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Communicating the Gospel into the Tribal World A New Reality and a New Language

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COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL INTO THE TRIBAL WORLD:
A NEW REALITY AND A NEW LANGUAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Objectives and Focus

God Himself has entrusted the message of his reconciling acts in Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-19) to his people. The proclamation of that message must always be the priority of those who have heard and been called into a new relationship with God. The Gospel involves communication because it is news, good news about a God who forgives and reconciles people through his Son. The Gospel involves effective communication of the truth that God has revealed. As Seamands has noted, "What we say is important, but how we say it is just as important. For we are not only proclaimers; we are also persuaders. We preach . . . not just to inform, but to transform."[1] The message itself is timeless and supracultural--it is for all people. This supracultural message must be communicated and the medium of that process is language. Unfortunately, there is no supracultural language. All languages are cultural, bound intimately to the patterns of existence, perception, interaction, decision, cognition, action and expression of the peoples who use them.

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[1]John T. Seamands, Tell It Well (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1981), p. 11.

It is the primary focus of this thesis to deal with the practical problem of communicating the Gospel into the thought world of people who have never before heard it, specifically the world of people who might be called "tribal" peoples.[2] The tribal worldview largely prevails in such widely separated cultures as Sub-Saharan Africa, the Pacific Islands, traditional Japan, and various groups in India, Australia, Southeast Asia, Siberia and the Americas. Stephen Neill has estimated that at least 40 percent of the world's population could be considered to have a tribal worldview.[3] Many of these peoples have never heard a meaningful presentation of the Gospel.

A people's perception of the reality in which they live is governed by their own peculiar worldview. It will not be the same as the worldview of those who first heard the Gospel nor of those who live in a western technological culture. Most of the tribal peoples have no cultural or linguistic neighbors who can communicate the Gospel to

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[2]The designation "tribal" is used throughout this paper with the understanding that it is not a completely satisfactory term. It is used to designate those groups of people throughout the world who have often been described as animists, primitives, or polytheists. It embraces not only people who live in social contexts that are tribal, but also peoples whose worldview and religion still reflect animistic and polytheistic foundations. For the lack of a more acceptable term, tribal will be used here. See David Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), pp. 148-151.

[3]Ibid., p. 150.

them--they are the "Hidden People."[4] For them, the advocate of the Gospel will almost always be an outsider, a cross-cultural agent. His task is critical--encode the message of the Gospel in the forms and symbols of a language which is not his own and communicate effectively to people who live in a different world than he does. The difficulty of this task is attested to by the numerous misunderstandings and syncretistic interpretations that have followed the well-intentioned proclamation of the Gospel in every part of the world.

Therefore, the proclaimer of the Gospel, while constantly aware of the inevitable tension that exists between the new reality that he advocates and the reality of those whom he addresses, will seek to present the Gospel so that the hearers can discern its significance for their own lives, find points of contact between the "new message" and their own reality, and ultimately, allow this Gospel to transform and reshape their own peculiar perception of the world. Robert Funk has aptly characterized the problem:

> The articulation of the Gospel depends upon the reality to which it refers becoming audible in language. The failure of language is commensurate with the disappearance of the reality to which it refers . . . when the Word of God invokes faith, man responds in the language that bears the reality of faith. When God is silent, man becomes a gossip; when God speaks and man hears,

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[4]Ralph Winter, Unreached Peoples, ed. C. Peter Wagner and Edward Dayton (Elgin, IL: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1978), pp. 47-48.

> kerygmatic language is born and the Gospel is preached.[5]

The rebellion of man against God perverts and destroys the world that God created. With the perversion of that reality also goes the pollution of man's language. The speech of Adam is language in a lost paradise.[6] Because the Gospel is news about a new and radically different reality, its coming transforms and reorders the reality in which man lives. Language is not only the key to the reality that exists, but also the key to the mediation of a new reality. Jesus himself said, "And these signs will accompany those who believe . . . they will speak in new tongues" (Mark 16:17). It was in new and exciting ways that they spoke, as Amos Wilder comments,

> How Jesus and his followers spoke and wrote could not be separated from what they communicated. It was the novelty of grace and the fundamental renewal of existence which brought forth a new fruit of the lips, new tongues and new rhetorical patterns.[7]

Today as well the proclamation of the Gospel heralds the birth of new ways of speech--words that can adequately express and convey the nature of a new world. Those who act as agents of this change, those through whom God makes his appeal, must take cognizance of the significance of

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[5]Robert W. Funk, Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 9.

[6]Samuel Laeuchli, The Language of Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 232.

[7]Amos Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 126.

language and its role in this process. The message must be meaningful, understandable and persuasive. In a cross-cultural context, the way the message is presented must facilitate and even initiate the birth of that new language. That this might happen is the central concern and focus of this thesis.

Scope and Limitations

A topic of this nature necessarily touches many related disciplines. Significant insights from the study of linguistics, communication, the science of translation, the study of mythology and even anthropology will all be relevant to the objectives of this study. However, the concern here is primarily practical--the most adequate and effective presentation of the Gospel possible to peoples in the tribal world.

It would not be possible to attain this objective without first examining the nature of language itself and its relation to reality, but here there can be no extensive treatment of such a discipline. It will be necessary to examine the tribal worldview and its dependence upon myth, but impossible to do little more than summarize the significant aspects of this immense field of study. The chapters that deal specifically with the narrow focus of this thesis will be more exhaustive than others that are intended primarily to provide a framework of meaning for the central goal of this thesis.

This study will not cover in a comprehensive way all

the relevant aspects of this communication process. Perhaps others will devote themselves to the task of completing what has been begun here. The responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel to as many as two billion people who live in a tribal world demands the best preparations that the cross-cultural agent can achieve. This thesis can be little more than a beginning for that preparation, but a church that takes seriously its responsibilities to God's mission needs all the stimulation it can get.

Methodology

Although the subject of this thesis is in essence a linguistic one, this is not a study of language. However, because of the essential relationship between a particular language and that peoples' perception of reality, it is necessary to investigate carefully the significant contributions of linguistics to the field of communication. Chapter two will examine the nature of language and its significance for man. In particular, the concern will be that to properly mediate reality for a specific people, language must be adaptive and flexible enough to accommodate the shifts in perception that can occur when a particular group of people come into contact with a different understanding of reality. Chapter two will also attempt to describe the symbolic nature of language and how meaning is related to the use of shared symbols.

Chapters three and four are properly the heart of this study. Chapter three will first of all characterize in the

most general way the worldview of the tribal peoples. Obviously, there are significant differences among the worldviews of the many tribal peoples in the world, but it is the commonalities they share, such as the intimate relationship between the sacred and secular dimensions of life that are of major importance for this study. Secondly, the impact of the Gospel message upon a tribal worldview will be analyzed. The Gospel itself is a powerful force, God's power, for reshaping peoples perception of the world in which they live. Therefore, as the Gospel enters a new culture, it will inevitably create change, change at the very center of peoples' existence. With that change in reality must come a consequent change in language. The birth and growth of that new language is considered in chapter three and carried by application into chapter four, where the intention is to demonstrate how the early church and particularly the Apostle Paul were involved in restructuring the reality of Gentile peoples through the power of the message they proclaimed. The way they proclaimed that message, the manner in which they communicated that Gospel, was significant and instrumental in the process of transformation that took place. Chapter four also makes this application more immediate by examining the impact that the Gospel has already had upon the people of Melanesia and how that fundamental reordering of reality can be seen reflected in language itself.

Chapter five is an endeavor to make the insights of this study relevant to the cross-cultural communicator of the Gospel. He is an agent of change, it is his intention to introduce people to the saving Gospel and thus to a new world. How he bridges the gaps between his own world, the world of the Scriptures and the world of his hearers is of critical importance for the meaningful hearing of the Word he proclaims. Understanding the nature of myth and its significance for tribal peoples, the concrete relational patterns of cognition that they use, and the predominance of the metaphorical in their expression can provide insight into how the Gospel itself might be most meaningfully proclaimed.

Chapter six will summarize the main insights and outline some of the wider implications of what has been said. It will have become obvious that the issues raised and discussed here are significant not only for missionaries in foreign fields, but for all those who communicate the Gospel in a context where different ways of looking at the world meet. In a pluralistic world, that kind of context is increasingly common, the need for those who can bridge the cultural gaps more urgent.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

What is Language?

The problems of language have been emerging with increasing regularity as critical to the resolution of numerous questions in very diverse disciplines. Although speech is a very familiar feature of daily life, men are becoming more aware of the immense complexity of language itself and its intimate relationship with the reality they share. Because language is sometimes the involuntary utterance of emotional states, some have attributed to language an instinctive basis that it does not really possess.[1] The process of acquiring speech is a completely different thing from the process of learning to walk or eat. Walking is an inherent, organic, instinctive function; on the other hand, speech is a "non-instinctive, acquired, cultural function."[2] Webster defines language as,

> the words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them used and understood by a considerable community and established by long usage; a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use

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[1] Edward Sapir, Language (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1921), p. 4.

[2] Ibid.

> of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures or marks having understood meanings.[3]

All peoples have a well-ordered language which enables them to communicate with each other as well as fulfilling other necessary functions. Language is distinctively human. Although animals do, to varying degrees, communicate with each other, only man is able to manipulate his organs of speech and give meaning to such shared linguistic expressions as to be able to communicate ideas, emotions, reflections, and desires in a meaningful way. It is the unique relationship between language and thought that gives man the ability to understand and deal with his world in ways no animal can.

Many have attempted to explain the origin of speech, but there is really no adequate explanation for this phenomenon. Language is a gift that God himself has given to man. To say that language is traceable in its foundations to the instinctive cries or interjections that men share in common or to the evolution from sounds of an imitative character cannot account for the incredible complexity of human speech or for the many complex and interrelated functions that language performs. Even the most "primitive" tribal societies have highly-structured languages with rich vocabularies.[4] Speculations on the genesis of speech in

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[3] Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1961 ed., s.v. "language."

[4] Joseph Bram, Language and Society (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 1.

man are unprofitable--language is a given.

Defining language in a precise way can help to clearly establish its nature and function. Yandall Woodfin has defined language as:

> the intelligible employment of arbitrary sensible signs by which man in a community of association or agreement represents his understanding of reality to himself and others self-consciously and overtly.[5]

Joseph Bram views language as a "structured system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which members of a social group interact."[6] Common to both these definitions is the arbitrary nature of the signs or symbols which man uses to represent the reality he apprehends. The intelligibility and value of any particular symbol or constellation of symbols are dependent upon one's association with a given reference. The signs themselves are axiologically neutral.[7] Before symbols become meaningful, however, they must be mutually shared. Two or more people must agree that a particular symbol is an adequate substitute for any object or concept of their consideration. Their consensus allows them to discourse on such subjects or concepts without actually producing them. The fact that different linguistic groups use different symbols to represent the

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[5]Yandall Woodfin, "The Sound of Meaning: A Christian Approach to Language," Southwestern Journal of Theology 19 (Spring 1979): 100.

[6]Bram, Language and Society, p. 2.

[7]Woodfin, p. 100.

very same aspect of reality matters little. Within their own group, the use of a particular symbol always (within an acceptable range of variation) stimulates a shared reality that enables the group to find meaning in their world.

It is in a very real sense then that language allows reality to be, to come into existence. Ernst Cassirer suggests that there is some primal bond between the linguistic and the mythico-religious consciousness that allows the word to become a "sort of primary force in which all being and doing originate."[8] Funk expands this understanding of language:

> Language is a primal force. The word is often the instrument of Creation, the name of the god is supreme in power, the individual is constituted by his name. The essential identity between the word and what it denotes lies at the base of this understanding of language. Naming does not mean inventing a convenient designation, but giving reality to the object, calling it into existence. By the same token, knowledge of the name gives power over the thing to which the name belongs.[9]

Understanding an essential relationship between word and thing and between word and power is common to the Scriptures. God creates by the force of his Word:

> By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made,
> and all their hosts by the breath of his mouth . . .
> For he spoke and it came to be;
> he commanded, and it stood forth. (Ps. 33:6,9)

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[8]Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth (New York: Dover Publications, 1946), p. 45.

[9]Robert W. Funk, Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 27.

God brought every beast and bird to Adam so that he might give them a name. With that name, Adam gave each an existence unique and special. In a very real sense, he gave them being, a being with which he could relate. Language gives man access to being, to reality, in a way that is impossible without it. Martin Heidegger's famous statement, "Language is the house of Being,"[10] is a precise statement of this understanding. Heidegger himself quotes from a poem by Stefan George to illustrate the impossibility of Being without word to name it. The last stanza reads:

> So I renounced and sadly see:
> where word breaks off no thing may be.[11]

Language thus functions to produce and posit the world. The symbolic forms are actually "organs of reality, since it is solely by their agency that anything real becomes an object for intellectual apprehension."[12] Wilhelm von Humboldt has said that "Man lives with his objects chiefly--in fact, since his feeling and acting depends on his perceptions, one may say exclusively--as language presents them to him."[13] Language then allows man to give immediate and sensible existence to the world in which he

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[10]Martin Heidegger, On the Way to Language (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 63.

[11]Stefan George, from his poem "The Word," cited by Martin Heidegger, p. 60.

[12]Cassirer, p. 8.

[13]Cited by Cassirer, p. 9.

lives. It allows man to understand and organize his world, to apprehend the world with his mind and express the structures and categories he perceives and creates. Language is thus indispensible if man is to be man, if he is to be God's agent and subdue the earth. Without language, it is impossible for man to act upon and interact with his world.

Language also gives to man another dimension in dealing with reality--the ability to transcend the immediately given and reflect, discuss and manipulate the intangible. The world of things and events with which man has to deal is thus not limited to what is physically accessible to him or perceivable by his senses.[14] Language enables man to overcome the limitations of time and make the lessons and values of the past a part of his present and make the future a relevant concern of his everyday existence. It allows man to go beyond his individual experiences into a larger common understanding which constitutes culture.[15] Language has been instrumental in helping man to conquer nature, but such dependence upon verbal symbolism has also alienated man from nature, making physical contact with the world unnecessary and allowing man to function with only the intricacies of his symbolic process.[16] Gerhard Ebeling

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[14]Bram, p. 7.

[15]Edward Sapir, Culture, Language and Personality (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), p. 7.

[16]Bram, p. 8.

has highlighted the ability of language to transcend the tangible in these words:

> Language is able to make present what no longer exists and what does not yet exist . . . . It makes present what would not be immediately obvious . . . . Language affirms the presence of what is completely hidden, and therefore does what only words can do.[17]

It is primarily this ability of language to open up levels of reality that are otherwise inaccessible that enables man to understand his world. The intimate, dependent relationship between thought and language must be understood if one is to grasp the true significance of language. Ebeling has noted that the "process of thought is so much a process of language that it does not attain its goal until it has reached the point of definition in language.[18] The struggle one sometimes experiences to find the right word is at the same time a struggle to attain a new understanding of that reality under consideration. Both the word and the understanding come together--they are mutually interdependent.

Determining which is prior--understanding or language--is not possible. They give birth to each other and also hold each other captive. They arise together, are reciprocal. The common reality to which they refer proceeds and follows. Language and understanding both arise out of and

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[17]Gerhard Ebeling, Introduction to a Theological Theory of Language (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 54-55.

[18]Ibid., p. 119.

invoke shared reality.[19] It is impossible to separate language and cognition. Reality may be deeper than language, but whatever is deeper is sense-less. Reality has no meaning until it can be grasped or apprehended and the instrument of that process is language. Edward Sapir has described it this way:

> The instrument makes possible the product, the product refines the instrument. The birth of a new concept is invariably foreshadowed by a more or less strained or extended use of old linguistic material; the concept does not attain to individual and independent life until it has found a distinctive linguistic embodiment.[20]

In speech, one does not merely translate thought, but one completes thought. Formal expression is needed not only for communication, but to bring one's own thoughts into perspective and make them recognizable to the understanding.[21] Language is in a sense then the key to one's understanding of reality, there is no other instrument with which to probe and examine the reality people perceive. One can understand and unlock reality through language. The word itself opens up and mediates understanding. In that sense, one can say with Ebeling that "the word itself has a hermeneutic function."[22]

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[19]Funk, p. 4.

