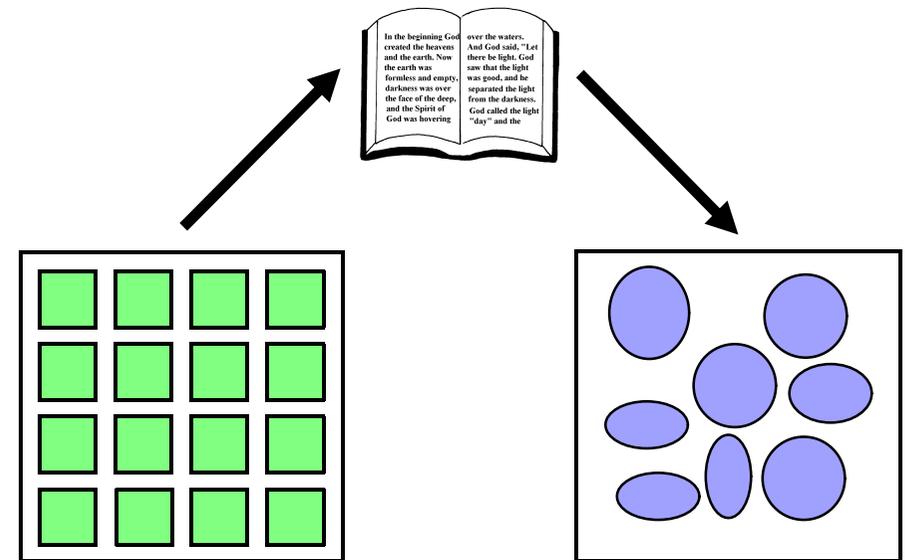


# *How to Make Disciples in Other Cultures*



***"the Spirit of truth ... will bear witness about me,  
and you also will bear witness..."***

John 15:26,27

This booklet is part 5 of the *Missionary Training Series*. To obtain others of the series, and, help and training in missionary work, contact:

**The Missionary Training Service,  
Oswestry Christian Centre,  
Lower Brook Street,  
Oswestry,  
Shropshire, SY11 2HJ,  
United Kingdom**

*Tel./Fax. National: 020 7932 0728  
International: + 44 20 7932 0728  
E-mail: coord@missionarytraining.org*

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The Missionary Training Service focuses on training missionaries for the multiplication of churches among unreached peoples. It gives advice and help to missionary agencies, other training institutions and churches about organizing training programmes, and runs and distributes appropriate courses.

Ian Benson is coordinator of the MTS.

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## What is Culture?

Culture is the way in which a people thinks, acts and expresses itself. It is learnt from infancy. Different peoples have different ways of thinking, of expressing their feelings and of doing things. Language is one important part of culture. Other parts are: what people see as right and wrong, beautiful or ugly, and what they believe to be true and false. These are the things that distinguish one people from another. There are thousands of different cultures in the world today.

The different aspects of a culture form a system. Changing one part affects the whole system.

When evangelizing, we should express the Gospel message in terms that the people group understands. We should introduce the Lord Jesus Christ in such a way that they can relate Him to important aspects and values of their own culture. When they become Christians, their way of expressing their faith and obedience should be in accordance with their culture, not ours: we should not impose our own culture. When they submit to Christ and seek to do His will, their culture will begin to be transformed and blossom for Him. The Lord Jesus will not destroy their culture: He will transform it so that it finds its most beautiful expression in Him. In heaven there will be people from every nation, tribe, people and language (Rev.7:9). At the same time, no culture is perfect, and all have evil and demonic features. Christians from the culture, with God's help, will root out these and replace them with practices and attitudes taught by Scripture.



Belief in the Lord Jesus Christ brings new values and new behaviour.

## **The Incarnation: Our Model for Adapting to Another Culture**

When the Son of God came to communicate with us, He did not thunder from heaven, but took flesh and blood and became a man. He left His glory and riches and identified Himself with us sinners. As a child He submitted to His parents and learnt from them. Following His example, we enter another culture like children, emptying ourselves of pride and superiority, and seeking to glorify our Lord Jesus Christ. We can only establish our credibility through loving and respecting people: through who we **are** as people and what we do.

*"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness." (Phil. 2:5-7)*

People are glad when we take the trouble to learn their language and show appreciation for their corrections. (We cannot learn a language just by reading books. We learn more quickly and pronounce it better if we talk to many people.)

Like everyone else, we generally tend to think that our way of doing things is best. However, often our way is neither better nor worse: it is just *different*. We should concentrate on learning the customs and understanding the reasons **why** things are done as they are. For example, in some cultures women do not speak to any man outside their family circle. In many places parents arrange their children's marriages without consulting the young people themselves. In some countries, it is bad manners to contradict a guest. If you visit them and ask, "Do you want to follow the Lord Jesus?", they may say, "Yes" just to avoid offending you. They do not see it as a lie, just good manners. In

some tribes there is no private property: taking "someone else's belongings" is not theft: everything is to be shared.

Jesus came to us as a child, totally dependent on other people. Similarly, when we arrive in another culture, we are **learners**. We listen to the people and, as far as possible, imitate them just as children do. We are following the example of Christ's Incarnation. We live with the people we want to win, spend time with them, and work and suffer with them.

