

WCC Papers on World Mission and Evangelism 1996

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No single comprehensive definition of culture. Ways of living - "the way we do things here." Set of symbols and relationships by which people make sense of their experience and in terms of which they orient their actions."

Gospel can be an announcement of God's action.

Others emphasise experience of the story of Jesus as good news. But can be bad news due to manner of its communication!

Gospel is never culture free. It is therefore not a kernel at centre of grain of wheat which has to be stripped down to get at the essence of it as non-cultural.

1. Authentic Witness within each culture

Gospel transcends all culture but always embodied in a particular culture.

Gospel has power to transform culture.

Care not to demonise a particular culture. Rom8v19-27 The Spirit is struggling to prepare human cultures and open up the whole creation to the fullness of life that is yet to unfold.

West have privatised religion in a secular culture, East more integrated.

Colonial packaging as if gospel a potted plant to be replanted into receiving culture.

Foreignness of exporting cultures.

"Culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ."

Evangelism cannot occur apart from culture. The gospel is not identified with culture but is identified in cultures.

Inculturation is enfleshing of gospel in each culture. P19

The goal of evangelising is to bring into being community of God which God wills for all people.

2. Gospel and Identity in Community

No identity can be absolute - God gave humans an 'open identity' which calls for dialogue and sharing among identities within an inclusive community. So it's misleading to speak of a person or group as 'having an identity'. Culture helps make identity, and can mar it. Ethnic difference can be turned into a highly politicised concept by groups seeking to perpetuate their own interests. (cf. biblical 'election' and 'covenant' theologies) However, our ultimate identity is nothing less than identity in Christ where there is no longer Jew or Greek (Gal 3:28)

Nation state faces countervailing pressures, retain local identity or create strategic alliances. Cf. Tower of Babel & Pentecost.

3. Local Congregations in Pluralist Societies

A local congregation committed to a dialogical way of life has vocation of being a signpost to the hope to which the triune God calls all creation and a foretaste of God's reconciling and inclusive love in an increasingly plural world.

a. Inculturating faith in life. A dynamic process, not just a one-off. Pagan symbols have always been appropriated but some have worries about this. Worship is transcultural in its remembrance and celebration. Worship is contextual as it encounters Christ in the present. Worship is counter-cultural as it anticipates and hopes. Worship is cross-cultural as it binds God's people together. Reading bible in context raises problems - eg 1Tim2:11 "let woman learn in silence" is acknowledged as transcultural but 1Tim2:15 "she will be saved through childbearing" is accepted only as cultural specific.

b. Becoming signs of God's inclusive love.

One body. Creating inclusive grouping. Open to the stranger.

Isaiah 19:19-25 - Egypt my people, Assyria the work of my hands. A blessing in the midst of the earth. Cf. Peter and Cornelius.

Revn 21 - looking forward to a time when eschatological pluralism of religion seen as gift of God's purposes. Prejudices clouded by lack of knowledge and meeting -demonising fanaticism.

A culture of dialogue where religion is growing factor in fragmentation of human community.

We are called to be witnesses not judges.

Pentecost is expression that plural expressions of gospel appropriate and God's gift to the Church. No culture is inherently unclean (Acts 10:15) yet also includes life-denying elements.

Catholicity? Catholic is from kata+holon = according to the whole.

That aspect of the Church in which diversities do not alienate but bring mutual enrichment.

Spirit of Communion empowers churches to transcend their limitations. Our identity is incomplete without the Other. This calls for *metanoia* and *kenosis*. No one cultural expression can exhaust the gospel or claim exclusive authority, nor exclude dialogue.

Catholicity indicates relatedness of all contexts but also relativises them in perspective of coming Reign of God.

Signs of Authenticity in expressing the Gospel.

What is legitimate diversity? Criteria:

1. Read in perspective of entirety of Gospel
2. judged in light of larger Christian practice
3. explored within communion of Churches.

Not to worry too early about syncretism since we've been borrowing Greek notions for ages!
Give it time to communicate before denying it.