[20]Sapir, Language, p. 17.

[21]Woodfin, p. 101.

[22]Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 318.

Language has many functions to perform, many of which are determinative for the world into which each person grows. Language is the primary channel through which social attitudes, beliefs, values and worldview are communicated to the young. It is the vehicle for the whole process of socialization and enculturation that make each individual a part of his culture. Language is instrumental in introducing each person to a world of meaning that is shared by all members of his group. Man is called to live in community and in communion with others. Human beings receive their identity from others. Communication is more than a mere transmission of information; it is a giving of one's self into a shared reality in which meaning is possible.[23] It is language which makes it possible for true communication to take place and which constitutes the community in which that necessary reciprocity can develop. What Robert Evans calls the "mutuality of mind,"[24] that must exist within a common speech community, is a prerequisite for understanding, meaning and intelligible communication. Only language can adequately account for this mutuality of mind and only language allows the mind to shape the reality that it perceives.

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[23]Alain Blancy, "From Sign to Symbol," The Ecumenical Review 33 (October 1981):379.

[24]Robert A. Evans, Intelligible and Responsible Talk About God (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 62-63.

Language: The Structure and Mediation of Reality

One of the most perplexing problems studied by philosophers throughout history has been the mysterious process of cognition. To even review the history of this investigation would itself be an extraordinary undertaking and certainly beyond the limitations of this study. The numerous debates on this subject have not really resulted in any agreement on the way in which man thinks. However, in recent times, the study of language has shed considerable light on the cognitive processes of various linguistic groups of people. The study of language has revealed that the forms of a person's thoughts are controlled to a significant extent by laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. Benjamin Whorf has been a leading advocate of this theory and although many would stop short of affirming all the implications of what he says, it is worthwhile to consider briefly what he says about the influence of language upon the way people think.

Whorf says that the patterns which control the forms of a person's thought are:

> the unperceived intricate systematizations of his own language. . . . Every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness.[25]

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[25]Benjamin Lee Whorf, Language, Thought and Reality (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1956), p. 252.

Whorf, along with Edward Sapir, has so championed the determinative function of language in the structuring of reality that their ideas have become known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The central theme of this hypothesis is that language functions, not simply as a vehicle for reporting experience, but also, and more significantly, as a means of defining experience for its speakers.[26] Sapir has said that:

> Language is a guide to social reality . . . it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone . . . but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. . . . The 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group.[27]

In elaboration of the definitive function of language, Sapir says:

> Language is not merely a more or less systematic inventory of the various items of experience which seem relevant to the individual . . . but is also a self-contained, creative symbolic organization, which not only refers to experience largely acquired without its help, but actually defines experience for us by reason of its formal completeness and because of our unconscious projection of its implicit expectations into the field of experience. In this respect, language is very much like a mathematical system which . . . becomes elaborated into a self-contained conceptual system which previsages all possible experience in accordance with certain accepted formal limitations. . . . Meanings are not so much discovered in experience as imposed upon it, because

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[26]Harry Hoijer, "The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis," in Language in Culture ed. H. Hoijer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1954), p. 93.

[27]Sapir, Culture, Language and Personality, pp. 68-69.

> of the tyrannical hold that linguistic form has upon our orientation in the world.[28]

Whorf, too, has emphasized the role that language plays in organizing the world perceived by man's senses. He says:

> We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds--and this means largely by the linguistic system in our minds.[29]

Although Eugene Nida has cautioned that there is not enough scientific evidence to verify this hypothesis[30] and that one must be careful not to push the implications of this hypothesis too far,[31] there is considerable evidence, both linguistic and ethnographic, that supports this view of language. It is not possible for man to confront reality immediately, he is too dependent upon the structured patterns of perception and organization that are in essence constructions of his own peculiar language. The patterns of cognition or "thought-grooves" as Sapir calls

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[28]Edward Sapir, "Conceptual Categories in Primitive Languages," Science 74 (1931):578.

[29]Benjamin Whorf, Collected Papers on Metalinguistics, cited by H. Hoijer in "The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis," p. 94.

[30]Eugene Nida, Language Structure and Translation (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 184-85.

[31]Eugene Nida, "Implications of Contemporary Linguistics for Biblical Scholarship," Journal of Biblical Literature 91 (1971):75-80.

them, are too inextricably related to language to deny that language places a very powerful hold upon those who belong to its circle. Man spins language out of his own being, but he also encapsulates himself in it. Von Humbolt says that, "Each language draws a magic circle round the people to which it belongs, a circle from which there is no escape save by stepping out of it into another."[32]

It is not possible to resolve the philosophical dispute over whether the presence of order is in the world and is discoverable by man or whether order exists in the mind and is constructed there, but it can be demonstrated that men find different orders and perceive different patterns in reality. Man does seem to be driven to find or construct order in his world--no society exists without some conception of order in the world or of system in experience.[33] Clifford Geertz suggests that it is the sacred symbols of each community that function to synthesize their worldview. The drive to make sense out of experience and give it form and order is as real as the more familiar biological needs.[34] Whorf, Sapir and many others are convinced that it is language that provides for

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[32]Cited by Cassirer in Language and Myth, p. 9.

[33]John H. Morgan, "Clifford Geertz: An Interfacing of Anthropology and Religious Studies," Horizons 5 (1978): 208.

[34]Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 89-91.

man the already constructed channels or patterns that force a particular kind of order upon the way man perceives the world around him and thus construct reality for him.

Man grows up physically and socially within a network of linguistic, cultural and behavioral patterns which have also grown up together, constantly influencing each other. Whorf has pointed out that in this partnership of culture and language it is language

> that limits free plasticity and rigidifies channels of development in the more autocratic way. This is so because language is a system, not just an assemblage of norms. Large systematic outlines can change to something really new only very slowly, while many other cultural innovations are made with comparative quickness. Language thus represents the mass mind; it is affected by inventions and innovations, but affected little and slowly.[35]

The organizing influence of language is generally outside the focus of personal consciousness. Only when this system has been exposed by another can an individual gain insight into the web-like bonds of his own language. It is primarily for this reason that men are slow to admit the existence of the circle that constrains them and orders their perceptions of reality. Man wants to believe that words have exact meanings, but instead the "patternment" aspect of language always overrides and controls the "lexation" or name-giving aspect. Meanings of specific words are less important than one would

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[35] Whorf, Language, Thought, and Reality, p. 156.

believe. The part of meaning that is in words is only relatively fixed. In reality, reference of words is dependent more upon the sentences and grammatical patterns in which they occur.[36] Whorf cites as an example the sentence, "I went all the way down there just in order to see Jack," which contains only one fixed concrete reference, "Jack." The rest is pattern attached to nothing specifically.

As much control and influence as language exerts upon the world in which men live, one must be prepared to also acknowledge that the use of language can be creative and intentional. David Rasmussen has carefully explored both of these critical aspects of language. Of the first he says:

> Language is always present. Language precedes birth and succeeds death . . . language has an implicit power over the individual within the culture . . . the limits of one's language are the limits of one's cultural universe of meaning. . . . Language is fundamentally social . . . it structures our pre-reflexive world of meaning. . . . The world signifies itself to us. In this sense there is a certain necessity in language. Man is born into a world that is already typified by language. He is forced to come to terms with language simply to know the world. . . . Language presents a set of structures and laws which the subject must obey if he wishes to be understood and to understand.[37]

There is a "givenness" about language that cannot be denied. A child is born into the linguistic world of his parents and that world is unconsciously imposed upon him.

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[36] Ibid., pp. 258-59.

[37] David M. Rasmussen, Symbol and Interpretation (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), pp. 19-21.

But man is also a creative being and cannot remain passive. In the act of naming man takes possession of his world both physically and intellectually; he subjects the world to his knowledge and domination.[38] The creative use of language demands a command of and an implementation of the grammatical rules of the language being used, but also involves the ability to intend language in specific ways. The grammar and structure of language are the basis for the possibility of communication, but actual meaning transcends grammatical usage. Language distinguishes itself as one moves from the abstract to the concrete, from potentiality to actuality.[39] Meaning is always dependent on the creative use of language and the ability of the subject to differentiate and actualize separate aspects of the total experience available to him. In the process of actualization of meaning, the "human subject is the free constructing agent. It is the human subject who selects; it is he who interprets, it is he who reflects."[40] A full understanding of meaning must recognize both the passive and active aspects of human consciousness.

Language would have no meaning at all if one had not already been drawn into the continuum of language that

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[38] Cassirer, p. 83.

[39] Rasmussen, pp. 21-22.

[40] Ibid., p. 13.

existed prior to and independently of him. But language would also be empty if it were not possible for the individual to mediate his own personal experience of the world and so give a new expression to reality.[41] As much as language is a circle or web in which man is caught and on which he is dependent, language is also the vehicle which allows him to reveal in new ways his own personal insights into the world. It allows him to open up and expand in new directions the reality that confronts him. It allows him sufficient flexibility to interpret his own unique individual experiences in the light of the totality of what is already given.

Symbol and Meaning

Symbols exert powerful influences upon our lives and exercise considerable power over those individuals who share the experiences to which they are linked at a deep level. Symbols can excite, delight, soothe, embarrass, deceive, inflame, compel and convince. They are capable of riveting one's attention on the very deepest levels of reality. They motivate toward action. They give personal meaning and power to the world they signify.[42] Webster defines symbol as "something that stands for or suggests something else by reason of relationship, association,

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[41] Ebeling, Theological Theory of Language, pp. 56-57.

[42] Dwight Stevenson, "Religious Symbols and Religious Communication," Lexington Theological Quarterly 1 (July 1966):75.

conventional or accidental but not intentional resemblance."[43]

Clifford Geertz, whose unique understanding of religion has given new direction to the study of man in the context of his culture, has described man as a "symbolizing, conceptualizing and meaning-seeking animal."[44] Man is constantly concerned with the problem of meaning. He struggles to bring order and stability to a world in which chaos, which Geertz defines as a "tumult of events which lack not just interpretation but interpretability,"[45] threatens to dismantle the conceptions of existence under which he lives. It is primarily through symbols that man expresses the meaning that he discerns in or imposes upon his world. The symbol is capable of eliciting belief and commitment from both the conscious and unconscious levels of man's personality. The symbol allows a people to actualize their most fundamental ideas and values in a powerful way so that a more direct relationship can be established.[46]

It is difficult to establish precisely what a symbol is because as Rasmussen has noted, "The symbol is more

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[43]Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1961 ed., s.v. "symbol."

[44]Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, p. 140.

[45]Ibid., p. 100.

[46]Wendy Flannery, "Symbol and Myth in Melanesian Cultures," Missiology 7 (October 1979):437.

aesthetic than logical, more cultural than individual, more imaginative than scientific."[47] The symbol has a linguistic dimension, but transcends that dimension as well. The symbol is able to express also that dimension of reality which language is incapable of communicating adequately. It is possible for a Christian to describe by means of language what the symbol of the cross means, but there is also a sense in which that symbol embraces and expresses a level of meaning that cannot be put into words. It is a characteristic of symbols that they do not only point to or lead to, but they lead into. They are vehicles or mediums of insight. They do not only represent, but they make us see.[48]

It is helpful in trying to understand the peculiar nature of symbols to distinguish the sign and the symbol. C. J. Jung has warned against a tendency to disregard the distinction between symbol and sign:

> A symbol is an indefinite expression with many meanings, pointing to something not easily defined and therefore not fully known. But the sign always has a fixed meaning, because it is a conventional abbreviation for, or a commonly accepted indication of, something known.[49]

Symbols are based on or built upon signs. A sign becomes a symbol when it is given a new context. In that

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[47] Rasmussen, p. 1.

[48] Wilbur Urban, Language and Reality (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1936), p. 415.

[49] Cited by Clifford Brown in Jung's Hermeneutic of Doctrine (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), p. 40.

new context, it points to or signifies a reality that is beyond the ordinary and cannot be fully grasped.[50] The true symbol is able to participate in the reality which it signifies. Jung's study of human nature has led him to conclude that symbols are not consciously constructed but rather are grounded in man's unconscious. For Jung, there is a vast and inexhaustible multiplicity of meaning in the unconscious. The symbols which emerge from this depth of meaning are thus carriers of hidden or unspecified meanings which "have an effect even though they cannot be grasped intellectually."[51] It is then the nature of a symbol to both reveal and obscure. They reveal truth by exploring new conceptions of reality, but they also obscure because of their multiplicity of meanings.[52] The sign is clear, it signifies literally. The symbol resists precise significance because it is not associated with the common sense view of the world. The symbol is used to convey a reality that may be otherwise inexpressible. It allows man to grasp a reality that is not yet fully known and give it meaning.

Symbols are important precisely because they help man to give meaning to his world. Language allows man to differentiate his experience and in identifying and naming

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[50] Flannery, p. 438.

[51] Cited by Brown, p. 41.

[52] Eugene Nida, Message and Mission (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1960), p. 69.

man establishes meaning and relationships of meaning in what he perceives. He does not perceive meaning, he understands it.[53] The ability of symbols to convey meaning must not be misunderstood. Symbols are not like containers into which prefabricated meanings are packed. They serve to stimulate meanings that are consistent with the context in which they are used. A powerful Melanesian symbol such as "blood" is heavily dependent upon the context in which it is spoken or used to become meaningful for those who participate in its use. Meaning always involves reference to a shared universe of discourse. The symbol "blood" may be virtually devoid of true significance in a highly developed technological culture. It can only be truly constituted by those who share the same understanding of the world.

Symbols become meaningful only in some previously articulated pattern. Understanding is never apart from a community of interpretation. No symbol stands by itself, but participates in and is determined by a surrounding world of images, all of which are bound in interrelated significance.[54] Meaning is certainly related to intentionality, but it receives its primary orientation from the reality in which those who hear it live. The phrase "people of God" was originally a Biblical designation for

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[53]Urban, p. 106.

[54]Austin Farrer, A Rebirth of Images (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), p. 18.

Israel in its special relationship to God, but in liberation theology, the term has assumed a political reference, namely, the poor, oppressed classes who are in turn identified with the church.[55] In the context of the Latin American situation and of the Marxist-Christian alliance, symbols like salvation, liberation, Christ, faith and justice partake of a new reality and introduce radically new meanings. As Jose Bonino has noted, "The choice of a language is never a purely neutral or formal decision. In the very act (of choosing) . . . a relation to reality is introduced."[56]

It is the symbol which allows man to use and manipulate conceptions as opposed to things. The symbol allows man to grasp a reality much deeper than the tangible. Symbols are the means to "centered selfhood and meaning. They build the bridges between the self and the world outside the self; between the self and other selves."[57] The symbol allows man to connect the subjective and objective aspects of reality. The symbol attempts to present reality rather than abstract it. Paul Tillich has commented on this function of the symbol:

> The symbol opens up a level of meaning that is otherwise closed. It opens up a stratum of reality, of

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[55]Dennis McCann, Christian Realism and Liberation Theology (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 214.

[56]Jose Miguez Bonino, Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age (London: SPCK, 1975), p. 79.

[57]Stevenson, p. 75.

> meaning and being which otherwise we could not reach; and in so doing it participates in that which it opens. And it does not only open up a stratum of reality, it also opens up the corresponding stratum of the mind.[58]

The symbol is the foremost instrument of thought. Those who create new symbols, whether poets, novelists, artists, or theologians, give men new instruments with which to think and new areas to explore. They are in a sense the legislators of the world and their insight into and real sensitivity to the as yet uncharted aspects of reality help to reshape the world.

Symbolism seems to be the only adequate way of expressing deeply felt, shared experiences. Man's experience of the sacred can only be communicated through symbol.[59] It is too mysterious, illusive and vague for the ordinary sign to contain it. The symbol invites participation and allows the community to be drawn into a unique relationship with something they feel deeply but cannot express. Ordinary signs are inadequate because the sacred does not manifest itself in ordinary ways. But the sacred may reveal itself in profane form. "Among countless stones, one stone becomes sacred--and hence becomes instantly saturated with being."[60] That stone becomes a symbol for

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[58]Paul Tillich, "Theology and Symbolism" in Religious Symbolism, ed. F. E. Johnson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 109.

