

Sharing the Message Cross-Culturally

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Part I: The Doctrinal Context of Cross-Cultural Ministry

The account of Jesus and the woman at the well of Sychar (John 4:4-42) may rightly be regarded as one of the most powerful lessons in the Bible. In this solitary event are taught many of the sublime Christian doctrines. As true Man, Jesus was tired; as true God, He knew everything the woman ever did. He modeled His undeserved love (grace) for sinners by speaking to this stranger. Jesus first illuminated her sins and need of savior and then presented Himself as her redeemer, thus rightly dividing the word of truth, Law and Gospel. The doctrine of the Trinity is shown in bold relief with Jesus speaking of His heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit working faith in the hearts of the woman and townspeople through the Gospel. Sanctification, a Gospel response, is illustrated by the woman's willingness to abandon her water jar and publicly confess her sin and her Savior. Furthermore, this text is one of the greatest examples of cross-cultural evangelism found in the Bible. In this short dialog Jesus viewed this woman as typical of all humankind which is born in sin and would be lost forever without the grace of God. He also viewed her as unique. Her own personality, set of sinful experiences, and attitudes made her an individual, distinct from all others. Finally, Jesus saw her as typical, or at least similar, to other Samaritans whose beliefs and culture made them abhorrent to most Jews.

In the final analysis the woman at the well was like all other people, like no other person, and like some other people. Jesus dealt with her accordingly. An understanding of this tripartite division is at the heart of *sharing the message cross-culturally*.

Every Person is Like Every Other Person

St. Paul reminded the Ephesians (4:4-6) that, "There is one body, and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." From these words we understand the unity of the Triune God and the unity of the body of Christ, the holy Christian church. Beyond these unities, however, there is one other commonality. In some ways every person is like every other person.

First, all people, regardless of age, sex, race, or nation are lost and condemned creatures.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way... (Is. 53:6).

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23).

The soul who sins is the one who will die (Ezek 18:4).

For the wages of sin is [eternal] death.(Rom. 6:23).

Notice that there are no exceptions and no exemptions. Inherited sinfulness, total depravity, concupiscence, is a common human predicament (Rom. 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 3:10-12) which leads to a common human consequence (Rom. 1:18; Mark 16:16).

Second, all people, regardless of age, sex, race, or nation have been reconciled to God through Christ.

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them...(2 Cor. 5:19).

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ....(2 Cor. 5:17-18).

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:23-24).

This objective justification is the end result of Jesus' active obedience and passive obedience coupled with God's good and gracious will.

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (Gal. 4:4-5).
You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom. 5:6).

Third, all people, regardless of age, sex, race, or nation come to faith only through the Means of Grace.

Baptism now saves you. . . (1 Pet. 3:21).

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior... (Titus 3:5-6).

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. . . (Rom. 1:16).

Christ Jesus . . . has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10).

Subjective justification takes place in any person only when the Holy Spirit works through the gospel in word and sacrament creating spiritual life where before there was only death. "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). Professor David Valleskey rightly notes, "Faith is not something man *does*. Faith, rather, is something God *gives*" (original emphasis).ⁱ

Fourth, all people regardless of age, sex, race, or nation are targeted by God's love for salvation.ⁱⁱ

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Matt. 28:19).

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation (Mark 16:16).

This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:46-47).

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men [people] from every nation who fear him and do what is right (Acts 10:34-35).

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile -- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. . . (Rom. 10:12).

God our savior... wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4).

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation (Rev. 4:9).

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth -- to every nation, tribe, language, and people (Rev. 14:6).

Every Person is Like No Other Person

When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, He realized that in some ways she was unlike every other person. Each human being is a distinct individual with his or her own unique history and personality. Jesus' disciples had much in common. They were Galilean Jews. Many of them were fishermen from the small towns to the west and south of the Sea of Galilee. The twelve were Old Testament believers. James and John, Peter and Andrew were disciples of John the Baptizer. According to Jewish tradition a man had to be about 30 years of age in order to be considered a teacher. Jesus sent the twelve on various missionary tours. They were, thus, probably about His age.

