continent. In fact, the most rapid growth in the missionary force today comes from these young churches.

We can, therefore, no longer equate missionaries with Westerners. When we use the word *missionary* in this study, we mean anyone who communicates the gospel in a cross-cultural setting, whether he or she is an African serving in India, or a Latin American in Spain. The illustrations used are slanted toward a Western audience, because this book will be used largely in the West. But the principles examined apply equally to missionaries from the Two-Thirds World. The reader need only think of local examples to replace the Western ones that are given.

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**Gospel and Culture**

Missionaries face many dilemmas, none more difficult than those that deal with the relationship of the gospel to human cultures. Such questions are not new. In the Book of Acts, serious questions arose when the Gentiles began to enter the church not by ones and twos but by the thousands. Did they have to become Jewish proselytes and adopt such Jewish practices as circumcision and such taboos as the proscription of pork? If not, which of the Old Testament teachings should the church follow, and which parts of Jewish culture could be discarded?

The first great church council (see Acts 15) was called to answer questions that arose out of the missionary outreach of the early church. The same questions arise today wherever Christian missions are successful. So long as there are no converts, it is easy to continue the work. We can preach, teach, broadcast, and hand out tracts, without having to deal with new converts. But when people do become Christians in other cultures, we face numerous decisions. Can they keep several wives? Should they give food to their ancestors? And what should they do about their old religious customs? Should we teach them our rituals, or are these mainly Western? Should we as missionaries live like these people? Can we in good conscience participate in their songs and dances, or do these have non-Christian connotations?

Most of these questions have to do with the relationship between
the gospel and human cultures. On the one hand, the gospel belongs to no culture. It is God’s revelation of himself and his acts to all people. On the other hand, it must always be understood and expressed within human cultural forms. There is no way to communicate it apart from human thought patterns and languages. Moreover, God has chosen to use humans as the primary means for making himself known to other humans. Even when he chose to reveal himself to us, he did so most fully by becoming a man who lived within the context of human history and a particular culture.

Before we can analyze the relationship of the gospel to human cultures, we need to look more closely at what those cultural patterns encompass.

The Concept of Culture

“Culture” is an ordinary English word. When we say, “She is a cultured person,” we mean that she listens to Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms and knows which of the many forks and spoons to use at a banquet. Or we say, “Henry has no culture at all,” meaning that he does not behave in a “civilized” way. When we use the word in this way, we are equating it with the customs of the elite members of a society—the rich, educated, and powerful. Implicitly, we assume that ordinary people, particularly the poor and marginal (those who are members simultaneously of two or more different cultures and do not identify fully with any of them), have no “culture” except as they emulate the elite.

Since anthropologists use the word in a different and more technical sense, there is considerable debate among them as to how the term culture should be defined. For our purposes, however, we will begin with a simple definition that we can modify later as our understanding of the concept grows. We will define culture as “the more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and values and their associated patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do.”

Dimensions of Culture

Let us look at this definition and unpack some of its meanings. Note first that culture relates to “ideas, feelings, and values.” These are the three basic dimensions of culture (Figure 4).

The cognitive dimension. This aspect of culture has to do with the knowledge shared by members of a group or society. Without shared knowledge, communication and community life are impossible.

Knowledge provides the conceptual content of a culture. It arranges the people’s experiences into categories and organizes these categories into larger systems of knowledge. For example, Americans divide the rainbow into six basic colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet. Telugus in South India see just as many colors, but divide the rainbow into two basic colors: eras, or hot colors (from red through orange); and patsas, or cold colors (from pale yellow through violet).

Knowledge also tells people what exists and what does not. For instance, most Westerners believe in atoms, electrons, and gravity, although they have never seen them. South Indian villagers, on the other hand, believe in fierce rakshasas, spirits with big heads, bulging eyes, fangs, and long wild hair, which inhabit trees and rocky places and jump on unwary travelers at night. Not all Indians believe in rakshasas, but those who do not must think about them, for they exist as a category within the culture. Similarly, atheists in the West are forced to deal with the concept of “God.”

Cultural knowledge is more than the categories we use to sort out reality. It includes the assumptions and beliefs we make about reality, the nature of the world, and how it works. Our culture teaches us how to build and sail a boat, how to raise a crop, how to cook a meal, how to run a government, and how to relate to the ancestors, spirits, and gods.

Because our culture provides us with the fundamental ingredients of our thoughts, we find it almost impossible to break away from its grasp. Even our language reflects and reinforces our cultural way of thinking. Moreover, much of this influence is implicit; we are not even aware of it. Like colored glasses, culture affects how we perceive the world, without our being conscious of its influence. Only when the lenses become dirty, or we put on other glasses, are we aware of their power to shape the way we see the world.

Cultural knowledge is stored in many ways. Many of us store infor-
mation in print. We turn to newspapers, books, billboards, cereal boxes, and even sky writing to retrieve it. Rarely are we aware of just how dependent we are on writing. Deprived of it, we soon starve intellectually, for we use so few other ways to store information. Most of us in the West know by memory only a few Bible verses and the first lines of a few hymns.

Although print is excellent for storing knowledge, it is not the only means. We often label those who cannot read “illiterate” and thus ignorant. The fact is, nonliterate societies have a great deal of knowledge and store it in other ways. They use stories, poems, songs, proverbs, riddles, and other forms of oral tradition that are easily remembered. They also enact dramas, dances, and rituals that can be seen.

This distinction between oral and literate societies and the ways they store and transmit information is of vital importance for missionaries. Since missionaries have generally been literate people, they have often misunderstood oral societies and their forms of communication. Consequently, they have generally concluded that the most effective way to plant churches in the mission field is to teach people how to read and write.

While literacy and education are important in the long run, particularly for preparing high-level church leaders, they are by no means the only or even the most effective ways of planting churches in oral societies. People do not have to learn to read to become Christians or to grow in faith. For example, P. Y. Luke and J. B. Carmen (1968) found that Christians in South India store their beliefs in songs—in what the authors call “lyric theology.” In church and at home they often sing by memory ten verses of one song and fifteen of another. They also use dramas presented in an open square. While Hindu villagers soon become tired of preaching and leave, they will stay half the night to see a drama to its end. Christians in other parts of the world have made effective use of bardic performances, dances, proverbs, and other oral methods for communicating the gospel.

