

The Adaptation -Syncretism Axis

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The position of the last contributor, commenting on the offerings of his three colleagues in regard to the acceptable limits of adjustment and adaptation is particularly difficult.

Nevertheless, the differences of opinion between the four of us — and especially between Dr. Hoekendijk and the other three — have been obvious. We have all stated well-considered positions. Those of you who know Drs. Tippett, Hoekendijk, Beyerhaus and myself have no doubt all the way through been saying, “How typical of each man are these chapters and responses.” The value of these twelve chapters is, I think, that they have brought together four major ways of considering the adjustment-syncretism axis.

Each man has written in a consistent fashion. Each has developed his thought skillfully. What a rich offering. What a contrast. What a complex process. What signs of hope! What signals of despair! What warnings and rebukes! What exposure of Marxist and agnostic presuppositions! Exciting, inviting and dangerous possibilities open up before us. The whole missionary movement will be much more aware of the real situation because the Carter Symposium has brought this unusual audience together and induced the four of us to give untold hours to the preparation of these papers.

I express special thanks to Dr. Hoekendijk. He holds views on revelation, the propagation of the gospel, the multiplication of churches, syncretism and *possessio* quite distinct from those of the rest of the team. It must have been difficult for him to bear with us. He has gone straight ahead, however, and stated his convictions modestly and courageously. Since his views are widely held by a large number of avant-garde thinkers on mission, his exposition has added a valuable dimension to the discussion. That I disagree with his position does not diminish from the fact that it needs to be heard. The adaptation process is ambiguous and complex. Christians need to see the various solutions being proposed and judge which is acceptable and which unacceptable. Further discussion on the adaptation-syncretism axis, however, will have to be on two tracks.

The presuppositions and assumptions of the three of us, on the one hand, and of Dr. Hoekendijk, on the other, are so different that it is confusing to cast them all in one conversation and to use the same terms for very different realities. Dr. Hoekendijk shares few of the basic positions held by Drs. Tippett, Beyerhaus and myself. Joint discussion will yield little fruit. For example, his translation of Romans 8:14-27 I understand, but there is so much on the other side. This mysterious passage is overwhelmed by so much more that is not mysterious but, on the other hand, is clear and readily understandable. Both strands are needed in understanding the Scriptures. To focus merely on the mysterious is to misunderstand what God is saying. Even in this one passage, the words of Paul must be seen in the light of how he used them in other passages.

Dr. Hoekendijk holds existentialist, mystical and cosmic opinions. He says his views of inspiration are “very weak.” He humorously calls himself a Calvinist Pentecostal and avers that neither Calvinists nor Pentecostals will be happy to own his position as theirs. He dispenses with revelation — save as that which takes place like a flash of lightning in any man’s consciousness. He proposes to “let God happen,” apparently untrammelled by the Bible. All this demands

separate treatment at considerable length. Perhaps Dr. Yamamori will arrange a separate symposium to consider on strictly biblical grounds just this one unusual way of looking at the Bible. We are all biblical people. What the Bible really says, that we will do. But we must be convinced that the Bible — the whole Bible — really says it.

I have been pleased with the urbanity of the exchange. We prepared chapters independently and did not know what the others were going to say. Naturally considerable differences have surfaced as a Methodist, a Presbyterian, a Lutheran and —you will forgive me —A Christian have expressed themselves in many matters concerning the heart of the Christian faith.

As we saw the differences, some penetrating questions have been asked. Dr. Tippett has appended some footnotes of dissent. Dr. Beyerhaus has differed vigorously with Dr. Tippett, Dr. Hoekendijk and myself at several points. We are all richer for his frankness. The tremendous issues are so rich with possibilities and so fraught with danger that plain speaking is demanded. Readers benefit by Dr. Beyerhaus' skillful evaluation of the various theological emphases made by the other three speakers. The Christian missionary movement needs a great deal more frank disagreement. This is ecumenical conversation at its best. The grave issues which Dr. Hoekendijk's second and third chapters brought before us demand considered answers. That they have not come in the last round is due to the suddenness with which they came before us and to the fact that they cannot be discussed on ordinary presuppositions. Answers will be given, of course, in other publications. The issues are too important to let them lie unchallenged.

