Beyond the "Chinese" Way of Doing Things: Contours of OBC-ABC Cultural Differences

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In 1984, I reflected upon the cultural differences which I perceived in my church and in neighboring churches. I tried to categorize these differences, and wrote them down in "The `Chinese' Way of Doing Things" (*CATW*, June-August 1984). After I wrote it, I thought that the categories "OBC" (Overseas-Born Chinese) and "ABC" (American-Born Chinese), or "culturally Chinese" and "culturally American," were too static. These stereotypes are helpful only in identifying people at two ends of a continuum; it may not be too helpful in fostering a more refined understanding of the cultural differences in the Chinese Church in North America.

Most encouragingly, at the Ethnic Chinese Congress on World Evangelization, held in Honolulu, July 5-12, 1984, it was brought out that the place of birth of a person (Asia or North America; China or indigenous host country) is not the determining factor of a person's attitudes, perceptions, and behavior. Rather, it is the cultural orientation of that individual. Dr. Gail Law has further developed this thought in terms of a Dynamic Bicultural Continuum Model, presented by herself in *NACOCE Bimonthly*, September 1984 and *Theology News and Notes* (Fuller Seminary), October 1984. The idea of Dr. Law is that every person is "on the move" somewhere along a continuum, ranging from Chinese-ness on one end, to American-ness or indigenous cultural orientation, on the other. The concept of a *continuum* is most helpful. It opens up possibilities for studying the seemingly infinite variety of Chinese people. However, it takes much effort for church leaders to accept this concept and to begin thinking in this way accordingly. It is not comfortable because it allows for little or no stereotyping. Reality becomes a matrix, not a dualism.

Last summer, I had the opportunity to visit with an ABC friend who is pastoring a congregation of fourth- and fifth- generation ABCs. He is astonished to discover how "China-fied" his church members are; how these ABC adults associate mainly with other Chinese in the community; how traditions (such as wedding rituals and beliefs) persist through to the fifth generation. This "residue" or resiliency of Chinese culture among Local Born Chinese (LBC) was further illustrated at ECCOWE in Honolulu, when Rev. David Chan of Houston shared how he, as a third-generation LBC, has returned to his Chinese roots. Chinese culture dies hard! Many LBCs, therefore, are more "Chinese" than they realize, or are willing to admit. At the same time, most OBCs, one must say, are more "American," or "indigenous" than they are prepared to face up to. We are all "on the move" in the bicultural continuum.

Back home, meanwhile, our congregation is struggling with the question whether cultural differences are real or only perceived. For example, some ABCs (more than others) are on very friendly terms with OBCs. There seems to be no problem in sharing and fellowship. There are other ABCs and OBCs, however, who would be more comfortable if

put in a monolingual setting for fellowship. Why is this the case? Is it perhaps because everyone is somewhere in a continuum (whether slightly to the side of "Chinese-ness" or to the side of "indigenous cultural") and finds it easier to communicate with others in the same "middle zone"?

There was the further question of whether differences in the church are really due to culture at all. Any two fallen sinners (we all are except by the grace of God in Jesus Christ) would become "incompatible" with other sinners. There is no perfect compatibility, whether between spouses or between Christians in a church or fellowship situation. There are definite personality differences between individuals. What does this mean? Does this mean that on top of cultural differences we have personality differences (both due to sin, cf. Genesis 3:15, 11:1-9)? Or are the purported "cultural differences" really personality differences?

These problems bring me to ask again, what is "Chinese-ness"? There seems to be no contemporary model of pure, static Chinese culture (except perhaps in very isolated settings in Asia). Everyone is affected by westernization, modernization, urbanization, immigration and the mass media. So who is a "Chinese person"? What makes a person "Chinese"? When Chinese Christians in Australia, South Africa and Indonesia begin to work together in integrated situations with brothers and sisters from India and other parts of the world, when do we stop talking in terms of a "Chinese ministry," or "Chinese church"? And what if the LBCs do not identify themselves as "Chinese," but rather, e.g., as Singaporeans and Australians? Are the OBCs willing to accept this "new reality" which is beginning to haunt us (although it has been on the horizon for years, perhaps decades, in certain countries)?

