

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN ASIA

Petrus Octavianus

Dr. Octavianus, Batu, East Java, Indonesia, is President of the Indonesian Missionary Fellowship and the Indonesian Evangelical Fellowship.

My theme is too extensive to be covered thoroughly in this paper. However, I am trying to put forward what I have learned through experience and investigation and observation concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Asia today, even though it be just a dip or two of water from the flowing stream of Asia's cultures.

Geographically, Asia stretches from Turkey in the West to Japan in the East, thereby covering one-third of the world's surface. It is more realistic to speak of sub-regions such as East Asia, South East Asia, Central Asia, North and North East Asia, and West Asia, as has been done increasingly in recent years.

Asia is not culturally uniform, but cultures are as divergent as the geographical areas: from the nomad life of Arabia's desert, to India's caste system, and to China's age-old clan structure with its ancestor worship, on to the manifold variations of Indonesia's adat areas on her 3,000 islands.

It is obvious that we cannot speak of one Asian culture, but must recognize many different cultures in Asia. Another important fact is the influence of religion upon culture, so that often culture and religion are inseparably linked together and can hardly be isolated.

It is the purpose of this paper:

1. to show the place of culture in the Scriptures and to recognize God's desire for communication with man in his culture;
2. to identify the biblical foundations and absolutes which are supra-cultural, and must be maintained in any given cultural situation;
3. to recognize the cultural-religious setting in Asia with the major religions; and to separate original-cultural factors (which are neutral and can be maintained) from such elements that are opposed to Christian revelation in the Bible, and must therefore be rejected by the Christian;
4. to consider the adaptation of the Christian faith to Asian culture, by studying various patterns of worship in Asia;
5. to make some suggestions for the proclamation of biblical faith in Asia's cultures today.

1. The place of culture in Scripture and God's desire for communication with man in his culture

God has given to us two mandates regarding our relationship to the world: the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:26, 28) and the evangelistic mandate (Matt. 28:18-20).

Through the cultural mandate, issued from God the Creator, Sustainer, and Lord of the Universe, man who was made in God's image, was commissioned to multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, exercising

dominion over all creatures.

That he was charged with the task of developing all areas of science and human culture, can be seen from Genesis chapter 4. Here, God gave an example how culture and the civilization of man should develop according to specialized fields. Jabal's task was to dwell in tents and care for cattle (Gen. 4:20). This task being further developed, covers all efforts in the area of food and clothing. Jubal's task was to play music (Gen. 4:21). This would apply later to all efforts in the fields of art, drama, and education. Tubal-Cain's task was to forge brass and iron (Gen. 4:22), which later developed into the branches of technics, mechanization, and science.

Though the cultural mandate is given to all mankind, I am in complete agreement with Dr. Glasser's statement concerning its relevancy for the Christian Church, "Despite the Fall, the cultural mandate was never abrogated . . . Man, even fallen man, continues under the divine obligation and compulsion to unlock and harness the natural forces of his environment and to involve himself in all aspects of human existence . . . from feeding the hungry and giving water to the thirsty, to laboring for justice in society . . . A valid missionary strategy for the church dare not overlook or downgrade the cultural mandate."

The purpose of the cultural mandate is to glorify the Creator (Exod. 20:2-6). But man responded with rebellion and disobedience to God's love. Sin has entered his life. Thus, man changed the purpose, and instead of glorifying God, he became proud and took the glory for himself, or for the worship of idols, or for the worship of his own works (Isa. 42:8).

Since God has never withdrawn the cultural mandate, even the non-Christian can still subdue creation, urged by an inner compulsion . . . since he was made in the image of God. However, he has lost fellowship with God, and he has not glorified God: his works and his culture cannot save him. He needs a Savior. There is no other way for reconciling him with God (John 14:6).

The second, the evangelistic mandate, complements the cultural mandate: because the Savior has come, who brings deliverance from sin, the Good News of the Gospel can be preached, and, by faith, man can be reconciled with God and recapture the original purpose for his life, to glorify.