Be that as it may, many major problems and aspects of adaptation and possessio have been spread out to be seen. We have illustrated them profusely. We have explained what they mean in many different situations. We have looked at the axis from many angles. Readers judging where the truth lies, will take those aspects of adaptation which fit their situation and build on them. Men and women gathered here come from and go out to all six continents — Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe and Oceania. I am confident that readers will find in this symposium much with which they will agree, much which will be new, much which they can use, some which they will doubt and some which they will strongly controvert.

Probably the most helpful thing I can do is to call attention to four main dimensions of the axis: the geographical-historical, the anthropological, the theological and the ecclesiastical. To the first of these I now turn.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL-HISTORICAL DIMENSION

The adaptation-syncretism axis must always be seen as a characteristic of a particular geographical-historical situation. There is no axis in general. All that exists is a series of particular adaptations. All that really exists is one kind of embodied Christianity at one specific time and place, making one adjustment to one particular religion and one particular culture. Indeed, usually the adjustment is made not to one religion and one culture, but to that religion and that culture as practised by a small group of highly selected individuals. In short, the geographical-historical dimension is an essential part of the picture. Much of the confusion which surrounds the subject is due to the grandiose world-embracing pronouncements in which it is set forth. These are almost certain to be in error. The greater the generalization the more certain the error. If the generalization has a degree of validity in Africa, it has none in regard to the churches arising among Japanese intelligentsia. If it sounds right in universities in North America, it sounds wrong to the proletariat in urban India.

My esteemed colleague Dr. Hoekendijk has done the symposium a favor in his careful historical description of the Indonesian scene of adjustment. As he dipped back into the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and laid bare the geographical-historical context in

which empirical Portuguese and Dutch churches found themselves, we could see clearly how impossible it is to project back into that scene our contemporary thinking about adjustment. Obviously what the Protestant chaplains were attempting in the fortified trading posts where they lived was closely limited by the fact that they were employees of an all-powerful state church, which in its homeland was coextensive with the state, and was locked in mortal combat with the other (heretical) politico-ecclesiastical system. A premise they never questioned was that all the subjects of a Roman Catholic prince should be Roman Catholics and of a Protestant prince should be Protestants. Naturally the task in the forts and factories established by Holland and Portugal was to practice the precise form of Christianity which each state church authorized, and to bring the Asian subjects of Portugal and Holland into conformity with the religion of the kings of Portugal and Holland. Had the chaplains been asked, "Is this not imperialistic?" they would have answered with a cheerful "yes — we intend to be imperialistic and are doing right in being so. It is the only possible course of action."

Another example of the geographical-historical setting is seen in the last 18 chapters of the book of Acts. Missionary work — which always involves adjustment and is always in danger of Syncretism — was there being carried out in a context radically different from both the seventeenth century Indonesian scene and the twentieth century Asian and African scenes. The early church was carrying out mission from a have-not nation to the political and military rulers and the intellectual elite of the Mediterranean world. Mission went from the "ignorant and unlearned" Christians of Jerusalem and Antioch to proud Athens and to imperial Rome. Inevitably it made its entry along that one thin extension of Palestine which found form in the synagogue communities of the urban centers. The missionaries were unpaid. There was no missionary society. Missiology would not be born for nineteen hundred years. There was no temptation to civilize before Christianizing. The Jewish Christian missionaries had no particular status in the lands to which they went. If they were stoned or beaten or thrown into prison, no Jewish consul took up the matter with the government. While the distances concerned were shorter, the time it took to get to the field was greater. In short, the geographical-historical circumstances were unique. That particular axis had marked dissimilarities from today's axes.

