Those who know them most intimately respect them most; and see best the necessity for many of their habits and customs—this being found in the climate, productions, and conformations of the people. There is perhaps no country in the world in which religious toleration is carried to so great an extent as in China; the only objection that prince or people have to Christianity is that it is a foreign religion, and that its tendencies are to approximate believers to foreign nations.

I am not peculiar in holding the opinion that the foreign dress and carriage of missionaries—to a certain extent affected by some of their converts and pupils—the foreign appearance of the chapels, and, indeed, the foreign air given to everything connected with religion, have very largely hindered the rapid dissemination of the truth among the Chinese. But why need such a foreign aspect be given to Christianity? The word of God does not require it; nor I conceive would reason justify it. It is not their denationalization but their Christianization that we seek.

We wish to see Christian (Chinese)—true Christians, but withal true *Chinese* in every sense of the word. We wish to see churches and Christian Chinese presided over by pastors and officers of their own countrymen, worshipping the true God in the land of their fathers, in the costume of their fathers, in their own tongue wherein they were born, and in edifices of a thoroughly Chinese style of architecture.

If we really desire to see the Chinese such as we have described, let us as far as possible set before them a correct example: let us in everything un sinful become Chinese, that by all things we may save some. Let us adopt their costume, acquire their language, study to imitate their habits, and approximate to their diet as far as health and constitution will allow. Let us live in their houses, making no unnecessary alterations in external appearance, and only so far modifying internal arrangements as attention to health and efficiency for work absolutely require.

Our present experience is proving the advantage of this course. We do find that we *are* influencing the Chinese around us in a way which we could not otherwise have done. We are daily coming in contact with them, not in one point, but in many; and we see the people becoming more or less influenced by the spirit, piety and earnestness of some of those labouring among them. But this cannot be attained without some temporary inconvenience, such as the sacrifice of some articles of diet, etc, etc. Knives and forks, plates and dishes, cups and saucers, must give place to chopsticks, native spoons and basins (and food)...

But there are other restraints and privations which to many will be far more trying than these trifling ones. Husbands and wives may not walk out together arm in arm, nor even walking separately may they be unattended. In walking out among the Chinese, persons of both sexes will have to adopt the slow,

orderly, sedate gait of educated natives; otherwise they will lose influence with the people, and be thought ill-brought up, unmannered and ignorant. Ladies must remember that they cannot enjoy that freedom in public to which they have been accustomed; that they can never go out unattended; and that they will find their personal liberty in other ways more or less restricted.

But will any brother or sister reflect on what He gave up who left heaven's throne to be cradled in a manger . . . and yet hesitate to make the trifling sacrifices to which we have alluded? We give you credit, dear friends, for being prepared to give up, not only these little things, but ten thousand times more, for Christ's sake...

Some time ago I was walking at a little distance behind a missionary and his wife, in the streets of Ningpo, (a place where foreigners are perhaps better thought of than in any other part of China) and was not a little pained to hear the remarks made by the Chinese about the foreign missionary and his "paramour"—if I may so far soften the expression used. A comparatively brief residence among the Chinese (I do not say *in* China) will convince the attentive observer that the prevalent opinion of the masses at the present time, is that the rite of marriage is unknown among the nations of Europe and America, which are believed to be appropriately styled, with regard to morality, "barbarian". Nor is it easy to conceive whence the Chinese could obtain more correction notions. Certainly not from the smuggling traffic of opium—so long carried on along the entire coast of China. Certainly not from the gangs of intoxicated seamen who frequent our open ports; nor alas! From the lives of too many of our countrymen, whose education and position, and in many instances, previous religious training might have led us to expect better things. Certainly not from the floods of filthy and obscene French and German prints and photographs which are sold in

We wish to see Christian (Chinese)—true Christians, but withal true Chinese in every sense of the word.

foreign stores at the Free Ports and are found adorning the walls of opium dens and lying on the shelves of native "foreign goods stores" throughout the whole country; —in many places these being the only representation of life and customs ever seen by the people. Identification with *them* is not likely to heighten the esteem felt for the first Christian missionary who may visit such localities. It is no small book to be as far as possible dissociated in the minds of the Chinese from their ideas of foreign customs and manners. Let a thoughtful observer visit a place in the foreign dress, and notice how carefully the younger and the more respectable females avoid him, and how quickly the doors and gates are closed and barred at his near approach. Let him then visit some place in native dress, and see how differently the people will receive him...