In spite of their similarities, each disciple had his own unique attitude, attributes, and abilities. While Peter may have been impulsive (Matt. 14:22-33; 17:4; Luke 5:8), he also demonstrated leadership potential (John 6:66-69) and in time became supervisor of the Christian churches in Palestine. Meanwhile his brother, Andrew, is characterized in Scripture as unobtrusive, an evangelist content quietly to introduce individuals to Jesus (John 1:40-42; 6:1-9; 12:20-36). James and John also were brothers. They were both presumptuous (Mark 10:35-45) and jointly shared the appellation "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). Yet, John was the disciple whom Jesus especially loved (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). Thomas may have tended toward pessimism (John 11:16) as well as doubt (John 20:19-29). Matthew, of course, was a changed man -- from tax collector to disciple (Mark 2:13-17). Simon was a political zealot (Matt. 10:4), and Judas was greedy (John 12:4-6).

Indeed one of the great mysteries of the Bible is how God took men with such distinct personalities as humble Moses (Num. 12:3), self-effacing Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6), and intellectual Paul (Acts 22:2; 23:6) and used them as His instruments in writing the Bible. Indeed, "prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21).

Every Person is Like Some Other People

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "...God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demanded miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles..." (1 Cor. 1:21-23). Paul, thus, made a fundamental distinction between the Jews on the one hand, and the Gentiles on the other. In doing so he recognized cultural differences.

Culture can be defined as that set of mental models or mental road maps which are shared by the members of society and which allow them to produce socially acceptable behavior.ⁱⁱⁱ Anthropologist Ward Goodenough comments that culture is:

the forms of things that people have in mind, their models for perceiving, relating, and otherwise interpreting them as such. The things people say or do, their social arrangements and events, are products or by-products of their culture as they apply it to the task of perceiving and dealing with their circumstances.^{iv}

The foregoing definition indicates that culture is not artifacts but mental patterns for perceiving reality and behaving responsibly. Culture is not innate or biological. It is learned and shared by group members. Since culture is socially transmitted, different groups have different cultures and behave differently. In some ways every person is like some other people-- the people with whom he or she shares their culture.

The Old Testament is replete with examples of cultural differences. Jonah acknowledged his religious if not cultural superiority and only reluctantly preached to the Ninevites. To the contrary the little Hebrew slave girl willingly told the Syrian general, Naaman, of her people's prophet (2 Ki. 5:1). Ruth walked away from her Moabite roots and accepted Naomi's God and people. Daniel struggled to maintain his own faith and customs in the face of Babylonian opposition.

Jesus, likewise, distinguished between different cultural groups. During His time of humiliation, He acknowledged that His ministry was restricted to only one cultural/religious group, "the lost sheep of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). Likewise when he sent out the He twelve disciples on their first missionary effort He instructed

them “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt. 10:5-6). In time the Good Shepherd would expand his spiritual flock to include those from other cultures (John 10:16). Once He was exalted He would draw all men to Himself (John 12:32).^y This was in keeping with explicit Old Testament prophecies (Gen. 12:3; Is. 2:2-3; 19:18; 60:3; Micah 4:1-2) as well as that of Simeon (Luke 2:32).

After Christ’s ascension the flood-gates of the Gospel were thrown open to people from different cultures. Peter’s Pentecost address is particularly interesting. People from different cultures, but who shared the Jewish faith, were addressed in their own particular languages (Acts 2:8-11). Another cultural group, the Jews from Israel, began to poke fun of them assuming they were drunk. Peter addressed the “Men of Israel” and preached Christ to them (Acts 2:22ff). Later God brought men of different cultures together when Peter visited the home of Cornelius (Acts 10). Finally Paul, a Hebrew of Hebrews (Phil. 3:5) became a principal missionary to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). His perspective was decidedly cross-cultural. “I am obligated both the Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish” (Rom 1:14). For, as Paul concluded “Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of the Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too” (Rom. 3:29). Consequently “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10). Finally, Paul’s closing words to the Romans were, “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen” (Acts 28:28).

In summary, the Bible teaches that every person is a sinner in need of the Savior, that Christ lived and died for all, that God wants all to be saved, and that God employs only the Means of Grace as the mechanism whereby He creates and sustains saving faith. On the other hand, every person is unlike any other person, endowed with a distinct personality and individuality. Finally, every person is socialized and generally lives within the confines of a particular culture with its own norms, values, and rules of expected behavior.