While the Church of Christ is entrusted with the fulfillment of the cultural mandate given by the Creator God, it is supremely committed to observe the evangelistic mandate given by Christ. "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18-20).

How does the Christian now function in his culture and society? Before he answered God's call in Christ, he was lost in his ambitions and desires, in his tradition, community, and in his culture. After experiencing the work of salvation in his own life and being filled with the Holy Spirit, he will consciously and willingly involve himself in the

fulfillment of both mandates.

His eyes having been opened to God's special revelation and plan for mankind, yes, for his own culture, his role will be unique. He does not leave his culture behind, but he re-evaluates it in the light of God's Word and its supra-cultural values. From then on, the evangelistic mandate will become of highest urgency and priority, so that other values of necessity will be subjected to it.

How does God communicate with man through his culture? While in the Old Testament God revealed himself to mankind through the Hebrew nation, language, and culture, the New Testament shows his revelation to the world in the framework of Graeco-Roman language and culture, the latter forming the *soma* for the *kerygma*.

We may therefore conclude that God looks upon cultures as potential channels for his interaction with man. Dr. McGavran expressed it in this way in his paper on "The Dimensions of World Evangelization," "According to the Bible, the Lord has no favorites among cultures. He accepts them all." In Rev. 21:26, we read, "The wealth and splendor of the nations shall be brought into the Holy City." Hour after hour, day after day, the kings of the earth shall bring in all their splendor and beautiful stream of their cultures — on one condition only, verse 27, "But nothing unclean shall enter." Cultures must be cleansed from sin, they must be redeemed and made whole by the Blood of the Lamb. Thus, they may troop into the New Jerusalem, and the Lord will accept them as part of the brilliance and glory of the Heavenly City (Isa. 66:18).

2. *Supra-cultural biblical foundations*

The biblical foundations or universals are those truths that can apply to any culture in any place at any time in history. They are absolute, which God expects and desires all men to know, to believe and to do. For a deeper study I recommend Charles Kraft's discussion in which he explains how Christian Ethnotheology would attempt to carefully distinguish between what in Christian doctrine is supra-cultural revelation from God, and what is the cultural clothing of this revelation in terms meaningful either to those who originally received the revelation, or to those in another culture.

Since the theology of biblical foundations is well known among evangelicals, I need not go into extensive details here, but want to confine myself to a simple listing of those truths that are of immediate importance when confronted with the challenge to share the supra-cultural truths with men in Asia today.

a. *The Bible* is God's revelation to all cultures and the document of supreme and unsurpassed value for the measurement, testing, and correction of all human cultures. It has already been translated in over 1000 tongues and languages and claims to be the inspired Word of God, agent of renewal of the human heart and of human societies, thus changing and refining such cultures that open themselves up to its dynamic influence. All the following truths are revealed in its pages, since the Bible deals with God's revelation concerning man's condition and origin, his purpose for life on earth, the coming of the Savior and his work of salvation on our behalf, as well as the future events still waited for

by the Christians and by the world in general.

b. *The Gospel of Jesus Christ* which introduces God's act to save man from sin by sending his only son into the world to die for us, thus making him the center of Old and New Testament revelation. First preached by Jesus himself, the Gospel was summarized by Paul in I Cor. 15:3-4, that he died for our sins, was buried, rose again and, in later writings, would return to earth. The absoluteness of the Gospel is confirmed by Acts 4:12, where Jesus Christ is called the only Savior of men.

c. *Man's condition* as fallen in sin, is described since the days of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. Sin's wages became death, and, since then, death has come upon all men. Man cannot redeem himself, his condition is without hope, awaiting eternal judgment.

d. *Salvation* is gained through personal faith in Christ as Savior, Lord and King. An active, personal response is necessary to make salvation valid for any individual or group of individuals, in whatever fashion they choose to decide.

e. *Personal repentance* is necessary in order to be saved, and it denotes an action taken, a turning away from, for example, idol worship, sin, traditions that are connected with dark powers, impurity of living, to a new life in Christ.