Diversity and change -- these are disturbing realities. Perhaps we need to admit our inadequacies, and see whether the Bible also offers a dynamic (rather than static) model of cultural process? Is God "dynamic" or "static"? Are we willing to entertain the possibility that cultural diversity and cultural change are realities which the Bible faces, accepts and deals with -- albeit in God's own way? Perhaps we all need to do more homework and study the original cultural contexts of the Bible -- both Old and New Testaments. Biblical studies should be part and parcel of the study of indigenous theology and indigenous ministry. (I owe this insight to my friend Dr. Che-Bin Tan of Fuller School of World Mission's Chinese Studies and Evangelism Program.)

Culture: Is It the Issue?

In the aforementioned situation of our church, we are asking the question, "Why do people find it difficult to communicate with and get along with each other?" Is it because of culture? More pointedly, is it *only* because of cultural differences? What about personality? More basically, what about sin? In what sense is the basic problem *spiritual* and the answer in one's relationship with Jesus Christ and the spiritual maturity of every believer?

There are many personality theories; for example, the four personality types model. One can speak of people as dominant (extrovert, task-oriented), influential (extrovert, person-oriented), steady (introvert, person-oriented), or competent (introvert, task-

oriented). In terms of "synchrony" between organizational structure and individual work performance, one could classify people at work as producers, processors or integrators. The question is, do we find all personality types, or individual work *styles*, in every culture? If so, do we need to draw graphs correlating personality and culture (see Fig. 1)?

When one begins to examine the cultural differences between peoples, e.g. pragmatic vs. conceptual, relational vs. task-oriented, mystical vs. cognitive, introvert vs. extrovert, aren't we dealing with personality differences? The question needs to be asked: in what sense do cultures differ from one another? Thus, the importance of anthropology is readily seen -- and in what sense are they similar to each other? Thus, the importance of integrating theology with anthropology is apparent. (I owe this concept to Samuel Rowen at Missionary Internship.) Can we draw the continuum as overlapping (see Fig. 2)?

Having asked the question, "In what sense are cultures similar?" we need to return to the issue of inter-cultural differences. There are distinctions. An English-speaking fourth-generation ABC is different from a Chinese-educated, Mandarin-speaking immigrant who has just arrived from Taiwan or from the People's Republic of China. Perhaps we can at least say this much: although the place of birth is *not* the primary determining factor for a person's attitudes, perceptions and behavior, the *language* (or languages) a person speaks (in which a person thinks!) is a fair indicator of a person's cultural orientation.

Language is not the only determining factor for cultural orientation, but it plays an important role. Language carries thought forms, symbols and beliefs; different languages involve different thought processes. Thus we can speak of "culturally more Chinese" or "culturally more American" persons, etc., when we note the fluency and ease with which a person converses and thinks in any particular language, be it Chinese, English, Spanish, or Indonesian. The situation becomes complicated when more than one language is used: Hakka and French (as in Tahiti); or Taiwanese, Portuguese and English (as by young people who were born in Taiwan, grew up in Brazil, and are now attending college in the U.S.); or different styles of English (as by an Australian-born Chinese living in South Africa vs. an American-born Chinese who grew up in Mississippi).

If language/culture and personality/work types fall on the same overlapping continuum, we begin to say that culturally more Chinese people may be stronger in certain aspects of the ministry, e.g. building relationships; while culturally more American people may be better at other aspects, e.g. planning and organization.

If language/culture and personality/work styles are correlated, we can conclude that every person, culturally Chinese or American, can learn to be a "generalist" in the ministry: a task-oriented person can learn to build personal relationships; a relational person can learn organizational skills. Thus, it would be profitable for an ABC to spend some time immersing himself/herself in Chinese language and culture, perhaps as part of his/her seminary training; or an OBC interning in an American church community, thus exposing himself/herself to more "pure American" ways of life.

We all have limitations. But we can all stretch beyond them, with God's grace. Can we live with *both* our limitations and God's possibilities for us?

Cultural Diversity: Making Law's Dynamic Bicultural Model Two-Dimensional

Diversity and change are disturbing realities that the static bicultural model does not take into account and Dr. Law's model does. But I would like to add another dimension to her work. As it is now, it stresses the fact that a person is, at any given point in time, moving from one point of the continuum to another. For example, a recent immigrant from Taiwan or the People's Republic of China is moving from the predominantly Chinese end of the continuum toward the middle. So is a typical Chinese pastor in North America. This is a helpful conceptual model for looking at the overall Chinese community in North America. I would add that one should take into consideration the historical factors in the development of the Chinese community in North America. There were "waves" of immigration and "baby booms" of ABCs. Thus OBCs immigrating and LBCs born at different periods result in a wide variety of cultural orientations. At ECCOWE I pointed out that, with my limited exposure to different kinds of Chinese, I could count at least 20 types of Chinese, OBCs and ABCs, culturally more Chinese and culturally more American people (See box).