As I developed this dimension of our problem, I asked myself: as men and peoples become Christian today, are there certain stages through which they pass? And do adjustments take place more in one stage than another? I answer yes to both questions. Adaptations of embodied Christianity to new cultures take place during a definite time span. Whether it takes a dozen years or a hundred, disciplining a given homogeneous unit usually occurs in three stages which I spread out before you.

First, come those years in which a few individuals out of the culture become Christians. Whether they leave the non-Christian culture to join the new Christian churches, or remain as oddballs and eccentrics within their former culture, makes little difference. In either case, they affect the culture but slightly. They do carry out, as it were, a series of exploratory adaptations, translate portions of the Bible and hymns into the new language and demonstrate what has to be given up and what can be retained. They show what men of that tribe or caste look like when they become disciples of Christ. They blaze not highways but paths through the forest.

During this first stage, the scales are loaded in favor of the older forms of embodied Christianity. The advocates — the missionaries — inevitably know best their own kind of Christianity. As they portray Christ and persuade men to become his followers, of necessity they speak of the Christianity they know. The few individuals who become Christian join congregations in which they are always incoming novices. Their inclination and the political weightage of the situation fairly well guarantee that they learn existing patterns rather than create adaptations and adjustments to their former religion and custom.

Missiologists who have served in congregations which have arisen as converts one by one across several decades came to Christian faith, have much to say about the need for more indigenization, adaptation and cordial welcome to other cultures. Yet in these first-stage conglomerate congregations and denominations, little real adaptation *can* occur, even if missionaries see the need for it and work hard for it.

Second, come those years during which a people movement sweeps through that unit. Large numbers in natural groups become Christian, live on in their ancestral homes and earn their living in traditional ways. They become Christian without social dislocation. During stage two, major adaptations take place. The scales are loaded in favor of the culture. indigenization takes place whether the missionaries want it or not. The hard problem is neither to make the church indigenous, nor to give the culture a chance. The hard problem is to make the church Christian, to communicate the essential gospel, to prevent Christopaganism from developing. Here ministers of the growing church and missionaries who have thought their way through the adaptation-syncretism process can make significant contributions. They can suggest adaptations and adjustments which transmit the Christian faith intact and dress it in the beautiful garments of the new culture.

During the early years of people movement growth, the new church is leadable, anxious to do that which Christians do. It is close enough to the traditional culture to be able to mold it to the will of Christ. For example, among the Bataks an early decision to accept the tribal *adat* (customary law) as that which Christians would follow helped the movement enormously. Christians were free to concentrate attention on the heart of the Christian religion. While they did change the *adat* here and there, most matters of conduct were judged according to its accepted strictures.

It is, of course, desirable during this second stage that adaptations be accepted by the people as their own decisions. This does not mean that the missionary plays no part and stays quietly in the background while the new converts decide whether ancestral tablets, for example, be burned, or modified, or hung in the church! New converts cannot make such decisions.

Often they have read little of the Bible or may, indeed, be unable to read it. They know nothing of the great sweep of Christian history. The missionary is an essential part of the picture. His role cannot be played by some elder who was recently baptized, and has stumbled through parts of the Gospel of Mark. But the missionary should be sensitive to the culture in which he works. He should carry his people with him. He should associate new Christians with himself.

Since by the time of the second stage, it often happens that ministers recruited and trained from people converted in stage one are available, the ministers too play an important part in working out adaptations essentially Christian and culturally correct. Perhaps more than anyone else they are in position to advocate courses of action true to the Bible and congenial to the culture.

Stage three is made up of those decades during which churches are multiplying through the whole people concerned, and adjustments worked out during stages one and two are being further modified and institutionalized. Major adaptations seldom occur during this stage. The church is already indigenous. The Christian way is simply burned still further into the consciousness of the Christians.