Part II: The Historical Precedent for Cross-Cultural Ministry

In 1871 theologian Nikolai F. S. Grundtvig provided a Danish interpretation of Martin Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” One verse, in particular, has become well known to Lutheran Christians. A portion of it reads:

God’s Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall a our chief endeavor. (CW #293)

Grundtvig, like Luther before him, understood the centrality of mission work in the life of the Christian Church. Christ was unequivocal in His directives to Christians to share the Good News throughout all the earth, or as Isaiah so graphically stated it “Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back, lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes” (Is. 54:2). Heaven should be the destination for people of every “nation, tribe, language, and people” (Rev. 14:6).

The question, therefore, is not whether Christ wants all people to be saved, or whether Christians should engage in mission work. Rather the question is, “Should cross-cultural mission work be done?” Can synods and congregations be successfully integrated? The Book of Acts provides documentary evidence that Christians from different cultures can successfully co-exist. The process, however, is not always easy.

Judaic Christianity

The book of Acts begins with a description of Judaic Christianity. As Pentecost dawned, the Christian church celebrated its initial birthday. Native Jews and Jewish proselytes heard the message of salvation and believed (Acts 2:1-40). And the church grew (Acts 2:41), and grew (Acts 2:47), and grew (Acts 4:4), and grew (Acts 6:7). As Martin Franzmann notes, the Jewish believers described in Acts 1-12 observed Jewish dietary

laws (Acts 10:14) and prayer hours (Acts 3:1; 10:9, 30). They taught in the temple (Acts 5:20, 25:42), met in synagogues (Acts 6:9-10), and proclaimed the message of Christ to fellow Jews (Acts 1:8).^{vi} For all intents and purposes they were Old Testament Jews who came to believe in Jesus as the promised Messiah.

Meanwhile, the letter of James provides clues about problems faced by Jewish Christians at this time. James, probably the brother of Jesus, was the head of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. He penned his epistle to Jewish Christians of the diaspora (James 1:1). With the stoning of Stephen persecution broke out against the church and the believers scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1) and radiated outward to Damascus, Antioch of Syria, and other areas near Palestine. James was aware that Judaic Christians were threatened from within and without. They faced poverty and persecution and the attenuating symptoms of bitterness and impatience. Their apathy or fatigue could potentially weaken them to the point that they were again ensnared by their former religion. Franzmann comments:

For them, accommodation to the “world” meant, of course, accommodation to the Judaism from which they had escaped, Judaism with its distorted piety, its encrusted and inactive faith, its superficial and fruitless hearing of the world, its arrogant and quarrelsome “wisdom,” its ready response to the seduction of wealth, its mad thirst for liberty. The danger of apostasy was for the members of this church anything but remote and theoretical. It was immediate and real.^{vii} [James 5:19-20]

Thus, James’ letter is like Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. It provides Jewish Christians with instructions on holy living.^{viii}

Cross-Cultural Christianity

It didn’t take long, however, before Christianity spread cross-culturally. Jesus’ apostles witnessed in Jerusalem and Judea, then in Samaria, and finally throughout the Mediterranean world (Acts 1:8). Philip preached among the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-25) then baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39). Cornelius and his household came to faith (Acts 10:9,16,27). Not long thereafter, unnamed Christian men from Cyprus, and Cyrene, “went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:20-21). Eventually Barnabas visited Antioch as did Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas visited Cyprus and Asia Minor. Paul’s message spread like an umbrella over people from different cultures. The Holy Spirit enlarged the tents of Christendom (Is. 54:2-3; Acts 12:24; 19:20).

Integration, however, led to growing pains as Acts 12-15:35 and Paul’s letter to the Galatians show. Tensions and conflicts arose among Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul had taught, “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39). The implications were clear. The doors of the Christian church had been thrown open to all including those who were neither circumcised nor followed Jewish customs. The Judaizers, nevertheless, insisted that Gentile converts first become Jewish. “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses,” they maintained, “you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).

An “Apostolic Council” was convened at Jerusalem to decide the matter. Delegates representing the “whole church” (Acts 15:22) were in attendance. The decision was rendered that the Gentiles were free from the Law. On the other hand, to promote fellowship within the churches as well as moral behavior, the Gentiles were asked to refrain from food polluted by idols and told to abstain from sexual immorality (Acts 15).

