



the Gospel and Our Culture

a network for encouraging the encounter in north america

NOTES FROM THE COORDINATOR

George R. Hunsberger

A new logo. Excerpts from Atlanta. New dates and venue for a major conference in 1996. These are all part of this combined March/June issue of the *Gospel and Our Culture* newsletter.

More than 1500 of us now are a readership network which continues to find ways to work together at the issues facing the churches

today. At the heart, that means understanding our culture as the gospel reads it, and listening to the gospel with an ear to its distinctive way of addressing us contemporary North Americans. Rooted in such a missionary encounter, we are constantly compelled to ask what forms of life and witness are faithful ones for the church. At numerous concrete places across the continent, we are people attempting to answer in practice the question: What does it mean to be the church in our new kind of world?

"...we are constantly compelled to ask what forms of life and witness are faithful ones for the church."

LOGO INTRODUCED

The new GOCn logo gives us a way to mark what brings us together. It speaks suggestively of much more, but it elicits at least that it is in and for our part of the globe that we are willing to ask how the cross speaks, more in tones of serving and suffering than in those of triumph and achievement. It suggests that it is as a community tied together in that cross that we receive

the gospel's way of reshaping the cultural assumptions we share with companions in our society.

THE ATLANTA CONSULTATION

On February 16-18, over 60 people gathered to consider an ambitious theme: "Fidelity to the Gospel in our Multi Ethnic Future." The six main presenters from Asian American, African American, and Hispanic American communities were among a total of 21 participants who were from other than European American origin. In a sense, the purpose of the consultation was to test where there are lines of companionship in our pursuit of faithful responses to the gospel, given the different ethnic communities we live in. Could we bring together the "Gospel and Our Culture" agenda as

the network has been seeing it thus far, mostly from the perspective of dominantly anglo church life, with the challenges faced by Christian communities attempting to be faithful within other ethnic groups? What is the point of intersection between the GOCn agenda and issues of multicultural life? What does it do to all of us if we envision working at these issues together? The diversity of experiences we brought to the conversation was matched by a diversity of expectations about what we might achieve. In a variety of small group and large group discussions, we all experienced what I would call the "toughness" of such a first exploration with each other. For the invited guests

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there was a question of trust. (Who are you and why are you inviting us to talk about these things?) And for veterans of prior collaborative work in the network there were questions of patience. (Do you understand the challenges we see and do you see ways to work together regarding them?) The de-centering we all experienced may be the most important fruit, and one which opens the way for more journeying together.

This issue of the newsletter contains an extended series of excerpts from the presentations. (A set of the papers is available from the GOCn office for \$6.00 to cover postage and copying.) Other notes and articles touch on similar themes.

THIS ONE'S FOR YOU

The GOCn hosts a major conference next year which promises to be a watershed event. The conference is for "local church leaders and those who care about them" and will pursue the theme: "Confident Witness—Changing World." The conference will be held March 20-23, 1996, at the Bismarck Hotel in Chicago. The dates are shifted from those originally announced in order to avoid a conflict with Ash Wednesday services held in many churches. That also meant finding a new site which could accommodate the 400 or more people expected to attend.

The primary audience is pastors and key lay leaders of congregations, who are encouraged to come as groups from their churches. Many in the network will find this focus especially useful. Other gatherings of the network till now have been in the form of "consultations" and "work groups" which have focused their attention on research in the areas of culture, gospel and church, working to build important foundations for a missionary encounter with our culture. That has brought together theological educators, church administrators, and some pastors. Next year's "Confident Witness" conference is different in that it will place the

emphasis on the implications of the research for the life and witness of the local congregation.

A broad-based Planning Team has been hard at work in recent months to plan the conference and establish partnerships with various organizations which share a concern for the "missional" shape of the church. The team includes Ben Beaird, Dan Devadatta, Wally Hobbs, Tricia Lloyd-Sidle, Mary Motte, David Risseuw, Alan Roxburgh, Craig Van Gelder, Lee Wyatt, Scott Young, Judy Bos, and Pete Hammond.

A preliminary brochure about the conference will be prepared in the near future and will be available for widespread distribution. (The complete text of the purpose statement for this conference is included in this issue of the newsletter. For other details about the conference, contact Judy Bos at the GOCn address.) †

A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

*Sayuri Kist-Okazaki
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Before our appointment to serve in Japan my husband and I pastored a congregation in New York City, in the borough of Queens. The church had only fifty members, mostly elderly (if you were forty, you were part of the youth group), and was struggling to grow. We were surrounded by Catholics and Orthodox Jews and there were also a number of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists as well. The neighborhood was too expensive to live in but not fancy enough or convenient enough, so people didn't stay. The church had constant financial difficulties so they learned to rent out the church space for anything for money. But this church, which struggled to survive, operated a homeless shelter. During the winter

months, four days a week, we picked up fifteen men from a center in Southern Queens. We brought them into our Fellowship hall and served them supper. After eating and fellowshiping with them, we slept with them. In the morning we served them breakfast, and sent them to the center with a lunch.

The church building was very small, smaller than any of the churches I've seen outside of the city. All of the work was done by volunteers from our church and by neighbors and friends of the church. The city reimbursed the church for heat and electricity, provided the beds and linens so that the cost to the church was relatively low, but it was a great effort to make for such a small church. They have been providing this shelter for seven years now.

"If this church did not have this homeless shelter, I think it might have been dead a long time ago."

This is a small mission work that they could do for the world. They do as much as they can as a small, struggling church. But, interestingly, by doing this work of healing, they are not only enriching the society, but also they enrich their own identity. They transform themselves from a small struggling church to an inviting, open church. They transform themselves from a needy church to a church that works for the needy. They transform themselves from a passive, surviving church to an active agent of God.