The affective dimension. Culture also has to do with the feelings people have—with their attitudes, notions of beauty, tastes in food and dress, likes and dislikes, and ways of enjoying themselves or experiencing sorrow. People in one culture like their food hot, in another sweet or bland. Members of some societies learn to express their emotions and may be aggressive and bellicose; in others they learn to be self-controlled and calm. Some religions encourage the use of meditation, mysticism, and drugs in order to achieve inner peace and tranquility. Others stress ecstasy through frenzied songs, dances, and self-torture. In short, cultures vary greatly in how they deal with the emotional sides of human life.

The affective dimension of culture is reflected in most areas of life. It is seen in standards of beauty and taste in clothes, food, houses, furniture, cars, and other cultural products. Imagine for a moment a culture in which everything is only functional. All clothes would be the same drab color and style. All houses would look the same.

Emotions also play an important part in human relationships, in our notions of etiquette and fellowship. We communicate love, hate, scorn, and a hundred other attitudes by our facial expressions, tones of voice, and gestures.

Feelings find particular outlet in what we call “expressive culture”—in our art, literature, music, dance, and drama. These we create not for utilitarian purposes but for our own enjoyment and emotional release. This is obvious whether we attend a rock concert or an opera.

The evaluative dimension. Each culture also has values by which it judges human relationships to be moral or immoral. It ranks some occupations high and others low, some ways of eating proper and other ways unacceptable.

Value judgments can be broken down into three types. First, each culture evaluates cognitive beliefs to determine whether they are true or false. For example, Europeans in the Middle Ages believed that malaria was caused by a noxious substance in the air. Today they attribute it to sporozoan parasites. In other cultures people believe that malaria is caused by spirits that live around the village. In each of these cases the culture determines what people should accept as true.

Each cultural system also judges the emotional expressions of human life. It teaches people what is beauty and what is ugliness, what to love and what to hate. In some cultures people are encouraged to sing in sharp, piercing voices, in others to sing in deep, mellow tones. Even within the same culture likes and dislikes vary greatly according to settings and subcultures. Tuxedos and formal gowns are out of place at a skating party, and Country and Western music generally is inappropriate at a funeral.

Finally, each culture judges values and determines right and wrong. For instance, in North American culture it is worse to tell a lie than to hurt people’s feelings. In other cultures, however, it is more important to encourage other people, even if it means bending the truth somewhat.

Each culture has its own moral code and its own culturally defined sins. It judges some acts to be righteous and others to be immoral. In traditional Indian society it is a sin for a woman to eat before her
The Gospel and Human Cultures

husband. If she does so, a village proverb says, she will be reborn in her next life as a snake. In China a person must venerate his or her ancestors by feeding them regularly. Not to do so is sin.

Each culture also has its own highest values and primary allegiances, each its own culturally defined goals. One pressures people to make economic success their highest goal; another assigns top priority to honor and fame, political power, the good will of the ancestors, or the favor of God.

These three dimensions—ideas, feelings, and values—are important in understanding the nature of human cultures, and we will refer back to them frequently.

The gospel in all three dimensions. Missionaries should keep the three dimensions of culture in mind in their work, for the gospel has to do with all of them. On the cognitive level it has to do with knowledge and truth—with an understanding and acceptance of biblical and theological information and with a knowledge of God. It is on this level that we are concerned with questions of truth and orthodoxy.

The gospel also includes feelings. We feel awe and mystery in God's presence, guilt or shame for our sins, gladness for our salvation, and comfort in the fellowship of God's people.

Ultimately, the gospel has to do with values and allegiances. Jesus proclaimed the Good News of the kingdom of God, in which he rules in righteousness. His laws stand in contrast to those of our earthly kingdoms, and his perfection rules in judgment on our cultural sins. Jesus also calls us to follow him. To be a Christian is to give our ultimate allegiance to him. Anything else is idolatry.

All three cultural dimensions are essential in conversion. We need to know that Jesus is the Son of God, but knowledge alone is not enough. Even Satan must acknowledge the deity of Christ. We also need feelings of affection and loyalty toward him. But feelings, too, are not enough. Both knowledge and feelings must lead us to worship and submission, to obeying and following Jesus as the Lord of our lives.

All three must also be present in our Christian lives. We need both good theology—a knowledge of the truth—and emotions of awe and excitement. But these should lead to discipleship and to the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, and so on. Ironically, in the West we have reduced these to "feelings." In the Bible they are commitments and values. That is why Paul can command us to love, to rejoice, and to be at peace. In Christianity we are called to give ourselves to God and to others. Understandings and feelings often follow later.

We missionaries and church leaders tend to stress the cognitive aspects of the gospel. We are concerned with knowledge of the Bible and with theology. After all, this is the area in which we have received our training. Consequently, the methods we use, such as preaching and teaching, emphasize information and reason.

We often fail, however, to understand the importance of feelings and attitudes in the everyday lives of most people. Human beings spend much of their free time and resources in the pursuit of excitement and thrills or affection and tranquility—more perhaps than they do in gaining knowledge. They do almost anything to avoid pain, fear, and grief.

Emotions also play a crucial role in the decision making of most people. They choose their clothes, cook their food, and buy their cars as much by feelings as by reason. If this is true, we must present the knowledge of the gospel with feeling, so that people will believe and follow. We must teach the truth in a way that recognizes that many respond to the gospel not because they are rationally persuaded, but because they are freed from fears or experience forgiveness and joy in salvation. And we must persuade people to respond.

In the church we need good preaching and teaching so that young Christians will grow to maturity. We also need to provide ways for Christians to express themselves through music, art, literature, drama, dance, rituals, and festivals. Too often Protestant Christianity has had little appeal to Africans and Asians because it appears joyless, colorless, and drab in comparison to the religions they already have.

Our ultimate goal, however, is discipleship. We do not proclaim the gospel simply to inform people or to make them feel good. We are calling them to become followers of Jesus Christ.

Manifestations of Culture

Another part of our definition of culture involves "behavior and products." These are the manifestations of culture that we can see, hear, or experience through our other senses.

Behavior. To a great extent people are taught how to behave by their culture. In North America they learn to shake hands, to eat with their forks, to drive on the right side of the road, and to compete with one another for better grades or more money. In Japan they are taught to bow, to take off their shoes at the door, to sit on mats on the floor, to eat with chopsticks, and to assist one another in school and work.