The matter was far from over. Judaizers in Galatia continued their teachings. In response Paul wrote his most hard hitting polemic. In Galatians he directly confronted the legalist heresy. The letter had the desired effect. When Paul later gathered an offering for the destitute Christians of Jerusalem, the Galatians joined in (1 Cor. 16:1). Gaius, from a Galatian church, even accompanied Paul with the offering to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). This outflowing of love was a clear “expression of the unity between Gentile and Judaic Christianity.”^{ix}

The Christian church had become integrated. Cross-cultural ministry and peoples from different cultures merge together into the Way. The remainder of Acts and many of the epistles provide prima facie evidence that the merger was comfortable. Some congregations contained Jewish converts, others Gentiles believers, and still others both Jews and Gentiles Christians.

<u>Congregation</u>	<u>Composition</u>
Jerusalem	Jewish Christian
Galatia	Jewish and Gentile Christians
Thessalonica	Predominantly Gentile Christians
Corinth	Jewish and Gentile Christians
Ephesus	Jewish and Gentile Christians
Philippi	Predominantly Gentile Christians
Colossae	Predominantly Gentile Christians
Rome	Predominantly Jewish then Gentile Christians

Professor Richard D. Balge writes, “That the congregations of Paul’s mission fields were ‘mixed,’ cross-cultural, multi-cultural is evidence that Christians can live out the implications of what Christ did when he broke down the barriers between God and man, along with all barriers between people.”^x

In light of the historical example provided by the early Christian church, it seems obvious that the contemporary Christian church should engage in cross-cultural outreach. Some modern theologians, however, question the wisdom of such work.

Donald A. McGavran, key spokesman and current leader of the Church Growth Movement, advocates what is called the “homogeneous unit principle” of mission work. Professor David Valleskey has distilled the salient points in McGavran’s doctrine when he writes:

McGavran maintains that “men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers,” and that “in most cases of arrested growth of the Church, men are deterred not so much by the offense of the cross as by non-biblical offenses” which are caused by forcing people to cross linguistic, class or racial barriers. “Christianity,” contends McGavran, “like electricity, flows best where there is good contact. The power of God acts best within a people.”^{xi}

McGavran has derived this principle on the basis of doctrinal misunderstandings and faulty exegesis. People do not “like to become Christians” under any circumstances.^{xii} On this issue the Scriptures are very specific.

The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time (Gen. 6:5).

Flesh gives birth to flesh. . . (John 3:6).

The sinful mind is hostile to God (Rom. 8:7).

The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. . . (Eph. 2:1).

McGavran bolsters his argument that Christians should work among “winnable people” and not engage in cross-cultural ministry by interpreting the “all nations” of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19) as referring to separate races, tribes, or castes. Such an interpretation is exegetically indefensible, as several authors have shown.^{xiii} Wendland, for example, writes:

McGavran, so interested in numbers proclaims “harvest theology” and decries what he calls “search theology.” In his thinking fields of “low receptivity” should be occupied “lightly” and the church should concentrate its efforts on “the proletariat” which shows more promise. This is consistent with his misunderstanding of the Great Commission.^{xiv}

What McGavran and other advocates of the Church Growth Movement fail to realize is that the Holy Spirit takes peoples from every nation, tribe, language, and people and through the Means of Grace makes them one people. Peter, drawing on Old Testament passages (eg. Is. 62:12; Deut. 4:20; Mal. 3:17), elaborates. “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:9). Christianity transcends any and all racial, ethnic, sex, and age boundaries.

Not only are Christians a new people, but in becoming Christians they lose their former identity. Peter writes, “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). The writer to the Hebrews (11:13) made the same contention. The former heroes of faith were “aliens and strangers on earth.” Just as Christ was not of this world (John 8: 14) and His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), His subjects are ξένοι (strangers) and παρρηπίδημοι (exiles) on earth while their citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20; Gal. 4:26). Consequently, regardless of age, race, sex, or earthly ethnicity, every Christian can rightly sing:

I'm but a stranger here;
 Heav'n is my home.
 Earth is a desert drear;
 Heav'n is my home.
 Danger and sorrow stand
 Round me on ev'ry hand.
 Heav'n is my fatherland:
 Heav'n is my home. (CW #417)

In summary, the Christian church is a cross-cultural church. It has been integrated from its inception, and it is God's will that all people today form congregations and synods. Furthermore the Holy Spirit, working through the Means of Grace transforms such diverse people into a new people.