If this church did not have this homeless shelter, I think it might have been dead a long time ago. I am not sure if they are conscious of that, but the vision of mission to the needy gives them a reason for existence. A reason to be God's people. A reason to be a "light to the nations." †

FIDELITY TO THE GOSPEL IN OUR MULTI ETHNIC FUTURE

Excerpts from the Atlanta Consultation

Setting the Stage

In the December, 1994 edition of *The Gospel and Our Culture Network Newsletter*, George R. Hunsberger made the statement that this gathering from its inception, "has felt like a risk", a risk he identified on several levels—in terms of social change and its implication for the GOCN movement, and in terms of such a consultation "pushing on the limits of routine experience in North American churches and relationships." I too share and appreciate that sentiment. From my perspective, accepting this invitation has also been a risk.

Since the beginning of African presence upon the North American shores, this theme, "Fidelity to the Gospel in Our Multi Ethnic Future" has been the primary concern of African Americans as they have sought to understand the relationship between culture and Christianity. The historical experiences of Christianity and the African American collective experience, however, teach the African American community to question the motivation behind consultations such as these, as well as the ultimate goals. What is the motivation behind the connections being made? And why now? Given the complexity of the communication process itself and all the baggage that we all bring to the round table, how will we know what is said will even be heard? Our coming together like this demonstrates that we have the courage to welcome one another, but do we really have the courage, wisdom and willingness to rethink mission theology, mission history, ethnic leadership styles, evangelism and mission, techniques and modes, and the other understandings that shape our faithful response to engage in missions according to God's will and way, now and into the future, and to "act with consistency"? But transformation, true Christ-like transformation, cannot take place without connections. It is important to find people who seek the qualities and values of the Kingdom of God, and select them for partnership if we are to meet the challenge to maintain fidelity to the gospel. And that is why I, like you, risk being here today. I like the sense of equity, the affirmation of worth and dignity given to the sharing of our ethnic stories, and the declared values identified in the theme notes to guide speakers.

-Marsha Snulligan Haney

SHARING OUR FAITH WITH JAPANESE NEIGHBORS

Stan Inouye
Iwa
Monrovia, California

One key concept has helped me understand what we Christians must realize if we are ever going to be effective relating the gospel to people of Japanese cultural backgrounds. That concept is known as *omoiyari*. This Japanese word roughly translated means *empathy*.

In *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*, Takie Sugiyama Lebra (p. 38) writes,

For the Japanese, empathy (*omoiyari*) ranks high among the virtues considered indispensable for one to be really human, morally mature, and deserving of respect. I am even tempted to call Japanese culture an *omoiyari culture*.

Omoi-yari refers to the ability and willingness to feel what others are feeling, to experience vicariously the pleasure or pain that they are undergo-

ing, and to help them satisfy their wishes.

According to Lebra, four behavioral patterns are characteristic of *omoiyari* people. One, they seek to maintain consensus or agreement by deferring to the fulfillment of each other's needs and desires.

Two, *omoiyari* people seek to optimize each other's comfort by seeking to provide pleasure or prevent displeasure by anticipating the other's needs and desires and taking initiative to meet those needs and fulfill those desires without the other person having to express them overtly in some obvious manner. A variation involves preserving another's pleasure or preventing displeasure by not revealing one's own discomfort or suffering.

Three, *omoiyari* people can control each other very effectively in non-verbal ways. One of the ways they can constrain or punish one another is by refusing to respond to another's expression of need for comfort or assistance.

Four, *omoiyari* people believe that non-verbal communication is the most

powerful form of communication. Lebra (pp. 46-48) expresses this dynamic of Japanese culture:

Omoi-yari makes explicit, verbal communication redundant and superfluous.... The Japanese find aesthetic refinement an sophistication in a person who sends non-verbal, indirect, implicit, subtle messages.... The message of a conversation is not what is said, but what is not said.

How are we going to reach people like this with the gospel, when so many of our traditional approaches to doing evangelism are so contrary to what is culturally natural to the very people we want to embrace for Christ? Our evangelistic method, media, and message must be in forms that are appropriate to our audience if we are going to be maximally effective relating the Good News to them. We must begin with who it is we are called to reach and serve for Jesus Christ and shape ministry accordingly.

The Japanese as an *omoi-yari* people are very relationally oriented. They

are other-centered. Their lives are extremely affected by what others think and feel, and by what others think and feel about them. They are very group-oriented, the needs of the group coming before the needs of the individual. They are family centered. As such, in Japanese culture, the needs of the family come before the needs of the individual family member. Each member must sacrifice for the good of the whole. In other cultures, members of close families may say, "I am a member of a close family." However,

"People of Japanese cultural backgrounds read and listen to lives lived rather than to eloquent words and rational arguments."

in Japanese culture close family members relate more like, "I am my family. My family is me."

Effective evangelism must seek to influence and eventually reach the entire family or Christ. Also, the relationships non-Christian Japanese have with the groups to which they belong, whether their informal network of friends or the company they work for, are seen as permanent and lifelong. All these bonds of belonging must also be addressed if the Japanese are going to be effectively reached with the gospel.

Because they are so relationally oriented, people with Japanese cultural backgrounds tend to judge truth by the integrity and sincerity of the person saying it, rather than by judging truth on its own merits. Western culture tends to see truth as truth, no matter who says it. Japanese culture says, "So and so said it, so it must be true." Truth is measured as much by what is not said as by what is said. People of Japanese cultural backgrounds read and listen to lives lived rather than to eloquent words and rational arguments. In my experience here in the United States, the way most of us have been taught to do evangelism is to communicate the truth of the gospel (the abstract plan of salvation), challenge the individual to make a conversion decision and then once the decision is made, incorporate that

individual into the church. It is my feeling, however, that for people like this with Japanese backgrounds who are culturally so relationship-oriented and group-oriented, cultures described as *omoiyari* cultures, the process has to be reversed.

