

- (i) When the speaker gives an unanchored message — a topical message without anchoring it in the Scriptures.
- (ii) When the receptor hears the message on the basis of his own presuppositions.
- (iii) When the receptor must fall back on an indigenous model for expressing his new life in Christ Jesus.
- (iv) When a gradual cultural change leads to a major change of values which is subtle and unconscious to the person living in that culture, as has occurred with much of Western Christianity facing secularism.

It was natural in the discussion to constantly resurface the basic question, "What is the Gospel and how can we find it?" While no final conclusion was reached, Dr. John H. Yoder helpfully presented the following seven hermeneutical guidelines which take the student of the Scriptures down the layers to find the Gospel core. These are as follows:

- a. The linguistic layer. A study of words in Scriptures when the two languages are in the same world. A transliteration of the Word can occur through the use of simple lexicographic aids.
- b. The quasi-linguistic layer, where a transliteration cannot occur. An interpretation of an idea in a particular historical point of time must be made. An understanding of the particular historical background is critical.
- c. Linguistic level, when the two languages are in different worlds, so that all referents differ.
- d. Linguistic level, when the two languages have different basic logics, such as in the cases of the Hebrew and the English. Some of the basic ingredients of the Hebrew thought patterns are not found in the English.
- e. Cultural level (e.g., what does the head covering of I Cor. 2 mean?).
- f. Ideological. This is the filter that each student of the Scriptures has into his self-consciousness — his world view that imposes itself on his grasp of the biblical message. This is best exemplified by showing how Bultmann has intentionally placed his world view as a filter for the understanding of the biblical message.
- g. Existential level — what is the meaningfulness of the Word for a specific subject?

In conclusion, the methodology that must guide both the communication of the Gospel and the theologizing is the missiological concern that the "whole world hear his voice."

HOW TO EVALUATE CULTURAL PRACTICES BY BIBLICAL STANDARDS IN MAINTAINING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN AFRICA

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"To you who were spiritually dead all the time you drifted along on the stream of this world's ideas of living, and obeyed its unseen ruler (who is still operating in those who do not respond to the truth of God) to you Christ has given life! We all lived like that in the past, and followed the impulses of our evil nature being in fact under the wrath of God by nature, like everyone else" (Eph. 2:1-3, J.B. Phillips).

These words of Paul to the Ephesians should help us in thinking about cultural practices, past or present. Paul, a Jew, liberated by the Lord Jesus Christ, is unafraid in applying the grace of God and his salvation to himself as well as the Ephesians, both Jews and Gentiles. For him the criterion of judging any idea of living is whether it is from God's grace, from God's love in Christ or from the ruler of this world and those still under his control. In union with Christ, Paul is freed from applying the criterion of Judaism to applying only that one, valid for all time, the grace of God in Jesus Christ. We can do no better than follow his example, since we too now belong to the same Lord Jesus Christ as he did and we live in union with him.

During the period of colonialism, much of African culture in all its forms was subjected to extreme pressures of subjection and despised because of the more vigorous and technically advanced forms of the colonizing Western culture, backed by the political power dominant at that time in any particular area. Even in the church there was generally an attitude of looking down on African culture.

With the coming of independence, there has been a strong reaction to all this, and the political liberation forces have played a great part in reasserting African culture in its various forms. For example, African traditional dances and other forms of artistic expression have now been given their rightful place in public entertainment. African handicrafts are now displayed all over the world.

But in church life several generations have grown up largely cut off from traditional forms of worship and the only ways they know are adopted Western models. Educated young people, for example, who are gifted in music will compose tunes for the guitar rather than for drums and flutes or other traditional instruments with which they have lost touch. And yet, what they produce is original and peculiarly their own. Must they go back to drums and other rattles to be African?

Their non-Christian contemporaries produce jazz and other musical forms for secular entertainment and no one grumbles that such music

is un-African. It is fully accepted as a new African creation acceptable and welcome to the rest of the world.

The church needs to accept the challenge of African Christian youth today, to be given every opportunity to create new forms of worship peculiarly suited to their needs, and thus give them a chance to blaze the trail for the next generation. The important thing is that such composition is for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and none other.