The Lord Jesus did not cease to be God when He became man. In the same way, when adapting to a new culture, we should not reject our own selves or background. We are important to God. He died for us and accepts us **as we are**. Because of this, we can let people see us as we really are, without trying to hide our weaknesses. If we hide who we really are, we create a barrier for the Gospel. We are complete in our Lord Jesus Christ. If we can accept ourselves, we will find it easier to accept other people.

It is important to understand and respect the culture, even though some of the customs may be difficult to accept. Let us have an untiring and genuine interest in every aspect of people's lives. We all have cultural prejudices. If we recognize them and make allowances for them, that is good. However, a missionary who thinks he has no cultural prejudices is dangerous, because he will teach his own prejudices as if they were biblical truth. Just like Peter in Acts chapter 10, let us allow God to take away our prejudices. God had to tell Peter three times, in a vision, to eat things that he thought unclean. In this way Peter could accept Cornelius as a brother in Christ, even though he was not a Jew, and ate things that Peter considered unclean.

*And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Colossians 3:17).*

In every culture we will find things that may seem strange to us. In Saudi Arabia they do not eat pork. In India many people abstain from beef. In Europe some Christians drink wine with meals. In Israel, dancing is a family entertainment. In Iran women cover their faces with a veil and do not speak with men. If we begin by criticizing these things, people will not listen to the Gospel. (This does not mean that we approve of everything people do. After people turn to God, they will be able to reassess their customs in the light of Scripture.)

The apostle Paul followed the principle of the Incarnation. He made himself equal to people to win them for Christ: he said, *"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law). To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some."* (1 Cor. 9:19-22). This means that we make friends with the people, and seek to understand them. Identifying with people is not just a matter of dress or outward appearances - adopting local clothes is generally good, but in some cultures this could make people think that one is trying to deceive them. There needs to be an inner identification - Christ's love, humility and willingness to share with people - receiving what they give and giving equivalent things to them. For example, if you have meals in their homes, welcome them to meals in yours. **Find out how you can be seen as a real friend - how you should adapt to be seen as one with them.**

Our feelings and attitude come through to people, no matter what we say. For example, if you feel that people are dirty, people will feel rejection, even though you say nothing. If, however, you are

full of the love of Christ, this will shine through in everything you do.

## **Preliminary Research**

Before entering a new culture it is good to do preliminary research. Find out where groups of these people live around the world, how many live in each place, their life expectancy, the number of people at different age groups, their language, beliefs and religious practices. Encyclopedias and libraries will help.

For more detailed information on how to research a people, see *Unreached Peoples of the World*, pages 24 to 38 (obtainable from the Missionary Training Service - see page 2 for the address).

## **How to Relate to People**

Relate to people with **love**. Try to love those you are discipling as if they were your own family. Only the Holy Spirit can give us this type of love and help us to adapt to the culture so that we become their true friends. Personal friendship, trust and respect lay a foundation for good communication of the Gospel.

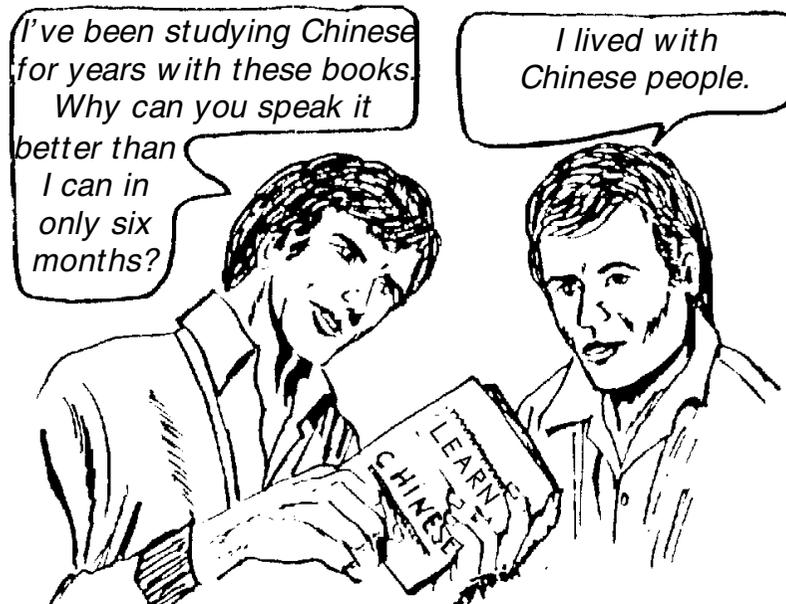
Ducklings hatched by a hen will follow her as if she were their mother. If the ducklings' natural mother is not present when they hatch, they become attached to the nearest animal or person. Something similar happens when we enter another culture. We become attached to the first people who relate to us. They become our new family and their culture becomes our own. That is why we adapt much better to a new culture if **from the beginning** we attach ourselves to the people we have come to reach, and do not wait even a few weeks. Otherwise we could find ourselves bonded to other missionaries rather than the local people.

## STEPS TO DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE:

1. Pray fervently that God will lead you to the people He has prepared, that He will open their hearts, break Satan's bonds, and give you someone respected by the community who will back you.
2. Lodge with them from the first day on, if possible, and not with your own fellow countrymen. Seek a family where you can stay for the first few months. Do not wait until you can speak the language.