This means we need to incorporate these people into relationships within the church first, with Christians and Christ himself, and then focus our attention on conversion. I am not advocating for church membership before a person becomes a professing

Christian. What I am encouraging, however, is the need to see conversion as a relational process.

The Christian's power to influence an *omoiyari* person toward faith in God is directly proportional to the degree that that Christian's life reflects the truth of the gospel. But since our ability to do so will always be limited, no matter how close our relationship with Christ, our primary responsibility is to introduce the non-Christian Japanese to the person of Jesus Christ, who is "the way, the truth and the life."

JOURNEY OF BEING CONTINUOUSLY TRANSFORMED AN ASIAN AMERICAN STORY

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I see some of the perennial problems/issues which the Churches face in every generation as follows:

Firstly, it seems to me that there are gaps and tensions between the gospel (God's Intention in Creation, Redemption and Sustenance) and the human understandability of and faithfulness to that gospel in different

times and places. What could be the factors to influence the human capability to understand and be faithful to the gospel with all their mind, heart and strength?

Secondly, as human community is encountered by the Self-Revealing God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, persons in the community individually and collectively can experience heightened feelings of "mysterious tremendum" with certain changes in life. Such experiences of the Holy are expressed in the forms of music, poetry, literature, arts and theological treatise. Those described are transmitted to others. What could be the criteria by which we would measure the authenticity of certain descriptions and expressions of such experiences?

As an example, in the Protestant missions in Korea the emphasis which was given to the equality and worth of human persons was timely and appealing to many people who had been under the rigid, feudal, hierarchical social system so long. However, this mission endeavor did not or could not appreciate the indigenous arts and music as viable means and vehicles to convey the Gospel to the Koreans with familiar art forms available to them.

Such forms were labeled as secular or non-Christian. The majority of the hymns which Korean Christians have sung in the last hundred years are all the American and western ones translated into Korean.

Thirdly, the concern is to notice the gap which exists between one group of people who have life-changing experience by the power of God's love in Jesus Christ and their off-spring who learn about the faith experience of their forbearers as information and knowledge without having personal experience. Through the Christian centuries, as one particular generation has life-changing experience, it tries to express that experience in a most consistent, relevant, and adequate way theologically. Then, as people try to bring their off-spring into the faith which they have experienced, not many individuals and their faith

communities have succeeded in letting the new generation experience the faith in as authentic and intensive a way as their forbears did.

As a generation comes and goes by, the vitality of the faith which the first generation had may be further diminished. Then the Church, the community of faith, usually tries to transmit the forms and contents of the faith to their adherents through the means of symbols, images, music, arts, and theological expression. However, those forms of faith expression may not be appealing any longer to the new generation.

Very slowly, individual Christians and their Churches may have the right kind of theological formula/dogma with a little bit of practice of what they know, yet without having the right kind of feelings and enthusiasm (to be in God). When such a case comes to an extreme point, people may obtain their salvation by accepting a neatly arranged and adopted theological formula/doctrine/dogma. Such a condition within the "Institutionalized Church" has caused confusion, for many take a certain form of faith-expression of a certain time and place as if it were the sole, legitimate, right form and content of the gospel.

This tendency may have created some unfortunate regimentation and compartmentalization of the indivisible reality of God's activity in individual and collective life within the Churches and in the world. When some one or some group of people believe that they have the right belief-system (orthodoxy), they are often convinced that they are "saved" by their faith in the right kind of belief-system rather than in the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Then, so often they neglect to do (right practice—orthopraxis) what they know as the truth and to have the right kind of feelings (orthopathy) toward God and their neighbors. We see this kind of corrupted form of the Biblical faith within and among us.

Our concern is how we can keep critical eyes to look at ourselves and the world (culture) as God would look.

AN AFRICAN AMERICAN REFLECTION ON FIDELITY TO THE GOSPEL

*Marsha Snulligan Haney
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Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya speak about the increasing bifurcation of the African American community into two main class divisions: a "coping sector" of middle income working class and middle class African American communities, and a "crisis sector of poor African American communities which are made up of the working poor and the dependent poor." These class divisions, for most practical purposes, are growing, and due to the changing demographics of middle class African Americans, the inner cities have become the home of the poor, who are both physically, emotionally and socially isolated.

As one who has worked with African American communities, his perspectives as an Asian Christian have led Lawrence Mamiya to make the following suggestions as to how churches can begin to take some steps in reaching the poor. First, all African-American churches, regardless of size, need to begin missions to the poor by sending missionaries into hard-core poverty areas.

The second step is the need for more community organizers and community organizations in poverty areas to help train lay members and clergy in the task of community organization.

The third step is the need for the African American churches to develop a prison ministry. More than 90% of all African American churches have no prison or jail ministry, in spite of the fact that the United States has the highest prison population in the world and that estimates suggest that half of the prison population is African American.

The last suggestion made by Mamiya addresses the need for the ministry of the churches to be concerned about the self-esteem and self-

identity of all African American children, regardless of class.

"Throughout their history in this country, black Christians have sought to affirm the worth of each human personality, that each person is a child of God, even in the midst of the worst and most dehumanizing conditions."