[59]Flannery, p. 438.

[60]Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. 4.

something not yet fully known but experienced nonetheless.

Religion, because it is ultimately concerned with the sacred, is necessarily heavily dependent upon symbols and symbolic language. Geertz's extremely important definition of religion stresses the dominant function of the symbol:

> Religion is a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, persuasive, and long lasting models and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[61]

The language of religion shares to some extent the character of poetic language, but it is the uniqueness of the religious experience and the object of that experience that distinguishes the religious symbol from the poetic one. For the Christian, it is primarily the fact of God's unique revelation of himself that imparts to the religious symbols a distinctive character. Religious meaning is therefore a final meaning. The symbol "God" for the Christian has a multiplicity of meanings related to it, but it is at the very center of the total meaningfulness of reality. The loss of that one symbol would be the loss of all meaning.

Religious symbols allow man to deal with the infinite and the sacred. They allow him to express his faith in meaningful ways. But as important as the symbol is in

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[61]Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, p. 90.

presenting reality, it can be misused. Symbols may be degraded and demonized into idols. Instead of becoming the bearers of truth, they can instead block or distort the communication of religious meaning. If they designate no reality but only evoke stereotyped emotions and responses, they have become idols.[62] Even the very best religious symbol is always inadequate for capturing the fullness of God's nature. Symbols allow us to express what "we know in part." There is no substitute for a faith which clings to that which it cannot even express. The Bible uses many dramatic and visual images which point beyond themselves to God. These symbols in the context of the Christian view of reality allow men of faith to interpret their relationship with God and communicate meaningfully with others who share that context.

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[62]Stevenson, pp. 70-76.

CHAPTER III

THE GOSPEL AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF REALITY

The World of Tribal Peoples

Any given group of people has a number of assumptions about the world that they embrace and use to give meaning to their lives. Their perceptions of their world are gradually patterned into different conceptions of what reality is or can be. Charles Kraft say that the worldview is

> the central systematization of conceptions of reality to which the members of the culture assent (largely unconsciously) and from which stems their value systems. The worldview lies at the very heart of culture, touching, interacting with, and strongly influencing every other aspect of the culture.[1]

Because people are not just content with receiving information from their senses but must have this information organized and related in a meaningful way, they systematize their perceptions into patterns that can be interpreted and understood. The primary forces for this process are the basic presuppositions they hold about the world. These basic philosophical or epistemological assumptions give an internal consistency to all the experiences of the group. They form the context in which all the information

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[1]Charles Kraft, Christianity in Culture (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 53.

the group receives is interpreted. They are like a grid which filters all available data in such a way as to orientate that data to their own unique understanding of reality. If a group of people believe that all sickness is caused by the spiritual forces who are angered by the failure of someone to observe the proper taboos or the social obligations of the group, then that assumption will condition their understanding and interpretation of every sickness. The conflict recorded in Acts 14:8-18 at Lystra was the result of differing assumptions about the world. The Lystrans assumed that only the gods could effect such a healing. That determined their conclusions about Paul and Barnabas. In Acts 28:1-6, again the worldview of the people of Malta forced them to conclude first that Paul was a murderer and then later that Paul was a god.[2]

The validity of any conclusion cannot be judged apart from the presuppositions that lead to that conclusion. That is not to say that every conclusion is valid. Paul rejected the conclusions of the Lystrans and the Maltans by challenging their assumptions; however, one must understand that the worldview of any particular group of people is valid for them. That validity must be taken seriously by anyone who attempts to communicate to those people. They are able to interpret any message or experience only within the framework of their own unique view of

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[2]See Kraft p. 57-59 for his comments about the conflicting worldviews involved in these events.

the world. People are part of the culture into which they are born and reared, the cultural reality is their reality. Failure to take cognizance of this fact dooms cross-cultural communication.[3]

The worldview of any particular group serves some very important functions in their life. Five of these functions have been described by Kraft:

1. The worldview explains how and why things got to be as they are and how and why they change or continue. It embodies the explicit or implicit assumptions concerning ultimate things on which they base their lives.

2. The worldview serves an evaluational--a judging and validating--function. Values, institutions and customs are seen from an ethnocentric viewpoint.

3. The worldview provides psychological reinforcement for the group during periods of crisis. Ritual and ceremony are frequently the means to fulfill this function.

4. The worldview serves to integrate all of reality into a comprehensive design that allows people to understand all their experiences.

5. The worldview serves an adaptational function that allows for shifts in perception and gives a culture the ability to change in the face of contradictions and disequilibrium.[4]

Because there are so many diverse groups within the "tribal" category, it is difficult to state precisely their basic assumptions. The characterization that will be presented will necessarily be a broad and general one. Although one might be able to point out exceptions to the

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[3]David Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 124.

[4]Kraft, pp. 54-57.

principles and characteristics ascribed here to the tribal peoples, generally they will serve to help define and give shape to the world in which they live. If one is to communicate the Gospel to such peoples, it is imperative that he have both a general idea of the tribal worldview and a comprehensive understanding of the unique worldview of the people to whom he wishes to proclaim the Good News.

David Hesselgrave highlights the tribal worldview as one which

> often transcends the secular-sacred distinction . . . it may be at one and the same time sacred and secular. It is preoccupied with gods, spirits, and ghosts, but it is patently anthropocentric in most cases. It brings nature and supernature together in a curious amalgam. It brings space and time together in an inextricable mix. It cements this world and the other world together in a single system.[5]

The qualifiers "often" and "most" that he uses indicate the caution that one must use in defining such an elusive category, but he has quite accurately pointed out some of the prominent characteristics of the tribal world.

The "tribal" man is above all else a religious man; his world is undifferentiated. As Bernard Narakobi has noted with respect to the people of Melanesia, there is no distinction between religious and non-religious experience. An experience is

> a total encounter of the living person with the universe that is alive and explosive. . . . For Melanesians there are no religious and other experiences. . . .

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[5]Hesselgrave, p. 149.

> Melanesians do not make this artificial dichotomy between things religious and things profane . . . he is born into a spiritual and religious order. Much of his life is devoted toward the maintenance and promotion of that given order.[6]

John Seamands calls this perspective of the tribal man a "holistic view of life."[7] There are no sharp distinctions between what is secular and what is sacred, what is spiritual and what is material. Every aspect of life is interconnected and part of a whole that is religious. For the tribal man

> the world exists because it was created by the gods and the existence of the world itself "means" something, "wants to say" something, that the world is neither mute nor opaque, that it is not an inert thing without purpose or significance. For religious man, the cosmos "lives" and "speaks."[8]

For this man, then, all of life is linked to the sacred; his own life is open and related everywhere to the reality of the sacred. Despite the fact that the tribal man often lives in a world that is actually very narrow physically, he has what Patrick Gesch calls an "extensive" view of the world as opposed to the "intensive" perspective of the western man. He uses these terms to describe

> techniques with which men approach the world: a habit of taking everything together (extensive), contrasted with a habit of abstraction, isolation and manipulation (intensive) . . . the extensive view of the world is

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[6]Bernard Narakobi, "What is Religious Experience for a Melanesian," Point 1 (1977):7-8.

[7]John T. Seamands, Tell It Well (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1981), p. 186.

[8]Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 165.

> one where a man views the world as a sweeping continuum in which he must find his own circumscribed context.[9]

The tribal man is more apt to use organic analogies to describe his understanding of the world, while the western technological man uses mechanical analogies. For the former, the world is alive, while for the latter, it is more like a machine.[10] The real world is a sacred world, a world given order and meaning by the gods who have established it. In this world, the tribal man lives in intimate relationship with the sacred and the forces of that realm. To a large extent, his ability to prosper depends upon his success in maintaining positive relationships with the spiritual powers that inhabit his world.

Because the tribal people live in a sacred world, they are fully aware of the powers that impinge upon them. In fact, every culture takes care to define and classify the "powers" that fill the world in which it lives. Donald Jacobs has stressed the importance of understanding that "a cosmology of power sources is at the very center of a group's existence."[11] Each culture defines the nature of power, how it operates, how it can be controlled and manipulated, where it resides and how it can be obtained. In the

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[9]Patrick Gesch, "Finding Your Place in God's World," Point 1 (1977):51.

[10]Paul Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," Missiology 10 (January 1982):41.

[11]Donald Jacobs, "Culture and the Phenomena of Conversion," Gospel in Context 1 (July 1978):7.

tribal world, man is very serious about the dynamics of power. R. H. Codrington's description of mana as a basic concept pervading Melanesian worldviews gave anthropologists a new perspective for analyzing many of the South Pacific cultures.[12] The tribal man understands his world to be full of power, much of which is available to him if he maintains proper relationships with the spiritual forces who dominate his world. Often, that power resides in objects or in people who have been in direct contact with the spiritual forces. The man who possesses those objects of power is able to control that power with the proper knowledge. The religious specialist in such a world is always someone who not only has access to power, but who can also both interpret the dynamics of that power and manipulate it.

The woman who pressed through the crowd to touch the clothes of Jesus (Mark 5:25-34) and the people who brought handkerchiefs and aprons that had been used by Paul to the sick (Acts 19:11-12) held assumptions about power that were very similar to those of the tribal people. People with such a worldview will understand the Gospel and experience salvation within that context, because they have no other framework from which to interpret a new message.[13]

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[12] R. H. Codrington, The Melanesians, Studies in Their Anthropology and Folklore (Oxford, 1891), pp. 117-19, 191-94.

[13] Jacobs, pp. 8-9.

Another unique aspect of the tribal worldview is the principle that every individual is a part of a great collectivity which determines and shapes every facet of his life. No one lives in isolation. He shares with his ancestors a common heritage in which the relationships one maintains within the community of men and spirits are of paramount importance. His life is a continual, changing and dynamic pattern of relationships between men and spirits, all of whom are living.[14] Because of this basic assumption, the tribal man must experience everything as a part of his community. Even salvation, which is experienced by western man individually, cannot be understood apart from the community in which he lives.[15] In such a community, all responsibilities, decisions and disputes are shared. There is little or no distinction between what is private and what is public. Opportunities for individual freedom and expression are limited, but the security one experiences in such a group is an adequate compensation. In such a world, ultimate situations such as death are often not as terrifying as might be expected. Death is understood as the change of status from living man to living spirit. The one who dies still remains an integral and important part of the community; he shares in a

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[14] Roderic Lacy, "The Enga World View," Catalyst 3 (1973):42.

[15] Gernot Fugmann, "Salvation Expressed in a Melanesian Context," Point 1 (1977):122-23.

collective immortality.

Time for the tribal man is not understood as a linear process, but rather as having a cyclical repeatable nature. Such a man, Mircea Eliade says, is able to distinguish between profane time and sacred time. Sacred time is reversible in the sense that in a religious festival or rite, man can reactualize the sacred events of primordial time allowing man to participate in the real and plunge periodically into sacred and indestructible time.[16] Ritual is therefore a highly significant and essential tool by which the tribal man establishes and maintains the important links between himself and the spiritual forces that have established his world. Eliade has clarified the significance of ritual for the tribal man:

> The origin of realities and of life itself is religious. The yam can be cultivated and eaten in the ordinary way because it is periodically cultivated and eaten ritually. . . . In the festival the sacred dimension of life is recovered, the participants experience the sanctity of human existence as divine creation . . . in festivals the participants recover . . . the strong, fresh, pure world that existed <u>in illo tempore</u>.[17]

There is a sense in which ritual can also be said to involve manipulation. The ritual is accepted as a real bridge to a dimension of reality that cannot be directly perceived but where the real forces or powers exist. There is a symbolic level of action in each ritual that enlists the support of the powers or even compels them to react

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[16] Eliade, pp. 85-89.

[17] Ibid., pp. 90-94.

favorably.[18] The tribal man depends upon ritual to both establish and maintain the appropriate relationships between himself and the sacred dimensions of his world.

It is a common theme in the tribal worldview that man's present situation is not what it could and should be. The tribal man recognizes that in the mythical past certain decisions, certain actions or circumstances beyond his control altered his status and deprived him of the means and the opportunity to attain such a condition known theologically as "salvation."[19] The tribal man is salvation-oriented, anticipating the advent of a golden age--a renewal of the primordial situation. John Strelan, commenting on the salvation expectations of Melanesians, says:

> There lives in Melanesia the hope that a time will come when the fateful decisions and actions which were taken in the past will somehow be reversed. Man will thereby regain his true identity and with it his self respect and integrity as a human being. What is envisioned is a new condition of being, a new man.[20]

One prominent theme in this orientation toward salvation is the emphasis upon a concrete, this-worldly salvation that is to occur in the present time. This kind of salvation has to do with pragmatic concerns, such as

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[18]Theo Ahrens, "Concepts of Power in a Melanesian and Biblical Perspective," Point 1 (1977):71.

[19]John Strelan, "Our Common Ancestor," Catalyst 5 (1975):34.

[20]Ibid., p. 34.

freedom from sickness and want, security for the community, health and wholeness. There is no dichotomy between a spiritual and a material salvation.[21] Every concern of this life is an aspect of well-being of the community--their salvation. The strong community orientation of the tribal worldview means that salvation is a communal hope. When salvation is realized, there will be a genuine unification of the living and the departed ancestors. That will initiate the "new age" which in reality is a return to the purity and perfection of the primal state.

What has been said about the worldview of the tribal peoples is necessarily general, but it provides one with a basic framework for understanding how the tribal man relates to and perceives his world. The one who wishes to communicate the Gospel to such people must be able to appreciate the importance these cultural presuppositions have for the way the message will be interpreted. It is simply not possible for the cross-cultural communicator to restructure the presuppositional grid of any particular people. Eventually, the Gospel itself will accomplish that task, but it happens over a long period of time. Jacobs has noted that the "findings of cultural anthropologists generally support the premise that at the level of

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[21]Fugmann, p. 123.

philosophical presuppositions, shift occurs--very slowly.[22] People will understand the message just as they are. Their basic assumptions about the world are primarily subconscious and difficult for them to express. Nevertheless, these assumptions still condition and govern every aspect of their experiences.

Jesus came to reveal a new wine that could not be contained in old wineskins (Matthew 9:17), but he was well aware of those "old wineskins." The people who reported to Jesus the slaughter of those who were offering sacrifices to God (Luke 13:1-5) were searching for meaning in that incident. Jesus does not really deal with the question of causality, but instead challenges his listeners to discern the meaning in that situation for themselves. Jesus begins where his hearers are, in their worldview, and encourages them to perceive reality in a radically new light. When he answers his disciples' question about the man born blind (John 9:1-4) he challenges their presuppositions by juxtaposing their alternatives with a more basic and meaningful one.

Roderic Lacy suggests that for a number of the Enga men in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, Christianity is perceived as a system that builds a new way upon the "condemnation and sometimes the destruction of a large segment

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[22]Jacobs, p. 7.

of what was their ancestral worldview."[23] The Gospel is a new reality, but destroying what was valuable and essential to the survival and continuity of a people in order to proclaim it is neither necessary nor fruitful. Destroying the old involves, moreover, the assumption that the Gospel itself does not possess the power in itself to reshape and transform the world into which it enters.

The Gospel: A Radically New Reality

It has always been the promise of God that he was "doing a new thing" (Gal. 6:15), and that this new creation came about through his annointed one, the Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). The message of what God has done and continues to do is good news for all men. Because this Gospel is a revelation of God, the manifestation of God's secret plan (Rom. 3:21; Eph. 3:9), its coming always involves the unfolding of a new reality. Despite the fact that man has experienced reality in many different configurations and distorted his world by removing God from it or disregarding him, the word of Holy Scripture discloses "the one reality" which takes hold of man and causes him to address "Him from whom he receives . . . the grace of a word that grants life."[24]

Implicit in the claim of the Gospel is the fact that

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[23] Lacy, p. 38.

[24] Gerhard Ebeling, God and Word (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 48-49.

this new reality is both unique and final. Francis Pieper has noted that there are but two religions in the world: the religion of the Law, which is of human origin, and the religion of the Gospel, which is the truth that God himself has revealed to men.[25] The Christian claims that in this revelation lies the ultimate meaning of existence. Men have proposed many different ways by which they can communicate with God, compel him to act, and propitiate his anger, but the Gospel outlines a new reality where God takes the initiative, seeks man, and freely offers to man a new relationship with himself on the basis of Christ's all availing sacrifice on the cross.

