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Strategy for Achieving Maximum Contextualization of the Church in Contemporary Missions

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The paper: "Strategy for Achieving Maximum Contextualization of the Church in Contemporary Missions" by Jonathan W. Berry.

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Honors Program
April 21, 1986
By Jonathan Berry

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The Biblical Basis for Mission Strategy

The Christian church has the responsibility to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with the entire world. The Bible is explicit in this matter. Matthew 28:19-20 says "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." This is what is known as the Great Commission.

Arthur P. Mackay and Malvern, Canada A., 1971
Library Theology of Mission, (Grand Rapids, Michigan,
Eerdmans Book House, 1971), p. 31.

"Never in history has there been so much evangelical activity seeking to make Jesus Christ known loved and served throughout the world. Yet the church has never been so harassed and troubled by voices calling for the reduction or elimination of these activities and for the reconceptualization of its message and mission in term of social justice, peace, racial integration and the elimination of poverty. Since there is validity to all of these activities perhaps it can be said that the Spirit is struggling within the church that they might rise to the complex challenge of world-wide mission."¹

This paper examines how the church today is commanded to have effective mission strategies and what it is doing and could possibly do to overcome the cultural barriers to bring the gospel to the entire world.

The Biblical Basis for Mission Strategy

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¹Arthur F. Glasser and McGavaran, Donald A., Contemporary Theologies of Missions, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 31.

Christians are commanded to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to all nations.

Avery T. Willis, Jr. in his book Biblical Basis of Missions stresses "Christ for the whole wide world."² He uses John 3:16 to emphasize this very important point. "For God so loved the world" The world, not just the United States, Mexico, or Europe but the entire world is the focus.

What exactly do Christians mean by "mission" or "missions"? One definition of mission is "carrying the gospel across cultural boundaries to those who owe no allegiance to Jesus Christ and encouraging them to accept him as Lord and Savior and become responsible members of the church, working as the Holy Spirit leads at both evangelical justice and at making God's will done on earth as it is in heaven."³ Education, literacy programs, agriculture, medicine, dialogue, presence, and social action can all be considered missions when their purpose is to witness to non-believers with the intent of making them disciples of Jesus Christ.

The unifying theme of the entire Bible is the kingdom of God. Jesus Christ gave his church a world-wide mission.

²Avery T. Willis, Jr., Biblical Basis of Missions, (Nashville: Convention Press, 1979), p. 15.

³Glasser and McGavaran, op. cit., p. 30.

The "good news of the kingdom" is to be preached through out the world as testimony to all nations when the end will come (Matthew 24:14). Paul Minear notes "that the deepest cry which the Holy Spirit arouses in man is the yearning cry for heaven - for direct contact with the throne..."⁴ So, Christians have the responsibility of letting all men know how they may enter the kingdom and have contact with God's throne.

Even though the kingdom of God is an explicitly New Testament theme, the Old Testament can also be understood from this perspective. The O. T. claims that God desires to destroy all evil and bring to an end every grief that tortures mankind. Without the Old Testament's contribution to the **understanding** of the eternal purpose of God touching individuals and nations, the New Testament portrayal of the kingdom would appear incomplete and inadequate. The O. T. gives depth to the kingdom concept by showing how the people of Israel struggled to keep their focus on God; therefore it makes it imperative that God eventually send his own son for mankind's salvation.

When the time had fully come, God sent for his son. The fallen condition of the human race was so bad and the need for redemption so great that only through the incarnation of God and the atonement of the cross could avail to provide salvation for his people. This sets the stage for

⁴Ibid., p. 31.

the final sending or mission. The coming of Jesus is the great hinge of history.

Five major perspectives of the coming of the kingdom are found in the Old and New Testament. First of all God is sovereign in his kingship. This is specified to initiate the thought of the confession of Jesus as Lord. He has obtained eternal salvation for His people. Therefore Christians must preach Jesus Christ as Lord.