Not all behavior, however, is culturally molded. In formal situations behavior is precisely defined. For example, at a banquet our clothes, behavior, and speech are carefully circumscribed. But everyday life is usually less formal, and we are allowed to choose from a range of permissible behaviors. Our choices reflect the occasion (swimming
suits are out of place in the classroom) and our personalities. They also reflect our decisions of the moment, which are influenced by the economic, political, social, and religious circumstances of our lives.

In a sense our culture encompasses the set of rules governing the games of life that we and the members of our society play. Like players in most games, we often try to "bend the rules" a little and get away with it. If we are caught, we are punished; but if not, we gain some advantage or sense of achievement.

All cultures have ways to enforce their rules, such as gossip, ostracism, and force, but not all violators are punished. A society may ignore some transgressors, particularly those who are important or powerful. Or it may be unable to enforce a specific rule, particularly when a great many people break it. In such cases cultural ordinances may die, and the culture changes accordingly.

People in the same culture do not always agree on what the rules are. Like kids in a sandlot baseball game, they argue for one set of rules or another. In the end, those who can make their rules stick become the leaders and control the game to their own advantage.

**Products.** Culture also includes material objects—houses, baskets, canoes, masks, carts, cars, computers, and the like. People live in nature and must adapt to it or mold and use it for their own purposes. They construct huts as shelter from the rain and cold, boats to cross the water, and hoes and digging sticks to farm the land. They sew clothes to keep warm and make weapons to kill game or to war with one another. They cut down forests, build roads, dam rivers, and tunnel through mountains. In the end, as their actions alter the environment, they in turn are forced to change their cultures.

People in simple tribal societies live in an environment largely formed by nature. Their culture may teach them how to make weapons to hunt game and how to build brush shelters and weave clothes to protect them from the elements. For the most part, however, they have to adapt to nature. In complex industrial societies most of a people's environment may be culturally molded. Electricity blurs the distinction between day and night; cars, planes, radios, and phones break the barriers of geographic distance; furnaces and air conditioners create artificial climates; and phonograph records freeze moments in history.

Material culture includes more than human responses to the environment. People make many things for their own use and to express their creative abilities. In simple nomadic cultures such things are few. In modern societies the number of different objects made is stag-gering. For example, a single Boeing 747 has more than 4,500,000 parts, and an average hardware store has more than 15,000 different types of objects for sale.

Human behavior and material objects are readily observed. Consequently, they are important doors for our study of a culture. We can begin our task by examining the things people make, who makes them and how, who uses them and for what purposes, what value the people place on their creations, and how they dispose of them. We can observe how people behave in different situations and with different people. In fact, if we do not take note of the behavior and products when we enter a new culture, they soon become so commonplace that we no longer notice them.

**Symbol Systems**

A third part of our definition is the word associated. Human behavior and products are not independent parts of a culture; they are closely linked to the ideas, feelings, and values that lie within its people. This association of a specific meaning, emotion, or value with a certain behavior or cultural product is called a symbol (Figure 5). In North America, for example, sticking out a tongue at someone signifies ridicule and rejection; in Tibet it is a symbol of greeting and friendship (Firth 1973:313).

In one sense a culture is made up of many sets of symbols. For instance, speech, writing, traffic signs, money, postage stamps, sounds such as sirens and bells, and smells such as perfumes are but a few of the sets of symbols in Western cultures. Even dress, in addition to its utilitarian value as protection and warmth, conveys feelings and meanings. In the United States a tuxedo or evening gown speaks of a formal occasion, just as jeans indicate informality. The uniforms of waiters and airline pilots announce their professions, just as the insignias of military personnel show rank.

**Figure 5**

**Symbols Link Meanings, Feelings, and Values to Forms**

A Symbol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>meaning, feeling, or value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>form</td>
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</tbody>
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Form and meaning. The symbolic link between forms and meanings (or emotions or values) is complex and varied. Sometimes it is purely arbitrary. A company may choose to use a triple circle as its logo, or a college may make the husky its mascot.

Most cultural symbols, however, must be understood within their historical and cultural contexts. For example, the Greeks associated the word *polys* with the meaning “full” or “many.” Over the centuries, as other languages evolved or borrowed from Greek, they kept that basic association. Today’s English speakers use words like “polychromatic,” “polygamy,” and “polyhedron” that are, in part, products of their symbolic history.

Similarly, once created, symbols become parts of cultural systems. Rarely do they stand alone. They acquire meanings not only by the definitions we give to them, but also by their relationship to other symbols of the same set. For example, when we think of the word *red* we do so in relationship to all the other color categories we have. Thus, when in English we say “red,” we also mean “not orange, not yellow, not purple,” and so on. Symbols, therefore, carry both positive and negative meanings.

Many symbols are used in varied settings and so acquire a number of different but related meanings. For instance, we say of a house, “It is red [color]”; of a person, “He’s a Red [political ideology]”; of ourselves, “I saw red [emotion of anger]”; of our friend, “Was he ever red [emotion of embarrassment]”; and of the stoplight, “It was red [command to stop].” These multivocal symbols help to integrate a culture by linking together various domains of thought.

Finally, for symbols to be part of a culture, they must be shared by a human community. Each of us has personal symbols that we use to communicate with ourselves. For example, we devise codes to remind ourselves of what we must do. But symbols become culture only when a group of people associate the same meanings with specific forms.

It is this shared nature of cultural symbols that makes human communication possible. We cannot transmit our thoughts into the heads of others. We must first code them into symbols that others understand—as although they receive only the forms of these symbols (our behavior, speech, or products), they can infer our meanings because they share with us a common set of symbols (Figure 6).

Because cultural symbols are shared and because they continue over time, people can transmit their knowledge and feelings from one to another and from one generation to the next. It is this that accounts for both stability and change in cultures. We are the recipients of a culture developed by previous generations. Although we begin with it, we in turn change it and transmit this modified form to the next generation. This transition from one generation to another also accounts for the cumulative nature of culture. New information is added and new products created, and it is important to remember that cultures are both social and historical in nature.

The fusion of form and meaning. The link between form and meaning in some symbols is so close that the two cannot be differentiated. This is often true with historical symbols. For Muslims, Mecca has strong religious meanings because it was the birthplace of Muhammad. Similarly, for Christians the cross stands for Christ’s death, for the simple reason that Christ was crucified on a cross. We may choose other symbols to speak of that death, but we cannot change the facts of history.