A Winning Combination: ABC/OBC

OVERSEAS CHINESE	AMERICAN CHINESE
Old immigrants, mostly Toisanese, who arrived before 1963.	2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th generation American-born Chinese, integrated into American society and way of life.
	2nd, 3rd generation American-born Chinese with Chinatown-type up-bringing; brought up during "Melting Pot" era.
New immigrants from Hong Kong, Cantonese, who arrived after 1973.	American-bred Chinese who immigrated from Hong Kong under age 10.
New immigrants, Mandarin and Taiwanese speaking who arrived after 1963 (mostly after 1970).	American-bred Chinese who immigrated from Taiwan under age 10.
New immigrants from mainland China who arrived after 1976.	
Vietnam/Cambodian refugees ("Boat People").	American-bred Chinese who came from Vietnam/Cambodia with their parents or alone under age 10.
"Old Guard" students who studied in the 1950's, now professional.	Professionals' children; suburban ABCs -- parents were students during the 1950s.
Student-professionals of the 1960s and 70s (poor, hardworking)	Professionals' children; suburban ABCs -- parents were students during the 60s, 70s.
Student-professionals of the 1980s (more affluent)	
Mainland China students of the 1980s: sponsored by government; or privately financed.	
Singapore/Malaysian students of the 1970s and 80s.	
Professionals and businessmen from Taiwan who lived in another 3rd World country before coming to U.S.	American-bred Chinese from Taiwan who lived in a 3rd World country before coming to U.S. (tri-cultural).
	ABCs from isolated areas -- small towns in the Midwest and South, e.d. Mississippi, Arizona.
Ameriasians (Chinese-Caucasian; Chinese-Black; Chinese-Native American)	
Chinese-Japanese;	Chinese-Korean; etc.

Criteria: place of origin; parents' place of origin; historical period in which immigration took place; occupation; type of visa.

But one insight occurred to me as I studied Dr. Law's chart. ABCs are sometimes more "OBC" than they realize; OBCs, on the other hand, are almost always more Americanized than they realize or admit. Why do they fail to realize this? It is because as redeemed sinners, we still have the remaining influence of sin (Rom. 7:15-20) in our new lives (2 Cor. 5:17). Because of this fact, we do not have a totally accurate picture of ourselves. We do not, and *cannot*, see ourselves as God sees us. We see through a dark glass (I Cor. 13:12). Our vision is blurred; one day we shall see Christ -- and ourselves! -- face to face, praise the Lord (Rom. 8:19)! Until then, we need each other -- and the help offered to us from the social sciences -- to help ourselves in our search for our true selves.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that, if we make Law's bicultural continuum two-dimensional, we will do justice to this fact of residual sin in our self-perception. This will help us to see why we are all more American, or more Chinese, than we realize or care to admit. (By the way, aren't we all more *sinful* also, than we care to face up to? cf. Psalm 19:12,13.)

The "cultural orientation" category can be broken down into two components: the first, for the lack of a better term, is a person's "socialization" (borrowed from psychology). This includes a person's family upbringing, language training, cultural exposure, crisis events, etc. This is what makes a person what he/she is, based on his/her past background. A person's cultural orientation, in terms of socialization, definitely finds itself somewhere on Law's bicultural continuum.

The second component is, also for the lack of a better term, a person's "self-perception" or "identification." That is to say, what does a person believe himself to be? Does he see himself as a pure American? As a half-and-half? A both-and? A pure-blood Chinese? As pointed out, very often there can be a discrepancy between a person's self-perception and his socialization. Thus a third generation Chinese may think himself thoroughly American, and become thoroughly upset when his daughter brings a Caucasian boyfriend home. And a Hong Kong born may believe himself completely Chinese, but find himself agreeing with ABCs that wedding and baby banquets are a complete waste of time, money, and effort.