Secondly, God's sovereign rule demands a deep personal commitment - the type that arises from a transformed heart. The Christian life involves nothing less than being conformed to Christ (Romans 8:9). The Old Testament commands one to love the Lord with all of his heart, soul and strength. For this reason the missionary mandate is so clear. Christians should not merely proclaim the historic fact that Christ died for mankind but Christians should emphasize the need for making disciples. Disciples are growing, totally dedicated Christians who bring others to Christ. This is the type of evangelism that changes lives completely after Jesus has been accepted. The Bible says that only those who are new creatures shall enter the kingdom of God.

Thirdly, God demands that the church is to be a servant-like community. When Jesus told Peter he would build the church he was speaking of his gathering together a community of the redeemed. As the Lausanne Covenant (1974) clearly states: "Evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. For both are

necessary expression of our doctrine of God and man, our love for our neighbor, and our obedience to Jesus Christ."⁵

Fourthly, God's sovereign rule is relentlessly restricted and opposed by his people, nations that do not know him, and unseen powers. Christians are under obligation of their king to play the role of prophet and reformer in society. For Christians to be effective in this demanding role they must first be victorious in their own hearts. Before the church can change other people's lives - the believers first have victory over pride, covetousness, jealousy, self-righteousness and lust. This would demand that believers be totally sold-out disciples of Jesus Christ - ones who have given up everything including themselves for the furtherance of the gospel.

Fifthly, God's sovereign rule is always directed toward the future. The church faces the future with expectations of much pain and suffering. The church will suffer much persecution as it continues to reach beyond its borders to bring the whole world into the kingdom. Some in the church will be unwilling to give of themselves bodily, financially, prayerfully or any other way because they do not see results. When the missionary task is finally completed God will call his people from the nations to the kingdom.

The Underlying Strategy

If one takes Jesus and his lordship seriously one is forced to develop a mission strategy. The Lord demands

that his stewards be found faithful (I Cor. 9:1-2). Faithfulness is doing what God wants one to do and accomplishing the goals he has set. The parable in Matthew 25:14-30, known as the parable of the talents, deals with stewards. Two of the three stewards used good strategy and accomplished their masters goal (in that case making wise investment of capital). They were called good and faithful servants. One did not, however, and was called "wicked and lazy." Anyone who does not take the strategy of fulfilling God's goals will be judged accordingly.

Strategy is simply the means agreed upon to reach a certain goal. Missionary strategy could be defined as the way in which the children of God go about obeying the Lord and accomplishing those objectives he has placed before them. Every Christian uses some kind of strategy to do God's will. Some strategies are superior to others so each Christian should examine all of the options and choose the one that is the best for achieving his goals.

The best strategy for missions must be Biblical in its orientation. God's work must be done in God's way. The Gospel and other Biblical insights must be the foundation for mission strategy. Personnel, money and time are limited and decisions need to be made as to what priorities are needed in accomplishing the goal. That goal is spreading the gospel to every country on earth. Thirdly, strategy must be relevant. Missions is such a fast moving field that what was effective a few years ago may be ineffective and obsolete today. Missions always needs updating.

For maximum effectiveness in world evangelism, many components of strategy must come together. Peter Wagner offers these four strategies for the modern missionary.

First of all, one must have the right goals.

Every one of Jesus' commands to his people contains some type of goal. Over a hundred such commands can be found in the New Testament. One command is above all others - the commandment known as the "Great Commission."

All missionary strategy must be evaluated by this commandment. The most complete and detailed summary of the commission is Matthew 28:19-20. The text says: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things as I have commanded you."

This passage contains four action verbs. They are "go", "make disciples", "baptize" and "teach." "In the original Greek there is only one imperative and three participles. The heart of the command, the imperative is to make disciples while going, baptizing, and teaching are the helping verbs."⁶ Making disciple is the end and going, baptizing, and teaching are the means toward accomplishing that end. Therefore, the goal is to make disciples of all nations.

