

About the *Author*



JIM CHEW currently mentors cross-cultural workers in the Asia-Pacific region. Jim and his wife Selene are Singaporeans who have served with The Navigators since 1963. The Chews are missionaries of Bethesda Katong Church, Singapore. They live in Wellington, New Zealand, where Jim is an elder of The Street City Church. Jim also serves as a member of the Mission Commission of the World Evangelical Alliance and on the Lausanne Leadership Development Working Group mentoring younger leaders.

"This book, with its well-balanced combination of biblical teaching, sound common-sense, and rich illustration from many years of practical experience, will inculcate sound principles for long-term effectiveness in mission."

Christopher Wright
*International Director,
Langham Partnership International*

"If you are a person that takes God's call to the nations seriously, you need this book. It is the most comprehensive treatment of the task I have ever seen in one volume."

Jim Petersen
Missionary and Author

"Jim Chew has been on the cutting edge of Christian missions. Church leaders, including bi-vocational 'tentmakers', looking for practical, down-to-earth, time proven counsel will find it here."

Robert Coleman
*Distinguished Senior Professor of Evangelism and
Discipleship, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary*

"With real life case studies and practical suggestions, Jim brings us into the living room of the mission field. He takes away the mystery of the mission field and plants our feet firmly on the ground."

Alan Ch'ng
Asia Director, The Navigators

ISBN 978-981-08-4579-7



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New Edition

When You Cross Cultures

Jim Chew

New Edition
When You
Cross Cultures
Vital Issues Facing Christian Missions



Jim Chew

“Jim Chew is a disciplemaking missionary at heart! This is vintage wisdom from a seasoned and esteemed Christian statesman. Jim deeply understands the enormous impact of cross-cultural dynamics in global missions today. From contextualisation to the proclamation of the Gospel, from philosophical worldview to emotional adjustments, from discipleship training to tentmaking, Jim gives us a steady compass to meaningfully engage pertinent cross-cultural issues today. I readily recommend this insightful book - don't leave home without it!”

REV EDMUND CHAN

*Senior Pastor, Covenant Evangelical Free Church, Singapore
Author, Built to Last, Growing Deep in God*

“This book brings with it the author's wealth of experience both from having lived as a cross-cultural missionary as well as one who is to this day coaching and mentoring cross-cultural missionaries across Asia. The numerous personal stories and that of Jim's friends and colleagues are a reflection of this.

The unique contribution of this book is that it is written by an Asian, from an Asian perspective, with Asian experience, narrating stories and addressing issues of missions in the Asian world. Jim spells out the issues and dilemmas on the mission field and brings a biblical perspective to it. With real life case studies and practical suggestions, Jim brings us into the living room of the mission field. He takes away the mystery of going to the mission field and plants our feet firmly on the ground.

Although Jim has written the book for missions and church leaders and prospective missionaries it is also relevant to all of us. Today, in many of the countries we live in, cross-cultural missions is at our doorstep. For those who are serious about taking the gospel to the nations I highly recommend a reading of this book.”

ALAN CH'NG

Asia Director, The Navigators

“No one better understands the issues in cross-cultural ministry than Jim Chew. He is a giant in the field, and for years has been on the cutting edge of Christian missions. Church leaders, including bi-vocational ‘tentmakers’, looking for practical, down-to-earth, time proven counsel will find it here.”

DR ROBERT COLEMAN

*Distinguished Senior Professor of Evangelism and Discipleship
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
Author, *The Master Plan of Evangelism**

“Cross-cultural mission is both an adventure and a challenge. For mission workers going to other nations, the richness of encountering new cultural contexts is rapidly balanced by the challenge of adaptation to local realities. Evangelical missions have developed great knowledge in crossing cultural boundaries, both through success and through failure during history. There are, however, new lessons to be learned as the world constantly changes and new generations of candidates volunteer for cross-cultural ministry. Among these are many from the Global South. Asians, Africans and Latin Americans are today half of the global missionary force, resulting in new paradigms in mission.

When You Cross Cultures is a precious tool to prepare both those who send and those who are being sent. Jim Chew, a good friend and colleague in the WEA Mission Commission, has long experience in cross-cultural issues and this new edition of his book will certainly be of great value and blessing for all engaged in missionary work. I recommend the reading of these chapters and a careful reflection on the relevant themes that are discussed by the author.

BERTIL EKSTROM

*Executive Director
World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission*

“I was excited to read this revised new edition of the book, “*When You Cross Cultures*” which was first published in 1990. While many books on the subject of crossing cultures have been written, this book carries a strong Asian flavor with reflections from an Asian perspective. The book has a wonderful simplicity with a richness in real-life stories. The book is strongly biblically based but pays attention to contemporary situations - a very practical book for those ministering in cross-cultural situations as well as for church leaders.”

DR PATRICK FUNG

General Director, OMF International

“The mission scene today has changed drastically. The need for cultural sensitivity among cross-cultural workers has not changed. Particularly with the increasing number of short-term workers crossing cultures every year, a demand for a concise but comprehensive book on crossing cultures is even greater. I recommend this book for every short-term worker, for tentmakers and not least for long-term workers.”

DR DAVID TAI WOONG LEE

*Director of Global Leadership Focus, Korea
Global Missionary Fellowship, Inc. Korea*

“Jim Chew’s teaching from the Scriptures and from his rich ministry and life experiences are worth serious attention from younger generation missionaries and global young leaders. It is no accident that there are young people around the world, like myself, whose lives and ministries have been impacted by Jim, a mentor and friend.

When You Cross Cultures is not merely a “how-to” book on cross-cultural missions but a WHO-TO book imploring TO WHOM we should look for our identity, our example, our how-to, our perseverance, and our hope in the great challenges of global missions. The Christ-centred focus that is consistently emphasized will serve as an invaluable guide for the ministries and lives of the next generations of missionaries and global leaders.

I wholeheartedly commend this book not merely to missionaries and missionaries-to-be but also to any Christian wanting to better understand the challenges and blessings of cross-cultural ministry."

DR MICHAEL OH

*President and Founder of Christ Bible Institute and Seminary
Nagoya, Japan*

"If you are a person that takes God's call to the nations seriously, you need this book. It is the most comprehensive treatment of the task I have ever seen in one volume. After you read it, you will want to keep it in your library as a reference.

Jim Chew and I have been friends for many years. I have always known him to be a serious student of the Scriptures, of modern missions and of the progress of the gospel into the cultures of the world. Multi-cultured himself, Jim has had personal experience with everything he writes about on these pages. You are holding a lifetime of wisdom in your hands".

JIM PETERSEN

*Missionary and Author, Living
Proof, Church Without Walls*

"*When you Cross Cultures* provides a significant contribution for 'missionary preparation' – offering a vital Asian perspective to issues of culture, contextualisation and cross-cultural stresses. Jim Chew lived out this book out of almost five decades of a mentoring ministry among cross-cultural workers. Thorough and well researched, this revised study should be a required reading for students and a companion for new workers interested in reflecting biblically and missiologically on a whole range of cross-cultural issues. An excellent and practical resource for mission training!".

DR KANG-SANTAN

Head of Mission Studies, Redcliffe College, UK

“Jim Chew has the wisdom born out of deep Biblical reflection and many years of hands on missions experience. By distilling his thoughts into this concise and extremely practical book, Jim has made the benefits of his insights available to a whole new generation of cross-cultural workers for the Kingdom. I highly recommend this book.”

MIKETRENEER

International President, the Navigators

“It is good to see Jim Chew’s book revised and re-published. As one who was involved for many years in training people for cross-cultural mission, I know that it is essential that people’s zeal for serving cross-culturally should be matched by better understanding of what it involves and more disciplined training in preparation for it. This book, with its well-balanced combination of biblical teaching, sound common-sense, and rich illustration from many years of practical experience, will be a most welcome resource. Written in a simple and easy-to-read style, with plenty of additional materials for further reference, it can be used as an institutional training text-book, or as a personal study guide. Either way it will prevent some common mistakes and inculcate sound principles for long-term effectiveness in mission.”

DR CHRISTOPHER J H WRIGHT

International Director, Langham Partnership International

Author, The Mission of God

“Jim Chew is no stranger to tentmaking professionals. The revised edition of Chew’s *When You Cross Cultures* is replete with insight into complex issues related to cross-cultural work. This book is a must read not only for current and aspiring tentmakers but also for anyone concerned with world mission.”

DR TETSUNAO YAMAMORI

President, WorldServe Ministries

Author, God’s New Envoys

WHEN YOU CROSS CULTURES:

**Vital Issues
Facing Christian Missions**

JIM CHEW

New Edition, Revised and Updated

WHEN YOU CROSS CULTURES

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ISBN 978-981-08-4578-0

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Published by Nav Media Singapore Pte Ltd
A ministry of The Navigators Singapore



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Cover design and printing by BAC Printers
Printed in the Republic of Singapore

First Printing 1990
New Edition, Revised and Updated 2009

To

Selene, my loving wife

and mother of our spiritual

daughters and sons

who have crossed cultures

to whom this book is also dedicated

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FOREWORD to the First Edition

By J. Oswald Sanders, 1990

One of the most encouraging missiological developments of our day is the fast-increasing flow of cross-cultural missionaries from former receiving countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Among them is my friend, the author, who is well known in missionary circles especially in Asia.

Growing up as he did in Singapore (a city that has experienced remarkable missionary activity and growth), and having himself served for thirty years as a missionary, he is well qualified to write such a culturally sensitive book as this. His spheres of service have been in North East and South East Asia, as well as in USA and New Zealand.

This book is born from his concern that many of these “two-thirds world” missionaries and lay workers (as well as many from “developed” lands) are entering upon cross-cultural work with inadequate preparation for that increasingly complex task. This means that they are being subjected to unnecessary and avoidable stresses and strains. From his wide experience as a trainer of candidates, and supervisor of missionaries, especially under the auspices of The Navigators, he shares keen insights that will provide invaluable counsel to both candidates and missionaries who are struggling with complex problems of inter-cultural adaptation.

It is estimated that within a decade about eighty per cent of the traditional mission fields will remain closed to evangelical missions, or will place severe restrictions on entry. In Asia today, only nine countries allow unrestricted entry, so new strategies must be devised and employed.

Of recent years, especially in East Asia, the term “tentmakers” (after Paul) has been used of suitably qualified professional or business people, who at the call of God enter these lands, to make a bona fide contribution to their development. By their diligence and effective lifestyle, and low-key witness as opportunity offers, they commend the Gospel to the many hungry hearts around them.

The author draws on his experience and observation of this type of ministry to demonstrate its importance and potential. Because the situation is so sensitive, more than usual tact and sensibility is required, and the counsel given here could keep the tentmaker from many avoidable mistakes, and also shows how to exploit the situation to the maximum for Christ and the national church.

I commend the book and its message most warmly to all who are preparing missions candidates for their task, as well as to candidates, missionaries and tentmakers themselves.

J Oswald Sanders

Auckland
New Zealand

PREFACE

The first edition of this book was published in 1990. I had wanted to do a revision for some time. But I delayed doing so because mission resources have become far more abundant. Books and articles are also readily available through the internet.

During the past year, several mission leaders have urged me to consider a revision because the first edition had been a help to them, especially when they were preparing for cross-cultural ministry. Since the book is no longer available for sale, I was convicted to proceed with a new edition. While most issues have not changed, the content needed updating. I have also been on a “learning curve” in the past 20 years, so I have added further perspective to some mission issues. I have also included resources for reading including internet sites.

As stated in the first edition, this book is meant to be practical. The readers in mind are mission and church leaders, prospective mission candidates including professionals, and business people who are ministering or planning to minister cross-culturally.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This new edition consists of four parts.

Part 1 deals with the essential subject of Culture and Contextualisation. Those working in a different context and culture must learn and understand that culture. Understanding culture means understanding “worldviews” at the heart of a culture. From its worldview will flow beliefs and values which in turn affect the behaviour of people in that culture.

Part 2 focuses on Preparation for Cross-Cultural mission – training that is needed and the qualities that are particularly important for cross-cultural candidates. Orientation is necessary before a person goes to the field of work and also when a person arrives on the field.

Part 3 deals with Cross-Cultural Stress – culture and language shock when first arriving on the field and the normal stresses of a different culture in living and relating to people and circumstances. How can this be prevented and how do we handle stress which is inevitable? Mission supervisors also need the understanding of “doing member care” from the beginning of assignments to the re-entry of workers.

Part 4 on “Tentmaking” is for those who intentionally decide to serve in another culture in their profession as bi-vocational workers. While some cultures or peoples may be in a foreign country, some workers may be called to minister among a different culture or people within one’s own country.

“Tentmaker” and “tentmaking” are terms widely used in church and mission circles. These terms are associated with Paul’s practice of “tentmaking”. Although I have led discussions on “Tentmaking” in Asia and at major international conferences, I have never been comfortable with the terms mainly because they have been used too loosely and widely to cover a variety of situations and professions.

In this book, I have stuck to the terms “tentmaking” and “tentmakers”, only because they are widely used. In using these terms throughout this book, I refer to those who are trained and equipped to be bi-vocational labourers serving in their profession. (This is likely a narrower definition than what some people mean when they use the terms to refer to any Christian business or professional person crossing cultural boundaries). I have assumed that

“tentmakers” are intentional in their calling, and that they are legitimately recognized by governments who grant them visas to practice their profession. The “tentmakers” are “bi-vocational labourers” who have the strategic intention of fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission in advancing the Gospel and making disciples. They are bi-vocational in the sense that they are professionals in their work and servants of Christ.

ACKNOWLEDGING ... WITH GRATITUDE

In the first edition of this book, I thanked Dr J Oswald Sanders, now in glory, who wrote the Foreword. I gave my life to Christ at a young age when he preached the Gospel at my home church. He encouraged me to write the book while I was on a sabbatical in New Zealand.

I am thankful that through my late father, Dr Benjamin Chew, my siblings and I met godly missionaries, especially those with Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF). Selene and I are thankful for the lessons they taught in our church.

I am grateful for my mentors Joe Weatherly who launched Singapore Youth for Christ in 1956, and Warren Myers, Navigator pioneer.

I thank God for Navigator leaders, some already in glory, who have been a vital part of my missionary pilgrimage and calling: Roy Robertson, Waldron Scott, Joe Simmons, Doug Sparks, Lorne Sanny, George Sanchez, Donald McGilchrist, Jerry White, Jim Petersen, Paul Stanley, Neil Grindheim and Mike Shamy. Mike Treneer, current President of The Navigators, has been a constant encourager. I am thankful for Asia leaders, Badu Situmorang and Alan Ch'ng and Asia-Pacific mission co-labourers.

I am grateful for many friends in the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and in the Lausanne Committee.

Selene and I thank the Lord for the years of support from the elders and members at Bethesda Katong, our home church in Singapore and for the encouragement of The Street City Church in Wellington.

...THIS BOOK

Working on this revision, I am indebted to Valerie Lim, a researcher with Global Mapping International and a mission associate with the WEA Mission Commission. Valerie gave invaluable help, setting aside many days to read and edit each chapter as well as to recommend mission resources.

Collaborating within the Body of Christ is a rich experience. I am thankful for the kind endorsements of friends in this global Body.

My warm thanks also to Christopher Liu, NavMedia Singapore, with whom I have worked on a number of projects and to Andy Tan, from BAC Printers, who

did the printing for the first edition and enthusiastically agreed to print this new edition.

This book, as in the First Edition, is dedicated to my loving wife Selene. This book is also dedicated to our spiritual sons and daughters, who with their spiritual children are some of the practitioners described in this book.

Part One

**CULTURE
AND
CONTEXTUALISATION**

CHAPTER ONE

LEARNING ABOUT CULTURE

Culture is God's idea. We see God's work among peoples from Genesis to Revelation. In Genesis 10 and 11, He scattered the nations over all the earth. The nations which comprised ethnic groups are shown as having families and tribes within themselves. They occupied their own territories and spoke their own languages. God did this, according to Paul in Acts 17:26-27, so that men would seek Him.

The Book of Revelation gives a portrayal of a great multitude of redeemed people from every tribe, language, people and nation before God and the Lamb (Revelation 5:9; 7:9). Revelation climaxes with the Holy City where God will live with this multitude. He will be their God and they His peoples (Revelation 21:3).

Christ's Great Commission is a command to disciple the nations. Crossing cultures is therefore very much a part of fulfilling that Commission. Cross-cultural workers obviously have to go from one culture to another. Culture should not be viewed as a "barrier" to the Gospel. It is in fact a "carrier" through which the Gospel can be made known. If we are serious about obeying Christ's Great Commission to disciple all nations, then cultural learning is imperative.

Every witness to the Gospel has a cultural context. This is where contextualisation comes in. A missionary must learn the local culture. Otherwise, his or her work could be irrelevant, even after spending years or sometimes a lifetime among a people.

When I was a missionary trainee in Vietnam in 1960, a missiological term such as "contextualisation"¹ was unheard of. Missionaries from Western countries found a haven in their "missionary compound". Within this compound where they lived, they basically continued their own cultural practices. When outside this "compound", they tried to identify with the local people by learning the local language. However, without sufficient orientation to the local culture, they were likely unaware that they were practising a form of "cultural imperialism" in the way they did their ministry.

Having grown up under British colonial times in Singapore, I could also sense the cultural imposition of Western missions. Methods and approaches that were familiar and workable in their home culture were used with little change. Hymn tunes were the same. Church buildings were similar to those

¹ According to David Bosch, the term "contextualization" was first coined in the early 1970's. David J Bosch (1991), *Transforming Mission*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, page 240.

“back home”. Ministry tools and materials were those imported from the West. As a result, Christianity was viewed as a Western religion by the local people.

Missionaries were also oblivious to cultural differences when they sought responses to the Gospel message. Thousands of “decisions for Christ” were being reported in some Asian countries. Although some people were genuinely converted, there were obviously many “decisions” that were questionable. Having teamed up with missionary colleagues in evangelistic endeavours, I soon learned that many who responded by saying “yes” did not truly understand the Gospel. “Yes” could also mean “Yes, the story sounds good” or “Yes, I will believe because I don’t wish to offend you”.

During one of my “follow-up” efforts to contact about 5,000 young people who had made some kind of decision for Christ (those who had said “Yes” when an invitation was given), we found that less than 200 were responsive to spiritual matters. We remained in contact with these responsive ones, and many continued to grow in faith. Later, some became church and mission leaders.

In a South Asian country, a person saying “Yes” could mean that he believes in Christ as one of many gods. In another, a “Yes” could mean “Yes, I’m listening though I don’t really agree”. To say “No” is to offend. Similarly, a nod in many Asian countries does not always express an agreement to the message. It is polite to keep on nodding especially when an older person is speaking.

It is therefore essential for any person wishing to engage in cross-cultural witness to study the culture and the language of a people. It takes time to learn and understand the society we wish to reach before our ministry and message can be relevant.

Culture, however, is complex and trying to define it isn’t easy. It has been defined as “the integrated system of a people, their language, habits, customs, and social organisation - those things that give them an identity and distinction from the many thousands of other peoples of the world.”²

Within a culture, there are customs of behaviour and relationships. These include how people greet each other, talk, eat, dress, work, play and do business.

Within a culture or country, there are also institutions which express these beliefs and values – including temples, churches, mosques (religious buildings), government, law courts, schools, family institutions, clubs, business places, shops, factories and so on. Not all these institutions may be appropriate to a cultural context, but they are there all the same.

Culture may be obvious and visible, or it may be less obvious and not talked about. It includes how people communicate, how they relate (there is usually a “pecking order”), what they expect of different people (different people have different roles). It includes concepts of space (how close we may draw to

2 The Navigators (1990), Scriptural Roots of Our Ministry, page 123.

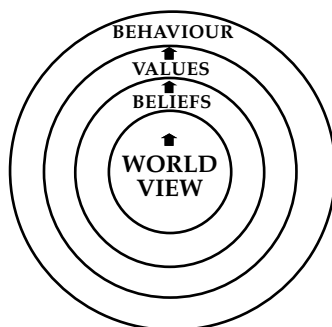
each other), time (what is late or early or urgent), and property (who owns what).

In cross-cultural communication, there are formal as well as informal patterns of behaviour. Formal behaviour is more clearly defined. Families would teach children these formal patterns - how to greet one another, what is proper and improper behaviour. These patterns are usually strict and rigid.

Other patterns are communicated and learned more informally. For example, standing too close to a person may not be acceptable in a Western culture, but it is all right in some Asian cultures. Privacy may be highly valued in one culture, but not so in another. When a behaviour pattern is broken, a person would feel anxious within, unless of course he is not aware of it.

UNDERSTANDING WORLDVIEWS

Culture has to do with a society's beliefs, values and behaviour patterns. A particular culture will have a view of reality which its members live by. This is called its "worldview" and it is the heart of a culture. From this "worldview" come the beliefs and values of a culture, which in turn influence its behaviour. If any change is to take place significantly, it has to take place at the heart of the culture, rather than in behaviour.



To understand a worldview, David Burnett in his book, *Clash of Worlds*, provides ten useful questions derived from Louis J Luzbetak's excellent text, *The Church and Cultures*.³

A worldview may be "religious" (God or gods are part of reality) or "secular" as in a secularised or Marxist society. From a person's worldview will flow his beliefs about God and reality. From these beliefs will flow his values of what is good and desirable, and what is acceptable to the community, and

3 David Burnett (2002), *Clash of Worlds*, Revised Edition, London: Monarch Book, pages 26 -29.

what is undesirable and unacceptable. A “value-system” usually stems from a “truth-system” of beliefs. Values in turn will affect behaviour and relationships between people.

Worldview determines a person’s view of God, of himself and of his meaning in life. For example, the worldview of most South Asians includes many gods. Asking a person if he believes in Christ will bring forth a positive “yes” in reply. But Christ is only one of the many gods in his pantheon. And Christ cannot be the Only Way. For the Christian who has come to know Christ, Christ is uniquely the Way. There is none else. His whole focus is on Christ, as was the apostle Paul’s when he wrote to the Philippians.⁴

A colleague in South Asia, in his witness to the peoples, views evangelism as a process rather than isolated events of proclaiming the Gospel message. Through bridges of friendship and discussions, his hearers are drawn progressively to understand who God is and why Christ is unique. His aim is for his contacts to be introduced to the person of Christ in such a manner that He will be increasingly attractive and glorious to them to the point that other gods will fade and disappear out of their minds. The process of changing their worldview will require a progressive understanding of the person of Christ.

E. Stanley Jones in “The Song of Ascents” describes how his hearers will often have an equivalent for many of our biblical portrayals of Christ. “Then the dawning came – and what a dawning! I saw that everything they brought up was the Word become Word, and what the gospel presented was the Word become flesh.”⁵

For Christ to be unique to the South Asian may take a long process because his understanding of Christ is coloured by his worldview and set of beliefs. The Holy Spirit’s work of conviction is often not a sudden matter but a process of the Word of God taking root. The blindness is ultimately dispelled and light shines.

How then can cross-cultural messengers learn to understand the worldview and beliefs of the people they hope to win?

David Hesselgrave suggests three ways that are logically possible.⁶

- Firstly, cross-cultural messengers can invite their non-Christian respondents to lay aside their own worldview and adopt the Christian worldview. This, however, is highly impractical. Few are prepared to do so or even able to do so.
- Secondly, cross-cultural messengers can temporarily adopt the worldview of their respondents. Then by re-examining their message in the light of the respondent’s worldview, they can adapt the message so as to make it meaningful. This approach is not easy but is possible and practical.

⁴ Philippians 1:21; 3:10

⁵ E. Stanley Jones (1968), *The Song of Ascents*, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, page 97

⁶ David Hesselgrave (1981), *Worldview and Contextualisation*, article in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, editors Ralph Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, Pasadena: William Carey Library, pages 401-402

- Thirdly, cross-cultural messengers can ask their respondents to meet them half-way to exchange views so as to establish common ground. This approach is risky as it will distort the message. Any religion needs to be viewed as a whole.

Hesselgrave suggests that the second approach is in keeping with the missionary calling and the realities of culture.

CONTEXTUALISATION AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The Gospel is universal, unchanging and for all cultures. But the cultural contexts in which the cross-cultural messenger delivers it are different from the culture in which God had revealed His message. During the communication process, it is important for the messenger to discern the local “worldview” and to distinguish it from other worldviews, so that the message can be delivered in a relevant way to the local context. This is the task of contextualisation faced by the cross-cultural messenger.

Contextualisation is necessary so that the Gospel message is clearly understood by the recipients without any cultural distortions. The cross-cultural messenger must accurately perceive the recipients’ worldview and subsequently define, adapt and apply the Gospel message to their local context.

Bringing the Gospel to another culture is more than a matter of preaching a message. For change to take place, Paul recognised that mere words will not be enough. To the Thessalonians, he wrote “Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Paul then described how he lived among them and how he worked in their midst. They saw his life. The life and lifestyle of the messenger is extremely important especially when that messenger first seeks to identify with a people and its culture.

Contextualisation affects three major areas for the messenger: his lifestyle, his message and his way of doing the ministry. His life and lifestyle will either develop rapport with the people or cause them to keep their distance.

When Paul went to Thessalonica, his life attracted the people. He could testify “You know how we lived among you ... You became imitators of us and of the LORD” (1 Thessalonians 1:5, 6). Paul did not want to burden the people financially. This was his deep conviction. He worked night and day supporting himself. He preached the Gospel. He was a tentmaker.⁷ The Thessalonians were willing to hear his message. They understood his message and it meant to them what it had meant to Paul.

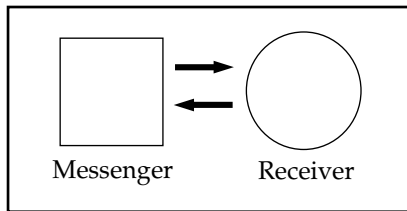
7 1 Thessalonians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 9:6-15; Acts 18:3

In other words, Paul really communicated clearly to the point that the message was understood and “welcomed with joy”. The Holy Spirit brought about conviction. The message was also relevant to his life, making its impact. The Thessalonians turned from idols to serve the living and true God. Finally, not only had the Thessalonians become part of Paul's life, but Paul had become a part of their lives.

Let us look more closely at the various stages of cross-cultural communication.⁸ There are five stages in the cross-cultural communication process:

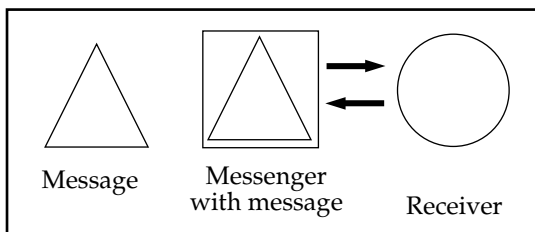
Stage 1 **RAPPORT**

For rapport to occur, the communicator needs to be aware of his own cultural background traditions, and how he must seek to understand the culture and traditions of his host culture, the people he desires to win. He needs also to be freed from any elements of his background that will inhibit him from relating to the new culture. To identify, the messenger (square) must constantly learn what the receiver's (round) culture is.



Stage 2 **COMPREHENSION**

Rapport takes place when the receiver says, “I want to hear what you have to say”. Comprehension occurs when the receiver says, “I understand what you are saying”.



⁸ I owe these five steps to Jim Petersen in his seminar on contextualisation.

Stage 3 EQUIVALENT RESPONSE

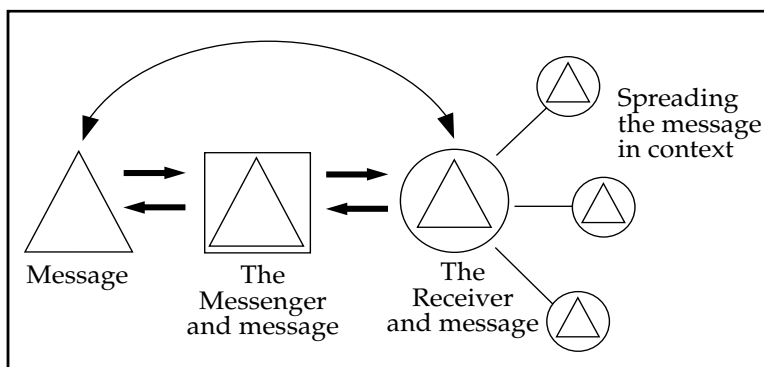
The receiver responds "It means the same to me as it means to you". What the messenger has communicated makes sense and brings about a positive response.

Stage 4 RELEVANCE TO LIFE

The message transforms the receiver's life and there is true conversion.

Stage 5 MATURE COLABOURSHIP

The receiver assumes his role in the spread of the Gospel. When true contextualisation takes place, the Gospel spreads and remains undistorted by cultural traditions.



The RECEIVER becomes a "new original". As Paul wrote, "You became imitators of us and of the Lord". These RECEIVERS are what some have termed "insiders" within their own culture and they spread the good news in their context. Here we see the spreading of the Gospel in context.

The above looks rather straightforward. In practice, however, the process can be complicated and complex. One major problem is one's own traditions; and tradition is what we bring with us. Just recall for a moment what Peter had to go through before he was willing to bring the message to Cornelius (Acts 10). God had to communicate to him three times. Peter was still meditating on the vision when Cornelius' men came to him. The Holy Spirit had to convince Peter that the men were specially sent.

Later, Paul himself had to sharply rebuke Peter when cultural traditions again became an issue. Peter, as a Jew, had wanted the Gentile believers to adopt Jewish cultural traditions when they received the Gospel. As far as Paul was concerned, Peter's behaviour was clearly insensitive. The truth of the Gospel was at stake (Galatians 2:11-14).

It is important to note that the Gospel spreads in context by the continued witness of insiders as followers of Christ. Tension sometimes arises when missionaries or other "outsiders" make judgements. Some even write negative critiques about these movements of the Gospel, and wittingly or unwittingly try to impose their views of how "church" ought to be carried out. They have also criticised the purity of the faith of these believers.

As we saw in Galatians 2, Paul had to rebuke Peter when traditions like circumcision became an issue. In trying to make the Gentiles practise Jewish traditions, the truth of the Gospel was at stake. Just imagine what would have happened if the Gentiles were forced to be circumcised. That would have tarnished the purity of the Gospel and stopped its movement among the Gentiles.

The Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 had to deal with this issue and thankfully resolved the issue. Similarly, we must allow followers of Christ to advance the Gospel in their context under the leading of the Holy Spirit without bringing in alien forms that will communicate different meanings to the Gospel. The Gospel grew at Colosse and beyond, because Epaphras, himself a Colossian, brought the "word of truth" and the people "understood God's grace in all its truth" (Colossians 1:5-7; 4:12).

"The issue in contextualisation", states Jim Petersen "is the truth and mobility of the Gospel. It is making sure the Gospel is clear of cultural and traditional accretions as it is carried into the host culture. It means taking care that it remains undistorted by the culture of the hearer as it is being received. The Gospel plus anything at all becomes a non-Gospel."

These key principles in contextualisation are absolutely crucial for the advance of the Gospel. Apostolic ministries, like that of Paul and his team, will take the issue of contextualisation seriously. Their long-term perspective envisions the growth of the Gospel in the receiver's context.⁹ New believers are transformed by the Gospel as they meet in relevant faith communities. The communities gradually grow in maturity with some, having the gifts of leadership, becoming leaders. Such local followers of Christ are "insiders" living in their own culture. Having received the Gospel without distortion for their local context, the "insiders" can be effective messengers to advance the good news through their local and regional witness of the Gospel.

⁹ For a long-term perspective, see Appendix B: Six Critical Factors for a Multiplying Ministry

Case Study for Discussion

New England Puritans: Missions to the American Indians¹⁰

Protestants began participating in world missions early in the 17th century with the evangelistic work of the chaplains of the Dutch East Indies Company and the New England missions to the American Indians. . . .

The aim of the missionaries was to preach the gospel so effectively that the Indians would be converted, individually receive salvation and be gathered into churches where they could be disciplined. The intention was to make the Indian into a Christian man of the same type and character as the English Puritan member of a Congregationalist church. This involved civilising the Indian according to the British model. . . .

Whatever may have been achieved in terms of spiritual development in the early Christian towns, the inhabitants had no evangelistic influence on other Indians, as they were cut off from any contact. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, missionaries to primitive peoples in Africa and the isles continued to be captivated by the idea of guarding the purity of the converts' faith and conduct by segregating them into Christian villages. The usual effect was to alienate the Christians from their people, and to create a "mongrel" kind of society that was neither native nor European. This prevented any evangelistic impact on others. A separated people cannot pass on the contagion of personal faith. . . .

Absolutely fundamental to the entire New England mission strategy was the recruiting and training of native pastors and teachers. Both the missionaries and their supporters realised that only native agents could effectively evangelise and give pastoral care to their own people. Unfortunately, the old Christian Indian towns declined under continuing white pressure and the supply of pastors and teachers also dwindled to nothing.

Questions for Discussion

1. What lessons (positive or negative) about contextualisation can we learn from the Puritan missionaries to the American Indians in New England?
2. What do you think the Puritan missionaries could have done differently to ensure the spread of the Gospel among the American Indians?

¹⁰ This case study contains excerpts from an article *The History of Mission Strategy*, R. Pierce Beaver in: *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, A Reader*, Fourth Edition, 2009, Edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steve C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library, pages 228-238.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LIFE AND LIFESTYLE OF THE MESSENGER

Contextualisation affects the life and lifestyle of the cross-cultural messenger. This will affect his way of life and standards of living. When missionaries go to a new culture, one of the first considerations relates to how they should live. Most missionaries will try to identify with the culture to some degree. Not all, however, will have the same convictions about lifestyles.

As a trainee in Vietnam, I noticed that living standards among missionaries were varied. Some adopted a “middle class” lifestyle living in a missionary compound with servants to help. A few Western church and mission agencies appeared to have had a policy for missionaries to live like the upper class in the land. Such luxurious living attracted nationals who already spoke their language and had former exposure to Westerners.

Other missionaries lived simply. Warren Myers was one of them. He was my mentor from the 1960s until his passing in 2001. As a missionary trainee in Vietnam, I had the privilege of sharing a room with him in a small bedroom attached to a small office. The size of the room was actually enough just for one bed, a chest of drawers and one desk. Warren added a foldable wooden and canvas “camp bed” for me, not particularly comfortable but adequate. He even squeezed another small desk into the room.

There was little privacy. The road beside the room had continual traffic – pedestrians, bicycles, taxis and horse carts. I remember a horse peering through our window one morning looking as bewildered as I was! Our room was still bigger than that of a Vietnamese co-labourer’s who slept in the same house. This person’s self-giving life was a continual challenge to me. Our rented house did not have an attached bathroom or running water. The toilet was a hole in the ground outside the house. Vietnamese nationals seemed to be comfortable coming to our “home” and bedroom for conversations. I presented the Gospel to a medical student in our room and he later received Christ.

When some of my colleagues (both Asian and Western) ministered in South Asia, the team initially committed themselves to living very simply in order to identify with the people of the land who were largely poor. The group decided to do without amenities, some of which were considered as essentials

in more developed countries. For example, homes did not have refrigerators. Home furnishings were simple and minimal. The team did not own cars but used public transport or bicycles. Water supply was a problem as even wells would run dry. Toilet paper was considered a luxury item.

Missionaries will experience different adjustment problems concerning living standards. Those who come from developed economies and who have had a background of higher standards of living and lifestyle will usually find adjustments to vastly lower standards very difficult.

In one particular Southeast Asian country, I noticed that within the same mission agency, some missionaries lived very simply while others lived fairly luxuriously by local standards. Usually single men and women find it easier to live simply. I observed that couples with young children adopted a higher standard of living. One Western missionary couple brought almost all their furniture from home and lived in a huge home as they did not want their children to feel uncomfortable in a foreign land. In actual fact, children will adjust fairly quickly - depending on the attitudes of their parents. If their parents have a positive attitude about living simply, they will be just as happy to join in the adventure of living in a new country.

In many fields today, Christians cross cultures as "tentmakers" serving Christ in and through their professions. They too need to consider the kind of lifestyles to adopt. Sometimes they may have little choice as their housing is decided upon by their employers. In most cases, their lifestyles match what is expected of expatriate professionals. A friend of mine in East Asia had developed his own convictions about living simply. He therefore refused to live like other foreigners who were usually housed in luxury hotels.

Another couple in a Southeast Asian country studied the lifestyles of the people, including foreigners in the country. This couple decided to set their budget just below the "middle class" levels. They found a house to rent that was very adequate as Asians. Their Western friends found their standards too stringent. However, their non-Christian contacts, the people they wished to reach, were pleased by their standards.

What kind of lifestyle then should missionaries have? Each will carefully have to decide for himself. When going to a new culture, getting advice from local people and from the Christian community, if there is one, would be wise. They could provide a more balanced perspective.

The main reason for a contextualised lifestyle is to identify with the people we desire to win. The main principle in cross-cultural identification is that of incarnation.

CHRIST'S INCARNATION, OUR EXAMPLE

Jesus Christ is our prime example. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," declares John (John 1:14). Note the word "among." The Son of God became a human being and lived among us, sharing our flesh and blood. We cannot fully grasp what this really means – that Jesus shared in our humanity. He did not have His own home; He did not own a boat or His own donkey. He was even buried in a borrowed tomb.

Jesus was exposed to the same dangers and diseases that missionaries to a strange environment would face. He faced loneliness and he experienced sorrow, hunger, thirst, temptations, pain and death. Jesus could therefore minister to the people of His day – the poor and needy, the hungry, and the untouchable. He befriended tax collectors and "sinners". He met the needs of people on every level of society and in various professions – the rich and the poor, women and men, old and young.

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ commissioned His followers. They were to follow His example in their ministry – "as the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). To do so would mean the renunciation of our own preferred lifestyles in order to identify with people, and to live among lost people.

Jesus was sensitive to the people to whom He ministered. He was a carpenter and He lived simply. He ate with the people and they felt at home in His company. Even to the Pharisees who opposed Him, He would speak to them about the law which was familiar to them. The Law was always central as He addressed their attitudes to it.

Though culturally a Jew, Jesus was also "supra-cultural" (above culture). His presence brought the Kingdom of God into their very midst. Thus the Gospel was not just a message to hear, but it explained all that was happening in their midst and was relevant to their lives. His miracles and messages on the Kingdom pointed to Himself. If they gave themselves to Him, their whole view of reality would change. The message of Jesus, though given in the context of His day is for all peoples and relevant to all cultures.

We are familiar with Philippians 2. Paul describes the "mind of Christ" which should also be ours. Jesus "emptied himself ... he humbled himself." His self-emptying speaks of His sacrifice, and His self-humbling speaks of His service. Jesus literally stripped Himself of position and rank, taking upon Himself the very nature of a servant. For cross-cultural missionaries, having the mind of Christ means sacrifice and service to the point of being slaves for Jesus' sake.

In trying "to be like Jesus", cross-cultural messengers need to be realistic in the way they apply the principle of incarnation. People in the host culture

may not require or expect the messenger to live like them. They may also not appreciate his style of identification. Applications of the principle, therefore, need to be sensitively learned over a period of time and adaptations be made for the sake of the messenger's own well-being and identity, for the people's sake, and for the Gospel's sake.

Case Study for Discussion

Kim and Dolly were sent to a South Asian city. They rented a one-bedroom home in a building with the landlord living above them. Another local family occupied a similar adjoining home. There was a little yard for their toddler son to play in.

The structure of the house was typically local - a small hall with a door leading to the bedroom for the three of them. When people they were ministering to came for fellowship over meals, they had to pass through the bedroom to get to the kitchen. Kim and Dolly were willing to live with the lack of privacy till the Lord led them to a more modern home later.

Water was a serious concern especially during summer. On a good day there would be one hour of piped water running into a sump, a cemented water trench below ground level. In drier days there would be an hour's water supply for every 2 or 3 days. For drinking and cooking purposes they would collect the water trickling out of the tap into several pails. This routine at the crack of dawn could take up to an hour as they stooped to hold the pails to collect clean water.

The bathroom and toilet were separately located away from the house. Running to and from the bathroom during the monsoon rains certainly stretched their aerobic capabilities!

Kim and Dolly had learned the importance of living in homes where there were water sumps for water supply. They would pick homes on the ground floor with others living on top so that they would not have to battle with the direct heat of the blistering sun.

With their experience in house-hunting, they were able to help other co-labourers who joined the team. After initial years of language learning and some ministry, these co-labourers realised that their lifestyles were causing severe strains, especially on families. They were also falling ill frequently and interpersonal relationship problems were developing.

Questions for Discussion

1. Some felt that Kim and Dolly had “over-identified” in some areas to their detriment. At first, the local people were pleased by their efforts to live like them. But the local people themselves did not expect the missionaries to identify to the degree they did.

If you were a mission leader or supervisor, what advice would you give to missionaries like Kim and Dolly?

2. There was another problem. Foreigners who came to the country were expected to live comfortably and far more luxuriously than these cross-cultural workers. Therefore individuals who try to live simply in order to identify can become suspect by both the authorities as well as the local people.

If you were Kim and Dolly, how would you have changed your lifestyle or living conditions?

CHAPTER THREE

THE CROSS-CULTURAL MESSENGER

THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL

Paul was constantly ministering contextually. Each of his messages was carefully communicated so that it was relevant to the recipients in their local context and culture. For example, his sermon to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13:14-41 was appropriate for that context. That sermon was very different from his message to the Gentile members of the Areopagus in Acts 17:22-31.

During this latter encounter at Athens, Paul's approach was different from his usual synagogue encounters. The Athenian "worldview" needed to be taken into account and addressed. F.F. Bruce comments that "when the gospel was presented even to the most cultured pagans, it was necessary to begin with a statement about the one living and true God"¹ This was what Paul did. He had already seen that the city was full of idols and he was greatly distressed. In his message, he made the observation that they were "very religious". This was neither a criticism nor a compliment (since flattery was not acceptable to these Athenians), but a statement of fact of what he observed. Paul drew their attention to an altar with the inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. He proceeds to proclaim who God is, the Creator, the Lord of heaven and earth who does not live in man-made temples. God is the Giver of all life. God determines the exact places where peoples should live. God did this so people would seek Him and perhaps find Him.

To build a bridge to the truth of God, Paul quotes two of their poets (Acts 17:28). The first quotation, "In him we live and move and have our being" is by Epimenedes, a 6th century B.C. Cretan poet, whom Paul also quotes in Titus 1:12. The second quote "We are his offspring" is by Aratus, a Cilician in the 5th line of his poetic work entitled *Phaenomena* in 315 B.C. Both these poems were about Zeus! In citing a truth from their context, Paul communicates the larger truth of the God he proclaimed. He emphasized God's character as Creator and Judge which is very different from the pantheistic Zeus.

The response was mixed when he spoke of the resurrection. A few believed including one of the members of the Areopagus.

1 F.F. Bruce (1990), *The Acts of the Apostles, GreekText with Introduction and Commentary, Third Revised and Enlarged Edition*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, pages 379-380.

Paul was sensitive to culture. He would have understood that peoples were culture-bound and shaped by their cultural backgrounds when he wrote 1 Corinthians 9. The context relates to his surrender of his rights as an apostle. He then makes the amazing statement "Though I am free ... I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible" (1 Corinthians 9:19). He further says "To the Jews I became like the Jew to win the Jews ... to those not having the law (Gentiles), I became like one not having the law..." Please note and meditate on the word "like". Paul was willing to become "all things to all men" in order to save some of them.

In the book of Galatians, Paul recognises that there is only one Gospel. But this one Gospel would have different manifestations to the Jewish and the Gentile believers. Therefore in bringing the Gospel to the Gentiles, Jews must not impose their Jewish forms on the Gentiles, because these forms are not essential to the Gospel. This would mean tampering with the truth of the Gospel.

CULTURAL PRECONCEPTIONS

Some cross-cultural workers have preconceived views of what constitutes their ministry. Not only do they have their own cultural patterns which they find difficult to change, but they bring with them their "Christian subculture". For example, a missionary engaged in church planting may already have a particular kind of building in mind. Such a mindset could hinder the spread of the Gospel. Worse still, people in the host culture will observe new Christian forms and think they must accept or practise these forms in order to become Christians. No wonder many Asians regard Christianity as a Western religion.

In reviewing the history of Christianity from 1500 to 1910 in Asia, Paul Johnson makes this piercing comment: "it was the inability of Christianity to change, and above all to de-Europeanise itself, which caused it to miss its opportunities. Far too often, the Christian churches presented themselves as the extensions of European social and intellectual concepts, rather than embodiments of universal truths. . . . Though Christianity was born in Asia, when it was re-exported there from the sixteenth century onwards, it failed to acquire an Asian face."²

Many Western missionaries in the past were unwilling to identify with their host culture because of the stresses and strains they would face in attempting to do so. Now that Asians are also involved in cross-cultural ministries, this same mentality must be abandoned. We can be guilty of violating biblical principles of mission.