Avoid spending too much time with people from your own culture and race (apart from necessary meetings with your team) until you enjoy and feel at home in the new culture and feel comfortable with the people. Living with people from the other culture from the beginning is difficult but very worthwhile. Adapting quickly to their customs (lifestyle, clothes, housing, etc.), breaks down many barriers. It makes people feel they can approach us, and our hearts bond with them.

3. Learn the language well. Greet many people in their language the first day and continue speaking to them every day, even if it is just a few phrases. A proven method of language learning is found in the booklet *How to Learn Another Language* (available from the Missionary Training Service - See page 2 for the address).
4. **Be a learner.** Learn people's games, ambitions, expectations, superstitions, and way of life. Listen to their fears, concerns and superstitions. You need to build a friendship and understand people before you can effectively communicate God's message to them. A learner is a friend. **Ask God for patience in learning.**



5. **Recognize that you bring with you your own culture and your own prejudices.** Nobody is neutral: we are all coloured by the culture in which we were raised. Make sure your judgements of the new culture are based on the Bible, and not on your own culture.
6. **Be servants for Christ's sake.** Do not treat people as children but as equals. Get rid of any superior attitude that you may have. Help in people's work, pray for the sick, listen to their stories, and tell them interesting stories from your own life and from the Bible.
7. **Concentrate on the people you want to reach.** If, at first, you associate yourself with a class of power and influence, it will be difficult to relate to the common working people. Some educated missionaries commit the error of attaching themselves to the middle class just because they have similar

interests. This can be a fatal error if not corrected rapidly: you would not be able to relate to the working class. The reverse also holds true: associating with common people can impede relating to higher classes. However, because they have vested interests in maintaining the status quo, upper classes may not be as responsive.

- 8. Form good friendships from the beginning.** Be a sincere, trustworthy friend. Reveal your own soul: do not use a super-spiritual mask. Recognize that you need forgiveness for your own sins. Letting others see your weaknesses makes you approachable.

Take time to **listen, and pay attention to what they say**. See them as created in God's image, precious to Him, and able to change into His followers. Cultivate your friendships, greeting friends on their birthdays, their family weddings, and visiting them when they are ill. Show respect for people even when they do things that you do not like. Do things together with them and help each other. Seek to become one of them with whom you can laugh and cry. They will be more open to trusting you and the message you bring. Always ask yourself the question: is what I am thinking, saying or doing building up trust?

Dress in ways that the people would appreciate. Greet them respectfully, and eat their food. As far as possible, do everything **the way the people do it**. Be polite, as defined by their culture. Following their customs makes them feel you love them. It also helps you to understand how they feel and think. Many customs, such as what to wear and greetings, can be learnt just by observing other people. For other customs, such as what to do in certain ceremonies, you will have to ask. Let people know that you want to understand and do

what is right, and that you are not asking questions in order to condemn them.

It is good to make yourself dependent on people. For example, on arriving in a new house, you could go immediately to neighbours, and say that as a foreigner, you feel lonely and do not know how to make friends: can they help you to make friends?

- 9. Do not speak in your foreign language when someone from the area is present.** This is offensive and generates suspicion.
- 10. Get to know the community well.** Study the people to differentiate between the social classes: rural and urban, middle class and working class, etc. (note the differences in lifestyle, interests, attitudes and values). Find out the family networks.
- 11. Identify yourself with that part of the community which responds best to the Gospel.**
- 12.** You will find it very profitable to find a **respected local person who will sponsor and back you.** Working through such a person may provide an entrance to places which seem impregnable: you should be subject to less suspicion and resistance. It may take time and effort to build up a relationship with a sponsor, but this will be worthwhile. The sponsor need not be a Christian, but he must be someone who is interested enough to invite you as his personal guest - or at least back you up. In Matthew 10:11, the Lord told His disciples, "Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave."

Working through a sponsor means that your work may initially take more time, because you are limited by the local people - their method of work, transport and organization. However, as the message takes root, it does so according to local forms and under local leadership, and these are important factors in the establishment of a real indigenous church.

**13. Find out what the community thinks about you.** They should feel good about your presence among them. They should see you as a real credible loving human being. Ask a good friend from the culture to explain how to act, and tell you whether or not you behave correctly. This friend should be frank with you about how people see you: he should not hide the truth for fear of hurting you. Your friend will tell you what the community thinks of you and your actions. He will also tell you about the needs and hopes of the community. If your work is misinterpreted by people, you need to know it. For example, in Acts 14 people thought that Paul and Barnabas were gods, and wanted to offer sacrifices to them. In one country some missionary women did not cover their elbows with long-sleeves. In that culture, this meant that they were seen as immoral. In other cultures, showing impatience is a terrible sin. If you violate the culture, you can impede the progress of the Gospel. Perhaps people will not want to tell you what they think: this is why you must find friends who will be open with you.

**14. Write down the customs and the events that you observe.** This will help you remember what is important. Note especially the things that irritate you or surprise you - these are key to understanding how the culture is different from yours. Think **why** people do what they do. What values does a certain practice express? For example, if women wear long dresses, modesty may be an important part of their culture. It

would be wise for missionary women to dress in the same way. Apply what you learn to your own way of living, and how you communicate the Lord's message. Review your notes regularly to see if your understanding is correct, and what further information you can add.