One of the greatest errors in contemporary missions is the confusion as to the means and end in understanding

⁶C. Peter Wagner, On the Crest of the Wave, (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 1983), p. 108.

the "Great Commission. Some missionaries have set up programs as though they were one means in themselves. They have not done much in terms of making disciples. Some just preach the gospel and don't care whether their preaching makes disciples. Today decisions are carefully counted. They are boldly reported in Baptist journals and Christian-missions pamphlets. However, no corresponding effort is made to report on the discipleship of those converts.

Evangelistic reporting seems inflated, very inflated, because people make decisions to become Christians and there is no attempt to teach them doctrine, how to grow as Christians, and how to witness to non-Christians. How else can they spread the gospel? The Lord of the Great Commission is interested in disciples, not simply decisions. This is why it is so vitally important to have the right goals so that the church can accomplish exactly what the Lord wants us to do.

The second strategy that Peter Wagner recommends is being at the right place at the right time. This involves concentrating on fertile soil if fruit is to be expected. Some people of the world are more receptive to the gospel than others. For example to put a great deal of money, resources, and missionaries in the Middle East right now would not be wise because there is little response to the gospel. The church should be concentrating on Brazil and Korea where the gospel is spreading like wild fire. This is the right place aspect of the second strategy.

When Jesus talks to his disciples about reaping he mentioned the need for praying that the Lord of the harvest would "send laborers into his harvest." (Matt. 9:37-38). Laborers are not needed when one harvest is green nor when the harvest is over. Timing is very important in missions. When a nation like Brazil is thriving the church should take full advantage and send laborers but when the main harvest is over the church should concentrate on other parts of the world.

Missionaries should be sent where they can be used to their fullest potential. For example it would be unwise to send a large group of missionaries to a place where the mission is self-sufficient and not really needing the help of additional outsiders.

Wagner's third strategy is the right methods. Something is definitely wrong when the effort does not bring results careful analysis will usually point out the problem as one of two things. Either the harvest is not ripe or ready for missionary concentration or the wrong methods are being used. This does not mean there will not be times of little harvest and patience but the church should not put all of our resources into an area that is not ready for it.

Many people in the world gladly receive the gospel and become one of Jesus' disciples but many missionaries are not winning disciples because they are using inappropriate methods. Wrong language is a common mistake. In

some cases the missionary thought preaching in the trade language would be adequate for making disciples. But only through switching to the local dialect, the personal language of the people did results begin to come.

Wagner's fourth strategy is the right message. The right messengers are those Christians who live by the Spirit and not those who are constantly defeated by the flesh. They are fully-committed Christians who take up their cross daily and follow their master. These messengers can be fully used of God. "I planted, Apollo watered," writes Paul, "but God gave increase." (I Cor. 3:6). The right messenger knows that only through God can one accomplish anything.

These strategies all seem feasible and logical. But is that all the church needs for its strategy? the Bible mentions something else that the original disciples had that is still needed in order to be an effective witness.

The very last words that Jesus spoke to his disciples were "Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be witnesses for me in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8). The disciples realized they could not be effective in their ministry without power so they went back to Jerusalem and "all continued in one accord by prayer and supplication." (Acts 1:4).

These disciples needed power. Therefore the church can assume that those also being the sons of God if they accepted Jesus as Lord ought to have access to this power that

the Bible refers to. This power comes from prayer. Not a "grace for food" prayer or an occasional 30 second or less prayer when one is confronted with a problem but a continual, genuine, heart-felt prayer that actually communicated with God.

In Korea prayer plays a different role that in ordinary Christian-living. Every morning at 4:30 or 5:00 a prayer meeting is held in every church. This includes different denominations, large and small churches both rurals and urban. This morning prayer meeting happens 365 times a year and the most of the congregation is there with its pastor. When pastors were asked why they do this, they typically replied, "Because that's where the power is."⁷ The Koreans are convinced that their spirits can no more function well without a daily intake of prayer than their bodies can without food.