Christians have been guilty of judging non-Christian cultures saying they are all perverse, fallen and pagan. A "Christian" culture, if there is such a thing,

2 Paul Johnson (1976), *A History of Christianity*, Atheneum, New York, pages 409, 410.

is also fallen. Much of culture is neutral and can be affirmed. As the Lausanne Covenant³ states in its section on Evangelism and Culture “because man is God’s creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness.”⁴

In his commentary, John Stott explains “Culture may be likened to a tapestry, intricate and often very beautiful, which is woven by a given society to express its corporate identity.”⁵

Common beliefs and customs are part of this tapestry. The Lausanne Covenant warns against exporting “an alien culture” with the Gospel. The Willowbank Report⁶ states, “Sometimes these two cultural blunders are committed together, and messengers of the Gospel are guilty of a cultural imperialism which both undermines the local culture unnecessarily and seeks to impose an alien culture instead.”⁷ All cultures ultimately must be tested and judged by Scripture as the Lausanne Covenant affirms.

FUNCTION, FORM AND MEANING

Missionaries involved in church-planting must be particularly careful to distinguish between function and form.

- A function is an essential activity with a purpose.
- A form is the pattern, structure or method used to perform the function.

New Christians need to express their beliefs and to worship in cultural ways that are meaningful. They must have the freedom to reject alien cultural patterns and develop their own. They are certainly free to “borrow” cultural forms from others but they need to be meaningful.

A person with an Asian religious background would be accustomed to falling prostrate in worshipping God rather than sitting on a bench with his eyes closed. In Africa, drums are being used in some areas to summon people to worship, although previously they were unacceptable.

In Bali, a council of church elders studied both biblical and cultural beliefs and forms, and decided that a particular architectural style for their congregations would clearly express their faith. Because the Balinese are a very “visual” people, they expressed their faith in the Trinity by designing a

3 In July 1974, the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation in Lausanne, Switzerland, brought together 4,000 participants, including evangelists, missionaries, mission leaders, theologians, pastors and national church leaders from 150 nations. A drafting committee headed by John R.W. Stott incorporated the ideas of main speakers and submissions from hundreds of participants into a document, now known as the “Lausanne Covenant”. The 15 tightly packed sections of the Lausanne Covenant spread the essence of Lausanne’s emphasis on biblical world evangelisation, and helped spark what became known as “the Lausanne Movement”.

4 Section 10, Lausanne Covenant, Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, 1974. The Lausanne Covenant can be found on the Lausanne website <www.lausanne.org>

5 Lausanne Occasional Papers No. 3, The Lausanne Covenant - an Exposition and Commentary by John Stott, LCWE WorldWide Publications, page 26. This paper is available on the Lausanne website <www.lausanne.org>

6 The “Willowbank Report” is the product of a January 1978 consultation on “Gospel and Culture”, sponsored by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation and conducted in Willowbank, Somerset Bridge, Bermuda. Some 33 theologians, anthropologists, linguists, missionaries and pastors attended. The report reflects the content of 17 written papers circulated in advance, summaries of them and reactions to them made during the consultation and viewpoints expressed in plenary and group discussions.

7 The Willowbank Report, LCWE, 1978. A copy of the Willowbank Report can be found in: Perspectives: on the World Christian Movement, A Reader, Fourth Edition, 2009, Edited by Ralph D. Winter and Steve C. Hawthorne, William Carey Library, pages 506-530. The report is also available on the Lausanne website <www.lausanne.org>

contextualised Balinese-style three-tiered roof for their church buildings.

In a culture, almost all customs would perform important functions. Therefore, customs should not be labelled “demonic” and abolished before discerning their function and meaning. Sometimes old customs can be given new meaning. Some will obviously have to be abolished. In some instances, substitutes may be provided which perform the same function.

1 Corinthians 13
(Missionary Version)

*I may be able to speak fluently the language of my chosen field
and even understand its culture, but if I have no love,
the impact of my speech is no more for Christ than that of a
businessman who comes to exploit the people.*

*I may have the gift of contextualizing God's word
when I deliver it to my hearers,*

*I may have all knowledge about their customs,
I may have the faith needed to combat witchcraft,
but if I have no love, I am nothing.*

*I may give everything that I have to the poor,
to the hungry in the favelas,*

*I may even give my life for them,
but if I have no love, this does no good.*

Love is ...

*thinking in their thought patterns,
caring enough to understand their worldview,
listening to their questions,
feeling their burdens,*

*respecting them,
identifying with them in their need,
belonging to them.*

Love is eternal.

Cultures pass away.

*Dynamic equivalents will change because cultures change.
Patterns of worship and church administration will need revision.*

Languages will be altered over time.

Institutions will be replaced.

... Because these are not reality.

*Since I am finite, I can only study how to express the Message
cross-culturally, trying to free it from my cultural bias.*

*I am able to do this only in a limited way,
but I pray that the Spirit will use my life to show Christ
to those with whom I work.*

Meanwhile these remain ...

Identification,

Contextualization

and

Love,

BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE.

Jean McCracken (Sao Paulo, Brazil)

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE AND CULTURE

Contextualisation affects the cross-cultural missionary in three areas: life and lifestyle, the message, and the missionary's way of doing the ministry. These areas are crucial in laying strong foundations of a ministry that will last and spread.

In Thessalonica, Paul and his team delivered the Gospel "with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction" (1 Thessalonians 1:5). The people had received the message, not as the word of men, but as the Word of God, and their lives were transformed (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE GOSPEL – ITS BREADTH AND DEPTH

The Gospel has been received in every continent of the world and in diverse contexts. The church is growing in sub-Saharan Africa, in Asia and Latin America far more than in Western countries where in fact Christianity is on the decline. But with the diversity, the Gospel as it is received faces fresh challenges. Can the truth of the Gospel of the grace of God remain "pure" and advance in its cultural contexts?

When I interact with missionaries on the field, especially those in pioneering situations among mainstream peoples, the first major question is: "What is the Gospel?" The word "gospel", *evangelion*, (used 77 times in the New Testament) means "good news" or "good message." To share the good news or to evangelise is *evangelizo* (occurs 55 times in the New Testament).

As we identify with people of another culture, the message we bring with us must be communicated in meaningful ways. The Gospel is not a "formula" to be presented, as though it was a new idea to communicate. Paul reminds us in Romans 1:1-4 that the Gospel was planned long beforehand by God and is the fulfilment of Old Testament promises. What God planned and promised was fulfilled in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I love Luke 24 when Jesus opens the Scriptures to two followers on the road to Emmaus just after His resurrection. He takes them through the whole

Old Testament “explaining to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). The eyes of their understanding were opened and their hearts burned as they finally realized that it was the risen Christ Himself speaking to them. There is plenty of good news in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.¹

Many Gospel presentations begin with the Fall and sin in Genesis 3. God’s good news actually starts from the very first verses of Genesis. God wants us to know Him as Creator. Every person is created in God’s image.

The Lausanne Covenant states “Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited.”² The good news speaks of the dignity and value of every person. And that’s the way we are to view people from every nation and culture as we bring the good news to them.

The story of the Fall in Genesis 3 sounds like bad news. But the good news can only be valued when the seriousness and extent of sin is understood. The first promise of the remedy for sin is found in the same chapter in verse 15 – that the serpent would be crushed on the head by the son of the woman, whom we know is Jesus Christ.

For those of us involved in missions, the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 rings loud and clear that through him, God would bless all the nations. Paul in fact affirms in Galatians 3:8 that the Gospel was being preached in advance to Abraham. The story of the Gospel continues from this promise onwards to the coming of Christ and does not end till the gospel is preached to all nations (Matthew 24:14). The glorious fulfilment is portrayed in Revelation 5:9 and 7:9. People from every tribe, language and nation will be worshipping the Lamb. Yes, the Gospel, the good news, is for the nations.

The content of the Gospel is found in the whole Bible which portrays or declares the Gospel in many different ways to peoples of every culture. There is something in Scripture that will be relevant to any culture. In the next chapter, we will have examples of how the Gospel message can be contextualised.

What we have to avoid is to come to a new culture or language with a pre-packaged Gospel. Many groups with a desire for hasty “decisions for Christ” have been unwise in their methods causing more damage than good and sometimes closing doors to further sensitive cross-cultural work.

People may resist the Gospel message not because they are antagonistic to Christ or Christianity, but because they perceive it to be a threat to their culture and the solidarity of their society. This happens not just among tribal and religious groups but also in secularised societies. Therefore the cultural factor cannot be taken lightly.

1 For a helpful summary, see Chris Wright (2009), *According to the Scriptures: The Whole Gospel in Biblical Revelation*, Evangelical Review of Theology, Volume 33:1, January 2009, World Evangelical Alliance.

2 Section 5, Lausanne Covenant, 1974. The Lausanne Covenant is available on the Lausanne website <www.lausanne.org>

When the Word of God begins to penetrate a society, it has the power to speak to the customs and beliefs of that society. Customs and beliefs that are incompatible with Scripture will have to be discarded. Others which are not contrary to Scripture may be preserved and even beautified further and transformed under Christ's Lordship. And when people submit to Christ's Lordship, the Holy Spirit illumines them through Scripture to understand truth in a fresh way through their own eyes.

CHRIST'S LORDSHIP OVER CULTURES

I remember as a pre-university student how my godly father took me aside and informally gave me sound advice. He advised me to view all the arts, sciences and philosophy that I would be exposed to as subjects under the Lordship of Christ. These had to be tested under the scrutiny of Scripture. I never forgot his advice. It became an adventure to view all studies in this light.

Similarly, if Christ is truly Lord of all, culture must come under His Lordship. This principle is particularly helpful as cross-cultural workers have to live with a degree of ambiguity (a requirement for effective cross-cultural workers) facing a new culture.

The Lausanne Covenant in its section on Evangelism and Culture states that "the Gospel ... evaluates all cultures according to its criteria of truth and righteousness and insists on moral absolutes in every culture."³ Therefore the Word of God will reject idolatry which opposes the uniqueness of God. God's moral law is also absolute whereas culture contains customs with values that are relative.

The Gospel of Grace also rejects customs, forms and practices that are based on human merit to obtain salvation. As people are exposed to the teaching of Scripture, we may trust the Spirit of God to cause change in the "worldview" of peoples as they obey the Word.

CONTEXTUALISATION AND ITS DANGERS

Contextualisation is not without its dangers. An obvious concern relates to the purity of the Gospel. Because all culture is tainted, when culture is brought into the Gospel message, the result may be a mixture of error with truth. This was something the early Christians and missions throughout history have had to wrestle with.

It is therefore a necessity for the cross-cultural worker to have a firm grasp of the Scriptures and its essential truths. The Bible must also be central in any kind of cross-cultural ministry. The messenger also needs to discern the

3 Section 10, Lausanne Covenant, 1974. The Lausanne Covenant is available on the Lausanne website <www.lausanne.org>

difference between universals and particulars, between primary truths and secondary truths. He should understand the differences between functions and forms, and their meaning. Most Christians, for example, believe in the importance of baptism, but they differ in their views on the mode of baptism. And churches have divided because of this one issue.

Majoring on minor issues in cross-cultural work can impede the growth of the Gospel and the church. I have sadly observed Christian leaders entering into sharp disputes over issues related to the use or non-use of music during worship meetings, drinking from the same cup rather than using many cups for the Lord's Supper, whether women should have their heads covered with a veil or not to have them covered, and other minor issues. The tragedy is that Christians majoring on such issues are unaware of the fact that such practices hinder the testimony and the mobility of the Gospel.

CONTEXTUALISING BIBLICALLY

In contextualisation, there is a theological dimension that needs to be looked into.

D. A. Carson makes the remark that "broadly speaking, there are two brands of contextualisation. The first assigns control to the context: the operative term is *praxis*, which serves as a controlling grid to determine the meaning of Scripture. The second assigns the control to the Scripture, but cherishes the 'contextualisation' rubric because it reminds us that the Bible must be thought about, translated into and preached in categories relevant to the particular cultural context".⁴

Assigning "control to the Scripture" will provide a safeguard to error.

The Willowbank Report describes various approaches to the interpreting of Scripture, distinguishing between traditional approaches and the contextual approach. Traditional approaches include the "popular" approach which simply reads and applies the Scriptures with no reference to the original cultural context of the writer. The weakness of this approach is that it ignores the original context of Scripture. Another traditional approach takes into account the context, but this "historical" approach ignores what the Scripture may be saying to the contemporary reader. It is also primarily academic and lacks application to the reader's own situation and cultural context.

The "contextual approach" seeks to combine the positive elements of the traditional approaches. It also includes the cultural context of the contemporary reader.

4 D.A. Carson, ed. (1987), *The Church in the Bible and the World*, World Evangelical Fellowship, page 220.

The task of understanding the Scripture should not just be left to a few individuals or theological scholars. The whole believing community should be involved in this challenging task. The Holy Spirit who has illumined the minds of believers throughout the centuries can also illumine the minds of people in present day cultures. Those of us who have had the privilege and responsibility of teaching the Word of God have often had the delight of seeing how new believers search the Scriptures. They often share scriptural truths in a fresh light, seen through their own spiritually illumined eyes.

It is our task as part of the believing community and the church (which is a historical fellowship with a rich heritage) to encourage the study and investigation of Scripture just as the Bereans did when Paul came into their midst. With a strong foundation in the Word of God, fears of error or syncretistic beliefs and practices may be dispelled.

FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION FROM CHAPTERS 1-4

1. In Galatians 2, why was Paul so vigorous in opposing Peter? (verses 11-16). What made Peter withdraw from the Gentiles? Discuss the main issue at stake.
2. In Galatians 2, Titus did not undergo the rite of circumcision (verse 3) but Paul had Timothy circumcised in Acts 16:3. Discuss the context of each situation and the reasons.
3. From Philippians 2:5-8 and John 1:14, discuss the principle of incarnation. In what ways did Jesus identify with us? How can we be more like Jesus as we are sent by Him (John 20:21)? How can Christlike behaviour be recognised?
4. Select a particular people or culture. What kind of lifestyle should a missionary from your country adopt when he goes to this particular culture or people?
5. Discuss the difference between "function" and "form". Why is it important to distinguish between biblical functions and cultural forms? In the following passages, discuss the relationship between function and form.

<u>Passage</u>	<u>Function</u>	<u>Form</u>
Matthew 6:5-13		
Mark 7:1-8		
John 13:2-5		
Acts 2:42-47		
Acts 19:8-10		
1 Timothy 2:8		
Titus 1:5		

6. In Acts 17:18-34 Paul seemed to have a different approach in addressing the Athenians. Discuss the content of his message in relation to the context and "worldview" of the hearers.

CHAPTER FIVE

DOING THE MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION

Contextualisation affects how a messenger will “do” the ministry. When a messenger is accustomed to “doing” evangelism using certain methods and programmes in his own cultural context, it could be difficult to change how he does ministry when in a different cultural situation. For example, my ministry training included preaching in the open air, doing personal and mass evangelism, using direct approaches as well as developing friendships and learning to use the Bible. Evangelism was usually linked with planned events.

As part of my training, I would approach people directly and to explain the facts of the Gospel using a booklet with “The Bridge” illustration.¹ When travelling to other countries, I would sometimes carry “Bridge illustrations” both in English and in the language of the people in order to be ready to present the Gospel to them. If I did not know the language, I would pray that I would meet people who understood some English!

I still believe that “The Bridge” illustration is an effective tool, and I will use it at appropriate times. But depending on a tool can be extremely restrictive and inadequate in cross-cultural witness. It can also be dangerous if evangelism is thought of as a method and in terms of special events.

Presenting an illustration, whether the Bridge or The Four Spiritual Laws,² does not mean that a person or a group has been evangelised. Neither the encounter nor the witnessing method amounts to effective evangelism. For some messengers, it eases their conscience that some strangers have heard the Gospel. However, there is more to evangelism than presenting the Gospel in such a manner.

EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLING AS PART OF A LONG-TERM PROCESS

When I was a young missionary trainee, a missionary pointed out to me that the sole imperative in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is “Make disciples”. He expounded the Greek to me – the *matheteusate* (make disciples).³

1 The Bridge” is an illustration developed by The Navigators, to present the message of the Gospel in diagram form with Scripture verses.

2 The “Four Spiritual Laws” devised by Campus Crusade for Christ is a booklet used widely to present the Gospel by illustrations.

3 For clarification, refer Christopher Wright (2006), *The Mission of God*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, page 35.

If only this Commission was translated accurately in the King James Bible on which I was brought up!

The “Go” is not an imperative, but it is a participle that takes on the mood of the main verb and should read “As you go, MAKE DISCIPLES.” The “baptising” and “teaching obedience” are all part of making disciples. Therefore, we are not commissioned to “make converts” but to “make disciples” wherever we are.

In other words, one must never separate evangelism from discipleship and discipling. Evangelism is the starting point of discipling, and it must never be thought of as separate from it. We need “the reminder that the New Testament was written by disciples for disciples whose primary commission was to make disciples wherever they went in the world”.⁴

Cross-cultural evangelism is a process of sowing and reaping. Sowing means hard toil and labour. It may involve many years of language learning, cultural identification and even heartaches and tears. Ultimately, the people we seek to win will require exposure to the Scriptures. We can be assured that the Scriptures speak for itself and that the Holy Spirit will bring about conviction. Sometimes it may take years before we see a response.

The process of evangelism involves bringing people who initially have little or no awareness of the Person and Work of Christ to a situation in which they understand the meaning and implications of the Gospel. Some peoples will take longer to understand and respond. We must depend on the Holy Spirit and His illumination to bring people to repentance and faith. The Holy Spirit is responsible for conversion and transformation.

GETTING STARTED BY SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

One of the best ways to prepare oneself for ministry is to search the Scriptures with friends and contacts. If we cannot win people to Christ where we are, it is not likely we will do so when we cross cultures.

As messengers of the Gospel, whether local or cross-cultural, we must learn how to “do” the ministry. I would recommend studying the Bible with “pre-Christian” friends. I usually go through one of the Gospels, either Mark or John, with my “pre-Christian” friends. More recently, I have had these sessions with international students and migrants. A number of them have come to faith in Christ. Seldom have I seen anyone going through these discussions for a period of time and not responding to the Scriptures. Most, who have studied the Bible, have become followers of Christ.

In Japan, I met a Japanese businessman in Tokyo who decided to contact his business friends simply to open relevant passages of the Bible during their

4 Jonathan Bonk (2009), *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Volume 33, Number 1, January 2009, Paternoster and WEA, page 47.

lunch hours. He would assure them there was no hidden religious agenda. There would be no preaching – just opening the Bible to subjects that would interest them. To his surprise, they were open to do so. He has seen them coming to faith in Christ. He said we only need to be convinced of two things: first, that the Bible speaks for itself, and second, the Holy Spirit will do the work of conversion.

As a university student, I had seen the power of the Word of God by informally getting my university mates together for “investigative Bible studies”. A number of them came to Christ just discussing the Gospel of John chapter by chapter. As my Japanese friend affirmed, the Bible speaks for itself and the Holy Spirit enlightens.

In the Appendix of his book “Living Proof”,⁵ Jim Petersen has a guide entitled “24 Hours with John” – with thought-provoking questions to guide in discovering “Who is Jesus?” and “What does He want of me?” When your friends go through the Gospel of John, “your part of the process in evangelism is to love the individual and help him understand what the Bible says. Leave the rest to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God”.⁶

Another resource is “Christianity Explored”⁷ with Mark’s Gospel as the text.

Many have used the “Alpha” Course in various languages.⁸ My sister and her husband in Australia have led post graduate international students to Christ using this course. I visit some of them when they return to their Asian home countries where the discipling process continues. The graduates become messengers of the Gospel to their family and friends.

DELIVERING THE MESSAGE CROSS-CULTURALLY

Contextualisation enables the messenger to deliver the truth of the Gospel in a way that will be understood by the hearers in their own cultural context. The message, however, must not be distorted by their cultural traditions as it is being received. The end result is that the message would have an impact on the worldview of the hearers, influencing their beliefs, their values and their behaviour.

Contextualisation will also affect how the message is received. In many Asian cultures, heavy emphasis must be given to the concept of God before Christ is being introduced. People want to know why the God that is being introduced is different and better than their god or gods. In what way is this God unique? Concepts of sin and salvation also differ.

The method used when communicating the Gospel should also be contextualised. In Western countries or among the more intellectual, explaining

5 Jim Petersen (1989), *Living Proof: Sharing the Gospel Naturally*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

6 Jim Petersen, *Living Proof*, Appendix page 217

7 Christianity Explored website <www.christianityexplored.org>

8 Alpha course website <www.alpha.org>

concepts point by point and step by step is considered normal. In many cross-cultural situations, telling stories is far more appropriate and effective. In some village situations, presenting dramas and plays have proven to be most effective. A good number of people have limited education and respond through visual means or through hearing the message.

There are many groups committed to making disciples of “oral learners” – discipling those who are partially or totally illiterate. “Two thirds of all people in the world are oral communicators – those who can’t, don’t, or won’t learn through literate means”⁹. In this electronic age, resources like CDs and DVDs are available to communicate the good news. Radio programmes (by Christian ministries such as TWR, FEBC, and HCJB)¹⁰ are also helpful when reaching out to oral learners.

Speaking of communicating the Gospel to “oral learners”, a unique situation comes to mind.

AUNTY SAY BAY’S STORY

Almost 40 years ago, I was asked by missionary Warren Myers whether those who were illiterate could be effectively disciplined. Without hesitation, I responded, “Of course, they can!” I had not given much thought at that time about this matter. I replied in the affirmative simply because the Great Commission includes all peoples.

Around that time, there was a lady in Myanmar. Naw Say Bay was led to begin a ministry among Sea Gypsies, a group called the Moken. This particular people group of between 2,000 and 3,000 did not have the Scriptures in their language, and neither were they literate. “Aunty” Say Bay (as her spiritual children would call her), responded to the call of God seriously. She decided to make disciples of this unreached people.

Though naturally a timid person, “Aunty” Say Bay overcame great obstacles to live among this people. She made her home on an island for three decades. Here was a woman of tremendous faith. She had to learn about the Moken sea gypsies by literally “incarnating” herself in order to learn their language. The Moken did not have the Scriptures, so “Aunty” began the painstaking work of Bible translation. Her story is a “must-read” for pioneers called to this lifelong task of discipling peoples.¹¹

After spending 30 years among the Moken, Naw Say Bay completed translating the New Testament. Two years ago, when “Aunty” showed me a published copy, I could share her tears of joy. What an amazing accomplishment! Today, on the island, there is a school that Aunty began, a church with dedicated workers, and many believing Sea Gypsies. Some have sailed to other islands to

⁹ The Lausanne website has a helpful overview on Oral Learners. <www.lausanne.org>

¹⁰ Their websites <www.twr.org>, <www.febc.org>, <www.hcjb.org>

¹¹ Angeline Koh (2007), *How the Moken Sea Gypsies Got Their Book*, NavMedia Singapore.

win their fellow-gypsies to Christ. Meanwhile, Aunty continues her work of translating the Old Testament.

Today, there are still numerous peoples without a translation of the Bible or portions of it in their own language. Bible translation agencies, especially Wycliffe Bible Translators and United Bible Societies, are doing a magnificent work in Bible translation. They need our support and prayers. Other groups are working on Bible stories which can be communicated audio-visually through multi-media such as films and DVDs.

CONSIDERATIONS IN COMMUNICATING CROSS-CULTURALLY

When delivering the message in a new culture, the cross-cultural messenger must ensure meaningful communication of Christ and the Gospel. Communicating the Gospel in another culture involves a process which includes four elements: Definition, Selection, Adaptation and Application.¹²

DEFINITION: The cross-cultural messenger must define his terms. This process requires hard work because the worldview of the host culture may attach different meanings to concepts of God, sin and salvation. The messenger has to work through the process by comparisons, contrasts, and stories to clarify divine truth and free it from cultural misconceptions, either from his own or the hearer's culture.

SELECTION: The whole truth cannot be communicated instantly. The process involves selecting what components of the message should be dealt with first. To Nicodemus, Jesus talked about the new birth. To the Athenians, Paul began by declaring that the "unknown God" has revealed Himself.

ADAPTATION: The cross-cultural messenger needs to perceive the special areas of concern of his hearers and make adjustments and adapt his message to these concerns. For example, in dealing with the fact of sin, he needs to focus on what is perceived as sinful in the worldview and beliefs of the host culture.

The messenger should be alert also to anything in the culture that would speak to universal truths, as Paul was when he quoted some of the poets respected by the Athenians.

APPLICATION: Ultimately, the message must be personalised. The Holy Spirit brings conviction when the Word of God is personally applied.

¹² This process is developed by David Hesselgrave. See his book *David Hesselgrave (1991 Second Edition), "Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication"*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

This entire process takes loving patience, genuine concern and persevering prayer on the part of the messenger. For meaningful communication to occur between the messenger and his recipients, the messenger needs to do three things:

1. He needs to gain an understanding of both his own cultural background and traditions, and the culture and traditions of his host culture. He must understand the people he desires to win. He needs to be freed from the inhibitions of his own culture in order to freely relate to his host culture.
2. He needs a clear understanding of essential truths - the differences between universals and particulars, primary and secondary truths and function and form. He will not be tempted to make an issue of things that do not matter.
3. Messengers and receivers need to develop relationships which allow for communication of essential truths. These must be relevant to every part of life. The results will greatly influence one's worldview, beliefs, values and behaviour.

TWO EXAMPLES OF CONTEXTUALISATION

The next two chapters will each contain an example of attempts at contextualising the method for communicating the Gospel. The first example shows how contextualisation of the message makes the Gospel relevant to Japanese. The second example shows how cultural forms (music and drama) and stories are used to communicate the Gospel message in a Javanese context.

CHAPTER SIX

AN EXAMPLE OF CONTEXTUALISATION AMONG JAPANESE

My colleague, Goro Ogawa¹ has had an effective ministry among his own extended family members and his people, 99 per cent of whom have little or no understanding of the Gospel.

Ogawa realised that in communicating the Gospel to Japanese, he had to consider the worldview of his own people and to build bridges of understanding. What has the Scripture to say about themes related to the Japanese mind? Ogawa carefully looked into the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, and developed a message that would be relevant to the Japanese.

Strictly speaking, the communication of the Gospel should not be termed “cross-cultural” for Ogawa, as he is Japanese. However, Ogawa has been concerned that for the message to become more relevant to the Japanese, he had to work at improving its presentation in order to communicate to the Japanese mind.

In the past, the approach of communicating the Gospel, learned from missionaries, emphasized the vertical relationship between God and Man. This approach neglected the essential ingredient of Nature which is foundational to the Japanese mind. With changes made, communication has become more meaningful with more encouraging response to the Gospel.

THE JAPANESE CONTEXT

Japanese culture has traditionally been Nature-centred. Shintoism, Japan’s main religion, was born on the basis of Nature worship. It is rooted in Animism. The Japanese worldview consists of a horizontal world of nature, man and gods. These three are integrated with no clear lines of distinction between them.

Shintoism teaches that nature is a world of many gods. Gods are for the benefit of man, and not man for gods. Man considers himself a part of nature and will become a god himself after death. Man must be at one with nature,

1 Goro Ogawa is serving on the staff of The Navigators in Japan.

learn from nature, and will return to nature. Shintoism is both Nature-centred and Man-centred, resulting in two forms of worship - Nature worship and Ancestor worship.

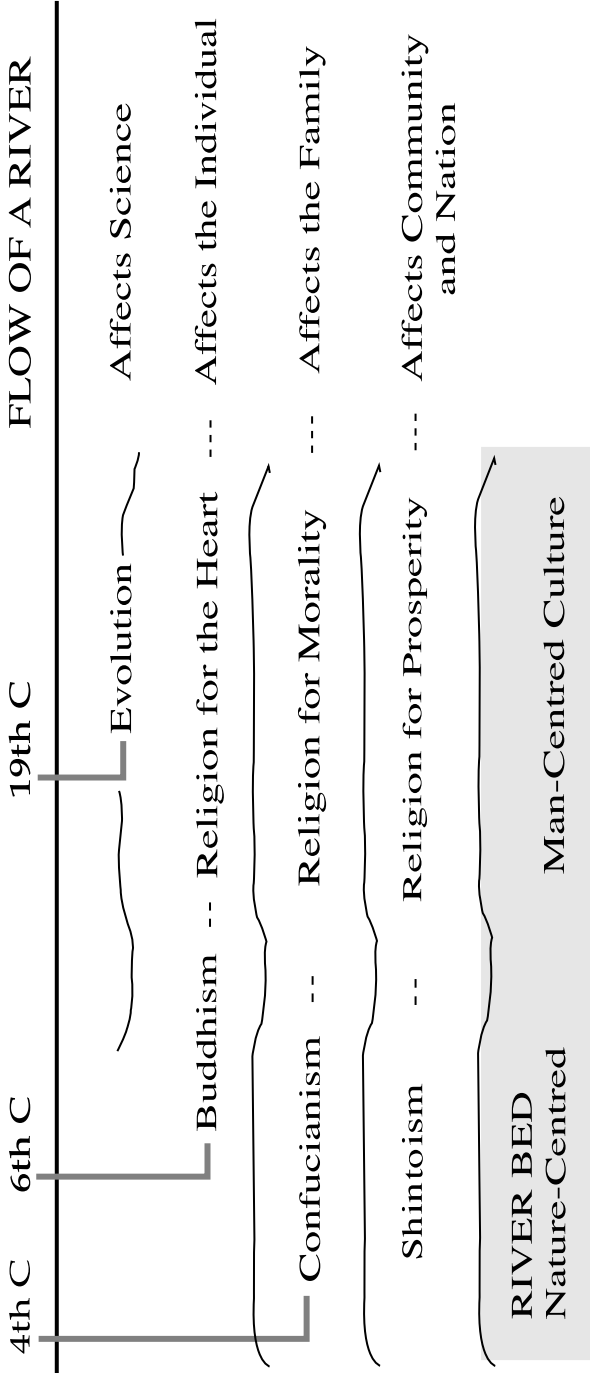
Japanese culture is also “multi-layered”. It has absorbed Confucianism and Buddhism which are traditional man-centred philosophies and religions. A 7th Century prince compared Shintoism, Confucianism and Buddhism to a tree. The root is Shintoism. Confucianism which came in the 4th Century is the trunk, and Buddhism which was introduced in the 6th Century is a branch. These concepts still prevail in modern Japan.

Shintoism is viewed as the religion for prosperity as it expects abundance from Nature. The philosophy affects the community and the whole nation. Confucianism is the religion for morality, and it primarily affects the family. Buddhism may be viewed as the religion for the heart, and it primarily affects the individual.

There is a fourth Man-centred philosophy which has influenced the Japanese mind. The Theory of Evolution which came in the 19th Century has been widely accepted. It affects Science. To be “scientific” gives the Japanese a measure of assurance.

Up to the end of the Second World War in 1945, the government was built with the Emperor at the top. After the War, the political system changed to a Democracy. The change, however, has not altered the culture.

The assimilation of religions and philosophies can be illustrated in a diagram which depicts the flow of a river, its deposits and the river bed. The diagram illustrates the foundations of Japanese belief.



WORLDVIEW, BELIEFS AND VALUES

The Japanese worldview founded upon Nature, together with its assimilated beliefs from Shintoism, Confucianism and Buddhism, have all influenced the values of the people.

Interpersonal relationships are very important and valued. Security for the individual is linked to the group he belongs to, and what they think of him. Maintaining harmony among associates must precede other considerations. The Japanese term “wa”, meaning harmony, is basic to all interpersonal relationships.

Value is also placed on relativity. In expressing opinions, being “gray” is better than a dogmatic “black or white”. However, being “scientific” gives assurance to people. Authority and order must be respected. Society should be well-ordered and controlled. Loyalty is also important. A high status and a good education are also to be valued.

OVERVIEW OF WORLDVIEW, BELIEFS AND VALUES

WORLDVIEW AND BELIEFS	VALUES
NATURE-CENTRED	
Integration of Nature, Man, gods: gods to benefit Man	Relate to INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS (and “wa”) which affect the
MULTI-LAYERED CULTURE	INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND NATION
SHINTOISM: Nature-Centred and Man-Centred Religion for Prosperity Affects Community & Nation	Harmony (“wa”) Security Relativity Science
CONFUCIANISM: Man-Centred Religion for Morality Affects the Family	Prosperity Morality Inner Fulfilment Education
BUDDHISM: Man-Centred Religion for the Heart Affects the Individual	High Status Authority Order Loyalty
EVOLUTION: Man-Centred Philosophy for Scientific Belief	

INTRODUCING CHRISTIANITY INTO THE JAPANESE CONTEXT

The message of the Bible is on the vertical relationship of God, Man and Nature. There is a clear distinction between them. God is the Creator and Man the creature. The Japanese view is the horizontal world of Nature, Man and gods. There is no clear distinction between them. Man considers himself part of Nature and thinks he will become a god himself after death.

God
Man
Nature

Nature is considered the resource of wisdom, power and production, and man lives a nature-oriented life. In this horizontal view, man still puts himself in the centre. It therefore becomes man-centred and self-centred.

Nature	Man	God
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THE CONCEPT OF RESTORATION

The “vertical” concept would come as a shock to the “horizontal” thinking of the Japanese. Therefore, to present a message that will be relevant to the Japanese mind, the concept of Restoration needs to be included. The concept of Restoration includes four elements (God, Man, Nature and History) which constitute the Japanese worldview and beliefs. If Christians can present a vertical worldview based on Restoration which is superior to the Japanese horizontal worldview, then Japanese will surely be interested in the Bible.

The history of God’s Restoration begins with Creation in Genesis and continues till the Book of Revelation with the New Creation.

The Gospel means reconciliation through Christ (Colossians 1:20, 21) not only that of God and Man, but also God and all things. Salvation culminates in the Restoration of man and all things, now under a curse. There will be Perfection (Acts 3:20, 21; Romans 8:18-23; Revelation 21:1-5).

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR COMMUNICATING THE MESSAGE TO JAPANESE

1. We should broaden the topics of conversation. The topics of conversation of evangelicals in Japan thus far have been on God, Man, Sin, Salvation, the Church

and Heaven. These subjects are of limited relevance to most Japanese.

Christian messengers need to be familiar with the interests of the Japanese and be convinced themselves that the Scriptures have a message that can attract the attention of the Japanese and speak to their needs. Here are some suggested topics of conversation.

About GOD: Polytheism, Idolatry, Satan, Angels, Ancestor Worship, Shintoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Heresy

About MAN: Worth and Purpose of the Individual, Growth of Man, Trials and Difficulties, Man and Woman, Marriage and Home, Aging and Death, After Death, Work, Gifts and Talents, Social System, Culture, Education, Science, Art, Social Justice, Poverty

About NATURE: Worth and Purpose of Nature, Growth of Nature, Beauty of Nature, Protection of Nature, Problems of the Environment, Development of the Universe, Energy Problems, Coexistence of Man and Nature, Threat of Nature, Evolution

2. Our attitude must be loving and accepting, not a critical one. A genuine desire to understand the Japanese will often bring about a reciprocal response on their part to understand and listen to us. We also need to realise that God is at work in their hearts to seek the truth. We should avoid thinking that what they do and think is all wrong. Our acceptance of their points of view will encourage them to listen to our message.

3. We should avoid the individualism of the West where the focus of Gospel presentations is on the individual. Japanese society is not individualistic. It is based on harmony or “wa”. Therefore we too need to be conscious of our harmony with others. It is natural to start with the whole, then to proceed to the individual, and to go back to the whole. In other words, we begin with God’s overall plan, then speak to the need of the individual and finally conclude with God’s whole plan.

The Gospel should be conveyed in the following way:

- Talk about God’s plan and the Spirit of Harmony or Shalom in His first Creation.

- Explain from God's Word why Shalom was lost - the fact and result of sin.
- Discuss the efforts of man to find a solution - trying to find reality but ignoring the fact of sin. Here we are dealing with man's inner problem. There is no real solution by man.
- Encourage the person to consider the solution of Christ. Christ solves the problem of one's sin. This leads to the growth of Shalom, first in one's own heart, then in one's family, friends and the whole society.
- From this perspective, invite the individual to receive salvation as a gift of God.

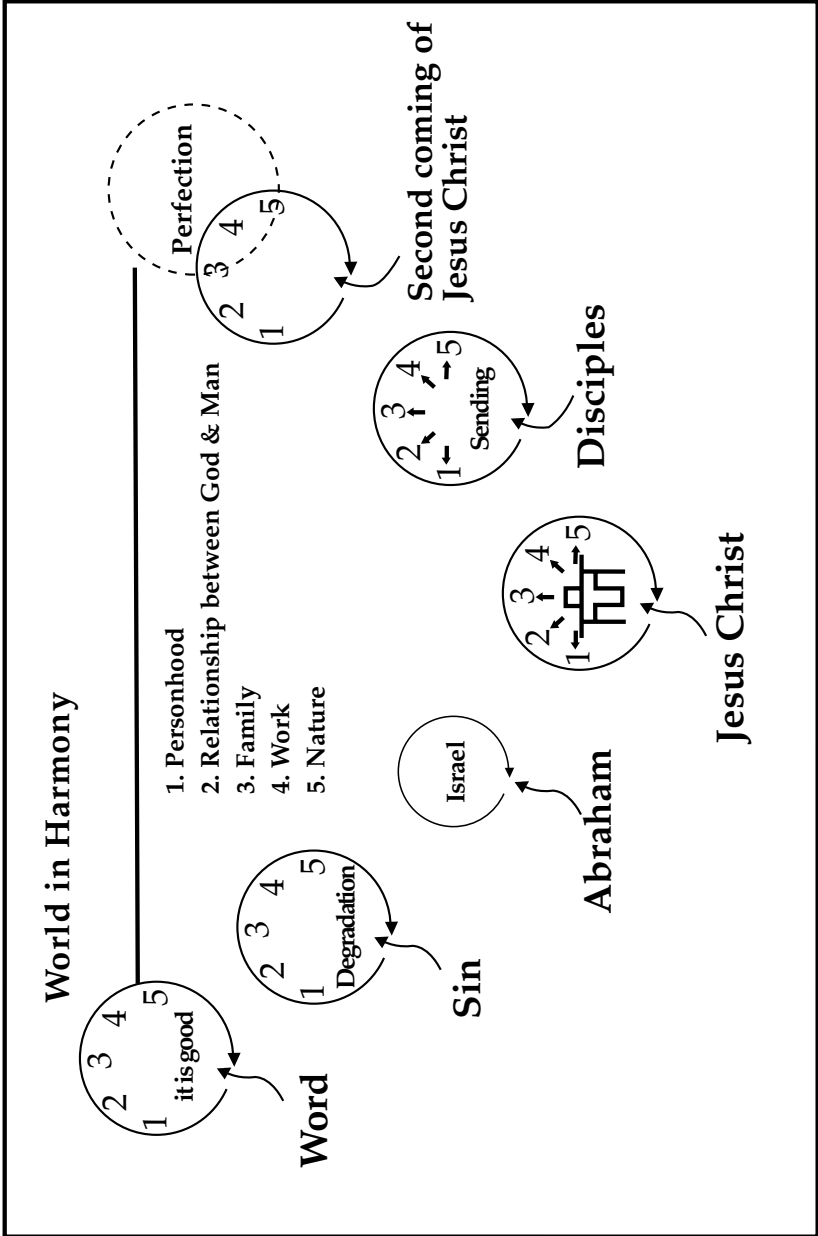
4. When we study the Bible with a seeker over a period of time, we should discuss from the Bible the four relevant concepts of God, Man, Nature and History. Be ready to teach simply the history of Restoration as it will highlight these four important areas. Present from the Scriptures God's wonderful plan and the fact that God's kingdom supersedes our present world.

5. Christians should be ready to discuss the areas of life pertinent to the Japanese. We need to be able to answer, from the Bible, questions posed by them. For example, they will often say that all dead people will become gods and be saved. They view Christianity as being too exclusive when it states that only some will be saved and others will be lost. They will also ask whether ancestors who have not heard the Gospel will be saved. We need to answer these questions.

6. Christians who have a conviction of being loved by God will reveal an attractive character which isn't seen among people in the world. Our lives will attract non-Christians to us. We have the opportunity to influence them or Christ by telling them that they too are being loved by God.

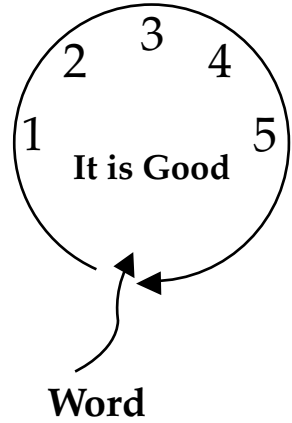
THE HISTORY OF GOD'S RESTORATION

The following chart illustrates the History of God's Restoration. The sequence may be used to present the Gospel message to the Japanese.



A CREATION

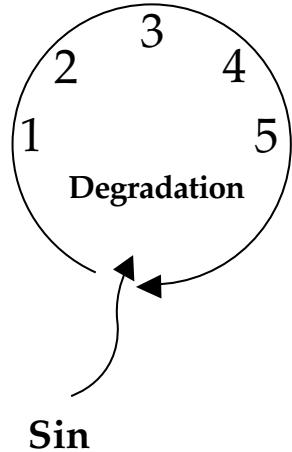
- a. In the beginning God created
Genesis 1:1; John 1:1
- b. God saw that it was very good
Genesis 1:24-31; Genesis 2
- c. There was order, harmony or Shalom
- d. **God blessed FIVE Areas**
 - 1 God blessed Man - Created in His Image
Genesis 1:26-27
 - 2 God blessed His Relationship with Man
Genesis 1:28; 3:8,9
 - 3 God blessed the Family Genesis 1:28
 - 4 God blessed Work Genesis 1:28
 - 5 God blessed Nature Genesis 1:29,30



B DEGRADATION

FIVE are as affected by sin

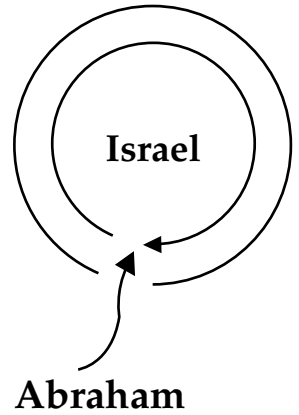
- 1 Sin entered into Man
Genesis 3:6,7
- 2 Sin broke the Relationship between God and Man
Genesis 3:8
- 3 Sin split the Family
Genesis 3:12,16; 4:1-8
- 4 Sin caused pain in Work
Genesis 3:17-19
- 5 All Nature groaned in travail
Genesis 3:17; 18;
Romans 8:22



C BEGINNING OF RESTORATION

God’s Plan in the Old Testament

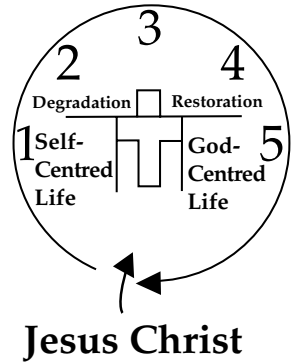
- a. His covenant with Noah affecting man and every living creature and the earth Genesis 9:1-12
- b. His plan of restoration through Abraham - of Israel and all nations Genesis 12:1-3
- c. Israel continually failed, but God spoke of hope of total restoration Isaiah 55:6-13; 58:6-12
Prophecies of restoration of later years Ezekiel 36:33-36; Isaiah 65:17-25



D RECONCILIATION

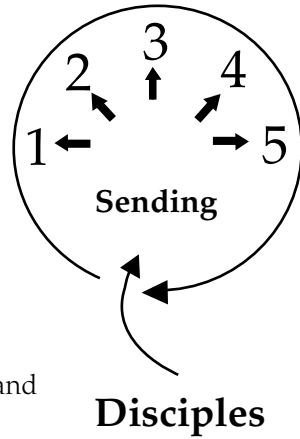
God’s Plan in the New Testament

- a. Man began to be RESTORED when Christ, the last Adam came Romans 5:12-21
Reconciliation and Restoration is possible through the cross Colossians 1:20-22
- b. Christ’s Resurrection ensures change and new creation 2 Corinthians 5:17
- c. The whole creation will be delivered from slavery and restored Romans 8:18-22
- d. Believing by faith, man is restored. His restoration affects all the 5 areas Romans 10:9-10
- e. The Holy Spirit lives in him and he becomes God’s child John 1:12; Romans 8:14-17



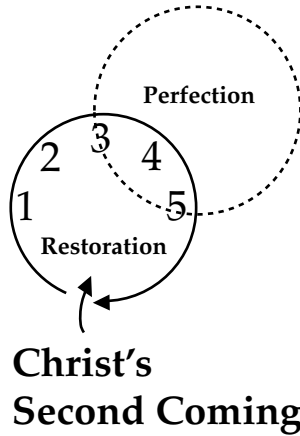
E COMMISSION

- a. Disciples are sent into the world to be Restorers.
 - 1 To be Salt and Light
Matthew 5:13-16
 - 2 To be Fruitful
Witnesses John 15:16
 - 3 To Make Disciples
Matthew 28:19-20
 - 4 To be Peacemakers
Matthew 5:9
- b. The Cultural Mandate affects Family, World and Nature.
 - 1 Old Testament: Be Fruitful and Multiply, Rule Over, Subdue Genesis 1:28
 - 2 New Testament: Make Disciples, Be Peacemakers Matthew 28:19,20; 5:9



F CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

- a. The whole creation will be totally restored at Christ's second coming
Isaiah 11:6-9;
Revelation 5:13,14
- b. God will bring about a new order
Matthew 22:30;
Revelation 21:4
- c. There will be a New Creation Revelation 21:1



CHAPTER SEVEN

AN EXAMPLE OF CONTEXTUALISED MINISTRY AMONG JAVANESE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on an example of contextualization among the Javanese in Indonesia. It does not discuss the worldview of the Javanese which is highly influenced by mysticism. For a further understanding of the Javanese worldview and beliefs, a study of Javanese mysticism or *kebatinan* is necessary. Mysticism runs parallel to the major religions which have influenced Indonesia – Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity.