Forms and meanings may also be equated in ritual symbols. For instance, worshipers in some cultures use images simply as forms to remind them of their gods. In other cultures they believe that their gods inhabit the idol. But worshipers in yet other cultures equate the two—the idol is their god. Many Western Christians differentiate forms and meanings in their rituals. The Lord’s Supper reminds them of Jesus’ last meal with his disciples, and the bread and the wine represent symbolically Christ’s body and blood. They say, “We go to church in order to worship.” In other words, the act of going to church is not itself an act of worship. Worship is an inner feeling they have in church. Other Christians do not make such a distinction. To them, the Eucharist is to eat with Christ, and the bread and wine are seen as his body and blood. They say, “In going to church we are worshiping.” They do not separate the outer act of going to church from the inner thoughts and feelings that led them to do so.

People in the West, in particular, tend to separate forms and meanings, whereas traditional and peasant cultures tend to equate them. Consequently, rituals often have little meaning in the West, although they are vital to the lives of people in other parts of the world.
need to recognize this as Western missionaries, lest we misunderstand the place of rituals in the lives of the people we serve.

As we shall see in chapters 5 and 6, it is important that missionaries understand the nature of cultural symbols, not only when we translate the Bible and its message into a new language, but also when we plant the church and contextualize its symbols and rituals within a new cultural setting.

**Patterns and Systems**

Cultures are more than random assortments of symbols that people use piecemeal. As noted in our definition, symbols are used in specific ways. For example, North Americans use forks when they eat most foods. This association of a specific symbol with a particular use or context is called a cultural trait, groupings of which are linked to one another in larger patterns sometimes referred to as cultural complexes. When dining, Americans use forks together with spoons, knives, plates, cups, glasses, chairs, tables, and often linen. Moreover, the silverware must be used in certain ways, depending on the occasion. In contrast to this, Indians use their fingers and eat from brass, aluminum, or leaf plates while seated on the floor.

Not all behavior, however, is patterned. When a teacher drops her book or a student slips on the ice, most likely these are accidents and not prescribed by culture. Moreover, some patterns are personal and have no significance or meaning in a society. One individual may eat only sour foods or dress only in brown. Cultural traits and complexes, on the other hand, are patterns that have meaning for the members of a given society.

The practice of some traits may be limited to a single person. A king, for example, may be the only one allowed to wear a crown or sit on a throne, but even these customs are understood by others in his court. Many traits, however, are practiced by specific groups of people within a society. Baseball players, secretaries, college students, and even missionaries have their own patterns of cultural behavior. So do women and men. Finally, some traits are practiced by most or all people in a society. For example, in the United States, everyone is expected to wear clothes in public, and, with few exceptions, those who do not will be punished.

It is not always easy to distinguish between patterned and unpatterned human behavior, because cultures are constantly changing as new traits are added and old ones dropped. Accidental or creative acts may be copied by others and so incorporated in the culture. An example of this is the American missionary in India who decided to treat the American missionary children in his area to a Christmas celebra-

tion. Dressed as Santa Claus and riding a bicycle, he went to their homes with gifts. Unfortunately, on the way he slipped in the mud while crossing an irrigation ditch. Each year thereafter, the children waited at the ditch to see him fall, and he never disappointed them.

Cultural traits and complexes are organized around systems of beliefs. For instance, the medical system in the West includes a great many beliefs about the nature of diseases and their cures, about the nature of healers as professionals, and about the way health care should be organized. These beliefs provide doctors, nurses, and patients with blueprints for their behavior and for the kinds of hospitals they build. On the other hand, by acting in the culturally prescribed ways, they reinforce their own systems of belief.

In complex societies, such as the United States or Canada, it is hard to speak of a single culture. Some beliefs and practices may be accepted by all, such as driving on the right side of the road. But the differences are also significant. In such societies it is useful to speak of “cultural frames.” A cultural frame is a social setting that has its own subculture—its own beliefs, rules for behavior, material products, symbols, structures, and settings. For example, a bank is a subculture that has its own information, feelings, and values, and corresponding symbols, property, and patterns of behavior. Similarly, supermarkets, hospitals, and churches are cultural frames. The ways people think and relate, their values and goals and the products they use, vary considerably from one of these institutions to another.

In simple tribal societies the number of cultural frames is few and the differences between them minimal. Among the Arunta of the Australian desert, men hunt and have secret rituals that no women can attend, and women share certain other activities by themselves. Much of the time, however, men and women are together in the camp, interacting within the same cultural frame.

In modern cities, on the other hand, there are many frames, and the differences between them are great. Religious, social, political, educational, economic, aesthetic, and recreational institutions form their own subcultures. In fact, there are even significant cultural differences between grade schools, high schools, colleges, and seminaries and to a lesser extent between one college or seminary and another.

People in urban societies take part in different institutions, but find their primary identity in only one or two of them. An individual may be a regular customer at one supermarket and a particular bank and occasionally attend an opera or professional baseball game. But his or her deepest commitment may be to a job as teacher or businessperson or doctor, to a role at home as mother or father, to a church as deacon or choir director or lay person, or even to a bowling team or yacht
The diversity of cultural frames in modern societies reflects their growing complexity and the increasing specialization of their institutions. In simple societies many of the functions of life such as instructing the young, raising food, caring for the sick, and performing religious rituals are carried out by the family and by groups of relatives. In complex societies these tasks are given over to schools, agribusinesses, hospitals, and churches. But such diversity also reflects the growing social hierarchy in these societies. The cultural frames of the rich are vastly different from those of the poor, as different as a country club is from a ghetto bar, or a corporate penthouse office is from the face of a coal mine.

Although modern societies are made up of astonishingly diverse subcultures, they are larger systems held together by webs of communication and transportation, by ties of trade and common government, and by networks of social relationships.

**Cultural Integration**

Cultures are held together not only by economic, social, and political organization, but also—at the deepest levels—by fundamental beliefs and values shared by the people. Much of the knowledge of a culture is explicit. In other words, there are members of the culture who can tell us about it. But behind such knowledge are basic assumptions about the nature of things that are largely implicit. Like foundations, they hold up the culture, yet they remain largely out of sight. Those who challenge these assumptions are considered crazy, heretical, or criminal, for if these underpinnings are shaken, the stability of the whole culture is threatened. (See Figure 7.)