f. *Conversion, or the New Birth* is a supra-cultural experience describing man's process of renewal, starting with repentance and faith in Christ, into a new life begun by and lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. The person's confession, his changed life, and his witness to Jesus Christ manifest the change that has taken place.

g. *Baptism* as a sign of the new-found faith in Christ and complete identification with him, is the outward seal on the new relationship, and usually also brings with it the incorporation into a new community.

h. *The church, or fellowship of Christian believers* consists of those who equally have been redeemed by the Blood of Christ, and strive to build up each other in him, strengthened through the Word, prayer, fellowship and the sacrament of the Holy Communion (or the Lord's Supper). United by the Holy Spirit, the church universal knows no boundaries of race, color of skin, nation, cultures, and customs, but continually celebrates the oneness of all in the Body of Christ and with the Head, the Lord Jesus.

i. *The Ten Commandments* ever since given by God to Moses upon the Mount, are basic for individuals and societies, to order men's lives in relationship to God and to each other.

3. *The cultural-religious situation in Asia*

As mentioned earlier, culture and religion are closely linked and often can hardly be separated. All the major religions of the world originated in Asia, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Islam, and Christianity. They all meet together in today's situation in Asia; they compete with and influence each other. Underneath and inter-mixed are such customs and thought-patterns and practices that have their roots in Animism which has preceded the major religions.

In order adequately to analyze, understand and evaluate Asian cultures, we must know both the religion and its background, as well as

the structure of the society we are dealing with. The messenger of the Gospel, who wants to bring Christ to some society or group, must determine such features in that culture that are neutral and can be maintained, these that are definitely opposed and contrary to biblical revelation and must therefore be either eliminated or a functional substitute found and those features that are endorsed by the Scriptures and should be encouraged and strengthened.

Such analysis and evaluation should best be done by one closely acquainted with that culture, even born in it and reared — but, who is renewed through conversion to Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit who alone can give the needed discernment and understanding.

J.H. Bavinck said, "Christians are to take legitimate possession of customs and cultures, give them new meaning and new contents, and enlist them in the service of Christ It is never easy to decide whether a custom may be retained or should be rejected"

It is desirable that not only individual Christians, but young churches in Asia themselves consider and judge such matters with concern and urgency, seeing that the foreign missionary cannot do it for them! It will contribute to their growth and maturity to thus interact with their own culture(s), and, though the job be difficult and the process slow, to come up with results that allow them to remain part of their culture, but faithful and true to the Word of God.

The main criteria for the evaluation whether any cultural features are neutral and can be maintained, opposed to Christian truth and must be rejected, or endorsed through Christian revelation, are given in the Bible, the inspired Word of God.

Close acquaintance with its precepts and doctrines in the Spirit of Christ is necessary for anyone attempting an analysis of any given cultural setting. Such passages as refer to the Christian's worship will throw light on the mode and contents of religious practices. Scriptures referring to the Christian's walk in the world and towards his family and fellow men will show them how to live as Christians within their society structure which in itself may be neutral, respecting the authority pattern and using it for the advance of the Gospel. Scriptures clearly teach the ethical standard to be aimed for, and practices that must be abstained from. Thus, the new Christians may stay in their cultural environment, not rejecting their own people, but showing forth the light of Christ within the context of their lives. Human events of life such as birth of a child, marriage, death, give ample opportunity to examine the customs and concepts related to it. I would like to illustrate this by describing and comparing the Asian view of marriage and the biblical view of marriage.

The Asian concept of marriage is that of a garden. Man is viewed as the sower of seed whereas woman is the garden (cultivated ground) which nurtures and gives food to the seed. This theory views man as the owner of woman, because woman is viewed as a possessed thing only (unbiblical).

The biblical concept of marriage is explained on the basis of God's statement concerning marriage, as is found in Genesis 2:24, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to

his wife; and they shall become *one flesh*."

This "triangle" cleave concept is supra-cultural in nature and has three aspects in it:

a. The *legal* aspect: the word "leave," shows that a legal act has to be taken for the marriage to become legal. The marriage is legal according to law, adolescence, and responsibility.

b. The *personal* aspect: the word "cleave," describes love which has come to a decision to remain faithful, faithful to *one* person, and to share one's life with one person only: the monogamy principle.

c. The *physical* aspect: "one flesh" describes the physical unity between husband and wife.