Although Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, pure Islam is practised by a small percentage of the population. The Javanese on the island of Java form the largest people. Javanese Islam is highly syncretistic. Studying *kebatinan* will give an important overview of Javanese religious life. Searching the internet under “*kebatinan*” will bring up some sources of anthropological articles and books.

Clanging gongs, beating drums, glaring footlights ... what is happening? Here is the true story.¹

For two years, a cross-cultural missionary experimented with traditional Javanese art forms in an attempt to contextualise the ministry. The aim was to convey the Gospel and biblical principles utilising traditional music and drama, so that Javanese could naturally respond to these concepts.

The missionary and his family developed an interest in learning *gamelan* instruments.² In the process of learning the *siter*,³ the missionary's teacher and his wife trusted Christ. The teacher was a well-known *wayang orang*⁴ actor who performed at *wayang kulit* shows.⁵ He was also leader of the *gamelan*. His wife was a skilful costume maker and make-up artist. As their lives were transformed by the Gospel, they wanted to communicate their faith to others.

1 Adapted from a paper with the same title, presented at a seminar, 1988.

2 *Gamelan* is the Javanese classical orchestra comprising approximately forty instruments, including bronze gongs, flutes, and xylophones. It provides the accompaniment for most traditional music and theatre.

3 Javanese zither in three sizes.

4 *Wayang* is a dance-drama, *orang* means a person. *Wayang orang* are actors-dancers who chant their parts, following careful movements in imitation of puppets, which are manipulated by a puppeteer.

5 Ancient puppet theatre of Java. Shadows are cast on a white sheet by flat leather puppets manipulated by a puppeteer who also narrates the story.

Orchestral practices were held in the missionary's home. Most of those attending were non-believers, the kind of people the missionary desired to win.

The missionary and his friends began to see how traditional music could be used in pre-evangelism. During the Christmas season, the neighbourhood held an official party (with forty five Javanese families attending) at the missionary's home. Instead of Western carols, traditional *gendhing*⁶ were used with *gamelan* accompaniment.

The missionary's Christian neighbour, a court attendant in the Sultanate, with his vast knowledge of Javanese history and culture, wrote new lyrics based on Isaiah and Luke to several Javanese *gendhing*. As a result, guests would unconsciously absorb the Scriptures concerning Jesus' coming. The orchestra, with a mixture of believers and unbelievers, began practising traditional tunes with scriptural lyrics. Soon, another family, after studying the Bible with the missionary, trusted Christ. This time, they encouraged the missionary to experiment with *wayang orang* and *ketoprak*⁷ in conveying the Gospel.

The court attendant wrote the script for their first *ketoprak*. The story was "Joseph Becomes Prime Minister".

The first performance was to 400 prisoners, guards and officials in the city jail. Prisoners identified with Joseph's imprisonment, his temptations and false accusations made against him. In the script, Joseph gave a veiled presentation of the Gospel to the baker and wine taster. He stressed their need for repentance and faith in a Saviour who would die for their sins and give true freedom. The performance proved to be a spiritual stimulus to the prisoners with whom the missionary and his team were already in contact. A prison disciplinarian ministry has resulted!

AJI SAKA: A FOURTH CENTURY "SAVIOUR"

Javanese literature is full of "redemptive analogies", stories from which the Gospel can be introduced.⁸

The legend of "Aji Saka" is about a fourth century Javanese kingdom ruled by a wicked king, symbolic of Satan. He developed a taste for human flesh, demanding one sacrifice a day to satisfy his evil appetite. Meanwhile, a king "over the wind", symbolic of God the Father, commissioned Aji Saka, whose name means "saviour", and is symbolic of Christ, to save the kingdom. His turban, named "secret writing of the sun", is symbolic of the Word of God.

Aji Saka entered the home of a widow, whose turn it was to be sacrificed. To her disbelief, he offered to give up his life in her place. As he faced the

6 Instrumental and vocal pieces or tunes for the *gamelan*. A female vocalist sings the melody while the male *gamelan* players sing variations on the theme.

7 Musical theatre form with stories usually based on Javanese history and legends.

8 Don Richardson defined the concept of redemptive analogies in his books, *Peace Child* (Regal Books, 1974), and *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Gospel Light, 1984), that embedded in a culture are beliefs, stories and practices which can be used to explain the Gospel

wicked king, Aji Saka requested and was granted a final wish: a piece of ground the size of his turban. As Aji Saka spread out his turban, it increased in size until it covered the entire kingdom, finally casting the wicked king into the South Sea.⁹

The theatre troupe performed the *ketoprak*, legend of Aji Saka, at evangelistic Christmas celebrations. During the performance, Aji Saka explained to his two disciples that, just as he was willing to die for the widow, there is a perfect Saviour who has actually died for the sins of all mankind. Aji Saka was enthusiastically received, providing an opening to those people interested in the Gospel.

HUDDLING AROUND THE RADIO

One mission board encouraged the missionary and his group to record Aji Saka for use in village evangelism. The Javanese enjoy huddling around a radio or cassette player for long hours at night listening to *ketoprak* or *wayang orang* performances. The team could envision their key contacts inviting their neighbours to listen to *ketoprak* cassettes, and then discussing the meaning. They recorded Aji Saka and distributed cassettes to key contacts as well as to other missions. The feedback was positive.

The theatre troupe has also broadcast several dramas,¹⁰ followed by a brief meditation, on the Christian programmes of two public radio stations. Their contacts call their neighbours when the programme begins so that they can listen together. They also broadcast a serial drama to see if they can capitalise on the popularity of secular serial drama.

CONVERSION IN THEIR MIDST

Besides the results in the hearts and minds of the audience, there were tangible results among the performers. One talented and respected *gamelan* player trusted Christ. His wife believed soon afterwards. He said that his entire extended family would eventually follow Christ. Other *gamelan* players who expressed an interest in Christ engaged in evangelistic Bible Studies led by the leader of the *gamelan*. They have been exposed to the Scriptures and to other believers over a two year period. And there are many more performers like them.

⁹ Mickey and Joyce Smith (1984), "An Eye-Opener for the Rural Javanese", in Unto The Uttermost, edited by Doug Priest Jr., Pasadena: William Carey Library, pages 216-228.

¹⁰ An informal theatre form using *gamelan* and recorded sound effects. All lines are spoken and the repertoire is unlimited.

BIBLICAL FREEDOM

The missionary and the group believe they have Scriptural support for this type of ministry. The Psalms abound with commands to praise the Lord with vocal and instrumental music.¹¹ David exemplifies the use of the arts to glorify God. He composed psalms which were lyrics for hymns. Psalm 57 for example was sung to the Hebrew tune “*Altaschith*”. He also danced before the Lord and, with all the people, shouted with joy and the sound of trumpets was heard (2 Samuel 6:14,15).

A warning, however, is implied in Genesis 4:21. God destroyed the Canaanite civilisation because, among other reasons, they used their cultural achievements to defy God instead of being dedicated to God’s glory.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul was willing to adapt, and expressed his freedom to experiment in reaching specific people groups (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). As mentioned earlier, he also quoted a Cretan and a Cilician poet (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12).

AN ASSESSMENT OF JAVANESE CONTEXTUALISATION

In Java’s history, some missionaries to the Javanese have freely utilised Javanese cultural forms to spread their faith.

Christian missionaries in general have almost unanimously rejected the use of cultural forms. The few notable exceptions that did succeed in penetrating Javanese culture with the Gospel have been largely ignored.¹²

One obvious danger of a contextualised ministry is syncretism. The Javanese tendency to assimilate mutually contradictory beliefs is seen in their history. To their ancient animism, they added Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam before Christianity arrived.

The questions are: how can new believers in Christ be kept from adding just “one more layer” to their syncretistic beliefs, especially when music and drama forms from these other layers are being used to present the Gospel? Is it right to use Aji Saka to represent Christ since he was probably a Hindu Brahmin? The answers lie in guarding themselves from this danger by being saturated in God’s Word. Every concept must be evaluated in the light of Scripture.

Another danger is Satanic influence. Javanese arts are heavily influenced by evil spirits. Many actors, dancers and musicians make pilgrimages to seek supernatural assistance at the graves of famous performers. They also ask *dukun*¹³

11 Psalm 33:1-3; 92:1-3; 98:4-6; 149:1-5

12 Avery T. Willis (1977), “Indonesian Revival - Why Two Million Came to Christ”, William Carey Library, C. Guillot, Kiai Sadrach (1981), “Riwayat Kristenisasi di Jawa”, Jakarta: Grafiti Pers. For failure to contextualise, see Dr Hendrick Kæemer (1958), “From Mission Field to Independent Church”, The Hague: Boekencentrum.

13 Animist witch doctor, capable of performing most of the practices forbidden in Deuteronomy 18:10,11.

for special powers so they will be attractive to members of the opposite sex in the audience. Because of the probability that every performer has had some ties with evil spirits, the missionary will share the Scriptures on Satanic influence early in the follow-up and challenge those responding to the Gospel to renounce those ties.

Music and drama are effective in reaching Javanese. The arts are an integral part of their lives. They have heard *gamelan* music and watched *wayang* and *ketoprak* performances since childhood. They have been trained to follow the example of *wayang* heroes. Their concept of right and wrong is based more on the *wayang* than on their holy book. Because drama performances are part of the culture, it is relatively easy to obtain permission from local officials to hold them. On the other hand, an open air meeting to preach the Gospel is out-of-the-ordinary and threatening. To process permission for such a meeting is very difficult.

A positive article in a secular newspaper quoted two of the actors. The performers said that, as a result of acting in the “spiritual” *ketoprak*, they were more open and knowledgeable, adding that they recognised the believers as a “people who remember the Lord”. This was encouraging feedback from non-Christians.

The arts ministry is not the only way to reach the people. It has proven effective in penetrating a difficult situation, but only in conjunction with other evangelistic approaches and with the support of a body of growing believers.

Javanese unreached peoples remain one of Asia’s most challenging harvest fields. Only two percent is Christian. Indonesia is the fourth largest country in the world with a population of 230 million.¹⁴ Javanese comprise about half of that population. Javanese live mainly in the central part of Java, Indonesia’s most populated island.

COMMUNICATING WITH THOSE OF OTHER FAITHS

Christians in Asia live among people devoted to the major religions of the world – Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. Christians have been accused of being intolerant and even arrogant because they believe in the uniqueness of Christ as the only Way, the Truth and the Life. But 1 Peter 3:15 reminds us we are to live exemplary lives with Christ as our Lord, and “be prepared to give an answer to everyone.” How are we to do it? “With gentleness and respect.” Gentleness, meekness, respect and humility are important Christlike qualities. They are indispensable.

14 UN estimate for 2009

In their ministry among Buddhists in Thailand, Dr Nantachai Mejudhon and his wife, Ubolwan, share their lessons in their dissertations on the way of meekness. Indeed, Christ's way of meekness is foundational to building bridges.¹⁵

¹⁵ Nantachai Mejudon (1998), "Meekness: A New Approach to Christian Witness to the Thai People", Lexington, KY: D.Miss. Dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary. Ubolwon Mejudhon (1998), "The Way of Meekness: Being Christian and Thai in the Thai Way", Lexington, KY: D.Miss. Dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONVERSION AND CULTURE

“Contextualising Biblically” recommends the contextual approach of a messenger that takes into account the original context of the Scriptures as well as the cultural context of the contemporary hearer. The cross-cultural messenger must learn how to communicate the truth of the Gospel such that it is being clearly understood by the hearer without distortions, either from his own or the hearer’s cultural traditions and background. The messenger will discover that contextualisation is no easy task. He must painstakingly learn the language, the culture and religious background of the people, identify with their lifestyles and contextualise his message.

Tensions will arise when the cross-cultural messenger attempts to maintain the balance between biblical truth and cultural variables. Nevertheless, he perseveres in his ministry. He looks forward to see the Gospel powerfully influencing the lives of the local people, deeply affecting their worldview, their beliefs and values and their behaviour. He knows that true conversion will lead to such a change in the hearers, as it did among the Thessalonians, where the Gospel “came ... not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Years ago, I presented a paper on “Culture and Religious Background in Relation to Conversion.”¹ The next section includes some salient points of the paper.

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF CONVERSION

In the Old Testament, the word used to express the idea of conversion is the Hebrew verb, “*shub*”. It occurs over a thousand times and means “to turn or return”.

Conversion simply means a turning or returning to Yahweh, Israel’s covenant God. It is primarily the people of God and not the heathen who were called to return. The reason why a whole people needed to return to the Lord was because they had strayed from Him and rejected His covenant.² Conversion was more than an outward reformation of manners; it involved a self-humbling,

1 Jim Chew, “Culture and Religious Background in Relation to Conversion”, paper presented at Congress on Evangelism for Malaysia and Singapore, April 1978

2 Deuteronomy 4:29-31; Deuteronomy 29:1,12,25; Deuteronomy 30:2; Malachi 3:7

a turning to God and seeking after Him, resulting in a deeper knowledge of Him and His ways.³

In the New Testament, two Greek words convey the meaning of conversion – “*epistrepho*” (regularly used in the Septuagint for “*shub*”) which means “to return, turn about, turn again” and “*metanoeo*” which means “to change one’s mind”. “*Epistrepho*” is often used of unbelievers turning to God for the first time (Acts 3:19). This turning brings about salvation. J. I. Packer explains, “It is a once-for-all, unrepeatable event, as the habitual use of the aorist in the oblique moods of the verbs indicates. It is described as a turning from the darkness of idolatry, sin and the rule of Satan, to worship and serve the true God (Acts 14:15; 26:18; 1 Thessalonians 1:9) and His Son Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:25).”⁴

Conversion is the result of both repentance and faith – repentance meaning a change of mind and heart toward God, and faith meaning trusting in Christ and His Word. Thus, Paul testified both to Jews and Greeks “that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21). In Paul’s epistles, justification by faith is prominent.

The emphasis thus far has been on the manward side of conversion. The Scriptures are clear that there is also a Godward aspect. Conversion is a work of God.⁵ God enlightens the mind, opens the heart, and quickens the total person.⁶ The triune God is the author of conversion. He also is at work in believers to change and sanctify them.⁷

The process of God’s grace is continuous. This process should not be under-emphasized as it helps us link conversion with sanctification, and in a practical way, enables us to be patient with people in a new culture who may seem slow to change.

As mentioned earlier, conversion in the Old Testament is related to God’s covenant. In the New Testament, especially in the Gospels, its context is related to the Kingdom. In Christ’s proclamation, the coming of the Kingdom is the main reason for the urgency of repentance.⁸ A person can only participate in the Kingdom through conversion. As Jesus told Nicodemus: “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again” (John 3:3).

RELEVANCE TO CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

The Covenant concept is relevant in cultural and religious backgrounds that include a multiplicity of gods. The Old Testament covenant emphasizes that there is only the one true God. Worship of other gods is idolatry. To the

3 2 Chronicles 7:14; Jeremiah 24:7; Hosea 6:1,6; Hosea 12:6

4 J.I. Packer (1962), in *The New Bible Dictionary*, London: IVP, page 251

5 John 3:1-8; Ephesians 2:1,8,9

6 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; Acts 16:14; Ephesians 2:1

7 Philippians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 3:18

8 Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15

religious Athenians, Paul expresses who this true God is (Acts 17:22-31). The Sinai covenant speaks about our responsibilities to God and man. There are moral absolutes. Although God accepts that humankind has different standards, the fact remains that all have fallen short even of their own standards.

The fact of sin is greatly obscured in religions which stress self-effort and salvation by works. The covenant brings out the need for true conversion as all humankind stands self-condemned before a holy God.

From another aspect in the covenant, God desires the blessing of the whole human race. To Noah, He makes a covenant that is universal in its scope (Genesis 9:9-17). To Abraham, and through him, all the families of the earth will be blessed. This promise is most significant for those who respond in faith to the Gospel, as the blessing promised to Abraham becomes theirs.⁹ The patriarchal system of the Old Testament is familiar all over Asia. Today, as always, God desires not just the conversion of individuals, but of families, clans and peoples.

In the New Testament, the concept of the Kingdom is central in the Gospels. This teaching is not entirely new as the Old Testament has many references to God's sovereign reign as King over creation and all history. David affirms this in Psalm 24 "The earth is the LORD'S, and everything in it ... he is the King of glory." God's realm includes and embraces all that exists, seen and unseen. It is characterised by holiness, righteousness and love. When Jesus came, He unveiled the Kingdom with His own presence. He began His ministry by preaching the Kingdom. In fact, the Kingdom was the first and the last thing He talked about. The Kingdom offers present and future hope for all. The Gospel is all about Jesus and His Kingdom and that is what we are called to advance.

The concept of the Kingdom is relevant in ministering to peoples with their own cultural and religious backgrounds. In emphasizing the importance of cultural understanding, we need to be reminded that the Kingdom is supra-cultural (above culture). The teaching of the Kingdom points to supra-cultural principles and values for all human societies. God is transcendent and above any human culture. And yet He reveals himself in the context of human culture. This makes the incarnation of Jesus all the more profound. The qualities and values of the Kingdom which God desires are modelled and communicated in the person of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus is truly Lord of people's lives and priority is given to seeking God's Kingdom and righteousness, their whole direction in life changes.

True conversion and change occur when allegiance is given to Christ as Lord. Sadly, however, in many instances, the introduction of the Gospel does not bring about genuine conversion. People may accept the outward forms of

⁹ Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8,9,15,16; 4:26-29

Christianity but with little or no evidence of inward transformation. Nominal Christianity, prevalent in many countries, makes the Gospel appear irrelevant.

CONVERSION AND CHANGE

True conversion brings about major change in people's lives. Conversion is radical in nature because a change in allegiance takes place. Whether the change is gradual or sudden, it will affect the person's whole life.

Firstly, a person's worldview and beliefs will change. Worldview, as we stated, determines a person's view of God, of himself and of his meaning in life. Former gods which ruled over him now are no longer in control. His allegiance is to Jesus Christ. His former beliefs which gripped his mind are no longer a force. The change to a biblical and Christ-centred worldview may take a process of time but the essence of change has already taken place. Jesus Christ is Lord.

Secondly, values and behaviour will change. Kingdom values begin to invade the life of the convert. Exposure to the Word of God and its high moral and ethical standards will impact his life. Christlike qualities will form and grow with the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Loving God leads to loving neighbour. Relationships to family and community will be affected. Sometimes there will be tensions and conflicts as he follows Christ. He will learn that discipleship is costly, but as he learns to follow Christ, he will be salt and light in his society.

THE CONVERT AND CULTURE

Upon conversion, the convert still lives within his cultural context. The cross-cultural messenger must be careful not to "de-culturise" new believers. As a Christian, the new believer must be helped to view everything in his culture under the Lordship of Christ. Obviously, certain elements of culture and religion must be put aside.

There are other aspects that are acceptable and good. Sometimes converts may try to imitate or adopt the culture of the missionary, be it Eastern or Western. This should be discouraged. The Gospel will stop growing naturally within a culture when converts adopt the trappings of a foreign culture or religious patterns. But the Gospel will advance when believers remain as effective "insiders" within their cultural context.

New believers usually pass through phases of adjustment. Initially they tend to reject their culture since they equate it with their "old" life. They will need help from the believing community. They will then go through a phase of

accommodation - accepting certain aspects of their cultural background which they realise are part of their heritage and identity. Finally, they become more settled and live a balanced life as they find their identity in Christ and in their culture.

Story of a Young Hainanese Convert

One of my first experiences in discipling was to be involved with a secondary school student who had received Christ on his own after exposure to the Gospel.

Nge Liang belonged to a Hainanese family which worshipped idols. Upon visiting his home, it was clear to me, by his parents' reaction, that they were hostile to Christianity which they considered to be a Western religion. The home was full of altars including two prominent ones, one in the front and one in the rear.

Nge Liang's father, Mr Tow Mui, a seaman by profession, was also a temple leader. He would organise temple sacrifices of goats, chickens and ducks and the continuous burning of incense. He would also perform priestly functions to appease the spirits. He would partake in fire-walking ceremonies with others, each person carrying an idol as he walked over burning coals. Mr and Mrs Tow Mui brought up their children in the precepts of filial piety - never to bring shame to their parents and to honour their ancestors. One member of the family would burn three joss-sticks every evening.

Nge Liang received strong opposition when he believed in Christ. I remember regularly meeting him for prayer and Bible Study, often meeting under a lamp-post on a street near his home. We prayed regularly for his parents. We did this for about two years.

Being educated in English, Nge Liang found it difficult to communicate spiritual truths to his parents who spoke their dialect. They, however, saw that their son had obviously changed and continued to be a respectful son. He had learned that being an example and serving the family was more important than preaching his faith to his family. Nge Liang decided to be baptised and to his surprise, there was no major opposition. Astonishingly, his father found his way to the church to witness his son's baptism. The Chinese elder at the church who greeted him was most cordial as he wished him "Peace to you" in Chinese. This made a deep impression. Mr Tow Mui also noticed that there were no Westerners at the church service.

Nge Liang took courage and began graciously to witness to his parents. Trying to do so was like crossing a cultural and language barrier. God gave him an idea. Instead of preaching directly, he gave his father a booklet with clear illustrations on the Gospel (called "A Tale of Two Cities") in Chinese, and asked his father to read and explain the message to him since his knowledge of Chinese was limited. In this way, he also showed respect for his father. At the end of the booklet there were some questions giving the opportunity for a response to the message. Nge Liang had another surprise when his father told him he had made the decision to receive Christ just as the booklet had suggested. Soon Mrs Tow Mui committed her life to Christ. Her hunger for the Scriptures motivated her to learn to read. She was able to understand the Bible and later to teach others. The amazing fact was that she had been illiterate, and was already in her fifties when she began to study the Scriptures.

With the family's conversion, they burned their idols. Initially they faced opposition from extended family members. Mrs Tow Mui's sister who was hostile fell sick and showed no improvement in spite of medical help and prayer to her idols. Mrs Tow Mui visited her regularly, serving her and sharing Christ's love. After a full year, she together with her husband decided to turn from their idols to serve the living and true God. It was a moving experience for me to be present at the idol-breaking ceremony at their home.

Mr and Mrs Tow Mui began to lead other relatives and friends to Christ. Nge Liang could not possibly be the prime agent to influence the Hainanese community. Not only was he too young then, but his language ability made it difficult. But his parents, as respected members of the community, could reach their clan members in more culturally acceptable ways.

Mr Tow Mui had fruitful years of service before he died. Mrs Tow Mui continued to witness boldly. When they first joined the Hainanese church, there were about twenty members. Today the church is an established church with several hundreds and still growing. Mrs Tow Mui has also made visits to Hainan Island in China and led many relatives to Christ. In the midst of persecution, they have continued steadfast. One of them became a pastor with a growing witness.

Nge Liang, now married with children, is an engineer and senior pastor of a growing Singapore church with a missionary vision.

This story shows how the Gospel changes not only individuals but extended families and relationship networks within one's own country, but how it advances beyond geographical boundaries. Certain aspects of culture and religion had to be put away, and other aspects affirmed and strengthened

under Christ's Lordship. Converts find their identity in Christ, and they become messengers of the Gospel to their community and beyond.

SOME ISSUES FACING CONVERTS

Converts face some issues in identifying themselves as Christians. This is because the term "Christian" may have negative connotations in some contexts.

THE TERM "CHRISTIAN"

In several groups, the term "Christian" has been discarded. Instead, believers have identified themselves in various ways as followers of Jesus. Some Muslim believers have identified themselves as "Muslim followers of Jesus" (or *Tuhan Isa Almasih* in Indonesian). These have also been referred to as Muslim Background Believers (MBBs).

Hindu believers retain their culture by referring to themselves as "Hindu followers of Jesus". This enables them to remain in their community, and continue to influence their families and relations towards following Jesus.

Some Buddhist believers have called themselves "new Buddhists". They explain to their families and friends that the old was dependent on self-effort and the new dependent on God and His grace expressed in Jesus Christ.

The reasons for not calling themselves "Christian" are many. In some cultural contexts, the term refers to:

- People who are followers of a Western or foreign religion
- Those who have left their culture and religion to rely on a foreign one
- One who works for and is dependent on foreigners
- Those who go to a Western church
- Protestants (as different from Roman Catholics)
- One who has changed his name (either deliberately or upon baptism)
- An immoral or greedy person

In other words, in these contexts, the local understanding of "Christian" has negative connotations.

The term "Christian" appears only 3 times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). It does not occur in the Gospels. The word 'disciple' to describe followers of Jesus occurs 269 times in the New Testament. In the Acts, believers in Christ were those who belonged to "the Way".¹⁰ In the epistles, they are referred to as "saints" or "children of God", "brothers and sisters".

¹⁰ Acts 9:2; Acts 19:9, 23; Acts 22:4; Acts 24:14, 22

Bigger issues relate to identifying with one's faith community and the movement of the Gospel within one's culture, among one's family and relational networks. We need to be clear as to what "Church" means. It is essential to understand and apply what Scripture teaches and not bring our "ecclesiological" baggage that may be irrelevant, especially its alien cultural traditions.

The debate continues with "insider movements" today in the growth of the Gospel in major religious cultures. As a start, I would recommend the reading list in my article "Reflections on Contextualization".¹¹

SOME WHO CALL THEMSELVES "CHRISTIANS"

The Gospel transforms lives. There are, however, many areas where the Gospel has been preached but lives have NOT been transformed. Some people who call themselves "Christians" have brought the name of Christ into disrepute. In countries, both in the Western and non-Western world, the church is anything but "attractive." Worse still, in some countries, tribal wars are being fought among "Christians". In some cities where there are huge numbers of Christian congregations, the crime rate continues to climb.

Why have lives not been transformed? The Bible communicates that every aspect of the Gospel has transforming power – faith, repentance, reconciliation, redemption and more – the response of sinners to the grace of God. Could it be that the foundations of the good news have been poorly laid – not on solid precious stones but on "wood, hay and straw" (1 Corinthians 3:11-12).

There are complexities in the growth of the Gospel in any culture, as we see in the book of Acts and the Epistles. Apostolic teams therefore know the importance of laying solid foundations of the gospel. Growth in discipleship is a long process with the goal of seeing followers of Christ transformed within their cultural context. Such faith communities will influence their relationship networks.¹²

THE FAITH COMMUNITY

A major issue for converts and believers is their identification with a faith community within their cultural and religious context. I mentioned in Chapter Four that the first major question often asked in pioneering contexts is: What is the Gospel? The second question is: What is "Church"?

Church planting movements are well known today. While I thank God for many of my mission friends who are seeing believers either being integrated

¹¹ See my article in Appendix A.

¹² For a long-term perspective, see Appendix B Six Critical Factors for a Multiplying Ministry

into churches or become part of new churches, I have been uncomfortable with some mission agencies having “church planting” as their primary goal in cross-cultural ministry. Firstly, church history shows the dangers of “cultural imperialism” with missionaries importing or exporting their alien “church culture” into situations. Conversion is to Jesus Christ and not to a church denomination. Secondly, the Great Commission is not “Go, plant churches”, neither is it to win converts but we are to “make disciples” as we go to wherever we are.

Having said this, the issue of “church” and for believers to be part of a faith community is crucial. The process of identifying with a relevant faith community within one’s culture is often messy, as was in the situation at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians, Paul does deal with issues of the Gospel, but more so does he speak to the problems that confronted the church such as divisions, immorality and idolatry. I dealt with some of these issues in an earlier article.¹³

In the New Testament, the early church did not invent new forms. Instead, believers used their existing social structure, the household (or *oikos*). The Gospel tended to flow within the household and from household to household. There were almost no church buildings for the first 300 years of Christian history. Homes were used. Estimates are that a church would consist of from 10 to 30 people. The *oikos* was both a social and economic unit. It was an integrated network of relationships that included the extended family, its education, leisure, production, trading and consumption. The household was headed by a leader who oversaw the family, defended its traditions and managed its business.

Today in East Asia, “house churches”¹⁴ have been growing. They have no major complexities of organized institutional structures and huge buildings, which also do exist as “officially recognized” churches.

The New Testament does not advocate particular church “forms” as the church is not a building with a steeple and a cross, but consists of people who are followers of Christ. Again, the people of God are called to influence the world where they live and work, rather than simply gather on Sundays.

There is no legalistic command to meet on a Sunday for worship. (Some of our translations about the church that “meets” in a home¹⁵ add the word “meet” which is actually absent from the Greek text!) The “one another’s” of fellowship are far more important. When this is exercised in cultural context, the church grows as a body.¹⁶ Indeed, God’s plan for the church in all its variety is stated in Ephesians 3:10-11: “His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and

13 Jim Chew (2007), “Mission and Spirituality: Lessons from 1 Corinthians”, in: “The Soul of Mission: Perspectives on Christian Leadership, Spirituality and Mission in East Asia”, edited by Tan Kang-San, Selangor, Malaysia: Pustakan Sufes Sdn:Bhd, 2007, pages 50-63.

14 On house churches, see Wolfgang Simson (2001), *Houses That Change the World*, Paternoster Press; Robert Banks (1980), *Going to Church in the First Century*, Beaumont, TX; Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch (2003), *The Shaping of Things to Come*, Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers.

15 For example, Romans 16:5

16 Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:11-16

authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

SUMMARY for Part One on Culture and Contextualisation

It is essential for a cross-cultural messenger to identify with the people he seeks to win. To understand them, he must learn and appreciate their culture.

For meaningful communication, the messenger and the receivers must develop a good relationship. The messenger’s life and lifestyle will either help open the way or hinder his ministry. The messenger’s patience, genuine concern, ways of communicating - all are important to build bridges of relationship and winning the hearts of people to Christ.

Evangelism is a process which demands painstaking effort on the part of the cross-cultural messenger. In contextualising the message, the messenger needs to work at defining biblical truth, freeing it from misconceptions that may come from his own culture or the culture of his hearers. He learns to select the truths that are most relevant to the culture, analyse and adapt these for the people. These truths have ultimately to be received personally.

As the Gospel penetrates a culture, we may trust the Holy Spirit to illumine the minds of recipients and bring about conversion and obedience to the Word of God and the Lordship of Christ. The worldview and beliefs of Christ-followers will change. The Lordship of Christ and biblical values will also affect their behaviour. The cross-cultural worker must humbly and patiently co-labour with people in the host culture to see the Word of God grow and multiply. A contextualised expression of the message will result in the spread of the Gospel by witnesses from the host culture.

FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION FROM CHAPTERS 5 TO 8

1. In crossing cultures, it is necessary to differentiate between essential beliefs and non-essential practices. In the following references, what beliefs or practices would you classify as non-essential and what as essential?

John 13:5

Acts 15:20; 16:3; 21:24

Romans 14:1-6

1 Corinthians 1:14-17; 8:4; 11:4, 5, 23-26;

1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Galatians 2:3-5, 11-14

1 Timothy 2:8, 12; 5:23

2. In your present culture, what customs, if any, would you expect new Christians to renounce upon conversion? Give biblical reasons why they should be renounced. Are there appropriate substitutes for any of these? Discuss.

3. Choose a particular culture or people in your own country or in a neighbouring country. Analyse the worldview of this group. How would you attempt to build bridges of communication in order to introduce the Gospel?

4. Define or describe contextualisation. Sum-up the reasons for contextualisation. In your opinion, what is the greatest danger facing the cross-cultural worker in his attempt to contextualise the Gospel. How should he handle this danger?

RECOMMENDED READING for Part One on Culture and Contextualisation

David Burnett (2002), *Clash of Worlds: What Christians can do in a world of cultures in conflict*, London: Monarch Books

Duanne Elmer (2006), *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the world in Christlike humility*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Ajith Fernando (2001), *Sharing the Truth in Love: How to relate to people of other faiths*, Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers.

Dean E. Flemming (2005), *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

David Hesselgrave (1991 Second Revised Edition), *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Paul G. Hiebert (1994), *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

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

Nabeel Jabbour (2008), *The Crescent Through the Eyes of the Cross*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Charles H. Kraft (1980; 25th Anniversary edition June 2005), *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-cultural Perspective*, Orbis Books.

Jim Petersen (1989), *Living Proof: Sharing the Gospel Naturally*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Jim Petersen (1992), *Church Without Walls: Moving Beyond Traditional Boundaries*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress

Jim Petersen and Mike Shamy (2003), *The Insider: Bringing the Kingdom of God into Your Everyday World*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Ralph D. Winter and Steve C. Hawthorne, eds. (2009 Fourth Edition), "The Cultural Perspective", in: *Perspectives: on the World Christian Movement, A Reader*, William Carey Library, pages 397-530. *This third section of the reader provides many helpful articles on Understanding Culture, Culture and Communication, Identity in Culture, Gospel and Cultural Change.*

Part Two

**PREPARATION FOR
CROSS-CULTURAL MISSION**

CHAPTER NINE

PRE-FIELD CHARACTER AND MINISTRY TRAINING

INTRODUCTION

Missionary biographies reveal how men and women were prepared by God and equipped to serve in other lands. Many factors contributed to their preparation.

The training of Christian workers does not merely cover a brief period of specialised preparation, but it includes many areas of their personal background and development. In this chapter, attention is drawn to the nurturing of character and the ministry preparation of workers who desire to advance the Gospel, whether locally or cross-culturally. Other important aspects of training are developed in the next chapters.

Pre-field training can be informal, non-formal or formal. Much of discipleship training and character building is informal and casual. Non-formal training is received through seminars, short-term courses and special conferences. Formal training is usually through attending a biblical or theological institution.

As most new cross-cultural fields today will require bi-vocational labourers or tentmakers, informal or non-formal training will be increasingly relevant for the mission preparation of lay people. Discipleship and basic ministry training aspects are practised by some local churches with trained disciplemakers. Such training is useful. However, this does not minimise the importance of formal theological or missiological education.

I have personally encouraged many young men and women considering Christian service to attend a theological college. Missiological aspects are obviously more essential for those who will serve in other cultures. Others who needed training in specialised fields were encouraged to complete graduate courses.

BACKGROUND FACTORS

Christian workers are no special breed. Background factors should not be overlooked. Some come from stable and secure families, others from dysfunctional homes. Sometimes personal or relational problems faced by missionaries on the field can be traced back to their family backgrounds.

Background factors also influence a person's values, lifestyle and certain aspects of personality, which may remain even with conversion. With the Spirit's enablement, strengths can be developed and weaknesses minimised. But limitations will remain.

One of the young men in our early ministry lost his father when he was a few years old. His mother was emotionally and mentally disturbed. This affected his upbringing. He was an only child, and was left with relative freedom and minimal discipline. He received Christ in his teens and received personalised attention in the follow-up process. But he had constant problems with areas of faithfulness and consistency. He would start well on projects but fail to complete them. When he lived in our home, the problems of consistent faithfulness continued in spite of careful check-up which he initiated.

This setback did not prevent him from having a good ministry. Later, after marriage, he left for a foreign mission field. At first he performed quite well, but later had to return from the field because of certain tensions and problems. These were not major sins, but partly stemmed from weaknesses and limitations with roots in his background. God continues to use him in his home country as a lay person. The mission agency he belonged to has ruled out any possibility for a return to the mission field.

We should take into account the background factors of those considering the mission field. Generally speaking, those coming from more stable families adapt to a different culture readily. They also cope better with changes and stresses, and relate to others in a mature way. This does not mean that those from insecure homes and families will not do well. Mission leaders must examine their backgrounds to ensure that there are no unresolved conflicts.

Aspects of personality may need to be assessed. These should not hinder the person's growth and overall effectiveness. Do not assume that those from Christian backgrounds are necessarily better-off. Some may have had insecure Christian homes, while others may have come from secure and loving non-Christian homes.

EARLY TRAINING

Background factors play an important part in the early training of the person, and the shaping of his life and character. Most of a person's early training takes place informally in the context of home and family, and formally in a school.

I am thankful for godly parents. My father was a busy doctor in government service during my childhood years. It was difficult to have regular times for family devotions. He would devote personal time and attention to his children when each needed it. We did not even have "official" prayer times over meals. Occasionally, on special occasions, the family would have prayer together.

Devotions were not organised. My parents communicated spiritual principles and values by example and precept. My father will use ordinary circumstances to informally communicate spiritual principles.

The "formal" sessions I experienced were through attending my father's Bible class every Sunday at church. Over a period of two years, he took the class through the whole Bible, studying each of the 66 books. I would have the added advantage of receiving further insights into these books during informal times at home.

But most of all, it was by example that principles were communicated, such as the Lordship of Christ, living under the authority of the Scriptures, discipleship, importance of the church and the Body of Christ, love in relationships, availability to serve any one in need. Many of these important essentials are more "caught than taught". Here were some other things "caught" mainly in the home:

- The priority of Bible Study
- Availability to serve the Body of Christ
- Meeting needs even when tired and weary
- Refusing to retaliate or think evil when wronged against
- Learning praise through music
- Wholeheartedness in all things - whether sports or playing "chess" or collecting stamps
- Loving your wife
- Absolute dependence on God and His Sovereignty

On the last truth, I remember vividly how my father took me with him on a night call to attend to an emergency. There was just the two of us. It was around midnight and he had to drive, then park in a dark lane and walk to the house. I waited for some time - a long time it seemed. My father returned looking tired and worn. As we drove home, he told me that the patient had died. There was nothing he could do to save her life. Then he quietly and

poignantly shared with me that it was absolutely essential to put one's trust in God, for He alone is sovereign and in control of one's life. In this case, a doctor could only do what was humanly possible to try to save a life. Human resources are always limited. Well, I would never forget that lesson in the early hours of the morning.

My father practised Deuteronomy 6:7: "Impress (these commandments) on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

INFORMAL TRAINING

I have always been convinced that informal training - communicating principles by example and precept - is the most effective. When my wife and I began a discipling ministry in Malaysia, we decided to open our home for people we were discipling, so they could receive the exposure to a Christ-centred home and family. Those who lived with us were mainly students and some young graduates. They came from non-Christian backgrounds in Malaysia.

We had the unique privilege and responsibility to build Christian principles and values into these lives. We also became involved with some of their family situations, visiting family members during the long vacation periods. We tried to apply some of the principles Jesus used in the training of the Twelve.¹

All the members of our team, at some point of their lives, have had some missionary experience, either full time or as professionals. Some situations were cross-cultural. Today, some are still "full-time" and others fruitfully serving in their professions.

EDUCATIONAL FACTORS

A good educational background is necessary for the Christian worker. Many bible and theological institutions will only accept students with a good secondary or post secondary school education. A university degree is definitely a plus factor for those considering tentmaking professions.

Occasionally there are exceptions. One of the members of our Malaysian team did not complete secondary school. After his conversion, he proved to be faithful in tasks assigned to him. He worked as a school clerk, then later with a book company, starting at the "bottom" of the ladder. He rose to a managerial position. Although without a university education, he was winning university students to Christ and influenced families for Christ.

A Christian should further his education as far as possible, not for the purposes of self fulfilment or personal ambition but with the view of being the best for God and Christ's Great Commission.

1 An article on this experience appeared in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Volume 6, Number 4, Summer 1970, "Training Malaysian Leaders", by Waldon Scott, pages 203-208. Scott's assistant, Carrie Sydnor, conducted interviews of Navigator team members.

CHAPTER TEN

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING ESSENTIALS

Many books have been written about discipling and discipleship training.¹ They should be carefully studied and applied. We need to be reminded that discipleship training is not the work of an institution or a special trainer, but is accomplished through a nurturing process. The process of training involves:

- God Himself who establishes and equips believers. Hebrews 13:20, 21; Philippians 2:13
- Gifted and trained disciplers, teachers, leaders and spiritual parents. Matthew 28:19, 20; Ephesians 4:11,12; 1 Corinthians 4:15,16; 2 Timothy 2:2
- Fellow believers in the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:15,16; 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- The believer himself who obeys the Word. John 8:31; Colossians 2:6, 7; Jude 20

The laying of strong foundations is essential for all followers of Christ. These foundations will enable them to remain steadfast and fruitful, whether these followers later serve on the mission field or whether they serve at home.

God also uses circumstances in life for a believer's growth and maturing. Character is developed through trials, suffering and life's pressures. Jesus spoke of the marks of a disciple. These marks should characterise the life of every believer. They may be condensed into three essentials.²

1. A disciple identifies with the Person of Christ. This begins when a person openly confesses Christ as Lord (Romans 10:9). Baptism is often a form of this identification. This identification means denying self, taking up the cross and following Christ (Luke 9:23).

2. A disciple is obedient to the Word of Christ. Obedience is not a matter of mental assent but must be actively practised (Luke 6:46-49). It means faithfully holding to Christ's teaching (John 8:31, 32). Obedience is costly. It means loving Christ supremely above the nearest and dearest family members, and forsaking all in order to follow Christ (Luke 14:26-33). With such loyal

1 Highly recommended are: Walter A. Henrichsen (1974), *Disciples Are Made Not Born*, Illinois: SP Publications. LeRoy Eims (1978), *The Lost Art of Disciplemaking*, Colorado Springs: NavPress. Robert Coleman (1963), *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co. Bill Hull (2001), *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being & Making Followers of Christ*, Colorado Springs, CO. NavPress. Edmund Chan (2001), *Built to Last, Towards a Disciplemaking Church*, Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church.

2 Lorne C. Sanny, *The Marks of a Disciple*, a Navigator booklet.

obedience, a disciple will be enabled to fulfil his responsibilities to family and to love his neighbour.

3. A disciple is fruitful in the work of Christ. Fruitfulness is seen in the character of the disciple. Disciples love each other with the love of Christ. The world will be influenced by such love (John 13:34, 35). The overflow of a disciple's life of abiding in Christ makes him a fruitful witness (John 15:8, 16).

These are the essential marks. How are they developed and built into the life of a believer?

The following qualities and aspects are basic to discipling and discipleship training.

1 The Lordship of Christ

Jesus Christ must be truly Lord of the believer's life. The major areas of life include - one's total personality, one's relationships, one's possessions and one's plans. It will affect one's perspective to all of life. Christ's Lordship will influence a person's choices, career, marriage and family, values, priorities and direction in life. Surrender to Christ's Lordship may take a process of time or at a special moment.

A conference was held in the hills of Malaysia, attended by university students, young graduates and professionals. The issue of Christ's Lordship and the major areas of life were discussed in depth over several days. Some knew that the choices they would make would affect the direction of their lives and the quality of their discipleship. Issues relating to career and marriage were primary to a number of participants.

The years have gone by. Many look back to the commitments they made at the conference as the turning point in their lives. They have maintained their commitment and are in fruitful Christian service as lay leaders or missionaries, godly husbands and wives with Christ-centred families.

2 The Word of God

The disciple lives under the authority of Christ and His Word. The authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures must remain a deep conviction.

In his initial years as a growing Christian, a believer should learn to have a regular and systematic intake of God's Word. He learns to read and enjoy the Bible. He learns to study the Bible personally and with others in a fellowship group, preferably with the help of a discipler or Bible Study leader. Progressively he learns how to deepen in the Scriptures - studying and meditating, memorising passages and applying them to life's situations.

It is also important that the disciple learns the principles of Biblical interpretation (hermeneutics).³ Because theological studies or the reading of theology books may often promote a particular system of thought or bias, it is necessary for the disciple to grasp the truths of God's Word in the light of all of Scripture and recognising its unity. A good survey of the Old and New Testaments would be helpful, seeing the various sections of the Bible, their backgrounds and writers, and how books of the Bible are inter-related.

In my opinion, the most important way to a deeper grasp of the Scriptures is the careful analytical study of books of the Bible, paragraph by paragraph, chapter by chapter. This is a continuous process.

Having received foundational training in the church and with The Navigators, most important has been the studying of the Bible, book by book. Doing "Chapter Analysis" studies of various books of the Bible meant devoting hours of study searching the Scriptures. Each chapter study would require a minimum of five hours, sometimes well over ten hours of verse by verse analysis especially of the New Testament epistles.

I had learned the significance of "word" studies (looking into the Hebrew and Greek meanings) from my father's example. Early lessons in Greek during my teens were helpful, but I had to do a lot more study later.

In Malaysia, our team members committed themselves to excellence in Bible Study. We critiqued one another's chapter analysis studies and graded them. (Overall grades had to be over 80 per cent for the study to be satisfactory). We also checked each other in applications made. We learned the principles of Observation (what do I see in the passage?), of Interpretation (What does it mean?), and Application (How does it work?). We cross-referenced verses and topics and wrote "Central Teachings".

If one aims at completing thirty five to forty chapters a year, a disciple can study the New Testament in about seven years. It would be a challenge to plan to study the whole Bible in depth.

3 Prayer and Devotion to God

When one of the disciples saw Jesus praying, he asked "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). Jesus then taught His disciples to pray, not just how to pray but what prayer was all about.