Occasionally during stage two some needed adjustment was *not* made. In such cases, changes need to be made during stage three. The example given by Dr. Tippett in his first lecture fits here. As the Indians of Latin America via the people movement route became Roman Catholic Christians, they were *not* instructed and *were* allowed to make adaptations which betrayed the

gospel. They became Christopagans. During stage three, Roman Catholic leaders should have led them on to renounce their old gods, obey the Bible and have a personal experience of Christ. When this did not happen, evangelical missionaries came in to initiate a radical change, a conversion out of the syncretistic faith to genuine Christianity. This became stage one in the movement to biblical faith.

Unless the Church of Rome in Latin America rapidly presses forward with the reconversion within itself of Christopagans to biblical faith, the present small beginning of an evangelical stage one will grow into large evangelical people movements in stage two, and will spread throughout each Indian tribe in stage three.

During stage one of the Aymara and Quechua movements to evangelicalism, small numbers are affected, and the embodied Christianity developed is loaded in the direction of Mestizo and North American Christianity. In stage two great opportunity will open for an embodied Christianity which is at once soundly biblical and thoroughly Indian. Many Roman Catholic and Indian features could be brought across intact. For example, there is no biblical reason why the excellent system of godfathers and godmothers (*compadres* and *commadres*) should not become a bulwark of all evangelical congregations.

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL DIMENSION

We live in a world and an era where the anthropological dimension of life is ever before us. For many the divine dimension has faded out of view. Most men in modern Eurica and the elite of Latrica also are incurably secular. They are all anthropologists and think and talk as if the only reality was that which can be seen and measured.

Consequently, all four of us have taken naturally to the unspoken assumption which has underlain most of our presentations — namely, that the adaptation-syncretism axis was something which men do. It proceeds according to anthropological and sociological laws. Cultural compulsives make certain adaptations almost inevitable. “Afro-messianism,” Dr. Beyerhaus says, “is the outcry of a community which has broken down in the cultural clash.” Dr. Tippett asserts that the nature worship of Juan’s fellow villagers was “the survival of a discrete cultural unit, an animistic cohesive cluster of both faith and practice.” In my second chapter I called attention to the fact that the first few individuals to become Christian always join congregations in which they are novices, and usually are a tiny minority. “Their inclination and the political weightage of the situation guarantee that they learn existing patterns, rather than create adaptations and adjustments to their former religion and custom.” Numerous other examples can be given. All of us write as if the whole matter of adapting empirical Christianity to each culture into which it flows were something that missionaries did. Converts did. Congregations did. Non-Christians did. In short, that men did. This is the anthropological dimension.

It is a useful dimension, though we should remember that it is not the only one. Men do act according to laws of human behavior. Regularities occur in their actions. Certain ways of response are statistically probable. As the sciences of man — psychology, sociology and anthropology — mature it becomes more and more possible to see what men do in the light of these laws. Madison Avenue knows that if fifty million people are exposed to such and such a stimulus, Z number of them will buy a certain product. Or, to change the illustration, every man acts on the basis of a network of typifications which are formed by his predecessors, his circumstances, his contemporaries as appropriate tools for coming to terms with things. For example, the universe of every person is experienced in the form of types — trees, houses,

students, teachers, plumbers, professors, cattle and among the last Holstein cows. There are types of artifacts such as tools, cars, typewriters and chairs. There are types of social roles such as politicians, taxpayers, legislators and laborers. All these typifications are taken for granted. Language is full of them. They are part of the anthropological dimension and they help us predict what will happen. Sophisticated anthropological thinking simply carries this typification a step further and refines and qualifies it and makes prediction somewhat more certain.

All this has a great deal to do with missionary adaptation. Adaptation is partly determined by conscious decisions on the part of Christian leaders; and partly by the laws of communication, of social structure, of innovation and of other ways of human behavior. Typifications and what Alfred Shutz calls domains of relevance greatly influence what adaptations should be and can be made. The homogeneous unit plays a very important part in church growth. Many adaptations which ought to be made are not made because the homogeneous units concerned are not recognized.