Thus, the Garden concept is unbiblical and must be rejected.

We can divide the countries of Asia into three groups:

(i) The countries in which the process of the growth of one of the religions into a state religion was completed before Christianity came, such as Arabia, China, Burma, Vietnam, Thailand, and Japan. This was the greatest obstacle for the penetration of the Gospel.

(ii) The countries in which the process of the growth of one of the religions into a state religion was still taking place and incomplete when Christianity came, such as Pakistan and Malaysia. The process by which Pakistan, or Malaysia for that matter, became Islamic was almost complete when Christianity came.

(iii) The countries in which the growth of other religions and Christianity took place at the same time, such as Indonesia and the Philippines. The two former reflect a stronger cultural identity and are harder to deal with the Gospel messenger, while the third has shown more openness to the change offered by Christianity.

The question arises: how much of cultural identity should be retained when people become Christians? I like to illustrate this point with reference to my own country, Indonesia. One interesting example is the birth of the Christian Church in East Java in 1842. The roots of this church are in two fellowships which differed greatly from each other and show us two different methods of evangelism, and two ways of dealing with the culture of the people.

Emde, a watchmaker of German descent married to a Javanese, lived and witnessed in the town of Surabaya. He requested his converts to cut their hair, to replace their sarong by western-style trousers, and to wear shoes instead of sandals. The gamelan (Javanese musical instrument), wayang performance (Javanese shadow play), and tembang (Javanese reciting style) were forbidden. Emde in every way replaced Javanese customs through European customs and thereby "westernized" his converts. Thereby he estranged the latter from their own society. His mistake was, that he identified the contents of the Gospel strongly with his own cultural framework, transmitting both to the Javanese, instead of bringing to them the universal truths only! He unknowingly hindered the Gospel from finding its own form in Javanese society.

Coolen, the founder of the second Christian fellowship, started in a village southwest of Surabaya, was the son of a Dutch father and a Javanese mother. Born and raised in Javanese customs and concepts, he carried the religion and independence of his father, while following

the Javanese mysticism through his mother. He "Javanized" the Gospel in every way: his converts would sing hymns in the form of tembang, perform Bible stories by the way of the wayang, and the gamelan was freely used in the worship services. Thus he gained much attention and many followers. His meetings resembled Javanese religious gatherings. Membership was attained when people could quote the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed. Baptism and Holy Communion were not practiced, because Coolen feared they might lose their cultural identity and become "Dutch." Coolen's strength was in his attempt to adapt to the Javanese way of life, so Javanese could become Christians without losing their Javanese identity. His weakness lay in the fact that he overlooked the importance of certain supra-cultural truths of the Bible, like Baptism and Holy Communion, and thereby compromised the contents of the Gospel, for the sake of cultural identity.

However, the witness of both groups was heard, inspiring others to follow Christ and to find their form of Christianity, which finally formed the Christian Church of East Java. Today, this church has the biggest number of converts from a Muslim background in the whole world.

I propose now to give a short list of features from the culture I am best acquainted with, the Indonesian Muslim culture, as to which factors can be maintained, which must be rejected, and which are endorsed by Scriptures.

a. *Neutral features that can be maintained:*

- (i) The use of the cap, Kopiah; White cap: used in Palembang (South Sumatra) by those who have not yet gone to Mecca for pilgrimage. Black cap: used in other parts of Indonesia, mainly as a national hat.
- (ii) The use of sarong and kebaya, the women's native dress, and not only worn by Muslims.
- (iii) Sitting on the floor mat without chairs.
- (iv) Ways of greeting one another.
- (v) To take off one's sandals or shoes when entering a house or church for worship or fellowship.
- (vi) The use of indigenous musical instruments with the preaching of the Gospel or with worship, to make Javanese feel at home.
- (vii) The use of Arabic language when approaching educated Muslims, since Arabic is the unifying language of Islam and shows our respect for them.