We can illustrate cultural integration by investigating our practices of sitting and sleeping. For the most part, North Americans try to avoid sitting on the floor. In an auditorium they find small platforms on which to sit. Latecomers who find no vacant seats stand along the walls or leave. At home, large amounts are spent to purchase special platforms suitable for various rooms and occasions: couches, recliners, rockers, dining-room chairs, bar stools, and lawn chairs.

North Americans also try to avoid sleeping on the floor. When they travel, they are afraid to be caught at night without a bed in a private room. So, in addition to travel reservations, they make certain they have bookings in hotels. Interestingly enough, they make no such reservations for meals—they assume they can find food somewhere or, if necessary, do without. Caught in an airport at night, they try to sleep slumped in a chair rather than stretched out on the carpeted floor, since they would rather be dignified than comfortable.

In short, platforms are seen everywhere in the United States. People sit on them, sleep on them, build their houses on them, store their goods on them, and even put fences around them for their babies. Why this obsession with platforms? Traditional Japanese sit comfortably on mats on the floor. And Indians know that all you need for a good night’s rest is a sheet to keep you clean and a flat place to lie down—and the world is full of flat places: airport lounges, train aisles, sidewalks, and parks.

Why then, do North Americans insist on sitting on chairs and sleeping on beds? Most of them have not given much thought to the matter. If they did, they might argue that these are the most “natural” and comfortable ways to sit and sleep. But this is not true. Rather, their behavior is linked to a fundamental attitude they have about floors, namely, that floors are “dirty.” And because dirt is bad, they must avoid contact with floors as much as possible.

This assumption also helps us to understand other patterns of our behavior. If a boy drops a potato chip on the floor and then pops it into his mouth, his mother is upset. The moment the chip touches the floor, no matter how clean the floor, the chip turns into dirt. And when people enter the house, they keep their shoes on. After all, the floor is already dirty.

Is it possible to build a culture on the assumption that floors are clean? We would sit and sleep on cushions on the floor and leave our

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**Figure 7**

shoes at the door. We would let our children play on the floor. This, in fact, is the pattern of traditional Japanese culture.

"More or less." Cultures and cultural frames are never fully integrated. Consequently, we must use such qualifiers as "more or less" and "tend to be." Human beings are creatures of curiosity and explore different areas of the world around them, not only to meet personal needs but also to understand them. They develop theories about nature, the weather, diseases, crops, fishing, birth, human origins, and why the sun crosses the heaven. They also seem to need some measure of consistency between these theories—a harmony found partly in the underlying world view. But human beings and their beliefs are never fully consistent. There are gaps and internal contradictions in their theories, just as there are in their behavior.

There is another way in which cultural integration is incomplete, particularly in complex societies. Groups and individuals in the same society may hold different theories. The rich, for instance, see things differently from the poor, or one ethnic group from another. There are differences between the folk beliefs of the common people and theories of the specialists regarding religion and medicine. There are also disagreements among specialists. For instance, an agnostic scientist and a Christian minister may offer different explanations of the same event.

A. F. C. Wallace (1956) points out that the differences in beliefs from one individual to another in modern complex societies are so great that we must talk about personal, rather than cultural, world views. People in these societies often experience a crisis of belief when they have no group assurance that what they think is right. When everyone disagrees with them, they begin to question their own convictions.

World views help us to understand cultural stability and resistance to change. In tribal and peasant societies, people generally share fundamental beliefs and assumptions that are constantly reinforced by the group. They also teach their world view to their children and so assure its perpetuation. Change is often resisted in such settings, because the whole society is unified in its beliefs. Individuals who adopt new ideas are ostracized. Consequently the first converts to Christianity are often rejected by their people.

Internal contradictions, on the other hand, often lead to changes in world view. When these are minor, the people may revise their beliefs or modify their behavior. If a tribesman finds that his amulet no longer protects him from danger, he throws it away and finds a new one. A modern woman faced with gas shortages may buy a smaller car or take the bus. Similarly, medieval scientists believed the sun revolved

around the earth and made constant adjustments to the Ptolemaic system of astronomy to make it fit their experimental findings.

Integration is limited by the fact that all cultures are constantly changing, some rapidly, and some more slowly. New traits are added, and in time their impact is felt on other areas of culture. Meanwhile, other traits are dropped. All these changes call for a new cultural synthesis.

Inconsistencies, competing theories and changes in customs undermine the internal harmony of a culture, but as long as a minimal cultural integration exists, organized social life is possible.

World view. People perceive the world differently because they make different assumptions about reality. For example, most Westerners assume that external to themselves is a real world made of lifeless matter. People in South and Southeast Asia, however, believe that this external world does not really exist; it is an illusion of the mind. And tribal peoples around the world see the earth as a living organism to which they must relate.

Taken together, the basic assumptions about reality which lie behind the beliefs and behavior of a culture are sometimes called a world view (Figure 8). Because these assumptions are taken for granted, they are generally unexamined and therefore largely implicit. But they are reinforced by the deepest of feelings, and anyone who challenges them becomes the object of vehement attack. People believe that the world really is the way they see it. Rarely are they aware of the fact that the way they see it is molded by their world view.

There are basic assumptions underlying each of the three dimensions of culture. Existential assumptions provide a culture with the fundamental cognitive structures people use to explain reality. These structures define what things are "real." In the West they include atoms, viruses, and gravity. In South India they include rakhasas, aparas, bhutams, and other spirit beings. In central Africa they include ancestors who after death have continued to live among the people.

Existential or cognitive assumptions also furnish people with their concepts of time, space, and other worlds. For instance, we in the West assume that time is linear and uniform. It runs like a straight line from a beginning to an end, and it can be divided into uniform intervals such as years, days, minutes, seconds, and nanoseconds. Other cultures see time as cyclical: a never-ending repetition of summer and winter; day and night; birth, death, and rebirth; and growth and decay. Still others see it as a pendulum. It goes forward and it goes backward, it moves at different rates, and sometimes it stops moving altogether. This, in fact, corresponds in some ways with our personal experience
of time. A good movie is over too quickly, and a boring lecture drags on forever. And sometimes, when we have deep experiences of worship of God, time seems to stop.

Cognitive assumptions perform many other tasks. They shape the mental categories people use for thinking; they play a vital role in determining the kinds of authority people trust and the types of logic they use. Taken together these assumptions give order and meaning to life and reality.