The African American churches also need to address the religiously plural environment in which they live with a sense of faithfulness and relevancy. To do that, priorities need to be changed. The African American churches must be willing to be revived spiritually in order to address the issues facing the African American community. The general social and moral decline of the dominant culture must be addressed by the churches in light of who we are, and whose we are, belonging both to God and our ancestors. We are the descendants of those who survived. Christian leadership needs to educate Christians first concerning the biblical and Christian traditions (negatives and positives) and secondly concerning the challenge of Islam, both the Nation of Islam (popular Islam) which often becomes a stepping stone for a religious journey leading toward al-Islam, and al-Islam (official Islam) itself as it has been contextualized within the African American community. This will enable Christians to participate in a relevant contextualized theology and missional response. The communication of the biblical Christian faith in word and deed, requires the application of the following six criteria adapted from a theoretical model put forth by William Pannell.

(1) A new formation and expression of theology should be directed toward the basic theological beliefs expressed in the universal Christian church but contextualized appropriately. The churches must continually engage in a *theological self-critical examination* to see if the responsibility of hearing, obeying and "being" the Word of God (as a sign of God's kingdom) is being carried out as faithfully as it could be.

(2) The *incarnational model* is essential

within an environment where proclamation of the Word of God must be accompanied by signs and demonstrations of the nature and power of the Christian faith. The churches' main concern must be to live out the biblical knowledge and revelation of God in a context of profound social, political and racial divisiveness.

(3) There is a need for *integration of new social patterns with incarnational theology*. The structure and the theology can not be separated, but must reflect a wholistic understanding of life ordained and sanctioned by God. New intentional structures for Christian community, education, and fellowship should encourage the freedom of the Word of God (living and written) to permeate every aspect of life of the total person and not be limited to spiritual or religious concerns.

(4) Relevant and authentic faith must move away from the perception that Christianity is basically relegated to the private spheres of life, and must become public. The perception that Christianity is concerned only about the soul and spiritual matters must be confronted. Christian values and ethics must be brought to bear upon secularity.

5) *Lay involvement* must be seen as the means to empowering biblically based evangelism and mission. The entire congregation, not the few individuals who are seminary trained, must be trained, developed, nurtured and led to discover what it means to do theology in a religiously plural society.

(6) The use of creation centered theology, which affirms culture, human experience, and the world as a place where God reveals Godself as a redeeming God is the starting point for theologizing. By means of an Afro-centric (rather than Euro-centric) presentation of Christianity, the attention of many African Americans will be recaptured and drawn anew to the Biblical message.

THE MEXICAN AMERICAN SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

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Several observations can be made from an analysis of the cluster of themes which relate to the Mexican American search for identity. First, many Mexican Americans appear to be striving to find an anchor for their sense of identity. Their search has focused primarily on their socio-historical heritage.

Second, different segments of Mexican Americans have attempted to gain a sense of dignity through the employment of different strategies. These strategies include efforts to get the dominant society to change the negative stereotypes it has of Mexican Americans, efforts to join the dominant society through the process of cultural and structural assimilation, and efforts to revitalize their own culture.

Third, some Mexican Americans are experiencing a sense of marginality with regard to the dominant society, to the culture of Mexico, or to other segments within their own cultural group. Some of the contributing factors to this sense of marginality are the attitudes of the dominant society, the desire of Mexican Americans to retain their cultural characteristics, and the different rates of assimilation to the dominant society among Mexican Americans. The sense of marginality, which is pervasive in the lives of many Mexican Americans is complex and at times destructive.

Fourth, some Mexican Americans believe that their sense of identity and their ability to overcome their sense of marginality are dependent upon their ability to achieve a spirit of *carnalismo*. Efforts to achieve this spirit, however, have been severely hampered by obstacles which come from within the group. Despite these obstacles many Mexican Americans continue to strive to attain a spirit of *carnalismo*.

The Mexican American search for a sense of identity is a continuous and complicated one. As Floristan states: "The quest for identity never ends because it consists not only in tracing our roots but also in looking to the future." As they look to the future, many Mexican Americans are optimistic about their ability to survive as a cultural group by "fashioning syncretic, adaptive strategies to the many changing conditions." They view the variety of cultural perspectives with which they have had to deal as a "core strength" which enables them to confront life and to attain a true spirit of *carnalismo*. This quest can find inspiration and guidance in the concept of the new community of the kingdom which is made possible by the life and ministry of Jesus.

This new community is not based on racial or political factors. Instead, it breaks down the walls of partition between the races and enables them to have a sense of appreciation for their cultural heritage. This new community is not confined to those who share a particular sociopolitical experience. In it racial and cultural factors are relativized for the sake of a higher priority. The messianic banquet theme which was a corrective to the motif of the eschatological pilgrimage of the nations to Zion places Gentiles on equal footing with Israelites. They are invited to become members of the body of Christ which includes men and women from all peoples of the world in a reconciled and reconciling community.

In their search for identity, therefore, Mexican Americans can emphasize the reality of a new creation in Christ in whom all are children of the same God and there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female. There is the possibility for them to develop a positive sense of identity and dignity knowing that Jesus accepted *mestizos* and identified with them. They are assured that they can become a part of the kingdom and have an equal share in the fundamental dignity of membership in the family of God.

At the same time, their search for identity is challenged by the teachings



and actions of Jesus who refused to confine his ministry to one sub-cultural group (e.g. Galileans), and offered compassion and friendship across the existing lines of exclusion. This dignity of membership in the family of God can lead Mexican Americans toward a positive identity which overcomes excessive preoccupation with self, transcends and celebrates cultural differences, and seeks to become involved in ministry to others. Gustavo Gutierrez challenges Mexican Americans to strive toward this goal when he states:

Why are you searching for your identity? Why do you want to know that you are a people with value—values denied by the sowers of death but affirmed by people who know how to live with hope in the resurrection of the Lord? There can only be one answer, one that does not depend upon whether one is Mexican American or Peruvian. The only reason why you need to affirm who you are is to be of service. If you are looking for identity for any other reason you are in danger of becoming egotistical and vain. Service should be at the core of our identity because it is at the core of our Christianity.