Growing Christians need to learn to pray. They can be taught how to have a meaningful "quiet time" as a daily habit. This may become a daily ritual without the motivation of true worship which God desires (John 4:23, 24). One of the joys of personally helping new believers grow is to see their growth in their personal understanding of the character of God. This is often reflected in their prayer life. Their prayers may focus on petition for their own needs. They

3 A helpful book is Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (1993 Second Edition), *How To Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, 2nd Edition, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan. Another is by Walter A. Henrichsen (1976), *A Layman's Guide to Interpreting the Bible*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

learn about God's faithfulness and also about His sovereign ways. Then they learn about interceding for others, widening their circle of prayer to include family members, non-Christian friends, their church, missionaries, those in authority and prayer for countries of the world.

During my months of training in Vietnam, Warren Myers⁴ and I would have daily sessions of prayer. Sometimes these sessions would last over an hour. We would see God marvellously answer prayer.

Two incidents remain vivid in relation to financial needs. Warren needed a certain amount for the printing of materials. We prayed specifically one morning for the need to be met. The mail arrived as we were praying. Warren rose and said, "I believe the answer to prayer is in the mail." Yes, it was in one of the letters!

On another occasion, I had "run out" of money. I made out a list of personal needs – amounting to 100 Vietnamese *piastres*. Although I had made the need known to the Lord, I could not sleep. I decided to read Psalm 119. Verse 62 caught my attention. The Psalmist rose at midnight to praise the Lord for His righteous laws. Since it was around midnight, I decided to do the same – to thank the Lord for His faithfulness and for meeting my need. The next morning, I walked to the missionary compound of another mission group on an errand. One of the missionaries called me and handed me an envelope. He said he and his wife were praying late in the night and the Lord prompted them to give me the envelope. I thanked him and later opened the envelope. In it were 100 Vietnamese *piastres*!

Although the Lord has not always shown His faithfulness in the above fashion, His faithfulness is perfect. As Isaiah affirms, God's faithfulness is rooted in His character and Name (Isaiah 25:1). Prayer is all the more meaningful when the believer's heart is occupied with God Himself and not just in the blessings he receives. He becomes a worshipper engrossed with the attributes of God. Knowing and experiencing God's attributes is not merely for older experienced servants of God, but for the youngest believer from the days following conversion.

As a disciple grows to be an active labourer, his involvement with the ministry may squeeze out his times for uninterrupted fellowship with God. Growing disciples need to learn to pray frequently with those they minister to. But this too isn't sufficient. Prayer has to be scheduled as a priority. This has been a continual need of many tired and weary workers. In the midst of the busiest of ministries, Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed (Luke 5:16). The apostles knew that prayer was not a secondary part of the ministry, but prayer was the ministry itself. The teaching of the Word was a by-product (Acts 6:4).

⁴ Books on Prayer are: Warren & Ruth Myers (1983), *Pray: How to be Effective in Prayer*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress; Warren & Ruth Myers (1987), *Praise: A Door to God's Presence*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress

Prayer for the harvest fields of the world, for missionaries and agencies penetrating unreached frontiers should be encouraged. This will enlarge the vision of the disciple. Our Lord exhorted His followers to pray for labourers to be sent. Many disciples have developed a missionary heart by praying thus, and later were themselves sent to the mission field.

4 Christian Character

Paul laboured in the ministry with all God's energy working in him, so that he might "present everyone perfect in Christ" (Colossians 1:28, 29). Christlikeness was Paul's goal. Therefore he wrote about Christlike qualities in his epistles.

For the believer, Paul saw that faith, hope and love were abiding essentials. The Thessalonians, for example, possessed faith and love but were lacking in hope (1 Thessalonians 1:8; 4:9, 10, 13). Consequently in his letters to them, he emphasised hope related to the return of Christ. The Corinthian church was a gifted church, but it was lacking in love. Paul showed them "the most excellent way" (1 Corinthians 12:31) – the way of love as described in 1 Corinthians 13.

Paul wrote of Christlike qualities in the second half of Ephesians and in Colossians 3, to cite a few examples. The fruit of the Spirit stands in stark contrast to the works of the flesh in Galatians 5. The most essential aspect of discipleship training is the cultivation of godly Christlike character. This is a lifelong process.

Jesus, as the Master-Trainer, majored on character in His training of the Twelve. He taught that everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher (Luke 6:40). Jesus taught His disciples the characteristics of the kingdom. The values of the kingdom were very different from those of the world. The Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes - beautiful attitudes of subjects of the King. Blessedness is for the poor in spirit, the broken and the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Humility was certainly not a prominent trait of the disciples. They were seeking prominence and greatness for themselves. Jesus taught by example. He taught the disciples by washing their feet and serving them. After being with Jesus for more than three years, they were still slow to learn.

Disciples should be learners. The root meaning of a disciple is "a learner". To be a learner is to be willing to be taught. A teachable attitude is essential to learning.

In discipleship training, the Navigators taught me to look for "FAT" people - those who were Faithful, Available and Teachable! In Acts 16:1-3, we read of Timothy, a faithful young disciple, who made himself available to Paul to learn from him. We should look for such a person to equip.

A good way to learn about character is to study specific character qualities from the Scriptures. Passages of Scripture form the basis of our convictions. These convictions are deepened as a person discerns the importance of these qualities and seeks to make them a part of his life. For example, younger disciples may want to study the following: self-control, purity, honesty, faithfulness, servanthood. Qualities such as patience, gentleness, contentment and a thankful spirit are also helpful for any believer. Love and holiness are larger aspects and take longer to study.

Certain qualities are particularly essential for cross-cultural workers, qualities such as humility, perseverance and a love for people.

At the heart of any change in character is a person's view of God and His moral attributes. God is holy, we must be holy. God is love – we are commanded to love as Christ loved (John 13:34-35). The Holy Spirit is the main agent of change in the believer's life. He reminds us of God's attributes, He points to the glorious character of Christ. We are changed into Christ's likeness as we behold Him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

God is continually at work in changing our character. His ways are not what we would choose. God uses trials, hardships, suffering and the pressures of daily living to change our lives.

Much of character training initiated by the discipler has to be done on a person-to-person basis. Because there are difficult areas, the discipler must be very prayerful about how he instructs and counsels the disciple. Disciplers who mentor others view their task as a special privilege of co-labouring with God in the character development of disciples.

Paul saw himself as a wise and careful builder, with the foundation already laid by Christ. He did not want his work of advancing the Gospel to be built on "wood, hay or straw", but on costly material so as to have eternal permanence on the Day when God will judge and test his work (1 Corinthians 3:10-14). The Gospel transforms lives. Christlike character will endure. It has eternal value.

5 Fellowship and the Church

It is crucial for believers in Christ to be identified with a faith community in their cultural context. The disciple grows in the context of fellowship with other believers. The Bible is full of passages about relationships with fellow-believers. A study of the "one another" exhortations show the importance of these relationships among believers – "encourage one another", "instruct one another", "bearing with one another", "love one another"⁵ and many more.

5 Hebrews 3:13; Romans 15:14; Ephesians 4:2; 1 John 3:11

Each believer in Christ needs a spiritual family. Leaders in the church can provide spiritual nurture. As a believer grows in discipleship, he is able to contribute to the life and witness of his faith community. It is important that believers are given a period of time to grow before responsibilities are thrust upon them.

When my wife and I were having a student ministry, we led a teacher-in-training to Christ. He had ingrained habits ranging from pornography to alcohol and was a chain-smoker. Breaking these habits would take time while he gradually cultivates spiritual habits of time alone with God, Bible study, and the fellowship of the church. After about six months, he graduated and went back to his home town to teach.

I visited his home to help him and to integrate him into a local church. I met the pastor who gladly welcomed me and told me that he had met the teacher. He went on to tell me that he had appointed him as chairman of the youth committee and organiser of other church activities! I informed the pastor that the teacher was a young convert, barely six months old spiritually and still having struggles in his life. The pastor replied he was impressed by his understanding of Scripture, especially the verses he had memorised. Besides, there was no other person available to give leadership to the youth group.

My young teacher friend soon found himself busy organising youth and church programmes and his spiritual life took a down turn. I had to travel long distances to help him. Recent converts should not be given major responsibilities.

As an elder of an established local church, I know that spiritual leadership is always scarce. Some years ago, I initiated a small discipleship group in our Singapore church. Later, I passed the responsibility to a younger person I had disciplined and trained. From this group which emphasized person-to-person discipling, group Bible Studies and purposeful outreach, new leaders were being developed. Our church extended its witness to another locality. The new “daughter” church began a significant ministry to the whole housing area. It also has a Chinese speaking ministry besides its English speaking functions. It is a missionary church too with an outreach to foreign workers in Singapore. Some of these workers have been disciplined and have returned to their East Asian home cities as witnesses. As I write, dozens of years have passed and the local church continues to have hundreds in discipleship groups. It continues to impact the neighbourhood, relational networks and beyond in missions to other peoples. The church is also a model to other churches in intentional discipling.

When a church is influencing its neighbourhood and members are reaching out to their relational network of family and friends, the Gospel grows

and lives are transformed. Vibrant faith communities provide the framework for preparing labourers for cross-cultural missions. A "missions-centred" church will also have a broad vision of what God is doing both in the wider Body of Christ and in the world. Such a local church will cooperate and partner with mission agencies and other churches to fulfil Christ's Great Commission.

When potential labourers and missionaries have been raised in the context of a missions-centred church, they will also have the prayer and financial support of its members. As was the case in the church at Antioch, this link between missionary and church is an excellent model to follow.

6 Spiritual Gifts

The disciple usually discovers his spiritual gifts as he serves others. The church provides an ideal framework for service within the Body of Christ. There are different ways of serving and different spheres of service - all for the "common good" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). In a sense, all gifts are serving gifts given to build up the body.

Gifts are usually better assessed after a period of time - evaluated and confirmed by members and leaders of the church.⁶ Some have the valuable gift of encouragement, some enjoy hospitality and some give generously. Some make good administrators and leaders. Some develop as pastor-teachers, preachers and evangelists. Some are more "up front" while others effectively serve in the shadows.

There is a generally alarming tendency for church responsibilities to fall on the shoulders of a few capable individuals. Those who are "multi-gifted" may find it difficult to channel their strengths productively.

A colleague of mine found himself serving in about fifteen church committees and sub-committees. Later, he felt God wanted him to invest his life in discipleship training. He tried to step down from most committees but was misunderstood by church leaders. He decided to move to another church. Later, he and his wife had a fruitful missionary experience in an Asian country. They have since returned from the field and continue to provide leadership for discipling ministries among students, graduates and in their local church.

Local churches should also be prepared to release their members for cross-cultural ministries. Some will serve with various mission agencies.

Being a missionary is more than a matter of giftedness. There are qualifications necessary for cross-cultural work. These will be discussed in later chapters. While not every person is called to be a missionary, those who possess needed qualities should seriously consider the possibility of cross-cultural ministries.

⁶ There are excellent books on Spiritual Gifts. I would recommend Dr James Robert Clinton (1985), *Spiritual Gifts*, Horizon House Publishers.

With the changing face of missions, there should also be a growing number of bi-vocational workers or “tentmakers”. My local church has “released” several gifted men, including medical doctors, for strategic overseas ministries. The church continues to provide prayer support for these workers.

7 Relationships

Interpersonal relationships taught and cultivated early during a disciple’s training will stand him in good stead in later years. Such lessons are also important for missionary preparation. “One another” exhortations in the Scriptures need to be taught and applied especially in small group relationships and witness. For example, in what practical ways can we serve one another, or show kindness or bear each other’s burdens? When conflicts arise, how do we resolve them biblically? Learning in the context of one’s culture is also helpful.

There are also specific relationships that are taught, such as relationships between

- Husbands and wives
- Parents and children
- Employers and employees
- Church Leaders and members

In discipleship training, it would be wise for the disciple to search the Scriptures first rather than read books on the subject of relationships. Discussions of biblical principles can then be done with an emphasis on the practical.

Young disciples can often learn from role models. The discipler or trainer can often be the model. “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” is what Paul said to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11:1). Examples of godly Christians (in the family, at work, in the church, on the mission field) are indeed powerful in influencing younger disciples.

In Navigator student ministries, special sessions are sometimes arranged for growing disciples to meet godly couples for discussions on marriage relationships. Before students graduate, they are also exposed to Christian businessmen or professionals who would teach practical relationships between employers and employees, and how Christians maintain a testimony in their work. Pastors from Christ-centred and growing churches provide instruction on relationships and service in the church.

After searching the Scriptures, disciples can also avail themselves to reading books, listening to tapes or attending special seminars on relationships.

It is essential for those preparing for the mission field not only to have learned about specific relationships but also to have demonstrated that they

can relate well to others. The chapters which follow – on qualities and qualifications of candidates, orientation of candidates and cross-cultural stress - also cover the subject of relationships.

8 The Grace of God

Discipleship training exacts energy and effort from both trainers and trainees alike. Paul laboured hard and was hard on himself. Training in godliness requires disciplined spiritual habits.

One of the dangers facing those in such training is dependence on sheer self-effort to accomplish results. The Bible gives a balanced view telling us to work hard assuring us that it is God who works in us “to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:12, 13). Paul worked very hard but acknowledged it was the grace of God that was with him (1 Corinthians 15:10, 11). God’s continual work in our lives is a work of grace. Just as we were recipients of His grace for our salvation, God continues to pour out His grace upon us, unworthy though we are.

It is the grace of God that keeps us dependent on God and humble before Him. In every aspect of discipleship training, God’s grace is at work:

- The Lordship of Christ. It is God’s mercy and grace that propel us to surrender completely to Christ’s Lordship (Romans 12:1).
- The Word of God. It is the Word of His grace that builds us up (Acts 20:32).
- Prayer. We approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace in time of need (Hebrews 4:16).
- Christian character. It is God’s grace that teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and to live godly lives (Titus 2:11, 12).
- Fellowship and the Church. God’s grace brings us into fellowship with Him and with one another (1 Corinthians 1:4-9).
- Spiritual gifts. These are gifts of grace (Ephesians 4:7).
- Relationships. God’s grace enables holy and sincere relationships (2 Corinthians 1:12). The lessons of grace are innumerable. Personally, I have kept a folder enumerating some of the lessons of grace. I refer to this “grace of God” folder from time to time to thank the Lord for the sufficiency of His grace.

Paul encouraged Timothy to take strength from the grace of God (2 Timothy 2:1). Peter ends his letter with an exhortation to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18). God allowed a “thorn in the flesh” to remain with Paul to keep him from being proud and to experience what Christ promised to him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The lessons of grace are best learned through trials and hardships. These lessons prepare followers of Christ for the hardships and stresses of the mission field. These stresses are inevitable and can be very painful. It is the grace of God that will keep His followers pressing on whether they minister locally or cross-culturally.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BASIC MINISTRY TRAINING

I TRAINING IN EVANGELISM

Any believer who desires to be an effective witness of Christ must receive training in evangelism. For the cross-cultural worker, such training is essential. No cross-cultural worker should expect to advance the Gospel in a different culture if he has not demonstrated his ability to win people to Christ in his own culture.

I received my early evangelistic training through leaders who were no mere theorists. They were practitioners who were engaged in the work of evangelism and discipling others. Three men in particular (Youth for Christ director Joe Weatherly and Navigator leaders Roy Robertson and Warren Myers) equipped me in the context of student ministries, and evangelistic preaching in villages and cities. While in the United States, I also learned from Paul Little through practical seminars he taught on evangelism.¹

It may sound strange that missionaries who have received Bible training have proved to be deficient in this most important area of evangelism. In a Lausanne issue group on Effective Evangelism of which I was a part, some leaders of biblical and missiological institutions expressed their concern about this weakness.²

Some years ago, I conducted a series on Evangelism at a Bible college in Singapore. The objectives of the course included learning how to understand the people we relate to in order to build bridges of friendship and communication. It is important to find common ground when sharing the Gospel. One of my surprises was to find that most students who attended the course had minimal contact with non-Christians. We began by having each one list non-Christian relatives and friends they knew and to make it a point to pray for them, building friendships and common ground that will lead them to the Scriptures and the Gospel.

Training in evangelism should include principles and concepts as well as evangelism skills. Missiological concepts related to contextualisation would be especially helpful for those crossing cultures.

1 Paul Little (1966), *How to Give Away Your Faith*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

2 Lausanne Occasional Papers No.56, *Effective Theological Education for World Evangelization*, 2004 Forum. This paper is available at the Lausanne website <www.lausanne.org>

Evangelism involves communication through life, deed and word.

- Our lives are to be exemplary. Jesus tells his followers that they are “salt” and “light” (Matthew 5:13-16).
- Our deeds should pave the way for people to be attracted to Christ (Matthew 5:16; Titus 3:8).
- We are to be ready always to witness graciously by word of mouth and through conversation (Colossians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:15).

Evangelism is a process involving both sowing the seed and reaping a harvest. The example of Jesus in John 4 is an excellent study of attractive soul-winning. Jesus “reaped” a harvest through the winning of the Samaritan woman who later witnessed to her whole town. Jesus was training His disciples to be “fishers of men”.

Though the work of conversion is that of the Holy Spirit’s, the ministry of reconciling men and women to God has been committed to us. A meditation of 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 will clearly point to our responsibilities.

The process of training is best conducted through actual practical situations. It is especially effective if an experienced disciplemaker can actually teach the disciple and observe him over a period of time.

1 Developing Friendships

Just as Jesus was a friend to many unbelievers, we too should cultivate many such friendships. Unbelievers would have felt comfortable with Jesus, knowing that He was genuine in His care for them. True friendship means demonstrating care and concern as well as acceptance of people. Such friendship also breaks down barriers of communication.

In many countries today, direct evangelism is not only legally restricted but unwise. “Relationship evangelism” is basically the only way to reach people for Christ. Many have found this approach to be fruitful. Lay labourers within their occupations can develop friendships with many people. Friendships not only pave the way for evangelism but allow for follow through in discipling those who are responsive to the Gospel.

Working in a sensitive country, an Asian engineer cultivated friendships with two young men. He would regularly meet them individually at a park. Over a period of time, they received Christ. They were discipled. Now they are beginning to reach out to others. This engineer has also been helping other cross-cultural labourers (non-Asian and Asian) in their witness in the same country.

2 Giving a Testimony

People almost anywhere are interested in stories. Every believer should prepare his story and learn to tell it naturally. A story about oneself is always non-threatening. It is also a way of introducing the Gospel in an indirect way. Communicating our personal faith in Christ is not something religious but relational. It introduces a relationship with a Person Jesus Christ.

We should learn to be sensitive to the occasion. We can prepare to give our testimony briefly or with more detail as circumstances permit. Read Acts 22 and 26, and note how Paul graciously gives his testimony.

3 Starting a Discussion on the Bible

We can learn to discuss the Scriptures with others. This is particularly effective with those who have inquiring minds and who wish to look more carefully into the claims of Christ. There are variations in doing such a study with a non-Christian - from exploring key passages to studying one book in the Bible, for example the Gospel of John. Studying a book could help to lay the foundations for faith in Christ. In some cultures, a topical study on Knowing God and His Attributes can be relevant.

4 Answering Questions

We need to learn to answer all sorts of questions, not only the difficult philosophical questions: Why the innocent suffer? What about those who have never heard the Gospel? Is Jesus the Only Way? and so on.

In cross-cultural situations, questions related to practical issues need to be answered. The issues include the worship of ancestors, polygamy, arranged marriages, the spirit world, and many others. The Bible does speak on these issues. Sometimes these issues have to be resolved before people will commit their lives to Christ.

5 Presenting the Gospel

The Christian witness needs to be alert to share the Gospel. An opportunity may arise unexpectedly at any time – whether during or after a general discussion on spiritual things or even after a sports game. As someone said - a person needs to be ready only on two occasions: “in season and out of season”, quoting 2 Timothy 4:2. Peter in 1 Peter 3:15 tells us, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” and adding how to do it – “with gentleness and respect.”

Communicating the Gospel can be complex. Firstly, there may be different views of Christ (as in India). Secondly, there are many ways of

communicating. Thirdly, as we saw in the first chapter, worldviews - how people perceive the world they live in - are very different. Therefore, to have credibility and integrity, the cross-cultural labourer must gain an understanding of the people he desires to reach. The Holy Spirit brings conviction as the Gospel is communicated in the hearer's own cultural context and experience. We know that the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to those who believe.

II ESTABLISHING NEW BELIEVERS

The Great Commission has “making disciples” as its sole imperative. Disciplemaking is essential for believers to thrive and grow. It is important for cross-cultural workers to have a long-term view of ministry. Evangelism and disciple-making are inseparable. The disciplemaking process will take a longer period of time in cross-cultural situations.

In preparation for cross-cultural ministry, the worker should be equipped to establish new believers in the context of their own culture. Learning about culture and contextualisation is essential if a ministry is to be effective and reproducible.

Spiritual maturity is a lifelong pursuit. The goal is transformation – seeing lives transformed into the likeness of Christ.

The establishing process involves a period of time. The disciplemaker ensures that the following essential qualities of a disciple are incorporated into the life of new believers.

- A clear understanding of the Gospel

- The Lordship of Christ

- The intake of the Scriptures

- Meaningful prayer and worship

- Fellowship in a contextual faith community

- Sharing the Good News spontaneously among relational networks

Sometimes “family discipling” can be effective in cultures where a family or group respond to the Gospel. In some difficult situations, workers trained in discipling others can operate as a team to establish new believers individually or in small groups. In sensitive fields, establishing a young believer person-to-person may often be the most effective way.

Establishing new believers can be a rewarding experience, especially when these new believers start to influence others. As believers mature and become fruitful disciples and disciplemakers, some who are gifted and called can also be involved in cross-cultural missions.

A Singaporean engineer in our ministry in New Zealand evangelised and established a New Zealand student. He had sown seeds of interest in Asia

in the New Zealander's life. The quiet and unassuming New Zealander did not appear to be a candidate for cross-cultural work, but he had the quality of perseverance. He decided to go to the same country in Asia to both learn the difficult language of the country and to teach at a university. He married an English teacher who he met on the field. Together they began to have a ministry in a university. They led students to Christ, and established them. The couple later joined an agency involved in the deployment of professionals to places closed to traditional missions.

III TRAINING IN MISSIONS

Training in missions can be received through informal, non-formal or formal ways. Informal training can be obtained by visiting the field for exposure and experience.

Non-formal training can be obtained through seminars or attending special courses on missions. Formal training in missiology is possible through attending Missionary Training Institutes or a School of Missions. Some of these ways will be discussed in the chapter on Orientation of Candidates.

1 Exposure Trips

Churches and mission agencies often plan short-term mission trips for interested Christians to receive exposure to missions. These trips may take up to a month. The programme usually includes visiting missionaries or churches, helping in work projects, and sometimes having opportunities for sharing stories of life-change. Participants will receive helpful exposure to the country and its culture, including some of the difficulties of cross-cultural work.

Exposure to areas where holistic mission is practised is invaluable. Ministry to the poor, the marginalised and in areas where injustice is prevalent, will "open the eyes" of prospective mission candidates to the realities of the mission field. However, such visits, though helpful, are insufficient to prepare groups for missionary experience. Adequate briefing and de-briefing is also needed for those going on such trips. Proper orientation is necessary for the trips to be beneficial.

Sometimes, well-meaning groups try to contribute to the work on the field, but because they are untrained and do not speak the language, they may prove to be a hindrance rather than a help to the people on the field or to the young church.

2 Missions Experience

A better approach, in my opinion is for Christians considering missions to spend a longer period of time on the field. If possible, they should learn from seasoned workers already on the field.

Many mission agencies have short-term programmes for people to be on the field for one to two years. Some language learning is usually necessary. If language learning needs to be done, a three year period may be advisable.

Upon graduation, some university students seek an overseas experience. Spending two or three years ministering on a mission field can be rewarding for these students. They could go as “mission trainees”, or they could serve in their professions, or they could enrol as students to countries which do not grant missionary visas.

This longer period of time will enable potential candidates to evaluate whether the Lord is leading them to serve for longer terms in a cross-cultural situation. From my experience, a high percentage of those who have spent more than a year on the field will become long-term candidates.

In some sensitive fields, overseas visitors can enter the country as tourists. They are granted a visitors visa for up to three months. This visa can be renewed for a further three month period later. This gives another option for entry into a country for up to six months.

Short-termers should be accountable either to leaders or missionaries on the field. They are not to be “loners”. Sometimes a small team can spend some months on the field and be accountable to a more experienced person. The principle of accountability applies to all going to the mission field.

FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the dynamics of informal training from the following passages:
 - a. Deuteronomy 6:5-7; Proverbs 22:6
 - b. Exodus 33:11; Joshua 11:15
 - c. Mark 1:16, 17; 3:14
 - d. Acts 16:1-3; Philippians 2:19-23

2. In 1 Timothy 4:7, Paul instructed Timothy to train himself to be godly. In your opinion, what are some essential ingredients to such training? Discuss reasons why character training is indispensable in preparing for ministry.

3. From the Scriptures, discuss how convictions can be developed and deepened in each of the following areas:
 - The Lordship of Christ: Luke 6:46-49; Romans 12:1, 2
 - The Word of God: Acts 20:27-32; 2 Timothy 1:13; 3:14-17
 - Prayer and Devotion to God: Luke 11:1-13; Ephesians 1:17, 18; 3:14-21
 - Fellowship: Hebrews 10:24, 25; Romans 15:14

4. There are obviously many passages in the New Testament describing how God's people grow and are equipped in the church. From the selected Scriptures, discuss how relationships among believers can contribute to spiritual growth and how leaders equip God's people for service.

RELATIONSHIPS

Romans 12:3-13

Romans 15:1, 2

Galatians 6:1-6

1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Ephesians 4:2, 3

LEADERSHIP

Acts 11:22-25; 13:1-3

Ephesians 4:11-16

Colossians 4:12, 13

2 Timothy 2:1, 2, 20-26

1 Peter 5:1-4

Discuss some practical steps your local congregation could take to:

- a. equip potential labourers in evangelism.
- b. prepare these labourers for mission should God lead them.

CHAPTER TWELVE

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS FOR CANDIDATES

INTRODUCTION

When preparing for missionary service, I was challenged by a motto which I heard. The motto said "Every heart without Christ: a mission field. Every heart with Christ: a missionary."

While every Christian is a witness, I soon learned that not everyone can be a missionary, especially a cross-cultural one. There is such a thing as "missionary aptitude" - the ability to make adjustments to another culture. All prospective candidates for cross cultural ministry, whether prospective career missionaries and bi-vocational "tentmakers", will need certain qualities and qualifications.

Tentmakers need additional qualifications to meet the demands of work responsibilities. These will be mentioned in this chapter and developed further in Part 4 on "Tentmaking".

The qualities described are not meant to discourage potential candidates from venturing to the field, but to convey a realistic view of what is required in cross-cultural work.

THE NEED FOR CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT

Over the years, mission agencies and boards around the world have been concerned about the "casualty rate" of career missionaries who return home. "Missionary attrition" refers to missionaries returning home for whatever reason. In some cases, missionaries return home because they were unable to adjust to their cross-cultural assignment. In other cases, when missionaries return home much earlier than expected, they return for reasons which could have been prevented.

In recent years, more attention has been given to the best practices for "missionary retention" - those practices which enable missionaries to serve

effectively over the long term. One important best practice involves the careful assessment and selection of mission workers. Such assessment and selection will determine which candidates are suitable to serve effectively as cross-cultural career missionaries or as tentmakers. Candidate assessment will also ensure that persons who are not qualified for cross-cultural assignments are not sent out.

Two books are highly recommended regarding this issue on missionary attrition and missionary retention. One explores the causes and cures of missionary attrition¹ while the other provides global perspectives on the best practices for missionary retention.²

There are major costs involved when missionaries have to return home. What are some of these costs?

1. There are personal costs to the missionary and his family in terms of lost years, readjustments to home, starting another assignment or finding a new job. The missionary has also to deal with feelings of personal failure.
2. The field will have to bear some costs. The work suffers a setback as it will take a few years to find a replacement. When one is found, it will take time for him to adjust to the field. Sometimes, negative public relations caused by an insensitive missionary may take years to heal. People who have been hurt need restoration.
3. Leaders and co-workers at home and on the field will also suffer some costs. It takes time and effort to counsel returning missionaries and to plan for a new assignment.
4. There is a financial cost involved. Missionary sending is very costly and the sending country will have to bear this.

Tentmakers, whether fully or partially self-supporting, also have their share of loads and burdens. In recent years, I know of the following situations:

- An engineer, who was facing severe work adjustments on the field, suffered from depression. His wife gave him needed emotional support, but at a personal cost to herself. He would have succumbed to despair were it not for her support.
- A single person, who was facing loneliness, fell in love and married on the field. This resulted in major changes in his life.
- A single lady faced severe stresses but received minimal support from co-labourers. She had to make special trips out in order to recuperate with the help of a like-minded friend.
- A couple on the field experienced temporary separation because the pregnant wife needed to return home to have her baby delivered. Sadly, she suffered a miscarriage.

1 W D Taylor (1997), *Too Valuable To Lose: Exploring the causes and cures of missionary attrition*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

2 Rob Hay, Valerie Lim, Detlef Blocher, Jaap Ketel and Sarah Hay (2007), *Worth Keeping: Global Perspectives on Best Practice in Missionary Retention*, William Carey Library and World Evangelical Alliance.

The above examples indicate that careful assessment of prospective candidates is important. Although some returning missionaries and tentmakers have been helped and rehabilitated and have been able to return to the field, they have borne the costs of their field experiences. Others have returned home permanently.

Who will make good cross-cultural candidates? What are the qualities and qualifications needed?

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES

From our experience on the mission field, some of my colleagues and I have compiled a list of qualities which we believe are essential for cross-cultural workers.

The list comprises ten essential qualities needed for missionaries and cross-cultural candidates. The first six are enumerated as SPIRITUAL qualities and the remaining four as NATURAL qualities. These qualities are essential for both the candidate and his wife.

Four ADDITIONAL qualifications have been added especially for tentmakers.

The qualities and qualifications are as follows:

Spiritual Qualities

A Consistent and Vital Relationship with God

Biblical and Stable Family Relationships

Humility

Love for People

a. People in the New Culture

b. Believers and Co-workers

Perseverance

Ministry Proficiency

Natural Qualities

Sensitivity

Flexibility

Physical and Emotional Capacity

Language Aptitude

Tentmaker Qualifications

Bi-vocational Conviction

Marketable Skills

Biblical Perspective on Work and Ethics

Healthy Interdependence

SPIRITUAL QUALITIES

1 A Consistent and Vital Relationship with God

The mission candidate must have a vital relationship with God maintained by daily fellowship with God in prayer and the Word. This fellowship is no mere routine. It means a life of deep trust and dependence on the Lord. His passion is to know Christ, to love Him and to become like Him.

The candidate believes he has been sent by God. He realises that he will not be able to carry out the ministry without God's wise direction. He also rests in the sovereignty of God as he will face hardships on the field. He is gladly committed to Christ's Lordship in his life. His fellowship with God enables him to live a Spirit-controlled life. His relationship with God is a growing one and his ministry is an overflow of this relationship.

A New Zealander, who had served in Papua New Guinea, had to return from the field. He experienced failure and defeat. He was helped by an older Christian worker to renew his fellowship with God, and to have a meaningful and regular "quiet time" each day. He was revitalised. Meanwhile, some of his co-workers on the field were struggling with similar problems and needed practical help. The field leader, who had noticed the tremendous change in the life of this once defeated missionary, invited him to minister at a missionary conference in Papua New Guinea. A Navigator leader and I were also invited to speak. For a whole week, the three of us had the privilege of personally helping missionaries and nationals to have a vital relationship with God, beginning with a daily "quiet time" in the Word and prayer. Field workers noticed what God had done in the life of their colleague. This, indeed, was a testimony in itself.

2 Biblical and Stable Family Relationships

Workers have had to return from the field because of difficult family relationships. Difficulties may be between parents and children or between husbands and wives. Such difficulties need to be resolved before candidates proceed to the field. Husband and wife relationships must be stable before the couple leaves for the field. Wives will face similar pressures on the field as their husbands. Sometimes initial adjustments are more severe for the wife. She has to learn a new language with responsibilities for shopping and relating to new neighbours. She shares the load of caring for young children.

The family unit must not be seen as a hindrance to the ministry. Realistically, this is no easy task. Emotional tensions relating to the home and family can sap the energy of Christian workers more than cultural factors.

An Asian couple with a young child was preparing to serve on the mission field but they were facing some adjustments to marriage and parenthood. Although these adjustments were normal, they realised that a cross-cultural assignment would definitely bring additional stresses to their relationship. The field leader who interviewed them agreed that the field assignment would merely aggravate the tensions the couple were working at resolving. The assignment was postponed. They overcame obstacles and are today on the mission field with their two young children and having a fruitful ministry.

One Asian medical missionary listed some family concerns he had faced on the field. These included adjusting living standards to a simpler lifestyle, children's dislocation and education on the field (at home or at a boarding school), family separation due to travel, and the wife's ministry. He had learned to involve his wife in decision-making, giving more leeway to her opinions. Because of their mature and stable relationship, the couple was able to deal with family stresses and to minister for twelve years on the field. They plan to return to the field, as God leads.

3 Humility

Humility is a quality prized highly in most cultures. In Asia, we have been taught that humility is shown by polite behaviour and respect of elders. This humility is sometimes culturally practised by customs and manners. However, true humility goes beyond outward behaviour patterns. It means having the mind of Christ and being a servant for His sake.

A cross-cultural candidate must be a keen learner with a teachable and gracious attitude. As a young missionary trainee, I was grateful for a gentle rebuke by a senior missionary. When I asked him what he observed in my behaviour that needed changing, he remarked that I exhibited a "know-all" attitude. Such an attitude gives opinions when uncalled for, rather than humbly listening and learning. This would not be conducive to ministering to people.

4 Love for People

Love for people is to be practised towards people in the new culture as well as towards co-labourers.

a. Loving People in the New Culture

The need to love people may seem obvious. However, some of those who may be committed to the task could find it difficult to love people of another culture.

Love begins with acceptance of people and their culture. Love dispels any form of racial prejudice or pride to the host culture. Loving people means accepting them as they are and seeking their good.

One missionary who returned (probably still facing a degree of “culture shock”) remarked, “I never got to the point where I could stand the people.” Another missionary, who was working among a resistant people, suggested why this special people group had never been reached. It was because Christians had shown a prejudice towards them culturally and racially.

From our conversations, one can sense whether a person has identified with the people. Someone who has identified himself with the new culture will refer to the people as “we”. He will say “We are a happy people” and “We do things this way”. When the people are regarded as “they”, then the cross-cultural worker is still a foreigner outside the new culture.

One way to ascertain whether a potential candidate will do well in another culture is to find out his attitudes to people of another race or ethnic group in his own country or a neighbouring country. Christ’s heart of compassion reached out to all types of people as He ministered at a level of their need. This quality of compassion is especially essential in reaching poorer communities. A friend who has worked among the poorest of Asian communities could never speak of the people without tears. He continues to live and work sacrificially among them as someone who really loves them.

b. Loving Believers and Co-workers

Loving people includes loving fellow-believers and co-workers. Harmonious relationships, based on love and humility, are essential on the field. Many workers have returned because they were unable to relate to fellow workers or to their supervisors. Interpersonal relationship conflicts are a major source of stress on the field. Although these conflicts occur, they can be resolved. Even where there is disagreement on issues, there can be love and forgiveness.

While in Vietnam, some co-workers were facing interpersonal relationship conflicts among themselves. In a Bible Study, the Lord impressed upon me Ephesians 4:2, “Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love.” An amplified translation defined love as “making allowances”. I had the opportunity of sharing and “praying through” these verses with my co-workers.

Jesus’ disciples were arguing among themselves as to who should be the greatest. In John 13, Jesus taught them how to serve. He gave them a new command to love one another. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

5 Perseverance

It takes patience and perseverance to adjust to a new culture and to develop relationships with people. It takes perseverance to see their efforts bear fruit and fruit that remains. It takes perseverance to learn a new language. It takes perseverance when you fall sick repeatedly. Ill-health can be experienced even by those who normally have a healthy body.

It certainly requires perseverance to rise up above the stresses of a foreign field. Those who have experienced these pressures have learned that it is only by the grace of God that they have been able to continue. Only God's grace can enable a person to persevere when human resources are depleted.

I have witnessed missionaries going through tremendous pressures on the field: ill-health of various kinds, death on the field of a child or loved one, interpersonal relationship struggles, loneliness and other stresses.

A person does not really know his capacities until these trials come. Sometimes the quality of perseverance can be gauged by evaluating a person's reactions when he faces pressures in his own local situation. Short-term assignments in a difficult area may also help to assess a person's capacity to cope with trials outside his own culture.

6 Ministry Proficiency

A prospective candidate should have demonstrated his ability to evangelise in his home culture and to disciple young believers before he considers reaching others in a different culture. Basic ministry as described in the previous chapter should already have been undertaken.

The candidate would also be more effective if he has learned to reach people in a variety of situations. For example, a person who has only been engaged in a programme of student evangelism may be inflexible or insensitive to reach groups or families in a different culture. But if this same person has learned to witness in a natural and relational way to family and extended family members, to neighbours and his circle of friends in his workplace, then he would develop a greater degree of sensitivity to different types of people from different ages and professions. After all, ministry has to do with PEOPLE and not programmes.

Learning to be proficient in the use of the Scriptures and in communicating Bible stories naturally will be an asset. Some workers are proficient only if they had certain tools and materials. It takes time to develop contextualised materials. Therefore a good grasp of the Scriptures and learning to use the Bible is essential in one's own culture. Later, the worker can be taught to use the Scriptures in another language and culture.

FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Discover the qualities found in the lives of the following workers, and discuss their relevance to the missionary task.
 - a. Timothy: Acts 16:1-3, Philippians 2:19-22
 - b. Epaphroditus: Philippians 2:25-30
 - c. Paul: 2 Corinthians 4:5; 6:4-7; 2 Timothy 3:10, 11

2. Why is the careful assessment of candidates important? Does your church/mission agency have a procedure? If it does not, what can be done to ensure proper selection of candidates? If it has, discuss how it can be improved.

3. Look over the 6 SPIRITUAL qualities. How would a vital relationship with God enhance these qualities? If you were on the “receiving” end to invite candidates to serve your people, what qualities would you desire and why?

4. Here are some passages of Scripture for meditation on each quality. Please add others.
 - a. A vital relationship with God: John 15:1-16; Acts 4:13
 - b. Stable family relationships: Psalm 127; Colossians 3:15-21
 - c. Humility: Philippians 2:1-8, 12, 13; John 13:1-17
 - d. Love for people: Matthew 9:36-38; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-9
 - e. Perseverance: Acts 20:19-24; 2 Corinthians 11:23-30; 12:7-10
 - f. Ministry proficiency: 2 Timothy 1:13, 14; 2:1-7, 15, 25, 26; 3:16-4:5

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

OTHER QUALITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

FOUR NATURAL QUALITIES

Besides spiritual qualities, four natural qualities that relate to the candidate's background and personality are needed. Though there is a degree of relationship between the spiritual and the natural, we should differentiate between the two types of qualities when we determine whether a person is qualified for specific cross-cultural assignments.

The four natural qualities to be considered are: Sensitivity, Flexibility, Physical and Emotional Capacity, and Language Aptitude. These natural qualities are especially important in assessing how effective and fulfilled candidates will be in another culture. In assessing these qualities, using a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being the highest rating, 5 as average, and 1 as lowest) may prove helpful. A person or couple who is above average in most qualities will have greater potential for success in a different culture.

1 Sensitivity

The candidate should be sensitive to people - to their feelings, their responses and their needs. A sensitive person can read both verbal and non-verbal cues which communicate how the other person is feeling and what he is actually saying or thinking. Trying to understand non-verbal signals is difficult enough in one's own familiar culture. They are especially hard to discern in an alien culture.

Sensitivity begins with little things, like being alert to take off one's shoes before entering most Asian homes. An Asian student who lived in our home in New Zealand returned to Asia upon his graduation. He had picked up some "Western" ways. On his way home, he stopped by in Japan. He visited a Japanese home and was invited in. He walked in with his shoes on. All eyes turned to his feet. He suddenly remembered he was back in Asia! In most of Asia, we assume that the floor is clean, so we take off our shoes to keep it clean. In most Western cultures, the assumption is the opposite - the floor is dirty, keep your shoes on, so you do not dirty your feet.

Sensitivity is especially important when developing in-depth relationships. An insensitive person who is programme-oriented but not people-centred will insensitively try to structure people into his programme or time-table. A sensitive person, on the other hand, would be acutely aware of the feelings of people. He would consider whether they are ready to fit into a particular programme or framework.

In many Asian cultures, relationships are more important than being efficient and keeping schedules. Relationships are a priority. A dominant characteristic of Asian societies is the awareness of shame that may be caused to the individual or to his family and community. In human relationships, one must be sensitive not to cause shame. One should preserve group harmony and the reputation of family and the community.

Case Study for Discussion

Insensitivity to cultural ways can have serious repercussions.

Many years ago, a non-Asian missionary had a leadership role in an Asian ministry. The missionary came from a culture that uses confrontational strategies to deal with interpersonal problems. People would speak out as a means of resolving difficulties. The missionary was therefore dissatisfied with the non-confrontational approach by Asians when they communicate with others about problems. One day, a young Asian in the ministry team wrote a note about some problems. The leader rebuked that team member for writing and lacking the courage to speak face to face about the problems. The leader did not realise that it had actually taken a lot of courage to write the note.

The missionary continued to train other Asians, who were taught to be outspoken and to confront others when there were problems. Sadly, this leader was insensitive to the cultural differences between non-Asians and Asians. In time, those who were trained became leaders. As the ministry grew over the years, older ministry leaders began to realise that the younger leaders were becoming increasingly non-Asian in some of their ways and approaches. Insensitive leaders usually leave their mark and affect a work.

Questions for Discussion

1. If you were another young Asian in that ministry team, what could you or others in the team have done after hearing about the rebuke by the leader to your team member?

2. If you were a culturally sensitive leader, who had observed the cultural differences in that team, what counsel would you have given to the leader and the young Asians?

2 Flexibility

Sensitivity and flexibility are related. A flexible person is sensitive to environmental factors and is able to adapt himself accordingly. This ability to adapt to changing situations is an important asset in a new cultural environment. The flexible person is able to adjust easily whereas an inflexible person, being comfortable primarily in structured or organised situations will find it difficult to adapt.

I have observed that many New Zealanders are naturally flexible because of their accepting and easy-going ways. A New Zealander ministering in a Southeast Asian country once told me how much he enjoyed the environment. He did not mind the dirt or the lack of order in doing things. Pillion-riding on his motorbike was an unforgettable experience for me. He enjoyed all the shortcuts, riding like the locals, defensively or offensively as long as he could avoid oncoming traffic.

It always takes time for me to adapt to a new environment. I remember being caught in a traffic jam during one of my early visits to Manila. The cab driver appeared most relaxed. I complained to my colleague with me of the terrible traffic system. My colleague tried to change the subject so we would not embarrass the driver. He was sensitive to the driver. Later I discovered that almost anyone could drive in Manila if he learned the unwritten rules! There indeed was a system.

Flexibility means that one is able to quickly adapt to the new culture and its lifestyle. Adjusting to new ways of eating, speaking, greeting, dressing, working, doing business are some adjustments that come easily to the flexible person.

The physical and climatic conditions of the environment could also be quite different from one's home country. Food and water may be less hygienic. Temperatures could soar to 40°C for long periods in some areas, or fall to zero °C during winter in other cities. In some areas, one has to adjust to insects and rodents. Dust and dirt could be continuous irritants. "Noise pollution" is common almost anywhere in Asia, and personal privacy almost non-existent.

The person who is well-organised, efficient and somewhat set in his ways will find it difficult to adjust to a new culture unless the culture is a structured, highly efficient and organised one. In some countries, it may take a whole day to accomplish a task which may take less than an hour in one's

home country. If a person has the urge to try to change the whole system to expedite matters, he would end up in utter frustration!

Culture shock and stress would be severe for the inflexible person. Being able to adapt and blend into a culture readily will reduce stress considerably. Though flexibility is an important asset, flexible people also need the sensitivity and love for people to develop deeper relationships. Being flexible is not sufficient.

3 Physical and Emotional Capacity

Cross-cultural candidates must be physically and emotionally adequate for their assignment. Stresses on the field are demanding. Fatigue sets in even for the strong.

The candidate needs to be a stable and secure person. Emotional stability, though related to one's spiritual perspectives, should not be confused with one's spirituality. It is strongly related to background factors and to one's degree of self-respect and security. An emotionally mature person has a realistic view of himself. He is not dependent on human approval for his normal duties. He can handle human disapproval. He is secure in his own self-identity. He recognises weaknesses and deals with them.

A person with a low self-esteem, who has a tendency to blame self or others, will succumb to stresses on the field. Negative emotions will sap a person's energy and affect his relationship with family, fellow-workers and people in general. Although there are ways of dealing with these emotions and spiritual resources are available, prolonged stress may cause deep scars in a person's life. The chapters on stress will deal with these issues in greater depth.

A candidate should also be in good health. There are those who have suffered ill-health repeatedly, but have been able to recover and continue in spite of these setbacks.

An American colleague with a strong constitution has been able to serve on the field for more than twenty years. He has suffered from various illnesses, some of which have been very serious almost costing him his life. He has been able to recover each time. However, not every worker with a strong body has succeeded in withstanding the rigors of the field.