Part III: Practical Application of Cross-Cultural Ministry

Mequon professor, Richard D. Balge, recently addressed the WELS Southeastern Wisconsin District Pastoral Conference. His paper was titled “Cross-cultural and Multi-cultural Ministry in the New Testament,” and he addressed the pastors and delegates with these opening words:

Although it was not so designated the synod's first notable cross-cultural mission effort was the work among the Apaches of Arizona. There have [been] many such efforts since then, and not only in what we today call “world mission fields.” There are many reasons why the topic of cross-cultural and multi-cultural ministry is timely. There are ever more immigrants entering the United States. The proportion of Hispanic people in the general population increases rapidly. The celebration and encouragement of cultural diversity has replaced the American melting pot idea. Without much reflection or research one can think if ministries carried on -- in or by our synod -- involving Native Americans, Hmong, hispanic, African-Americans, and Koreans.^{xv}

A question, however, arises. As we have seen, the Bible teaches that Christianity transcends cultures. Therefore, does culture matter? Worded differently, should the church be sensitive to cultural differences as it works

cross-culturally? As we will see an awareness of crosscultural differences can be important in avoiding impediments to gospel transmission, and in directing the Word of God toward a particular people.

Cultural Awareness and Barriers to the Evangelism

While not absolutely necessary, an awareness of another person's culture can be very important in evangelism. The missionary or pastor who displays cross-cultural awareness may avoid painful mistakes. In his paper, "A Biblical, Lutheran Theology of Missions," Professor David J. Valleskey states the following thesis: *"As Christians use the means of grace to carry out Christ's commission, they will remember that while they can do nothing to add to the power inherent in the gospel, they can unconsciously put barriers in the way of the gospel, making it more difficult to communicate to unbelievers"* (original emphasis).^{xvi}

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthian congregation, "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited" (2 Cor. 6:3). Paul then advised both Timothy (1 Tim. 3:1-13) as well as Titus (2:1-10) about the attributes expected of God's people which will enable them to avoid facing the path of the unbeliever with stumbling blocks. On the other hand, Valleskey also points out, "godless behavior" as well as "insensitive behavior" form barriers to communicating the gospel. The latter behavior can include cultural insensitivity.

The Apostolic Council described in Acts 15 was convened in order to delineate between cultural and spiritual differences separating Jewish and Gentile Christians. The decision of James and the Jewish council was to allow the Gentiles to remain uncircumcised and to eat their traditional food so as not to "make it difficult for the gentiles who are turning to God" (Acts 15:19). Likewise, in a matter of adiaphora and to avoid placing a stumbling block in the way of the Jews, Paul circumcised Timothy before continuing on his missionary journey (Acts 16:3). Paul's willingness to accommodate himself to different cultures for the sake of the gospel is spelled out in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Professor Richard Balge characterized Paul's cross-cultural attitude as follows:

Paul would put himself at anyone's service, adjust to anyone's culture, accommodate himself to anyone's lifestyle (excluding, of course, what was sinful), if it might help to win that person to eternal life. Though his stomach may not have rejoiced at Gentile cuisine he was willing to become like the Gentiles in diet... He would do that "so as to win those not having the law." Strong in his understanding of Christian liberty, he put himself in the sandals of those who were still weak in understanding, "to win the weak." Giving up his exercise of freedom in certain matters, he adapted his conduct to the sensitive conscience of those who needed to hear the message of salvation. Paul's words teach us a perspective to be converted in any cross-cultural ministry, any gospel ministry: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."^{xvii}

Cultural Awareness in Proclaiming Law and Gospel

There is no question but that the early Christian leaders were aware of cultural differences and took them into account when engaged in cross-cultural mission work. The letter of James, for example, especially addresses "the sins of Judaism in their Christianized form; the problem of sexual license, for instance, which looms so large in gentile Christianity and is constantly dealt with in letters addressed to gentile churches, is not touched on here."^{xviii}

An isagogical study of the synoptic gospels also indicates cross-cultural awareness. Matthew apparently had a Jewish audience in mind when he penned his gospel account. Thus he traced Jesus' genealogy back to King David and then back to Abraham, the father of the Jews (Matt. 1:1). Since former Jews would have known the Scriptures, Matthew quoted the Old Testament almost three dozen times (2:6, 18). Sixteen times he indicated that prophecies were fulfilled. In the narrative Matthew mentioned Jewish landmarks, customs, and laws without elaboration or explanation (15:1-2). Finally, he included considerable material to show how the Scribes and Pharisees opposed Jesus (27:1-4). Mark, on the other hand obviously wrote to Gentiles, probably Romans. Consequently he interpreted Hebrew and Aramaic expressions not known to Latin and Greek speakers