Because of the many different perceptions and expressions of reality that exist in the cultures of the world, it is difficult to determine what the real, significant and ultimate differences are. Only by looking closely at the very center of a people's worldview is it possible to discover the basic assumptions that dictate the shape of the reality in which people live. At the very center of a people's existence is a cosmology of power sources.[26] Here, people identify and classify the significant powers that impinge upon them as well as the dynamics of how man is able to relate with and appeal to those powers. It is at this level that the ultimate meaning of

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[25] Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), pp. 19-21.

[26] Jacobs, p. 7.

existence is contained. All other aspects of life are structured by the cultural presuppositions about and conceptualizations of who the gods are and the nature of their relationships to men. Essential transformations in the worldview of any group of people must begin at the center and not at the periphery.[27]

It is precisely at the center that Christianity is different in a critical way. The Gospel places the creator God firmly in the center of all history. He himself is the power that calls all things into being and controls the destiny of all life. He cannot be manipulated by the endeavors of man. On the contrary, he has acted decisively in history to reverse the desperate situation of man by offering up his only Son as a sacrifice for the sins of all. The reality that is established upon this fundamental truth can only be grasped by faith. This faith is not a matter of knowledge (in the scientific sense) and so does not enter into competition with knowledge. Rather, as Gerhard Ebeling says,

> Faith has its proper place where it is a case of understanding reality. And indeed, understanding reality as a whole . . . the experience that at one particular point everything stands or falls together. . . . Before this reality unbelief must pass away. For unbelief is at bottom hatred of reality. . . . Faith is at bottom nothing else but praise of the Creator.[28]

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[27] Kraft, pp. 362-63.

[28] Gerhard Ebeling, Word and Faith (London: SCM Press, 1963), pp. 384-85.

In a sense, then, faith is a kind of knowledge--the knowledge of concrete reality. Faith is the "experience of being grasped by God's indubitable reality, the actual knowing of him by whom we are fully known, the actual resting in him who made us for himself."[29] Faith penetrates beyond and beneath what is visible and can be perceived to the ultimate center of reality--God himself. By faith, then, man is able to truly apprehend reality and to understand the actual relationship between man and God.

The key to this reality is God and the ultimate criterion for determining this new reality is in Jesus Christ. St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, spells out clearly why man stands under God's judgment. God has made himself known (Rom 1:19) so that the knowledge of God is not a possibility, but rather the inexorable reality under which the whole world stands.[30] Therefore, man's lost situation is not a result of his ignorance of God, but the result of having rejected and suppressed the knowledge he had. Man's sin is unbelief and idolatry--refusing to say yes to what God has revealed and instead "exchanging the truth about God for a lie" (Rom. 1:25). The Gospel exposes this lie, this false reality, and clearly reveals in Christ the God who belongs in the very center of man's life.

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[29] John Knox, Myth and Truth (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1964), p. 12.

[30] Gunther Bornkamm, Early Christian Experience (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 33.

Placing God back into the center of a people's world-view, as the Gospel does, has obvious implications for every other aspect of life. The goals, themes and values of that culture will reflect the more fundamental change at the center like the ripple effect of a stone thrown in the center of a quiet pool. Placing God in the center forces a re-alignment of man's life within a new framework of significance. As Eugene Nida has noted, conversion results in a radical alteration of one's value system.[31] Paul said that because of Christ the things he once valued could only be considered refuse (Phil. 3:7-8). When man is taken out of the center and replaced by God, then values such as love, grace, mercy and forgiveness take on new significance and indeed may come to be recognized for the first time. In the tribal world, the giving of gifts is most often reciprocal--gifts are given with the understanding that a return gift must follow. The Gospel exposes man to a God who gives freely as an act of his love. His gift is of such a nature that man cannot begin to reciprocate. Jacobs has noted, however, that a new Christian community usually moves its value matrix toward the values they see expressed in the Scriptures as a result of nurture in the Word and not of conversion.[32] The primary change must occur first at the very center where man recognizes and establishes relationships

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[31]Eugene Nida, Message and Mission (South Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1960), p. 79.

[32]Jacobs, p. 10.

with the powers in his world.

An encounter with the Gospel that results in a conversion also involves a reorientation of man's social consciousness. Stephen Crites has described how significant the narrative or sacred story is in awakening the consciousness of the individual to the social matrix and symbolic system in which he lives.[33] Because man's story defines his orientation to reality,

> a conversion or a social revolution that actually transforms consciousness requires a traumatic change in a man's story. The stories within which he has awakened to consciousness must be undermined, and in the identification of his personal story through a new story, both the drama of his experience and his style of action must be reorientated. Conversion is reawakening, a second awakening of consciousness. His style must change steps, he must dance to a new rhythm. Not only his past and future, but the very cosmos in which he lives is strung in a new way.[34]

A significant aspect of this reorientation of consciousness is the addition of an eschatological dimension to history. The tribal man who understands time to be a cyclical, repeatable process is confronted by the Scriptural concept where time has a beginning and will have an end. The idea of cyclic time must be abandoned. Yahweh does not "manifest himself in cosmic time (like the gods of other religions) but in a historical time, which is irreversible."[35]

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[33]Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience," Journal of American Academy of Religion 39 (1971): 304-306.

[34]Ibid., p. 307.

[35]Eliade, p. 110.

The Christian calendar calls to mind and rehearses the sacred events over and over, but they are always understood as events that belong in a historical framework and that have shaped the entire process of history. The Gospel places man in a reality where God moves and acts through history toward an end that he himself has shaped and for which he himself has planned. As a tribal man discovers through the Gospel that his own history must be related to the events of salvation history and that those sacred events have powerful implications for his own life, his understanding of reality becomes radically altered and the eschatological dimension of history reshapes his own conceptions of time. For the Christian, time begins anew with the birth of Christ, for "the Incarnation establishes a new situation of man in the cosmos."[36]

A New Language For A New Reality

Ebeling has pointed out that the whole question of truth arises only because man possesses the gift of language.[37] It is only because man can describe reality that there can be a question of the validity of his description. With language, the categories of truth or falsehood become meaningful; therefore, a fundamental purpose of language is to tell the truth. Falsehood is a misuse and corruption of language. Telling the truth means in the first instance

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[36] Ibid., p. 111.

[37] Ebeling, God and Word, p. 22.

to "set reality into words."[38] As man's understanding of reality grows, so does his language. As new fields of endeavor are conquered by man, he formulates new fields of language to manipulate and utilize that knowledge. Whenever man's reality is partial or incomplete, his language must also necessarily be partial and incomplete. All men who stand outside of that personal relationship with God which is mediated by Jesus Christ have a false and corrupted understanding of reality and a language yet to be brought to completion.

It is for this reason that the Word of God always confronts man as his adversary. It does not as Ebeling says,

> confirm and strengthen us in what we think we are and as what we wish to be taken for. It negates our nature, which has fallen prey to illusion . . . this is the way the word draws us into concord and peace with God.[39]

The Word of God confronts man constantly with the truth about reality that exposes the corruption and perversion in which men live. The Word of God calls man both to acknowledge his own alienation from the truth and to accept a new reality which has been constructed by God's grace. In this new reality, man finds his "old" language to be inadequate and insufficient. Like old wineskins that are incapable of containing new wine, the forms and

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[38] Ibid., p. 23.

[39] Ebeling, Theological Theory of Language, p. 17.

symbols of the "old" language simply cannot contain the vitality and freshness of the new that has broken in on the old.

Jesus of Nazareth broke into the world of speech of his time with a powerful utterance that led people to marvel at his authority. He gave a new dynamic and power to the spoken word and initiated a new world of meaning that spread throughout his society.[40] The power he unleashed in the Gospel was creative in both life and thought. It was as though,

> the finger of God touched the world . . . in a new day of creation. It was as though a spark had been struck between heaven and earth which gave the first community a new and blinding light on existence and which changed the face of the world.[41]

In any other time as well, the coming of the Gospel promises an equally transforming revolution. It is always the advent of a new reality, the opening up of a new dimension of man's awareness that leads to renewal and enrichment of language. When the Word of God comes into language, "language itself is redeemed and with it man's relation to reality."[42]

The advent of the Gospel into the lives of people and the subsequent transformation of their reality signals the

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[40] Amos Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 17.

[41] Amos Wilder, New Testament Faith for Today (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), p. 56.

[42] Robert W. Funk, Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 56.

renewal of language. But the new language that is the vehicle for this new reality is not a sacred or holy language. It is not a language never before spoken, but rather the vernacular. It is the language of the marketplace and the barrack room. It is earthed in the commonness of ordinary life.[43] But the ordinary, common language that must be used to proclaim the new reality is itself transformed by the new rhetorical power of the Gospel. The Gospel always meets man where he is, but it is also always a new word that liberates both man and his speech.

When the cross-cultural advocate of the Gospel seeks to proclaim the new reality of God's grace and redemptive action in the words and thought-patterns of the receptors, he finds both poverty and richness in the language vehicle he uses. On the one hand, concepts and symbols that are capable of adequately expressing the grace and love of God, his forgiveness, the mystery of redemption, and the meaning of the resurrection will be lacking. On the other hand, the genius of every language is its ability to express ideas that have never before been conceived. He must search for analogies in the life and language of the people that can at least begin to convey the radical newness of the Gospel. It is the transforming power of the Gospel itself that effects changes in the men and women

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[43]John McIntyre, "Frontiers of Meaning," Scottish Journal of Theology 10 (1957):129-30.

who hear and in the language they employ, so that gradually the old vehicle of language is modified and enriched by its new referent into a powerful and adequate tool. Samuel Laeuchli has observed that the man who spoke about the foolishness of his language (1 Cor. 1:21) was the man with the most powerful, lively and original speech of the early church.[44]

If one were to describe God's love in terms of the love of a father for his children, that analogical use of language might allow people to begin to grasp the radical newness of God's love. However, once that application has been made and understood, and once people begin to understand the radical nature of God's love, then that love becomes the logically primary reference for love and the love of a father for his children becomes secondary. In that way, the whole concept of love itself has been renewed. It is that kind of pattern that characterizes the fundamental transformation of language that takes place in the context of the new reality of the Gospel.

The new speech of the Gospel also represents a purification of language, a filling up of the emptiness and hollowness that characterizes the language of those who stand outside the reality of God's revelation. The writer of Ecclesiastes groans (1:8) under the burden of the boundlessness of man's loquacity that still produces

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[44]Samuel Laeuchli, The Language of Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 246.

nothing but vanity.[45] A language exposed to the purity and light of the Gospel will necessarily be purified and enlightened. The richness of the language of faith both fills up and perfects the inadequacies of every language it touches.

The language of faith is always the result of a clash between two worlds. The revealed reality of the Gospel confronts the reality in which people live and there the languages of each world meet. The language of each people is always a sinful language that reflects the brokenness of man's condition. It is language that stands in need of redemption, and which receives this in its encounter with the new reality of the Gospel.[46] The freshness and vitality of the Gospel liberates the corrupted speech of men without God and allows them to sing new songs (Ps. 98:1).

The "new" language of faith is a product of that clash between the common language of men and the fresh, explosive power of the Gospel. Because the decisive act of transformation has taken place in Christ, the birth of Christianity itself is what Austin Farrer has called "a visible rebirth of images."[47] This rebirth was precipitated by the thought and action of Jesus Christ. In Christ, all the powerful images of the Old Testament (Messiah, Wisdom, Son of Man,

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[45] Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric, p. 31.

[46] McIntyre, p. 135.

[47] Austin Farrer, A Rebirth of Images (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949), p. 14.

Suffering Servant) were fused and transformed, so that they might be understood in a new light.

The language of faith is heavily dependent upon the language of Scripture; it is always canonical language.[48] The roots of faith are always deep in God's revelation to man. The unique ways in which the authors of Scripture have expressed their inspired understanding of God constantly shape the expression of faith in new languages. The early Christians of the New Testament era reached back immediately to their Old Testament roots to formulate and make relevant the Gospel to those they addressed. Their efforts still guide that process today. The one who proclaims the Gospel to the world today stands first with his feet in the New Testament faith, but always at the point where the Gospel interacts with the world, so that his speech has both relevance and Christian roots. Central to the language of faith is always the experience of the resurrection. It was Christ's triumph over death that shaped, more than anything else, the life and language of the early Christian community. One has only to look closely at the Easter hymns of any church to appreciate the profound effect that event still produces. It is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead that clearly signals the new reality of the Gospel, and the new language of faith that expresses that reality has its focus in that event.

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[48]Laeuchli, p. 239.

CHAPTER IV

COMMUNICATING THE GOSPEL: REFINING THE LANGUAGE

Paul: The Gospel for the Gentiles

When under the guidance and impetus of the Holy Spirit the early Christians began to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles, they found it necessary to "translate" that message into the context of those who were becoming hearers of this new message for the first time. They were deeply involved in a process that has been more recently designated as contextualization. Contextualization is the process of making the Gospel message meaningful, understandable and persuasive in the idiom of the language and culture of the receptors. Since language is the primary instrument of communication, the formulation of that message is critical to its hearing. The message of the Gospel itself has eternal significance and universal application: the content of that message never changes. However, there is a dynamic relationship between the forms, symbols and images which convey a particular message and the context in which it is heard, so that effective contextualization results in the truth being perceived and understood in its absolute sense by the hearers in their own context. True and proper

evangelism preserves the content of the Gospel, while the mode of expression is tuned to the ears of the recipients.[1]

The Jewish Christians who tried to bridge the cultural barriers between their world and the world of the Gentiles discovered that many of the linguistic symbols that had deep meaning and significance for those with their roots in the Old Testament did not strike the same responsive chords in their Hellenistic neighbors. There were elements in the religious vocabulary of Judaism which had no true parallels in Greek, and translation offered problems of incredible difficulty. The teaching of Jesus, delivered in Aramaic and wholly Jewish in its presuppositions, made use of terms and themes which were grounded in the Old Testament inheritance and which could not easily be made intelligible to the non-Jewish world.[2] Such terms and symbols quite simply had no frame of reference in the Hellenistic world.

It was not the intention of those early cross-cultural advocates of the Gospel to produce a theology that would be truly Hellenistic. They were motivated by a desire to proclaim the Gospel in such a way that men could understand the true implications of its message. They did not seek to remove the scandal of the Gospel, but so to present it

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[1]Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1970), p. 128.

[2]F. W. Beare, "New Testament Christianity and the Hellenistic World," The Communication of the Gospel in New Testament Times (London: Talbot Press, 1961), p. 61.

in terms that were meaningful to their hearers, that the real scandal of the Gospel could be perceived and faced.[3] It was this primary missionary thrust of the early church which stamped its proclamation with a remarkable flexibility and adaptability. F. W. Beare highlights this character of the New Testament church in this way:

> The swift and bold movements of thought which are reflected in the New Testament documents, the freedom with which New Testament Christianity adapted its Gospel, sprung from the soil of the Old Testament . . . to forms of expression and frames of thought which enabled it to challenge effectively the Hellenistic world--this reflects the essentially dynamic character of Christianity itself, its inherent capacity for becoming all things to all men, for developing new forms of thought and new modes of expression in response to the changing environment of the world to which it ministers. . . . They were called to carry the Gospel of Christ into world which did not understand many of its central symbols; they did not shrink from finding new symbols and from enlarging the whole framework of their thought, that they might by all means bring the message of God's salvation in Christ home to their hearers.[4]

The major impetus and need for contextualization always grows out of a missionary situation. It was Paul's desire to "win as many as possible" (1 Cor. 9:19) that drove him to be adaptive and responsive to the needs of his hearers. Translating or contextualizing the message does not occur in a vacuum, it takes place in the context of a serious need to make the Gospel understood so that men can be confronted, not with its strangeness, but with its scandal. God himself is supracultural and his revelation is for all

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[3]Green, p. 142.

[4]Beare, p. 72.

men and for all time. But because God wanted to speak to people in a specific time and culture, he used the forms of language and conceptual patterns that would be meaningful to them. He used a specific form without binding his eternal message to that form.