New Zealanders are normally rugged and are able to persevere in the midst of hardships. However, two couples who were serving in two Asian cities faced repeated pressures which took their toll. Although both these couples were godly, sensitive, flexible and persevering, and also contributed to the field ministry, they had to return because of extreme fatigue.

Some fields are more difficult. They will require candidates with greater physical, mental and emotional capacities.

4 Language Aptitude

Although some people have better language aptitude than others, expect language learning to be hard work and practice. Because learning a language is a necessity for cross-cultural work, it would be advisable to test one's language aptitude. Some people have difficulty in hearing different sounds; others have difficulty in pronouncing words accurately. Some languages are also more difficult to learn than others.

There are some good language schemes. One that is commonly used is the LAMP (Language Acquisition Made Practical) method. It was devised by E. Thomas Brewster and his wife Elizabeth S. Brewster to help missionaries develop effective techniques for learning any language.¹

Their textbook *Language Acquisition Made Practical (LAMP)* describes their technique for creative language learning. The method emphasises speaking the new language right from the start and this gives motivation for the learner. Language helpers are alongside to help the learners practise. The course attempts to link language learning with the broader culture.

One of my Asian colleagues studied a new language using LAMP. He found that, though LAMP had many strengths, the method had some limitations. It assumed that language learners could teach themselves with minimal help from language teachers. This assumes the learner has had linguistic training to know what to look for. The method also suggests that the traditional classroom approach is ineffective. My Asian colleague together with his field leader modified their language learning approach by incorporating the study of language structures, a syllabus of topics and a weekly evaluation. They used part of the classroom approach.

In language learning, methodology is only one of the considerations. Other considerations are language aptitude, maximum exposure and language immersion, full time disciplines, and motivation. The degree of difficulty or ease in learning a particular language is obviously a major one too.

Sometimes candidates with a low linguistic aptitude have been sent to countries with difficult languages to learn. Occasionally a person has been able to perform well in spite of language limitations because of other exceptional qualities. But there have been other situations when a good candidate has had to return from the field early because of language difficulties.

Others remain longer and prolong their frustration as they struggle with language learning. The time taken may have diminishing returns both in the cost to the mission and the persons themselves. It may take up to eight years or more to master a difficult language. Poor language learners may never be able to adequately master such a language.

¹ The Lingua House website mentions that this is "A Non-School language" learning project. A sixteen cassette album with a 300-page syllabus contains an entire language acquisition course by Drs. Tom and Betty Sue Brewster. < www.instantweb.com//linguahouse/How-to.html >

TENTMAKER QUALIFICATIONS

Tentmakers or bi-vocational workers need additional qualifications for work in countries that are restrictive to conventional career missionaries.

1 Bi-Vocational Conviction

The potential tentmaker must have the conviction that God has called and led him to his particular vocation as a means of obedience to the Great Commission. If married, his wife should also share his conviction. If called to another culture, he must have a basic desire affirmed by evidence of the Lord's leading to that culture. This leading is confirmed by mature leaders or co-labourers who believe he has the qualifications to go to another culture.

God leads in a variety of ways. The case studies in the chapters on Tentmaking show some of these ways. Most cross-cultural fields today require these bi-vocational labourers. Such labourers ought to function with authenticity and integrity in their roles.

2 Marketable Skills

The potential tentmaker must have marketable skills particularly those that are needed in the country to which he or she is going. Besides, they need the credentials that would convince prospective employers to hire them. In East Asia, having a Masters Degree or a Doctorate will open the door to countries in need of expertise in education. Others have gained access to situations as doctors or engineers, or as business and professional people.

There are many opportunities for "creative access." Tentmakers would have researched the kind of jobs needed in the country. Some visit the country to explore available opportunities.

3 Biblical Perspective on Work and Ethics

The potential tentmaker should have a biblical perspective on key issues relating to work, working relationships, wealth and possessions. He should also develop convictions concerning ethical and moral values in order to handle situations when compromises are expected, security considerations in sensitive countries, and how to be prudent as a Christian witness in a sensitive situation.

4 Healthy Interdependence

Tentmakers are sometimes sent by their companies to remote areas where they will experience loneliness due to the absence of fellowship with other believers. Tentmakers should know the dangers of being isolated. They should

take steps to seek the fellowship of likeminded believers whenever possible. They should also plan to meet any co-workers in the country from time to time. They need to work at communicating with a support group to whom they have a degree of accountability. In other words, tentmakers have to learn to be independent when they are isolated. At the same time, they will work at seeking fellowship and to keep in regular contact with their support group.

Some years ago, I met a group of tentmakers who were studying an Asian language together, while they were preparing for their various assignments. Each one had his or her "accountability group" back in his or her home country. They were also developing relationships on the field and preparing to meet periodically for mutual encouragement with accountability. After many years on the field, with some changes of personnel, the principle of accountability still remained. As a result, each tentmaker in that group has been effective in work and witness.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Briefly describe each of the four NATURAL qualities. Discuss why each is relevant in a cross-cultural situation. Do you personally know any cross-cultural missionary or tentmaker? How does he or she exhibit some of these qualities?
2. Why is a long-term career of prime importance to the missionary task? Discuss the advantages and the limitations of short-term assignments.
3. Do you think tentmakers should be assessed as thoroughly as career missionaries? Why or why not? Review and discuss the importance of the four tentmaker qualifications.
4. If you are preparing for cross-cultural ministry as a tentmaker, what would you do to ensure there is fellowship and accountability prior to your going to your field of work?
5. What are some difficulties do you envisage in ensuring that your accountability group will continue over the long term? How would you ensure key relationships remains strong?

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HOW TO ASSESS PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES

Not many candidates will rate highly on ALL these qualities and qualifications. Those who evaluate prospective candidates need to be reminded that they should be as realistic as possible when assessing the readiness of candidates for their assignments. Individuals too need to make realistic estimates of themselves and their abilities. Romans 12:3 exhorts us not to think more highly of ourselves as we ought but to make a “sober judgment”. This means simply that candidates should assess themselves with a sound mind or realistically.

Mission and church leaders together with the candidates need to prayerfully determine the way God has fashioned them - with unique gifts and qualities - and whether a cross-cultural assignment is best for them.

Should a candidate already be a proven labourer in his present ministry, and has demonstrated the spiritual qualities enumerated, it would be wise to focus on the four natural qualities. The four additional “tentmaker qualifications” are for bi-vocational labourers.

The following procedure has been used by some of my colleagues and The Navigators for both full time and bi-vocational labourers:

1. At least three confidential evaluations are made of each prospective candidate and of his wife (if married).
 - a. A husband would first evaluate himself, then his wife. She would evaluate herself and then assess her husband.
 - b. The ministry leader or pastor or both will each make an assessment of the candidate and his wife.
 - c. A mature co-worker or friend involved in the same ministry will make an assessment.

2. An evaluation form given to each evaluator lists the Spiritual and Natural Qualities (and Tentmaker Qualifications for bi-vocational labourers). A numerical rating of 1 to 10 is given (10 being the highest, 5 average, and 1

lowest). Specific observations should be written on each quality. Together with the evaluation form, evaluators need to carefully study the qualities and be able to describe and discern the importance of each quality. Special attention needs to be given to natural qualities for those who demonstrated their faithfulness and abilities in a home assignment.

The evaluation form which appears may be expanded especially for natural qualities. For example, sensitivity could be subdivided into (a) sensitivity in close relationships, and (b) sensitivity in casual social situations. Flexibility could be subdivided into: (1) Lifestyle adjustments, (2) Reaction to changes in schedules or efficiency, (3) Personal preferences and plans.

3. Husbands and wives should be assessed individually. However, their complementariness in working as a team should also be taken into consideration.
4. Mission and church leaders should have a personal interview with each candidate. These should be done as casually and informally as possible.
5. Leaders would then discuss the assessments with the candidate and a decision be made prayerfully concerning the assignment.

This procedure is an attempt to carry out the process of candidate selection and deployment in as thorough a manner as possible. Assignments need to be made responsibly by sending agencies and churches which are familiar with the nature of such assignments.

EVALUATION FORM FOR SELECTING CROSS-CULTURAL CANDIDATES

Numerical Rating	Specific Observations
SPIRITUAL QUALITIES	
1 A Consistent and Vital Relationship with God _____	
2 Biblical and Stable Family Relationships _____	
3 Humility _____	
4 Love for People _____	
a. People in the New Culture _____	
b. Believers and Co-workers _____	
5 Perseverance _____	
6 Ministry Proficiency _____	
NATURAL QUALITIES	
1 Sensitivity _____	
2 Flexibility _____	
3 Physical and Emotional Capacity _____	
4 Language Aptitude _____	
TENTMAKER QUALIFICATIONS	
1 Bi-vocational Conviction _____	
2 Marketable Skills _____	
3 Biblical Perspective on Work and Ethics _____	
4 Healthy Interdependence _____	

The purpose of having criteria for evaluation is not meant to disqualify people from the mission field but to help them consider their cross-cultural career carefully and realistically. Those who go will be made aware of what it takes to be a cross-cultural worker. They will also need adequate orientation to prepare them for their assignment.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE PLACEMENT OF CANDIDATES

The placement of cross-cultural candidates is not an easy or straightforward matter. Besides considering the qualities and qualifications of the candidate, the specific assignment has other important ingredients.

1 Cross-Cultural Ministry Skills

Not only must the candidate be proficient in the ministry in his home country but he must be able to modify methods and approaches in the new context. The chapters on Culture and Contextualisation deal with these issues. The candidate must not only be aware of these issues but would need proper cross-cultural orientation.

2 Spiritual Gifts and Motivation

Certain assignments demand corresponding gifts to perform responsibilities on the field. The candidate must be personally motivated to carry out the responsibilities, and have the needed capacity to carry out an effective ministry. Usually a “job description” lists qualifications necessary, and describes the responsibilities of the assignment.

3 Personality Characteristics and Style

The candidate should have a style of leadership or way of ministering that is acceptable to the people. He should also complement the team with whom he is ministering. He does not need to have similar personal characteristics as the culture, but his personal style must be compatible with the culture. Personal style needs to be assessed in relation to how flexible or structured a person is, or how relational he is. For example, some Northeast Asian countries may respond to a directive leadership style especially in structured ministries, but many Southeast Asian ministries require a more non-directive relational type of leadership.

4 The Leading of God

The leading of God is more than an individual “call” of God experienced by the candidate. There must be a confirmation by all those involved in the assignment. Normally this includes those who are sending the candidate and those who will be receiving the candidate. The assessments made on the candidate would also be communicated between those who are sending the candidate and those who are receiving the candidate (unless candidates are assigned to totally new pioneering situations with no receiving supervisors).

On rare occasions, God could give strong and clear direction to the candidate and his supervisors that an assignment is in order even though the candidate may not have met all the criteria. Should this be the case, the criteria should still be examined. More prayerful consideration is also necessary until the Holy Spirit gives clear confirmation.

5 The Placement of Tentmakers

Tentmaker placement may be more difficult as job opportunities may open up in unplanned locations. Normally, locations can be explored and selected. In certain locations, it may be possible for teams of 2 or 3 people to go either with fairly similar occupations or with different ones. The terms or length of assignments may also be more flexible.

Accountability relations need to be worked out. Proper orientation on matters pertaining to security in sensitive countries and careful ways of communicating is extremely important.

LENGTH OF SERVICE

These chapters assume that candidates are preparing for a long-term assignment, whether ministering as career full-time missionaries or as tentmakers. An important assumption is that the long-term worker is pivotal to the mission task to be accomplished. In many cases, language learning is also necessary.

For the career missionary, a long-term assignment is normally a four year term followed by a year’s furlough back in his home country, after which the missionary returns to the field for a second term. There can be variations to the length of each term and the period of furlough. Visa considerations, children’s schooling, family needs, remoteness and hardships of the field are some factors that have a part in determining the length of each term or of furloughs.

A tentmaker’s length of service usually depends on his contract with the company or educational institution. Tentmakers who intend to make a significant

contribution both to the country as well as to the ministry with people will seek to lengthen their period of work in the country.

Missionaries need to remain on the field for two or three terms for a reproducing ministry to result. This means having a long-term view of ministry in seeing faith communities emerge and leadership developed for the advance of the Gospel.¹

In cultures where language learning is difficult, missionaries may need to minister for much longer than three terms to see to the equipping of leaders in the host culture. The first term is spent primarily in language learning with minimal ministry. It is only in the second term that effective evangelising and establishing occur. During the third term, leaders are being equipped.

Candidate assessment and proper selection of cross-cultural workers are therefore absolutely essential to ensure that the right workers and teams are sent to various fields of ministry. Selected workers should have the potential to fulfil their mission and complete their full length of service.

SHORT-TERM ASSIGNMENTS

Although our emphasis is on long-term assignments, there is a place for the short-termer. In the previous chapter, I proposed that those desiring missions experience could plan to devote one to three years on the field. They could then ascertain whether God may be leading them to long-term cross-cultural assignments.

It would be invaluable for short-term personnel to serve alongside more experienced workers on the field. For those who return to the field as long-termers, their short-term assignment may be viewed as a period of valuable apprenticeship. They now become an asset to the mission effort with their added experience.

Short-termers who are sent should be sufficiently mature and be able to contribute to the total field ministry. If they are immature or untrained, they would unnecessarily add to the burdens of the team rather than share in the load of the ministry. Short-termers are sent to the field not to be served but to serve others. Therefore, although criteria for selecting short-termers may not be as stringent as for long-termers, there are still some basic requirements such as relative maturity, stability and basic ministry skills.

Some short-term assignments are for support or administrative roles and do not require ministry proficiency skills or as much missions preparation as other positions.

1 See Appendix B Six Critical Factors for a Multiplying Ministry

SUMMARY

Candidates for the mission field require certain essential qualities and qualifications. Spiritual qualifications relate to the candidates' relationship with God, having stable family relationships, qualities such as humility, love and perseverance, and ministry proficiency. Natural qualities include sensitivity, flexibility, physical and emotional capacity and language aptitude.

Tentmakers need additional qualifications: namely, bi-vocational conviction, marketable skills, perspective on work and ethics and a healthy sense of independence balanced with interdependence.

Prospective candidates for cross-cultural assignments should be carefully and responsibly assessed before being selected and sent for their assignments. These assessments should be made by those responsible for their welfare and by the candidates themselves.

The placement of workers needs to be carefully considered with long-term service in mind. Long-term assignments are preferable for the laying of foundations for a multiplying work. However, there is also a place for short-termers on the field.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ORIENTATION OF CANDIDATES

God had given the land of Canaan for Israel to possess. In Numbers 13, Moses instructed each tribe to send one of its leaders to explore the land. Have you wondered why Moses wanted the land explored when God had already promised it to the people? Shouldn't they simply march forward and enter the territory? It was because the people were entering into warfare. It was necessary for Moses and the people to find out about the land and its people in order to be prepared for battle. Any mission operation is a venture of faith. This faith must be based on the proper interpretation of facts.

All twelve explorers who were sent saw the land and its people. Ten of the twelve interpreted what they saw with the eyes of fear. Only Caleb and Joshua interpreted what they saw with faith. We know that God judged the ten and struck them down. Joshua and Caleb survived. Joshua learned from this experience. He later carried out a similar procedure before conquering Jericho.

Similarly, in cross-cultural missions today, workers need to be prepared for their ministry and to undergo proper orientation before proceeding to the field. It is necessary for them to know what they would be encountering.

No cross-cultural candidate should go to the field without adequate orientation. After the process of assessment is completed and a specific assignment is decided upon, orientation needs to be conducted before the candidate arrives on the field. This is usually referred to as PRE-FIELD Orientation. When a candidate arrives on the field, ON-FIELD Orientation should be conducted.

Both Pre-field Orientation and On-field Orientation are important and should not be neglected. Tentmakers also need orientation. Besides learning similar aspects as full time missionaries, tentmakers could profit from a study of work and ethical issues. In an interview of Asian tentmakers, seventy per cent of the respondents received pre-field orientation, some lasting as briefly as two weeks and the majority as long as three to four months. A majority also had on-field orientation but this lasted for a brief period of one or two weeks for most.

Orientation of new mission workers would normally be conducted by the mission agency sending out the candidates. Certain aspects, however, may

also be received through training institutes specially designed for the preparation of cross-cultural candidates. Pre-field and On-field aspects may overlap. The following outline gives an overview of the total curriculum to be covered.

OVERVIEW OF ORIENTATION CURRICULUM

PRE-FIELD ORIENTATION	ON-FIELD ORIENTATION
1 CULTURAL AWARENESS	1 HISTORY OF THE COUNTRY
2 LANGUAGE LEARNING TECHNIQUES	2 RELIGION OF THE PEOPLE
3 PERSPECTIVES ON WORLD MISSIONS	3 CHRISTIANITY IN THE COUNTRY
4 PERSPECTIVES ON MISSION AGENCY	4 INTRODUCTION TO CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY
5 FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES	5 CUSTOMS OF THE PEOPLE
6 PRACTICAL LOGISTICS	6 LANGUAGE LEARNING
FOR TENTMAKERS	7 MINISTRY IN THE COUNTRY
7a WORK PRINCIPLES AND ISSUES	8 PRAYER
7b BIBLICAL ETHICS	9 BIBLE STUDY
	10 FAMILY LIVING
	11 INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS
	12 HEALTH AND STRESS

PRE-FIELD ORIENTATION

The purpose of Pre-field Orientation is to prepare the candidate for his or her specific assignment and to enable the candidate to carry out what is needed to go to the field. The focus is on the needs of the candidate and of his family.

The programme is normally conducted in a particular location for a period of time for a group of candidates. It is usually geared towards those who are embarking on long-term assignments. Short-term candidates may attend some sessions that are applicable to them.

In an Asia Missions Survey conducted, almost half of the missionaries and tentmakers who responded indicated that they had been on exposure trips to their target area. This had given them clearer impressions on the language and culture of the countries and helped them to anticipate what was needed. However, they all affirmed the benefits of pre-field orientation.

Benefits enumerated included:

- a greater awareness and increased sensitivity to what was required
- practical insights which could be verifiable
- cross-cultural stress prevention
- practical ways of dealing with crises and problems
- helpful training in ministering in context
- understanding of missiological issues

Their orientation was conducted by mission agencies or by veteran missionaries.

Some survey respondents indicated that their pre-field orientation was inadequate. One candidate attended a two week course which was helpful but far too short. He recommended more cross-cultural aspects to be covered.

Missionaries and tentmakers who have received adequate orientation have expressed greater self-confidence with less anxiety about their venture into the unknown. Many field leaders have expressed their conviction that improving the level of pre-field orientation would increase the effectiveness of workers and the overall performance of the mission.

Pre-field orientation can be most beneficial when conducted in a non-formal or informal atmosphere. There are also special training institutes that have their own curriculum.¹ After attending such an institute, candidates receive other aspects of orientation from their own mission agency or sending base.

¹ A useful guide to these training centres and institutes can be found in Robert Brynjolfson and Jonathan Lewis, editors (2006), *Integral Ministry Training Design & Evaluation*, World Evangelical Alliance, William Carey Library.

PRE-FIELD ORIENTATION CURRICULUM

A pre-field orientation programme should include the following for its curriculum:

1 Cultural Awareness

The candidate must be alerted to the implications of cross-cultural living and of ministering in a different culture. He needs to be motivated to learn the culture of the country. He will be given information on the country but further details are usually covered through on-field aspects of orientation.

Cultural awareness includes learning about CULTURAL DIFFERENCES and how these affect lifestyle and relationships. The chapters on Cross-Cultural Stress and the Prevention of Stress cover these aspects. Cultural differences will affect the worker in areas such as personal privacy, adjustments to efficiency and concepts of time, money and amenities and environment and health.

CULTURAL LEARNING is possible and cultural identification is necessary. But the cross-cultural worker needs to learn how to sensitively and realistically adjust over a period of time.

In ministering to another culture, learning about CONTEXTUALISATION is essential. Part One of this book covers this important subject, giving practical suggestions on CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION.

To summarise, cultural awareness includes:

- Cultural Differences
- Cross-Cultural Stress
- Cultural Learning
- Contextualisation
- Cross-Cultural Communication

2 Language Learning Techniques

Language learning is essential in most cross-cultural situations. Learning a language can be expedited by proper techniques. The subject of language aptitude was discussed in chapter 13. Should a candidate be proceeding to a field with a difficult language, it is advisable for the candidate to sit for a language aptitude test.

Some fields have followed the LAMP (Language Acquisition Made Practical) method of learning described in chapter 13. There are also effective traditional methods of classroom learning.

Together with these methods there are also other considerations like language immersion and maximum exposure, full time disciplines and personal motivation. Candidates must be committed to language study. Only by knowing the language well can cross-cultural workers identify with the heartbeat of the people they seek to befriend. And, from the perspective of the people, knowing their language demonstrates that the worker is truly committed to them.

3 Perspectives on World Missions

This aspect will help the candidate widen his vision and shows him how his assignment is related to God's overall plan. It includes an overview of world missions: biblical, historical, cultural and strategic perspectives. There is actually a "Perspectives Course" on Missions. A shorter version is the "Kairos Course". These courses are valuable for any follower of Christ and not just for those preparing for the mission field.

Mission candidates need to be aware of the changing face of Christian missions with a great percentage of countries closed to conventional approaches. With the collapse of Communism, there is also the rise of paganism and religious fundamentalism. Urbanisation is a modern day phenomenon affecting urban and rural strategies. There is also an increase of cross-cultural workers from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

4 Perspectives on the Mission Agency

The candidate sees the work of his agency as part of what God is doing through the Body of Christ. Approaches also differ in various parts of the world. Ministry philosophy can also be discussed. One major aspect which could be covered and also developed in On-field orientation is that of interpersonal relationships among co-workers. This aspect can also be discussed in relation to cultural stress.

5 Family Responsibilities

This aspect deals with family matters faced by the candidate with obligations in two different countries - his home country and his mission field. Asians often have obligations to parents and extended family members.

Family responsibilities include the following:

Implications of Living in Two Different Worlds

The Extended Family

Children and Education

Financial Obligations

Family Stresses

6 Practical Logistics

This practical aspect is to help the candidate with all that is required to go to the field and to maintain links with the mission agency. Logistics include:

- Financial Matters
- Administrative Matters
- Medical and Insurance
- Travel Matters
- Communications

Tentmakers will usually receive logistical help from their companies. Bi-vocational tentmakers, who have formal or informal links with support groups or mission agencies, need logistical orientation. In sensitive situations, workers need to be aware of security considerations. Because email communications are common today, those in countries hostile to the Gospel should assume that all correspondence including emails will be intercepted by governments, scrutinized and read. No “carbon copies” should be sent for correspondence. No mission agency letterheads should be used. These security considerations are particularly important to protect people in the country. Some may be oblivious to how their governments operate.

7 Especially For Tentmakers

A Principles and Issues related to Work

Tentmakers need to develop convictions related to their work. A good Bible study and discussions among tentmakers will provide perspective to work issues. A basic outline is found at the end of this chapter. But a more detailed study would be helpful. The chapter on Tentmaking elaborates on the work of tentmakers.

B Biblical Ethics

Many tentmakers will work in sensitive countries. They are professionals or business executives in their role but they also share their Christian faith. This bi-vocational role may cause some tensions and endanger their work and the work of fellow-workers. What they do may also affect the Christians and local churches with whom they may be associated. Ethical issues have to be looked into regarding their bi-vocational role, what they communicate with others, and how they go about their work. Norman Geisler’s book provides a helpful study on ethics.²

An introductory study on ethics especially for those working in sensitive countries is found at the end section of Part Two.

2 Norman L. Geisler (1971), *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

PRE-FIELD ORIENTATION SCHEDULE

Pre-field preparation and orientation could last up to six months or more if the candidate attended a training institute. About two months would be the very minimum.

The seven aspects highlighted can be carried out in different ways. The first, second and third - Culture and Language issues and Perspectives on World Missions - can be conducted by an institute or by attending seminars.

The fourth and fifth aspects - on the Mission Agency and Family Responsibilities - could be covered through a one week Pre-field Orientation Seminar for candidates. A longer seminar can be held if other aspects need to be dealt with.

The sixth aspect on Practical Logistics can be done informally by the mission agency administrators.

The seventh aspect on issues related to work and ethics can be done by tentmakers through personal study. However, it would be helpful for tentmakers to discuss their study among themselves or with senior leaders.

CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING INSTITUTES

It is heartening to see Third World Mission Agencies on the increase. Many of these agencies recognise the need for adequate preparation and training of their candidates. Cooperative endeavours and networking efforts in the area of missions training are also encouraging. Less duplication of effort will result if more agencies, especially newer ones, were aware of channels available for the preparation and orientation of their candidates.

The formation of the Asian Cross-Cultural Training Institute (ACTI) in Singapore is an excellent example of cooperation and partnership in missions.³

Thankfully, training in missions through formal and non-formal centres is increasingly becoming available in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Prospective mission candidates do not need to think they need to attend institutions in the West in order to be missiologically qualified and trained. The West has certainly contributed to missiological thinking and training and is continuing to influence the mission movement. However, an increasing number of African, Asian and Latin American mission leaders are grappling with their own responsibilities in missions. They are viewing important issues such as contextualisation and culture with their own eyes. Training in missions will hopefully be progressively conducted with greater sensitivity and closer to the field.

³ Visit the ACTI website for more information. < www.acti-singapore.org >

The call today is for even closer cooperation, collaboration and partnership in missions. There continues to be a need for experienced trainers to prepare the right candidates for missions. Not just trainers, but the best candidates to send for as our Lord said, "The labourers are few."

The church in Antioch sent the best they had for apostolic ministries. They sent Barnabas and Saul. Today, the challenge of missions is to prepare and release the best.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ON-FIELD ORIENTATION

The purpose of On-field Orientation is to help the candidate to adjust and learn how to live and minister in his new culture. A Singaporean candidate preparing for an assignment in Africa will need pre-field orientation in Singapore and on-field orientation on arrival in Africa. In most cases, on-field orientation takes place at the location of the ministry assignment. Exceptions would be a new field without an adequate framework for orientation. In such cases, orientation is conducted at another location with better facilities and resources.

During their first year on the field, the majority of new workers will usually take several months to adjust and learn about the new culture. This is “on the scene” orientation. A few eager workers may plunge into the ministry, hoping to learn while they reach out to the people. This latter approach is not encouraged because it often has diminishing returns later.

Case Study for Discussion

A new missionary was sent to the Middle East. Because the people could understand English, he decided to initiate a ministry quickly. He became so involved in the ministry that there was no time for language study. He later discovered how limited his ministry was because he did not know Arabic. He says that his biggest regret was not learning Arabic early in his ministry. Language learning was not his priority when he first arrived.

Proper pre-field orientation would have convinced this missionary that language learning was crucial in communicating to the hearts of people. Today, all new personnel to his field begin by learning the local language.

English is taught and spoken quite well in many countries (the Philippines, some South Asian nations and a few African countries). Even in these countries, language learning will enable the cross-cultural worker to minister on a deeper level.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you consider language learning as absolutely necessary? Give your reasons. If the local language of a people could take up to four years of concentrated language study, would you be willing to persevere to learn the language?
2. If you are a business or professional person, how would you make language study your priority?

WAYS AND MEANS OF ON-FIELD ORIENTATION

A good orientation programme will use a combination of the following methods:

1. **Understudying a Mature person:** A new worker will learn from an experienced missionary or tentmaker in an actual situation for a period of time. Mission agencies could use mature local Christians to help with on-field orientation. These Christians usually know what aspects of their country and culture are important to learn, as well as the needs of their people.
2. **Individual Study Assignments:** In some cases, new workers may need individualised orientation when only one or two persons arrive at a ministry location. Sometimes, a worker can learn on his own using planned study assignments.
3. **Learning from a Pool of Different Resources:** This is an informal but effective way of learning. The new worker learns by observation and initiating conversations with different people. Sometimes an individual worker can live for a short period of time with a local family. Learning via the internet could be helpful. However, because of the quantity of material available, it would be wise to seek advice from mature mission practitioners. Learning never stops. Being part of an ongoing “learning community” will always be a bonus.
4. **Formal language learning:** Attending a language school is usually the best way to learn the local language. There are also “language laboratories” for intensive language learning for a period of time.
5. **Special Seminars:** A mission seminar with a training curriculum may be conducted.

All aspects of orientation for new workers need to be carefully monitored. The field leader is usually the key person to monitor their orientation programme.

ON-FIELD ORIENTATION CURRICULUM

Here is an OVERVIEW of the curriculum:

History of the country	Ministry in the country
Religion of the people	Prayer
Christianity in the country	Bible study
Introduction to cultural anthropology	Family living
Customs of the people	Interpersonal relationships
Language learning	Health and stress

Warren Myers, a veteran missionary, was one of my mentors. He used the above curriculum for his 15 week orientation programme. Warren is now “with the Lord” but he has equipped others, including me, to conduct similar programmes.

1 History of the country

Each worker needs to learn the historical background of the country in which he or she will be ministering. The worker does not need to absorb too many details which are difficult to remember. A brief history from an academic textbook is usually adequate. Interesting and important personalities should be noted. A one page summary recording important periods, events and personalities would be a useful tool for reference and review.

2 Religion of the people

The predominant religion of the people, important religious festivals and their meaning should be studied. In some fields, more than one religion needs to be studied. As religious philosophy and culture are often related, it is necessary to understand how these philosophies have affected the overall thinking of the people and their worldview.

For example, the teachings of China’s ancient religious philosophers like Lao Tsu (on whose teachings Taoism is based), Confucius and Mencius still wield their influence. If you were to visit a main bookstore in China’s major cities, you will notice how educated young people are buying these books to learn about their ancient philosophers.

The examples on contextualisation in Part One illustrate how religious beliefs have influenced the worldview of the people.

3 Christianity in the country

How did Christianity come into the country? What influence has Christianity made on the people and how do they view Christians? Is Christianity viewed as a Western religion? If it is, why is it? What are the major denominations and churches and what is their present condition? Helpful information can be found in "Operation World".

4 Introduction to Cultural Anthropology

Anthropological insights on the culture of a country are extremely important. This introduction should provide a basic foundation in the study of culture - how the people live, how they communicate, what they believe, their worldview and how this has affected their values and behaviour. The worker learns what makes up a culture and aspects that are important to the people. As a result, the worker learns how to adjust to the new culture.

Some of these aspects relating to cultural awareness and contextualisation would have been covered during pre-field orientation. However, during on-field orientation, the studies need to be more specifically related to the country in which the worker will be ministering.¹

5 Customs of the People

Customs are part of the culture of a people. They have to do with how people behave and relate to one another - how they greet, talk, eat, dress, pray, do business and so on. Knowing customs will help the cross-cultural worker learn appropriate behaviour patterns.

Each of us has a tendency to view life with ourselves in the centre. When going to another culture, it is easy to judge others by our values and assumptions of what is proper or "civilised" behaviour. When we judge others by our cultural standards we are actually "ethnocentric". Ethnocentrism is based on our feelings and values rather than the feelings and values of the people in the new culture.

We need to understand that local customs have functions and are not to be regarded as "strange" behaviour. For example, Westerners do not usually eat with their fingers. In India and some parts of Asia, people always eat with their fingers. They wash their hands carefully before they eat, and consider their hands and fingers clean. Forks and spoons may not be as clean because they have been used by many different people.

¹ A helpful start is to read Louis J Luzbetak (1978), *The Church and Cultures*, Techny, IL: Divine Word Publications. Paul Hiebert (1978), *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

In adjusting to new customs, workers will need to deal with personal feelings and attitudes. At first, we may distinguish between “my kind” of people and “their kind” of people. Identification takes place when these two circles of people disappear, and we become part of the same local circle.

6 Language Learning

Learning the language of the people is indispensable if the worker wishes to communicate on a heart-to-heart level. The standards of language proficiency for both husband and wife should be determined, and the best available methods be agreed upon. Language learning also gives valuable cultural insights.

7 Ministry in the country

During orientation, it should be evident to the worker that strategy and ministry methods in the new country could be different from the ministry “back home”. For ministries to multiply, they need to be contextualised, as already discussed in Part One.

In penetrating new fields, creativity and patience are qualities needed. Disciplemakers who are relational are a definite asset in the initiating of new ministry frontiers. The ministry must be viewed as a long-term process². Workers should speak to and learn from veteran missionaries who have this long-term view of decades, and not just a few years.

Mission agencies learn from their past achievements and weaknesses. New workers should not repeat the same mistakes, if they seek to do far better in their ministries.

8 Prayer

As prayer is a key to an effective spiritual life and ministry, practical opportunities for prayer, scheduled and unscheduled, should be included in any training curriculum. Prayer should be a priority in an intensive orientation programme. Leaders should be models and schedule periods of prayer, including days of prayer. A day of prayer should be planned with some variety. The leader prepares specific information and items for prayer. Prayer for individual missionaries and workers, selected countries and unreached peoples as well as prayer for one another may be included.

2 Refer Appendix B Six Critical Factors For a Multiplying Ministry

Here is a proposed schedule:

MORNING:	1 hour - Devotional and Briefing 1 hour - Prayer in groups of 4 1 hour - Prayer in pairs
LIGHT LUNCH OR FAST	
AFTERNOON:	2 hours - Time Alone for Reflection 1 hour - Prayer in groups of 3 or 4
EVENING MEAL	
EVENING:	1½ hours - Group Sharing and Prayer Together

Prayer may also focus on the following issues and trends.

- Almost 3 billion people (of the world's total population of 6.7 billion) can only be reached by new cross-cultural efforts.
- Pray for a new force of bi-vocational labourers to relocate in these areas, that they will be credible and authentic witnesses through their vocations and quality of life.
- There is a resurgence of religious fundamentalism. Pray for those who faithfully incarnate the Gospel in these lands.
- Secularisation and nominalism have sapped the spiritual life of many countries. Pray for Christians to put on the whole armour of God that they may be spiritually strengthened and renewed daily to be salt and light influencing society.
- Pray that God's Spirit will initiate a movement of both qualified labourers and senders. There are challenges of ministry to "oral learners" (those who are partially or totally illiterate). Two thirds of all people in the world cannot or do not learn through literate means. Pray also for holistic ministries to the poor, the marginalized, and those who are victims of injustice.
- Thank God for movements which bring about cooperation and a unified purpose in the Church to fulfil the Great Commission. Pray for increasing collaborating efforts in advancing the Gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom.
- Pray that our Sovereign God will be glorified among the nations, for Satan to be bound, that Christ's victory on the cross will break the enemy's hold on cultures and peoples. Pray for those in authority that Christians may live peaceful and holy lives and people will be saved.

9 Bible Study

Bible study is an important element in the on-field orientation programme. Important subjects related to missions and the new culture can also be studied, for example, spiritual warfare, ancestral obligations and healing. Personal Bible study plans and practical discussions will help lay foundations for the worker's on-going spiritual development on the field.

In one particular field, the leader meets with his team for monthly Bible study. Each member spends a minimum of ten hours of preparation in studying a chapter of a book in the Bible. In another field, the team meets monthly to discuss a synthetic study of a book in the Bible.

10 Family Life

Although family responsibilities would have been discussed during pre-field orientation, there are many other practical matters which the worker and his family will face. These include lifestyle and appropriate living standards, housing, schooling, medical and dental care, food, hospitality demands, cultural obligations and other matters.

11 Interpersonal Relationships

The new worker must develop proper attitudes to both the people he will be ministering to and the colleagues he will be co-labouring with. He needs to understand his own personality traits and how he will be perceived especially by the local people. Mission involves teamwork. Love and respect between colleagues, sometimes of different nationalities, are essential on the field.

Pastoral and shepherding care may not be readily available, although the field leader will normally be responsible for this need. A small group of peers could meet regularly to provide mutual support through their social interaction and spiritual fellowship.

Interpersonal tensions on the field may not have a spiritual root. Often the problem is physical or psychological fatigue due to stress or overwork.

12 Health and Stress

Health issues, such as diet and environmental cleanliness, should be discussed thoroughly especially where medical facilities may not be readily available. A health manual will be useful.

Because cross-cultural stress is unavoidable, the subject of stress should be carefully looked into. Workers need to be alert to their own stress factors and focus on stress prevention.

A personality test will alert the worker to particular traits that may make him or her stress prone. The chapters on cross-cultural stress and the prevention of stress will deal with the important issues.

FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. "No cross-cultural worker should proceed to the field without adequate orientation." Discuss a possible scenario when orientation has been non-existent or inadequate.
2. When Jesus sent the Twelve out on a short-term assignment, He gave them specific instructions (Matthew 10). What instructions could your church or mission agency give to:
 - a. Long-term workers?
 - b. Short-termers on a one year assignment?
3. Who should be responsible for the orientation of missionaries and tentmakers in your church or mission agency? What resources or channels for orientation would you utilise?
4. Discuss the concept of pre-field and on-field orientation. In your situation, how would you carry out (or receive) these two aspects? What components would constitute the curriculum?

WORK ISSUES: FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. How did work begin?
 - a. With God Genesis 1:1; 2:1-3
 - b. With Man Genesis 1:26-30; 2:15, Exodus 20:9,10

2. With the fall of man, work has become burdensome. Discuss the tension between the enjoyment of work and the pain of work.
Genesis 3:17-19
Ecclesiastes 2:18-24

3. Imagine what it would be if man had no work. God gave work to man as an expression of His grace. Reflect on these passages.
Ecclesiastes 3:12, 13
Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

4. Since God gave work to man as a gift, he should therefore work hard. His work provides for his needs. However the Bible has warnings about looking to our labour to provide for our needs rather than looking to God alone. What do these passages teach about our focus?
Deuteronomy 8:10-18
Psalm 127:1, 2
Matthew 6:25-34
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

5. What are the symbols of significance in the eyes of man? Is personal significance found in the work we do? Discuss the source of our personal significance.
Jeremiah 9:23, 24
Philippians 3:7-10

6. Is there any value in work? Some view work as “secular” and others view it as “sacred”. What do these passages teach?
Ephesians 4:1
Ephesians 6:5-8
Colossians 3:23, 24
John 6:27
1 Corinthians 3:10-15

7. Since God has completed His work and continues to sustain it, there is nothing we can do to add or contribute to it. However, He has given us the privilege of participating and sharing in His work of meeting the needs of others.

Discuss the relevance of these passages.

Isaiah 46:10

Psalm 115:3

Esther 4:14

Ephesians 1:11, 12

Ephesians 2:10

Ephesians 6:7, 8

8. Discuss how service to others and meeting their needs fulfils the command to love our neighbour.

Luke 10:27-37

Mark 10:43-45

Ephesians 4:28b

9. Discuss the importance of these passages on work in relation to the believer's testimony and example.

1 Thessalonians 2:8, 9

1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

1 Timothy 5:8

Titus 3:14

10. Work and wealth are gifts of God. Rest and leisure are also His gifts. In fact all of life is a gift of God. Believers are to be good stewards of all of God's gifts (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2, 7). From the selected topical passages below, study and discuss the ones that are relevant to you.

a. God's Ownership and Our Stewardship

Genesis 1:1; Psalm 24:1; Psalm 50:9-14; Haggai 2:8; Proverbs 27:23-27; Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-27; 1 Peter 4:10,11

b. The Use and Abuse of Resources

Leviticus 19:35,36; Leviticus 25:8-55; Deuteronomy 25:13-16; Proverbs 11:1;16:11; 21:5,20; 22:29; 28:19; 31:10-31; Ecclesiastes 5:13; James 5:2,3

c. Giving and Generosity

Deuteronomy 15:7-11; Psalm 112:1-5,9; Proverbs 3:9,10; Proverbs 31:20; Matthew 6:19,21; Acts 2:45;2 Corinthians 8,9; 1 Timothy 6:17-19

d. Employment, Wages and Taxes

Matthew 22:17-21; Luke 10:7; Romans 13:6, 7; 1 Corinthians 9:10-12; Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1; 1 Timothy 5:17, 18; 1 Timothy 6:1, 2; James 5:4

e. Rest and Leisure

Exodus 20:9, 10 (cf. Romans 14:5-12; Colossians 2:16, 17) Leviticus 16:29-34; Psalm 127:2; Matthew 11:28-30; Mark 6:31; 1 Timothy 6:17; James 1:17

INTRODUCTORY STUDY ON ETHICS

This study is directed to those who will be working in difficult and sensitive countries.

1. Discuss the following situations of conflict between obedience to authorities and obedience to God. What conclusions can you draw as to the limits of earthly authorities?

Exodus 1:15-21

Daniel 3:1-18

Daniel 6:1-10

Matthew 28:18-20

Acts 4:13-20

Acts 5:27-29

Romans 13:1-5; 1 Peter 2:13

2. Can deception ever be justified? Study these passages and list some principles.

Exodus 1:15-21

Joshua 2:1-7; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25 1 Samuel 16:1, 2

2 Kings 6:13-20

3. The passages in the questions above show that the Bible teaches a hierarchy of values. Observe that (1) the Bible does present clear examples of absolutes in conflict; (2) there is a hierarchy of values, for example, the saving of human lives is more valuable than speaking the truth, and that obedience to God is of greater value than one's life; (3) God does not hold us to be guilty for following the higher value or command. Note the higher value in these verses:

Matthew 12:5; Mark 2:27

Matthew 10:37

Matthew 23:23

John 19:11

4. Values determined subjectively can be dangerous. Dependence on the leading of the Holy Spirit to guide into all truth is essential. Note Proverbs 3:5-7; Luke 12:12; John 16:13; Romans 8:14
5. Jot down the principles of prudence and wise speech from these verses in Proverbs. Proverbs 12:23; 13:3; 15:1, 28; 17:27, 28; 22:3
6. It is not necessary to volunteer information. A person can refuse to answer. Learn to differentiate between information and truth. Information may be used to tear down, whereas truth liberates and sanctifies. Write down observations from these passages:
 - Ecclesiastes 3:7
 - Mark 15:1-5
 - Luke 23:6-12
 - John 8:32; 17:17
 - John 18:33-38
7. How should we treat those who are enemies or who oppose us?
 - Matthew 5:38-48
 - Romans 12:17-21
 - Philippians 2:14-16
 - James 1:19-21
 - 1 Peter 2:15-23; 3:15-17
8. When the people of God were carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, they were told to seek the peace and prosperity of the city. Read the passage in Jeremiah 29:4-7 and write down the implications of serving in a foreign country and genuinely contributing to its prosperity. Discuss with fellow professional colleagues some "best practices" to adopt in seeking the welfare for the city.

RECOMMENDED READINGS for Part Two on Preparation for Cross-Cultural Mission

Discipleship Training

Edmund Chan (2001), *Built to Last: Towards a Disciplemaking Church*, Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church.

Edmund Chan (2008), *Mentoring Paradigms: Reflections on Mentoring, Leadership and Discipleship*, Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church.

Edmund Chan (2008, 2nd edition) *Growing Deep in God: Integrating Theology and Prayer*, Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church.

Walter A Henrichsen (1974), *Disciples Are Made Not Born*, Illinois: SP Publications.

Walter A Henrichsen (1990, Singapore Edition), *Disciples Are Made Not Born*, Singapore: The Navigators.

J Oswald Sanders (1967), *Spiritual Leadership*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press.

Paul D Stanley & J Robert Clinton (1992), *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Basic Ministry Training

Robert Coleman (1963), *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell; Baker Publishing Group (1994)

Robert Coleman (1989, Singapore edition), *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Singapore: The Navigators.

LeRoy Eims (1978), *The Lost Art of Disciplemaking*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

Kelly S O'Donnell and Michele Lewis, ed. (1988), *Helping Missionaries Grow: Readings in Mental Health and Missions*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, pages 109-136.

Mission Orientation

These three texts are highly recommended for an understanding of Missions:

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

Christopher J H Wright (2006), *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Ralph D Winter and Steve C Hawthorne, eds. (2009 Fourth Edition), *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, A Reader, Fourth Edition*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

Part Three

CROSS-CULTURAL STRESS

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

RECOGNISING CROSS-CULTURAL STRESS

INTRODUCTION

Cross-Cultural Stress is an important issue for both labourers going to their new fields of service, and for those who will be supervising and providing pastoral care. “Doing member care”¹ is an issue all mission agencies and mission sending churches must undertake seriously. The mission sending process begins from the preparation and orientation of cross-cultural workers and continues until their re-entry to their home countries.

This section on cross-cultural stress was not easy to write. When I first wrote these chapters on sabbatical, my wife was recuperating from physical and emotional fatigue. Specialist physicians had diagnosed the main cause to be stress. As we were in the midst of a sabbatical, I continued to learn new lessons about dealing with stress and making applications prayerfully and specifically to my own situation.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Briefly defined, stress is the wear and tear caused by the pressures of daily life. Pressure cannot be avoided. It is not always bad. When viewed correctly, pressure can develop the qualities of endurance and perseverance.

Stress is a normal feature of everyday living. Every person, whether living in his own culture or in a different one, experiences stress to some degree.

Stress becomes dangerous when it is prolonged. It may cause irreparable emotional and physical damage. Illnesses from stress are the most difficult to heal even with continuous treatment. They often continue until the real sources of stress are discovered and dealt with.