Affective assumptions underlie the notions of beauty, style, and aesthetics found in a culture. They influence the people’s tastes in music, art, dress, food, and architecture as well as the ways they feel towards each other and about life in general. For example, in cultures influenced by Theravada Buddhism, life is equated with suffering. Even joyful moments create suffering, for one realizes that they will come to an end. There is, therefore, little use in striving for a better life here on earth. By contrast, in the United States after World War II, many people were optimistic. They believed that with hard work and planning they could achieve a happy, comfortable existence during their lifetime.

Evaluative assumptions provide the standards people use to make judgments, including their criteria for determining truth and error, likes and dislikes, and right and wrong. For instance, North Americans assume that honesty means telling people the way things are, even if doing so hurts their feelings. In other countries, it means telling people what they want to hear, for it is more important that they be encouraged than for them to know the truth.

Evaluative assumptions also determine the priorities of a culture, and thereby shape the desires and allegiances of the people. During the past century North Americans have placed a high value on technology and material goods, and business is their central activity. Their status is determined largely by their wealth, and their culture is focused on economic themes. The skylines of modern American cities are dominated by bank and insurance buildings. In the Indian countryside, on the other hand, people place a high value on religious purity, and the greatest honor is given to members of the priestly caste. Their culture is organized around religious themes, and temples are the centers of their villages. Medieval towns, with their kings, vassals, lords, and knights, focused on power, conquests, and politics. Castles and forts were their dominant structures.

The fact that different cultures have different standards of morality creates many cross-cultural misunderstandings. In North America the cardinal sin among Christians is sexual immorality, and missionaries from that part of the world have placed a great deal of emphasis on proper sexual behavior. Those who went to South Asia, however, often did not know that a cardinal sin in that part of the world is losing one’s temper. They were unaware of the consequences when they became impatient or angry with Indian servants, students, and pastors.

The fact that moral systems differ from culture to culture raises many difficult questions in missions. How do we deal with the existing ethical beliefs of the people, and how do we introduce biblical concepts of sin? What, in fact, is the biblical view of sin, and to what extent are we in danger of forcing our own cultural values on others?

Moreover, what happens when we do not live up to the norms of the people? For instance, in many societies barrenness is seen as a curse of God upon those who are evil, so a man must take a second wife if his first one bears him no children. In these societies, what should a missionary couple do if they have no children? To take a second wife violates their beliefs about sin, but to have no children undermines trust in their witness.

Taken together, cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions provide people with a way of looking at the world that makes sense out of it, that gives them a feeling of being at home, and that reassures them that they are right. This world view serves as the foundation on
which they construct their explicit belief and value systems, and the social institutions within which they live their daily lives.

**World-view functions.** Taken together, the assumptions underlying a culture provide people with a more or less coherent way of looking at the world. One’s world view serves a number of important functions.

First, our world view provides us with cognitive foundations on which to build our systems of explanation, supplying rational justification for belief in these systems. In other words, if we accept our world-view assumptions, our beliefs and explanations make sense. The assumptions themselves we take for granted and rarely examine. As Clifford Geertz points out (1972:169), a world view provides us with a model or map of reality by structuring our perceptions of reality.

Second, our world view gives us emotional security. Faced with a dangerous world full of capricious and uncontrollable forces and crises of drought, illness, and death, and plagued by anxieties about an uncertain future, people turn to their deepest cultural beliefs for emotional comfort and security. It is not surprising, therefore, that world-view assumptions are most evident at births, initiations, marriages, funerals, harvest celebrations, and other rituals people use to recognize and renew order in life and nature.

One powerful emotion we face is the dread of death. Another is the terror of meaninglessness. We can face death itself as martyrs if we believe it to have purpose, but these meanings must carry deep conviction. Our world view buttresses our fundamental beliefs with emotional reinforcements so that they are not easily destroyed.

Third, our world view validates our deepest cultural norms, which we use to evaluate our experiences and choose courses of action. It provides us with our ideas of righteousness—and of sin and how to deal with it. It also serves as a map for guiding our behavior. A city map, for instance, not only tells us about the street names, but also enables us to choose a route that will take us from our hotel room to a recommended restaurant. Similarly, our world view provides us with a map of reality and also serves as a map for guiding our lives. World views serve both predictive and prescriptive functions.

Fourth, our world view integrates our culture. It organizes our ideas, feelings, and values into a single overall design. In doing so it gives us a more or less unified view of reality, which is reinforced by deep emotions and convictions.

Finally, as Charles Kraft (1979:56) points out, our world view monitors culture change. We are constantly confronted with new ideas, behavior, and products that come from within our society or from without. These may introduce assumptions that undermine our cognitive order.

Our world view helps us to select those that fit our culture and reject those that do not. It also helps us to reinterpret those we adopt so that they fit our overall cultural pattern. For example, villagers in South America began to boil their drinking water, not to kill germs, but (as they saw it) to drive out evil spirits. World views, therefore, tend to conserve old ways and provide stability in cultures over long periods of time. Conversely, they are resistant to change.

But world views themselves do change, since none of them are fully integrated, and there are always internal contradictions. Moreover, when we adopt new ideas they may challenge our fundamental assumptions. Although we all live with cultural inconsistencies, when the internal contradictions become too great, we seek ways to reduce the tension. Normally, we change or let go of some of our assumptions. The result is a gradual world-view transformation of which we ourselves may not even be aware.

Sometimes, however, our old world view no longer meets our basic needs. If another and more adequate one is presented to us, we may reject the old and adopt the new. For example, some Muslims and Hindus may decide that Christianity offers better answers to their questions than their old religions. Such world-view shifts are at the heart of what we call conversion.

**Implications for missions.** The integration of cultural traits, complexes, and systems into a single culture whole has considerable significance for missionaries. First, as we shall see later, the more integrated cultures are, the more stable they are—but also the more they resist change. Second, when we introduce change into one part of a culture, there are often unforeseen side effects in other areas of the culture.

Jacob Loewen in a lecture cited one example of such unintended consequences of introducing change. The people in one part of Africa kept their villages swept clean. When they became Christians, however, their villages were soon littered with trash. On investigation, the missionary found that formerly they feared the spirits, which they believed were in the forest and came to the village, hiding behind old rags, stones, broken pots, and other litter. Consequently, they kept the village clean so that the spirits would not enter the compound and harm them. But, when they became Christians, they no longer feared these spirits and had no reason to remove the dirt and debris.