Morris Inch, in his booklet, Doing Theology Across Cultures, makes two valuable observations about the process of communicating the Gospel in a cross-cultural situation. First, that one ought to expect a continuity between man's former experience and the Christian experience and second, that he ought to also anticipate a discontinuity between man's previous experience and the good news of Christ.[5]

The continuity to which he refers might perhaps be better explained as the potential that exists to formulate the Gospel message in such a way that it can be understood in the light of men's past experience. Concepts can be borrowed from the culture of the recipients, filled with a new content and set firmly into the context of the total story of revelation, so that the substance of the message is not changed, but rather made more meaningful in the new environment.[6] Jesus himself took a number of significant concepts from the Old Testament tradition, such as

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[5]Morris Inch, Doing Theology Across Cultures (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), pp. 30-31.

[6]W. A. Visser't Hooft, "Accommodation--True and False," South East Asia Journal of Theology 8 (January 1967):10.

"Messiah," "suffering servant," and "Son of Man" and re-interpreted them so that in the context of his total ministry they took on new meaning. John took the philosophical Greek term "logos" and transformed it in a new context so that it might reveal the Son of God in a unique and powerful way. Paul borrowed "soter," "mysteria," "Kupios" and other terms from the Hellenistic world and made them bearers of the Gospel message.

The advocate of the Gospel must also expect a discontinuity between the Gospel and the rest of man's experience. Paul noted that in the past, God had allowed men to go their own way (Acts 14:16) and that he had overlooked the times of ignorance (Acts 17:30), but that now with the coming of His Son he called all men to repentance. The breaking in of the Gospel inaugurates a new age by announcing a radically new reality. Men can comprehend it only in the context of their own cultural situation, but at the same time, that message assaults the reality in which they exist and thoroughly transforms it. Man is not cut off from his past by the Gospel, but neither is he allowed to continue living in it. The Gospel allows man to reinterpret his past in its new light. This true light of the Gospel rejects any syncretistic mix between the old and the new; instead the old must surrender to the new.

It is in this surrender to the new that a unique expression is allowed to emerge. The language of the early Christians occupies a unique position between the Old

Testament and the Hellenistic world. Samuel Laeuchli describes it as a language that it

> rooted in the Hebraic, touched by the Greek . . . existing in a delicate borderline situation. One is tempted to call it syncretistic, yet this generalization does not catch the essential which lies in the combination of Hebraic primacy plus Hellenistic infiltration, in the transformation of the concept of the old covenant into the Christological fulfillment, and in the transmutation of the Greek concept into a biblical theological concept. . . . The axis of the gospel lies on a razor's edge between conflicting worlds.[7]

The impulse to communicate the Gospel meaningfully to a new world always creates a tension that is the result of a struggle to witness to the uniqueness of the Gospel and yet establish contact with the world. The advocate of the Gospel is torn in two directions, the "identification creating a bridge of syncretism, the uniqueness creating polemical speech."[8] This tension, however difficult, is a creative tension in which the Spirit of God works as he gives utterance to the messenger. In this creative tension can be forged a new synthesis that enables the Gospel to come alive to people who have never heard it before. The messenger must speak to the world and yet his message also takes issue with the world. In the tension of this situation, a new expression of faith is forged and a new language of faith comes into existence.

The Apostle Paul was involved throughout his ministry

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[7]Samuel Laeuchli, The Language of Faith (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 169.

[8]Ibid., p. 171.

in the tension of such a situation. Although he was a Hebrew of Hebrews (Phil. 3:5), he understood himself to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13). Paul was bi-cultural, a man who was at home in two different worlds. He was able to appreciate the diverse styles, norms and values of both cultures and be comfortable in both without surrendering his own identity and mission.[9] He criticized Peter for requiring the Gentiles to abandon their own cultural identity when he was willing to accommodate himself to that world (Gal. 2:14).

Paul grew up in a context in which two significantly different cultures flourished side by side. Judaism was in close contact with the Gentile world, from the time of Alexander onwards.[10] Judaism was not particularly aggressive in its missionary thrust into the Greco-Roman world, but the translation of the Old Testament into Greek, the Septuagint, at least made possible the communication of their faith in the language of the Hellenistic people. The Septuagint also provided the bridge between the Old and New Testaments. The Koine Greek of the New Testament was derived from the Hebrew world of the Old Testament through the medium of Septuagint Greek.[11] Paul was certainly the

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[9]Inch, pp. 27-28.

[10]Wilfred Knox, St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles (Cambridge: University Press, 1939), p. 9.

[11]J. W. Wevers, "Septuagint," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 4 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 4:277.

beneficiary of this translation in his mission work to the Gentiles, using both the vocabulary and thought structure of Hellenistic Judaism to produce a unique and meaningful expression of the Gospel.[12] Paul was what W. A. Visser't Hooft called a "frontiersman," a man in "dialogue with two worlds," who did not sacrifice the substance for the sake of intelligibility, but challenged the hellenistic world from within by placing spiritual dynamite in the midst of its life.[13]

Paul did not set out with the theological intention of systematizing the Gospel for the Gentiles, but only intending to proclaim the foolishness of that message of the cross (1 Cor. 1:23-25). Nevertheless, as Wilfred Knox has pointed out, Paul was perfectly willing to use the language of the wisdom of that world to express the Gospel effectively.[14] Paul was so anchored in the Biblical soil that he could carry on his dialogue without being unfaithful to the substance of the Gospel. He was what Visser't Hooft called a "Hebraic fifth-column" in the Greek religious and cultural world.[15]

Paul stood firmly on the content of the kerygma that

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[12]Jules Moreau, Language and Religious Language (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 28.

[13]Visser't Hooft, pp. 10-11.

[14]Wilfred Knox, p. 90.

[15]Visser't Hooft, p. 11.

he had received (1 Cor. 15:3), but exhibited a freedom to be flexible and adaptive in the form of his proclamation. C. H. Dodd has noted that a survey of the apostolic preaching demonstrates two main facts,

> first, that within the New Testament there is an immense range of variety in the interpretation that is given to the kerygma; and secondly, that in all such interpretation, the essential elements of the original kerygma are steadily kept in view. Indeed, the farther we move from the primitive modes of expression, the more decisively is the central purport of it affirmed.[16]

Wilfred Knox has been criticized for arguing in his book, St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles, that Paul was "opportunist in his theology, and that the development of his mind was historically conditioned by his audience."[17] His essential thesis has been challenged, but the fact that Paul was adaptive and flexible in his ministry was a conscious attempt by Paul to be "all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:22). Michael Green has shown that Paul was prepared to alter the wrappings of his Gospel in order to better reveal its contents. He points out that,

> there is a fundamental difference between the defender of orthodoxy, who is anxious to maximize the gap between authentic Christianity and all deviations from it, and the apologist who is concerned to minimize the gap between himself and his potential converts.[18]

Henry Chadwick describes Paul's genius as an apologist

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[16] C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), p. 74.

[17] H. Chadwick, "All Things to All Men," New Testament Studies 1 (1954):274.

[18] Green, p. 117.

as "his astonishing ability to reduce to an apparent vanishing point the gulf between himself and his converts and yet to 'gain' them for the Christian gospel."[19] Even though Paul does adopt new ways of expressing the faith for his Hellenistic hearers, he always remains firmly rooted in the basis of the Christian faith--Christ, who died and was raised. Only from that center does Paul speak and to that center he always returns.[20] He demonstrates an unshakeable will to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5).

It is not possible within the scope of this paper to adequately demonstrate the wide-ranging linguistic flexibility that Paul demonstrated as he transcribed the Gospel from its Palestinian roots to the Hellenistic world, but a brief survey of Paul's linguistic adaptations can help one to appreciate the nature of this process in which Paul was a significant participant. That Paul's proclamation was not merely a repetition of Jesus' preaching of the in-breaking kingdom of God is immediately obvious. Indeed, Paul has been accused of having falsified Christianity and of having turned Jesus' good tidings into a gospel of redemption, replete with Jewish ideas and Hellenistic

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[19] Chadwick, p. 275.

[20] Daniel von Allmen, "The Birth of Theology," International Review of Mission 64 (January 1975):47.

mythologies.[21] Such charges fail to discern the fundamental continuity between Jesus himself and Paul's proclamation of what God had accomplished in Jesus Christ to save all mankind, and the fact that many of the forms of the Gospel Jesus preached would have been meaningless in the context of Paul's preaching.

Jesus was to the Jewish Christians the promised Messiah whom God had exulted to his right hand. The Greek word for Messiah was Christ, but in the Gentile mission "Christ" began to lose its specific Jewish notion of Messiah and instead became a sort of surname for Jesus.[22] The characteristic title that Paul gives to Jesus is "lord," a title that was full of religious significance in the Hellenistic world.[23] In that world, there were many lords and many gods, and Paul's concern was to give the Gospel an expression that would directly challenge the powers at the center of the Hellenistic worldview. Proclaiming Jesus as Lord allowed Paul to fuse his soteriological concerns with the cosmological concerns of the Greeks that he might emphasize the lordship of Christ over all the powers and principalities of the cosmos. Chadwick notes that Paul was continually able to outclass his opponents on their own ground as he did with the Colossians and their obsession

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[21] Gunther Bornkamm, Paul, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 109.

[22] Green, p. 115.

[23] Beare, p. 61.

with the "things above,"

> Paul will not discourage their upward look, but wishes to direct it even higher to the very summit of the hierarchy, 'where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. . . . ' There is a tendency to use the vocabulary of the opposition in a different and disinfected sense. The allusive use of such technical terms as "pleroma" is intended to convey the impression that the apostle has nothing to learn from the Gnostic teachers . . . it is all in Christ.[24]

Paul's concern to have Christ confront the "powers" of the Hellenistic world also led him to cast a new light on how sin could be understood. In Judaim, sin is uniformly transgression.[25] Paul made use of that concept of sin (Rom. 1-3), but he also spoke of sin as if it were a power that entered the world through one man (Rom. 5:12), condemned all men (Rom. 5:18), and ruled over man and enslaved him (Rom. 5:21, 6:16). One must be freed from the power of sin, then, by being buried with Christ into death (Rom. 6:3-4) so that one might become one with Christ in new life and under his lordship. That Paul may have been concerned to express the Gospel in such a way as to make contact with the Hellenistic mystery religions with his emphasis upon the union of the believer with the Christ who died and rose is little more than conjecture; however, by giving emphasis to this theme in Romans and Colossians,[26]

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[24] Chadwick, p. 272.

[25] E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 546-47.

[26] Von Allman, p. 45.

he allowed the Greeks to hear the Gospel in a way that both made contact with their world and changed it decisively at the very center.

The translation problems faced by the early Christian missionaries can be understood to some extent by looking at some of the terms and themes from the Old Testament inheritance, which made the Gospel meaningful for the Jewish people, but were basically meaningless in the Hellenistic context. Key themes such as "Messiah," "Son of man" and "Kingdom of God," had no potency to the people of the Hellenistic world. Consequently, St. Paul "never uses the title 'Son of Man;' he makes almost no use of the notion of messiahship; and he scarecely ever speaks of 'the Kingdom of God.'"[27]

The notion of the covenant is one of the central themes of the Old Testament and the idea of being in a covenant-relationship with God had profound meaning for the Jewish people, including those who became Christians. However, the Gentile-Christians could not find a similar depth of meaning in this idea and virtually abandoned the whole idea of "New Covenant" in the Jewish Christian sense. The Septuagint rendered the Hebrew "b'rith" with Greek word "diatheke" which in ordinary Greek usage means "a will," a testamentary disposition of property.[28] Beare points out how both Paul

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[27] Beare, p. 61.

[28] Ibid., p. 70.

and the author of Hebrews, who knew the Old Testament dimensions of the Covenant well, also took "diatheke" in the Greek sense of a will and

> made use of legal analogies drawn from the principles of succession to property in human affairs (Gal. 3:15-18; Heb. 9:16-17). Here we find two men of Hebrew race and training, writing Greek, using a Greek word in a sense derived from Hebrew religion, and mingling with that a Greek sense of the same word which owes nothing to the Hebrew at all.[29]

Paul also used the metaphor of "huiothesia," adoption, to help the Gentiles understand the nature of their new intimate relationship with God. Adoption was common in Roman society, but not a Jewish concept at all.[30] It became a marvelous tool expressing the Gospel, communicating God's initiative in calling those with no relationship to himself into his own family and making them heirs to all his promises. For the many slaves of the Hellenistic world, the metaphor of "apolutrosis," implying redemption through ransom, must have had a powerful meaning. Paul's motivation for this contextualization of the Gospel was simple--to express the Gospel meaningfully to his hearers so that they could understand its message in their own context and by the power of the Spirit respond to God in faith.

Reinterpreting the Gospel and casting it in new forms was necessary if the Gospel were to win the culture of the Greeks for the service of Christ. That there are dangers

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[29]Ibid., p. 71.

[30]Green, p. 117.

and risks involved in this process is clear, but as von Allman points out:

> In Paul's writings the heretics are not to be found among the Hellenistic progressives but rather among the Judaizing reactionaries who feel themselves obliged to denounce the foolhardiness or the rank infidelity of the 'translation' project upon which the church has become engaged in Hellenistic territory.[31]

The risk of distorting the content, the risk of syncretism, is real and must be faced. But the alternative is a meaningless message that covers up the real scandal of the Gospel. The early missionaries took the risk, and insofar as they were centered in Christ, his death and resurrection, God honored their witness.[32] Their witness turned the world upside down because it was a comprehensible message, a message that could penetrate their lives and lead men and women to the salvation which is in Christ.

The Gospel for Melanesia

When the Gospel was first preached to the Melanesian cultures in the late 19th century, the missionaries discovered that the context of their proclamation was unique and demanded their careful attention if their hearers were to understand this new message. After almost a century of Gospel proclamation, the people of Papua New Guinea, to a large extent, have embraced Christianity. But how deeply

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[31] Von Allman, p. 49.

[32] Green, p. 143.

the Gospel message has penetrated the lives and cultures of these diverse groups of people is difficult to say. Matthew Kelty, a Roman Catholic priest who spent more than thirty years in Papua New Guinea, has pointed out that if the Gospel is to truly enter the heart and life of the people, it must respond to the primaeval myths that rise from the depth of man and take various shapes and forms among different peoples. The Gospel must not crush these myths, but answer them, fulfill them and supplant them with something richer and more complete.[33] He goes on to describe the process necessary to allow a meaningful faith to grow:

> To be sure, the darkness and catastrophe will still be there, but it will be filled with a presence of God that will be at work bringing into being a new people, a new world. . . . If we can show how every myth and legend has its blossoming in Christ, every dream its answer, every voice and vision its true source--better, if we can share a life that is a participation in the great drama of God in relation to man through all history, through our own time, my own time, my own life, we cannot have lived for nothing.[34]

This is not to say that somehow man the messenger must supply the power that produces faith. The Word of God itself possesses the power to bring people to salvation (Rom. 1:16), but unless that Word of God which is both Law and Gospel really confronts and encounters people in the uniqueness of their own lives, unless the message can be

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[33]Matthew Kelty, "Dreams and Visions and Voices," Point 1 (1977):15.

[34]Ibid., p. 19.

linked in an intimate way to the total life of the people, then the chances of it being adequately accepted are diminished. Establishing links between the traditional and the Biblical gives greater impact to the new message.[35] At times, this relationship will show the new to be the fulfillment of the old; at times, the very antithesis of the old. The continuity and discontinuity of the Gospel to the traditional are part of the tension in which the proclamation takes place. Charles Taber prefers the term indigenization to describe the process whereby a message which is initially alien takes on a shape more congenial to the total receptor context. Good indigenization, by making the message intelligible in terms of receptor categories of thought and imagery and relevant to the existential concerns of the receptor people, sharpens the focus of the Gospel; bad indigenization diffuses and confuses the Gospel.[36]

One of the primary means of establishing links between the Gospel message and the traditional culture is by taking traditional cultural and religious concepts and baptizing them with new meaning. In order to avoid a false accommodation, these traditional concepts must be re-interpreted, set in a new context and filled with Biblical content.[37]

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[35]Donald McGregor, "New Guinea Myths and Scriptural Similarities," Missiology 2 (January 1974):43-44.