Knowledge of the laws of human behavior described by anthropology and other social sciences helps minister and missionary establish churches which fit the culture and feel good to people of that culture. Such knowledge is part of the working equipment of all missionaries. In times past they have acquired it by living in it, observing it and forming an accurate opinion of how the people of this caste or that tribe regularly behave. But today, extensive researches on almost every segment of mankind, if studied by the missionary and minister, place at their disposal expert opinion and mountains of evidence concerning how the people they are evangelizing think and act. Today adaptation can proceed in the light of knowledge. There is less excuse for a fumbling approach. Much less time is needed to become effective communicators of the grace of God.

Above all, the wealth of anthropological detail should enable those seeking to embody Christianity in the thought forms, logic, understandings and customs of any given people, to achieve substantial indigeneity without sacrificing any part of the core of Christianity.

THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF ADAPTATION

These conversations on adjustment and adaptation have been greatly enriched by Dr. Beyerhaus, who has called our attention so effectively to the fact that the spread of the Christian faith into every culture is God's will and must take place in accordance with God's revelation. All the speakers have, it is true, stressed this, but Dr. Beyerhaus probed the depths and laid the missionary movement under deep indebtedness. Unless the process of adaptation is seen in God's perspective and circumscribed by his regulations, it soon degenerates into syncretism.

It would be impossible in a short summary statement to review adequately the treasures Dr. Beyerhaus has spread before us. I shall not attempt the task. I intend rather to select three emphases which typify his contribution and thus attempt to recapture the flavor of the whole.

The theological dimension discerns that many adaptations have feet of clay. They are not culturally *necessary*. They did not arise because Christians in this culture have to make this adaptation. Rather they arose as a natural response of unregenerate man. If he happens to be in North America, his response appears in the guise of American culture; if in Japan, in the guise of Japanese culture; if in Nigeria, in the guise of some Nigerian culture. But in all three cases the response may be not so much cultural as sinful. Missiologists should beware of idealizing all responses of Christians in other cultures than their own. The Korean missionary to Los Angeles should not assume that all American responses are, by virtue of being American, the outcome of

a pure heart! The missionary from India to South Africa would be a simpleton, indeed, were he to believe that every Christian in South Africa acts exclusively from brotherly and loving motives, or that South African cultural responses are necessarily good responses.

For example, many an agnostic in North America — heart of the agnostic culture — disbelieves in the resurrection of the dead and, therefore, in the resurrection Of Jesus Christ. He thinks it a quaint tale. He fancies himself a hard-headed secularist. He knows that when men are dead, they are dead and never rise from the grave. But such an agnostic should not deceive himself that the culture of the twentieth century will not allow belief in the resurrection of the body. It was equally difficult for the disciples who had seen the cold stiff dead body of the Galilean. leader to believe that he had risen. The culture is not to blame. Unregenerate man in any culture finds it easy to deny the resurrection. He excused himself saying “my education, my culture, my worldview, my science really makes it quite impossible for me to believe.” The fact of the matter, of course, is that once he gives himself to Christ, the intellectual difficulties in any culture which prevent faith simply disappear.

Similarly, in India the minister must not assume that the Hindu who believes on Christ and wants to go on worshiping Ganesh is compelled to such action by Indian culture. It is much more likely to be lack of real belief in God the Father Almighty, who has commanded “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” The Indian church is continually faced with adjustments worked out by individuals and congregations. While welcoming all moves which make Christianity in India more Indian, the church should not stupidly close its eyes to the possibility that a fair number of adjustments will prove on inspection to be neither good nor really Indian.

What this symposium is saying to us is that the theological dimension of the adjustment-syncretism axis helps us see that man is not solely a creature of culture. He is also regenerate or unregenerate as the case may be. This must be taken into account.