In (Chinese dress) the foreigner though recognized as such, escapes the mobbing and crowding to which, in many places, his own costume would subject him; and in preaching, while his dress attracts less notice his words attract more. He can purchase articles of dress and also get them washed and repaired without difficulty and at a trifling expense in any part of the country...

You will see that it is not without reason that I desire to see this principle thoroughly carried into

effect... Let it not be a question with you as to whether *you* prefer the appearance of the European or the Chinese costume, nor yet as to whether your own personal appearance will be improved or deteriorated by the change in the eyes of others. And though I am well assured that if you heartily adopt the costume both your health and your comfort will be promoted thereby, I would say let not these considerations be the chief reasons which influence you. Rather let the love of Christ constrain you to seek to commend yourselves and your message to no reservation; give yourselves up fully and wholly to Him whose you are and whom you wish to serve in this work; and then there can be no disappointment. But once let the question arise, "Are we called to give up this or that or the other?" or admit the thought, "I did not expect this or that privation or inconvenience," and your service will cease to be that free and happy one which is most conducive to efficiency and success. God loveth a cheerful giver. ⚙

NOTES

¹ The following has been transcribed from A. J. Broomhall, *Survivor's Pact*, Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century, Book Four (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton and OMF, 1984), 355–358. He was apparently quoting from J. Hudson Taylor, *China: Its Spiritual Need and Claims*, 3rd ed. (London: James Nisbet, 1868), an edition that I have not been able to find.



In October 1936 several boats carrying new CIM workers arrived in China. Among them were forty-one single ladies who are included in this photo.

China Inland Mission SHANGHAI

April 23, 1907

MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

After full and careful consideration of the whole subject, it has been decided that the time has come when it will be well that the wearing of the Chinese dress shall no longer be obligatory. This conclusion has been reached by me after weighing the opinions of the members of the China Council, and reviewing information received from all parts of the field occupied by us in China, and also ascertaining from our Home Directors their judgment as to the effect of this step upon our supporters in the home-lands. A sense of the serious and important issues involved has occasioned those of us more particularly concerned in dealing with this matter no little exercise of heart and mind, lest, through mistaken action, we should fail in the fulfilment of our responsibilities to the Lord and His work, and also to yourselves. I feel it is due to you, as our fellow-members in the Mission, to acquaint you with the main points affecting the consideration of this subject as they appear to myself and others.¹

We are persuaded that, regarding the Mission as a whole, the wearing of the Chinese dress has been of great value in diminishing racial distinctions between the Chinese and ourselves, in facilitating social intercourse with them, and thus helping us to an intelligent, sympathetic understanding of their language and habits. It has furnished a practical manifestation of the Spirit of Christ in our relation to the people, which has been the means of spiritual blessing, both to ourselves and to our ministry. Again, the wearing of the Chinese dress has meant the saving of time and money. It has been a help to us in the direction of simplicity of living, and unquestionably has been an important factor in enabling us, as a Mission, to maintain so large a number of workers, scattered over such a vast area of country, upon an income relatively so small as ours.²

Why then, it may fairly be asked, relax a rule proved by experience to be so beneficial, and place upon individual members of the Mission

the responsibility of deciding each for himself or herself whether to wear the Chinese dress or not? Such a question, we shall all agree, merits a full and careful answer.