Some time ago, I conducted seminars on cross-cultural stress for new candidates at the Asian Cross-Cultural Training Institute. I had seen the effects of stress on many of our field workers, having counselled many over the years. Some of them have had to leave the field permanently. In some cases, preventive

¹ Refer to Kelly O'Donnell, editor (2002), *Doing Member Care Well – Perspectives and Practices from around the World*, William Carey Library.

measures could have been taken. Learning to recognise stress symptoms early is especially important for the cross-cultural worker. Working at the prevention of stress is always best.

CROSS-CULTURAL STRESS

For those living in a different cultural context, stress is inevitable. All cross-cultural workers will face it. Because cross-cultural stress is caused by many factors, it is often difficult to diagnose. One must, however, guard against making dogmatic conclusions about missionary behaviour, such that we attribute every problem to stress. The illustrations given below are to help us understand that cultural stresses are normal and they can be dealt with.

Cultural stress is unavoidable. All workers will face the stresses of adjusting to a new culture. Recognising this fact - that "cultural stress" is normal and unavoidable - prepares the worker to be alert to stress symptoms and to learn to deal with them adequately. The intensity of the stress experienced will vary from individual to individual as personalities and temperaments are different. The nature of cross-cultural assignments also may differ widely. Some are in situations where amenities are easily available and others in more remote areas.

Case Study for Discussion

A Singaporean couple had been on their Asian field for about six months. They were primarily engaged in language study and had also made some friends. When their supervisor visited them, they had a lot to share about their initial experiences. After talking about some positive experiences with their new friendships, they spoke of their cultural stresses.

The dusty environment caused constant discomfort. Closing doors and windows did little to prevent fine dust from settling everywhere. Tables were dusty. The floor was dusty. Beds, curtains, furniture were all covered by dust. The house had to be cleaned daily. The floors were mopped every morning. But by evening, there was more dust.

The traffic flowed continuously by day and by night, with car horns tooting. The couple had to leave early in the morning to catch their bus to attend language school. If they left a little later, the traffic jams would be too severe.

The language was a difficult one. A slight change of intonation could either offend someone or cause laughter.

Questions for Discussion

1. What stresses were experienced by this couple? Were any stresses avoidable? Or were they inevitable? Would you have lived differently from them? Why or why not?
2. What attitudes could be helpful when facing stress?
3. If you were their supervisor providing pastoral care, how would you encourage or advise them?

TWO KINDS OF CULTURAL STRESS

Generally speaking, the cross-cultural worker faces two kinds of cultural stress.

A “Culture Shock” – When You First Arrive

Firstly, there is the stress that comes from the loss of familiar cultural cues - what is termed “culture shock”. Anxiety is experienced whenever the familiar is lost, confusion follows and there is a degree of “shock”. When workers first arrive in their new field, they face a host of adjustments which produce cultural stress.

No worker, no matter how thorough his orientation and preparation, will be able to grasp all the cultural norms of behaviour and communication patterns of a different people. Every culture has thousands of subtle cultural cues, some of which can only be learned over a long period of cultural exposure. Until they are learned, the worker will be culturally disorientated. He will experience uneasiness, tension and even emotional maladjustments because familiar props have been removed.

In many parts of Asia, where people are polite and hospitable, you are never too sure when to accept an invitation to stay and join the family for a meal. You do not accept an offer the first time it is made. Usually, you do not accept the offer even on the second time it is made. You will have to discern by subtle signs (the enthusiasm of the person and his family members, facial expressions, other comments being made) as to how you should ultimately

respond. Sometimes, you may accept the invitation prematurely. At other times, you may refuse and cause hurt.

When going from one culture to another, a most important motto to keep in mind is “NOT WRONG, BUT DIFFERENT”. Eating noisily by slurping your soup would be impolite in a Western culture but in parts of Asia, it is often a sign that you are enjoying your food! Not wrong, but different!

B Lifestyle and Relationship Stresses – Adjusting To Cultural Values

The second kind of stress comes from unavoidable changes to a new way of living and relating to people. These are lifestyle and relationship stresses. Here, cultural values are involved. Facing these different values and having to make changes will cause stress. Values relate to matters such as personal privacy, use of time, money and cleanliness.

The first kind of stress, culture shock, can be overcome over a short period of time. The second kind related to deep-seated values will be more difficult to handle. Frustrations together with a negative attitude to people and the culture can deplete the energies of the worker and his family. On the other hand, the capacity of the worker to accept the situation and learn to live with it will help to reduce stress. Let us look further into some of these stresses.

1 Personal Privacy

Living in New Zealand, my wife and I observed that personal privacy is highly respected. In many areas, homes will not have fences or gates. In crowded and noisy Asia, retreating into the quiet privacy of one’s own home may not be possible. Your neighbours or strangers walk past your gate and peer over your fence. Their staring inquisitively at you or looking intently at your home may appear to be their past time. There is often nothing you can do to change such behaviour.

Because relationships play an important part in ministry, the home of the missionary is often open for hospitality. When my wife and I were involved in a grassroots student ministry in Malaysia and New Zealand, we had students in our home continually. Although we enjoyed ministering to them, the demands of hospitality would place additional stresses for my wife. We also had students and young graduates live in our home for Christian training. Having times alone to ourselves would be rare.

Women are usually expected to serve and therefore will experience greater stress with the demands of hospitality. My wife would serve our visitors meals we normally ate rather than add sumptuous extras which are really unnecessary.

With the many comings and goings, the home ceases to be a place of rest and refuge. Cross-cultural workers need to find other ways to relax. Husbands and wives, and parents and children need to make time to enjoy meaningful communication.

Another common practice among Asians is that of discussing prices and bargains. Local friends and visitors will enquire how much has been spent on various items. Some cross-cultural workers may experience tensions if they feel that these visitors may be probing into their personal affairs.

2 Concept of Time and Efficiency

New mission candidates who come from efficient time-conscious cultural backgrounds find it difficult to adjust to cultures where rigid time schedules and punctuality are considered unimportant. "Rubber time" is the norm in many cultures. In some rural areas, people may not even own watches and clocks.

To confuse matters, people may be punctual for some functions and late for others. In Singapore, office workers are normally punctual for work and students are punctual for school. But arriving punctually for a wedding dinner will usually mean a long wait. Dinner may begin an hour after the stated time. At a Chinese dinner, guests are seated around tables with about ten people to each table. It takes some time for guests to relate to each other. A later dinner gives the opportunity for conversation. Because several courses are being served one at a time, the main topic of conversation often relates to the food.

Those who equate efficiency with the saving of time and view punctuality as a mark of faithfulness will find certain cultures very stressful. In some situations, a long wait is usual at government offices, post offices, and hospitals, so bring a book to read!

In most developed economies, money is spent to save time. But in developing countries, time is spent to save money. Some Asians will travel to a distant shop or store if a bargain is worthwhile. Asians can spend a whole day seeking for bargains. They will not usually consider their search a waste of time.

3 Money and Amenities

Being careful with how money is spent would be regarded as a virtue by most people. Asians are usually frugal about money matters. Certain ways of spending will be regarded as wasteful; for example, buying convenience or "off season" foods, spending money on certain kinds of clothing, or using time-saving gadgets. However, as economies grow, having the latest computers, mobile phones, washing machines or microwave ovens, or cars are becoming a way of life.

Adjusting to a simple lifestyle will cause tensions for those who come from developed economies or from backgrounds accustomed to having amenities. What may be considered as necessities in one's home culture may be regarded as luxuries in the host culture.

Some of my colleagues who served in South Asia decided they would not own refrigerators because the people they were ministering to did not have them. Later they realised that refrigerators though considered a luxury item were not a hindrance in their desire to identify with the people. Having a refrigerator certainly helped to reduce stress where storing food was concerned. Today, there is a variety to choose from even in South Asia.

4 Environment and Health

Dirt and dust are commonplace almost anywhere, and often there is nothing much that can be done to alter the situation. More difficult to face are unhygienic factors which prevail because of poor sanitation. Ants, bugs, fleas, mosquitoes, cockroaches and rats abound in many locations. Clean water is not always available.

One common mistake is to think that the people in the culture detest cleanliness. In fact, the lack of cleanliness may be an issue not only for the cross-cultural worker but also for the local people.

A young missionary was learning the culture of a people living in hot and dry conditions. He would only take a shower or two in a week, just as he would in his temperate country. His friends in the host culture had to tactfully tell him he should bathe twice daily, using clean water from the well. Body odour was offensive to this particular culture!

In a South Asian country, workers had to adjust to the fact that toilet paper was not used. Toilet paper was too expensive an item for the local people. They would use water and soap.

One of the common symptoms of cultural stress is a preoccupation with unhygienic conditions and germs. Some people indulge in washing their hands excessively and at odd moments. Others will refuse to eat food offered by people in the host culture. We should note that no cross-cultural worker can live normally or minister adequately if he refuses to eat with the people.

Although illness is a risk, the worker need not be overly anxious if he has learned how to refrain from drinking untreated water and from eating uncooked food. In some countries, water has to be boiled and left boiling for at least five minutes. Untreated vegetables at the roadside stall in countries where dangerous diseases prevail should also be avoided. Even nationals with built-in resistance to certain viruses are careful with their eating habits. They also value health.

Cross-cultural workers often pay a heavy price where health is concerned. Our colleagues have suffered from almost every possible disease - tuberculosis, hepatitis, dysentery, blood diseases, cancer and other diseases. Some co-labourers have had to return from the field prematurely and permanently for health reasons.

Besides major diseases, there are also stress-related ailments. Though stress may not be the only root cause of these sicknesses, it often can precipitate many of them. These ailments include migraine headaches, allergies, asthma, stomach and other ulcers, constipation and insomnia, to name some of them. Such ailments can be continuous and debilitate the cross-cultural worker. Sometimes the sources of these stresses are difficult to treat. Patients continue to live on pain killers and sedatives as doctors are able to treat only the symptoms. Deep seated problems often require specialised counselling over a period of time as the healing process takes time.

The host country may lack adequate medical facilities. Most mission agencies are aware of this fact and are alert to the availability of medical care at the nearest hospital. Where specialist treatment is needed, workers sometimes have to travel further or fly to another country. Two close friends of ours lost their firstborn son at birth because of inadequate medical expertise. The baby would have survived if the birth had taken place in their home country.

5 Language Stress

When a new worker first arrives on the field, he immediately realises how handicapped he is without the language. A person without the language constantly feels helpless. He repeatedly makes mistakes and is like a little child. In certain fields, even after weeks of language study, communication is limited.

A colleague of mine who pioneered a new ministry carried his language dictionary wherever he went during his initial months. There were no close friends to assist him, so he had to learn certain essential words just to move around. This was a very stressful period for him and his wife.

As an Asian who primarily speaks English, I have felt and identified with my colleagues, both Asian and Western, as they spend their initial term struggling with language learning. As I travel from one Asian country to another, I would constantly be mistaken for a local. People would talk to me in their particular language, in Japanese, Korean, Taiwanese, Tagalog, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Thai and Indonesian. I had learned to say "Sorry, I can't speak your language!" I also had to learn simple phrases just to get around.

Language stress is real and part of cultural stress or "culture shock". Language students describe how tired they feel just listening to new sounds

and trying to practise them. I remember joining a group of missionaries in a LAMP (Language Acquisition Made Practical) programme. We learned a few sentences each day with the help of a tutor. Then, we would go out and practise speaking these sentences with strangers.

Only with continuous practice, and making mistakes in sounds and vocabulary, can one learn a language well. Some language learners suffer a mental block when practising speaking something they don't really know well. Some are university graduates with doctoral degrees who find it more difficult to learn language than others with only a secondary school education. The language learner needs to become like a little child in attitude in order to make progress. Some refuse to attempt to speak until they have practised sufficiently. In their minds, they continually think of what they want to say in English, and then translate it into the new language. Using this process, they will miss out on whole portions of the new language. A vicious cycle is the result. They are unable to make further progress in language learning. They are also unable to communicate without further learning.

Language and culture are intertwined. Learning a language well contributes to learning a culture well. Much of cultural stress disappears when a person learns to speak the language. The new worker learns through mistakes, develops a sense of humour, and laughs at himself. When he is able to do this, tensions ease. Communication does not seem as difficult as it once was. Learning cultural cues becomes easier too and more meaningful relationships can develop.

Because language learning is absolutely essential, workers need to be motivated to devote as much time as is needed to complete their language studies. After their formal period of learning, they should persevere to improve their language skills. They should treat language learning as an adventure. Workers learn about themselves through the whole process and become better servants of Christ. Language study is never a wasted pursuit.

Some Asians will face greater stresses than others in language learning. Many Asian workers who do not speak English face a double problem: they have to study both English and the language of their host people. They study English because orientation and language programmes require that they first learn English. Japanese, Koreans, Taiwanese, Indonesians and others have to struggle first with the English language. Many have indeed succeeded in learning English, and speak it well. But when they minister in Asian countries, they are expected to learn the language of their host culture, and to speak it well too.

There are situations where people in a country speak more than one language. For example, Indonesian is widely spoken in Indonesia, but a particular people may have a different mother tongue, like Javanese or Sundanese. People in Central Asia speak Russian and their mother tongue.

There are scores of language groups in South Asia even though each country may have a national language. One question to ask is, "What would be the heart language of the people?"

A missionary friend from Malaysia who served in Taiwan thought he would have no trouble communicating as he knew Mandarin well. But he soon discovered that the Taiwanese had different expressions and a different accent. These differences meant he had to make unexpected adjustments.

Asians who speak English know that English accents differ, which makes communication more difficult. There are huge variations of spoken English! A Singaporean has his own brand of English - termed "Singlish". If he speaks quickly with a staccato accent to a foreigner, the foreigner may think he is hearing a foreign language. This actually happened to an American missionary on his arrival in Singapore. When he first heard Singaporeans and Malaysians speaking, he wondered if they were speaking in their mother tongue. They were actually speaking English with a local accent and understanding one another well.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

DEFENCE MECHANISMS ACCOMPANYING CULTURAL STRESS

People use unconscious adjustment mechanisms to deal with unpleasant emotions and painful experiences. These are called “defence mechanisms,” and they are used for self-protection. Defence mechanisms are neither good nor bad. Unfortunately, most people use them in unhealthy ways in their relationship with others.

Cross-cultural situations can bring severe stresses and threaten our well-being. When we face cultural stress, we can choose to recognise certain symptoms of stress and learn to deal with them accordingly. Under stress, many will choose to use defence mechanisms. However, when defence mechanisms are used repeatedly, we are actually protecting ourselves from facing certain truths about ourselves. In other words, using defence mechanisms can distort reality.

For example, a husband, who saw himself as a highly intelligent scholar, could not accept that his wife had surpassed him in learning the new language. On the other hand, his wife, who always saw herself as socially adaptable, hated making social blunders by missing subtle cultural cues. She realised she had to work hard before she could really feel free and expressive in the new language.

It was easier for the couple to find refuge behind defence mechanisms than to face reality about themselves. But unless both husband and wife faced their inner problems, they would miss the opportunity to accept themselves with reality. “It’s true,” the husband can acknowledge, “I’m slower than my wife in learning the language.” She could say, “I need to study hard and also depend on God to help me understand and love the people no matter what they think of my social adaptability.”

Facing reality, though not easy, will spare us from draining away our energies through efforts to guard some cherished illusion about ourselves. J.B. Phillips sounds a warning note in his translation of 1 John 1:8 that it is possible to live in “a world of illusion” with truth becoming a stranger to us.

A “reality check” frees us to accept ourselves as God has made us. It also helps us accept others and to relate to them. When facing adjustment and change, cross-cultural workers must learn to recognise their use of defence mechanisms. Then they can ask questions such as: “What am I feeling? Why am I using this mechanism?”

If we keep responding to our unpleasant emotions and painful experiences by using defence mechanisms, the mind and body will experience prolonged stress. The resulting emotional and physical damage may be difficult to heal. It is therefore important to recognise stress symptoms early and to deal with the needs and problems behind them.

What are some commonly used defence mechanisms? Five of them are: Denial, Suppression, Projection, Rationalisation, and Withdrawal.

1 DENIAL

By denial, we ignore any unpleasant emotions we are experiencing. Denial keeps us from accepting their reality. The emotions felt are usually too painful and stressful to face or accept.

In the early stages of a cross-cultural assignment, a worker may unconsciously use this mechanism and deny that there is any element of stress. One missionary told me, “This country is just like home. Big buildings, supermarkets ... I’ve hardly noticed any differences.” In actual fact, there were many differences. In contrast, another couple whom I visited during their initial months shared the difficulties they were facing and the cultural adjustments they were learning to make.

A person who denies he is experiencing cultural stress may find himself making comparisons between the new culture and his home culture. These comparisons may have negative connotations, yet he may deny the fact that he is facing tensions. Expressions such as these are common:

“The traffic here is terrible.”

“The water is undrinkable. At home, we drink from the tap.”

“Things are really cheap/expensive here.”

More serious are situations when a worker jokes about the strange patterns of the local people, highlighting their idiosyncrasies and weaknesses, yet denying any hostility towards them. Denial helps him preserve illusions about himself. Facing reality may make him feel unacceptable. Perhaps his denial protects a self-concept that says, “I’m really good at adjusting culturally,” or “I don’t get irritated; I’m spiritual.” Denial gives a person some relief, but it hinders him from understanding his need and dealing with his feelings in a healthy manner.

2 SUPPRESSION

When unpleasant emotions are experienced, we can either express these feelings or consciously suppress them. Putting these thoughts away without dealing with their inner cause will mean storing them up. They will be released some time later in other ways. The unconscious process of storage is termed “repression” by psychologists.

A missionary trainee had faced many relationship and other adjustment problems on the field. When older supervisors tried to help him, he found it difficult to openly share his inner struggles. He would internalise many of his fears and suspicions. When he returned from the field, I had some sessions listening to him. Because I knew him well, he would talk for more than three hours each time. He had suppressed some of these feelings on the field. As he matured, he made progress and now he serves on the field with a responsible occupation and role.

3 PROJECTION

Through projection, we find fault with others. We attribute to them the characteristics that we cannot accept in ourselves. We project attitudes, feelings, weaknesses or failures to others. When blinded from reality, and truth is distorted, we feel justified in criticising others and in taking out our frustrations on them. The person who makes quick judgments or rash criticisms often uses this defence mechanism.

I know an Asian Christian worker who would treat others graciously and politely. On the surface, he would seem to have all the social graces. But he had a volatile temperament. When under stress, he would lose his temper and instead of calmly dealing with the issues at hand, he would lash out at people. He would criticise other workers for some of the attributes seen in his own life.

If a person sees these characteristics and deals with them seriously, there is hope for change. But if he does not recognise his need, then change may be extremely difficult. The person will gradually develop an unforgiving spirit and also miss the joyful experience of being forgiven. Such a person will find himself living in suspicion of people and attacking them in direct or indirect ways. Bitterness not only defiles others, but it is a form of “self-cannibalism” that will ruin a worker’s life and ministry.

Asian cultures are described as “shame” cultures rather than “guilt” cultures. However, both guilt and shame are prevalent in interpersonal relationships. It is common for Asians to take the blame for violating a code of conduct rather than offend someone. Sometimes, a person may put the blame on circumstances rather than embarrass another. People will avoid causing shame or embarrassment to an individual, his family or community in Asian

cultures. We use the term “face-saving”. While the defence mechanism of projection can be used to save face, it nevertheless causes hurt to others.

An American missionary had been invited to pastor an Asian church. A few leading elders in the church did not like his forthright manner of pointing out certain weaknesses in the organisation of the church. They felt he was insensitive to Asian “polite” ways. The congregation, however, affirmed the pastor. The church more than doubled in attendance through the pastor’s excellent teaching ministry.

Sadly, these few elders began to spread criticisms about him because they wanted him to resign. Although the pastor was willing to change, and even asked forgiveness for his abrupt ways, the few elders refused to change their view. Other elders tried to persuade them to be forgiving and invited respected Christian leaders in the country to mediate. The critical elders stuck to their position. In the end, the pastor resigned and the church was split into two camps. Such tragic situations are not uncommon in Christian work. They cause great damage and tremendous hurts that take years to heal.

Is emotional healing possible? Yes, but the deeper the hurts, the longer it takes to complete the process of forgiveness and healing. There are important steps to take. The process begins by placing guilt where it actually belongs.

The natural tendency would be to try and forget the painful experience. For example, in the incident described, those who were hurt might say, “The elders are, after all, good people. Their actions were really not what they meant. We’ll forgive and forget.” Such attitudes excuse the transgressions rather than forgive them. To forgive, those who were hurt need to admit, “The attitudes and actions of the few elders hurt all of us. They were wrong to criticise the American pastor, and wrong not to accept his request for forgiveness. They were wrong to force him to resign.”

After placing guilt where it truly belongs, they can then proceed to forgive the elders by not trying to “punish” them for their wrong-doings. They had a choice to make: whether to forgive or not to forgive. In this case, they chose to forgive.

The next step is to allow God to free them from the painful experiences of the past. Not placing guilt where it belongs can be a cultural weakness. This causes unnecessary stress for Asian cross-cultural workers. As Asians, we need to be responsible when handling such matters and to live in reality. Practising forgiveness is also essential.

4 RATIONALISATION

Sometimes when conflicts arise or when our self-esteem is being threatened, we try to formulate rational causes for our actions or reactions.

Rationalisation helps us to avoid facing the real reasons which are unacceptable to us. It justifies wrong behaviour and we can deceive ourselves often through unrecognised motives.

When I visited a tribal mission field to speak at a missionary conference, I found out that some missionaries believed they should not help local Christians on a personal basis or probe too deeply as the culture required people to be community oriented. I discovered that these missionaries were not developing meaningful relationships with the local people. They had rationalised about the culture to the point that some refused to be relationally close to the people as brothers and sisters in Christ. Meanwhile, the local people were viewing these missionaries as foreigners. Later, some missionaries confessed that they found it emotionally easier to keep a certain distance when relating to the local people.

Rationalisation is a psychological mechanism that helps us to maintain our self-respect and confidence. It serves as a protective means against anxiety or failure. But rationalisation can be harmful when we refuse to take responsibility for our weaknesses. Only when we accept responsibility can we overcome our weaknesses.

5 WITHDRAWAL

The withdrawal mechanism is a means of escape from the pressures of the field. Healthy withdrawal to rest and recuperate is necessary. A missionary once told me that he knew when he needed a break. It was when he wouldn't want to meet with anyone, not even his closest friends, because of fatigue. All he would long for was to be alone and away.

The withdrawal mechanism is unhealthy when we refuse to relate with people. We may substitute other activities instead to compensate for our lack of motivation or feelings of failure. We may spend excessive time reading, indulging in a hobby, listening to music or just sitting at our desk and daydreaming. We also sleep more. If the stress is prolonged, we will try to get away from the scene. Language learners may practise this mechanism just to get some respite. Planned withdrawal on a limited scale can help prevent unhealthy excessive withdrawal.

The "missionary compound" has been a place of refuge for many workers. The compound helps to insulate them from over-interaction with the local people. While like-minded fellowship is necessary, workers must guard against building walls around themselves.

As a young trainee, I remember feeling awkward when Western missionaries met. I noticed that some would talk freely among themselves, ignoring the local people in their company. They were likely unaware that the

locals were feeling uneasy. Such patterns of behaviour prevent the worker from interacting with locals on a deeper level.

If you are facing difficult circumstances, and are tempted to lose heart, please take time to meditate on Romans 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." There is true hope in Christ.

FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Read 1 Kings 19:1-18. What were some symptoms of stress in Elijah's life? What "defence mechanisms" did he use? How did God deal with His servant?
2. What can we learn about stress and its effects from the following passages?
John 16:33
Romans 5:3-5
James 1:2-5

CHAPTER NINETEEN

EMOTIONAL FATIGUE

When stress is prolonged, our faculties can suffer an overload. Emotional fatigue overcomes us. It is essential for workers to recognise the symptoms of overload. Certain symptoms may be peculiar to some and not to others. However, as often is the case with conscientious Christian workers, blind spots are common and the signs of overload are either unrecognised or neglected. As a result, workers have to be laid aside for lengthy periods of time in order to recuperate.

Emotional fatigue does not happen only in cross-cultural situations. Christian workers and leaders in general, who are driven by the ministry, usually experience some degree of fatigue some time during their careers. Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators experienced this fatigue. His wife Lila often had to bear his burdens too.

Case Histories of Two Mission Leaders

DAWSON TROTMAN

When Daws finally recognised he was tired, he was impatient with the fact. He noticed he could not face some of his daily work or go through his mail. The aversion seemed temporary yet deep down was a gnawing realisation he would have to relinquish personal control of some things and delegate them. What taxed him most was counselling and building in the lives of those at the Glen, helping them hurdle major hindrances in becoming fruitful servants of Christ. Alone with Lila in their room one Friday, he fell across the bed sobbing, clear evidence of emotional fatigue. His doctor told him he had narrowly missed nervous collapse and must give up all responsibility for at least a month.¹

J OSWALD SANDERS

When J Oswald Sanders was General Director of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship, he and his wife Edith experienced fatigue. In 1964, both of them faced a period of increased difficulty.² For ten years, Oswald Sanders had been driving himself hard, and Edith had tried to keep pace. Both experienced

1 Betty Lee Skinner (1974), *Daws: The Story of Dawson Trotman*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, page 361.

2 Ron and Gwen Roberts (1989), *To Fight Better*, Great Britain: Highland Books and OMF, pages 136-139.

physical, mental and emotional strain. Oswald had also been troubled by a neurotic condition which affected his heels. This needed surgery. But Edith's health caused the most concern. Oswald had tried to protect her from highly sensitive issues, but because she often acted as his secretary, she would inevitably learn of matters that would distress her. She became exhausted, and was physically and emotionally depleted.

The directors of the mission wisely decreed leave of absence for a few months. Oswald continued his work as General Director, but with Melbourne as a base instead of Singapore. Edith received much help through consultations with a Christian woman psychiatrist. Oswald's health was also restored after two successive operations.

These examples indicate that Christian leaders pay a heavy price for leadership. So do their wives. What happened to these two leaders is not uncommon among leaders who bear the load of their responsibilities.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are some symptoms and reasons for fatigue in the case of Dawson Trotman and Oswald Sanders?
2. What actions did the doctors and directors of the mission take? What do you think might have happened had these two leaders continued in their fatigued condition?

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO FATIGUE

What are some factors that contribute to emotional fatigue?

Carrie Sydnor Coffman, a Christian writer, experienced extreme fatigue after a four-year assignment in Malaysia. Later, she did some research. She interviewed Navigator workers who had undergone exhaustion. In her publication, she enumerates various factors that caused emotional fatigue.³

Here is a summary:

- Commitment to others' needs but little attention to one's own personal needs
- Inadequate vacations, no weekly off days, little recreation, not knowing how to relax
- Unrealistic workload, inaccurate estimation of one's capacity, not heeding the warnings of others

³ Carrie Sydnor Coffman (1997), *Weary Warriors: Lessons from Christian Workers Who Burned Out*, 3rd Edition, Norman OK, Apples of Gold.

- Pressures as a result of tense relationships, lack of support from leader, emotionally draining circumstances
- Over-conscientious attempts by both men and women workers to please leaders and their demands
- Feeling inferior, temperament
- Unclear job expectations

SYMPTOMS OF FATIGUE

Carrie Coffman records the symptoms which were shown by those experiencing emotional fatigue. The following were commonly displayed.

- Lack of interest and loss of motivation for the ministry and meeting people
- Depression for a period of time
- Spiritual dryness
- Inability to perform normal tasks
- Difficulty sleeping, trouble with nerves, excessive tiredness
- Physical problems such as chest constriction, headaches, migraines, muscle tension in various parts of the body, knotted muscles, a choking sensation, irregular heart beats, tongue and mouth pains, loss of appetite
- Overly sensitive emotions and uncontrollable tears
- Warped perspective

The recovery period for these fatigued workers took three months for one person and as long as seven years for another. They all had learned valuable lessons. There is hope. The next chapter deals with stress prevention.

SUMMARY of chapters 17 to 19

All cross-cultural workers will face stresses. There are generally two kinds of cultural stress. The first is "culture shock" which is experienced with the loss of familiar cues. The second, more difficult to handle, involves lifestyle and relationships. It encompasses values and attitudes to which the worker must adjust in his new cultural environment. Some major areas are personal privacy, time and efficiency, money and amenities and environment and health. Those who have to learn a difficult language will experience language stress as they will feel helpless without being able to communicate.

Defence mechanisms are common human responses to unpleasant experiences. When cross-cultural workers experience stress, they will often unconsciously use different defence mechanisms to help them relate to people and circumstances. When defence mechanisms are overused over a prolonged

period, their overuse could cause serious physical and emotional damage which may be difficult to heal. Defence mechanisms can cause inner conflicts to be stored away.

Emotional fatigue is the result of many contributing factors. The cross-cultural worker can avoid prolonged stress and prevent emotional fatigue by recognising these factors and other symptoms.

FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Discuss how attitudes can increase or decrease stress. From the passages listed, what attitudes are definite hindrances to a person's own growth and relationships?

Matthew 5:22-24

Matthew 6:14, 15

Matthew 7:1-5

Ephesians 4:31

Hebrews 12:15

Discuss how these attitudes affect both a person's relationship with others and his own personal well being. How can the believer overcome these attitudes?

2. What major areas of stress will a cross-cultural worker going to a difficult field encounter? How should he or she prepare for these unavoidable stresses?

3. When does stress become dangerous? What would be some possible symptoms of extreme fatigue?

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE PREVENTION OF STRESS

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters dealt mainly with the symptoms of stress and fatigue, as well as various defence mechanisms used by those who experience stress. When stress is prolonged, the outcome can be extremely serious. Illnesses may continue until the real sources of stress are known and dealt with. Stress-related illnesses are difficult to heal even with continuous medical care and treatment.

Prevention is better than cure. All cross-cultural workers need to take preventive steps. The proposals in this chapter deal with building physical resources, learning to know ourselves and our personalities, and handling emotions and attitudes. It also deals with self-esteem factors, building healthy interpersonal relationships and drawing from our spiritual resources. Pastoral care is also essential for cross-cultural workers.

BUILDING PHYSICAL RESOURCES

Stress prevention begins with taking care of our bodies and building our physical resources. This may sound like commonsense, but many Christian workers do not watch their diet, neglect taking regular exercise, and do not take adequate rest breaks.

1 Diet

Balanced and nutritious meals are especially important in stressful cross-cultural situations. Wise dietary patterns can increase our ability to handle stress.

A good diet includes plenty of fresh green vegetables and fruit, dairy products, whole grains, lean fish and poultry. Because the body uses more protein during stress, eating meat, eggs or dairy products can supply what is needed. In certain parts of Asia, soya bean or “dhal” (legumes) with our rice provides the protein needed. A missionary friend, realising that the normal diet of the people was not adequate for him, would supplement his local diet with milk and with yoghurt made locally.

My wife, in a Bible study on nutrition, discovered how God provided bread and water for Elijah when he was under severe stress. Evidently after a second meal, he was greatly strengthened and he was able to travel for forty days and nights.

In an earlier episode, God also provided food for Elijah through ravens bringing bread and meat in the morning and evening, and Elijah drank water from a brook. Later, a widow provided bread for him (1 Kings 19:5-8; 17:1-16).

Jesus ate broiled fish, bread and figs, and asked for a drink of water when He was thirsty. The disciples picked heads of grain (John 21:9-13; John 4:7; Matthew 21:18,19; Mark 2:23).

2 Exercise

Regular exercise is excellent as a stress reducer. Walking, swimming, jogging and cycling are all healthy forms of exercise. Brisk walking for thirty minutes or jogging for twenty minutes three or four times a week is adequate. Strength training exercises with weights are beneficial too for strengthening muscles. One does not need to buy expensive equipment. Place bricks in plastic bags instead of buying expensive weights.

It is wise for those who have been sedentary for some time to consult a doctor before launching on an exercise programme.

3 Sleep and Rest

As one who does not sleep easily, I need rest breaks in order to function normally. Taking a day off a week, and occasional rest breaks to revitalise our bodies and minds will help us to “stay on top”.

A woman worker experiencing emotional fatigue went to bed at 9 pm and slept for nine hours each night. She felt she could have slept longer during her recovery period. Although she continued working for forty hours a week, she stopped overtime work and all ministry activity. She took two years to resume a normal life.

One mission agency recommends that in the early years of cultural adjustments, workers should take afternoon naps and sleep more.

Years ago, I was grateful that a visiting colleague encouraged my supervisor to include a two-week vacation each year in my job description. After twelve years of missionary work, my wife and I took our first two-week holiday. It was a new experience for us. Since then, as we have grown older, we know that it takes at least the first week to unwind before we can begin to benefit from a holiday that is meant to renew our strength.

4 Pacing and Planning

All Christian workers must learn to pace themselves well. This means wise planning of priorities. God wants us to live purposefully under Christ's Lordship.

It is possible for Christian workers to be involved with a host of seemingly good activities and still wonder why there seems to be a lack of purpose. When Saul of Tarsus met the Lord, he asked two pertinent questions: "Who are you, Lord?" and "What shall I do, Lord?" The first question deals with purpose, while the second with objectives and activities.

Some Christian workers behave like business executives, whose lives revolve around corporate business objectives and activities. They grow weary just trying to meet their objectives and activities. Let us be sure we have our focus where it should be. Let us first establish our purpose to know Christ deeply. We can then proceed to wise planning of His priorities for us.

Prayerful planning will lead to lives that are rightly focussed. Taking a day off each month for prayerful reflection and planning will provide fresh perspective for the worker. It is also wise to spend some time each day to think through and pray over the activities of the day and then reflect over these at the end of the day with thanksgiving.

A field supervisor was heading towards emotional fatigue and decided to take three months off. He realised he was following dangerous patterns. He has since learned to pace himself. The difference, he testifies, is the fewer burdens he carries and a clearer focus on the priorities he chooses.

LEARNING TO KNOW OURSELVES

Because different people have different symptoms and particular circumstances which cause stress, it is needful for each person to learn to know himself. Questions such as these would be helpful:

What aspects of my personality make me stress prone?

What are my early signs of stress?

What "self-esteem" problems and false thoughts about me add to stress?

How do I use the various defence mechanisms?

What particular circumstances cause stress?

Knowing ourselves can greatly help in preventing stress overloads in our lives. We need to know our strengths and our weaknesses, our abilities and our limitations. It is important too that we accept the facts about ourselves. This acceptance does not mean that we approve everything about ourselves. Our self-acceptance means that we admit that we are a particular kind of person, admirable in some ways but not in others.

To learn about ourselves and our personalities is not always easy. We need to be honest with ourselves. Psalm 139 tells us that only God knows us through and through, and in detail. The more we know about ourselves, the more we can prayerfully deal with aspects of our lives that need changing. We must also be realistic about our limitations, recognising our humanity.

With God's help and increasing insight, qualities of life that hinder our growth in Christlike character can be dealt with. However, some of our weaknesses will not be totally eradicated. With God's enabling power, they can be checked and controlled. Later in this chapter is a Personality Assessment exercise for cross-cultural workers. It is designed to help the candidate in his or her adjustments to a new culture. In relation to stress, certain aspects of our personality make us more stress prone. We need to recognise these. Learning about ourselves can help us deal with situations in the areas of our emotions and attitudes, and our self-esteem.

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

HANDLING OUR EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDES

Stressful situations can happen unexpectedly on the mission field. We can minimise the intensity of stress by learning to handle our emotions and attitudes. In fact, stress can even work for us, instead of against us.

To minimise our stress, we can avoid situations that are likely to produce undesirable responses. We can also remove ourselves from stressful situations. At other times, avoidance or retreat is not wise.

Frustrations are common on the mission field. The extreme summer heat can frustrate us. The traffic can be frustrating. The long waits at public or airline offices can be unbearable. Feelings of annoyance and anger may surface when we face some situation that frustrates us. Our negative emotions need to be released safely. People, who need an outlet for their frustrations, may release their emotions in various ways.

A frustrated missionary wife once stormed out of her home. She jumped into a passing trishaw and asked the driver to take her on a ride around the block. The surprised driver obediently followed her instructions and received his payment. She returned to the house feeling much better!

Hidden feelings of hostility which have not been dealt with can cause greater stress. These feelings will spill out on others sooner or later. Hurts can be handled effectively if we acknowledge them.

Fears or phobias are also not unusual on the field. We may fear crowds or strangers; we may fear animals and creatures or we may fear dirt, germs and contamination. Fears are not always bad. They can make us more alert, sensitive and perceptive. They make us more prepared to meet crises. However, they become abnormal when their intensity and character are out of proportion to the dangers encountered.

When fears cause deep anxieties, they need to be addressed rationally. Trying to deny them will not help.

Learning to change our thought patterns can alter seemingly negative situations to positive ones. We can choose our own attitudes. Scripture encourages a host of good attitudes. Here are some of them:

- Acceptance of circumstances, of people and of ourselves without judgment or blame.
- Thanksgiving in all things, trusting God's control and care when circumstances are difficult or unexplainable.
- Courage to take the first step when change is needed.
- Wholeheartedness in our work.

Choosing the right attitude will change our response to people or circumstances.

Ruth Myers¹ has a three point outline, "A-R-T" that is helpful in handling our emotions.

A - Acknowledge the fact that you are experiencing the emotion.

R - Reject the false thoughts that fuel the emotion.

T - Think the truth. Replace the false thoughts with true ones that have a positive effect on your emotions. Doing this with a verse or phrase of Scripture will strengthen the truth.

In other words, this is what we should do when we sin:

- We acknowledge and confess, "Lord, this is sin."
- We reject the wrong, "I repent and turn away."
- We think the truth, thanking God for forgiveness as promised in 1 John 1:9.

When confessing sin, we should not only acknowledge the obvious sin (like an outburst of anger) but also the emotions we felt and the negative thoughts. Behind negative emotions, we can often find some specific problem that relates to our self-image. For example, behind the angry outburst may be this thought – "You've made me feel I am nothing, and I'll teach you not to do that to me again."

One missionary wife had to be especially alert to anxiety in her life. When she notices she is anxious, she can often trace her anxiety back to finding self-esteem in her performance. She feels anxious about how well she is doing as a wife, as a mother, as a counsellor or simply as a Christian. When she detects the inner cause, she confesses to the Lord that she has sinned by basing her confidence on something other than Him. Then she looks in the mirror of God's unchanging love and acceptance and her anxiety melts away. As a result, she feels less strain in her life, though circumstances have not changed in the least.

It is important for us to deal with our hidden anxieties and conflicts. We may use defence mechanisms to ward off threats to our self-esteem. We may repeatedly use certain mechanisms to protect ourselves from feeling inadequate or unacceptable, or to present an acceptable image of ourselves to others. Our stubborn refusal, to face up to who we really are, will hinder our self-discovery

1 How to Handle Stress, an unpublished paper by Ruth Myers.

and the opportunity to grow.

Unresolved conflicts will lead to prolonged emotional fatigue. The distortion of reality about our selves also prevents the Holy Spirit's work to heal our emotions. Practising "A-R-T" enables us to think the truth about ourselves and to replace false thoughts with true ones. When we allow the Holy Spirit to heal our emotions and change our lives, we will grow in Christlikeness.

Because our self-esteem affects how we handle the stresses we face, we need to look into it more closely.

SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem, self-worth, self-image and self-concept are terms used interchangeably for how people view themselves - how they see themselves. The concept describes a personal judgment of one's worth based on input received since childhood especially from one's parents and family.

According to research, those with low self-esteem are usually more easily anxious, discouraged, depressed, more fearful of displeasing others, less adaptable and insecure about relationships. They have problems related to self-identity. They are also more prone to stress and less able to cope with it. Sometimes people with an excessively high self-esteem may mask a very low self-image hidden below all the layers of false superiority. Such people are also prone to stress.

In contrast, those with a healthy high self-esteem are less dependent on situational factors and are better able to cope with stress. Such persons can think more clearly, focus on definite goals and tasks and function more competently with greater emotional stability.

When a person becomes a Christian, it is important that the individual understands the biblical teaching on the subject. A person with low self-esteem may be inclined to keep thinking of himself or herself as a "worthless" sinner.

Jesus taught the value of humans when He spoke about life's anxieties. "Look at the birds ... your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26). Jesus spoke of the value of the human soul when He said, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36).

The tremendous cost of our redemption points to the worth of the human soul. John Stott points out that the cross of Jesus Christ shows that we are of great worth.² It also should evoke a response of unworthiness on our part. That God should *choose* to send His Son to die for our sins shows that we are of great worth. That He should *need* to send His Son shows that we are unworthy.

2 John Stott (1984), "Am I Supposed to Love Myself or Hate Myself, in Christianity Today, April 20, 1984, pages 26-28.

We are unworthy, but we are not worthless. We are unworthy because we are sinners. We are depraved, deceitful and corrupt. We are of worth because we are created in the image of God and redeemed by Christ. Creation and redemption both point to our worth. Creation is the ground of our worth, and redemption is the evidence. Jesus took our unworthiness upon Himself and gave us His worth. Now we are made worthy before God. We were “unprofitable” before (Romans 3:12) but now “profitable”. That’s why we worship God. We have come to know the great mercy and grace of our holy God.

GOD’S GRACE AND OUR SELF-ESTEEM

An understanding of the grace of God is essential to a balanced view of ourselves. Our view of self must be rooted in the grace of God, that is, God’s unmerited favour.

God’s grace shows that we are of value, not because of what we do. We are, as it were, worth saving. God’s grace also shows we are unworthy and undeserving. If we deserve salvation, then salvation is by works (what we do), and grace is unnecessary. This leads to pride according to Ephesians 2:8, 9. When we understand that grace is necessary, it leads to true humility.

We certainly do not deserve God’s pardoning love seen on the cross. There is no room for human pride, which is always a false pride. Salvation is wholly of grace. Grace makes us fall before God in humble gratitude. We rise up before Him with full confidence that we are important to Him. We now live for His glory and serve others with true humility.

While we should encourage high self-esteem, the way we think about self must always be rooted in the experience of God’s grace. It is God’s grace that is sufficient for all our inadequacies and needs. Because of who we are in Christ, our lives will then be characterised by true humility, honesty and courage, contentment and empathy for others.

CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

SELF ASSESSMENT

Paul's admonition in Romans 12:3 is for Christians to think of themselves "with sober judgment" - that is, with sound mind or realistically. In Galatians 6:3, 4 Paul further states "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to somebody else." This "pride" coupled with true humility enables us to view ourselves realistically and to serve others to the glory of God.

Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:3 (*italics mine*) has been translated in a variety of ways. J B Phillips states, "Don't cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a *sane estimate* of your capabilities by the light of the faith that God has given to you all". Kenneth Wuest uses the phrase "*sensible appraisal*". The New Living Translation says, "*Be honest in your evaluation of yourself*". The New International Version is more literal - "Think of yourself *with sober judgment*." These expressions speak of how we are to assess ourselves.

A young Asian doctor was preparing for missionary service. He was asked to complete an evaluation form, which included assessments on his gifts and strengths, and aspects of his personality. He rated himself abnormally low on most areas. He did not think he had achieved much. Some of his co-labourers who knew him well were also asked to assess him in these areas. They rated him far more highly. Strange as it may seem for someone of his profession, this medical doctor had a problem of self-esteem. He had a low estimate of himself. Part of it may have come from his background.

Some Christians would view any high rating of self as pride. Indeed, a self-centred pride is condemned in Scripture. The solution however is not in self-condemnation. This is because self-condemnation or self-disparagement (sometimes linked with an inferiority complex) can be just as self-centred. Self-condemnation or abnormal self-depreciation is false humility.

C S Lewis wisely writes, "Pleasure in being praised is not Pride ... The saved soul to whom Christ says 'Well done', (is) pleased and ought to be. For here the pleasure lies not in what you are but in the fact that you have pleased someone you wanted (and rightly wanted) to please. The trouble begins when you pass from thinking, 'I have pleased him; all is well,' to thinking, 'What a fine person I must be to have done it'."¹

1 C.S. Lewis (1958), *Mere Christianity*, New York: Macmillan, page 97.

Closely related to the joy of receiving praise is the expression of one's thankfulness. Personally, I have learned precious lessons from my wife concerning a thankful spirit. She constantly expresses her gratitude in spontaneous ways. She has taught me the importance of expressing thanks as well as the receiving of thanks. Thanksgiving should characterise our lives. Verbal expressions of thanks should be encouraged. Thanksgiving enables a person to overcome the inner tensions which stress brings.

In an Asian culture, thanksgiving is an important trait. It is often shown by the giving and receiving of gifts. Asians have polite ways of showing gratitude that may be misunderstood by others as false humility. All of us need to learn to receive gratitude and to express gratitude humbly and honestly.

We also need to receive with gratitude the gifts and abilities that God has blessed us with, and use them for the building up of others. We need to have a sane estimate of these abilities and develop and use them for God's glory.

HANDLING WEAKNESSES AND LIMITATIONS

Our weaknesses and limitations should cause us to lean more dependently on God and to take strength from His grace each day. Some friends who attended a seminar were encouraged by this statement - "Please be patient with me. God is not finished with me yet!"

Like Paul who experienced weaknesses, we need to learn the lessons of God's sufficient grace throughout our lives. God's grace is sufficient to meet our inadequacies and limitations.

For those with a low self-esteem, the following exercise may be helpful. It was proposed by Ruth Myers in a seminar on stress.