(Mark 3:17). He explained aspects of Jewish religion and compared Greek money to Roman currency (12:42). Meanwhile Latin expressions like legion, centurion, praetorium frequently occur. If Latins identified with power, then Mark's gospel was tailored for them. Forty-two times action words like 'immediately', 'at once', and 'without delay', were utilized. Luke wrote to Theophilus, who was probably a high ranking official living in Rome (Luke 1:3). Understandably he used Roman dates, traced Jesus' chronology past Abraham to Adam (1:38), and refrained from calling Jesus by the Hebrew term 'rabbi.' Since Luke was writing to a Gentile convert he emphasized Jesus as the savior of all people including the Gentiles (9:52).

Church historian, Milton L. Rudnick, draws this isagogical conclusion:

The specific form of the Gospel was determined by the background and situation of the hearers. To Jews, for example, Jesus was introduced as the messiah promised to their fathers (Acts 13:16-41) and the heavenly High Priest foreshadowed in the Old Testament history and cultus (Heb. 7-10). To Gentiles He was presented as Lord of all (Acts 10:36), the unknown God, creator and judge, whom they worshiped without realizing who He was (Acts 17:22-31), the image of the invisible God, who by His blood reconciled all things to God whether on earth or in heaven (Col. 1:15-23), the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16).^{xix}

This process of relating the Word of God to the cultural context of the hearers is called contextualization. As various authors have shown, contextualization involves accommodating oneself to another culture. It does not mean altering the Word of God or trying to make the message of the cross more rational or less offensive.^{xx}

Paul, who has been labeled "the greatest practitioner of cross-cultural and multi-cultural ministry" was a master at this approach.^{xxi} As David Valleskey has clearly shown, Paul went from place to place he had a basic message to proclaim, but he did not use a "canned speech" approach. When confronted by different situations he employed a manner and text which was relevant to that place and time.^{xxii} Building on the work of Valleskey, Krause provides a case in point:

In Athens, at the Areopagus, Paul in his famous discourse about the "unknown God" demonstrates the folly of idolatry and skillfully demolishes both the deism of the Epicureans and the pantheism of the Stoics (Acts 17:22-31). Paul uses excerpts from two Greek poems that were dedicated to Zeus to back up his contention that God is both the creator and the preserver, and thus is deeply concerned about his creation. "In him we live and move and have our being" (Epimenides, ca. 600 B. C.), and "we are his offspring" (Aratus, ca. 315-240).^{xxiii}

Another example of contextualization is found in the way American pastors understand their own culture and approach people accordingly. A people's world view is their basic assumptions about the world in which they live, which forces and entities control it, and the place of humans in the scheme of things. Most Americans believe that the world and most things in it, for that matter, operating according to discoverable scientific laws.^{xxiv} Like machines, the things in the world can be manipulated and improved. Such betterment or improvement comes about through much individual effort. Thus Americans emphasize things which are new and improved and highly value personal initiative. A kind of optimism envelops scientific enterprises as learned men and women make war on poverty and conquer space as they foster the cause of social evolution. This pragmatic and empirical outlook leaves little time for the pursuit of wisdom, the art of contemplation, and the acknowledgment of things not seen.

Professor David Valleskey rightly notes that Americans have "drunk deeply from the poisoned well of evolutionary thought."^{xxv} Consequently they believe in no personal Creator, deny creation, and question the doctrine of sin. Obviously the Christian pastor has his work cut out for him. Meanwhile Paul working in ancient Lystra or cosmopolitan Athens faced people with a different world view. Those people accepted without

question the existence of a god. Knowing this the apostle utilized their “natural” knowledge of God as a starting point for his discussion of the one true God.^{xxvi} Ultimately the pastor’s task is to transform a person’s world view into a Christian world view.^{xxvii}

Cultural Awareness in Gospel Response

Finally, cross-cultural awareness is important in allowing Christians to express their faith within the confines of their own culture. The writers of the Augsburg Confession rightly declared, “For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the divine Word. It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places” (VII:2-3). Wendland clearly grasped the implications of this statement when he wrote:

We will want to let other nations express their faith and joy in the Lord in ways which reflect their own identity. We will want to guard against giving the impression that our Western culture is of itself superior. We will want to avoid showing a domineering spirit when working in cross-cultural relationships. At the same time, however, we dare not contextualize God’s law or gospel to make it more palatable.^{xxviii}

For missionary Wendland, cross-cultural sensitivity to gospel response need not result in diluting true Christian worship. The Lutheran church is liturgical. In Africa portions of the liturgy remained inviolate (Confession and Absolution, Creeds, Scripture Readings, Sermon, Prayers, Sacraments, Benediction). What was altered?