[36]Charles Taber, "The Limits of Indigenization in Theology," Missiology 6 (January 1978):54.

[37]Visser't Hooft, p. 13.

Wendy Flannery has pointed out that in every symbolic system there will be found certain "master" or "dominant" symbols or clusters of symbols that have a polysemic or multivocal character.[38] Victor Turner elaborates that such symbols

> exhibit the properties of condensation, unification of disparate referents, and polarization of meaning. A single symbol, in fact, represents many things at the same time: it is multivocal, not univocal. Its referents are not all of the same logical order but are drawn from many domains of social experience and ethical evaluation.[39]

These symbols are in a sense the "molecules" of myth or ritual. They grow out of the peculiar worldview of a given people and give shape and identity to that cultural group. Flannery has advocated a more extensive exploration of these "master" symbols in the Melanesian context so that a more contextual expression of the Gospel might take place. Of these symbols she says,

> Due to their properties of condensation and the plurality of their referential base, the symbols are not semantically static but can undergo shifts, induced by elements in the context in which they operate, whereby they attract and lose meanings. Hence, though they do possess the quality of reflecting the social context, they also have a capacity for combination which allows them to be the generators of new meanings. This dynamic is clearly illustrated in Melanesian myths which bear obvious traces of culture-contact.[40]

Theodor Ahrens has pointed out that in the Melanesian

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[38] Wendy Flannery, "Mythic Traditions," Point 2 (1978): 113.

[39] Victor Turner, The Ritual Process (Middlesex, England: Pelican Books, 1969), p. 48.

[40] Flannery, p. 113.

context, Christianity has been from the very beginning "thoroughly indigenized," not necessarily by the proclaimers, but by those who listened. It was constantly being reconceptualized by the receptors in terms of their worldview and their situation as they sought to relate the message to their world and in their own categories.[41] This kind of reconceptualization is necessary, especially if the Gospel message is not consciously linked to key traditional themes in its presentation.

In considering the task of communicating the Gospel in a Melanesian context, one must begin with that particular context and its unique themes, values and symbols that provide both cohesion and meaning for that cultural group. The dominant themes and symbols are the focus for the creation of new meanings, the points at which the Gospel can enter the culture in an authentic, meaningful fashion.[42] Melanesian cultures are extremely diverse and yet there are values and symbols that are common to them all. Some of the more predominant symbols are blood, water, knowledge, power, the big-man, exchange of pigs and the staple food (either yam, taro or sweet potato). These dominant symbols are linked to every aspect of Melanesian life and are linguistic _loci_ for its unique

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[41] Theodor Ahrens, "Local Church and Theology in Melanesia," _Point_ 2 (1978):141.

[42] Philip Gibbs, "Blood and Life in a Melanesian Context," _Point_ 1 (1977):166.

expression of reality.

One of the central values in Melanesian cultures is the quest for salvation. Some of the most significant aspects of this anticipated salvation are: 1) a reversal of unfortunate decisions and aspects of the past; 2) the beginning of a new age; 3) the intervention of the "Ancestor" who is a member, and yet not a member of the group awaiting salvation; 4) the renewal of broken relationships in the community and with the ancestors; 5) participation in the power of the ancestors and deities; 6) the true communal nature of this new life.[43] Their hopes for salvation share commonalities with peoples from every part of the globe and readily suggest points with which the Gospel of Jesus Christ could establish effective contact.

It is not possible to demonstrate thoroughly how the expression of the Gospel has been decontextualized in the Melanesian context, but by looking at some of the symbols that have been utilized in this process, it can be seen that there are numerous possibilities for linking the new to the old. A significant aspect of the Melanesian hope for salvation is the expectation of the return of the ancestor who will inaugurate the new age. Christians have identified this ancestor with Christ, who brings salvation

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[43] Cf. John Strelan, "Our Common Ancestor," Catalyst 5 (1975):33-38, and Gernot Fugmann, "Salvation Expressed in a Melanesian Context," Point 1 (1977):122-28.

to his people by his decisive action in history. John Strelan has rightly pointed out that although there is perhaps a point of contact here for the Gospel, there is also a fundamental difference between the New Testament and Melanesian ideology. Melanesian religious movements, such as cargo cults, have made the salvation that comes through the intervention of the ancestor dependent upon the proper ritualistic preparation of the right moment for that return, which promises restoration and renewal of all things.[44] In Melanesian culture, the mediation of an important man, a "Big-man," between the members of the group and the supernatural powers is essential. The Pidgin translation of "Kurios" as "Bikpela" (literally "the Big one") has definitely linked Jesus Christ to this man of authority and power so important to the realization of "salvation" ("i stap gut," "gutpela sindaun") among the people. Local languages have also established this link linguistically. The Ipili translated "Kurios" as "Amango," their word to describe the most powerful and influential leader who could establish a "gutpela sindaun" for his people. In linking our Lord to this concept, they both deepened the dimensions of their own traditional understanding of salvation, and made Christ the fulfillment of their own deeply-felt aspirations. Ipili hymns sung in the traditional style and the prayers of the people are full of

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[44] Strelan, "Our Common Ancestor," p. 37.

the rich imagery associated with the Big-man, the "Amango," who has both the power and love to rescue and deliver his people.

In Melanesian cultures, real knowledge which is received through tradition or revelation is a precious and often secret possession that allows certain individuals to assume a prophetic or messianic role.[45] The Pidgin term "save" has been associated with the special revelation given by God in Jesus Christ. Ipili Christians refer to those who are receiving instruction from God's Word as "mana mene," literally, those who are in a state of receiving knowledge or "mana." But "mana" for the Melanesian is more than what we understand knowledge to be. "Mana" is always related to power, the power to control and manipulate different dimensions of reality. The new "mana" or "save" brought by the missionaries has always been closely associated with Jesus Christ, and those who accept him as their "Amango" or "Bikpela" share in the "mana" that is new and promises a new reality.

An Enga myth about the first people relates the story of the first man and woman who lived in complete happiness and harmony. When their first child was born, a son, the father set out to fill his bamboo water container with the life-giving water that issued from a special spring. The

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[45] Theodor Ahrens, "Concepts of Power in a Melanesian and Biblical Perspective," Missiology 5 (April 1977):150.

"sky-people" had carefully instructed them to give this water to the child to drink before he nursed at his mother's breast. With equal force, the man reminded his wife before he left their house, not to nurse the child before he returned with the life-giving water. But the father was gone for a long time and the child cried incessantly, and at last, in desperation, the mother nursed her child. Shortly thereafter, the father returned to find the child nursing and in his anger, he threw down the water container, shattering it and allowing the precious water to seep into the ground.[46] Enga people understood the story of the fall of Adam and Eve as a fuller expression of a reality they already shared--man by his own fall no longer possessed the water of life and was condemned to death. Water is a powerful symbol in the Melanesian context that touches such values and meanings as life itself, refreshment, nourishment, growth, power, destruction, purification, grief and healing.[47] Jesus identified himself with the water of life that truly satisfies (John 4:10), and in numerous places, Scripture uses water as a symbol of God's gift of life to men (Rev. 21:6; 22:17; Is. 58:11; Jer. 2:13; and so forth). Such obvious links have helped Melanesians to grasp the Gospel in terms that they can readily understand.

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[46]First related to the author by Rev. Herbert Schaan in Papua New Guinea.

[47]Flannery, "Symbol and Myth in Melanesian Cultures," Missiology 7 (October 1979):442.

Rufus Pech has analyzed the theology of first generation Christians from the Madang area of Papua New Guinea by looking at its expression in the language of the people's hymns. The early hymnal and service book of the Bel speaking people was known as the Kanam Buk. The language of these hymns demonstrates clearly that the Madang Christians of the Lutheran Church were already in the first generation expressing their faith in traditional patterns and symbols that made it real and meaningful for them.[48] A baptismal hymn by Mileng of Karkar Island expresses the baptism of pagans as an emergence of men from the deep jungle into the light of open village neighborhoods; an "emergence from the lostness, mutual suspicion and estrangement into deliverance and wider, deeper fellowships."[49] The Bel word used to express the rescue and deliverance of Jesus is "tetazag ngiliag" used to describe being snatched and saved from the crocodile's mouth, the shark's jaw and from death by burning or drowning.[50] A confirmation hymn by Pah of Hardurem describes the Almighty as the "true circumcision-chief whose period of thorough instruction is climaxed by the rite of manhood." The blessings of the Lord's anointing transcends the ancient rite by bestowing

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[48] Rufus Pech, "An Early Indigenious Theology--Expressed in Worship," Point 1 (1977):87-121.

[49] Ibid., p. 90.

[50] Ibid., p. 103.

"lifegiving blessings."[51]

Blood is a powerful symbol in Melanesian life, understood both as a body substance that symbolizes life and as a bond that establishes relationships between people in society. Blood is significant in initiation rites, taboo regulations and a central part of religious rituals where it is shed and sprinkled in offerings made to the ancestral spirits.[52] The blood of Christ was also shed as an offering for the sins of the people and the effect of this perfect offering was to create a new relationship between God and those who in faith grasp God's promise of life. The Ipili word used to describe the clan grouping is "yame." Ipili Christians speak of becoming part of God's family (Gotena yame gulo atamakale) in baptism and through the redemptive action of Christ. Becoming part of a new family has traditional implications of obligations and responsibility which also help Christians to understand the life of the man who is now "in Christ." An Enga father must give payments to those who share the maternal substance of the child (mother's brothers) so as to recruit the child and in effect redeem the child from the maternal clan relationships in which he exists because of shared blood. It would be possible for the redemption effected by Christ in his death to be understood in Enga context not so much as satisfaction

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[51] Ibid., p. 92.

[52] Gibbs, p. 168.

for sin, but really an "at-one-ment," where the claims of death upon the sinner are cancelled and he is recruited to the clan of life in the Father.[53] Proclaiming the Gospel in this way could help to deepen and enrich the understanding of Christ's redemptive act among Enga Christians.

The Ipili translation of Galatians 1:4 draws upon a familiar theme of compensation and exchange that effects new peaceful relationships between warring clans to describe how Jesus delivered us from our sins (Jisas kasia auwa atanguyale umeaepia--Jesus died carrying our sins in exchange). That frequent ritual in traditional life could be more effectively utilized in the proclamation of the Gospel in order to enhance the Ipili Christians' comprehension of the salvific act. In Ipili, the phrase "ando atalane akali oko" (literally, "the man who customarily stands watch") is used to describe one who assumes responsibility over against the possessions of another, usually gardens or pigs. This phrase has frequently been applied to Christ and his lordship over Christians and the "kingdom of God" was very early translated as "Goteto yuu ando atalane oko" (literally, "the place where God himself rules and controls"). The use of this traditional concept and others in a new context served to facilitate the penetration of the Gospel into the real life situation of the people.

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[53]Ibid., p. 173.

Melanesians frequently use the imagery associated with repayment of debts (bekim dinau) to describe what Christ has done for them. "Jisas i bekim dinau bilong yumi" which means, "Jesus has paid our debts for us," has more connotations for Melanesians than its English equivalent has for Americans because debts in Melanesia are closely tied to relationships and the payment of debts (dinau) effects the restoration of broken relationships and restores harmony between the parties.

John Strelan has noted that the many messianic and millenerian movements in Melanesia, such as cargo cults, ought to be understood as expressions of deep-felt needs and longings.[54] The Gospel promises that wholeness, integrity and salvation are to be found only in relationship with Christ. Relating the Gospel more intimately to the needs of those searching for the salvation that comes through the return of "the ancestor," is a real challenge which Christianity must assume in Melanesia if the hopes and longings of the cargo cult movements are to be fulfilled in Christ.

Carl Loeliger has pointed out how the relationship between creation and salvation in both the Old and New Testaments (salvation involves a new creation--2 Cor. 5:17-18) ought to be emphasized more fully in the Gospel proclamation

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[54]Strelan, "Our Common Ancestor," p. 38.

in Melanesia.[55] Traditional Melanesian concepts of creation contain numerous symbols and themes that might be effectively utilized in the expression of God's saving activity in history.

Melanesian reconceptualizations of the Gospel that have already occured and those that are yet to come are often threatening to the advocates of the Gospel who have formulated their theology in a far different context. Ahrens insists that one must begin by acknowledging "primitive religiosity as a basic structure in the human mind" and then try to discover the critical power of the Gospel in that context.[56] The Christian message establishes contact with the traditional religion but also stands in judgment of it. Jesus compared the teacher of the Law who becomes a disciple of the kingdom to a homeowner who brings forth both new and old things from his storage room (Matt. 13:52). It is the new Gospel which transforms and reshapes the old patterns and concepts that they might become effective vehicles of the new.

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[55] Carl Loeliger, "Biblical Concepts of Salvation," Point 1 (1977):142-43.

[56] Ahrens, "Concepts of Power," p. 165.

CHAPTER V

MYTH AND METAPHOR: BRIDGES FOR TRANSFORMATION

Myth and the Integration of the New Story

It would not be possible to offer any general guidelines for the communication of the Gospel into the tribal world without first dealing with the nature and function of myth. Among the tribal peoples, the participation in myth and its associated perception of experience is immediate and largely uncritical.[1] Their consciousness is undifferentiated; they live their lives within myth. It was noted in an earlier chapter that the only possible perception of reality is that which is predicated in the symbol structure called language, and at the most fundamental level, it is myth that gives shape to language. Even if myth be broken, there is no way around it. One can only move through it and recognize the "mythic-linguistic given" with which one begins and which is the foundation of all intellectual activity.[2]

Because the tribal peoples still exist largely in a

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[1] W. Taylor Stevenson, "Myth and the Crisis of Historical Consciousness," Myth and the Crisis of Historical Consciousness, (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975):6.

[2] Ibid.

mythical world where historical consciousness has not yet emerged, their understanding of any new information communicated to them will be conditioned by the mythical framework of reality in which they live. It is not possible for them to simply shed their mythical perspective of reality and assume an historical perspective. Rather, the mythical will filter all new information so that it can be understood and interpreted in terms of the reality that myth has already established for them. This obviously has implications for the communication of the Gospel in a mythical world. Tribal peoples who hear the Biblical stories almost always identify and attempt to unify them with their own mythology. Both deal with the basic issues of life that are close to the heart and soul of the people.[3] Careful attention must be given to the way in which the Gospel is proclaimed, so that it can be seen to both make contact with the mythical and confront it with radicalness of a new reality. Brevard Childs' book, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament, develops the thesis that the Old Testament understanding of reality was in conflict with the mythical world of its time, but that it still was able to assimilate and reshape the form of myth so that it might be used in the service of God's revelation.[4] That same kind of process ought to take place

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[3]Donald McGregor, "New Guinea Myths and Scriptural Similarities," Missiology 2 (January 1974):42.

[4]Brevard Childs, Myth and Reality in the Old Testament (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1960), p. 7.

as the new reality man experiences in Christ encounters the mythical world of the tribal peoples. In order to facilitate that encounter, the proclaimer must understand well the role that myth plays in the tribal world.

Webster defines myth as "a story that is usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates historical events usually of such character as to serve to explain some practice, belief, institution, or natural phenomena, and that is especially associated with religious rites and beliefs."[5]

B. Malinowski says that, "Myth is not merely a story told, but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction . . . but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies."[6] The myth is concerned above all with the sacred and the true. It relates a sacred history, what Mircea Eliade calls a "primordial event that took place at the beginning of time."[7] It is always the recital of a creation and is therefore always bound up with ontology. In its telling, it establishes the truth because it deals with the sacred and it is the sacred dimension that is pre-eminently the real. It is the

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[5]Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1961 ed., s.v. "myth."

[6]B. Malinowski, Myth in Primitive Psychology (Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1926), p. 18.

[7]Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profance (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 95.

eruption of the sacred into the world in creative activity that establishes the world as a reality and this activity is narrated in myth.[8]

Although myth is essentially a story in which the supernatural elements are intimately involved with the world of men and women, the full significance of myth in the tribal world is to be found in every aspect of life. It is easier in some respects to describe the functions of myth than it is to accurately define the concept. By understanding the functions of myth, one may gain a greater appreciation for the importance of myth in the tribal world and also its lingering influence on the modern man.