So I propose a two-dimensional bicultural continuum model (see Fig. 3). On the x-axis we have socialization, and on the y-axis, self-perception. If we draw a 45° line, we have a continuum of people who are exactly as culturally Chinese, or exactly as culturally indigenous, as they think they are. On either side of this diagonal line, however, are the vast majority of Chinese people. There is distortion in self-perception; there is change in self-perception; and we are often more American, or more Chinese, than we realize.

My social scientist friends would protest that what we have in this two-dimensional diagram is a "confounding of factors." They would point out that a person's self-perception is part of one's social and cultural experience (socialization). My response is that, while that is certainly true, one must also take into account two other facts: first, the human mind, being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26,27), and especially when renewed in Christ (Eph. 4:2,4; Col. 3:10), is capable of creative and "independent" thinking. When a person thinks about who he is, he *can*, and most often *does*, act upon his environment. He is an intellectual agent acting upon his world. Second, while the social sciences can help us

understand many dimensions of culture and personality, the Christian must never lose sight of the truth the remaining influence of sin in a believer's life *can* and often *does* distort his perception, especially his self-perception. We do have illusions about who we are; we *do* need Jesus' warning! (Matt. 7:15-23, Rom. 12:3).

Most of us, however, do not stray too far from the "line of consistency." By God's grace, our self-perception is not too distorted (2 Cor. 4:6,7; 5:7,11). In terms of culture, we are only a little more Chinese, or more American, than we realize. This makes it relatively easy for us to get along with others in this two-dimensional bicultural continuum. We can be *somewhat* compatible with others. And with the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we can become even better (Eph. 4:1-3). I would like to draw an ellipse, therefore, around the "line of consistency." What we now have is a "field" of people. This "field" is the Chinese community in North America (see Fig. 4, p. 72).

There are those who would argue that their self-perception is "Christian." They do not belong to any cultural category *per se*, but are first and foremost citizens of the Kingdom of God (Phil. 3:20). This is based on most Biblical concepts, and we all need to be more aware of where our priorities and commitments lie, and to see if our action and thinking reflect our prior commitment to Christ and His Kingdom (Matt. 6:33). The point is well taken.

However, having granted that our first identity and priority is Christian, we need to balance this with the *reality* that we are all more or less Chinese or indigenous in our socialization. Although our self-perception may be "pure Christian" or "pure Biblical," we cannot change our past. Inasmuch as we are describing a *social* and *cultural* reality in this discussion, I would draw a shaded area in our two-dimensional, bicultural continuum to indicate that, while these "pure Biblical Christians" owe their first loyalty to Christ (in self-perception), they are nevertheless of various socialization patterns.

Cultural Change: Different Ways to Define "Theology of Culture"

We have seen that, by making Law's dynamic bicultural continuum model into a two-dimensional one, we can better understand the *diversity* of cultures in the Chinese community in North America. Because people are often more Chinese, or more American, than they realize or admit, we have a "field" model of the Chinese community.

I listed 20 kinds of Chinese people. The list could go on, but one point is clear: it is no longer possible to say with confidence, who is a "pure Chinese" or who is "totally indigenous." Based on a person's date and place of birth, or the historical record of a person's immigration into North America, one can delineate different types of sub-cultural groups. The point is: Chinese culture is in the process of transformation; it has been in transformation since the mid-19th century. In order to better minister to Chinese people today, we must wrestle with this reality of *change*. The reality of Chinese in places such as Indonesia and Singapore, who no longer identify with the Chinese-speaking community/churches, is very telling. Are we ready to cope with change? Does the who we are; we

More importantly, are we ready to address this phenomenon of cultural change theologically? In recent years, evangelical Chinese leaders have begun to explore the whole field of "theology of culture." Men are trained in graduate schools of theology in the whole area of theology of culture; we find a variety of creative, culture-specific expressions of the Christian faith in sub-cultures (e.g. Hong Kong youth, visa students in North America, American-born Chinese young adults, etc.). But I think it is necessary to define what we mean when we say we need to address theologically the issue of cultural change.

When we speak of "theology of culture," we often mean many things. For example, the theology of culture may refer to the Biblical basis and justification for Christian involvement in the pursuit of art, science, education, economics, social and political action. It is the search for a Christian perspective on these spheres of cultural endeavor. In traditional theology, we call this effort the "cultural mandate." (This is what I attempted to do in the first sections of the article "The Gospel on Campus: The Chinese Church and the University, 1880-1980," *Chinese Around the World*, December 1983.)