Sacred hymns, liturgical responses, and choir anthems, however, must be given musical settings that let the African truly “sing his religion from the heart.” What a thrilling experience to be present in an African church service with its lively people-participation! It should be mentioned that in our African mission this didn’t develop until Africans were involved with helping formulate musical settings for church services.^{xxix}

In summary, cultural sensitivity helps the pastor or missionary foresee or remove stumbling blocks from the path of his hearers. Cross-cultural understanding helps the Christian understand his audience and communicate effectively with it. Finally, cultural awareness allows people to respond to the gospel in ways which are familiar, comfortable, and culturally understandable as long as they are not contrary to Biblical teaching.^{xxx}

Conclusion

Christ’s Great Commission gave the church its marching orders to proclaim the Gospel to all people of the earth. World-wide people have different cultures. Such differences, however, need not be construed as insurmountable barriers to evangelism. Jesus and the early apostles were aware of cultural-differences, and, yet, the multi-cultural church grew. Without compromising doctrine the Christian church can enjoy unity with diversity.

Perhaps at long last, it is time to provide a definition of multi-culturalism. Krause suggests it is “something akin to learning about other cultures and races; mastering their languages; learning to value differences as well as similarities among people; and preparing to live in an increasingly diverse society without prejudice and bigotry”^{xxxi} Why? For the glory of God and the salvation of many souls.