FIDELITY TO OUR GOSPEL FOR HISPANIC AMERICANS

*Elizabeth Conde-Frazier
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We're in a time of crisis! We have been displaced in the economy of this country along with many others who once offered their physical labor. The cutbacks ask us to work at jobs we are not trained for or which do not exist. To retrain we are to call upon skills that the quality of education provided for us did not offer. The gospel of rewards for righteous living and hard work is no longer offering its own mission dollars to help create opportunities. What is the gospel in this hour?

The middle class church seems to be

at its own impasse seeking a spirituality that will not cost them any discomfort to obtain. I seem to remember a rich young man asking about eternal life but who went away sadly because it cost more than he was willing to pay. What is the gospel for the Gadarene demoniac who is crying out because of legion, poverty, proposition 187, low self esteem, abuse, drugs, AIDS and others have taken control of his life? He lives among the tombs and does violence to himself. Is violence to himself and to others the only way for the Gadarene of today? The chains we place on him can not contain his great pain and need. More prisons, stiffer and longer jail sentences are not the solutions. Has Jesus not crossed the sea to visit our Geresenes?

Jairus pleads and waits for the healing of his daughter but his servants, the media, the psychologists, the teachers all tell him its too late for she has died. She's been in too many foster homes, she has learning disabilities due to her parents' cocaine addiction, she lives in the projects and doesn't have much hope anyway. Jairus, don't bother the teacher. Won't Jesus comfort the Jairuses and come and stop the mourners to raise her?

The woman with the issue of blood, the one whose life is drained with all the responsibilities as she heads her home alone while trying to get up from the brokenness of her body and spirit, remember her? She's the one that got in the way of everyone else. Where is it, where is the hem of Jesus for her to touch?

Crisis is a time for theological dislocation and relocation, for seeing the revelation anew and with different eyes. I seem to remember another time of crisis which brought a movement of the spirit and prophets who breathed new life into the word; a word which became flesh and from its fullness we all received grace. It was a time when our particularities contributed to one same struggle and vision. It was the first time that African American and Hispanic churches on the same block in New York City came together on the corner to preach the gospel and then registered people to vote. We extended

hospitality to each other and we watched it slowly turning into shalom for that community. Let me not fail to mention that our initial interaction around some of the community's needs did not stop there because we saw the need to understand each other's histories as peoples and the way that "church" emerged for us in the history. Soon those histories began to form the different notes of chords and the chords became a song that we could both sing in this strange land, although we did sing with contrasting rhythms.

Constructing a contextualized theology means an understanding of the social context instead of perceiving that context as the world from which we separate ourselves. It is the world that God so love. A contextualized theology connects the body with the soul, the flesh with the bone. A gospel of reconciliation must first reconcile or integrate its own dimensions.

A contextualized theology sees scarcity as a key focus. In an attempt to win us over to the gospel we were presented with a gospel which promised the blessings of prosperity. This has focused our energies and direction of ministry in an "other worldly" direction where the other world is not the heavenly city but the white collar and professional jobs and the nearby suburbs. (This is not necessarily bad but it is the focus that I am calling attention to.) The new life has not always meant the life of service but of lifestyles afforded by the climb up the socio-economic ladder. Our gospel needs to focus itself on the scarcity in our midst, not the prosperity, for in doing so, we will discover the richness of the transformative power of the gospel anew

Focusing on prosperity means that we each go for the bit of the pie that has been left for us to fight over. Focusing on scarcity means that we look at the needs before us and we work together to redistribute the whole pie. Highlighting scarcity turns us away from the idols of selfishness and injustice to the total commitments of the gospel.

Concluding Thoughts

You brought us here, Asian American, African American, Hispanic American and what did you expect to hear? Well, you've heard a repeated theme of issues of identity. We have shared with you the journeys of first, second, third and a half and fourth generation. Journeys of struggle, agony, life and celebration; of death and rebirth. You brought us here and we told you our histories of conquest, enslavement and repression. We shared our present challenges with nihilism, brokenness, poverty and the need for reconciliation and for hope. You heard our issues of identity and found your own. Ours has been an identity crisis because of subjugation and yours has been an identity crisis because of power over.

"We have shared with you the Journeys...of struggle, agony, life and celebration; of death and rebirth."

We are reminded by the Apostle Paul to be humble. To be humble is to know who we are so that our insecurities don't get in the way and we can contribute to others so they, in turn, can become who they are. It is also to know who we are not so that we don't become confused and believe a lie that destroys us or take on a privilege or entitlement that will rob another of their dignity.

So, how do we let go without having something else to hold onto? Hold onto the cross, to the agony, suffering and loss of letting go. Hold onto the cross, to the fear and trembling of trusting and to the pain of being disappointed by the church. The cross reconciles us with God, ourselves, our histories and identities that we may come to understand our gifts and Christian vocation in the world. This cross reconciles us with others enabling us to be committed to confrontation, repentance and forgiveness and thus bearing witness that Christ indeed has "irrupido," irrupted into the history of our humanity.