**15. Ask people to tell you their life histories.**

**16. Keep a journal of your experiences and thoughts.**

### **Questions to Help Understand a Culture**

The following questions will help you to understand what people think and feel. Before explaining God's message, you need to know how they think, and what they already know of God. If you teach the Gospel without this foundation, people may completely misunderstand you. Obtain the information from respected friends and as many other people as you can from the community. Learn to ask questions without being intrusive.

Sometimes, you can ask a general question such as "What health problems are common?", and then follow this up with a personal question: "Have you or your family had to deal with any illnesses - how did you cope?" At the back of your mind:, always have the question: "What does this mean for the communication of the Gospel?"

It is helpful to keep a notebook, explaining that it helps you to remember new words and what people say. However, if it causes suspicion, it may be best to record your notes later.

(Before you ask the questions of your new friends, ask yourself the questions about the culture **you** come from. This helps you to

understand where you are coming from in seeking to communicate with the people.)

### **General Questions**

1. What does the people group call itself? (it may be different from what others call it)
2. Can they draw a map of the area in which their people live? What are the important places?
3. What are the most important events in a normal year (the seasons, changes of routine, etc.)?
4. What are the most important events in their history?
5. What makes this people group different from other people groups?
6. How has the geography of their homeland affected their lifestyle?
7. In which geographically and culturally near people groups are there Christians who are acceptable to the people? (They could help to evangelize the people.)
8. What language do they speak? Do they speak other languages? What is the literacy rate? Which people cannot read? What is the reason for this?
9. What does your neighbour do during a normal day? What does his wife do? (in many cultures it is best if this is asked woman to woman)

10. What other important activities do they carry out during the week? When?

### **Basic Needs**

11. What do they eat? Where do they obtain this food? What are common recipes?

12. Is clean water available? In what locations? Is water treated? What is the drainage system like?

13. How do they heat food and warm their houses?

14. What are their houses and other buildings like?

15. How do they support themselves economically? What are the major economic activities?

16. What health problems are common? How do they protect their health?

17. How developed is their technology? What traditional technologies exist?

18. What are some of their needs at this time?

19. How much do they help each other?

### **Ways of Relating to Others**

20. How do they greet each other? Are there different greetings for different classes of people?

21. How do they express friendship? (Do they ask for things? Do they give presents? Do they visit each other in their homes?)

22. What are the main facial expressions and bodily gestures of the people (communicating with their eyes, hands, facial expressions, etc.), and what do they mean?
23. How far apart do people stand when speaking? How does this vary in different situations?
24. How do people indicate something at a distance (pointing with the finger, eyes or lips, in any other way)?
25. Are there different ways of speaking to different people (e.g. speaking to family, friends and strangers)?
26. What use and meaning do their clothes, colours, decorations, furniture, and other implements have?
27. On what occasions do they give presents?

### **Family**

28. What is the family structure like (e.g. do grandparents live with families)? How strong are family relationships? What is the divorce rate?
29. What importance do different relatives have? (e.g. to whom would someone go for help in different situations?)
30. How does their inheritance system work?
31. How are marriages arranged? How do people prepare?
32. What is the correct attitude and behaviour of men towards women, and of women towards men?
33. How do they teach and discipline their children?

## **Communications and Transport**

- 34.** What literature exists in their language? Who reads it? Why?
- 35.** What other means of communication are used (e.g. radio, television, newspapers, books, videos, etc.)? What is their style and content? How is publishing arranged?
- 36.** What art forms are valued? What do they communicate?
- 37.** When someone is teaching others, does he stay standing or sit down? Does he sit on the floor?
- 38.** What systems of transport exist?

## **Cultural Values**

- 39.** What ceremonies, religious festivals, holidays and celebrations are important (for example, birth, passing from childhood to adulthood, marriage, promotion and death)? Explain how they celebrate them, and what they mean. How would you relate the Gospel to any of these?
- 40.** Who are their national heroes - past and present? What made them heroes?
- 41.** Which people are respected in the community? Who are not respected? Why?
- 42.** What are the normal topics of conversation of men, women, young women, young men, boys and girls?
- 43.** What do they find entertaining (their jokes and games)? What do people do to relax? What are common themes of jokes?

44. What themes are important in their songs? What musical instruments are used?
45. What are common wise sayings or proverbs?
46. What are common folk tales? What are the themes of these tales?
47. What attitude do people have towards time (for example, are they punctual or do they arrive late)?
48. What things are private and what is shared amongst the community or between several families?
49. What are the customs about borrowing and lending?
50. Should all members of a community be alike, or can some individuals be very different in what they believe, do and say?
51. Is competition good or bad? When? Why?
52. Can one ever touch another person? Whom and when?
53. What are most of their conflicts about (among husbands and wives, neighbours, in communities, and with other peoples)?
54. How do they resolve conflicts? Do they use mediators?
55. What are people most afraid of? What do they do when these things happen?
56. How do people express happiness, sadness and anger?
57. What changes have there been in customs over the last generation?

58. What other customs do people have which are different from your own? Why do they do these things?
59. What customs appear wrong to you, but not to the people? Why?
60. What opinions do non-Christians have about you, the other missionaries, and your work?
61. What things in your own culture seem wrong to them, but not to you? (Ask your friends from the people: perhaps others will not want to tell you. Try to understand why your customs seem wrong to them.)

### **Institutions**

62. What is their legal system?
63. What is their political system, locally and nationally?
64. How are children and young people educated? What is taught, and who does the teaching?
65. How do they learn the most common jobs and professions (by observation, instruction or by apprenticeship)?
66. What is the basis of the economy? What are the prospects?
67. Where do people gather to talk or do business? Do only men meet together?
68. How do they defend themselves against their enemies?