You are all aware that for some years past there has been a remarkable change in the attitude of the Chinese toward Western ideas and customs, the tendency in some districts to modify the pattern of their own clothing, and even to adopt the Western dress being noticeable. The new uniforms and costumes introduced amongst military officers and government students are one indication, among others, that this tendency is shared by the official mind of China. There can be little doubt that, in spite of the present somewhat reactionary attitude of the Chinese Government, the general trend of events is, and will be, in the direction of Western thought and Western customs more and more getting a foothold amongst the Chinese. As a result of these changes the feeling has been growing in the minds of

some of our fellow-workers residing in districts most affected by these changes, that the principle of the exercise of individual discretion concerning the dress, which was recognized by Mr. Taylor in the early years of the Mission in relation to workers in the Province of Cheh-kiang,¹ should now be extended to their districts. Let me quote here from a letter dated October, 1872, addressed by Mr. Hudson Taylor "To the Friends of the China Inland Mission", in which the following extract occurs:

We shall seek, by God's help . . . to get as near as possible to the people, and to be as accessible to them as possible, that our lives may commend the Gospel to the heathen, whom we endeavour by word to instruct. . . . Pray that we may daily follow Him Who took our nature that He might raise us to be partakers of the Divine nature. Pray that this principle—of becoming one with the people, of willingly

taking the lowest place—may be deeply inwrought in our souls and expressed in our deportment. With regard to missionaries wearing the native costume, there will always be difference of opinion, and we do not therefore make its adoption a *sine qua non* of membership with the Mission; but for work in the interior we value it *much*, seeing year by year more reason and value in it, and we are very thankful where it is appreciated and adopted. In every case we hold strongly the need of cultivating the lowly, loving spirit, which so characterized the Apostle Paul, who cherished the converts as a nursing mother cherishes her own children with a never wearying love. . . . We ask your prayers that this spirit may be deeply implanted in each of us and steadily maintained.

These words of our beloved and revered Founder deserve, in a special way, the thoughtful, prayerful consideration of us all at the present time. It must, I think, be admitted that the circumstances, as relating to the Province of Cheh-kiang, which at that time led Mr. Taylor to make the wearing of the native dress there optional, now prevail, to at least the same extent, in some other parts of China. Moreover, when we reflect upon the devoted lives and fruitful service of honoured members of the Mission in Cheh-kiang, who have laboured there for many years, is there not ground for confidence that the wider extension of similar liberty will meet with a similar response on the part of those availing themselves of it?

It is a serious thing, in a matter such as this, to impose upon godly, thoughtful workers an arrangement which, under altered conditions, no longer has the cordial assent of their reason and conscience. I feel persuaded that the spirit of unity and mutual confidence so essential to our strength as a Mission will be best maintained and strengthened by, for the future, leaving this question to the discretion of the individual worker. We shall all recognize that an added and great responsibility is thus placed

upon each of us, carrying with it a corresponding need of much prayer in the light of the eternal issues that depend upon our life and influence being turned to the best account in securing the spiritual good of China. Our consideration of this question should always be from the standpoint of our Divinely appointed mission to the Chinese. There are some points of practical importance connected with this subject, which should be referred to.

(a) The present decided attitude of the Chinese Government against the removal of the queue, and on the other hand the strong desire in some quarters to do so, on avowedly seditious grounds will be recognized as constituting a reason for special care in regard to this point, in affected districts. In view of information received from one district it should perhaps be added, that conforming to the national customs and laws on the part of Chinese Christians in this matter must, of course, be insisted upon.

(b) A fear has been entertained by some lest, under the new arrangement, harmony between workers in the same station should be impaired, through difference of judgment concerning the dress. It must be admitted that this fear is not a groundless one, unless by God's grace mutual consideration and forbearance are exercised. It will, I think, be recognized that, in a matter of this kind, it specially behoves those desiring change to respect the feelings of their brethren, who think it better to adhere to our past practice as a Mission. This is specially true in the case of young workers entering a district where the general feeling is in favour of retaining the Chinese dress. Consideration has, indeed, been given to the question of our still regarding the wearing of the dress as obligatory in the case of workers under two years' service in China, excepting in stations where the older workers wear the foreign dress; but we prefer rather to count on the good feeling and Christian spirit of our younger brothers and sisters to guide them in this matter.

(c) It has been pointed out that, if the Business Departments of the Mission are to become responsible for attending to orders from the interior for foreign clothes, the existing staff and accommodation—already large—would have to be much increased. It must be clearly understood, therefore, that such responsibility cannot be undertaken by the Departments concerned.