-Elizabeth Conde-Frazier

MODERNITY'S PROGRAM OF REPRESENTATION VERSUS THE POSTMODERN ACCEPTANCE OF DIVERSITY

Reflections on the Atlanta 1995 GOCN Consultation

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The primary intent of the Atlanta consultation was to structure a conversation among diverse ethnic Christian communities. The critical questions which were to be explored were: (1) what do we have to learn from each other's stories of God working in our communities, and (2) how can we experience unity around the gospel in a multi ethnic future? These issues have been around for some time. What is unique about the conversation in the GOCN discussion is the assumption that we are now living in a postmodern condition of cultural diversity. This means that persons no longer assume there is an outside authority or ideology that is able to bridge the differences between cultures. A Christian orientation to this postmodern focus suggests that cultural differences become a matter of exploration, mutual conversation and shared learning as we seek to understand the gospel and its message for our lives.

REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSULTATION

Three issues were raised by the conversation we had at the consultation which we will need to continue to address. Each of these issues is related to the shift taking place from a modern to postmodern world view.

1. *A Tendency to Assume a "Dominant" Culture.* There was a strong theme present in many of the presentations that a dominant culture is at work in the North American scene that is under the domain of the Anglo population. This is the assumption that there is a primary "story" that is shaping a condition of "insiders" and "outsiders." There are two practical problems with this interpretation of our cultural context. On the one hand, it tends to promote either a conflict between "power coalitions" or promote an "assimilation" model for enfolding marginalized groups with mainstream society. On the other hand, it tends to keep the church thinking in terms of a general responsibility in serving as chaplain in fostering a just society. While a case can be made that a dominant economic culture is increasingly at work, this is no longer true politically. There is no longer a dominant story line capable of shaping a common identity.

2. *A Tendency to Address Multicultural Issues through our Representation.* Some of the core assumptions of modernity continued to surface in our consultation. These are the notions of society functioning as a unified whole, and using social engineering through representation processes to create a just and equal society. This notion of "representation" as the key to addressing cultural differences is laden with problems. First, this model tends to promote competition between disparate groups. Second, this model tends to break down as representation becomes just one more round of paternalism through privileging participation of persons who possess a particular social characteristic.

3. *A Tendency to Use the Academic Scholarship Model to Critique the Issues.* We structured our consultation around the classic academic model of preparing and reading a professional paper as the basis for addressing multi ethnic issues. While some presenters chose to weave in examples of their community's "story," these tended to function only as subtexts in the presentations. The academic model has much to offer in providing a careful analysis of the issues. But its use can miss the heart of the fundamental problem of a multi ethnic future. Its use is simply insufficient for moving the conversation forward in exploring cultural differences as the basis for shared learning.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MOVING FORWARD

The postmodern landscape has all of us somewhat disoriented in trying to understand the "gospel and culture" conversation. It is essential, however, that we firmly grasp the reality of how "difference" now pervades our society, and that this "difference" confronts us without any shared social norms to adjudicate differences. This is where the gospel must be rediscovered afresh as the basis for discovering a shared unity in Christ that will help Christian communities experience a common

fellowship. This fellowship cannot be manufactured on the basis of modernity's model of representation. It must instead find its roots in a genuine discovery of how God's story has uniquely shaped the diverse stories of Christian communities in various cultures. This is a fellowship which many in the GOCN discussion are increasingly coming to value. It is also one for which the rules have yet to be written. The February meeting in Atlanta served the discussion by helping to clarify the issue but also indicating how far we have yet to travel in experiencing a postmodern version of Christian community.



BOOK REVIEW

MISSIONARY CONQUEST: THE GOSPEL AND NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURAL GENOCIDE BY GEORGE E. TINKER (FORTRESS PRESS, 1993)

George H. Montanari
Apache Reformed Church
Apache, Oklahoma

The GOCN is to be commended for its look at the impact of culture on the Gospel. The February 1995 consultation which examined "Fidelity to the Gospel in Our Multi Ethnic Future" was an important addition to the Network's conversation. And yet, one voice was not represented among the key-noters of this multi-ethnic conversation, namely that of the Native American.

George E. Tinker, *Osage/Cherokee*, of the Iliff School of Theology, fills the void in his *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Fortress Press, 1993). Tinker boldly stated his thesis that "Christian missionaries—of all denominations... were partners in genocide" (4). He recognizes that missionaries were seldom intentional about such a goal, but forces us to recognize that "the conscious intent to destroy a people is

not necessary for an act to be genocidal or for it to succeed in destroying." He admits that missionaries may have had the best and noblest of intentions, but calls us to see that "the good intent of some may be so mired in unrecognized systemic structures that they remain unaware of the destruction that results from good intentions" (5).

For Tinker, cultural genocide is

the effective destruction of a people by systematically or systemically (intentionally or unintentionally in order to achieve other goals) destroying, eroding, or undermining the integrity of the culture and system of values that defines a people and gives them life (6).

Cultural genocide, then, has political, economic, religious and social aspects. Missionary complicity in cultural genocide is measured by the involvement in or use of political, economic and social structures to effect conversions or to protect or support the mission.

Tinker supports his thesis by recasting the history of four of the most well known missionaries to Indian peoples: John Eliot in Massachusetts, Junipero Serra in California, Pierre-Jean De Smet in the northwest, and Henry Benjamin Whipple in Minnesota. He tells of their high idealism, and also of the compromises they made as servants of the gospel. Of Eliot and his methods Tinker writes, "[T]he establishment of the praying towns, as segregated Indian communities for converts, was an act of government, a political act in which Eliot, as missionary, participated explicitly as a political functionary, an agent of government serving the political aims of that government" (30). Serra, a candidate for canonization for sainthood, receives no less scathing of an evaluation: "His canonization would be first of all a glorification of Christian (in this case Roman Catholic) triumphalism, a celebration of dysfunctionality" (66). De Smet is introduced to us as "an