Endnotes

- ⁱ David J. Valleskey, *We Believe—Therefore We Speak: The Theology and Practice of Evangelism*, Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1995, p. 81.
- ⁱⁱ For a more complete discussion of spiritual universals see David J. Valleskey, *We Believe—Therefore We Speak: The Theology and Practice of Evangelism*, Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1995, pp. 19-163, along with “A Biblical Lutheran theology of Missions,” Nov. 17, 1995, paper delivered at ess/mistheol conference. Much of the groundwork for this paper has been laid by Professor Valleskey’s insightful and Scriptural writing.
- ⁱⁱⁱ This definition and examples of contrasting cultures can be found in William B. Kessel “Apache Indians and Anglo Missionaries: A Study in Cross-Cultural Interaction” May 5, 1992, paper presented at WELS Native American Symposium held in Tucson, Arizona.
- ^{iv} Ward Goodenough, “Cultural Anthropology and Linguistics” In *Report of the Seventh Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Study*. Paul L. Garvin, ed., Monograph Series on Language and Linguistics. No. 9, Washington D. C., 1957, pages 167-173.
- ^v During His time on earth, Jesus, not infrequently encountered people from other cultural groups. A list of these contacts include the: Visit of the Wise Men (Matt. 2:1-12). Woman at the well of Sychar (John 4:5-42). Healing of the royal official’s son (John 4:46-54). Healing of the centurion’s servant (Matt. 8:5-23; Luke 7:1-10). Healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter (Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30) Healing of the Gadarene demonic (Luke 8:26-39). Healing deaf and dumb man in Decapolis (Mark 7:31-36). Rejection by Samaritan villagers (Luke 9:51-56). Cleansing of the Samaritan leper (Luke 17:11-19). Audience with Greeks (John 12:20-22). Audience with Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27:2, 11-30; Mark 15:1b-19; Luke 23:1-5, 13-25; John 18:28--19:16). Roman soldiers (Matt. 27:27-56; Mark 15:16-19, 38-41; Luke 23:36-27, 45-49; John 19:2-3).
- ^{vi} Martin H. Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961, p. 20.
- ^{vii} Martin H. Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961, p. 26.
- ^{viii} William B. Kessel, *The Life of Christ*. Madison: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1984, pp. 20-21. *The Living Church: The New Testament*. Madison: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1985, p. 53.
- ^{ix} Martin H. Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961, p. 59.
- ^x Richard D. Balge, “Cross-Cultural and Multi-Cultural Ministry in the New Testament.” Paper presented at the Southeastern Wisconsin District (WELS) Pastoral Conference, Muskego, Wisconsin, June 6, 1995, page 14.
- ^{xi} David J. Valleskey, “The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation.” In *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 88, No. 2, 83-123, Spring 1991, page 95. The quotations cited by Valleskey are from Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp. 223, 230, 1980; and *Bridges of God*, New York: Friendship Press, p. 94, 1995.
- ^{xii} David J. Valleskey, *We Believe—Therefore We Speak: The Theology and Practice of Evangelism*, Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1995, p. 46-47, 81.
- ^{xiii} Walter L. Liefeld, “Theology of Church Growth,” in *Theology and Mission*, David J. Hesselgrave (ed.), Grand Rapids, Baker, p. 208, 1978. Ernst H. Wendland, “Church Growth Theology,” in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 2, p. 113, 1981. David Valleskey, “The Church Growth Movement: An Evaluation,” in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 88, No. 2, p. 96, 1991.
- ^{xiv} Ernst H. Wendland, “An Evaluation of Current Missiology” in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 3, pp. 174-175, 1982.
- ^{xv} Richard D. Balge, “Cross-Cultural and Multi-Cultural Ministry in the New Testament.” Paper presented at the Southeastern Wisconsin District (WELS) Pastoral Conference, Muskego, Wisconsin, June 6, 1995, p. 1.
- ^{xvi} David J. Valleskey “A Biblical, Lutheran Theology of Missions,” paper delivered at ess/mistheol conference, Nov. 17, 1995, p. 7.
- ^{xvii} Richard D. Balge, “Cross-Cultural and Multi-Cultural Ministry in the New Testament.” Paper presented at the Southeastern Wisconsin District (WELS) Pastoral Conference, Muskego, Wisconsin, June 6, 1995, p. 12.
- ^{xviii} Martin H. Franzmann, *The Word of the Lord Grows*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961, p. 23.
- ^{xix} Milton L. Rudnick, *Speaking the Gospel Through the Ages: A History of Evangelism*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988, p. 33.
- ^{xx} Richard A Krause, “All Things to All Men: Where is the Limit? An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23,” in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 93, No. 2, 1996, p. 88-89. Ernst H. Wendland, “An Evaluation of Current Missiology,” in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 3, 1982, pp. 182-184. Ernst H. Wendland “The Theology of Contextualization,” in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 4, 1979. David J. Valleskey, “A Biblical, Lutheran Theology of Missions,” paper delivered at ess/mistheol conference, Nov. 17, 1995, p. 14-15.
- ^{xxi} Richard D. Balge, “Cross-Cultural and Multi-Cultural Ministry in the New Testament,” Paper presented at the Southeastern Wisconsin District (WELS) Pastoral Conference, Muskego, Wisconsin, June 6, 1995, p. 3.
- ^{xxii} David J. Valleskey, *A Portrait of Paul with Application to Current Trends and Methods In Mission Work*. 1992, pp. 48-52.
- ^{xxiii} Richard A Krause “All Things to All Men: Where is the Limit? An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.” in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. 93, No. 2, 1996, p. 90.
- ^{xxiv} E. Adamson Hoebel and Thomas Weaver, *Anthropology and the Human Experience*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979, pp. 532-534.
- ^{xxv} David J. Valleskey, *We Believe—Therefore We Speak: The Theology and Practice of Evangelism*, Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1995, p. 40.

^{xxvi} David J. Valleskey, *We Believe—Therefore We Speak: The Theology and Practice of Evangelism*, Milwaukee, Northwestern Publishing House, 1995, p. 22.

^{xxvii} E. Allen Sorum, *Mission and Ministry Across Cultures in Urban North America*. Multicultural Mission Committee of the Board for Home Missions of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, nd., p. 114.

^{xxviii} Ernst H. Wendland, "An Evaluation of Current Missiology," in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Vol. 79, No. 3, 1982, pp. 182-183.

^{xxix} Ernst H. Wendland, "Pastoral (Theological) Training on the Mission Field." Paper presented to the National Free Conference No. 7, First Annual Congress on Confessional Lutheran Missiology held at Itasca, Illinois, 1996, p. 6.

^{xxx} Milton L. Rudnick, *Speaking the Gospel Through the Ages: A History of Evangelism*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988, p. 218.

^{xxxi} Richard A Krause, "All Things to All Men: Where is the Limit? An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 9:19-23," in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*. Vol. 93, No. 2, 1996, p. 99.

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