1. Write down the things which you feel about yourself. Write them down whether you think they are true or not. For example,

I am not:	well-educated
	outgoing
	comfortable with people ...
or I am:	too emotional
	too rigid
	always dependent on people ...

2. Prayerfully ask God to show you where your view of yourself would have distorted the facts. God's grace is also sufficient to meet all your inner needs.

3. Examine your feelings and unmet needs. Write them down.

I need to feel loved

I need others to express their appreciation

I need to stop blaming myself ...

When your basic needs are unmet, especially the need to be loved and to be able to love others, then other needs become excessive. You will try to meet these in unrealistic or demanding ways.

4. Pray over your list. You may also need to share your feelings with a mature godly person who can help you.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

ASSESSING PERSONALITY

Personality assessment can help Christian workers understand themselves. They can determine which aspects of their personality need growth and change. With increased understanding and motivation, workers can learn to develop their strengths and minimise weaknesses.

In relation to cross-cultural stress, workers need to know how their personalities affect their responses, their use of defence mechanisms, and their efforts to adjust to the environment, to people and to tasks. This knowledge will help them handle stressful situations better.

There are various kinds of personality tests. But there is no perfect assessment system for the totality of human personality. The more helpful ones would show how aspects of our personality affect our sources of emotional satisfaction, our degree of sensitivity to people, our environment, our work, our ease in adapting to social relationships and changing circumstances.

A PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

In the following personality assessment system, we can measure three aspects of personality. This system has been used by cross-cultural candidates for self assessment.

Husbands and wives have found it helpful to discuss each other's traits. Field supervisors have also assisted in discussions related to cross-cultural adjustments and stresses that may be experienced according to different personality traits.

Those who assess themselves or others should avoid the dogmatic categorising of one another. We cannot easily deduce accurate knowledge of ourselves and others, even with input from the people concerned. During assessment, we should avoid making moral judgments which congratulate or condemn traits. We should be careful not to attach moral value to psychological factors.

Assessments should be made prayerfully in dependence on the Holy Spirit. Honest communication is also important. After personal study and thought, husbands and wives or close friends could assess each other's

personality traits. They could use these descriptions to share how each person seems to fit these various categories.

The cross-cultural candidate could use a scale from 1 to 10 to show how strong (or intense or true) a trait in each category seems to be in his or her life; with 10 being the most intense, 5 being average, and 1 being the least. Rating each point will give a better overall view of our personalities. In each chart, each aspect will have sub-points to clarify.

I SOURCE OF BASIC EMOTIONAL SATISFACTION

The first aspect describes the intensity of one's natural emotional need for other people. It determines whether a person's emotional satisfaction is derived from within oneself (INTERNAL), or whether a person's emotional satisfaction is derived from relationships with others (EXTERNAL).

INTERNAL

Finds satisfaction within oneself, does not need people around
 Stressful when people seek interaction
 Tendency to withdraw
 Tendency to blame oneself when things go wrong

EXTERNAL

Finds satisfaction in relating to others, needs people around
 Stressful when no people around for interaction
 Initiates interaction
 Tendency to blame others or organisation when things go wrong

Please note that this first aspect does not describe an introvert or an extrovert. It deals with a person's basic source of emotional satisfaction. The "internal" person finds his basic emotional satisfaction within himself, relating to his own inner thoughts and feelings. The "external" person finds emotional satisfaction in relating to other people and has a more intense need for others.

The person who does not need people around for his basic emotional satisfaction may find it more stressful to be around people who seek interaction. He will try to withdraw from them. If he lacks emotional maturity, he will be tempted to blame himself should things go wrong. In times of stress, this person needs healthy withdrawal for some time to be alone.

On the other hand, the person who finds emotional satisfaction in relating to others will normally initiate relationships. If he is confined to tasks without people around him, he may battle inner stresses and become depressed. If he

lacks emotional maturity, he will usually blame others or his organisation if things go wrong. For times of withdrawal to recharge his energies, he prefers to do things with other people.

The cross-cultural worker who assesses himself or herself may conclude: "At this point, I feel I am about 2 in intensity in seeking satisfaction from within myself (INTERNAL) and about 8 in my need for others (EXTERNAL)." In this case, it is perfectly natural to seek opportunities for interaction.

If a person finds he is more internal and has the tendency to self-blame, he can be easily guilt-ridden when there are conflicts. All of this can cause physical symptoms of stress. He needs to take strength from the grace of God and see himself as an acceptable person in God's sight.

II SENSITIVITY TO ENVIRONMENT, TASKS AND RELATIONSHIPS

The second aspect assesses the degree of sensitivity to environment, tasks and relationships. It describes a person's sensitivity to stimuli and the manner of handling tasks and personal relationships. It determines whether a person is more FLEXIBLE and insightful in handling tasks and relationships, or whether a person is more STRUCTURED and logically organised.

FLEXIBLE

Sensitive to environmental "stimuli", to verbal and non-verbal expressions
 Insightful and creative, not naturally organised
 Warm emotionally, more easily distracted
 Discerns needs of people
 May be easily hurt by reactions of others

STRUCTURED

Receives less "stimuli", insensitive to less verbal and non-verbal expressions
 Organised, logical approach to tasks and people
 Rigid in thinking, better focus of attention
 Insensitive in reading and discerning inner needs of people
 Stressed by anything out of routine

In this second aspect of personality, a person assesses his degree of sensitivity to stimuli in his environment, to tasks in his work and to people. He tries to discern how flexible he is, or how structured he is.

The flexible person is naturally sensitive to receiving stimuli from his environment. He reads both verbal and non-verbal expressions. He is aware of subtle distinctions and variations and reactions. He absorbs many impressions simultaneously and is less able to categorise them logically. Therefore it is difficult for him to be organised.

The flexible person is insightful and creative with natural counselling ability. His insights concerning people and relationships are often more accurate than the organised conclusion of the structured person. He is also warm emotionally. This does not mean he is more relationship oriented than the structured person. But he is able to establish understanding relationships more quickly and easily. He is also able to adapt to changing situations. Nevertheless, being sensitive to every stimulus, he can be more easily distracted. He can also be more easily hurt by the reactions of others.

The structured person is less sensitive, receiving fewer stimuli from his environment. He is gifted at being organised. He looks at tasks and people in a logical way. He tends to be precise. If extremely structured, he can be rigid and unbending in his plans and preferences.

He has a better focus of attention than the flexible person, finding it easier to concentrate on a task without distraction. Because he is less sensitive to stimuli, he sees less especially in terms of people's feelings and needs. He may sometimes miss factors needed for wise decisions. He may experience stress in decision-making and is especially fearful of taking risks. Feelings of inadequacy may also create inner tensions and stresses. It is also harder for the structured person to adopt the attitude "Not wrong but different" in a new cultural situation.

In adapting to most Asian cultures, the structured person should expect to have adjustment problems to time values, concepts of efficiency, environmental and health and cultural stress in general.

III SOCIAL EASE AND VERSATILITY

The third aspect is social ease and versatility. It describes a person's ease in relating socially and adaptability in playing different roles in social situations. It also reveals the person's capacity for casual or deeper relationships. It determines whether a person is naturally ADAPTABLE in changing roles expected in social situations or whether the person is UNIFORM in social relationships.

ADAPTABLE

Adapts easily to roles expected

Socially sensitive and versatile

At ease in unfamiliar, casual or impersonal social situations

Uncomfortable with deeper relationships

Stressful at gatherings demanding deeper interaction

UNIFORM

Plays same role regardless of situation

Learns social acceptability by trial and error rather than quick perception

Uncomfortable in unfamiliar social situations

Comfortable with known relationships and capable of deep relationships

Stressful at gatherings with new people

In this third basic aspect of personality, a person assesses his ease and versatility in social situations. It determines whether he is adaptable and can naturally play different roles, or whether he is uniform and plays one role regardless of the situation.

The adaptable person is socially sensitive and versatile. It is easy for him to play a number of roles skilfully, sensing what is acceptable. He has an inherent social appeal, and, on a superficial level, creates a favourable impression. He is at ease in unfamiliar situations where relationships remain casual. He is uncomfortable, however, when interaction shifts to a deeper level.

The cross-cultural Christian worker who is adaptable must be able to proceed beyond this superficial, partial contact with people to become more deeply involved. People will not respond on a meaningful level if he does not hold back on his superficial relating. He may need to make a significant compensation and take more time for a few close relationships. He himself needs the stability of close relationships with at least a few people.

The uniform person plays the same role, and lacks the sense of what is right socially. He gradually learns through trial and error. Therefore he feels more comfortable in familiar social situations and in smaller settings with known people. New social situations are taxing for uniform persons. In a cross-cultural situation, the person will miss cultural cues. He will remain his own self gravitating to people like himself. He will take longer to adjust to a new culture as he will have to work harder at becoming familiar with it. If he is one who tends to withdraw from people, he will have to consciously guard against the use of this defence mechanism. He should only use it occasionally when needed.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Knowing one’s personality can help the worker in the prevention of cross-cultural stress. Personality assessments should be conducted by the cross-cultural candidate, his or her spouse and preferably a close friend. Then the field supervisor or counsellor should discuss the assessments together.

The following applications (the Personality Assessment sheet can also be used for prayer purposes) can then be made:

PERSONALITY ASSESSMENT

(Insights from personal reflection, counsel and discussion)

General Observations	Strengths to utilise
	<u>Patterns to Modify</u>
	<u>Reasons for change</u> (include Scriptures)
	<u>Practical Steps</u>

Learning about ourselves is a lifelong process. As we grow older in years and also in spiritual and emotional maturity, strengths can be developed and weaknesses can be increasingly minimised. Other aspects of our personality can be brought into more ideal balance. This happens as we learn to make adjustments and compensations along the way. Behaviour patterns and changes can be made.

*"O LORD, you have searched me and you know me ...
For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you
because I am fearfully and wonderfully made ...
Search me, O God, and know my heart.
Test me and know my anxious thoughts.
See if there is any offensive way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting."*

Psalm 139:1, 13, 14, 23, 24

CHAPTER TWENTY FOUR

BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships with people can be a major source of stress. As a young missionary trainee, I had observed the tensions between missionaries – between leaders and subordinates, between missionaries and local leaders, between co-labourers on the same team.

One major cause for the premature return of missionaries to their homeland is related to interpersonal problems. These problems can erupt at any phase of a work.

In one field, an Asian missionary found it difficult to communicate with his field leader. He felt his leader should promote the views of national leaders, but the leader would not listen to him. His leader, a godly and sensitive person, found that the missionary was not particularly teachable in certain ministry directions. Soon they could not communicate. Among Asians, confrontation is not considered a virtue. Sadly, their strained relationship continued for more than ten years. Other members of the team noticed the tension that existed. But they overlooked the problems because they felt that showed loyalty to the leader and to fellow team members. Team morale and spirit weakened as a result. Only years later did another supervisor notice these tensions and take the time to resolve the strains.

Disagreements on the field are not uncommon, and they need to be resolved as speedily as possible. The example in Scripture of Paul and Barnabas indicates that disputes can be sharp (Acts 15:36-40). Solutions may not always be ideal, but parties involved need to meet together and resolve conflicts.

In an Asian setting, direct confrontation between parties may not always be the best way. Usually a neutral person, preferably an older godly man who is respected by the Christian community, can be called upon to mediate. An amicable atmosphere needs to prevail and times of prayer are essential.

Having been involved in many situations where conflicts have had to be resolved, I have learned that it takes a process of time, hard work and prayer for reconciliation to be complete, and harmony to be restored. Occasionally, a conflict may never be fully resolved.

Whatever the degree of conflict or problem, forgiveness must be practised. To forgive someone does not mean admission of a wrong or agreement of an issue. It means that you acknowledge that the other party had to bear a measure of pain on account of the conflict. You want him or her to be free from any resentment that may have resulted. You want relationships to be restored in Christ. Each party should make the decision to forgive and to communicate forgiveness. This act of love in action neutralises feelings of resentment. Needless to say, situations of this nature are extremely stressful, especially when the people concerned are mature co-labourers.

Conflicts causing interpersonal tensions may not necessarily be spiritual in nature. There are problems related to organisational matters. It is important to discern the difference.

When conflicts are not resolved, they can develop into deeper problems causing heartache and bitterness. A critical and bitter spirit will be detrimental to the missionary effort. It can ultimately ruin the life and testimony of the person harbouring such an attitude.

Scripture is rich with passages on relationships. A Bible study on this subject would be profitable for all workers. Qualities of love and humility are to be practically applied with the constant awareness of one's own human fallibility. Our prayer life must be a continual priority. We should pray for others and together with others. Specific praying will lessen stresses and tensions. Growing in loving honesty and openness will help resolve many of the conflicts that threaten to hinder God's work.

RELATING TO OTHERS CONSTRUCTIVELY

Together with love and humility, we need to develop skills that will help us relate to people in a constructive manner.

When under stress, it is easy to lose self-control and respond critically and bluntly to others. Some of us can be negatively direct and cause communication to cease. Husbands and wives know such situations well, and so do friends and co-labourers. Everybody has a "boundary of respect" which if violated by unkind remarks or pressurising questions will add to the strains of relating and communicating. People need a degree of emotional privacy. If a friend or husband or wife tries to force a person to share when he or she is not ready, this will cause the person to further distance himself or herself.

In Asia, most people do not appreciate total frankness. Western "openness" in sharing can be a stumbling block if done indiscreetly.

Some Asians laugh at others for their idiosyncrasies or their appearances. This can also be harmful. A sense of humour is a good thing, but jesting at others may be destructive.

We need to develop constructive habits and responses that communicate respect. Sensitivity to verbal reactions and non-verbal signals can enable us to relate positively. When people are discouraged, we should avoid giving lectures. We should recognise their need is simply for someone to listen in sympathy. Encouraging words can strengthen and reassure. We don't need to give our opinions, approval or disapproval. We should develop the habit of giving a non-judgmental response.

The Book of Proverbs has much to say about wisdom and right words. It also encourages us to find friends who can help us in practical ways (Proverbs 17:17; 27:6). We can ask such a friend, "Please tell me how I can improve our relationship. Are there things I say and do which make it more difficult for you to relate to me?" Thank God for such friends!

DRAWING FROM OUR SPIRITUAL RESOURCES

With the constant demands of the ministry, Christian workers may find themselves giving more attention to the work of the kingdom than to the King Himself. When worship is neglected, our inner resources become depleted.

Because we are engaged in spiritual warfare, our enemy exploits every weakness to his advantage. Our lack of fellowship with God makes us vulnerable to Satan's attacks. James strongly exhorts us to resist the enemy. Humble submission to God and drawing near to Him will enable us to experience God's grace which He gives lavishly (James 4:6-8). James mentions the characteristics of wisdom when we need it (James 1:5), wisdom that is "first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:17).

In stress prevention, our daily fellowship with God is most important. Our Lord Himself, in the midst of a busy ministry, gave constant attention to prayer. He often withdrew to solitary places for these special moments (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). We need to do the same.

The fundamental answer to the problem of stress is found in our personal inner focus on the triune God Himself. No one finds rest until they have found it in Him. We focus on knowing God, reverencing and loving Him, trusting and obeying Him, looking to Jesus Christ, setting our minds on the things of the Spirit and living in the Spirit.

The more God occupies our hearts and minds, the less will be our stress.

When the disciples experienced a storm, they were filled with fear even though Jesus was with them. They had to change their focus from the storm to the Lord Himself, the Controller of the winds and waves. Only then could they experience His "Peace, be still!"

True rest is found in Christ (Matthew 11:28, 29). True rest is not a rest from normal work or activity, but rest *in the midst* of work and its pressures. This is because, in Christ, all our faculties and affections find true satisfaction.

Human therapists recommend various techniques to calm the mind. We should note that some of them are good, while others are dangerous. God has already provided His therapy, His "means of grace". Most indispensable is our daily fellowship with Him through the Scriptures and through prayer. The Holy Spirit often brings to mind phrases or verses of Scripture, especially those we have meditated upon and memorised. We can also bring these verses to mind at any time - even during the hours of the night, and learn to commune with God.

Worshipping God and His attributes enables us to experience them in our lives. We can experience His power, His wisdom, His holiness and His love. Our hearts and minds are illumined to experience His sovereign control over circumstances and our lives. God draws near to us and His loving care for us can be a constant reality.

It is dangerously easy to rely on our own strength. It takes no effort to do so. When our times with God become sporadic, when we neglect our intake of His Word, we only add to our stresses and burdens. We can try to come up with our own ideas and plans to meet our needs or solve our problems. But trying on our own will only take care of our problems temporarily or peripherally.

We need to set aside and schedule times to meet with God. Our fellowship with Him should never be rushed if it is to be meaningful. Hard-driving people and cross-cultural workers need to learn to calmly and quietly wait on God.

Answers to our pressures and problems do not always come quickly. God's ways and timing are different from ours. We must learn perseverance in prayer and our faith is stretched during times of waiting. God's presence and person becomes real in times of seeming darkness. His ways of developing our character and deepening our lives are usually not the ways we would choose. God alone knows us through and through and will do what is best for us.

As I write this chapter, I am learning to wait on God. Isaiah 30:15-21 is a passage that has encouraged me. Four words stand out: REPENTANCE and REST ... in QUIETNESS and TRUST.

In the passage, God's people refused to obey. They experienced terrible defeat. God impressed upon me that His solution to my pressures and problems

first comes with *repentance*. I must put aside the props on which I rely. He is also showing me areas in my life that need changing. This must be done with the enabling of the Spirit. The next step is *rest*; that is, to calmly wait on Him. This takes prayerful reflection and then applying to my situation what He brings to mind. Writing down applications has helped me persevere in prayer.

Two more words describe this period of rest: *quietness* speaks of my attitude of heart, and *trust* speaks of my confidence that God is in control of my life. This exercise may seem to be passive but God says it actually is strength. The passage goes on to assure that through the pressures and affliction we have been facing, God will be gracious and provide fresh direction which we need. He is absolutely trustworthy. Blessed are those who wait on Him!

PASTORAL CARE OF WORKERS

Mission work is costly. When workers have to return from the field prematurely, both they and the mission agency they represent pay a heavy price. In Chapter 12, the costs were enumerated to emphasise the need for careful assessment and selection of cross-cultural candidates and tentmakers.

Workers need preparation and orientation before they leave for the field. They need ongoing care and supervision when they minister on the field. They need adequate support when they return from the field and face the stress of re-entry. Good mission agencies will manage all these phases of the worker's career.

This section focuses on pastoral care on the field. Workers face a host of stresses already described in the previous chapter. Good pastoral care is essential to cross-cultural stress prevention. Important counsel must be readily available when needed. Those in difficult and lonely situations need care even more although contact with them may not be easy.

I know of an individual who faced isolation when working as a professional in a remote East Asian city. Although this person was a rugged and disciplined person, he had to initiate fellowship and contact with likeminded believers through planned travel.

In one country, it was necessary to advise all personnel to leave the field because of military action which endangered their lives. In this particular instance, information on the field was not available on the media. Long distance phone calls had to be made. They were informed that their governments had arranged special flights for evacuation purposes.

Who is responsible for the shepherding of workers? What does pastoral care involve?

J O Sanders gives the following advice:¹

1. The Sending Agency or Church, in the first instance is responsible for providing adequate spiritual and emotional support. This may be difficult in the early stages but as the work develops, pastoral care should be provided.
2. The Field Leader, where there is one, as representative of the agency or church, will have the responsibility for pastoral care. He should have a shepherd's heart, and conform to Hebrews 13:17.
3. Sometimes several mission groups can combine to invite a Gifted Pastoral Counsellor to visit areas where care is lacking.
4. Paul set the pattern of continuing pastoral care through correspondence. Phone-calls are relatively cheaper today. Even "conference calls" via internet are possible. However, a word of caution is necessary for those in sensitive fields where emails and phone-calls could be monitored.

Sometimes, among a team of workers on the field, there is a member with a pastoral and discerning heart. Team-mates could turn to him as he would be able to identify with them in the mutual concerns they share on the field.

WHAT DOES PASTORAL CARE INVOLVE?

Pastoral care involves discerning the needs of each worker and meeting them. J O Sanders emphasises that the nurture of the spiritual life is of paramount importance. Help may be needed in this area. He also stresses the need for regular visitation. Nothing can take the place of supportive face-to-face contact. Workers need encouragement. If visits are not possible, then write encouraging letters or emails.

Instruction concerning relationships is often a need. Here, a loyal recognition of constituted leadership is important. Genuine problems should be submitted to the appropriate person.

In my experience of shepherding workers, I have learned that it sometimes takes hours of sympathetic listening before a person will share his heart. Relationships of trust are foundational for openness and vulnerability to take place. Therefore visits to the field cannot be rushed. Not all workers will communicate freely with their supervisors unless they know they are being heard and understood.

The field leader should be careful not to take sides. He should instead be a peacemaker when dealing with difficult relationships. In Asia, there are discreet

¹ Personal outlined notes by J O Sanders were presented at a workshop

and appropriate ways of problem solving among Asians. Sometimes a third party may be needed - usually an older discerning person.

In counselling married couples, it would be preferable to speak to husband and wife together. The leader can help couples to develop constructive responses to each other. They can learn to relax and develop a sense of humour also helps to relieve tensions on the field.

Not all problems faced on the field have a spiritual root. Leaders need to be alert to workers' real needs.

Overwork is common. Overwork seems to be particularly hazardous among certain personality types. Those who are engaged in "open-ended" work are the most vulnerable. Cross-cultural workers could labour almost non-stop each day, and at the end of the day still think of work to be done.

Some of these workers seem to lack an inner "referee" to govern their lives. For various reasons, they will ignore the symptoms that tell them they need a rest. They will therefore overextend themselves. Such people do not complain of overwork. They complain that they are unable to work as long or as well as they "should". People who succumb to fatigue are not tempted to be slack. Overwork tempts them as they are propelled by the ministry. Such workers should be encouraged by their supervisors to have a realistic schedule and to take appropriate breaks.

Those labouring under hot climatic and culturally stressful conditions should plan for more frequent and shorter breaks. A longer holiday of at least two weeks annually will enable the worker or the couple to be renewed.

Because supervisors cannot be readily available on the field, workers should meet informally among themselves to encourage and affirm one another. This practice can build individual morale and promote excellent team spirit on the field. All too often, field work is done without visible rewards. Encouragement from fellow-workers and supervisors may be the only tangible reward.

SUMMARY on Stress Prevention

Stress prevention is always best. Cross-cultural workers should maintain their health through proper diet, exercise, rest and sleep. They need to plan their priorities and pace their lives well. Learning about themselves and their responses to stress can help workers to be more alert to symptoms and factors causing stress. Building a realistic view of self, relying on the grace of God for the Christian's well-being will contribute to a healthy self-concept.

Personality assessment helps cross-cultural workers to understand their source of emotional satisfaction, their sensitivity to environment, tasks and people, and their capacity to adapt to social situations. Knowing their personalities enables workers to develop strengths and modify patterns of behaviour. Building healthy interpersonal relationships and learning to relate constructively will prevent unnecessary conflicts and tensions on the field.

Above all, the worker needs to draw from spiritual resources already available. Daily fellowship with God is essential, for the fundamental answer to stress is found in the believer's inner focus on God Himself.

Pastoral supervision is vital to ensure that workers on the field are encouraged and cared for.

FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Most field workers are accustomed to hard work. What constitutes "balanced priorities" for such workers? Discuss how "balance" can prevent stress overloads.

2. Why is it important to know oneself in order to handle stress? What personality traits make a person more prone to stress? Why is it needful to have a realistic estimate of one's abilities and capacities?

Romans 12:3

Galatians 6:3, 4

1 Corinthians 15:10, 11

3. Cross-cultural workers need encouragement. Even great pioneers like the Apostle Paul needed it. Try and picture the scene when the arrival of Titus encouraged Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:5-7, 13-16. Describe what may have transpired. How can you encourage workers from your church?

4. Hebrews 13:17 gives an injunction about leadership. How can this be applied to workers on the field in their relationship to supervisors or leaders? How might supervisors fulfil their roles in providing pastoral care and ensuring the prevention of stress overloads?

5. How would you practically draw upon God's resources to overcome stress? How would this be applicable to someone regularly facing stress on the field?

RECOMMENDED READING for Part Three on Cross-Cultural Stress

Carrie Sydnor Coffman (1997), *Weary Warriors: Lessons from Christian Workers Who Burned Out*, 3rd edition, Norman, OK: Apples of Gold.

Kelly S O'Donnell and Michele Lewis, ed. (1988), *Helping Missionaries Grow: Readings in Mental Health and Missions*. Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

Kelly S O'Donnell (2002), *Doing Member Care Well: Perspectives and Practices from Around the World*, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library.

Marjory F Foyle (2001), *Honourably Wounded: Stress Among Christian Workers*, Mill Hill, London and Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books.

Neal Pirollo (1991), *Serving as Senders: How to Care for Your Missionaries While They are Preparing to Go, While They are on the Field, When They Return Home*. San Diego, CA: Emmaus Road International. *There is an excellent section on the re-entry of the missionary.*

William A Smalley (1963), *Culture Shock, Language Shock and the Shock of Self-Discovery*, *Practical Anthropology*. 1963: Vol. 10, pages 49-56.

Part Four

TENTMAKING

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

THE PRACTICE OF TENTMAKING

CLARIFYING THE TERM AND CONCEPT

The term “tentmaking” comes from the example of Paul who had worked as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). In Paul’s situation, his tentmaking was related to his financial support. For many years, the term “tentmaker” was used for a Christian who supports himself through his vocation while he serves Christ on the mission field.

Today, however, the term “tentmaking” is used differently. “Tentmaking” often refers to the gaining of access into restricted countries (also known as “creative access nations”), some of which may be hostile to the Gospel, through a profession.

I have never been comfortable with these terms “tentmaking” and “tentmaker”. They have been used too loosely to cover a variety of situations and professions. Instead of the term “tentmaking”, I prefer the term “bi-vocational”. In fact, we could describe the workers according to their business or professional roles. Other vocabulary has been used. J Christy Wilson in his book *Today’s Tentmakers*¹ calls such workers “self-supporting missionaries”. However, many cross-cultural workers I know would never use the term “missionaries” when introducing themselves. While on the field, the workers will not identify themselves with their sending agency, or their home church. Most mission agencies would also avoid the use of the term “missionary” for such people. One mission agency simply refers to them as “professionals”.

In this book, I have nevertheless stuck to the terms “tentmaking” and “tentmakers”, only because they are widely used in mission circles. When I use the terms “tentmaker” or “tentmaking”, I refer to the following:

- Bi-vocational workers in the sense that they are professionals in their work and also serve Christ where they live and work
- Those who are trained and equipped to be bi-vocational labourers
- Cross-cultural workers who serve in their profession with the strategic intention of fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission
- Those who are legitimately recognized by governments who grant them visas to practice their profession.

¹ Wilson, J Christy (1979), *Today’s Tentmakers: Self-Support - an alternative model for world wide witness*, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.

Some workers may have personal issues with a dual identity. However, this should not pose problems if their professions are not a “cover” merely to gain access. There must not be any appearance of duplicity which could cast doubt. The workers should work hard in their profession, in order to be a good witness to the local people.

The qualities needed and qualifications for tentmakers have been covered in Chapter 13. Orientation aspects have also been discussed in the chapters on Pre-field and On-field Orientation of Candidates. These should be considered and taken into account. This chapter deals with other factors, principles and issues related to tentmaking, while the next chapter contains some actual case studies of tentmakers.

The tentmaking principle is critical today with the great number of countries becoming either restricted or closed towards conventional missions. Tentmakers find that taking on a vocation in these countries would open opportunities for them to contribute to the welfare and needs of these countries and also to serve Christ through their occupations.

TRENDS TOWARDS RELIGIOUS RESTRICTEDNESS

Restrictions on access to a country may not be just for religious reasons. Some governments choose to be reclusive for political or economic reasons. They view religious activity as having political agendas. Missionaries may also be unwelcome not just because of their religion, but because of their nationality and their citizenship.

Although recent events in some countries have seemingly indicated a relaxation of religious restrictions, public Christian witness is still not permitted in a majority of the world. More than 80 percent of the world’s non-Christians live in these countries. Christian missionary programmes and structures will not be practicable in these situations. In countries hostile to the Gospel, Christian citizens living in their own countries still face opposition and persecution. Their governments often will not intervene to stop the persecution of local Christians.

Religious restrictions are normally viewed as a big hindrance to the progress of the Gospel. However, we know that the church has grown in countries like China and Vietnam. In the midst of suppression, persecution and isolation from outside influences, churches have multiplied.

Countries with religious restrictions are becoming far more open politically and economically to the rest of the world. In the past decade, globalisation has opened many doors of opportunity for business and trade. “Business as mission” is a viable cross-cultural option for many entrepreneurs, business and professional people. Social, medical, and educational enterprises are also increasingly being carried out.

1 Religious Fundamentalism

The rise of religious fundamentalism has led to civil unrest and disharmony. In some multi-religious societies, laws have been imposed to maintain stability and to protect groups. Authorities believe that there will be negative and possibly violent repercussions if large numbers turn to Christianity. Governments also fear that Christianity might become a political force. They also are concerned about other religious movements.

In countries where there is a state religion (including state-sanctioned Atheism), Christianity is perceived as a threat. Countries that have a state or national religion will oppose the propagation of any other religion.

2 Nationalism

Nationalistic movements have cast suspicious eyes on any foreign or cross-cultural influences, including Christian movements which in some countries are still perceived to be related to Western cultural imperialism.

There has been a history of growing restrictiveness on Christian education, especially aspects that are considered spiritual and evangelistic. Censorship of literature or certain internet sites is an effort to curtail foreign influences.

3 Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism

Authoritarian regimes have demanded and enforced strict control of all potential political forces which may pose a threat to their hold on power. This would include the control of religious movements. In some of these countries, there is no constitutional freedom of religion.

Religious propagation is perceived to be threatening and must be restricted. Freedom of assembly is curtailed. The press and the media are subject to controls. Postal communications and telecommunications, emails through the internet are being monitored. Imprisonment and persecution of Christians are practised.

RESPONDING TO CURRENT TRENDS

We need new, creative and sensitive approaches to respond to current trends. In many difficult areas, the role of the tentmaker has become even more relevant and significant.

As more Christians become trained as lay disciplers, more bi-vocational labourers will become involved in fulfilling Christ's Great Commission. This growing movement could be far more significant than the traditional missionary movement.

THE TENTMAKING CONCEPT AND PRINCIPLE IN THE BIBLE

The tentmaking concept is neither something new, nor did it originate with Paul. The Old Testament has many stories of lay people being called by God and used of Him in different cultural situations.

1 Some Old Testament Illustrations

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were semi-nomadic cattle ranchers. They were a witness to the Canaanites that God Almighty, El-Shaddai, was the one true and living God.

Joseph witnessed to the Egyptians, first as a captive, and then as second in command to Pharaoh.

Moses married Zipporah, a non-Jew, and tended his father-in-law's flocks for forty years. He had very likely influenced his father-in-law to the worship of Yahweh.

Naomi, though she lived through much hardship, became a mother-in-law to Ruth the Moabitess. Ruth has an Old Testament book ascribed to her, and through her lineage came David and later the Christ.

Amos was the lowly shepherd of Tekoa. He became a mighty prophetic voice to the nations surrounding the Jews.

Daniel, together with his friends, became a captive, and eventually became a witness to the highest levels of the Babylonian government. He proclaimed that "the Most High reigns over all the earth."

2 Some Examples from the New Testament

The New Testament has its share of stories. Lay people, scattered by persecution at Jerusalem, travelled as far as Cyprus and Antioch.² A church began at Antioch which became a missionary church with leaders from different cultural backgrounds. They released Barnabas and Saul to the missionary task.³ Lydia, a merchant of purple cloths, responded to Paul's message and opened her home to believers at Philippi.⁴

PAUL THE TENTMAKER

A study of the life of the Apostle Paul and his epistles indicate that he functioned with a considerable degree of flexibility in his career and livelihood. He gave himself to the ministry of teaching and preaching. There were times when Paul worked and supported himself by making tents.

² Acts 8:1,4; 11:19-26

³ Acts 13:1-3

⁴ Acts 16:14, 15,40

Tentmakers actually made and repaired a variety of leather goods, not just tents. Paul could be described as a leather-worker (Greek, *skenopoioi*) rather than just a manufacturer of tents. This was a common trade in his home province of Cilicia, which produced a fabric made from goats' skins called *cilicium*.

Although he defended the legitimacy of the full-time Christian worker, quoting Jesus' teaching that "the worker is worthy of his hire", Paul worked to support himself as a matter of "principle". He did not refuse support when it was given and expressed gratitude to those who gave to him. But he also worked because of significant reasons.

PAUL'S REASONS FOR TENTMAKING

Paul did not work primarily because he was anxious about meeting his own needs. He knew that God would provide for his needs. On all occasions, he was well provided for by the Lord.

We first learn that Paul practised the business of tentmaking in Acts 18. When in the city of Corinth, Paul teamed up with fellow-workers, Aquila and Priscilla, a couple who were also tentmakers. We are not told of the length of time that Paul worked as a tentmaker, but we are informed that when Silas and Timothy joined them from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself "exclusively to preaching". Financial support could have been brought from believers in Philippi (Philippians 4:15). Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time.

What is of particular significance at this stage is the fact that Paul did not allow the Corinthian Christians to provide for his financial support. Indeed, in his letter to them, he gives a lengthy statement (in 1 Corinthians 9) explaining the reasons why he had every right to receive financial support from the church, but he chose not to do so.

1 For the Gospel's Sake

Paul chose to financially support himself for the sake of the Gospel. He did not want to hinder the Gospel. He wanted to win some by all possible means. He could preach the Gospel freely and offer it "free of charge".⁵ That in itself was his reward. Paul could not be accused of seeking personal or dishonest gain. In Thessalonica, his opponents had likely accused him of having false motives. To the Thessalonians, he could declare the purity of his motives as his life and hard work were evident to all.⁶

2 Not to Burden Anyone

Another reason for working and supporting himself was his desire not to burden any of the Corinthians in any way.⁷ He could say with deep conviction

5 1 Corinthians 9:18-23; 2 Corinthians 11:7, 8

6 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6,9

7 2 Corinthians 11:9; 12:13-16

“What I want is not your possessions, but you.” To the Thessalonians, he had also said that he worked night and day so as not to be a burden to anyone while he preached the Gospel.

3 To Be a Model

Paul had a further reason for working. He wanted to be an example. Ministering among Gentiles who did not have a strong ethical concept of work, he knew it was not sufficient to preach to them about hard work. He needed to be the model. To the Corinthians, he had urged them to imitate him and his way of life.⁸

To the Thessalonians, Paul and his companions did not only preach the Gospel but they shared their lives. They worked night and day and demonstrated how work and ministry could be integrated.⁹ It was important for new believers to learn responsible discipleship. New Christians need to work with their hands to win the respect of unbelievers and to practically testify to the power of the Gospel.¹⁰ In his second letter to the Thessalonians, he strongly urges them to work hard to support themselves. He gave them the rule: “if a man will not work, he shall not eat.” He reminds them that he had provided the model for them to follow. They ought to follow his example (2 Thessalonians 3:7-13).

4 For the Mobility of the Gospel

Underlying all these reasons for working, Paul knew the importance of the role of ordinary believers in the spread of the Gospel. The mobility of the Gospel depended upon lay Christians who would sound out the good news. If they depended on financial support for this task, the Gospel would be impeded.

The Thessalonians had already become imitators of Paul, and they themselves had become a model to believers in the surrounding areas (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7, 8). The mobility of the Gospel and the missionary expansion of the church should never become highly dependent on financial support. Lay Christians needed to catch the vision of the deep significance of their vocation. What happened in the church at Thessalonica has given us an example to follow in this day and age.

Having a good occupation and marketable skills in themselves are not enough for the mobility of the Gospel. Tentmakers need to be available and flexible, ready to penetrate new frontiers. In Acts 18, Aquila and Priscilla are good examples of flexibility when they were ready to close down their business in Corinth and start all over again in Ephesus when Paul’s ministry shifted to that city. Their work followed God’s leading. They went where the harvest was waiting and the labourers were few.

8 1 Corinthians 4:15-17

9 1 Thessalonians 2:8-12

10 1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12

IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES TO APPLY

Paul's example gives us principles that can be applied to present day tentmaking. Here are some of them:

1. The mission's goal is to minister to the hearts and lives of people, and not merely to cross boundaries of countries.
2. Tentmaking ministries require two operational principles: incarnation and authenticity. The tentmaker is to be an example *among* the people, a model of integrity and authenticity in his life and work.
3. Tentmakers need to grow in their understanding of the world and in how they address and engage the world. Adapting to different cultural contexts is needful for cross-cultural identification and communication.
4. Teams of workers, equipped and mature in life and work, are needed, who will co-labour to penetrate frontiers.
5. Today's mission fields are diverse and flexibility in approaches is needed. Applications must not be rigid.
6. Tentmakers must also be readily available to shift their fields of service as doors of opportunity open.
7. Mission today demands partnership and collaboration between groups with similar goals because the harder the challenges, the greater the need to work together.

Case Study of a Tentmaker in a Sensitive Country

This case study has two parts, each with issues for discussion. Understanding the issues will optimise the use of this case study.

Part 1 POSITIONING to live within a community

Tim is a tentmaker. For prudent reasons, we cannot divulge his real name or citizenship. He did not go to another country but had to make a cross-cultural leap within his own country.

Tim has had a growing burden for the majority people group in his country. In this country, it is against the law for this mainstream people to change their religion. Tim had a vision just over ten years ago. He saw a jumbo jet full of passengers that could not land because there was no runway. He sensed God speaking to him about an impending harvest but the harvest would fail without harvesters for the people. He believed his calling was to reach this people.

Tim had served as a worker at his local church. But now, he decided to use his expertise as a craftsman and trust God for his support. He took on the identity as a business consultant. There would be religious hostility if people knew his associations with a church. He then joined a team of believers who had a similar burden for this people group.

At first, Tim's wife did not share his burden and calling. After one year of studying the Scriptures with a group, her initial prejudice changed to enthusiastic support. She became his most valued team member, together with their children. About 5 years later, he and his wife and family moved into an area where 95 percent of the neighbourhood comprised the people group he was burdened to win.

FIRST DISCUSSION: *What helped Tim and his family to position themselves for ministry among this people?*

Issues/Questions:

- **A Vision from God.** Note that in the book of Acts, "visions and dreams" were ways related to the movement of the Gospel. Do you think God works this way today?
- **Wife and Family.** How important is it for a family to be united to reach other families?
- **Identity.** Why was it important for Tim to take on the identity as a business

- consultant? (Formerly he had a church position as one of its workers).
- **Scriptural mindset.** As Tim and his team of friends worked through the Scriptures for a few years, they clarified apostolic principles in pioneering situations. Why do you think this mindset would be critical in this context?
 - **Financial freedom.** Tim did not accept support from his church. Neither did other team members. Their conviction was based on 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Team members were all self-supporting through their various businesses and professions. What would happen if Tim's support came from a church?
 - **Mobility.** Tim and his family decided to live in a neighbourhood where the large majority was the people they wanted to befriend and win. They were convinced it was important to live AMONG the people rather than just thinking of going to a people. What would be the difference between LIVING AMONG and GOING TO?
 - **A Long-term perspective.** It would take Tim and family years to be part of the community. Why is this crucial for the advance of the Gospel?

Part 2 LIVING AMONG the lost

The first four years in their adopted neighbourhood was like living in a goldfish bowl. Every move of Tim and his family would be scrutinized. They decided they would not place a cross on the wall, or eat food that would offend their neighbours.

Their neighbours slowly overcame their suspicion of an alien stranger in their midst. Tim and his family got to know over 15 families. They began by befriending these neighbours and serving them in practical ways. They showed the life and love of Christ through practical deeds like taking in the laundry, babysitting children and taking a pregnant wife to hospital in the early morning hours.

Tim was careful not to use his former ways of directly proclaiming the Gospel which would be inappropriate in this new context. They had opportunities though in discussing values of the kingdom like integrity, justice, love, forgiveness, family life, practising their religion rather than mere religious profession. Tim prayed regularly for his neighbours and so did his team of friends. He prayed for an opening to share the Gospel in a relevant way so it would be seen as really good news.

An opening came rather dramatically. The wife of a family living opposite their home experienced demonic attacks after someone had cast a spell on her. Many in the community dabbled in the occult. This family's life was disrupted by frantic visits to exorcists, the husband having to take leave from work and their young children having to be cared for by other relatives. Tim saw this as an opportunity to share from the holy books how Jesus was the only one with power over demons. He did not impose his solution but made himself available whenever they felt ready for help from Jesus.

Three months later, neighbours Pam and Abu asked for help. Tim helped the wife in a clear deliverance from demonic oppression. This took place a few times. Pam and Abu became very open to the Lord and began to study Luke's Gospel weekly. They discussed Luke 10:18-20, where it describes their new relationship with God as more significant than their victory over demons. And Luke 11:24-26 describes how seven demons can easily replace one demon that left. The real challenge was for victory over occult forces to be sustained and possible through an abiding relationship with Jesus.

Pam and Abu discovered that Jesus is also mentioned in their holy book. They were encouraged to study their holy book more devotedly. They believed that only Jesus could fulfil the ideals mentioned in their holy book. Their close friends heard about their deliverance and some joined in Bible discussions.

More recently, Pam and Abu brought Tim and family to Abu's village seven hours drive away. Abu's father was the village headman. Tim met Abu's parents, siblings and community. He was seen by all of them as a good family friend. Pam then introduced Tim and his family to her family and relatives who lived seven hours away in a northern state. Tim and his team of friends are now praying for the Gospel to move among these two communities of Pam and Abu's friends and family.

A team member visited one of these weekly "fellowships" with Pam and Abu. He observed there was no "Christian" singing or prayers which would have drawn public attention. Instead, they spent a lot of time snacking, talking over the Scriptures, praying and discussing the issues of life, including how to take the Gospel to their family networks.

Tim was careful not to intrude into their discovery process in the Scriptures. Their discoveries were more important than his.

SECOND DISCUSSION: *How did Tim and his family communicate the Gospel to their neighbourhood friends in such a way as to lead to a movement of the Gospel?*

Issues/Questions:

- **Becoming like the people.** Tim avoided behaviour from their Christian background. Why is this important?
- **Living the Gospel.** The Gospel is communicated by life and deed as much as by word. Discuss how Tim communicated first by life and deed and then by word. What do you think might have happened if Tim began by openly declaring the Gospel? When Pam and Abu came to Christ, who would be their model? (1 Corinthians 11:1).
- **Sensitivity to Timing.** The problem of the occult and demonic oppression opened a door of opportunity. Note that Tim did not rush by claiming he could deliver them but was patient in the process. Why is it important to be sensitive to God's timing?
- **Remaining in Context.** Pam and Abu were not yanked out of their context to embrace Christianity with all its forms (Sunday meetings, baptism, leaving their community, learning a different religion). Do you think that keeping them true to the ideals of their own religion was important? How would this cause the Gospel to grow in their context?
- **Valuing the Gospel of Jesus.** How did Pam and Abu grow in appreciation of the Gospel of Jesus? Note how they wanted Tim and family to meet their family members.
- **The Receiver and the progress of the Gospel.** Why is it important to be "receiver-oriented"? Just as the Gospel met the felt need of Pam and Abu (demon possession), so now it is Pam and Abu's questions that will determine the agenda for discipling. The Word of God and the Spirit of God are keys in the process of discipling. Tim is primarily a facilitator and a channel.

CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

TYPES OF BI-VOCATIONAL LABOURERS

There are many types of bi-vocational labourers who are working in other cultures and countries other than their own.

When I wrote the first edition of this book twenty years ago, the demand for English language teachers was enormous. On my visits to many Asian cities, whether in Vietnam or East Asia, there would be long queues of students wanting to learn English. These students knew that the learning of English was a key to their future. Teaching English as a second language became popular too for teachers. That need still exists. Students, who intend to go overseas for further studies, will take a course in English in order to qualify for their main courses.

Teaching as an occupation remains one of the major opportunities for bi-vocational work. But there are a host of other occupations. Some are in medical work including sports medicine. Some are in holistic mission, especially in projects that help the poor and marginalised. For example, micro-credit agencies have been started to help locals start businesses.

Among my many bi-vocational friends, most are business and professional workers. Their occupations range from being chief executive officers of companies to engineers, professors, and entrepreneurs of macro as well as micro enterprises. Macro-enterprises require gifted entrepreneurs and provide employment for hundreds of workers. Such enterprises ought to contribute to the prosperity of countries.

With my background in Economics, I have had the opportunity of occasionally conducting business seminars. During one of these, I encouraged some company directors to contribute a percentage of their profits to meet the needs of the nation – social, educational or medical. On my next visit, I was shown a newspaper article that a few company directors had indeed responded to this challenge.

A favourite passage of Scripture which highly motivates me is Jeremiah 29 when God tells His people in exile to “seek the peace and prosperity (Hebrew, *shalom*) of the city...because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” They were to settle in these cities and bless it, as it were, by seeking its “*shalom*”. This is the challenge of bi-vocational mission – to be among the people in order to advance

the good news by life, deed and word.¹ That is what the Great Commission focuses on – “to make disciples” where you live and work.