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BOOK REVIEW

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outspoken exponent of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny who devoted as much of his bountiful energies to realizing the American conquest of the West as to converting native peoples." Tinker continues, "it is often difficult to determine whether conquest or conversion provided him with the greater impetus for mission. Indeed, the latter goal appears to serve the former in ways that belie a distinction between them" (70). And of Whipple we find this summary with its distinct implicit warning for contemporary non-Indians engaged in Indian ministries:

If Whipple confused issues of gospel and culture in his reform commitments and in his role as pastor to the Indian mission congregations, his confusion was due in large measure to his overwhelming commitment to his own culture as an inherently superior form of human existence. In the final analysis, Whipple subscribed to an assimilationist position and helped the very people he sought to protect. As such, he typifies the more subtle, systemic racism inherent in unbalanced cultural interrelationships. His was the sin of good intentions. Hoping to reform an oppressive system and curb some of its overt bigotry, he ended up serving that system and compounding its oppressiveness (110).

Tinker closes with a chapter on "The Enduring Dilemma" in which he presents the challenge for "an introspective questioning of our own modern blindness" (113). He raises questions concerning the sense of cultural superiority carried by (white) missionaries into cross-cultural settings, the white missionary's use of rites or instruments from traditional native spirituality, the continuing patterns of paternalism and dependency which in turn create patterns of dysfunction and co-dependency, and "the [c]ontinuing [c]olonial

[c]onquest" (12) of New Age use of Indian traditional spirituality.

This is a well written challenge to those who would confront gospel and culture issues. While written specifically concerning mission efforts with Native Americans, the criticisms raised apply to other cross-cultural efforts as well. Tinker has provided abundant research with numerous examples to substantiate his case. As one engaged in ministry with Native Americans, I found myself vacillating between wishing Tinker were beside me to offer insight for my work, and wishing he might never learn the work he would see bears my signature upon it. In that vein, I would have valued a chapter with more positive guidance for the work at hand. Nevertheless, this is valuable reading for people with concerns like GOCN members. Further, it adds a missing voice—one already too prone to be left out—to conversations about our multi ethnic future.

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NETWORKINGS

■ To help reflect further on the theme of the February 1995 Consultation ("Fidelity to the Gospel in our Multi Ethnic Future"), the following resources may be of use: *Out of Every Tribe and Nation: Christian Theology at the Ethnic Roundtable*, by Justo L. Gonzalez (Abingdon Press, 1992), draws on the theological perspectives of different ethnic minority theologians on the nature of the gospel and the church. *Coming Together: The Bible's Message in an Age of Diversity*, by Curtiss Paul DeYoung (Judson Press, 1995), comes out of Curtiss' work as director of TURN Leadership Foundation in Minneapolis, an urban resourcing network for reconciliation and social justice. *Lift Every Voice: The Bible in an Age of Diversity* is a five part video series (on 2 60-minute tapes) on cultural diversity featuring Cain Hope Felder and Tony Campolo, available from Seraphim Communications, 1568 Eustis St., St. Paul, MN 55108.

■ Beginning next fall, Columbia Theological Seminary of Decatur, Georgia, will offer a new "gospel and culture" specialization in its Doctor of Ministry program. With the institution of this program Columbia becomes the first theological school in the country to offer a D.Min. program focused on the intersection of the gospel and church witness. It intends to be a program "for ministers seeking strong faith for strange times." Courses will enable practicing ministers to explore changes in technology, social relationships, politics and morality in relation to culture and the gospel message. The core seminar for the first class of participants will take place October 23-November 3. Write the Office of Advanced Studies, Columbia Theological Seminary, PO Box 520, Decatur, GA. 30031 for more information. The program is under the direction of George Telford, a participant in the GOCn.

■ A conference entitled *People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture and Community* was held in January in the San Francisco Bay Area. Over one hundred Christian leaders from various Asian American communities came together for this event sponsored by Pacific Asian American and Canadian Christian Education (PAACCE) and funded by the Lilly Endowment and the Marin Community Foundation. This historic meeting was unprecedented because of its diversity culturally, linguistically, denominationally, generationally and theologically.

■ A conference *Faith in Society, Setting the Future Agenda*, will be held in England this summer. The event is sponsored by Christians in Public Life (CIPL) whose purpose is to achieve a new quality of public life by enabling Christians to engage in addressing fundamental questions of common concern. Dates for the conference are July 14-16, 1995. Additional information can be obtained from CIPL, Westhill College, Birmingham B29 6LL, England.

CHRISTIAN MISSION AND MODERN CULTURE SERIES

Trinity Press International (P.O. Box 851, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851) has announced the first two volumes in a new series of publications. Edited by Alan Neely, H. Wayne Pipkin, and Wilbert Shenk, the series is based on the assessment that according to the editors, "both Christian mission and modern culture are in crisis. Although widely regarded as antagonists, the emergence of the modern mission movement in the early nineteenth century cannot be understood apart from the rise of technocratic society. Now at the end of the twentieth century, both modern culture and Christian mission face an uncertain future."

The purpose of this new series is to help the church understand its missional responsibility to a culture in crisis. The series therefore (1) examines modern/postmodern culture from a missional point of view; (2) develops the theological agenda which the church in modern culture must address in order to recover its own integrity; and (3) tests fresh conceptualizations of the nature and mission of the church as it engages modern culture.

The first two volumes in the series—

BELIEVING IN THE FUTURE TOWARD A MISSIOLOGY OF WESTERN CULTURE

David J. Bosch

Professor Bosch begins with an analysis of the postmodern world, the legacy of the Enlightenment, and Christian faith in a postmodern age. He then sketches contours of a missiology of Western culture, including considerations of mission as social ethics, mission and the Third World, and Godtalk in an Age of Reason. After a brief section on "The Impossibility of Not Believing," he concludes with a summary of the five ingredients of a missiology of Western culture: that it include an ecological dimension, that it be countercultural and ecumenical and contextual, and that it be primarily a ministry of the laity.