In Africa, as in other parts of the world, there are as many cultures as there are tribes. While certain broad outlines may be similar in many ways, nevertheless there are also fundamental differences, e.g., between sedentary agricultural peoples and nomadic pastoral ones living on livestock. Their focus of worship and attitude to sacrifices also differs from tribe to tribe. But neighboring tribes may share religious leaders at times, provided peaceful conditions exist between the parties. A medicine man may be consulted by people from a very wide area according to his fame and attributed dependability. Traditionally, chiefs too may extend their influence beyond their own language group by mutual consent. This is why opinion makers are so important in spreading ideas as often they are the ones who will determine their rejection or adoption. Key men are often the opinion makers. But occasionally women have assumed that role for considerable periods of time.

In God's own sovereignty, he gives his gifts to men and women for the building of the body of Christ. The greatest of all these gifts is that of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ personally as Savior and Master. When the message of Jesus Christ lives in the language of any people, such dynamic power is released that great things happen as a result of faith in the living Christ, whatever the cultural background. For example, a woman, long troubled by demon possession, hears the Gospel for the first time in a village open air meeting. She cries out, "Is this message for men only or is it also for women?"

"Mother, it is for all of us — mothers, children, and all," answers the evangelist. She follows and hears more of the power of Jesus Christ and is completely and permanently healed. Then the husband, delighted with his wife's cure, tries to take and keep her in the old way of life away from where she can hear and learn more of Jesus Christ. But she is adamant though carefully obedient otherwise. In the end he arranges a contest between his god (a witch doctor) and her new found Lord.

The witch doctor comes and performs all his magic to bind her to the village. But she has prayed to her new Master for deliverance and complete victory so that she can go for more teaching and baptism. She wins and a new congregation of believers soon grows in that village because of the faith of one who was formerly a demoniac.

Second example. Here is a chief. He is troubled by the tribal hatreds and constant fighting and family feuds. He has tried for more than twenty years to end these, all to no avail. Then he is told of one who is God's only Son who came personally into this world to give his own life so that his blood may wash away the sin of mankind. He learns that all the sacrifices he had personally witnessed in his own lifetime

never actually took away any sin. Only the blood of Jesus Christ, God's own sacrificial lamb is acceptable for cleansing away sin. Furthermore, he learns that this same Jesus actually rose from the dead and is alive and can give new power and life today to any who believe in him. He has the power to change difficult lives. The chief believes. He himself is changed. He tells his family and they too are changed. New joy and peace spreads to the neighbors. Fighting subsides, quarrels disappear, new congregations of believers are born and multiply. Jesus lives afresh in new hearts, in a new language and culture. New life has been created by the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

Then the elders, traditional helpers and guardians of chieftainship resent departures from tradition especially by the chief. They mobilize to stop it all. They apply traditional methods, they organize a cursing raid on the chief's home in his absence. This is reported to him on arrival. Will he retaliate? No. Like his newly-found Master, he forgives completely with the words, "No, let them alone. They do not yet understand what I am doing. One day they will."

But they organize themselves again to get him officially demoted by the government. But a fellow Christian is sent to settle the dispute and instead of demotion, he is confirmed in his new zeal and given material help to complete an unfinished church building.

A drought comes. Water is short. The new believers are building a new church. They want to stop till after the drought. The chief says, "No. Honor God first. Complete his house. Let him think what he is to do about water."

As they begin roofing the new church, a friend arrives unexpected, uninvited, unknown — a water engineer from another country but a servant of the same Master, Jesus Christ. He builds a dam and pipes water to the wall of the new church. The faith of the new congregation is confirmed. They know now that Jesus Christ is real, he is near.

But the evil one is at work. Three brothers believe. Two brothers love the Lord dearly. One has more understanding than the others. The Lord calls him first. He becomes an evangelist and gives up herding cattle to preach the Gospel. The middle brother believes but is weak. His wife has lost too many babies. He thinks he must try at least one more medicine man for his young wife's sake. She agrees. Before they get to the medicine man, the evangelist hears and stops them. He persuades them to try the prayers of God's people first. They agree and come and spend a couple of days of prayer with other believers. Other Christians help at the clinic and the longed-for baby arrives safely, their first son. Brother Wilson's faith is confirmed; he also becomes an evangelist.

But the older brother is still tradition-bound. His father loves him dearly. He has found him a third girl from a wealthy family, and he is determined that the oldest son must marry a third wife before he accepts these strange new rules of the Christians and be dipped in the water. The man himself is a dutiful, obedient son but *weak*. He is unable to stand on his own like his younger brothers. This particular denomination would have baptized him with his original two wives whom he married before he believed. But he was told quite definitely

that after professing faith in Jesus Christ he could not live in the old ways anymore. So he slips back; he never really understood the new Master and his ways. He had just followed his two younger brothers.