Kim Sundo, who pastors the ten thousand-member Kwary Lim Methodist Church in Seoul, spends an hour and a half per day in prayer. A study done by Kim reveals that no pastor in Korea spends under one hour of prayer per day, and that 47 percent spend two or more hours per day. And the church wonders why the gospel is spreading unbelievably fast in Korea. What would happen in the United States if the church became as dedicated to prayer as the Koreans.

So the church can say that prayer for power is Biblically based and a necessity for the ministry, but prayer

⁷Ibid., p. 124.

itself is not enough. Christians must know what to pray and what to expect God to do. Jesus told his disciples in Luke 24:49 to "tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high."

The power on high is the Holy Spirit working in men's lives. The power of the Holy Spirit is not only for getting one's heart right but also for witnessing to others and winning souls. David Howard, now General Secretary of World Evangelical Fellowship, lists four different ways the power of the Holy Spirit is exercised: "(1) filling men for power in witnessing, (2) giving gifts to the church for outreach, (3) choosing some for special outreach, and (4) guiding men in outreach."⁸

Many American evangelicals do not really believe in the immediate power of the Holy Spirit in miracles and wonders. Some believe it intellectually because they have read about it in the Bible. But does the power of the Holy Spirit play any part in daily lives and churches? If not maybe the church needs to reexamine our walk and our commitment to Christ. Peter Wagner thinks that a great deal of the problem stems from the pervasive influence of secular humanism in the American society. In the American society it is easy to have a half-hearted commitment to Christianity because the Do what I want to do and go with the crowd attitude is so prevelant.

⁸Ibid., p. 129.

All five versions of the Great Commission contain the promise of divine power. Paul wrote after many fruitful years of missionary experience. "I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed to make the gentile obedient in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the spirit." (Romans 15:18-19)

The gospel is flourishing in some places of the world. People are coming to know the Lord as savior in massive numbers. According to an unnamed source in China the church was growing tremendously in China while the Bamboo Curtain was still down. It has grown for about 1 million to at least 50 million. Many China watchers think the main reason for such growth is that in every province there has been a spontaneous outbreak of supernatural signs and wonders similar to what one might read about in Acts.

David Adeney of Everseas Missionary Fellowship relates this power to prayer. "Conscious of their own weaknesses," Adeney says, "Chinese Christians follow the example of the early church and devote themselves to prayer. Many have believed because God has obviously heard the cry of His children, bringing deliverance in times of danger, in healing and freeing of the demon possessed."⁹

Some of the headhunting tribes of Northwest India are now largely Christian. Some Christian leaders from those

⁴Ibid., p. 133-134.

tribes now have degrees in missiology. So many supernatural signs and wonders have occurred that the leaders of the churches often forget to mention them.

One of them is Robert Cunwille, who now serves as an evangelist in India with Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. He tells the story of the power of God among the Nishi tribe.

A Nishi government official's son had become critically ill and was dying. The town's doctor was away. The official went to the local pharmacist who told him that his son was beyond medical help. "Why not sacrifice to your god," the pharmacist asked? "I have" the official answered. "I have sacrificed my best goat and my water buffalo." Then the pharmacist said, "Why not try the Christian's God-Jesus Christ?"

The official sadly turned and went home. When he arrived he saw his neighbors coming into his house and he knew the worst had happened. His son had died. His wife was in tears and the house was deeply moved with emotion. Then something stirred inside the official and he said out loud, "Jesus I don't know who you are but I heard you have the power to raise the dead. My son died only a few hours ago. If you raise up my son, I promise that my family and I will worship you forever."¹⁰

As soon as he finished the prayer the dead boy's eyes began to flicker. Soon they opened and after a short

¹⁰Ibid., 136-137

time he was completely well. The family of the official kept their word and became dedicated Christians. Soon hundreds of other families in the surrounding area accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. God is still using miracles to bring others to know Him.