Until his tragic death in 1992, David J. Bosch was Professor and Head of the Department of Missiology at the University of South Africa. He is the author of the massive and highly acclaimed book, *Transforming Mission*.

WRITE THE VISION THE CHURCH RENEWED

Wilbert R. Shenk

Professor Shenk contends that the engagement of the church with modern Western culture resulted in the marginalization of Christian faith and the undermining of the church's integrity. During the same period the missionary movement became a catalyst for extending the faith to other continents with the result that the majority of Christian adherents are now to be found outside the West. As the church in Europe allied itself with political and military power, its integrity was compromised and it suppressed mission to its own culture. When the church of the West is renewed, it will be a church with integrity and a clear sense of mission to its own culture.

Wilbert Shenk teaches in the Mission Training Center at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary.

AN ANNOUNCEMENT FROM OUR SISTER MOVEMENT "GOSPEL AND CULTURE" IN THE U.K.

FACING THE FUTURE - Christian Faith in a Postmodern Culture

St. John's College, Durham, England

SEPTEMBER 25 - 27, 1995

At the heart of the Christian faith there is a conviction that we are set free from the past and shaped by our hope for the future. This conference wishes to explore how we can continue to talk of future and hope when the culture we live in tells us that we live in a perpetual present which denies us both past and future.

There will be sessions that outline some contours of what we might identify as Postmodernity.

Is there a new freedom now?

How do we tell our story?

How do we use the Bible?

The particular focus of the conference will be the place of worship and how worship is the public expression of our faith to our culture.

Enquiries to: Rev. Kristin Ofstad, Wolf's Castle Avenue, Llanishen, Cardiff CF4 5JS, Wales, United Kingdom

THE MAKING OF CHRISTIANS

The Rev. John Westerhoff, a widely known author and professor in the field of Christian education, led participants at a recent conference of the Association of Presbyterian Church Educators in an intense two-hour session titled "The Making of Christians in the Modern World." Westerhoff, who currently serves on the staff of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Atlanta, challenged educators to redefine their task to fit a world in transition.

"We are living in a period of tremendous change," he said, "which means that everything we are doing now probably isn't going to work."

"We have reached the end of the Enlightenment era, in which faith was defined as belief in an intellectual truth," Westerhoff said. "We have also reached the end of the era of Constantine, when clergy were regarded as leaders in the community and being a Christian meant being a good citizen."

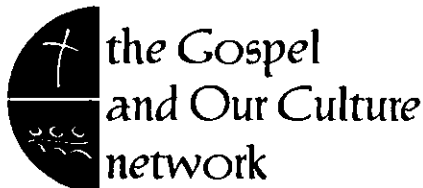
"Nobody cares what the church has to say anymore," Westerhoff declared. At one time "we could count on public schools to do at least basic Christian education," he added. "Not anymore."

The key to making Christians in today's world is formation, in which people participate in the practice of faith within a faith community, Westerhoff said. "The church ought to be an educational ministry rather than have one."

Real Christian education will not happen, he added, until we focus on developing spirituality as "ordinary, everyday life lived in ever-deepening relationship to God." He defined teaching as "an artistic act," in which you "arrange the environment so people can encounter the Word of God."

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CONFIDENT WITNESS-CHANGING WORLD

REDISCOVERING THE GOSPEL IN NORTH AMERICA

A conference for local church leaders and those who care for them.

March 20-23, 1996
Bismarck Hotel
Chicago, Illinois

*"God is our refuge and our strength ...
therefore we will not fear though the earth be shaken." (Psalm 46)*

The earth is shaking. Vast social and cultural changes reshape life in North America bringing radically new challenges to the church. Confidence in the power of the gospel is being shaken. This conference invites us to discover the fresh ways of being the church and the forms of tradition needed to engage these sweeping currents of change with the good news Jesus Christ brings. We will wrestle with this challenge in three areas:

- CULTURE:** *Discerning* the shifting worlds so radically reshaping our lives and the places where God is at work.
- GOSPEL:** *Discovering* the fresh ways in which the gospel gives us resources for a confident witness to Jesus Christ.
- CHURCH:** *Developing* new forms of mission-shaped churches as the Spirit calls us to be faithful people of witness.

Our purpose is to recognize those ways the church has become so complicit in North American culture that it has lost its biblical identity. At the same time churches must become missionary outposts, distinct communities announcing God's presence in a post-Christian setting. The call of this conference is to confess our situation and grapple with such issues as:

- Shaping communities of faith, God's alternate society, in a culture that creates fragmented, privatized, individual church members.
- Recognizing our forms of complicity in the culture.
- Seeking out patterns of life that witness to the gospel in a society which marginalizes and trivializes the church's voice.
- Learning how to read the culture in order to shape a witness which addresses the levels of need and concern in people's lives.
- Listening to the Bible with fresh ears as it speaks prophetically to the church, freeing us to rediscover gospel themes that address the spiritual yearnings of a changing North America.
- Discovering forms of leadership that empower new directions in a time when church leaders experience tremendous stress and confusion over role and identity.
- Confessing the social, economic, ethnic, and confessional divisions in both society and church, and hearing God's call toward a church that heals these divisions.

This conference is sponsored by the *Gospel and Our Culture* network in partnership with other organizations. It will utilize nationally known plenary speakers and provide multiple workshops led by leaders of the *Gospel and Our Culture* movement.