## **Community**

69. What social divisions are there in the community?
70. Are people drifting to the cities? Why?
71. Do people with different customs or different ethnic backgrounds live in separate areas of the community? Why?
72. Who make the decisions in the community, and how do they make them?
73. How are leaders recognised?
74. How does the community maintain its stability? - how does it dissuade people from doing things of which it disapproves (e.g. laws, police force, taboos, patriotism, etc.)
75. What changes have there been in the community recently? Where did these changes come from?
76. Whose decision for Christ would best open the way for other relatives and community members to follow? (Try to make friends with such people.)

## **Beliefs and Religion**

77. Discover what the people already know about God - ways in which the Holy Spirit has already been preparing them. Investigate if there are legends, proverbs or ceremonies which contain any truth about God and His character. Discover their beliefs about:
  - \* God (what do they call the God who made everything that exists: the Creator who was not created?)

- \* creation (where did they and everything else come from?)
- \* man
- \* the soul
- \* sin - how do they define it? What is their moral code - what things should people do or not do?
- \* the characteristics that are most valued in a person (e.g. bravery, humility, punctuality, etc.)
- \* the spiritual world
- \* life after death
- \* the judgement (rewards and punishment)
- \* how they try to pacify God (or their gods) when they think that He is angry with them)
- \* their sacred writings: how should they be treated
- \* if there are special places for worship: what they are like, and who go there
- \* what religious ceremonies and worship activities they perform
- \* what they do in crises - for example when there is no rain
- \* how they defend themselves against evil spirits?

**78.** What things are of the highest importance for this society (for example, friendships, family, personal honour, their ceremonies, education, following the ancestors, earning money, punctuality, success)? Why?

**79.** What is the purpose of people's lives?

**80.** What are common sins? How do they define guilt?

**81.** What do ordinary people believe about diseases and why people get ill? How do they treat illnesses?

**82.** How do they communicate their beliefs, history and traditions to their children, grandchildren and to other people? (For example, some use stories, songs, poetry, dialogues, dramas,

craft work, art, music, etc..) You can use these methods to communicate the Gospel.

What values or beliefs are expressed in these ways?

- 83.** Do they use music in their religion?
- 84.** How fervently is the main religion practised by the people?
- 85.** Which other religions have any influence?
- 86.** What motivates them in their religion? (e.g. the fear of God, desire for immortality, fear of their ancestors' spirits, etc.)?
- 87.** What movements are there in their religion? (for example secularization, fundamentalism or superstition)
- 88.** What are the greatest fears that people have?
- 89.** How do they define shame?
- 90.** What previous contact has there been with the Gospel? What is their present attitude to Christians?
- 91.** Who are the religious leaders? How are they chosen? What is their attitude towards their religious leaders?
- 92.** If these people had contact with Christianity, how and when did this happen? What were the results? How has church growth occurred?
- 93.** How would the Lord Jesus become flesh and minister to the people? How would He relate to them?
- 94.** How would a new community of Christians act, worship, fellowship, and evangelize?

## **The Gospel as Good News**

The Gospel is good news for people and not primarily a criticism of their culture. We call them to change their allegiance from any other god (or no god at all), and turn to the living God, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ who will give them forgiveness through His death, and eternal life through His resurrection.

Use examples taken from their life and culture. In the Gospels, the Lord used people's customs to explain the Kingdom of God: He spoke of the Good Shepherd because people knew how to look after sheep. He spoke about sowing and harvesting because people worked in agriculture. Paul also illustrated his teaching with local customs (Acts 17:22-23). He began with what they already knew, and built on that.

On one occasion, working among a tribe, some missionaries distributed tracts against beer drinking. Many people in the tribe produced beer. Previously, people had shown quite a lot of interest in the Gospel. However, when the chief saw the tract, he prohibited the missionaries from returning. Even before the Gospel could put down roots, condemnation of a cultural practice destroyed the work. People should see that God is basically supportive of their way of life, their values, and families: not that the Gospel is primarily about condemnation of some practices.

This does not mean to say that we approve of every practice. However, we do not begin our work by condemning these things. For example, the practise of keeping slaves is not explicitly forbidden in the Bible. However, the biblical principle of the equality of all men has led many countries to abolish slavery. It took years for Christian principles to transform this practice. In a similar way, it may take a long time for every aspect of a people's culture to be transformed.

Share in the activities of the people as much as you can. However, sometimes you will be invited to participate in something unlawful for a Christian: something which fosters idolatry, immorality or injustice. An example would be a spiritist session. Explain why you cannot participate (before they invite you, if possible). Try to decline the invitation in a way that does not break the friendship.

## **Steps to Effective Evangelism**

- 1. Pray to God for His guidance, wisdom and power.** Prayer is basic to everything else. A culture opens to God only by His miraculous grace. Evangelism is a spiritual battle.
- 2. Think about what they already know about spiritual matters.** (See the answers to your questions from page 21.)