His brothers have not given him up. They still teach him and love him for Christ's sake and they hope that one day he will be courageous enough to stand for Jesus Christ on his own. The peculiar thing in this situation is that the emphasis among the believers is not how many wives a man has, but whether he loves the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart and wishes to obey him above all others. Polygamy is normal in the community and family ties are strong. Clan and extended family relationships are also strong. Even if a man disowns a wife and children, they would still belong to the extended family and clan; hence the problem of believers in dealing with polygamy. In any case, the first believer among them, the chief, still retains his original two wives. Is this unchristian?

What is the essence of conversion? Is it not a complete change of direction in one's life and instead of being directed by one's own human motives, to let the Lord Jesus Christ reign supreme? Is it not having a new permanent point of reference, someone loved and trusted, who is consulted whenever any decision has to be made? It is a most revealing thing with new converts that the Lord gives them often a peculiarly sharp perception in spiritual matters which more mature believers seem to have lost. It is the Spirit of Christ who marks people out as belonging to Christ by showing clearly the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. In doing this, any forms of legalism seem peculiarly out of place.

In telling people about the Cross of Jesus Christ and the love of God so revealed to mankind, a rare opportunity is provided for leading men to faith in him. The idea of shedding blood for cleansing away sin is commonly understood. But in the tribal situation the physical elements are uppermost in the mind. There is a necessity to dwell on what are the unique elements in the death of Christ at Calvary. First, that he is the Son of God and always has been. That he came voluntarily to offer himself for our sake according to God's own plan. That he loved us when we did not deserve such love, just as he prayed for the Cross for forgiveness for those who put him there. That his death cannot be repeated and needs no addition of any kind to complete our salvation other than that we accept what he has done for our sake.

In the traditional setting, tribal presuppositions are peculiarly resistant to change. People often talk of sin as synonymous with a curse. They often worry about the consequences of sin in the same way as the result of a curse pronounced on a person by his father. There is great need to teach about the attitude of one's heart to God and his holiness, his righteousness, and his commands as well as his judgment.

The key to much Christian teaching is the Bible which, when available and readable, immediately forms a firm point of reference on all matters of faith and conduct. All customs and social rules are then tested with what the Scriptures say. The Bible also delivers believers from the limitations of tribal ethics which always tend to encourage double or multifaceted standards. For instance, in the tribal situation one is expected to be loyal, truthful, honest, and reliable to one's

relative, clansman, and so on. But cheating an outsider is supposed to be clever. Stealing from a relative or a fellow tribesman is definitely frowned upon but robbing a neighboring tribe is adventurous and brave.

From the Bible we learn that the deepest and most precious truth of God is revealed graciously to man and that he could never have attained to such on his own. We also realize that by God's sovereign will some are saved while others may be forever lost. Some are granted gifts of healing, speech, or prophecy by the same sovereign will, just as it pleases him.

In the tribal situations, the worst thing that can be done to a neighbor or a clan is to be declared an "outsider." That means that they cannot enjoy the normal protection from the group. Stolen animals will not be restored, murders will not be paid for, and so on. The Bible teaches us that in Christ God does the opposite and in his grace he makes us through faith in Christ his own children, members of his own household and even heirs of God with Christ.

Reconciliation is a major part of the Christian message. The word used in several tribal languages means, "to make people hear one another" or "to make people obey one another."

In union with Christ, God has enabled us to become his own obedient children instead of rebel subjects. He has also given us his own Spirit who prays for us in groanings which cannot be uttered. He gives us the assurance of answered prayer.

Through the Bible we learn that the truth of God which has become precious to all believers is universal and applies to all mankind through faith in Jesus Christ. Thus we are freed from the tyranny of the tribal mold which would bind and cramp our spirits for time and for eternity. Jesus said, "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8.36).

When the Bible is well translated we hear the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ in an authentic way as he speaks directly to our own inner being. Matters of outward form, of dress, and at times rituals in worship, become less significant as we commune with him in spirit and learn to love him more. A new relationship is established with the living God. We learn to recognize other Christians, the body of Christ, not by tribal labels which are often derogatory, but by the fruits of the Spirit — love, joy, peace, kindness, etc., as in Galatians 5:22. We do not then cease to belong to our tribes, but we belong to the new universal tribe of Jesus Christ through faith in him. The love of Christ which found us when we were dead in trespasses and sins frees us to tell others that he can do the same for them, too.