(viii) Circumcision, a Muslim tradition, is basically a health measure and should be considered as such.

b. *Indonesian Muslim features that are endorsed by Scripture:*

- (i) Respect to parents (Exod. 20:12).
- (ii) Respect to husband (Eph. 5:22).
- (iii) Strict sex regulations: no sex relationships before marriage (Eph. 5:3,5).
- (iv) Giving of alms, concern for the poor (Eph. 2:10).
- (v) Abstinence from alcohol and drunkenness: in strong Muslim areas, like Aceh, nearly no liquor can be found in the shops (Gal. 5:21).

c. *Features opposed to biblical revelation:*

- (i) Polygamy.

(ii) Prayer ceremonies performed for the deceased.

(iii) Other forms of association with the occult, such as spiritualistic practices and animistic observances.

Each of the major religions, with its underlying Animism, has to be carefully examined and evaluated, according to the above pattern, so that Christians may discern which practices and features are neutral, which are opposed to Scripture, and which can be endorsed by Scripture. In this way, e.g., the Gospel messenger to the Chinese will have to introduce a functional substitute that replaces the customs related to Ancestor Worship, in order to fill the social vacuum.

I would also like to give a short list of forms of culture which has Shintoism and Buddhism as its background, as to which factors can be maintained, which ones must be rejected, and which ones are endorsed by Scripture.

a. *Neutral features that can be maintained:*

(i) Ethics on polite manners; e.g., "Sado" (tea ceremony), "Kado" (flower ceremony).

(ii) Way of visiting friends and relatives with gifts after returning home from a long journey (not just because of tradition but with all sincerity!).

(iii) Music and Japanese traditional dance, e.g., using "Kato," a kind of harp, played by women, and "Shakohochi," a kind of flute played by men.

b. *Forms of culture which can be taken from Shintoism/Buddhism and then substituted:*

(i) "Hichi-go-san" Ceremony. Children aged three, five, seven years go to the temple and ask blessing from their gods and then receive cakes. The Christian can take this and give the real meaning of Christianity, e.g., by taking the Christian children to the church to receive the blessing of our God and introduce them to the congregation to pray for them one by one (the pastor can pray for each one of them).

(ii) Self-discipline in Buddhism is stressed in order to gain peace, reading loudly the Buddhist sacred books diligently every day, and copying the words out from the Sacred Books. This custom in Buddhism can also be copied with the Bible: reading it aloud every day and copying it. The Buddhist people lead a self-disciplined life only for their own salvation, but Christians lead a self-disciplined life for the glory of God as people who have been saved.

c. *Forms of culture endorsed by Scripture:*

(i) Monogamy (Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph. 5:31).

(ii) Respect to parents (Exod. 20:12).

(iii) Respect and loyalty to the government (Rom. 13).

d. *Forms of culture opposed to biblical revelation:*

(i) To worship the departed ones. Those who think that a departed person still has a living soul and thus must be fed. The food must be prepared on the table with the ashes of the departed upon it.

(ii) Yearly ceremony held during spring and autumn in the temple for the departed. By doing so they think that the soul of the departed will take time to visit their homes ("Higan"-spring; "Bong"-autumn).

(iii) Ceremony for the deceased (Buddhist ceremony).

(iv) Wedding ceremony. "San-san-kudo" ceremony, drinking sake: worshipping the sun god (from Shintoism), also drinking liquor (God's sake, "Syinsyu," a kind of sanctification before marriage).

(v) Birth ceremony. The son must be taken to the temple on the thirty-first day after his birth (a girl on her thirty-second day), to be prayed for and given a sanctification mark to be able to receive the blessing of the sun god. A worship ceremony to the gods in a small temple is held on Children's Celebration Day, every March 5.

(vi) Economic and political matters: economic and political discussion is always accompanied by the presence of women and the serving of alcohol. There is a saying in Japanese, "Machiai seeji" or "The policy of the Japanese government is decided in the bar."