There often exist things in common between the Bible and a people's religion. Identify and enlist every possible aspect in the culture as a peg to which to connect the Gospel message. Some tribes in Africa believe in a great God who is above all other "gods". This "great God" is like the almighty God of the Bible. Muslims believe in one God, that the Lord Jesus was a prophet, that He will return to earth to reign, and that He will kill the Antichrist. Some sacrifice a sheep for the forgiveness of their sins — one can relate this to the Lord's sacrifice on the cross. These parallels awaken people's interest. However, people's ideas are often incomplete and corrupted, so you must teach with care.

In Acts 17:22-31, Paul saw many altars in Athens. One had the inscription "To the unknown God". Paul said, "I'm going to tell you about this God that you have not known about until now." People were interested in his message.

If people are afraid of evil spirits, we can explain that the Lord Jesus Christ is more powerful than evil spirits.

3. **Investigate people's hopes and needs, especially those that their old religion does not satisfy.** People will only change if they feel a need to do so. Many are looking for the meaning of life, peace with God, and help with family problems. Relate the Gospel to the needs that they feel. Help them to see and trust in God's power and help when we pray to Him through the Lord Jesus.
4. Prayerfully imagine what multiplying churches would look like in that culture. How would they worship? How would they train their leaders? How would they evangelize? Think back from this to consider how to go about your work. Will you need help from Christians from another culture who are closer to the people than you are?
5. If possible, always work first with heads of households who are responsible, accepted, typical members of the community. These should be good potential channels of the Gospel to other members of the community. Beware of those who attach themselves to you only because they think they will receive some material benefit, or want to travel to another country.

A people movement occurs when a group of people - large families, villages or communities - after instruction in the Gospel, decide together to become Christians; this group decision helps influence other groups to decide to become Christians too. At least two-thirds of all converts in Asia, Africa and the Pacific have come to faith through people movements. For example, the tens of thousands of Muslims who became Christians in Indonesia between 1966 and 1980 came not as scattered individuals but by whole villages and extended families. In a people movement, people are going

with the tide rather than against it. The Gospel flows along family and friendship lines. **To take advantage of this, work within one group: do not try to mix people of different groups.** Concentrate on people from one economic and social class. Although different members of the team have different ministries, all should concentrate on the same group and class of people.

6. Teach the Gospel as their friend, in a way they can understand, related to their everyday life, customs and unfulfilled needs.

A good example comes from a certain part of Indonesia: When tribes there made war on each other, they could become reconciled by means of a "peace child": to secure peace, one tribe gave the eldest child of their chief to the chief of the other tribe to be brought up as his own son. During the life of the child there would be peace between the tribes. Previously, the missionaries had evangelized without success. Then they discovered the custom of the peace child. They explained that Jesus is the Peace Child, sent from God to bring peace between Him and us. Risen from the dead, Jesus lives for ever to maintain peace with God. With this explanation began the conversion of the whole tribe. They understood the Gospel through an example from their own culture.

Concentrate first on that part of the Gospel that they understand well. Afterwards, through this "eye-opener" one can then communicate all the essentials of the Gospel: God as our maker, our sin against Him, the Lord Jesus - who He is, what He has done, and what He will do, repentance, faith and discipleship, the Holy Spirit. Do not leave out anything just because they may find it unpleasant: they must hear all God's message. Show that the Bible is a historical reliable book.

7. Encourage them to turn to God, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are looking for a verdict in favour of the Lord. Do not seek premature conversions. People must understand what they are doing. In the book of Acts, many families and intimate friends were converted and baptized together. Try to win whole families and groups, not just scattered individuals. Encourage those interested in the Gospel to decide together with their families and friends to follow the Lord. Constantly teach that in Christ families are stronger and happier.

Try not to isolate those who are interested in the Gospel from their families, even when there is opposition. Try to maintain these close loving relationships: the Gospel will run along them to the other family members and friends.

#### **Other Suggestions:**

- Use simple Bible stories about the Lord Jesus Christ's power to save and heal, and the value of His death and resurrection. Other stories, such as creation, the fall, and Noah's ark, can help set the scene. People usually learn better from stories and illustrations than by teaching "pure doctrine".
- Talk about sins which they already acknowledge in their culture. Otherwise there may be no conviction.
- Use local vocabulary to refer to spiritual truths. It may not be ideal, but you can explain the new Christian meanings. Do not use foreign words.
- Allow time for the Lord's message to be discussed and absorbed by the community.
- Teach in a way that the new believers can easily imitate, and that does not depend on technology they do not have. Use their forms of expression: art, dramas, poems, songs, storytelling, etc.. In this way they can spread the word easily themselves.
- Help heads of households (even those who are not yet converted) to teach their families.

- Use other local forms of communication (e.g. dramas and poetry) to help those who are beginning to understand the Gospel to teach it to others. Encourage new Christians to be salt and light in their family and community by their good lives and deeds. Encourage, too, enthusiastic communication of the Gospel by new converts to their friends and relatives. In circumstances where persecution arises, it is often important to let the good works and changed lifestyle lay a foundation for verbal witness.
- Help the new churches to organize as cells which have the power to form other cells easily, and where new leaders can be trained.
- Take advantage of common courtesy. Avoid confrontation whenever possible: arguing may make enemies. When there are different opinions, first listen. Then others owe you the courtesy of listening to you.
- If you try to integrate people of different cultures in one group, the strongest culture always predominates: those of the weaker culture feel left out. Do not oblige the people you want to reach to meet with another social group. (After conversion you will teach them to accept people of every race, language and culture as equals - but they will probably not meet together all the time.)
- Witness where you are vulnerable and unconverted people are in control - this way people do not feel threatened, and are able to make a decision more freely.
- Help unconverted heads of families to pass on the teaching to their families.
- Use several complementary ways of communicating the Gospel. This adds impact to the message.
- Help them to learn key Bible verses.
- Answer questions about the Gospel with your personal testimony. Personal stories give credibility.