It is rare that any language group in Africa fits into a single Christian denomination. Normally, there are several denominations working in any language group. The Bible is the surest unchanging common factor which is universally acceptable for all denominations. In many ways this is providential because there has been a tendency to put doctrinal matters which may be denominational on an equal footing with the Bible. Before political independence, this was largely accepted without question. Many of these old attitudes are bound to be questioned within the next few decades. But the essentials of Scripture will

stand. For this reason evangelism should more and more be biblical so that the messages cut across denominational boundaries. Often there has been duplication of effort in evangelism because some denominational requirements must be observed. Training facilities cannot be shared because of doctrinal differences. Is this scriptural among evangelicals?

It must not be imagined that with political independence in Africa there have been secular pressures on the Church of Jesus Christ to conform or to compromise her position. These pressures have come, but on the whole, the church has remained loyal and often the result of such pressures has been remarkable spiritual growth in faithfulness. For instance, faced with the threat of losing one's life for the sake of Jesus Christ, many Christians were able to discover that the gift of enduring pain and suffering for the Master may not be the ultimate reason for the trial. Many were granted the perception that the greater gift was learning to forgive the unrepentant sinner. A word of testimony to the gaoler or persecutor, and an assurance of forgiveness for Jesus' sake, had a much more permanent effect on such individuals than the actual endurance of physical pain and torture.

Christians have discovered under trial that many outward forms of church life are not essential for deep spiritual fellowship in Christ. The secular world also learned that the church of Jesus Christ in Africa is not dependent for survival on any outside group or people, nor on material help however welcome such may be. The power lay in faith in the ever-present help of the Lord of the church and his indwelling Spirit in the believer. This Spirit, of course, they could not see or understand, in accordance with the Scriptures.

And yet, at such times of trial, other members of the body of Christ who looked apparently helpless and could do nothing physically for their suffering brethren were extremely active in praying to God on behalf of his Church Militant here on earth. In other words, it has been during the times of trial that the church has been most active both in deep mutual fellowship and in witnessing to the hostile world around us. We need to remember things so that we may not look for help or encouragement either for the growth or continuing strength of the church of Christ from the wrong direction. The church of Jesus Christ is alive and growing in Africa, perhaps more rapidly than the world realizes. Is this an indication that the Lord's return is near?

HOW TO EVALUATE CULTURAL PRACTICES BY BIBLICAL STANDARDS IN MAINTAINING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN AFRICA REPORT

Chairman: N. Olukimaym

Secretary: J. Dean

Following the reading of the paper by Mr. John Mpaayei the following points were made in general discussion.

- 1) Things that distinguish the different cultures should not be allowed to divide us.
- 2) All cultures are corrupted by the fall of man. We are all prone to ethnocentricity. We are interested in neither Western culture nor African culture in any of their varied forms but in a life-style based on Scripture.
- 3) We agreed with the point made by Dr. McGavran that the best thing that can happen to any culture is for it to meet with the Gospel.
- 4) There is a danger to think in terms of culture being something static and of the past. We must think of it as being dynamic and contemporary.
- 5) The possibility of certain things being attributable to neither God nor the devil but to a third source, the flesh.
- 6) The need to distinguish between the essential and the inessential. Those gathered divided into five groups, three Anglophone and two Francophone. The major questions being asked were then identified.
 - 1) The traditional missionary insistence on monogamy and the prevailing local traditions of polygamy.
 - 2) Whether confession of sin should be public or private.
 - 3) Are certain rhythms intrinsically demonic?
 - 4) Should Bible reading and prayer be individual (Western culture) or communal (African culture)?
 - 5) The question of living standards with reference to sanitation.
 - 6) Involvement in traditional festivals and the eating of food associated with such.
 - 7) The extent of family responsibilities for a Christian in a culture with the extended family system.
 - 8) The problems connected with engagement and marriage, especially those of the ceremony itself.
 - 9) Initiation ceremonies.
 - 10) Dress, including the covering of the head in church.
 - 11) Segregation of men and women in the church and in the home.
 - 12) Naming ceremonies and names.
 - 13) Conditions for baptism.
 - 14) Funerals and funeral rights.
 - 15) Dress for the clergy.
 - 16) Is the African concept of God at loggerheads with the biblical concept?