Although myth is often understood to function primarily in an etiological sense, and though it does often serve this function in many cultures, the etiological function is only secondary. The fundamental function of myth is one of cosmicization. Man seeks through myth to give meaning and shape to the world.[9] Through myth, Martin Buber says, "a special conception of the cosmos; only through this act is cosmos, an apprehended world, a world that is homely and houselike, man's dwelling in the world, made possible again and again."[10] Myth enables man to give order to the world. Eliade has

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[8]Ibid., pp. 95-97.

[9]Stevenson, "Myth and the Crisis of Historical Consciousness," p. 5.

[10]Martin Buber, I and Thou (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 54.

emphasized man's drive to understand himself in terms of origins and to create an "archaic ontology." He says that, "To know the myths is to learn the secret of the origin of things. In other words, one learns not only how things came into existence, but also where to find them and how to make them reappear when they disappear."[11] Samuel Laeuchli ties many of these concerns together in his own description of myth:

> Myth had been cosmic-poetic theology. It was a statement about life told as a story about gods; theology projected upon the screen of heaven. It created a vision of life. It gave whole cultures a frame in which they could think and play and in which their imagination could grow. Myth presupposed a poetic relationship between earth and a world above, an up-and-down that seemed to give direction and security to man and his society.[12]

Myth also functions decisively to give meaning and establish values for the community. It is the powerful symbols operative in myth and their interrelationship which express the values that guide the community's life. Myths deal with issues that are existentially crucial for life and the enigmatic aspects of a peoples' experience. By integrating these important dimensions of reality and providing a reasonable framework for dealing with them, the myth establishes patterns of existence that have meaning and value

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[11] Mircea Eliade, Myth and Reality (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 13-14.

[12] Samuel Laeuchli, Parable, Myth and Language ed. by Tony Stoneburner (Newton Centre, MA: National Institute for Campus Ministries, 1968), p. 8.

for a given people. Wilder points out that these "patterns of meaning were crystalized at junctures of the human pilgrimage more propitious to ultimate disclosures" than other situations and therefore are accorded ultimate respect.[13] People who live within the myth have no power to disassociate themselves from the meanings and values that have been set forth by it unless they embrace another "myth."

Myth deals with primeval events because it conceives of the present order as having its true basis in the primordial interaction between man and the supernatural forces. Myth functions as the bearer of the cult. The cult possesses only a punctual character, but allows the participant to enter into the reality of the timeless events of the past and actualize that reality in the present.[14] In the ritual of the cult, the individual is associated in a powerful sense with those aspects of reality which are the most sacred and most real. The myth itself provides the foundation upon which the cult depends for its significance.

John Strelan has pointed out that myth also performs a significant function with respect to the salvation hopes of the community. The myth "provides the dynamic and lays out the blueprint for the salvation which the society will achieve when original events are recapitulated and pristine

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[13]Amos Wilder, Theopoetic (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 81.

[14]Childs, p. 19.

conditions of wholeness and well-being and self-respect are restored."[15] It is ultimately myth that the Gospel must confront with a new ground of and hope for salvation. It is myth which establishes the very core of a peoples' world-view and it is in the core that the powers and forces of man's world must be confronted by the power of Jesus Christ and the powerful message that sets men free and gives them real life. Malinowski has described myth as a "hard-worked active force" that provides a charter for primitive faith.[16] It is the active force of myth that provides the primary opposition to the Gospel message in the tribal situation.

While it is not possible to equate the language of religion with myth, it is possible to understand myth as the matrix out of which religious language emerges.[17] The primary and dominant symbols used to express religious truth in any culture have their source in the mythology of that people. In this sense, myth is creative, giving birth to the symbols and their interrelationships that order man's expression of reality. As F. C. Prescott has said, "The myth-maker's mind is the prototype; and the mind of the poet . . . is still essentially mythopoetic."[18] Even as myth shapes the worldview

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[15]John Strelan, "The Old Testament and Salvation," Catalyst 7 (1977):14.

[16]Malinowski, p. 19.

[17]John MacQuarrie, God-Talk (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 169.

[18]F. C. Prescott, Poetry and Myth (New York: Macmillan, 1927), p. 10.

of those who live in it, so also is its language paradigmatic for their thought patterns and expression.

A closer analysis of the basic characteristics of myth and its language will reveal more clearly how myth can facilitate the understanding of a new story, namely the story of God's action in history to redeem mankind. For the following analysis of myth, the author is primarily dependent upon John MacQuarrie.[19] The language of the myth is dramatic because it is the language of action. Myths involve the action of both men and the gods and usually their interaction. A second characteristic of myth is the evocative nature of its language. Its symbols are rich in feeling and connotations and the content and reference of these symbols cannot be clearly delimited. A third characteristic of myth is its immediacy. The mythical man is not questioning or critical of his myth, he is totally immersed in it. For him, there is no question as to whether the myth is literal or symbolical--it is true and real. Another characteristic of myth is its alogicality. It tends to become fantastic so that in ordinary usage the word "myth" is associated with absurd or incredible stories. However, the myth is not absurd; its categories and logic are different from those used in everyday experience. The part played by supernatural agencies in mythical dramas is a fifth characteristic of myth. The supernatural elements or forces are not isolated and

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[19]MacQuarrie, pp. 171-78.

transcendent, but are intimately involved in the affairs of men. A sixth characteristic of myth is the remoteness of its action in time and space. The events of myth usually take place "in the beginning;" they lie outside of familiar historical time. Myths deal with primordial time, the "Urzeit." A final characteristic of myth is its relation to a community. Myths are not private stories, but they have been accepted by the community and are formative in its history. They are able to provide a basic ideology for the community and establish their identity.

These seven characteristics of myth could, with the exception of one, be ascribed to the Biblical narrative. That one exception is the characteristic of remoteness. The Biblical narrative is without question historical. Its validity depends on the fact that God acted in history, with a particular people and persons, in particular places and at particular times. MacQuarrie, noting the significance of this exception, said that "In the Bible, myth seems to be bursting into history."[20] The Old Testament bears the marks of the tension that existed in the encounter between the revelation of Yahweh to his people and the mythical world context into which that revelation came.[21]

Although the myth acts as a conservative force, preserving the existing structure of reality, it also serves

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[20] Ibid., p. 180.

[21] See Childs' discussion of this conflict and how it was resolved in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of Myth and Reality in the Old Testament.

as an integrating and assimilative force, providing the incentive for the introduction of fundamental changes in the social and cosmic structures. A myth may be constantly updated and made relevant to the existential situation, but the myth itself endures.[22] Wendy Flannery has pointed out that myths can "die" when their meaning loses contact with the shared world of experience of the community. They can also be "reinterpreted to integrate new experiences, or provide the framework for interpreting new experiences."[23]

Because of the potential in myth to act as an integrating force, especially where cultures are undergoing rapid change, it is important for the Gospel proclaimer to be familiar with the mythology of the people to whom he announces the Gospel. The central mythical themes and symbols will usually provide the "guiding framework through which people initially identify with and assimilate Christianity as meaningful for their lives."[24] Some of these themes and symbols will continue to endure, though transformed, and be filled with new meaning. In the Old Testament, there are scattered allusions to Rehab the dragon and Leviathan the serpent, which were powerful creation symbols in the Near Eastern world (Is. 51:9; Ps. 89:10; Ps. 74:13-14; Is. 27:1). Childs has demonstrated that the Old Testament

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[22]John Strelan, "Eschatology, Myth and History in Melanesia," Point 1 (1977):199.

[23]Flannery, "Symbol and Myth in Melanesian Cultures," Missiology 7 (October 1979):447.

[24]Ibid., p. 448.

writers made use of the broken myth to perform a service within their own witness.[25]

In the Melanesian context, Rufus Pech has shown in the indigenous hymns of the Madang people, that mythical symbols can be recast to serve as vehicles for the Gospel. In one hymn by Jabon of Siar, in the Bel language, the phrase "Jesus Krist id paiad, Do ngesae" occurs. Translated literally, it says, "Jesus Christ he tells us: The gong (Pidgin--garamut) I beat." The "garamut" ("do") is a slit drum carved from a hardwood log, but is used here to invite comparison with a number of myths in which the body of a slain titan was fashioned into a "garamut" to signal the deliverance gained through his death.[26] This kind of creative assimilation facilitates the comprehension of a new message and helps to tie the new to the old in an effective manner. Ipili Christians have substituted Christ for the powerful symbol of the sun (Ipili--"nai"), which gave both light and "mana" (knowledge) to the people, and in the process of this assimilation have filled the former symbol complex around the "sun" with rich new meaning. The kind of assimilation that is able to find similarities between symbol complexes of both the old and the new and link them as well as distinguishing clearly the radical differences of

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[25]Childs, p. 70.

[26]Rufus Pech, "An Early Indigenous Theology Expressed in Worship," Point 1 (1977):116.

the new reality in Christ is the kind of assimilation that can avoid syncretism and yet stimulate the proclamation of a contextual message.

Points of Contact

It is a fundamental tenet of communication theory that the source must identify with his receptors by establishing some point of contact. Politicians demonstrate this principle when they put on hard hats when talking to construction workers or when they try to establish some link between their own past and the lives of those whom they address. Jesus was a master communicator who knew how to effectively establish contact with his hearers as he did with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-10), the people who had experienced his power in the miracle of the loaves and fishes (John 6:26-29), and as He did on numerous occasions by expressing profound truth in simple parable form that made the message touch their lives in intimate ways.

When one seeks to cross cultural barriers in communicating the Gospel, the importance of establishing some point of contact or identification is even more crucial. The extreme cultural differences that may exist between the source and the receptors and the radical newness of the Gospel message may make comprehension difficult for the hearers unless attempts are made to bridge those differences through the commonalities that are also a part of human existence. Hendrik Kraemer observed that the very use of the word communication with respect to the attempt to reach others with

the Gospel implicitly affirms an attempt to take one's stand in the world and as part of the world in which those others live.[27] To be effective the communicator must be receptor-oriented in his proclamation. He must begin precisely with those to whom he speaks.

Theologically speaking, the question of the existence of any point of contact (Anknüpfungspunkt) between the religion of natural man and the Gospel hinges upon one's approach to natural theology or the natural knowledge of God. Francis Pieper has provided a summary of the balanced Lutheran approach to natural theology:

> Our Lutheran theologians are very careful when they discuss the natural knowledge of God. On the one hand, they set forth its value in great detail; on the other hand, they stress its inadequacy and utter insufficiency in bringing man to salvation.[28]

In Romans 1, Paul is not concerned to present a natural theology but to analyze man's true condition before God. Paul demonstrates the religion of natural man to be idolatry (Rom. 1:23). The idolater at some time or other has a measure of insight into God's divine nature, but instead of letting the insight grow, he suppresses it.[29] While the natural man is always suppressing the truth (Rom. 1:25), he

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[27] Hendrik Kraemer, The Communication of the Christian Faith (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), pp. 60-61.

[28] Francis Pieper, Christian Dogmatics, Vol. I (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), p. 376.

[29] H. P. Owen, "The Scope of Natural Revelation in Romans 1 and Acts 25," New Testament Studies 5 (1959):141-42.

is also capable of acknowledging it. Because he always has this capacity, he is always without excuse. Because God has revealed himself to man (Rom. 1:19) in the works of his creation, it seems certain that he has provided points of contact for his ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ. God has not left himself without a witness (Acts 14:17). Ned Stonehouse comments that divine revelation has not been

> without effect upon their minds since it brought them into contact with the truth, but their basic antipathy to the truth was such that they suppressed it in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18). Paul could allow consistently and fully for the thought that pagan men . . . as creatures of God confronted with the divine revelation were capable of responses which were valid so long as and to the extent that they stood in isolation from their pagan systems. Thus thoughts which in their pagan contexts were quite un-Christian and anti-Christian, could be acknowledged as up to a point involving an actual apprehension of revealed truth.[30]

The point of contact should not be understood to be a text for what the Christian evangelist has to say. The Gospel is without adequate analogy in the secular realm. The point of contact is rather an introductory point, an opportunity presented, for the proclamation of the Gospel that can link the new to the old. The insights into the truth that may be contained in non-Christian religions or cultural symbols are never placed on the same level as the inspired Word of God.

The point of contact for the Gospel may be developed further into what Don Richardson calls a "redemptive analogy"

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[30]Ned Stonehouse, Paul Before the Areopagus (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 29-30.

by a process of "concept fulfillment."[31] Paul took the inscription "To the Unknown God" from an Athenian altar and using it as a point of contact announced that that concept was fulfilled in the God who created all things (Acts 17:23-24). John the Baptist pointed to Jesus as the perfect fulfillment of the sacrificial lamb by saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The writer to the Hebrews demonstrates in his letter how Christ truly fulfills all the central elements of the Jewish religion: priesthood, tabernacle, sacrifice, and even sabbath rest.[32]

When the Damal people of Irian Jaya linked the Gospel promises with a traditional concept called "hai" which was really a long anticipated golden age or utopia, a tremendous breakthrough occurred and virtually the entire population welcomed the Gospel. The neighboring Dani tribe was intrigued by what was happening among the Damal and inquired more closely. The Dani had a hope that one day immortality would return to man. This hope, called "nabelan-kabelan," seemed to be the subject of the missionaries who talked of Jesus and his "words of life." When the identification was made in their minds, thousands of proud Dani people turned to Christ as the fulfillment of "nabelan-kabelan."[33]

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[31]Don Richardson, "How Missionaries Enrich Cultures," Moody Monthly, June 1976, p. 1.

[32]Ibid., p. 1.

[33]Ibid., p. 2.

In the cannibal Yali culture of Irian Jaya, missionaries labored to bring the Gospel to the Yali people. In 1966, priests of the Yali god Kembu murdered two of the twenty converts to Christianity and two years later killed two of the missionaries who worked among them. A unique concept was later found in their culture that provided a helpful analogy for the Gospel. The Yali people had established near their traditional fight grounds sacred stone walls that enclosed places of refuge called "osuwa." Once inside this "osuwa" a man could laugh at his enemies who were forbidden to harm anyone inside the sacred place of refuge. For these people, Christ came to be understood as the spiritual "Osuwa," the perfect refuge from sin and death. That analogy helped the Yali people to understand the Gospel in a new way, one with which they could intimately identify.[34]

Don Richardson's book, Peace Child, is an account of the way in which the Gospel was communicated meaningfully to the Sawi people of Irian Jaya through the redemptive analogy of the "peace child."[35] Until that analogy was discovered, the missionaries discovered little interest in the Gospel stories, with the exception of the Sawi interest in Judas, whose treachery was prized as a high virtue. The ritual exchange of babies between two warring factions that established a peaceful state became a key that provided the entry for

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[34]See Don Richardson, Lords of the Earth (Glendale: Regal Books, 1977).

[35]See Don Richardson, Peace Child (Glendale: Regal Books, 1974).

the Gospel into the lives of the Sawi people who came to know Christ as their "Peace Child," given by God to them to establish a new relationship and raised up from death to seal that gift of new life.

Among the tribal peoples, their own concept of and belief in a high god may often serve as a point of contact for the Gospel. The Mbanza people of the northern Congo believe in the existence of a god named Chuchu who made the earth and all of mankind. Although this god liked the people he had made, they did not like him, and to escape from him they ran away and practically forgot him.[36] Embedded in this traditional understanding of a creator is a truth which can be linked to the fuller revelation of God in Christ. The Bambara people of West Africa express the meaning of redemption in their language as "God took our heads out." This analogy refers to the memories of their ancestors who experienced the Arab slave raids into the interior of their country. Long lines of men and women were lash-driven to the coast, each with a heavy iron collar around his neck linked by chain to those in front and those behind him. As they passed through local villages, a local chief or king might see some friend whom he would want to redeem. If he could pay enough gold or ivory to the Arabs, he could buy his friend's freedom, literally "take his head out of the iron

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[36]Eugene Nida, God's Word in Man's Languages (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 160.

collar."[37] Today, Bambara evangelists are able to use this traditional concept as an analogy for God's redemptive action in removing mankind from the iron collar of slavery to sin and death.