4. *The adaptation of the Christian faith to Asian cultures*

In order to find out which forms the adaptation of the Christian faith to Asian cultures has taken we may study various patterns of worship represented in Asia. The question which may serve as a criterion is simply: are the patterns of worship in Asia today relevant to the culture and social structure of the people?

First of all, we observe, that many an Asian church consciously or unconsciously follows a pattern which has originated in the West. The reason is that often Western missionaries have not only brought the Gospel to Asia, but the structure and form of their own denomination has been brought along with the Gospel. Dr. Ebbie C. Smith has discussed this problem in the following way, "The pervasive temptation of the missionary is to establish a church patterned on his own customary denominational structure. This use of American methods without any real attempt to adapt to national psychology and methods is one of the foremost reasons for failure to establish churches that can live, grow, reproduce and share the life in their own community. The tendency to reproduce cultural factors in missionary churches is called by McGavran 'Cultural Overhang,' and has profound effect on Church Growth."

Dr. J. L. Ch. Abineno, who quotes Dr. Hendrik Kraemer's warning against gradually developing "spiritual domination," calls the "imported forms of worship" an "obstacle in the life and growth of the young churches." Dr. Muller-Kruger, well-known Indonesian church historian, feels that the Indonesian Christians are so used to their imported forms of worship, that they don't recognize their foreign origin and consider them as their very own!

It seems to depend on a people's measure of selfhood and indigen-ousness, how much or how little of the foreign culture they will accept along with the Gospel. And there are various degrees in which features are adapted or assimilated, accepted, modified, or rejected.

The second point of concern is the fact that Western missions often brought along an over-emphasis on individualism, not being aware of the communal nature of Asian societies. The claims of Christ for conversion and dedication are usually directed to the individual, not to the group, thus encouraging the "one by one against the crowd"

conversion pattern. McGavran explains the advantage of the multi-individual mutually interdependent conversion pattern which lies so much closer to the Asian way of making decisions, and thereby allows people to become Christians without social dislocation or separation from their family and society.

If people in this way retain part of their social structure, their worship patterns will also remain relevant to the Asian way of life, and this is desirable for the sake of the growth of the church and for the multiplication of Christians.

Dr. Abineno reminds us that we must pay attention not only to the purity of the *kerygma*, but also to the *soma*, the pattern of worship, so that we might attract and enable the whole of our community to hear the proclamation of the Gospel. Obviously this is not a matter of principle, as some tend to think, but a matter of relevance, which we must emphasize. In this way, the pattern of worship will never be a barrier between the Christians and their surrounding community, but become a useful tool for the *kerygma*.

Dr. W. A. Smalley expresses his opinion in these words, "While the basic need of man and the basic message are the same everywhere, the most effective presentation of the Gospel is that which takes into account the cultural beliefs and fears of the people."

A successful experiment has been carried out by the Rev. Nagakura of Okayama, Japan. He has carried on worship services in forms of "tatami" (a form of assembling) which seems to fit well the Japanese tradition (house church). He felt that, "Japanese must become Japanese Christians, not European or American Christians." About 200 people attend these weekly meetings (the biggest number of worshippers among Japanese churches), and there are about 600 members of his church today. The *Okayama Seisin Kyokai*, as the church is called, emphasize giving, and their offering reached fifteen million yen a year, or about US \$60,000. We can see that an indigenous structure encourages the development of an indigenous Christianity, because, as Donald McGavran states, "Men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers."

In conclusion, we will summarize some important elements in a form of worship:

a. *The Word of God*. The proclamation of the Word of God (*kerygma*) must have first place.

b. *Relevancy*.

(i) The form of worship must be relevant to a particular community/society in a concrete situation. The culture, social structure, customs, and traditions of that nation/people must be studied, in order that certain methods, forms, cultural tools may be determined to be used in the forms of worship as a tool to communicate the Gospel. A pattern of worship forms is needed here to relate the *kerygma* and the *soma* so that it becomes relevant to the society (local).