South America is a place that has been very receptive of the Gospel. Guatemala, for example, is 25% evangelical and the church continues to grow rapidly. The World Christian Encyclopedia claims there were only fifty thousand Protestants in Latin America in 1950. By 1980 that figure was over 20 million.

The church is growing even more rapidly in Africa. In 1960 less than ten million Christians were in Africa. Now, according the World Christian Encyclopedia there are over 200 million Christians and the projection for the end of the century is just under 400 million.

The power of God is working where His people allow it to flow. The power of God is as strong today as it was in the first century. Jesus' last words to his disciples "Tarry.....until you are endued from power on high," (Luke 24:49), are words for all Christians. In mission strategy, the church will be able to accomplish the incredible task of world evangelization if it makes full use of His power.

The Cultural Problem

Since world-wide evangelism is to be the goal, the church must address another problem in contemporary missions. This problem is how to overcome cultural barriers.

The Cultural Captivity of the Missionary

First of all, the missionary is a captive of culture. By the time a man or woman reaches the age of thirty he or she has an implanted idea of what kind of church he or she is trying to plant. He or she by their birth into their particular culture embarks into a different culture wearing cultural contact lenses, so to speak. If the missionary is an American missionary he can only see American institution patterns. This presents a problem because each nation has a different concept of what kind of church it wants to plant. American Christians are tempted to believe that people in other cultures must adopt American institution patterns when they are converted.

Micheal Griffiths gives his best explanation of the problem when he says, "He who never visits thinks his mother is the only cook."¹¹ The American church will not be able to reach all nations until it realizes that Americans do not have to mold the "savages" into "civilized Christians" --dressed in American attire and functioning in the conventional Protestant tradition.

The Cultural Captivity of the Indigenous Christian

Another problem is the cultural captivity of the indigenous Christian. A cultural gap exists between the missionary and the national. (By national, I mean the person in the particular country to which the missionary is witnessing). The national may have no image of what a Christian

¹¹Micheal Griffiths, The Church and World Mission, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1980), p. 37.

ought to be. The national in comparison to the missionary's cultural contact lenses has cultural ear filters rejecting some of what they **hear as inapplicable** when it may be useful.

Some things that are thought to have been learned are in fact misunderstood. Some English Protestant missionaries in West Africa fail to recognize differences between the minds of Africans and their own. **They have a tendency to regard the African as a person with a mind that has to be emptied like a jug and then refilled with their particular knowledge.** This is part of the cause of mission failure. Both the indigenous Christian and the missionary have to cross the gap that separates them.

How Contextualization Can Happen

Before problems can be resolved, contextualization must be achieved. Byang Kato defines contextualization as "making concepts relevant in a given situation."¹² "The Son of man descended and became God in flesh and pitched his tent among men to make it possible to be redeemed," (John 1:14). This should motivate the church to make the gospel relevant in every situation in any country as long as the gospel is not compromised. Another example of contextualization is the decision by Jewish Christians at the council of Jerusalem. It was decided that Gentile converts not be expected to adopt Jewish culture as well-namely circumcision. Uncircumcised converts everywhere appreciate that decision I am sure.

¹²Ibid., p. 52.

The apostle Paul, probably the greatest missionary ever, shows the attitude necessary to spread the gospel everywhere. In I Cor. 9:22, Paul says "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak. I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." Paul's ultimate goal was to "save some." In mission strategy the church too must become all things to all men.

Missionaries should become indigenous to the culture in which they enter. Webster's dictionary defines "indigenous" as "produced, growing, or living naturally in a country or climate." Music in India has a different diatonic scale than the western culture. It is very difficult for Indian people to sing in the western culture's strange key so the musical form should be national as long as the content is Biblical.