In the second place, the theological dimension helps us see that since mission always involves translation, the adjustment process is always affected by the quality of the exegesis, hermeneutic and translation. If any of the three go wrong, faulty adaptation results. Careless exegesis fails to discern what the Bible really says. A slipshod hermeneutic distorts the meaning - generally in the direction of the unconscious or unconfessed sinful drives of the interpreter. Incompetent translation fails to put into the heart language of the receptors the exact meaning of the message. Let us take an example from North American Indian culture. This cordially receives those teachings concerning the Holy Spirit which accord with Indian beliefs of a vague spirit power which can be very dangerous or, when guided and controlled by the shaman, can heal and benefit men. Since pre-Christian Indians know nothing about the Holy Spirit who is the Third Person of the Triune God, and guides the church into all truth, the idea of definitive revelation given by the Holy Spirit is strange to them. The following is not a message for which American Indians are culturally prepared: “No prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (II Peter 1:21). Indians know of the vague Spirit World, but not of the indwelling Spirit who transforms the Christian into the image of Christ — the image which has been revealed in the Scripture and can be compared with and checked by the Scripture, the Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

In the third place, the theological dimension reminds us sharply that the African Confession, the Indian Confession and the Korean Confession toward which the church in those lands is undoubtedly trending will do two things. First, it will affirm the faith in terms understandable by men in those cultures, congenial to their thought forms (though not necessarily congenial to them) and conveying exactly the meanings which God has revealed in the Bible. Second, it will expose the misunderstandings of God’s word which missionary and national translators have

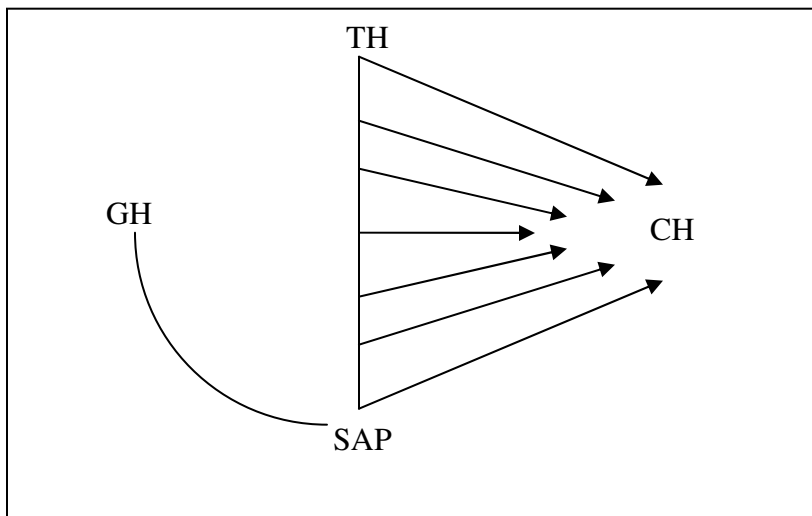
unwittingly exhibited and denounce the misunderstandings which unregenerate men, both in the church and out of the church, have loaded onto the pure gospel.

For example, when we think about adaptation from the theological point of view, we think about it *as it looks to God who has spoken to us in his word*. We remember that throughout the Bible God demands respect for his majestic position. He expects Israel to give him exclusive loyalty. I am God, he declares, and there is no other. You shall have no other gods before me. This position, so impressively stated in the Old Testament, is diametrically opposite to pantheism, universalism and the easy opinion that all concepts about God are about equally right. This position grates on the ear of secular relativistic men. They do not like it. It sounds narrow and exclusivistic. But there it stands, like a rock. God *is* a jealous God. He tolerates no other conception of God than the one he has revealed. There is no other Name by which men can be saved. There is no other way to reach God the Father. God's self-disclosure was for all men. Speaking in the Hebrew culture and the Hebrew language and the Greek culture and the Greek language, he intended to disclose his purposes and his nature to the whole of mankind. He intended to be adored by men of all nations.

This theological dimension which forms such a clear and substantial part of the Scriptures means that as the Christian Confession forms in every culture, it is jealously guarded by God to see that it conforms to his true nature as revealed in the Bible. The American Confession of today must speak in terms understandable by Americans.

THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF ADAPTATION

Adaptation takes place in a particular geographical-historical situation, according to the laws which govern human behavior, under the sovereign power of God and governed by his written word, and always manifests itself as a churchly phenomenon. Adaptation cannot be done by a single isolated Christian. It is something a church does. It has to do with congregational life, with how Christians live together, with the regulations governing their relationship to other Christians and non-Christians. It is an ongoing process within the *ecclesia* of God.



The above diagram will help us see the situation. Let GH represent a precise geographical-historical situation. Let TH represent the theological dimension, the biblical given, the message which must be transmitted intact, the divine self-disclosure which it has pleased God to give in

the Bible and in Jesus Christ. Let SAP represent the sociological-anthropological-psychological context in which the gospel is advancing. Let CH represent the church forming on new ground. The arrows reaching out from various parts of the line TH — SAP toward CH represent adaptations or adjustments which carry forward into the new congregations and the new denomination elements of the SAP culture and the TH biblical given. The mixture in each arrow is different. In the arrows nearest SAP, the mix contains much of the culture and little of the theological given. The lowest arrow, let us assume, represents how the Christians out of that precise situation (GHI) earn their living. After becoming Christians they continue to earn their living in very much the same way they did before they became Christians. Hence the arrow goes out from the line very near SAP.

The top arrow represents the God the Christians worship. Here the mix heavily favors TH not SAP. They have left their old gods and have believed on Jesus Christ and come to the Father through him. The second arrow from the top might represent how they worship. They use their own SAP language. They gather for worship in one of their SAP houses, They come dressed in their SAP clothing. They sing according to the SAP tunes they know. All this is indicated by the position of the arrow down from TH toward SAP. But in worship they address their adoration, penitence and offering to God as they are coming to know him in Christ according to the Scriptures. This is indicated by the position of the second arrow toward the top of the line, near TH.

If it be borne in mind that any diagram has severe limitations and illustrates only a few things, much may be learned from this one.

Note first that what we loosely call “an adaptation” is in reality a cluster of adaptations. In actual fact each new congregation demonstrates thousands of adaptations. Most come over from the previous culture very little changed. That is why the diagram shows many more arrows at the SAP end than at the TH end. Each separate cultural component makes, so to speak, a mix of its own. Or, to speak theologically, God calls into his new church thousands of cultural components substantially as they existed in the pre-Christian population.

Note second that each separate adaptation has a mix of its own. It is composed of a different proportion of SAP and TH. Even such a neutral element as language, which might be expected to be the same for Christians and non-Christians, is found to be different for Christians. They purge their language of idolatrous, perverse and hateful words. A high caste Hindu feudal lord once said to me of a group of low-caste Christians who worked for him, “They use much better language now that they have become Christians. Better language in fact than we do.” One expects that Christians will treat their animals better, educate their children more carefully, pay their debts more conscientiously and keep their houses cleaner. In general, however, it may be said that the closer to SAP, the less change is to be expected in cultural components, and the closer to TM, the greater change is expected.

Note third that the ecclesiological dimension insists that, in regard to any proposed mix, an essential question is the pragmatic one: does it work? Does a church form out there at CH? An adjustment which is theologically correct, or anthropologically correct, and does not take shape in an ongoing church is an irrelevancy. Armchair theorists can discuss these things at great length and waste incredible amounts of time doing so. Gunpowder is that mix of charcoal, saltpeter and sulfur which goes off bang. An adaptation is that mix of Christian conviction and existing culture which produces a growing, thriving church. It is quite useless for anyone to advocate a wonderful adaptation which produces church decline. If the operation is successful, the patient must not invariably die.