- Baptize those who believe. Baptism, rather than "going forward" or "hand raising" was the New Testament sign of becoming a Christian.
- Keep converts in a strong, loving relationship with their relatives and friends. They and their friends should feel that by becoming Christians, they have become better members of their own people, and not that they have joined a foreign group.
- Help the new converts to obey all the Lord's commands as the new church did in Acts 2:37-47 (Repentance and faith, baptism, receiving the Holy Spirit, the apostles' teaching, brotherly love and fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, giving, worship, and evangelism). Help them to love each other in many practical ways as members together of one body in Christ.
- Prepare converts for opposition or persecution (1 Peter 4:12-19, etc.).
- Teach adults to read, if necessary.
- The style of worship must fit the culture. It may be very different from your worship in your own culture. The style of leading worship must be simple and imitable by quite new Christians.
- Start the new church meetings in homes of the people: not in your own. Avoid simply inviting new converts to worship with the team. Rather, help them to start their own *completely new group*, within their own culture and community. There may be only one or two new converts plus a team member, but the Lord Jesus has promised to be present (Mt. 18:20).
- At the first worship meeting, the new believers and their family and friends should outnumber outsiders, so that the church is born with its own cultural and community identity (some team members may have to stay away).
- Celebrate the Lord's Supper in homes or other private places. This was the centre of worship in the early church each week. Family or friends can observe until they are converted.

- Help them to develop their own style of worship. For example, if they prefer to pray on their faces, or in other ways, it is up to them.
- Worship without foreign musical instruments, electrical equipment or Western songs. Help new Christians compose worship songs using their own style of music: at first, they might use Psalms without any music at all.
- Immediately mobilize local leaders to lead meetings using a simple style of service. Do not open the worship meetings up to the general public until local people are always leading.
- At least at the beginning, there should usually be no Western style preaching: rather telling Bible stories and sharing the application.
- Train local leaders, giving them responsibility as soon as possible.
- After conversion, teach them to become obedient disciples. If people are illiterate or semiliterate, daily services using Scripture passages such as the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, Psalm 23, Romans 12:9-16, the Apostles' Creed and hymns are very helpful for people to grow in the faith. Constantly repeated Scripture passages, perhaps chanted or sung, give comfort and strength.

## **The Effect of the Gospel on the Culture**

### **TO TRANSMIT INTO THE NEW CULTURE:**

Teach the Gospel of Christ - and nothing more. According to 1 Cor. 2:1-5, Paul evangelized the Corinthians not with words of human wisdom, but spoke only of the Lord's death and resurrection.

To new believers we teach first the commandments of Christ (for example, repenting and believing, being baptized, loving God and our neighbour, sharing in the Lord's Supper, praying, giving, evangelizing and making disciples).

If they obey these commands in another way from us, they have the freedom from God to do so. For example, Muslims sometimes pray kneeling, raising their hands. When they are converted, it is not necessary to teach them to pray in another posture (although they will, of course, change what they say). They can also use poetry and chants in their worship as Muslims do. They should feel at home in expressing themselves to God.

Differentiate between:

1. The commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles: we should always obey these.
2. The apostles' customs: they are worth imitating, but are not obligatory. (For example meeting in homes.)
3. A local church's customs: we leave behind the customs of the churches from which we come, and put the Lord's commands into practice using the customs of the new culture as far as possible.

Do not impose practices of the church of your own culture that do not fit in with the new culture. For example, in your own culture, men and women might sit together in worship meetings, whereas in the new culture, they may sit in different parts of the room.

Other examples of things that we should normally filter out:

- music and hymns from our own culture (help the people to compose their own hymns with their own music)
- formal methods of teaching (at first it could be better to tell Bible stories and add a practical application)
- electronic equipment
- human rules for the church
- denominationalism
- professional full-time pastors
- professional evangelistic methods (which are difficult to imitate)
- dependence on money from overseas (teach them to give to the Lord and pay for everything from the beginning)

## **THE TRANSFORMATION OF CULTURE BY THE GOSPEL**

Help the believers to evaluate their own customs, traditions and beliefs in the light of the Bible. Do not impose your own opinions. From the beginning, the new church must look to the Holy Spirit to guide them. Trust Him to illumine **the people themselves** to establish guidelines for the church. The missionaries' role is to teach the Word and pray, without obliging people to change.

A good practice is to continually ask ourselves, "What would the Lord Jesus do?" "How does the Gospel contradict what I think, what I believe and how I live?" If we ask these questions of ourselves daily, we will certainly change how we live. In taking the Gospel to another culture, we can teach the new believers to ask themselves the same questions. This will help them transform their culture.