(d) It would clearly be inconsistent with equity if larger grants from Mission funds for travelling were allowed to those wearing the foreign dress than to those who continue the practice of the Mission of wearing the Chinese costume. The principle hitherto followed in this matter will, therefore, be continued, namely, that travelling expenses will be provided on the basis of native fares as heretofore. The case of the teachers in the Chefoo schools, which, at first sight, might appear to be an exception to the foregoing, is not so, as the wearing of foreign dress, in their case, was decided upon by Mr. Taylor as the rule, in view of their special work.

In closing this letter, may I remind you of our Annual Day of Prayer and Fasting on May 26? You will be glad to know that we have been very conscious of God's presence and blessing amongst us during the past days of prayer and conference together here, and I need scarcely assure you that our dear absent fellowmembers were constantly remembered by us before the Throne of grace. May we, on May 26, unite as a Mission in a solemn act of renewed consecration to our blessed Lord and Redeemer, and may we seek afresh for grace to live and labour as never before on behalf of China's spiritual need and claims!

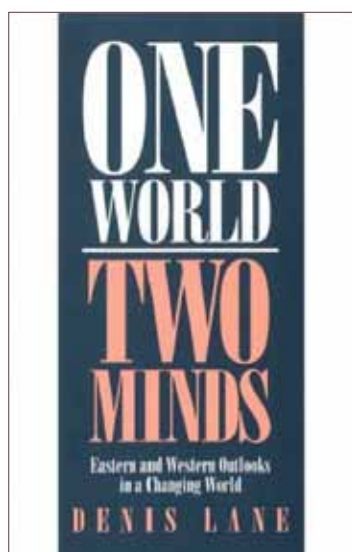
With love in Christ,
Believe me,
Yours in His service,
D. E. Hoste

NOTES

¹ The letter to this point has been a facsimile of Hoste's original letter. From here on it has been reset to save space."

² Known today as Zhejiang.

Recommended Books (Continued from back cover)



One World, Two Minds: Eastern and Western Outlooks in a Changing World

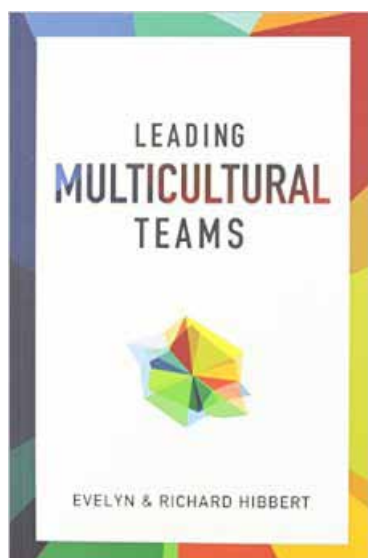
By Denis Lane. Singapore: OMF International, 1995. ISBN 9813009711. 64 pp. Reviewed by Susan Chapman.

Denis Lane's book *One World – Two Minds* was first published in 1995. In the 1999 and 2011 editions of OMF's Personal Development Program study book, *Bind Us Together, Lord*, it was included as an extensive appendix. The guidelines and principles outlined in this booklet twenty years ago are still valuable today. The value lies in three key attributes: the neat, concise summary that it provides; the qualifying statements Lane begins with; and the structure used to succinctly cover the topic along with practical application. The sixty-four pages are written in an easy-to-read manner, with numerous real-life illustrations. This provides a useful introduction to the whole topic of cross-cultural interaction.

From the outset, Lane helpfully qualifies his writing. He informs us that since his introduction is so short, the differences between East and West are of necessity very generalised. He also notes that since all cultures are in a state of superficial flux, all comments are understandably tentative. His last two qualifiers are directed at his own perspective and assumptions: firstly his belief that no culture has rightly “grasped the biblical approach to thought and life” (p 2), and secondly that, although his experience and perspective is from Asian and Western settings, the principles also apply in African and Middle-Eastern environments.

The structure of the book follows logically through the basic background and viewpoints, the effect on our thinking, the outworking of these differences, and finally the effect of differences on our religious outlook. In each area covered, Lane compares the two perspectives (East and West) and gives a concluding section on the “Christian viewpoint”. This arrangement provides real-world practical applications in a wide variety of situations, covering politics, education, the view of history, feelings of security, the doctrine of God, attitudes to doctrine, and the approach to prayer.