Another example of indigenization is the time of the church service. Ben Dyrit, a former missionary, points out that worship service in Philippine churches starts at 10:30 A.M. When he went to the tropics this time was a problem because everyone was far too sleepy and hungry to concentrate. So, for the tropics, worship service should begin at about seven or eight A.M. when everyone is fresh and can think more clearly.

When applied to mission work indigenous means that as a result of missionary effort, a natural church has been produced which shares the life of the country in which it is planted and within itself has the ability to govern itself, support itself, and reproduce itself. If all of these characteristics of the church that has been planted in a different culture are accomplished, then it has become contextualized.

Focus - Self Expressing

The church should as soon as possible be a self-expressing church. They should know who they are and what they stand for. The church should have its own worship and leadership patterns and know why they have them. In some parts of Africa shared authority is not practiced because they are so used to having one authority-the chief-so they have no board of deacons. All practices in terms of the church's individuality should be tested by scripture.

Government - Self Governing

Secondly, before contextualization can happen, the church must be self-governing. Some missionary experts think self-government is the most difficult to accomplish and requires the longest time for achievement. To achieve self-government is probably most important because a failure in this may choke the convert's initiation and dwarf his spiritual growth.

Furthermore, a rising tide of nationalism demands that the natural church be freed from the domination of foreign missionaries. The national convert will welcome the missionary's leadership in the beginning, but they will not be happy for long if the entire management of the church belongs in foreign hands.

When helping the church to ultimately become self-governing, several factors need to be considered. The missionary should be there to help the church agree on fundamentals. He should help the church reach a common agreement as to a Biblical doctrine and standards of conduct.

The next step is choosing officers. The missionary

will no doubt find it necessary to guide the proceeding by suggestion and counsel, but the decisions must be made by the congregation. The missionary must be patient enough to give counsel in helping the church get on its feet in terms of doctrine and church policy, but the missionary must gradually break off when the time is right. The missionary should be willing to help with preaching and discipleship and other church-related business but he should withdraw more and more from the church until he can leave it entirely in the hands of the national.

Support - Supporting

Another aspect of contextualization is self-support. The main church must be self-supporting if it is to be contextualized for a variety of reasons. First of all self-support is Biblical. The Acts of the Apostles will convince anyone that this is the apostolic method. Churches among the Gentiles were not supported by the Jewish churches. Tithing is a Biblical word demanded by God. Support should be dependent upon the congregation of that church.

Secondly, self-support is a logical plan because, under ordinary circumstances, even the poorest of congregations can support a pastor if there are ten or more families tithing. If the church follows the New Testament pattern, in which the pastor is one with his flock and lives on the same level as his congregation then the the pastor's salary should not be a problem.

Thirdly, the spiritual welfare of the church demands that it be self-supporting. Responsibility often times fosters spiritual blessings. If the converts are deprived of the privilege of giving and the responsibility of sacrifice to support the church then weak Christians will result. They will probably be inactive in evangelism and fail to assume the responsibility of church discipline. If a church is spoon-fed then spiritual babes will result. On the other hand the congregation is more likely to take initiative and grow if they are put in a position of responsibility. The congregation will cherish a work that costs much sacrifice and a great deal of effort.

Finally a church should be self-supporting because the pastor needs to feel the responsibility to the congregation rather than to the missionary. The missionary-paid worker has only his missionary to worry about. But a pastor that is supported and maintained by his congregation feels responsibility to his flock.

Propagation-Propagating

Contextualization demands that a church be a propagating church. Propagation is defined as "the continuance or multiplication by generation or successive production" or "the spreading or extension of anything." If world evangelization is to be considered a potential reality, then the self-propagating church must be in full force.

Converts to Christianity are seed-gospel seed. The world is the field and the children of the kingdom are

are the seed, (Matt 13:38). Each convert is seed for a potential harvest. Their vital experience with Christ has made them zealous to tell others of their new-found knowledge. Missionaries must learn to utilize these new converts and harness their God-given zeal to bring others into the kingdom.

