

Multiculturalism

Life in a "cosmopolitan" city

WE ARE ALL "CULTURAL" PEOPLE.

Human beings only exist as members of communities which share a common language, customs, ways of ordering economic and social life, ways of understanding and coping with their world.

THE GOSPEL IS CROSS-CULTURAL AND TRANS-CULTURAL.

If the gospel is to be understood, if it is to be received as something that communicates truth about the real human situation, if it is, as we say "to make sense," it has to be communicated in the language of those to whom it is addressed and has to be clothed in symbols which are meaningful to them. But the missionary does not come with a "pure" gospel and then adapt it to the culture served, he comes with a Gospel embodied in his own cultural community. He has to be careful to distinguish between the two.

CONTEXTUALIZATION, ACCOMODATION AND IDENTIFICATION

The Gospel came in the historical and cultural context of the Hebrew and Greek culture, and has crossed many cultural boundaries. The New Testament church as it expanded took on new cultural forms with each cultural boundary crossed. The Hebrew practices of circumcision and dietary laws, for example, were set aside in the Gentile world. The churches did not always agree as to how to relate to surrounding cultures – resulting in controversies, such as meat offered to idols, styles of worship, etc.

Where there is a believing community whose life is centered in the biblical story (gospel) in its worshipping, teaching, sacraments and discipline there will be differences in opinion, and mistakes, but the gospel takes on life as it makes the story of Jesus real in different cultural situations.

Contextualization accords to the gospel its rightful primacy, its power to penetrate every culture and to speak within each culture, in its own speech and symbol – God's word of grace and judgment. It must be local for that people as God speaks to them in their real situations, and at the same time global – representing the catholicity of God's purpose of grace for all humanity.

PLURALISM, INCLUSIONISM AND EXCLUSIONISM

The PLURALIST VIEW: God's grace is at work with indiscriminating generosity among all peoples and in all the great religious traditions; other faiths show just as much spiritual vitality as Christianity, and that in light of the global nuclear and ecological threats there is a need for unity (not aggressive claims by any one religion) - there are no absolutes - a claim to absolute truth is oppressive. (For example: John Hick *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, *The Rainbow of Faiths: A Christian Theology of Religions*)

The INCLUSIVIST VIEW: acknowledges Christ as the only Savior, but affirms that his saving work extends beyond the bounds of the visible church, that non-Christians can be saved by faithfulness to their religious practices - and that non-Christian religions may have a saving role, but the one who accepts Christ has a better chance of being saved. (This view is widely accepted by contemporary culture). (Karl Radner is a proponent of this view)

The EXCLUSIVIST VIEW: It is through Jesus Christ that God is reconciling the world and all who do not accept Jesus as Lord and Savior are eternally lost.. Some who hold this view do not deny that God can save someone apart from the Gospel – salvation is his work and the Spirit brings conviction and faith to the heart (Old Testament saints, elect infants, etc.), but that God has elected to save people through the preaching of Christ in the Gospel. (Hendrick Kraemer takes this position)

The Triune God's love and grace reaches out to every creature. There is not person, of whatever kind or creed without some witness of God's grace in heart and conscience and reason. God shows his love to all men through common grace - but saving grace is needed for salvation. "...the same revelation in Jesus Christ compels us to acknowledge that this world which God made and loves is in a state of alienation, rejection and rebellion against him. Calvary is the central unveiling of the infinite love of God and at the same time the unmasking of the dark horror of sin."

“TOLERATION” - TODAY’S WATCHWORD NEW TACTICS FOR POST MODERN GENERATION??

In the Post Modern world - a center-less pluralism reigns - each “community” is allowed its own “truth”, and to assert an “absolute” message like the gospel is to go against the cultural flow. But “No absolutes” is a myth of contemporary culture – what grounds does contemporary tradition have as criteria for assessing the many diverse claims to divine revelation? This thinking comes right out of our “supermarket culture”... *“in a society which has exalted the autonomous individual as the supreme reality, we are accustomed to the rich variety offered on the supermarket shelves and to the freedom we have to choose our favorite brands. It is very natural that this mentality should pervade our religion. Who am I to force my brand on everyone else!”*

Such a universalistic mentality goes contrary to the gospel - if every one could be saved, why would God have sent his son to die on the cross. The very nature of the Gospel showing both God's love and God's judgment makes it clear it is much more than preferences. We must take a stand on the matter of Truth, but put it in a welcoming context of love and concern for the whole person, and demonstrating the reality of the gospel in the life and culture of our believing communities.

THE ‘COSMOPOLITAN CITY’ - MANY CULTURAL SUB-GROUPS LIVING SEPARATELY TOGETHER THE “WORLD” HAS COME TO US!!

We live in a multi-cultural world - our cities are filled with people and cultural life from all over the world. We constantly rub shoulders in the market, classroom and workplace with all sorts of ethnic groups and our culture celebrates its diversity. “Tribal’ subgroups develop even within our own culture - groups of friends or peer groups - that have taken on all the elements of cultural life. Migrations of ethnic groups have given us a tremendous opportunity to minister to the world without going anywhere. We must become sensitive to cultural identity - both ours (to which we are often blind) and the diversity of cultures around us - and proclaim the gospel to a world that has now gathered at our doorsteps. And careful to share the gospel without forcing our culture on them along with it.

TWO EXAMPLES OF MULTICULTURAL MINISTRY VERY CLOSE TO HOME: FAITH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, VANCOUVER, B.C.

Our sister congregation has over 30 nationalities represented in the congregation in a city that is truly international and seems to be becoming more Asian than Western. They have an Arabic Bible study meeting, have English as a second language Sunday School classes, and Sikhs for neighbors. In a believing community where “Truth is one,” Doug Codling the pastor says, the community demonstrates that the body can be live together in love, kindness, the Sovereignty of God and much patience and endurance.

DAVID HOPKINS, CHIEF AND CUME

David, a member of our presbytery works with Native American groups around the PNW through CHIEF, and teaches pastors from many ethnic groups through Contextual Urban Ministry Education. He told me of recently teaching a class of Vietnamese pastors in the Portland area, and theological education is being carried on among many other groups as well. Over 11,000 Russians have recently moved into the Portland area.

(Some of this material is quoted from [The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society](#) by Lesslie Newbigin)