Being self-supporting is an obvious issue among bi-vocational workers. At the 1989 Lausanne Congress in Manila, I was involved in a “Tentmaking Track”. One of the issues related to how different bi-vocational labourers were supported. There are a variety of ways of support – from full salaries in companies, to partial support, to support from churches.²

WORKERS DOING HOLISTIC MISSION

Many bi-vocational workers are involved in difficult situations where there is poverty, corruption, and injustice. Some Christians work with mission and development agencies and they are sent to places with such conditions. Christians should be in the forefront of facing and addressing these challenges. As followers of Jesus, we cannot think of fulfilling Christ’s Great Commission if we lack concern for the world’s poor and marginalized. Eighty-five percent of those living in the so-called “10/40 Window”³ are the poorest of the world’s poor.

In Jeremiah 29, God’s people were in the worst of situations, in exile in Babylon. In that context, God calls them to live and settle for the long-term. He then gives an amazing command in verse 7 to “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city... Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

As mentioned earlier, the Hebrew word for “peace and prosperity” and “prosper” is *shalom*. The word “*shalom*” means more than “peace”. It communicates a sense of total well-being of people – not just spiritual. It is a holistic word. It reminds me of the ministry of Jesus. Our Lord had lived among beggars, lepers, prostitutes and people marginalized by society. Jesus brought “*shalom*” to such people.

In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan in answer to the question, “Who is my neighbour?” In advancing the Gospel among lost people, we must also answer this question, in order that we may minister holistically among the people we encounter. Some people are not only poor, but they also are victims of unjust practices of their culture and society. There are huge challenges. Jesus had faced similar challenges in His mission, as we read in Luke 4:18-19 and Isaiah 42:1-4.

My colleagues and I have been studying the Scriptures as we work with practitioners of holistic mission. There are enormous challenges and many complex issues. The following suggestions may be helpful as you begin to consider holistic mission.

1 Bradshaw, Bruce (1993), *Bridging the Gap: Evangelism, Development, and Shalom*. Monrovia, CA: MARC. This is the 5th volume in the “Innovation in Missions” series edited by Bryant L Myers.

2 This issue is developed in a book by Patrick Lai (2005), *Tentmaking: Business as Missions*, Colorado Springs, CO: Authentic Publishing.

3 The “10-40 Window” is an area extending from 10 degrees to 40 degrees North of the equator, which stretches from North Africa across to China.

1. Do a Bible study on the poor and needy. The Bible clearly states God's heart for the poor and His concerns about oppression and injustice.⁴
2. Learn from biographies. You can begin by reading about the life and work of William Wilberforce,⁵ Mother Teresa,⁶ and Pandita Ramabai Saraswati.⁷

TWO MODELS FOR TENTMAKING

In the first edition of this book, I gave the following two representative models which are expressions of the tentmaking principle.

The first, Model A, represents those who are totally self-supporting, and the second, Model B, those who may be partially supported by other means besides their occupation on the field. In some of these case studies, these cross-cultural labourers described, after twenty years, are still on the field and having an on-going ministry.

In both models, the use of the gifts and strengths of the bi-vocational worker are important. He or she is often a part of a team with a variety of strengths. Teamwork is important in laying the foundations of a work. Bi-vocational workers with a long-term perspective of ministry would want to ensure their work of the Gospel will continue when they leave the country. In their bi-vocational roles, the issue of one's capacity is also an important consideration. There are demands of work and family for those married with children which can deplete their energies.

1 Model A, totally self supporting

This person will be interested primarily in serving Christ as an extension of his craft, career or profession. He or she will have a salaried position abroad with a company or institution. Some may be self-employed. The ministry and witness of this person will normally be in the context of a work task. He or she may be well-placed in the cultural mainstream, and accordingly, will not be frustrated if the job is demanding in time and energy. This is because the work at hand is, in large measure, a prime focus of the person's ministry.

In most cases, the person is part of a team. The tentmaker's local colleagues will be the recipients of the Gospel from his life and witness, and may range from high government officials to peasants on the field, depending on the job. What matters is that the tentmaker on assignment is faithful to his calling as a disciple of Christ and is committed to sensitively share the reasons for his faith.

4 Here is a sampling of Scripture: Exodus 23:6, 9; Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 24:14; Psalm 68:10; Psalm 82:3-4; Psalm 112:5, 9; Proverbs 14:20-21, 31; Isaiah 42:1-4; Isaiah 58:6-12; Isaiah 61:1-3; Amos 5:12-15; Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 4:16-20; Luke 14:12-14; Galatians 2:10; 1 John 3:17.

5 Chuck Stetson, editor (2008), *Creating the Better Hour: Lessons from William Wilberforce*, Macon, GA: Stroud and Hall.

6 Malcolm Muggeridge (1986), *Something Beautiful for God: Mother Teresa of Calcutta*. San Francisco, CA: Harper.

7 Sakhi M Athyal (1995), Pandita Ramabai: An Indian missionary model, in: *Indian Women in Mission, Madras, India: Mission Educational Books*, chapter 4, p. 83-104. Nicol McNicol and Vishal Mangalwadi (1996), *What Liberates a Woman? The Story of Pandita Ramabai — A Builder of Modern India*, New Delhi, India: Nivedit Good Books Distributors.

2 Model B, partially supported

This person is usually backed by a support group, a church or organisation which remits some or almost all of his budgetary needs. This person may choose a job which is less consuming in terms of time and energy. The job is a means of partial support. Sometimes, in poorer countries which are less developed, remuneration from the job will not be sufficient to fully support the tentmaker and his family. Teaching is often a suitable job - either language teaching or a subject in line with the person's expertise. Other avenues would be research, social and development work or relief work. The student route, including learning the language, would be another possible way.

With the greater amount of flexible periods in between or during the job assignment, this person focuses more of his or her time and attention to ministry-related activities among locals other than his work colleagues. The ministry may focus on students or unreached groups or helping a local church grow. This person may sometimes have more opportunities of having a ministry than the other model. Inevitably there will be a range of other valid options in between the two models.

GETTING TO THE FIELD

Tentmakers are people of purpose and usually get to the field through their own initiatives. Here are some ways.

1. Get job information from Trade Commissions or Embassies and read advertisements in newspapers and publications in major city centres. Job applications can also be made through the internet. An Asian tentmaker responded to an advertisement and worked as an engineer with a large corporation in East Asia. Later he extended his stay with another company.
2. Write to agencies which give information on job opportunities overseas. Hundreds of Caucasians in particular have received jobs through these means.
3. Ask friends or other tentmakers who know of contacts. Two Asian women received information from friends who had contacts on the field. They wrote to these people and obtained teaching posts in East Asia. Both these women developed networking relationships with other tentmakers and had fruitful ministries in the country.
4. Visit the field to explore opportunities. A Caucasian couple visited East Asia as tourists and they were invited to teach at a university.

Another friend made contacts with businessmen in a Southeast Asian country and learned how he could gain access into the country. A group of Europeans visited a Southeast Asian country and had several job offers to fit their skills. They have been able to operate as a team and also network with other tentmakers in the country. They were purposeful men and women who believed God wanted them to serve cross-culturally. Sometimes tentmakers have obtained jobs that do not perfectly fit their qualifications or skills. They have been challenged to be learners as they developed new skills.

Successful tentmakers are those with initiative, adaptability, faith, vision and courage. The harvest fields are ready for such men and women.

CASE STUDIES AND ISSUES INVOLVED

The following three case studies are about tentmakers in Asia. The key issues involved in each case relate to:

- Personal preparation
- Networking, Residence Access
- Financial Viability
- Scope of Potential Relationships among Locals
- Opportunities for Ministry
- Security, Sensitivity and Prudence

PERSONAL PREPARATION involves educational qualifications and marketable skills required for the particular occupation in the country. It also includes discipleship and basic ministry training.

NETWORKING relates to the tentmaker's links with those who pray and support him. These relationships may be either informal or organised. Tentmakers need a healthy sense of independence balanced with a degree of accountability.

RESIDENCE ACCESS informs how the tentmaker gained entrance into the country and his occupational status.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY concerns how his financial needs are being met.

SCOPE OF POTENTIAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG LOCALS tells how his occupation opens doors for relationships with people in the local culture. Relationships are also initiated by tentmakers who are relational.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINISTRY describe the ministry of the tentmaker within the context of his work or outside of his work environment.

SECURITY, SENSITIVITY and PRUDENCE are essential in sensitive countries. Prudence needs to be practised in all forms of communication within the country and with those outside the country. It should be assumed that government authorities are monitoring and reading correspondence and emails.

Tentmaker A, a Personnel Manager employed by a multinational hotel in Asia

Personal Preparation: When Tentmaker A (TM A) was being discipled, the Great Commission was given significant emphasis. TMA's friend encouraged him to investigate this possibility through his own private research. He subsequently geared his career development toward the market opportunities in Asia, finally landing the job of a personnel manager in a multinational hotel line based in a key city in the country. He was further helped by experienced lay people who had spent time in the target country themselves. Their individual counsel was a boost to his plans.

Networking: There was no organised support system that backed TM A in his venture into Asia. Instead friends, who were instrumental in broadening his vision and helping him to focus on the tentmaking strategy, formed a loose individual network. They would be a resource base in terms of information and informal orientation as well as a prayer and nurturing network for his encouragement.

Residence Access: His job within a multinational corporation gave him longer term residence access. His wife joined him later.

Financial Viability: His job was more than adequate in meeting his financial needs.

Scope of Potential Relationships among Locals: His job enabled him to develop a wide range of relationships both within his work sphere and also outside in the city through his job linkages.

Opportunities for Ministry: Due to security considerations, TM A refrained from oral evangelistic initiatives within his office and job, but was able to develop an evangelistic initiative outside his workplace through relationships developed. He is helping key locals in memorising and studying the Bible through verse analysis outlined by a Scripture Memory System. He does this with them on a

person-to-person basis. He is able to do this as a result of fluency in the language as well as his discipling experience in his home country. He also teaches and demonstrates to the key locals how to develop their own personal devotional life as well as character development. He also teaches them basic evangelistic approaches. He has recently seen these bear fruit in family conversions. TM A, however, studies fellowship possibilities carefully so as to avoid any undue attention on his case.

Sensitivity and Prudence: Since being a hotel personnel manager is a high profile position, TM A has carefully avoided any undue attention to himself. He especially is very careful within his workplace. Blending in was not too difficult because he was of Chinese descent and spoke the language quite well.

20 Years On: TM A is still in Asia. I have had the privilege of mentoring him since he was disciplined by one of my spiritual sons. TM A no longer works with a multinational company.

With his entrepreneurial skills, he and some Asian friends began a fast-food business with several outlets. This business provided employment for a number of young believers from rural areas. In that context, he and a number of local leaders he had trained were able to continue the discipling process.

He has also been able to market souvenirs made by rural believers. He has also met a number of gifted artists in a particular province. He has been able to use their talents to provide support for them from the sales of their paintings through exhibitions.

The process of discipling in the context of small groups continues. One key local leader is completing theological training in the midst of a fruitful ministry. TM A continues communicating with his church and accountability group both in Asia and in his home country. His wife and children have been with him in Asia.

Tentmaker B, an Agricultural Engineer employed by an international research institute in a Southeast Asian country

Personal Preparation: Tentmaker B (TM B) got his college degree in Agricultural Engineering from New Zealand where he also met some friends who deepened his walk with the Lord and gave him a vision for ministering to students overseas. He applied for the Masters programme in his field of specialisation in an internationally accredited institution in a Southeast Asian nation. This was done by TM B mainly to further his career development, but

was later led by the Lord to consider starting a ministry among the several international students from all over the world who were enrolled in the institute's various programmes.

Networking: His New Zealand friends gave him both encouragement and advice on an individual basis. He was also referred to his NZ friends' associates for prayer and networking. TM B was often visited by other friends who were concerned about developing a work within the country.

Residence Access: His student status until he graduated from the international institute enabled him to stay in the country. Later, he accepted a job within the same institute as a research associate which enabled him to continue to stay in the Institute for a longer period of time.

Financial Viability: His present job enables him to support himself. As a student his funds were raised personally. His interaction with the locals is minimal.

Scope of Potential Relationships among Locals: His effective sphere of influence and interaction is with the students and faculty within the institution and this has borne fruit in the ministry.

Opportunities For Ministry: Most if not all ministry fruit (TM B has adequate evangelism, very good establishing and probably equipping gifts) has been within the confines of the Institute which seems to be open to their activities (they have regular fellowship meetings). Through his stay within the institute over seven or more years, TM B and the team he has developed has seen the conversion and growth in discipleship of international students from almost all Asian countries.

Security: Within the confines of the institute the environment for the spread of the Gospel is quite unrestricted. TM B and fellow members of his fellowship openly identified themselves as Christians and actively engaged in outreach activities.

20 Years On: TM B left the Southeast Asian country to serve in a Central Asian city about 10 years ago. Some students he had led to Christ were back in Central Asia and he continued contact with them.

Going to a different country meant having to learn a new language. TM B works with an agency which provides micro-credit help to the local people needing to start small businesses. He is part of a team of co-workers serving Christ in the city. In that context, TM B has befriended a host of local young men and families and continues to advance the Gospel. One of the key persons he disciplined when he was an agricultural engineer, has reached out to his family and relational networks. TM B's long term perspective of ministry has seen the foundations laid in a few lives.

As a single person, he has kept focussed on his relationship with Christ, and has developed a framework of accountability with leaders on the field and with churches and his sending mission agency. TM B had to renew his working visa year by year but now has a residence visa.

Tentmaker C, an American postgraduate student in South Asia

Personal Preparation: Tentmaker C (TM C) finished his college degree in Science in a small university town in the US Midwest. There he met and was led to a deeper walk with the Lord by a representative of a Christian group. They held regular prayer meetings focusing on various countries with unreached peoples. TM C also was encouraged to attend various mission conferences in other parts of the country. In one such mission conference, he was touched by the testimony of a veteran tentmaker who shared about his experiences and the facts about a country in South Asia.

He was encouraged to go and do his own extensive research on the opportunities to go and establish residence in the country. This research coupled with advice from some Christian groups who had been to the country led him to consider the possibility of a graduate and postgraduate program in Energy Economics which was offered in one of the country's top universities located in one of its major cities. He submitted his application and was accepted.

Networking: TM C came from a very supportive church. Since his college days, most of his Christian training was in a small group. This group committed themselves to praying and encouraging each other to establish vision for the mission field. This group also had links with a mission organisation through its leader.

TM C was encouraged to attend specific orientation programmes for countries which needed lay workers. One programme was led by a veteran missionary and a tentmaker who had extensive experiences in a country in the South Asia region. They gave an orientation incorporating key cross-cultural issues such as: cross-cultural adjustment and adaptation, history and geography, culture and religions, politics and socio-economic behavioural patterns, language and contextualisation of witness, security considerations. Sub-programmes were on spiritual, emotional and physical development. The orientation prepared workers to persevere for long-term assignments in a foreign environment. Subsequently, the above mentioned veteran missionary and tentmaker would visit him on occasions for follow-up and nurture. They would also help stimulate prayer and support for him and his family.

Residence Access: TM C has been in the country for almost ten years as a result of his student visa. The nature of his programme involved the pursuit of a Masters and a Doctorate degree.

Financial Viability: Initially, TM C had to raise funds for his education from his support groups in the United States. Later on, he was able to get part-time jobs in the South Asian country as a result of his training in a highly specialised field. Thus he was able to support himself and his family through his fund-raising and his part time jobs.

Scope of Potential Relationship among Locals: Both TM C and his wife were very relational, people-oriented even while being quite high calibre achievers. (His wife is a medical doctor who surrendered her career to follow her husband and for the sake of her family). They also adapted easily to the local environment. They even preferred to stay in almost the same living conditions as the locals, who were mostly from a lower middle class economic bracket. Coupled with his wife's knowledge of medicine, they had developed very good relationships and an outstanding reputation among their neighbours.

Opportunities for Ministry: With the help of their advisors (the veteran missionary and lay person) they were able to focus their ministry not only among their neighbours but also among some key men and women with leadership potential both inside and outside the university. Since the pace of university life was not as rigid, TM C had adequate time to deepen friendships and minister to various people without overburdening and stretching themselves. Among the fruits of their ministry are men who have strategic positions in the local government and private sector. They have a disciplinarian vision which is applicable to laymen like themselves.

Security, Sensitivity and Prudence: With the help of the orientation programme which incorporated security matters and principles of prudence in the light of the sensitive situation of Christian witness in the country, TM C was able to conduct his life and witness in a very discreet manner. His manner of ministry was done on a person-to-person basis and almost without any group activities and events. His meeting with students was justifiable because of his student status. TM C was also prepared along with his family to answer questions with clear convictions which they had developed beforehand.

20 Years On: TM C, his wife and family returned to their home country about 6 years ago. He has since completed his doctoral programme. While back in their home country, they have had a fruitful ministry among international students including some from their South Asian country. They are now planning to return to South Asia as TM C has been offered a position in a university.

FOR BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Review the reasons for Paul's tentmaking practice. How relevant would these be for today's tentmakers? Why or why not?
2. How would you describe a present-day tentmaker? Are there any differences between Paul's approach and that of present-day tentmakers?
3. "Tentmaking ministries especially require two operational principles: "incarnation and authenticity". How did Paul practise these principles?
1 Corinthians 9:19-23
1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2:3-10
2 Thessalonians 3:7-9
2 Corinthians 4:2
4. Why is tentmaking important in modern missions? Would full-time missionaries become less relevant? What are the advantages and disadvantages of tentmaking in cross-cultural missions?
5. Discuss why prudence is necessary in difficult and sensitive countries. What are some areas and practical ways to practise prudence?
Proverbs 14:8, 15
Proverbs 22:3
Amos 5:13
Matthew 10:16
Colossians 4:5, 6
6. Does your church or mission agency include tentmakers in its missions policy? How can you provide a framework for preparing and sending tentmakers, and then networking with them on the field?

RECOMMENDED READING for Part Four on Tentmaking

Don Hamilton (1989), *Tentmakers Speak: Practical Advice from over 400 Missionary Tentmakers*. Regal Books. *This volume provides you with the invaluable insight of over 400 veteran tentmakers worldwide.*

J Christy Wilson, Jr. (1979) *Today's Tentmakers*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale. *The book aims at educating these professional people to the understanding that they can become tentmakers (missionaries with professions). This is a major work on tentmaking that has motivated many of the present world tentmakers.*

Jonathan Lewis (1997), *A Study Guide - Working Your Way to the Nations: A Guide to Effective Tentmaking*, InterVarsity Press. *This book provides essays on effective tentmaking by experienced and knowledgeable missions specialists from around the world. It is designed as a study text either for individual or group use. You can download the study guide at: < www.tentmakernet.com/working/working.pdf > An online course for this book is available at < www.workingyourwayonline.com >*

Patrick Lai (1995), *Tentmaking: Business as Missions*, Colorado Springs, CO: Authentic Publishing. *This book is a manual that will benefit both those who are beginning to investigate business as missions as well as experienced tentmakers.*

Tetsunao Yamamori (1987), *God's New Envoys: A Bold Strategy for Penetrating "Closed Countries"* Portland, OR: Multnomah Press. *The author writes that a new force of "envoys" must find their own employment and point of contact in "closed" countries. Because the countries more or less closed to traditional missionary work are developing nations, they need a great variety of professional and semi-professional skills for which envoys can train and find ready employment.*

TENTMAKER WEBSITES

These websites give information on tentmaking seminars and courses. Some focus on “business as mission” and marketplace ministries.

Scruples < www.scruples.net > *Scruples is an online marketplace community. SCRUPLES stands for “Serving Christ Radically in an Uncompromising People Loving Entrepreneurial Spirit!” The purpose of the SCRUPLES webpage is to equip Christians in the marketplace with the character and the skills to succeed in business, work or ministry.*

Tentmakernet < www.tentmakernet.com > *Tentmakernet.com is a virtual organisation that seeks to help churches, mission agencies and nations to develop their own tentmaking vision. The articles section has an excellent collection of tentmaking related articles which can be read online or downloaded.*

JOURNAL ARTICLES RELATED TO TENTMAKING

Two issues of the International Journal of Frontier Missions were dedicated to a range of articles on Tentmaking: IJFM volume 14(3) and IJFM 15(1). < www.ijfm.org/archives.htm >

The April 2006 edition of Connections (the Journal of the World Evangelical Alliance’s Mission Commission) was on the theme Tentmaking in Today’s Global Environment. The entire issue may be downloaded at: < www.worldevangelicalalliance.com/resources/2006_04.pdf >

Holistic Mission

Viv Grigg (1992), *Cry of the Urban Poor: Reaching the Slums of Today’s Mega-Cities*. Monrovia, CA: World Vision MARC. (2005 revised edn), Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media.

Viv Grigg (1985), *Companion to the Poor: Christ in the Urban Slums*. Monrovia, CA: World Vision MARC. (2004 revised edn), Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media.

APPENDIX A

Reflections On Contextualization: My Personal Journey

Jim Chew, 2008

This article was first published in Connections: The Journal of the WEA Mission Commission, September 2008, pages 24-27. The theme of that issue of Connections was "Contextualization Revisited: a Global and Missional Perspective".¹

Missionaries from the United States brought the Gospel to my grandparents. My father's mother came to Christ in Malacca, Malaya through Methodist missionaries. These missionaries majored on education and started schools. My grandmother's father was keen not only to have his daughters educated in English, but to have a school started in his home. My grandmother was the first convert to be baptized and was also the first local teacher of the Methodist Girls School.² Both my paternal and maternal grandparents were "Straits-born Chinese" (or "Peranakan") as they had mingled with Malays and spoke Malay. As I reflect, I am thankful my background has helped me value other cultures.

With exposure to Western education, those converted to Christianity were more than happy to adopt Western patterns while holding to some of their own customs. These would sometimes cause tensions. For example, the selection of a husband for my grandmother would normally be done by her parents. But because my grandmother insisted on having a Christian as her husband, the choice became difficult because there were no eligible Christian men in Malacca. Her father had to journey to Singapore and with the help of missionaries, he met five fine Christian men for his daughters, and my grandmother, the eldest daughter, was matched with the one who was to become her husband. The Methodist archives describe some of these customs which to us today would be quite hilarious!³ The Methodist mission through schools bore much fruit. My father, Benjamin Chew, trusted Christ as a teenager through the Anglo-Chinese School when the evangelist E Stanley Jones spoke.

My mother's side of the family was influenced by Presbyterian missionaries and prominent lay leaders. My parents were also ministered to by

1 Connections, the Journal of the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission, is a publication used by the Mission Commission to encourage, inform and challenge. It is a must-read journal for all individuals, agencies and movements involved in training, sending, and supporting missionaries all over the world. Connections is published 3 times per year. Each edition has a specific theme. To subscribe, please visit the Connections website < www.weaconnections.com > or send an email to < connections@initialmedia.com >

2 *My Times are in His Hands, a Biography of Dr Benjamin Chew*, (Singapore Youth for Christ, 1991), pages 23-25

3 Earnest Lau, *Malacca's first Chinese Methodist wedding*, Methodist Message June 2003 (The Methodist Church, Singapore) describing my grandparents' wedding

Brethren missionaries. When my parents married in Singapore, they were already members of the Brethren Assembly. The churches that were founded followed the patterns of church governance and liturgical practices of the Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian or Brethren from England or America.

At an early age, I responded to the Gospel through New Zealander J Oswald Sanders who spoke at my church. I loved my Bible, which was the Authorized King James Version, the Bible used by all congregations. The many Scripture verses I memorized were in the King James. Our leaders prayed using "Thee, Thou and Thy" and we were taught that this was the reverential way to address God. The hymns and choruses we sang were also in "old English." They remain meaningful to me – to this day.

Many Singaporeans, former "Buddhists" (though more accurately, practicing a mixture of Chinese religions) and "freethinkers" (a favourite expression of those who considered themselves broadminded) turned to Christianity as their new "religion". Conversion was commonly viewed as changing religions – often through the rite of baptism when one would sometimes be given a Christian name. Some Christian leaders would scarcely know the difference between true conversion, or the difference between converting to Christianity as a religion and entering the kingdom of God. Christianity in Asia, then and now, is generally viewed as a Western religion. Paul Johnson made the piercing statement that "though Christianity was born in Asia, when it was re-exported there from the sixteenth century onwards it failed to acquire an Asian face".⁴ He explained, "It was the inability of Christianity to...de-Europeanise itself, which caused it to miss its opportunities." Christianity came to Singapore with British colonization. Colonialism, however, was a political issue and not a religious one. I don't ever remember Christians speaking of "cultural imperialism".

The People's Republic of China was proclaimed on 1 October 1949. China began to expel missionaries and in the early 1950s, the China Inland Mission, later renamed Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) set up its headquarters in Singapore. Churches were to benefit from the presence of many OMF missionaries. "Para-church" organizations such as Scripture Union, Youth for Christ and The Navigators also came to Singapore. These groups influenced our churches in Bible reading, in teaching, in evangelism and discipleship. Theological seminaries were founded and also had evangelical teachers.

Being English-speaking, I had limited contact with Chinese-speaking congregations. In some Chinese services I attended, the worship patterns and hymn tunes were (except for language) similar to English-speaking churches.

4 Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity*, New York: Atheneum, 1976, page 410

Dr Bobby Sng's book, *In His Good Time* gives the story of the church in Singapore.⁵ Today, there are English-speaking and Chinese-speaking (some in dialects) churches, and also Tamil-speaking and other language groups. However, to this day, to my knowledge, there is no official Malay-Muslim congregation, though there have been some Muslims who have become followers of Christ and are part of a Christian congregation. Would "contextualization" be an issue? I believe so.

During my student days, a university-mate from a staunch Hindu background received Christ. He did not change his name to a "Thomas" or a "John" so common in India. If he did, it would have made it more difficult to influence his family for Christ.

I first encountered the concept of "Contextualization" when working with university students. (According to David Bosch, the term "contextualization" was first coined in the early 1970s).⁶ For example, I found some open to talking about religious things. I knew that it was against the law to "convert" them to any other faith. I thought about the relevance of the Gospel to them. I had a conviction that getting them to change their religion to "Christianity" and to join a "church", adopting a Christian culture was not the mandate of Christ. However, these seed thoughts were dormant.

In Malaysia, my wife and I learned the importance of applying the principle of "incarnation" by opening our home, sharing our lives, and having students and young graduates live with us. They came from non-Christian backgrounds. Some students we disciplined later ministered cross-culturally.⁷

In the early 1970s, we were sent by The Navigators to New Zealand where we served for four years. At first, it seemed strange to us as Asians to go to what we thought was a "Christian" country. Our "mission field" was primarily the university where we disciplined New Zealanders (and not Asian or international students). In order to identify with these students, I enrolled for a course on campus. Our New Zealand friends helped us learn the culture. Since we spoke English, there was no need for language learning. As in Malaysia, our home became the centre for ministry with many coming to Christ. There wasn't a big need to work at "contextualizing" the message. We studied the Scriptures, developed a sense of community among the students and gave them a vision for their lives, seeking God's kingdom above all. From New Zealand, young missionary trainees were sent for exposure to cross-cultural mission mainly in Asia. Some continued in long-term mission. As missionary sending increased, I realized that missionary preparation and orientation was absolutely vital. On the mission field, missionaries were starting to pioneer ministries among Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Chinese in East Asia.

5 Bobby E K Sng, *In His Good Time, The Story of the Church in Singapore, 1819-2002* (3rd Edition, Bible Society of Singapore, Graduates Christian Fellowship, 2003).

6 David J Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), p 240.

7 See David Bok, *The Navigators in Malaysia, The First Twenty Five Years* (Navigators Malaysia, Second Edition, 2001). Also Waldron Scott, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Volume 6, No 4, Summer 1970, *Training Malaysian Leaders*, pages 203-208.

My wife and I returned to Asia in the mid-1970s. Seeing the need to prepare mission candidates (both from the West and from Asia) for their work, my colleagues and I had long discussions on culture and contextualization. We studied the Scriptures and read books, papers and articles on culture and cultural anthropology. One text-book was "The Church and Cultures" by Louis Luzbetak⁸. I also read books by Christian anthropologists Eugene Nida⁹, Paul Hiebert¹⁰ and others, and articles in *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. David Hesselgrave's book, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* was helpful.¹¹ I recognized the importance of understanding "worldviews". The concept can be complex as a worldview is a composite of beliefs from one's culture, family and religion and determines how one views and interprets reality. From this worldview will flow a person's values which in turn will influence behaviour. There can be no behavioural change without transformation within the heart of a person. I observed why missionaries like E Stanley Jones made an impact because of their understanding of their host culture's worldview. I remember hearing Stanley Jones preach on "Conversion" defining it as a "change gradual or sudden when one passes from the kingdom of self to the Kingdom of God." He was certainly passionate about the Kingdom of God. He wrote, "Jesus was obsessed with the Kingdom of God... The Kingdom of God was the only thing he called good news".¹² Surely, that's what we are called to advance among the nations – the Gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom.

I strengthened my convictions about contextualization, rooting these in the Scriptures. Jesus Christ, of course is our prime example. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). All New Testament authors wrote "in context". Paul was constantly ministering contextually and his messages were relevant to his different audiences. For example, his sermon to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14-41) was very different from his message at the meeting of the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31). Contextualization will affect not only our message but our lifestyles and the ways we minister.

In 1978, at a Congress on Evangelism, I presented a paper and spoke on "Culture and Religious Background in Relation to Conversion."¹³ By then, "Contextualization" was becoming a much-discussed concept. The *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, January 1978 had an issue on Contextualization. In January 1978, there was also a landmark Consultation on "The Gospel and Culture." The Willowbank Report on the Consultation is a "must-read."¹⁴ One section of the Report worth re-reading is on "Missionary Humility." "Ethnocentrism" is an obstacle we face in crossing cultures. None of us can claim to be "exceptions"! Peter (in Acts 10) is a classic example. Dean Flemming writes about Peter's

8 Louis J Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, (Tehny, Illinois: DivineWord Publications, 1970).

9 Eugene A Nida, *Customs, Culture and Christianity*, Tyndale Press, 1963.

10 Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978).

11 David J Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) The 2nd Edition was published in 1991.

12 E Stanley Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1968), page 153

13 Jim Chew, *Culture and Religious Background in Relation to Conversion*, paper presented at Congress on Evangelism for Malaysia and Singapore, 1978

14 <http://www.lausanne.org/willowbank-1978/lop-2.html>

“conversion” from his Jewish ethnocentrism. “The ‘conversion’ of the messenger must come before the conversion of those who need the message.”¹⁵ Humility means taking the trouble to understand and really appreciate the culture of those to whom we go.

In the 1980s, I continued studying the Scriptures with my colleagues on issues of contextualization. We held consultations with mission practitioners ministering among Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Secularists. Paul’s letter to Galatians was one of the key epistles for our study and discussion, together with the history of the early church in Acts and in subsequent church history with many lessons to learn. A project on “The Scriptural Roots of Ministry” was launched. We were concerned about the “purity” of the Gospel and with it, the “mobility” of the Gospel to spread in context. Studying the Scriptures was both mind-stretching and also liberating. Two key questions were: “What is the Gospel?” and “What is ‘church’”? On the latter question, Western ecclesiology has highly influenced concepts and strategies of so-called “church planting”. Such ecclesiology can be extremely disadvantageous among hostile religious contexts – and this could affect the mobility of the Gospel. How does the Bible view the whole matter of “church” and “doing church”?

I took a sabbatical in New Zealand where I had discussions with missionary statesman, J. Oswald Sanders, one of my mentors. As we talked about contextualization and mission issues, he encouraged me to write a book. I wrote “When You Cross Cultures”.¹⁶ I was particularly impressed by the example of Paul and his team in 1 Thessalonians 1:5-9 and 2:1-12. It was not just their message, but their lives and lifestyle – all part of contextualization.

In my book, I mentioned the 5 stages of cultural communication (owing much to Jim Petersen, who had led a seminar on “contextualization”).¹⁷ The communicator must firstly

- (1) *Gain rapport*. He needs to be aware of his own cultural background and free himself from traditions that will inhibit him from relating to the new culture. The continuous learning of the host culture’s background is essential. Rapport takes place when the people in the receiving culture say, “I now want to hear what you have to say”.
- (2) The second stage is “*Comprehension*” which occurs when the receiver says, “I now understand what you have to say”.
- (3) The third stage is for an “*Equivalent Response*” on the part of the receiver – “It means the same to me as it does to you”. What the messenger has communicated makes sense and brings about a positive response.
- (4) The fourth is “*Relevance to Life*”. The message transforms the receiver’s life and there is true conversion.

15 Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, IVP, 2005), pages 36-37.

16 Jim Chew, *When You Cross Cultures: Vital Issues Facing Christian Missions* (The Navigators Singapore, 1990).

17 Illustrated in pages 8-10 in my book above.

(5) Finally, we see “*Mature Colabourship*” in the advance of the Gospel. The apostolic team has assumed its role and the receivers spread the Gospel in context undistorted by cultural traditions. As Jim Petersen states: “The issue in contextualization is the truth and mobility of the Gospel...It means taking care that it remains undistorted by the culture of the hearer as it is being received. The Gospel plus anything...becomes a non-Gospel”.¹⁸

In practice, this process can be complex and even messy. One obvious problem comes from one’s own traditions. The Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) had to convene to deal with this problem and Galatians was written because “the truth of the Gospel” was being threatened. We see Paul in heated battle with Peter on this issue. James’ words in Acts 15:19 are a reminder “that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God”.

I was helped reading Paul Hiebert’s book, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* where he writes about “Bounded sets” and “Centered sets”.¹⁹ Western culture and churches often think and operate as bounded sets with a Greek worldview of reality. Hiebert examines Hebrew culture as a “centered set”. This helped me to see the dangers of “Churchianity” (promoting the traditions and forms of church), of promoting Christianity (as a religion) and not focusing on the Person of Christ.

In the 1980s, more Asians were responding to the challenge of cross-cultural missions, many going as bi-vocational tentmakers to restricted access countries. The lack of missionary preparation and pre-field orientation became evident. In Singapore, mission leaders from eight mission societies met, and under the leadership of Dr James Taylor of Overseas Missionary Fellowship, formed the Asia Cross-Cultural Training Institute (ACTI). We developed a curriculum which included Cross-Cultural Living and Ministry, Contextualization and Cultural Anthropology. ACTI continues to function well. Its September 2007 publication, *Asian Mission*, has its focus on “Contextualization and the Church”.²⁰

Churches are growing in Africa, Asia and in Latin America. When evangelical statesman, John Stott was asked about this enormous growth, his response was that the growth was a fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham. When asked how he evaluated this growth, he said, “The answer is, ‘growth without depth’”.²¹ This speaks again of the importance of laying the foundations of the Gospel well. It also emphasizes the importance of establishing our churches, ensuring that true spiritual transformation is taking place. In doing so, I have learned the importance of concepts such as function, form and meaning. Are the functions and forms relevant as we see the work of God in the growth of faith communities?

¹⁸ Ibid, pages 10-11.

¹⁹ Paul G Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), pages 110-136

²⁰ ACTI website <www.acti-singapore.org> (look under “PRESS”)

²¹ Christianity Today, October 2006

Finally, in the past decade, the issue of “C5/Insider Movements” has come to the fore. The concept began with John Travis (a pseudonym) in 1998, who proposed a scale (or continuum) C1-C6 describing six types of “Christ-centred communities” (that’s what the “C” stands for).²² “C5” refers to believers who identify themselves as “followers of Jesus”. I don’t intend to enter this debate as many papers have been written on this subject. (See a sampling in the endnotes).²³ This issue has generated much discussion sometimes with more heat than light. Do keep in mind that C1-C6 began as an analytical (and not a prescriptive) tool. It was devised by an American ministering in a sensitive country. My American friends think in terms of matrices and spectra (as an Asian co-worker reminded me). These are helpful. However, Asians don’t have discussions using such a paradigm. We usually communicate through stories (as Jesus did).

Having met some believers in these “insider movements” whose lives have been transformed, each community would have their stories. They worship God deeply and are seeing the movement of the Gospel among their own relational networks. I visualize the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. I can’t help thinking of the years the Apostle Paul took to see the growth of the church at Corinth.²⁴ Similarly, the apostolic ministries among these believers have seen fruit. In one Asian country where race, religion, language and politics all reinforce each other, C5 seems to work best. My plea is for critics to pray more for these “insider movements” and affirm the work of God. The discussions continue and so must our attitude of being learners.

Some years ago, I was told that these growing believers from a particular people group did a prolonged Bible study on “Worship”. It would have been a grand study! I often try to visualize the scene in Revelation 5 and look forward to worshipping with these believers in heaven! John Piper’s words are a powerful reminder – “Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Mission exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate ... because God is ultimate. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more ... Worship abides forever”.²⁵ That’s ultimate reality!

22 John Travis, *The C1-C6 Spectrum*, Evangelical Missions Quarterly, October 1998, pages 407-408

23 (1) Evangelical Missions Quarterly, October 1998, articles by Phil Parshall and John Travis, pages 404-415

(2) Joshua Massey, *His Ways are Not our Ways*, EMQ April 1999 <www.EMQonline.com>

(3) International Journal of Frontier Missions, Spring 2000, Volume 17, articles by John Travis, Joshua Massey, Bernard Dutch

(4) John & Anna Travis, *Appropriate Approaches*, in *Appropriate Christianity*, ed. Charles Kraft (Pasadena,

CA: William Carey Library, 2005), pages 397-414

(5) Bill Nikides, *Evaluating Insider Movements*, St Francis Magazine, No.4, March 2006, published by Interserve and Arab Vision

(6) International Journal of Frontier Missiology, January-March 2007 Volume 24:1, < www.ijfm.org/archives.htm >

articles by Gary Corwin, Herbert Hoefler, J Dudley Woodberry, Kevin Higgins

(7) Articles in IJFM Volume 24:2 in <www.ijfm.org/archives.htm>

24 See my article, *Mission and Spirituality: Lessons from 1 Corinthians* in *The Soul of Mission*, ed. Tan Kang San, (Pustaka Sufes Sdn Bhd, Selangor, Malaysia, 2007), pages 50-63

25 John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993), page 11

APPENDIX B

Six Critical Factors For A Multiplying Ministry

When we speak of cross-cultural mission, we assume a long-term calling. A long-term ministry has a perspective of thirty to fifty years, especially when we think of cross-cultural work. This perspective envisions spiritual generations as a ministry grows and multiplies.

Pioneering ministries require language and cultural learning. Evangelism and discipling is often a long process especially in sensitive and resistant cultures. Workers are not alone, but work in a team. When the lost are evangelised and are being disciplined, faith communities emerge. What will they look like? How will the gospel advance through these faith communities? There are also issues of interdependence between the apostolic pioneering team and the local faith communities.

Groups of ministry practitioners, led by Navigator leader Jim Petersen, interacted on these critical factors for a long-term, multiplying ministry.

The first critical factor of *laying foundations* has the end results in mind – that of seeing “*spiritual generations*”. The next four factors (evangelising, discipling on to maturity, the developing of faith communities, generating leaders and leadership) need to be aligned, so that the outcome will be a true movement of the Gospel. Note that these factors are not necessarily sequential. In reality, once the initial evangelism has borne fruit and there is a new generation of followers of Christ, these four factors are carried on simultaneously.

The following is a brief outline of the Six Critical Factors that can be used for discussion.

1st Critical Factor: LAYING FOUNDATIONS

Getting started for long-term ministry

God’s passion is to bless the nations through Jesus. He desires that our ministries be fruitful and that our fruit multiply. We anticipate God blessing His people for many generations.

Our vision for lasting fruitfulness is rooted in God’s promises. For some cross-cultural workers, these promises motivate them for a life-time. Others simply obey Christ’s Great Commission. It is a command, and that is sufficient

to respond in obedience. The promises of God enable us to focus on God and His purposes for the nations. Here too, we trust God, take Him at His Word and obey Him.

The Promises of God¹

“God is not a man that He should lie” (Numbers 23:19). His promises never fail. God made promises to Abraham and to prophets in the Old Testament that affect us all. The entire Bible is the story of God fulfilling His promises made long ago.

The New Testament teaches that in Christ all the promises of God are fulfilled. He Himself will fulfil His commitments. We are not dependent upon our own efforts.

While many of God’s promises are general promises applying to all believers, God also impresses individuals with specific promises. These personal promises become foundational to life and ministry.

What is needed:

- Clear Vision
- Faith in the Promises of God
- A team of labourers
- Access for the Gospel

Questions:

1. From 1 Corinthians 3, how would you describe the laying of firm foundations? What other passages of Scripture come to mind?
2. Share your personal vision and promises from Scripture that grip you.
3. What kind of leadership would be needed in pioneering a new work? What gifts and qualities are needed in a team of labourers?
4. If you were in a difficult mission frontier, how would you describe your identity?

1 The three paragraphs following are extracts from a Bible study on “The Process of Missions”, The Navigators, 1998

2nd Critical Factor: EVANGELISING

What is needed:

- Understanding your audience by living among them
- Communicating the Gospel by life, deed and word
- Relevant Skills
- Teamwork

Questions:

1. A first question, which cross-cultural workers need to ask and be clear about, is: "What is the Gospel?" (Chapter 3 shows how Paul had argued in Galatians that there is only one Gospel. But this one Gospel would have different manifestations to the Jewish and Gentile believers. Jews must not impose their Jewish forms on the Gentiles because these are not essential to the truth of the Gospel). List Scriptures that you consider relevant in your context where the worldview and beliefs of the people need to be taken into consideration.
2. What is central in the Gospel? List passages on the Gospel which grip you.
3. What do you understand by "the good news of Jesus and His Kingdom" (Mark 1:14-15).
4. How can we ensure that people believe and follow Christ for the right reasons? What process do you anticipate to see people become followers of Christ?

3rd Critical Factor: MAKING DISCIPLES

This is the heart and imperative of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20

What is needed:

- The Survival of Converts
- Discipleship Goals
- Transformation of Life: Addressing this Process is Crucial²

Questions:

1. What are some dangers that new believers face? According to Mark 4:19, what are some obstacles which have to be overcome?
2. What are some marks of discipleship? How can we help believers in this process towards discipleship?
3. What are some long-term goals we should have in mind?
4. Describe the process of spiritual transformation. How does transformation occur?

² Jim Petersen, *Lifestyle Discipleship: The Challenge of Following Jesus in Today's World*, Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, Seven Elements of Spiritual Transformation, pages 103-121.

4th Critical Factor: DEVELOPING COMMUNITY

What is needed:

- Understanding “Church”
- Concepts in the New Testament of “*oikos*” (household)³ and “*ekklesia*” (church)
- Understanding the difference between Form and Function

Besides the question “What is the Gospel?”, another crucial question is: “What is Church?” Doing a bible study on this subject is essential.

Questions:

1. What was Christ’s promise about His church? Who will build it? (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23)
2. What are some descriptions or metaphors in Scripture for the church? What is the most common?
3. Believers fellowshiped in homes. Who were some of these? (Romans 16)
4. What positive attitudes and actions and “one-another’s” are important in order for believers to comfortably share their lives with each other? What will cause them NOT to share their lives?

³ The early Church did not invent new forms. Instead, they made use of their existing social structure, the household (*oikos*). There were almost no church buildings for the first 300 years of Christian history. Homes were used. Estimates are that a church would consist of from 10 to 30 people.

5th Critical Factor: GENERATING LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP

When studying the book of Acts (especially from Acts 13 to 20), notice the ministry of the mobile apostolic teams and the local expressions of the church; both working to advance the missionary task. They were independent, yet interdependent. Neither one could do the work without the other. From the epistles, we read the letters from Paul, Peter and John to growing churches.

What is needed:

- Interdependence between the apostolic pioneers and local leaders
- Spiritual Parenting and the developing of local leaders
- Ensuring the strengthening of churches and the advance of the Gospel

Questions:

1. What are the implications of “interdependence” between the pioneering leaders and the local expressions of church?
2. What qualities of life are important for leadership? (1 Timothy and Titus)
3. How do you see the process of entrusting “the good deposit” (2 Timothy 1:14; 2:2) to local leaders?

6th Critical Factor: SPIRITUAL GENERATIONS

The idea of spiritual generations is illustrated in several scriptural themes:⁴

Abraham and His Descendants (Genesis 12:1-3)

Physical and Spiritual Generations (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 78:1-8)

The Seed and Organic Growth (Genesis 1:11-12; John 12:23-26)

The Will of Christ (John 17:6-26; Matthew 28:18-20)

Sustaining Leadership (Act 20:18-36; 2 Timothy 2:1-2)

As you work through these generational themes, ask yourself:

1. From these scriptures, how are we instructed to think about spiritual generations?
2. What can we learn on how we should think about missions?
 - What is needed:
 - Understanding the Vision of Spiritual Generations
 - Understanding the Purposes of God

Questions:

1. Please review the 1st Critical Factor of “Laying Foundations”. Why is the laying of firm foundations crucial for “spiritual generations” to be a reality?
2. Share some passages of Scripture that highlight “spiritual generations”.
3. Describe how you envision spiritual generations to occur.
4. What happens when there is no vision for spiritual generations?

⁴ These themes are extracts from a Bible Study on “The Process of Missions”, The Navigators

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