Polygamy is another case in point. In many parts of the world, men frequently die young. To provide companionship and care for a widow and her children, the people marry her to the brother or closest male relative of her dead husband, regardless of whether or not that relative
is already married. If the church then forbids polygamy, it must make other arrangements for widows and orphans, since the people can no longer turn to their traditional solutions. Missionaries need to realize that changes they introduce often have far-reaching consequences in other areas of the people’s lives, and they must be sensitive to unintended side effects.

**Cultural Education**

By definition, we restrict “culture” to learned beliefs and behavior. In so doing, we differentiate it from biologically instinctive responses. For example, when a North American girl accidentally touches a hot stove, she jerks her hand away and says “Ouch,” “Blast it,” or something similar. The former reaction is instinctive; the latter is learned. An Indian girl says “Array” or “Abbow.”

If culture is learned, it must also be taught. All people are born helpless—without language, culture, or the ability to survive alone in the external world. Yet, within a surprisingly short time, the same person can be molded into a Canadian, Dutchman, Chinese, or member of one of a thousand other societies. One of the important discoveries of the social sciences has been the crucial importance of childhood years in the formation of the human personality and in the transmission of culture from one generation to the next. As one wit put it, each generation must civilize the barbarian hordes that are constantly invading it from below.

Each society has its own ways of “enculturating” its young, of teaching them its cultural ways. All, however, use a combination of pressing them on the one hand and pulling them on the other. The pressures are often obvious. Parents discipline their children for bad behavior, and the society punishes adults for serious violations of the cultural norms. Other pressures are not so obvious—gossip, snide remarks, social ostracism, and withholding rewards—but these are equally effective in enforcing a society’s rules.

Societies pull people by giving them cultural heroes, ideal characters and models for the various roles found within the society, and by rewarding good behavior. A Western child is taught by example what it means to be a good teacher, preacher, or truck driver. She or he is also similarly taught how to behave as a wife or husband, mother or father.

“**Shared by a Group of People**”

Finally, a culture is “shared by a group of people.” It summarizes the beliefs, symbols, and products of a society.

Humans are social creatures and dependent upon one another for survival and meaningful existence. They need care during their long childhood and often in their old age. Since they find their greatest joy and fulfillment in the company of others, social isolation is among the greatest punishments they can inflict upon one another.

All human relationships require a large measure of shared understandings between people. They need a common language, whether verbal or nonverbal, a shared set of expectations of one another; and some consensus of beliefs for communication to take place. In other words, they must share to some extent in a common culture. The more they have in common, the greater the possibilities of interrelating.

We need to clarify what we mean by “society,” and how it relates to “culture.” A society is a group of people who relate to one another in orderly ways in different settings. The basic order that underlies these relationships is called a social organization or structure. A social structure is how people actually relate to one another. This is linked to, but different from, their culture, which encompasses their beliefs about relationships.

People do not always act as their culture says they should. For example, most Christians believe that they should attend church on Sunday, but many find excuses when they want to stay home. Interestingly enough, when they want to break the cultural rules, their culture tells them how to do so. It is all right for them to tell the pastor that they were sick or out of town. But they should not tell him they hate his sermons or cannot stand another member in the church.

Even suicide, the supreme act of social rejection, is culturally molded. Men in Western cultures think of guns or autoicide and women may use drugs, while Indian women drown themselves in open wells and Indian men may choose hanging.

The relationship between a society and its culture is dialectical. People develop structures in order to carry out their lives. In turn they teach these to their children as part of the culture that will mold their lives. People also create new ideas and products that—if they are accepted by the society—influence the way people relate to one another. The car, for example, has led to greater mobility, which in turn has led to the flight of the affluent to the suburbs.

Social and cultural boundaries are clearly defined in tribal societies. Here a group of people shares a distinct culture and often the same territory and language and “culture” and “society” are closely linked.

In complex peasant and urban areas, however, cultural and social boundaries become fuzzy, and the relationship between them is more complex. For example, there are many subcultures in Los Angeles, even though the people in that city participate in many of the same social structures, such as the government, political parties, and banks.
and markets. On the other hand, people who share the same culture, such as Korean immigrants, take part not only in the activities of the Korean community, but also in schools, factories, and neighborhoods made up of people from many different cultures.

In such situations, what constitutes a culture or a society? Here we need to return to our concept of cultural frames. Each social institution, for example, is a cultural frame—it has its own community of people, social structure, and subculture. In a school, members of a group relate to each other through respective roles, be they teachers, students, administrators, staff, and caretakers. They share beliefs and feelings about how these relationships should be carried out. They also share a common body of knowledge, much of it stored in libraries; common ways to express their feelings; and common values and rules.

In a bank, on the other hand, another group of people interrelates in other ways, using roles such as client, teller, office manager, and bank president. They, too, have certain knowledge, feelings, and norms in common. A hospital provides yet another case of a cultural frame having its own community of people and local culture.

Individuals in complex societies move from one frame to another, from one group to another, and from one culture to another, "shifting gears" as they move. Depending on the frame, they may wear different clothes, change their ways of speaking, express different attitudes, and talk about different things. To an outsider they often seem to be different people in the various contexts.

Cultural frames are linked to each other in local cultures. The schools, banks, hospitals, and churches in a city are not only made up of many of the same people, they are also related by systems of laws, economic trade, and networks of communication.

Local cultures are integrated into larger regional and national cultures. For instance, people and institutions in the United States share a common cultural history and beliefs in freedom and democracy, use the same money and postage stamps, and have other cultural ties. In this sense we can speak of different levels of cultural integration, beginning with cultural frames at the bottom and ending with national or even international cultures at the top.

**The Gospel and Culture**

If cultures are the ways different people think, feel, and act, where does the gospel fit in? Is it not itself part of a specific culture? If we say yes, what culture must we adopt to become Christians? Obviously not European or North American cultures, for these came late in history and certainly are not essentially Christian. The answer must be the Jewish culture of the time of Christ. But here is the question raised by Gentile converts in the Book of Acts. Must they become Jews in order to become Christians?

The early church struggled with this question. The answer they gave was no. Although the gospel was given within the context of Jewish culture from Abraham to Christ and must be understood within that context, the Good News was God's message given within that culture. It is not limited to that cultural frame.

Since then, however, the debate has continued. Each Christian community is tempted to equate the gospel with its own culture. This has led churches to split on the basis of cultural differences alone.

The consequences have been equally devastating in missions. By equating Christianity with Western culture, we have used the gospel to reinforce our sense of cultural superiority, and we have made the gospel foreign to other cultures by asking people to convert to our culture to become Christians.