Propagation basically involves putting converts to work-especially in evangelism. This involves the missionaries training nationals to become teachers, pastors, and evangelists. Programs must be designed to stress evangelism. If the church makes the most of discipleship as the Bible has commanded then it is well on its way to gaining new churches and more importantly more disciples of Jesus Christ.

Cultural Fusion

But even with these steps taken toward contextualization, cross-cultural communication is a factor that must be considered. Cross-cultural communication is the essence of mission work. If the gospel is communicated from one person in a culture to another person in the same culture ten that person will probably understand. That is local evangelism and that sounds okay but two-thirds of the world's population will not be reached because there are not enough Christians in their own culture to reach them. So, they must be reached by Christians who will cross over into another culture.

When one crosses over into another culture, one must consider several points of concern. For one thing preservation of culture is very important to a nation's self-respect. Far from trying to destroy culture some missionaries

sought to identify themselves closely with it. Hudson Taylor wore typical Chinese dress and even had a pigtail. There is nothing wrong with preserving a culture as long as it does not compromise the word of God.

Gottfried Osei Mensah, a pastor from Ghana and an executive to the World Evangelical Fellowship said three things can be said about culture. "Firstly, the culture of sinful man, insofar as it enshrines his cherished ideals, beliefs, and practices. His way of life is not neutral but fallen.

Secondly, even traditions derived from God's Word, God's revelation to man, may be corrupted by sinful man, (Mark 7:8-13). Every ideal, belief, or practice should be brought to the judgement of Scripture.

Thirdly, culture is not static but evolving. Resistance to a higher ethical standard or the revival of a degenerate practice under the guise of authenticity is part of man's self assertion against God."¹³

"The fact of diversity is very important. It is not our responsibility to bring American, German, or British Christianity to the world but the message of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in its pure Biblical form."¹⁴

Enrique Guang, a Latin American educator, psychologist, and theologian describes the cultural fusion problem. "Missionaries think they know us. Our anthropology, sociology are a world apart from North America's. And unless an.

¹³Harold Fuller, Mission-Church Dynamics, (Pasadena William Carey Library, 1980), p. 154,155.

¹⁴Griffiths, op. cit., p. 161.

effort is made to know those deeply, missionary work will continue as practiced....regardless of results, "as beating the air," (I Cor 9:26).¹⁵

In Asia or Africa a traditional North American "hi" or "hello" would indicate a lack of interest or unfriendliness. Traditionally no African bride looks directly in her husband's face or that might represent a lack of respect. In the Mexican culture if a woman offers a firm handshake to a male that would mean she was overly aggressive and had loose morals.

Almost imperceptible cultural differences can cause great misunderstanding. For example, many a new missionary has thought a national child to be dishonest because in some African cultures children are taught not to look directly at adults when talking to them, whereas in western culture if a child does not look directly into the eyes it indicates he is trying to hide something.

Other customs of etiquette, although minor in themselves, could give a very negative message. This is a story told by Harold Fuller, author of *Mission-Dynamics* and a former missionary. "I may invite an African pastor to my house, when he arrives ask him if he would like a cold drink before the meal, tell my wife the meal is delicious and profusely thank our guest for coming while we shake his hand at the door as he leaves. I may feel I have shown my sincere love for my friend; I have acted just as I would with a guest in my own land.

¹⁵Fuller, op. cit., p. 161.