Ultimately, *One World – Two Minds* is “an attempt to bring about a meeting of minds ... to understand each other better and to relate more effectively” (p 1). Two decades of use by cross-cultural workers has proven just how successful this attempt has been.



Leading Multicultural Teams

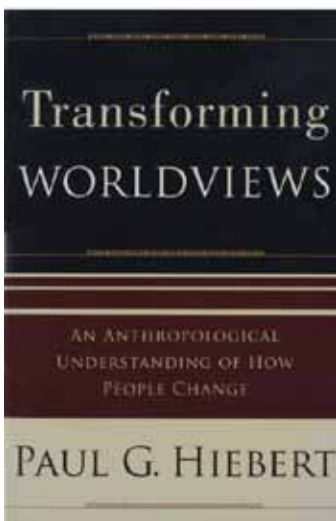
By Evelyn and Richard Hibbert. Pasadena: William Carey, 2014. ISBN 9780878085415. 249 pp. Reviewed by Susan Chapman.

When I first heard of this book, I thought it sounded interesting and quickly recommended it to others. The blurb on the back promised an integration of “insights from the Bible, team theory, leadership, and intercultural studies to explain how leaders of multicultural teams can help their teams become enriching and enjoyable contexts to work in, at the same time as achieving their purpose.” It seemed a helpful resource for leaders, but since I wasn't leading a multicultural team, I assumed that the book didn't apply to me personally, and therefore didn't read it myself. A year later, while researching multicultural ministry in the majority world, I casually flipped through the book to see if it offered anything helpful, and unearthed a goldmine of wisdom and insight.

Evelyn and Richard Hibbert have worked in multi-cultural teams in three continents, and their experience is reflected in not only the perceptive information they provide, but also the way they clearly communicate it throughout the book. For example, the

graphic on the front cover is a symbol of multi-cultural teams. It is explained in the first chapter, and forms a basis for the understanding of team throughout the whole book. This use of shape and shading skillfully adds depth to the written explanation.

This book has many strong points. The text is easy to read. The authors skillfully integrate insights from multiple disciplines as they describe healthy multicultural teams. They also clearly demonstrate how organisations can support team leaders. A number of practical appendices for teams round out the book. As I see it, the major weakness of the book is its title, as it provides helpful insights for more than just the leaders of multicultural teams. All in all, *Leading Multicultural Teams* is a strategic, easy to understand resource for anyone involved in or supporting ministry in a multicultural environment.



Transforming Worldviews - An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change

By Paul G. Hiebert. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Academic, 2008. 368 pp. ISBN-10: 0801027055.

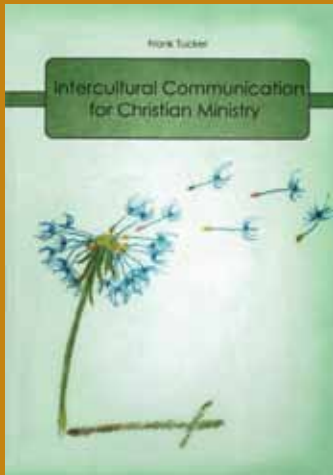
This major book, named one of the fifteen outstanding books of 2008 for missions studies by the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, is a must read for those who work or live cross-culturally. It has a scholarly tone and is not light reading, but one's effort is richly rewarded.

Hiebert offers a comprehensive study of worldview and its implications from an anthropological perspective. After reviewing the philosophical foundations of the concept, he describes characteristics of worldviews and various methods for analyzing them. He then provides a detailed analysis of several worldviews that missionaries must engage today, from the worldview of small-scale societies, to peasant, to modernity, postmodernity, post-postmodernity, and the emerging glocal context of twenty-first century ministry. Hiebert addresses the impact of each on Christianity and mission and then outlines a biblical worldview for comparison. Finally, he argues for gospel ministry that seeks to transform the worldviews of its recipients and offers suggestions for how this can be done.