(ii) There must be a participation of those worshipping in the service. Usually in Asia, in the ceremonial/traditional feasts, e.g., in reciting a song or poem, the leader recites it or reads it with intonation verse by verse, followed by the audience. Thus it goes alternately until it is finished.

The pattern of the form of worship, as much as possible liberates itself from the form of worship as a rule based upon rites and regulations. Is it not that Christ through his death and resurrection has freed us from the bondages of law, regulations and rites? The patterns of worship, according to the New Testament, are in Christ Jesus freed from rites.

(iii) *The worship element.* In the service, opportunity must be given for its participants to express their worship to God in the liberty of the Spirit.

(iv) *The evangelistic element.* The form of worship must be a two-way channel: In one aspect it is a means of God to express his work of salvation for the world, in another aspect it is an invitation to the world/surrounding community. The pattern of Christ's life, moreover, is a pattern of a form of worship which covers all aspects of the ministry of the Gospel.

5. Summary and suggestions

a. We concluded that there is a place for culture in the Scriptures, and we learned how cultures began. God loves men in their cultures and wants to see them all redeemed through the salvation provided through his Son Jesus Christ. He wants them to hear his voice through his Word in their own cultural setting. We have sought to identify from the Bible such basic truths that are supra-cultural and must be preached and maintained in any cultural situation.

b. Furthermore, we have tried to point to the cultural-religious setting in Asia with its major religions, which present us with the challenge to separate original cultural factors (which are neutral and may be maintained) from such features as are opposed to Christian revelation in the Bible and must therefore be rejected by the Christians, to those features that are endorsed by the Bible and must be strengthened and kept.

c. A thorough study of the cultures, society structures, customs, religions past and present, has been recommended for Asia, so that the Gospel may be proclaimed in a relevant way. A clear separation of essential Christian elements from the "cultural enclothing" is attempted through a biblical ethnotheology, to help the messenger of the Gospel.

d. Adaptation of patterns of worship to those forms that are indigenous and familiar both to the worshipers and to their community, have been recommended as necessary, if barriers are to be kept down.

e. Besides the individual conversion pattern brought over from the West, I recommend the multi-individual mode of conversion which allows people to become Christians within their social structure, so that they need not feel they must become Westerners when they turn to Christ!

f. Let us consider that for the sake of reaching the millions of Asia with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a clear understanding of *biblical foundations and cultural identity* will be the basis of a new strategy for missions which will bring many not only to hear the Gospel, but also to become Christians in their own cultural setting.

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

Chairman: D. Chan

Secretary: G. Samuel

1. Points of agreement (with Mr. Octavianus' paper)

- a. The importance of the subject in relation to the evangelization of Asia
- b. The need for further study of the subject
- c. Recognition of the diversity of each culture
- d. The culture itself is not evil
- e. Cultural and religious elements are often inseparable
- f. Culture is to be seen as a channel for communication
- g. The supracultural aspects as set forth in the Bible are more than the nine aspects listed in the paper (e.g., aspects of eschatology are to be included).

2. Significant disagreements

Though Hebrew and Greek cultures are media for revelation, these cultures are not to be considered as superior; however, it was pointed out that these cultures *are* superior.

3. List of major questions and answers

- a. Is multi-individual conversion typical in Asia? Often the Asians make their decisions in groups. The Asian society is not that individualistic, so Asians like to make decisions in mutual affection and dependence.
- b. Is Christianity imported to Asia from the West? No. Christianity is not imported from the West. Its origin is in Asia. But the Gospel message was brought back to Asia mainly by Western missionaries.
- c. How much of the cultural element can be retained? Those which are not contradictory to the Bible and those which do not have religious significance.
- d. Is individualism evil? Modern forms of individualism (these are unscriptural) are to be differentiated from individual's integrity before God and man.

4. Specific attitudes

People can become Christians in their own culture with a minimum of social dislocation. Cultural adaptation is acceptable, but should not lead to syncretism of any kind.

5. New emphasis in evangelization

- a. Use culture as a channel for communication.
- b. When the particular cultural practice is opposed to biblical revelation, find (or look for) suitable functional substitutes for the social life of the society concerned.