But my African guest would go away convinced I don't like him and that my invitation was a coverup for hostility. Otherwise why would I have set time for him to visit instead of letting him drop by anytime? Why didn't I put a drink before him instead of asking what he'd like, obviously I didn't want to give him one so he replied, 'No thank you.' What was the problem between me and my wife and me that I had to tell her that the food was delicious? And why didn't I walk down the street with my guest when he was leaving, instead of shaking hands at the door. I must have been glad to see him go. Yet I hypocritically bared my teeth and smiled as he left."¹⁶

Some misunderstandings are related to leadership. Dr. Bud Fray, a former missionary and principal tells the story of a cultural misunderstanding. "I went to my carpentry teacher and asked him questions about inventory and made comments on how much wood was used already. A few days later the carpentry teacher came to me and handed me his resignation. I asked the teacher why he wanted to resign and he responded, 'When you accused me of stealing I could not sleep for three days so I finally will resign.'¹⁷ Dr. Fray did not realize that direct questioning in the African culture was equivalent to the harshest of accusations.

How do a national pastor and a missionary work together on problems when the pastor's culture has taught him it is a sin to report someone else's wrong doing and the missionary has been taught that it is a sin to keep silent about

¹⁶Ibid., pgs. 163-164

¹⁷Dr. Marion "Bud" Fray, private interview, professor of Religion, Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, AR.

it? What happens when a missionary has been taught that every coin must be accounted for and money designated for one purpose can not be used for another, but the national pastor has been raised with the holistic concept of the extended family where anything belongs to anyone in time of need?

Cultural misunderstandings will never cease. But through the close personal fellowship between the missionary and the national, confidence can be increased. "When people of different cultures play and pray together, they make allowances for each other's differences instead of criticizing them."¹⁸

Enrique Guang, the Latin American educator, makes this statement, "If the missionary assumes a monopolizing role in the work i.e.--teaches, preaches, visits, sings, decides, buys,....etc. The latent message he is sending his congregation is 'You are stupid, incapable, inept, don't know how, and are the type of people that can't be put in charge of anything.'"¹⁹

The missionary must use his or her most important resource is people. The happiest and smoothest running church is a church whose people have a bicultural experience. Reciprocity is the key. The best possible way a mission-church can operate is with the mutual dignity of both parties (the missionary and the national) offering themselves to each other.

¹⁸ Fuller, op. cit., p. 161.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 168.

Recommended Solution

Christians have an awesome task set before them. According to statistics released by the U.S. Center for World Mission the 1.36 billion Christians in 1983 was equivalent to about 30 percent of the World's population. About 78,000 new Christians are reported a day. Still millions have never heard the Gospel. The Great Commission is to preach the Gospel in every nation to every people. According to the U.S. Center for World Mission 16,750 groups of people do not have any idea who Jesus Christ is.

With the astronomical growth rate of the world's population is world evangelization a realistic goal? With the advancements in technology and the availability of the many types of mass media world evangelization is a realistic possibility. For everyone in the world to hear the gospel each and every Christian in the world must be involved. Americans who have many books on witnessing and Christian living must set the example. If every Christian today were a true example of Jesus Christ and had the faith to pray for and rely on the power of God, significant progress would be made toward accomplishing this goal.

Several thousand graduate from six Southern Baptist seminaries each year. Of these graduates 5% will go into foreign missions and the other 95% will remain in the U.S. A mere 5% of these graduates will try and evangelize 93% of the world's population, according to Keith Parks, President of the Foreign Mission Board. Such an imbalance is hardly reasonable. Are Americans really concerned with the needy and lost

of the world?

If the church today were really world Christians who are concerned about the entire world and its needy, the church would be open to missions and would pray, give, and sacrifice until it hurt. Jesus met the physical needs of the people and then met their spiritual needs. He had a holistic ministry that dealt with the whole person-no matter what race, culture, or creed he came from. Jesus contextualized the Gospel.

Discipleship is the key to world evangelization. The entire church must realize that unless we take our stagnant Christians and train them to live a life of spiritual growth that produces much fruit the church will not make much progress. In order to achieve maximum contextualization of the witness of the church Christians should strive to meet peoples needs in every culture and then disciple them. The only way Christians can achieve maximum witness is by allowing God to work through them. Until Christians realize that they must be willing disciples of Jesus Christ then any mission strategy will be useless when reaching out to the world.