Secondly, we make specific evaluations and critiques of contemporary (or historical) examples of art, whether they be works of literature, film, visual arts, or popular entertainment. Thus, book reviews and film reviews are very much an important part of Christian reflection on the contemporary world. (MY own feeble attempt at reflecting on the entertainment world of Walt Disney was written up in "Jesus Christ, Walt Disney and I," *Chinese Around the World*, January 1983.)

Or it can refer to the search for the meaning of the communication process which takes place when one engages in cross-cultural evangelism and ministry. In this area, evangelicals, both Western and Chinese, have concentrated more on the "how" in cross-cultural evangelism, than in the "what" of cultural dynamics. We have been more interested in effectiveness than in a more refined understanding of what culture and cross-cultural work are all about. In this connection, the church has listened to the voices of the social and behavioral sciences without giving an adequate theological response. (Harvie Conn's new book, *Eternal Work and Changing Worlds*, offers a significant contribution to this ongoing "trialogue" between theology, missions and anthropology.) My own attempts in this area of understanding cultural differences were presented in "The 'Chinese' Way of Doing Things: Contours of OBC/ABC Cultural Differences" (*Chinese Around the World*, June-August 1984.)

Fourthly, the theology of culture brings us to the inquiry into the justification for, and the process in expressing and applying the Gospel in a particular cultural context. This is the whole area of indigenization, or contextualization. We, the Chinese Church, have talked a lot about the need for "contextual theology"; what we have accomplished, however, is more indigenized forms of theological education. There has been very little contextual theology done, partly because it requires a combination of skills in Bible, theology, Chinese history, literature, and the social sciences. I have tried to suggest some of the question which contextual Chinese theology needs to ask in "The Gospel for Modern Chinese: Suggested Contours for a Contextual Theology" (*Theology, News and Notes*, October 1984). Others have called for a "redemption of culture," and "Christian counter-culture."

Fifthly, the theology of culture may make inquiry into the whole process of cultural transformation. This is our concern here. We need to respond to the reality of cultural change and make proper theological response to anthropological insight on cultural change. Since I am not a theologian nor an anthropologist, let me simply raise several issues which I believe a "theology of cultural change" needs to address. All of these issues concern

themselves with the work of the Holy Spirit in history, that is, the superintending work of the Holy Spirit over the process of cultural change.

God and Culture: Four Theological Questions

The first question we need to ask is, according to our traditional formulations of the doctrine of God, how is He related to the historical process of change? We evangelicals have been critical of a "process theology" which *identifies* God as part of the historical process of change. God becomes identified with His creation. A Bible-based theology of cultural change would not want to do anything like this.

However, the following question is worth asking: is our concept of God as a *person* so static, that any concept of God as *dynamic* is ruled out? Consider how we sometimes teach the doctrine of God. We list God's attributes, and then classify them as communicable or incommunicable. We speak of God as infinite over His creation -- omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent. God is often presented as a static person, rather than as a Creator, a creative person and a Sovereign Lord whose mind is characterized by infinite variety and power. God is constantly working out His eternal decree.

Granted, the essence of God does not change in the same way His creation would change. But as we come to know God in the person of Jesus, the carpenter's son of Galilee, we learn of Him growing from perfection to perfection (Luke 2:52; Hebrews 5:8); what does this mean to us? (Sinclair Ferguson, in *Grow in Grace*, showed how Jesus Himself grew in grace.) What does this say about the *dynamic* character of Jesus, and of God? While on the one hand God does not change of become something else other than Himself, on the other hand our description of His Godhood as a *static being* may need improvement.

We may further ask, have we done all we could, when we assign "immutability" to the divine essence, and "transiency" to creative existence? Have we inherited too much from Greek philosophy? Have we learned too little from contemporary "dialectical" thinking? In what sense is God the Person and Power who is the Creator of, and therefore the most powerful and perfect example of, both being *and* becoming? Can we conceive of God as eternally integrating the two?

The second question has to do with the Holy Spirit's work in redemption and in God's self-disclosure. When the Holy Spirit inspires men to speak and write the Word of God, in what sense is He superintending the divine plan of revelation, and in what sense is He also addressing concrete human problems in a specific cultural context? (Men like Charles Kraft, in *Christianity in Culture*, would have us see that god the communicator addresses concrete human situations when He revealed Himself.) Does the Holy Spirit do both? If so, is our doctrine of inspiration adequate to consider his second aspect, the "communicational" dimension, of revelation?