What, then, is the gospel, and how does it relate to human cultures? Here we will speak of the gospel as God's revelation of himself—in history through his deeds, and supremely through his incarnation. The definitive record of this revelation is found in the Bible. The relationship of God's revelation in the Scriptures to human cultures is complex and can best be understood by analogy to Christ's incarnation. Just as Christ was fully God, but became fully human without losing his deity, so also the gospel is God's revelation, but is communicated by means of human cultures without losing its divine character.

There are three principles we need to examine to help us understand the dynamic tension between the gospel and human cultures.

**The Gospel Versus Culture**

First, the gospel must be distinguished from all human cultures. It is divine revelation, not human speculation. Since it belongs to no one culture, it can be adequately expressed in all of them.

The failure to differentiate between the gospel and human cultures has been one of the great weaknesses of modern Christian missions. Missionaries too often have equated the Good News with their own cultural background. This has led them to condemn most native customs and to impose their own customs on converts. Consequently, the gospel has been seen as foreign in general and Western in particular. People have rejected it not because they reject the lordship of Christ, but because conversion often has meant a denial of their cultural heritage and social ties.

A second danger in equating gospel and culture has been to justify Western imperialism. Christians in the newly formed United States
believed that God had blessed their country in a special way and that they were God’s chosen people. Pietism and patriotism were blended together. Political parties and the national government used Christian sentiments and symbols for their own purposes. When religion is used to justify political and cultural practices, it is "civil religion."

Early Americans believed that God was on the side of their country, making it different from and better than all others. For them the purposes of their nation and of God became one. Colonialism and military actions were justified as ways of Christianizing the world. It should not surprise us that in many parts of the world, Christianity is equated with militarism and imperialism.

A third danger in equating gospel and culture has been a growing sense of relativism with regard to sin. All cultures have their own definitions of what constitutes sin. As cultures change, so do their ideas of sin. For example, it was once considered evil in the West for women to wear trousers. Today it is widely accepted. Formerly, young couples were publicly condemned if they lived together without marriage, but this no longer raises comment in some modern circles.

Because cultural definitions of sin change, many argue that sin is relative, that there are no moral absolutes. They point out that churches that once forbade their young people to go to movies now hold youth outings there. Who is to say, then, that the premarital sexual relations still generally condemned may not one day be accepted? As cultural definitions of sin change, if we do not distinguish biblical norms from those of our culture, we cannot affirm the absolute nature of biblically defined standards.

As Christians, we affirm that there are God-given standards of righteousness by which all humans and cultures will be judged. The Good News is that there is forgiveness for sin.

**The Gospel in Culture**

Second, although the gospel is distinct from human cultures, it must always be expressed in cultural forms. Humans cannot receive it apart from their languages, symbols, and rituals. The gospel must become incarnate in cultural forms if the people are to hear and believe.

On the cognitive level, the people must understand the truth of the gospel. On the emotional level, they must experience the awe and mystery of God. And on the evaluative level, the gospel must challenge them to respond in faith. We refer to this process of translating the gospel into a culture, so that the people understand and respond to it, as "indigenization," or "contextualization."

The whole Bible is an eloquent witness of God’s meeting humans and conversing with them in their own cultural contexts. God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden in the cool of the day. He spoke to Abram, Moses, David, and other Israelites within a changing Hebrew culture. And he became the Word who lived in time and space as a member of the Jewish society. Similarly, the early church presented the apostolic message in ways that the people understood. Peter’s sermon at Pentecost and Paul’s address to the Areopagus in Athens show how they tailored the message to fit their audiences. The Gospels and the Epistles likewise address people in different cultures in different ways. All authentic communication of the gospel in missions should be patterned on biblical communication and seek to make the Good News understandable to people within their own cultures.

All cultures can adequately serve as vehicles for the communication of the gospel. If this were not so, people would have to change cultures to become Christians. This does not mean that the gospel is fully understood in any one culture, but that all people can learn enough to be saved and to grow in faith within the context of their own culture.

Not only are all cultures capable of expressing the heart of the gospel, but each also brings to light certain salient features of the gospel that have remained less visible or even hidden in other cultures. Churches in different cultures can help us to understand the many-sided wisdom of God, thereby serving as channels for understanding different facets of divine revelation, truths that a theology tied to one particular culture can easily overlook.

**The Gospel to Culture**

Third, the gospel calls all cultures to change. Just as Christ’s life was a condemnation of our sinfulness, so the kingdom of God stands in judgment of all cultures (Figure 9).
Not everything in human culture is condemned. Humans are created in the image of God, and as such they create cultures, each of which has much that is positive and can be used by Christians. Every culture provides a measure of order that makes life meaningful and possible.

But, because of human sinfulness, all cultures also have structures and practices that are evil. Among these are slavery, apartheid, oppression, exploitation, and war. The gospel condemns these, just as it judges the sins of individuals.

A truly indigenous theology must not only affirm the positive values of the culture in which it is being formulated, but it must also challenge those aspects which express the demonic and dehumanizing forces of evil. Kenneth Scott Latourette (Minz 1973:101) points out, "It must be noted that Christianity, if it is not hopelessly denatured, never becomes fully at home in any culture. Always, when it is true to its genius, it creates a tension."

The gospel serves a prophetic function, showing us the way God intended us to live as human beings and judging our lives and our cultures by those norms. Where the gospel has lost this prophetic voice, it is in danger of being wedded to beliefs and values that distort its message. Charles Taber (1978:73) notes:

This is precisely one of the most flagrant failures of western theology: it has too often tended to emasculate the gospel, to accept, uncritically, profoundly unbiblical values and principles—and even to provide guilt-edged justifications for some of the grossest evils of human history.

The same can happen in young churches that seek to contextualize the gospel uncritically within their culture. Nirmal Minz (1973:110) warns:

There is a very subtle kind of bondage in which the indigenous church may live. Revival of national heritage and various forms of neo-paganism might creep into the church and may dominate its life and work. The Batak Church in Indonesia had [for a time] almost succumbed to this temptation and lived under the bondage of nationalism and neo-paganism. ... Such indigenous churches are false to the teaching and Spirit of Jesus Christ.

All Christians and all churches must continually wrestle with the questions of what is the gospel and what is culture—and what is the relationship between them. If we fail to do so, we are in danger of losing the gospel truths.