David Hesselgrave has suggested that points of contact may be found in the religious teachings of the receptors, but that extreme caution should be used lest misunderstandings and even syncretism occur.[38] Such points of contact should be developed only by those who are prepared for dialogue at deep levels. Hendrik Kraemer insists that the disposition and attitude of the missionary himself is the real key to establishing contact:

> The missionary himself . . . is to have an untiring and genuine interest in the religion, the ideas, the sentiments, the institutions--in short, in the whole range of life of the people among whom one works, for Christ's sake and for the sake of those people. . . . Only a genuine and continuous interest in the people as they are creates real points of contact . . . as long as a man feels that he is the object of interest only for reasons of intellectual curiosity or for purposes of conversion . . . there cannot arise that humane natural contact which is the indispensable condition of all real religious meeting of man with man. In these conditions the door to such a man and to the world he lives in remains locked, and the love of Christ remains for him remote and abstract.[39]

If the missionary is not able to establish himself as a credible human being, his ability to make contact with his

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[37] Ibid., p. 13.

[38] David Hesselgrave, Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 434.

[39] Hendrik Kraemer, The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1963), pp. 140-41.

hearers on any level will be impaired and the relevance of his message perhaps called into question. Contact is very important for the sake of the message, but is is the power of the Gospel itself that penetrates the hearts and lives of the people and produces the response of faith and calls men into a new and lasting "contact" with the God of creation.

Metaphor: Stretching Language for New Insight

Because the message of the Gospel is the artisan of a new reality and because language itself is the primary instrument of communication and expression, tremendous demands are placed upon language as the Gospel enters a world where it has never been heard. The new reality of God's forgiving grace in Christ must be proclaimed with the symbols and images of the "old" language. It is only because of the elasticity of language and the imagination of man that the old vehicle can convey the new. In the process, the old is also transformed as established patterns are suspended and language is stretched to express a new apprehension of reality. One of the special modalities of language that enables it to be innovative is metaphor. Metaphor is defined by Webster's Dictionary as, "a figure of speech denoting by a word or phrase usually one kind of object or idea in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them."[40] The classic definition of metaphor, which was held by

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[40] Webster's Third New International Dictionary 1961 ed., s.v. "metaphor."

Aristotle, is "the extension of the meaning of a name through deviation from the literal meaning of the words."[41] The motion (phora) that the word metaphor connotes is a semantic motion in which a similarity is predicated between something known concretely and something which is less known or more obscurely known.[42] By an act of combining something known with something unknown, similarities not readily noticed are called to attention in fresh ways that provide new insight into a particular aspect of reality. The best metaphors have a freshness that involves, in Aristotle's phrase, "an intuitive perception of the similaritys of dissimilars."[43] Placing "dissimilars" into new combinations creates a tensive vibrancy that is creative and innovative. Shelley was aware of this when he referred to metaphoric language as marking "the before unapprehended relations of things."[44] Metaphor sunders the "givenness" of the delineated object, wrests it from its customary context and places it in an alien context. It "shatters the conventions of predication in the interests of a new vision, one which grasps the 'thing' in relation to a new 'field,'

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[41]Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory (Fort Worth: Christian University Press, 1976), p. 49.

[42]Philip Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962), p. 73.

[43]Cited by Wheelwright, p. 74.

[44]Cited by Wheelwright, p. 82.

and thus in relation to a fresh experience of reality."[45]

Metaphor is the attempt to introduce new meaning into a situation, to express the unknown by means of the known. It allows the extraordinary to be revealed in the ordinary. Robert Funk, in a discussion of the use of metaphor in parables, clarifies this important role of metaphor:

> If A stands for the fresh insight that beckons the poet mutely, and B stands for the available language fund, a fund that has acquired conventions and is presided over by tradition, the poet must allow A to come to expression through and out of B. A is not 'there' except as it enters language, but it cannot, because it is a fresh insight, be merely accommodated in conventional language. A is raised to cognitive status in language only as the linguistic tradition undergoes some modification.[46]

It is only by rupturing tradition that one is allowed to have a new glimpse of the world through the cracks that can give birth to new meaning. The new reality of the Gospel cannot come to expression in the language of a people except through the use of that language fund. But the radical newness of the Gospel message forces the proclaimer to break the conventions of predication and force into a creative tension elements never before so imagined.

Paul Muench has maintained that people who are encountering the new reality of the Gospel begin to reinterpret their own history, their own past, from a new perspective.[47]

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[45] Robert Funk, Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 139.

[46] Ibid., p. 139.

[47] Paul Muench, former missionary to Papua New Guinea, interview held in St. Louis, Mo., July, 1982.

Bernard Lewis has noted that a new future requires a different past.[48] Because memory is selective and because meaning is subject to the perspective of the interpreter, looking at one's past experiences from the basis of a new identity in the Gospel radically alters the past and how it is remembered and interpreted. Muench has noted that the Gospel is like a new mental configuration that will be little more than a passing thought unless it can be identified with the present reality. Unless the new is perceived to be related to the experiences of the people, it is virtually impossible for them to consider it to be relevant to their lives. When the identification is made, then it is possible for people to combine known configurations with unknown to produce a new vision of the world. This whole process is essentially metaphorical and the missionary has a poetical role to fill in introducing the Gospel in forms that will facilitate the identification of the Gospel message with the lives of the people so that new meaning can emerge. A new relationship to God becomes the hermeneutical key to understanding the past, the present and the future in a new way.

The normal patterns of predication are narrowing and restricting, while metaphor is, by contrast, open-ended. It resists specificity. Robert Funk notes the potential of

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[48] Bernard Lewis, History Remembered, Recovered, Invented (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 11.

metaphor to reveal:

> It intends more, much more than it says. What it says is minimal; what it intends is maximal. . . . It must perforce resist rational fragmentations and refuse ideational crystallization. It endeavors to let the next one see what the previous one saw but to see it in his own way. As a result, it opens onto a plurality of situations, a diversity of audiences, and the future. It does not foreclose but discloses the future; it invites but does not come to rest in eventful actualization.[49]

It is through the creation of new linguistic arrangements that the natural, conventional meanings of words can be enriched and stretched so that reality can be described in new ways.[50] When Paul refers to Timothy as a "soldier of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:3-4), the conventional predications are abandoned and new meanings are conjured up by a unique arrangement that discloses new possibilities for understanding the nature and character of one who is "in Christ." A metaphorical statement makes a "kinship" appear where ordinary vision can perceive no mutual appropriateness at all.[51] In a metaphorical statement, things which do not go together are assimilated. It is what Ricoeur calls a "calculated error," but he goes on to say,

> Precisely by means of this calculated error, metaphor discloses a relationship of meaning hitherto unnoticed between terms which were prevented from communicating by former classifications. . . . Good metaphors

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[49]Funk, pp. 142-43.

[50]Carl Raschke, "Meaning and Saying in Religion: Beyond Language Games," Harvard Theological Review 67 (April 1974):113.

[51]Ricoeur, p. 79.

> are those which institute a resemblance more than those which simply register one.[52]

Paul Ricoeur contends that in metaphor much more than mere substitution takes place. Metaphor establishes a tension between the literal and figurative that produces a new signification. It is what he calls a "semantic innovation."[53] It is in this innovation that the possibility of new meaning lies. But metaphor is more than the suggestion of a resemblance or similarity. The power of metaphor is to effect an instantaneous fusion of ideas that is transformative and metamorphic.[54] Some metaphors are so powerful and determinative that they can effect major revolutions in thought, such as the time in the seventeenth century when the universe was likened to a "machine" rather than an "organism."[55] Such metaphors have been called "root metaphors" by Stephen Pepper or "conceptual archetypes" by Max Black.[56] These root metaphors can be expanded in order to generate new meanings. The metaphor sharpens man's perception of reality that he might discern what formerly was unknown and be able to understand things that were formerly meaningless. It allows man to redefine the world and reinterpret new experiences. Whenever new experiences and new information enter a man's world,

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[52]Ibid.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Victor Turner, Dramas, Fields and Metaphors (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 25.

[55]Ibid., p. 28.

[56]Ibid., p. 26.

he needs to utilize the potential of metaphor to help him understand the transformations taking place around him.

When the Gospel enters the world of the tribal man, it must be related to his world in order to be understood. The more intimately the Gospel message can touch his life, the more meaningful it will be and the greater its relevancy. The use of metaphor in the "translation" of the Gospel into the tribal world is essential, because metaphor is the linguistic means by which one can bring the known and the unknown into a linguistic relationship that discloses unimagined parallels and facilitates the birth of new understanding. The Scriptures are always the norm and point of reference for theological analogy and they provide a great variety of forms that can stimulate the identification and recombination that takes place in the metaphorical process. Many of the powerful Scriptural symbol complexes such as life, light, blood, water and salvation are important in the tribal world as well. Taking these powerful Scriptural symbols and placing them into the creative tension of metaphor with the known world of the tribal man can allow the Gospel to both penetrate and transform that world. In the context of that tension, both the continuity and discontinuity of the Gospel becomes evident and the powerful word that God himself speaks can not only reach the hearts of sinful men, but lead them to repentance and faith.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

Any human language represents a special kind of order that is superimposed upon the existence of those who live in it.[1] Language plays a fundamental role in ordering and shaping the very world in which people live. Language both reflects their understanding of reality and structures their perception of every experience. Because there is such an intimate reciprocal relationship between language and worldview, any substantial change in the worldview of a people will necessarily be reflected in their language. Should any particular group of people undergo a radical transformation of their worldview, their ability to understand, interpret and give expression to that transformation would depend upon commensurate changes in their language. A new reality demands a new language. Only a new language can give birth to a new perception and understanding of the world.

The Gospel is a message about the way in which God has intervened powerfully in history to initiate a new creation with his Son, Jesus, as the Head. By the death of his Son, God has set men free from their slavery to the power of sin and death. In Christ's death, men have been freed from the

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[1] Amos Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 13.

ruling spirits of the world (Col. 2:20). The message of this new reality calls men into a new relationship with God, placing him in the very center of existence and placing all other powers and forces at the feet of Christ. The announcement of the advent of God's kingdom among men is the beginning of a new reality. When the Gospel penetrates the world of the tribal man and calls men to a radically new understanding of God, the faith to which men are called by the Spirit reshapes and transforms their language into an adequate vehicle for the expression of their new life in Christ. The exhortation of the psalmist to "Sing to the Lord a new song" (Ps. 98:1) is really a call for all peoples to give joyful expression to the "marvelous things" God has accomplished in their midst. The vibrancy and potency of the language of faith makes the language of that previous state seem like silence. Ignatius of Antioch described the new dynamic in human speech in a similar way:

> Jesus Christ, his son, who is his word proceeding from silence (Ad Magn. 8:2),
> He is the mouth which cannot lie, by which the Father has spoken truly (Ad Rom. 8:2).[2]

The Father has spoken truly in his Son and his incarnation was a model of what must take place if the Gospel is to be expressed with impact and power to each particular culture. The supracultural message of God's revelation was expressed within the frame of reference of a particular culture. God himself was receptor-oriented in his communication

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[2]Cited by Wilder, p. 17.

to men and that orientation was personified in the sending of his Son in the flesh. God not only "came to men, he became."[3] Wherever that saving message has been proclaimed, the same process of incarnation has taken place. Sometimes the perceptive and sensitive evangelist has initiated that process and sometimes it has been left to those who heard the Gospel out of the strangeness of another context. Paul's letters are vivid testimony to his determination to become "all things to all men" (1 Cor. 10:33). He was God's foremost instrument for the task of making a salvation that had been expressed in a Hebrew context meaningful also to the Hellenistic world. Drawing upon the rich and varied metaphors of his receptors' lives, he translated the Gospel into an expression that was both contextual and yet faithful to what he had received (1 Cor. 15:3). In every place that the Gospel has been proclaimed, the same transformation has taken place. For any given group of people, a new message can only be understood in terms of their own language and perception of reality. If it is to be intelligible, it must be contextual. The translation of the Gospel is not without risk. Syncretism or Christo-paganism is always a present danger. On the other hand, those who refuse to express their message in forms and thought patterns that are familiar to their hearers may discover either that what they say has no meaning for the receptors or that the translation the receptors effect is a

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[3]Charles Kraft, Christianity in Culture, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), p. 125.

complete distortion of what was intended.

The evangelist who brings the Gospel into the tribal world must attempt to relate God's revelation to the world of his hearers. The mythology of the tribal people provides the matrix for the dominant symbols of their culture. It is in their mythology that he may find clues to the ultimate meaning of their symbolic system and points of contact for the precious message he bears. God has revealed himself to all peoples (Rom. 1:19) and the knowledge they possess of God, though distorted or rejected, provides an important reference point for God's ultimate revelation in Christ. Paul told the Greeks at Athens that the "unknown god" that they worshipped was in fact the God of all creation who would one day judge all men (Acts 17:22-31). Emil Brunner has noted the significance of man's natural knowledge of God for the evangelist:

> What the natural man knows of God, of the law and his own dependence upon God, may be very confused and distorted. But even so it is the necessary, indispensable point of contact for divine grace. This is also proved by the fact that on the whole the New Testament did not create new words, but uses those that were created by the religious consciousness of the pagans.[4]

Wilder has noted how Christians effectively utilized the linguistic context of their proclamation both to establish contact and to renew.

> Christian speech eventually laid hold of artistic media of communication current in paganism. But every step of the way, beginning with Jesus himself, represented an

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[4]Emil Brunner in Natural Theology, trans. Peter Frankel (London: The Centenary Press, 1946), pp. 32-33.

> identification with and a renewal of existing idioms. In one sense, as language the Gospel met each man and each people where they were--was "all things to all men"--in another sense it spoke a new word to all.[5]

It is the potential hidden in language and man's imagination to accomplish this identification and renewal by use of metaphor. Metaphor enables man to stretch language to the very limits of his own imagination and fuse the new and the old in a way that allows new insight to emerge. The missionary can facilitate this process by the way in which he proclaims the Gospel. It is his purpose by use of the language he uses to conduct those whom he addresses into the initial situation of encounter out of which the Scriptures themselves emerged so that they might find affinity between their own existence and the word God speaks, and by God's grace be led to faith.[6] Much depends upon the way in which the missionary proclaims God's word, but ultimately he is God's agent, his instrument, and the power of the Gospel does not rest in the skill of the communicator, but in that Word itself, which always accomplishes its purpose.

What Bengt Sundkler has said about theology is certainly applicable to the challenge of communicating the Gospel across cultural barriers:

> theology is, in the last resort, translation. It is an ever-renewed re-interpretation to new generations and peoples of the given Gospel, a re-interpretation of the

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[5]Wilder, p. 47.

[6]Yandall Woodfin, "The Sound of Meaning: A Christian Approach to Language," Southwestern Journal of Theology 19 (Spring 1979):108.

> will and the way of the one Christ in a dialogue with new thought forms and culture patterns . . .[7]

Christ himself in his incarnation gave us a visible model of communication. Those who speak for Christ can do no better than following the pattern he set. The Gospel possesses its own power, the power to save all who believe, but presenting that Gospel so that those who hear can discern its significance for their lives and its relevancy for their existence is nonetheless a crucial task. The missionary must "transform" the Gospel so that it may ultimately transform the lives of those who hear.

This thesis does not intend to be a comprehensive statement about how the Gospel can be effectively communicated to the tribal peoples. In some respects, it is a challenge to the church to look more closely at the nature of this important confrontation between the world of the tribal peoples and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Millions of tribal people have not yet heard the Gospel. The effectiveness with which this precious message is presented to them is of immense importance. Much more work needs to be done on some of the ideas that have only been suggested by this study. The challenge to be effective and able ministers of the Gospel is one that must be taken seriously. Missionaries who will deal with tribal peoples will want to explore in greater depth the nature of the tribal worldview. Linguists can certainly offer helpful insights into the unique

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[7]Cited by Kraft, Christianity in Culture, p. 297.

relationship between language and worldview and the way in which language both changes to reflect perceptual shifts and effects changes in the reality of a given people.

The process of communication demands the best of many diverse gifts. The gifts that God has supplied to his church ought to be diligently applied to the task of meaningful presentation of the Gospel in the cross-cultural situation. This study is only a beginning. It includes a call for others to bring it to completion.

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