This question makes many evangelicals uneasy. Let me add that God did come in the fullness of time to redeem His people, and bring His self-revelation to c climax in the person of Jesus Christ, God the Son. God chose sovereignly to come in the first century. God sovereignly chose to covenant with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the people of ancient Israel. In so doing, God's Word came to His people -- in those specific time-space

situations -- and *transformed* the context. In a unique way, the text transforms the context. Yet at the same time the context -- with all its human agony, struggle and sin -- makes the text all the more meaningful. Here, we Chines evangelicals need to do a lot more homework in studying the original cultural context in which the Bible was written.

A third set of questions relates to the human writers of Scripture and the original hearers (or readers) of Scripture. In what sense can we say that the original human writers of Scripture were *not* influenced by their culture when they wrote by divine inspiration? Or did the Holy Spirit so inspire them, that He superintended over the whole process of culture, personality and specific circumstances? What about the original hearers of revelation, e.g. the people of Israel at Mount Sinai, the crowd by the Sea of Galilee? Revelation, we have said, is both the self-disclosure of God (and His plan of redemption), and a divine address to human problems. And all human beings live in one cultural context or another.

We may ask: how many world views are there represented in the Bible; for example, in the Book of Acts? How many cultures, or sub-cultures, can we identify as we see the Gospel go forth from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria, and unto the end of the world? The church in Jerusalem, for example, was probably all Jewish in culture (world view); and the church in Antioch, perhaps 30% Greek, 70% Jewish. The churches in Asia Minor might have been 50% Greek, 50% Jewish. The churches in Macedonia and Greece might have been 70% Greek, 30% Jewish.

It may not be possible to say therefore, that there were only "two cultures," Jewish and Hellenistic. (What implication can we draw about our understanding of OBC/ABC distinctions and differences?) On top of this process of cultural change which accounts for the different gradations of Jewish/Hellenistic combinations, we may ask *which one* is the New Testament's worldview? Does the New Testament itself provide another (third) *world view*? In what sense is God's revelation in the New Testament a *world view?* In what sense is it by nature different from the Jewish and Hellenistic world views?

My colleague Dr. Che Bin Tan at Fuller's School of World Mission would suggest that while the New Testament does not provide a world view (in the same sense as the Jewish and the Hellenistic are world views), it does provide the basis for the transformation of all cultures and world views, whether Jewish, Hellenistic or otherwise. Perhaps I can put it another way: the kind of response which the Gospel demands of us is so radical and deep-seated, that there needs to be an inner, deep-seated transformation of our world view. This deep-level transformation of our world view allows us to make proper responses to the cultures in which we find ourselves, and to witness effectively to the Biblical faith. This is transformation of culture on another level: the level of attitudes values, beliefs, and life-styles.

A fourth kind of question has to do with God's relationship to cultural change in general world history. God is never without a witness; through the things which were made, His glory and power are made manifest. As a matter of fact, since the Fall (Genesis 3), cultural change and cultural diversity may be seen as the working out of divine curse (Genesis 11) upon human sin (Romans 5:12-21).

We can classify at least three kinds of cultural change under divine judgment. First, there were the secular/pagan cultures of biblical times. God told Abraham that the sins of the Amorites were not complete (Genesis 15:16); He hardened the heart of Pharaoh; He expelled the nations before Israel; He condemned idolatry and intermarriage with pagans (Ezra 9-10). God is the judge of the nations.

Second, there is the secular culture of Western civilization. Here we see the indirect influence of Christianity over twenty centuries as European culture evolved. We see the conflict between a man-centered cultural orientation (e.g. the Renaissance) and a Bible-oriented culture (e.g. the Reformation). Through it all, we find it difficult, for example, to say whether America was founded on *Christian*, or deist principles. Yet God is in control.

Third, there is the case of China. As a nation, it is endowed with the general revelation of God (Romans 1:18-21). Yet the Chinese did not honor God, but erected a sophisticated form of man-centered culture, Confucianism-Taoism. This culture was humiliated before the Western powers. This same culture is inherited by every Bible-believing Chinese Christian. And this culture awaits transformation with the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rev. 21:24,26; 2 Cor. 10:4,5) -- a process which would take generations, perhaps centuries. (This makes the task of evangelizing the Chinese people both challenging and frustrating.) It is into such cultures that missionaries enter with the Gospel and with the task of contextualization.