Hiebert has organised his writing into eleven chapters with three appendices, and helpfully included fifty-two figures that summarize and condense his points. This book is a valuable resource for anyone who has asked the question, "What is the gospel and what changes must take place when one becomes a Christian?" The introduction to this book states, "Conversion to Christ must encompass all three levels: behavior, beliefs, and the worldview that underlies these... if their behavior is based primarily on traditional rather than Christian beliefs, it becomes pagan ritual. Conversion must involve a transformation of beliefs, but if it is a change only of beliefs and not of behavior, it is false faith (James 2). Conversion may include a change in beliefs and behavior, but if the worldview is not transformed, in the long run the gospel is subverted and the result is a syncretistic Christo-paganism, which has the form of Christianity but not its essence" (p 11).

The main point of the book comes back to the gospel being about transformed lives. Hiebert concludes, "we invite people to a whole new life, not simply some modifications of their old lives. This transformation is radical and total.... It also changes them physically, biologically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually. This is the transformation that God works in them if they follow him." (p 332).

Recommended Books

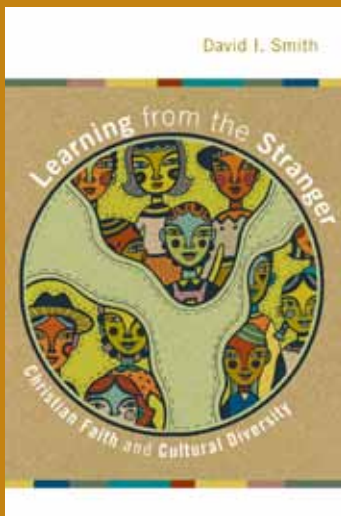


Intercultural Communication for Christian Ministry By Frank Tucker. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013, ISBN 1490311149. 388 pp.

A huge challenge faced by all cross-cultural workers is how to communicate God's story in their new culture. This takes much study of Scripture, study of the culture, study of their host people's language, and much personal reflection. As one who has ministered cross-culturally for more than thirty years, I'd like to commend *Intercultural Communication for Christian Ministry* as an aid to this process.

Using Hesselgrave's seven dimensions of cross-cultural communication, Tucker wonderfully covers many current topics that impact cross-cultural communication. While you might expect such a book to cover topics such as interpersonal communication theory, communicating cross-culturally, worldview differences in communication, social structures and communication, and communication through verbal and non-verbal language, Tucker's book also includes teaching on the place of electronic media, ethno music and ethno drama, thinking styles, and gender issues in communication. I was amazed by his helpful summary of so many of the issues. I would particularly recommend Chapter 10, which provides a succinct summary of the topic of contextualization for Christian witness. The book also offers excellent references for those who want to read further on the topic. An extra bonus is an introduction to a very accessible free companion website. www.interculturalcommunicationresources.info

Intercultural Communication for Christian Ministry provides the foundational understanding that every cross-cultural worker needs as they think through how to appropriately minister in their context.



Learning from the Stranger: Christian Faith and Cultural Diversity

By David I. Smith. Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2009. Reviewed by T. E.

Is there a Christian approach to thinking about intercultural learning? David Smith proposes there is. Though he did not write this book particularly for missionaries, it is nonetheless relevant and needed for the missionary community. How do we get beyond viewing language and culture learning as simply a means to an end (perhaps even an unfortunate one that slows us down on our goal to proclaim something)? Smith suggests we do so by seeing intercultural learning as something "grounded in Christian discipleship (as an outgrowth of a determination to love one's neighbor)," and as "an arena of growth in Christian discipleship (as a way of becoming the kind of person who is more likely to love his or her neighbor)." The first, middle, and final chapters each maintain a strong theological focus that sets the trajectory for the book, as the author moves from Abraham's calling to Jesus' ethical teaching and on to the experiences of Pentecost and the early church. Between the first two guideposts, the author explores the concept of culture and how it affects our identity and perceptions. Between the final two guideposts he spotlights intercultural learning by demonstrating how we approach other cultures in unhelpful ways and showing us the benefits of learning about, from, and with those of another culture.

This book reads easily and is dotted with examples and illustrations that those living cross-culturally will find to be very familiar. But while reading *Learning from the Stranger* is far from challenging, putting it into practice can be. As we are informed, "contact is no guarantee of learning, peace or blessing;" intercultural learning does not necessarily come easily. Even so, taking this instruction to heart can deepen our discipleship and further enable us to love the strangers in our midst and be a blessing to them.