### **Suggestions for dealing with a questionable cultural practice:**

1. First the Christians ask God for guidance about the custom or other aspect of their culture, recognizing that He must take first place in all aspects of their lives.
2. They gather all the information they can about the custom: for example, when and why it is practised.
3. They study the biblical teaching relevant to the custom.
4. They now evaluate the custom in the light of the biblical teaching. They can put the customs in different categories:
  - A. **Customs that the Bible supports**, like honouring one's parents and respecting the government. These customs should continue without change.
  - B. **Neutral customs (which the Bible neither commands or condemns)**, such as sitting on the floor, or the use of local musical instruments. Most components of most cultures are neutral: they should usually be maintained (although Christians cannot be obliged to follow them - the Christians' only authority is what God says in Scripture).
  - C. **Customs which express wrong ideas**. For these customs, other similar new forms that express biblical truth should be substituted. For example, instead of a ceremony to ask the blessing of the local gods on the harvest, Christians can ask God's blessing on the harvest in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not simply destroy customs without substituting something which will take its place: fulfilling the function that it had in the culture. Otherwise, the culture, like a building from which bricks and beams are removed, could collapse with unforeseen consequences.

**D. Customs that are opposed to the Bible.** For example, worshipping the dead, receiving the blessing of an idol, receiving its mark on the face, participating in immoral acts, etc.. In 1 Corinthians 10:20-22, Paul shows that it was not acceptable to eat in the temple of idols. As Christians, we have baptism and the Lord's Supper in which we commit ourselves totally to the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot participate in anything which would compromise our allegiance to Him.

Here again it is good to substitute another custom which fulfils the function that the evil custom had in the society. For example, people might sacrifice a chicken to demons on the birth of a child. An alternative ceremony would be to have a special service of thanksgiving and petition for the child's protection, followed by a celebration meal.

The new Christians themselves must make the decisions: they know the culture better than we do. We will always have the tendency to see things from the point of view of our own culture.

### **Church Leadership**

- Leaders should have the qualities that members of the society would expect from leaders, as well as the guidelines given in such passages as 1 Timothy 3:1-7.
- Train leaders as soon as possible. For advice on suitable pastoral training programmes you can contact the Missionary Training Service (see page 2 for the address).
- If you want to reproduce churches in the working class, their pastors should also be from the same class. Leaders from a higher class usually paralyze growth. This is because common people do not feel free to lead or take responsibility when

someone from a superior class is in control: they are afraid of criticism for making mistakes.

- For the churches to grow and reproduce, they use their God-given authority and duty to obey all the Lord's commands - including baptizing new believers and ordaining new leaders.
- The missionary team works to foster a movement for Christ in the community: churches led and taught by members of the people itself, not by missionaries. The new churches have the responsibility to take the Gospel to the whole people group, and to begin new churches. Missionaries should not control the new churches: they give them freedom to lead. Of course the new leaders will make some mistakes, but so do missionaries. Let the new churches work out how they should organize themselves. Do not try to impose a style of organization from your own culture.
- Irrevocably renounce control over the national church. Commit them to God: He will help them.

## **Practical Work**

As a missionary to another culture, make a serious commitment to God to:

- 1.** Follow the example of the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Explain with your own words how we imitate Him to penetrate a new culture with the Gospel: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- 2.** Live with the people in love and patience.
- 3.** Learn the language and customs well.
- 4.** Proclaim the Gospel as Good News and not as a criticism of their culture.
- 5.** Study Acts chapters 10, 13, 14 to see how the apostles taught in different cultures.
- 6.** In the culture, what examples of the Gospel could you make use of (such as the "Peace Child")? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Reading on Working in Other Cultures:**

*Agents of Transformation: A Guide for Effective Cross-Cultural Ministry*, by Sherwood Lingenfelter, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49516, USA, 1996.

*Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*, by Paul G. Hiebert. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49516, USA, 1985.

*Case Studies in Missions*, by Paul G. and Frances F. Hiebert, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49516, USA, 1987.

*Clash of Worlds*, by David G. Burnett, Monarch Publications, Broadway House, The Broadway, Crowborough, East Sussex, TN6 1HQ, UK, 1990.

*Christianity Confronts Culture*, a Strategy for Cross-Cultural Evangelism, by Marvin K. Mayers, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49516, USA, 1974.

*Christianity in Culture*, by Charles H. Kraft, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY 10545, USA.

*Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective*, by Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Mayers, Academie Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. 1979.

*Friendship Across Cultures*, by Tim Stafford, IVP, Norton St. Nottingham, NG7 3HR, UK.

*It Shouldn't Happen to a Missionary*, by Alf Cooper, Monarch Publications, Broadway House, The Broadway, Crowborough, East Sussex, TN6 1HQ, UK

*What About Other Faiths?*, by Martin Goldsmith, Hodder Headline, 338 Euston Road, London, NW1 3BH, UK.

*What's So Unique About Jesus?*, by C. Wright, Monarch Publications, Broadway House, The Broadway, Crowborough, East Sussex, TN6 1HQ, UK.



*"I am delighted to become aware of the very significant thrust of the new Missionary Training Service, and its programme. Many people study in colleges that are not primarily designed for this purpose and do not get as concentrated and as strategic an exposure as is offered in this programme."*

Ralph D. Winter, Founder of the US Center for World Mission and President of William Carey International University

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**The Missionary Training Service,  
Oswestry Christian Centre,  
Lower Brook Street,  
Oswestry,  
Shropshire, SY11 2HJ,  
United Kingdom**

Tel./Fax. Nat'l.: 020 7932 0728

Int'l.: + 44 20 7932 0728

E-mail: [coord@missionarytraining.org](mailto:coord@missionarytraining.org)