The task of expressing the Christian faith in a cultural context is never ending. There are two tendencies which the Church must avoid: on the one hand is the problem of *dead orthodoxy* -- in so identifying her faith with the Bible, the Church becomes inconsistent with the Bible so that her theology (orthodoxy) becomes irrelevant in the next generation, or in another culture. On the other hand is the problem of *heresy* -- in so identifying herself with the world and the process of cultural change in the world, the Church has lost her God-given message and failed to make a Biblical evaluation and critique of the cultures of the world. We need to explore a third alternative: one which would be serious about, and obedient to, all of God's revelation -- the whole counsel of God, nothing less -- and yet at the same time sensitive to the process of intellectual and cultural change. To put it in another way, how far do we take the changeless, timeless character of the truths in the Bible? And how far do we take the "historical character" of revelation?

There are no easy, pat answers. A hard, tedious task of exegesis and application awaits us -- the task to which all communicators of the Gospel are called.

Practical Suggestions

Do we abandon the bicultural model? By no means. Stereotypes are tools -- although *only* tools, nevertheless *helpful* tools. As we better understand the variety of sub-cultures of the Chinese community in North America, we need to do more research into each sub-culture, or each "people-group." How do they think? What are their values and beliefs? What things are important to them? How do they solve problems? My list of 20 kinds of Chinese is suggestive of the kinds of "people group studies" which need to be conducted.

As the Church develops leadership to evangelize and serve the Chinese, there is the acute need for multi-cultural and cross-cultural awareness on the part of those who will serve. Theological training and leadership training (whether in the setting of a seminary, an evening course, an adult Sunday School class or a retreat) must help produce World Christians with a cross-cultural sensitivity. The Chinese Church in North America is in a cross-cultural context. In fact, it is itself a multi-cultural context! To this end, training

programs which provide exposure to Chinese or American culture (e.g. North American seminary programs which provide a year in Asia for study and internship; internships for Chinese-speaking seminary students in American cultural settings) would be essential to the development of a whole generation of culturally aware church leaders in the 1990's and the 21st century. Long-held assumptions must be examined and evaluated; new philosophies of ministries need to be developed.

We need to *learn* how to live out the Gospel in our contemporary world. For example, in recent months I have been sensitized to the whole issue of women's role in family, church and society. The issue has been around for a number of years; it has such far-reaching implications to which Chinese evangelicals have not yet awakened from their dogmatic slumber. Beyond the issues of what women can or cannot do, there is the positive task of reconstruction -- how to mobilize and channel women into positive, constructive roles, relationships and tasks in the home, in church and in society.

It does no good to mourn the present or long for the return of the past. The issue is: what does it mean to live in our world *now*? To me this is the significance of the "women's issue." Husbands and wives are finding that their roles are becoming blurred. Wives with modern education and various talents and gifts, are looking for meaningful ways of fulfilling themselves. This is bewildering and frustrating for the husband, the pastor and the church. Yet we are in this together, all of us.

We are all called upon to live out the Gospel in our contemporary world. We are the generation who brings our parents over to North America for their retirement; who buys our own pension plans; and who will support our children through college. The task of living through the process of cultural transformation, in the industrial-information age, is simply too much. It amounts to two or three full-time jobs. It is as if Tevye, the poor dairy farmer in "Fiddler on the Roof," is seeing his first daughter (who asks for permission), second daughter (who only asks for a blessing), and third daughter (who merely asks for acceptance), off to their respective weddings all on the same day! "If you bend too far, you'll break!"

Indeed, many people are bending, and some have broken. Yet, this is exactly what God has called each one of us to do -- to follow Christ in our world, *now*, to find out what it *means* to follow Christ in our world, *now*.

The need for training materials for the laity is never so great as now. Adult Sunday School and Bible study materials need to be developed, materials which would be sensitive to our time-held assumptions (along with their fallacies), the Bible's message, and the very complicated world in which we live.

Meanwhile, we hold on to the divine revelation as truth, and struggle with the problems in the *process*. We learn to say, "Jesus is the answer. What are the questions? Are there any questions which do not have *easy* answers?" And we continue in that struggle, in that process.