Let me illustrate the last point. In August 1973, I was in Nigeria conducting a church growth

seminar and heard that black missionaries of the Nigerian church had gone to the islands in Lake Chad, settled there as humble cultivators of the soil and had, in a quiet way, evangelized the dominantly Moslem population. The Christians, finding everyone on the islands worshipping on Friday and gathering for prayer five times each day according to the Moslem custom, had themselves gathered for prayer to God-in-Christ five times a day, and for weekly worship on Friday when the Moslems were in their mosques. Earnest evangelism, as it so frequently does, won converts. Moslems became believers in Christ. They continued to pray five times a day — but now at Christian places of worship and to God in the name of Christ. Weekly worship on Friday suited their culture and they continued this joyfully. Back in the United States I reported this interesting incident at a meeting.

I was somewhat dismayed, however, when I heard one of my disciples advocating this adjustment to Moslem custom as one of the great new breakthroughs of missiology. Theoretically it is an adjustment about which much may be said both for and against, but that is not the point. Before that adjustment is worth serious consideration, it must lead thousands of Moslems into ongoing Christian churches. And that, I fear, is not the case on the Lake Chad islands. There, I seriously question whether the Moslem converts who commune on Friday number more than a handful — maybe they have not even been baptized. On the other side of the question, more than 100,000 Moslem converts who have been baptized in East Java, have apparently come into all kinds of churches, and followed all kinds of orders of worship from Pentecostal to Reformed, and all have done so *on Sunday*.

In short, it has yet to be proved that an adjustment to Moslem custom which consists in prayers five times a day and weekly worship on Friday is a good adjustment. So far it has not developed anything out there toward CH. It has not “worked”.

On the other hand, the Jews for Jesus Movement, led by Moishe Rosen, has proved that when American Jews are offered the option of becoming followers of the Messiah without leaving their Jewish culture, without eating pork, without losing their sense of Jewish identity, without traitorously abandoning their people, it has enabled some hundreds of them, perhaps by now some thousands of them, to accept Jesus Christ as God and Savior. They call themselves fulfilled Jews or Jews for Jesus. In the case of the Jews for Jesus, adjustment to Jewish culture which is still true enough to TH to satisfy the most meticulous, ‘asses the pragmatic test, It works. It is not ivory tower conversation. It is actual church-multiplying evangelism. To use Dr. Hoekendijk’s terminology, it establishes “new units of Shalom” in a formerly non-Christian territory. The congregations do not look like any existing denomination, but they are made up of disciples of Christ, followers of the Way. They are as Christian as were all Jesus’ disciples from the day of Pentecost till about A.D. 50.

As missiologists consider adaptations, possessions, accommodations, they must make sure that the resulting church is still Christian. Nothing is gained by promoting a series of syncretisms. Nothing is gained by watering down the Christian faith till it can mix with any other faith or non-faith: that is a sure formula for syncretism. Equally, nothing is gained by adding to the Christian faith elements from other faiths or non-faiths so that the new church is not Christian at all. Syncretisms which are gained by reducing Christianity or by adding to it are equally to be eschewed.

At the same time, missiology should beware of any adaptation which does not help the church grow on new ground. That is the purpose of adaptations — that they sweep away non-biblical obstacles. As men and women confront Christ, they must face and overcome biblical obstacles: the scandal of the cross, the difficulty of penitence, the renunciation of self, the abandonment of idols. But the church must be careful not to place non-biblical obstacles in the way of would-be believers. Just as the early Christians became baptized followers of Jesus Christ while still remaining culturally Jews, so it must be increasingly possible for men of all nations, languages

and cultures to become baptized followers of Jesus, while still remaining culturally Maasai, culturally Russian, culturally Brahmins, culturally factory workers or culturally university professors. This is the next great frontier for the Christian faith. How to achieve that end while remaining simply, honestly and thoroughly biblical is an exciting adventure. That it can be achieved, I do not doubt. It is in fact currently being achieved. All the signs are that it will be achieved more and more in the years ahead.

The cultural diversity of the Christian faith will increase tremendously. The essential unity of the church will, if I am any prophet, also increase. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all — this is the unity of the Body. This is what the one Book, the one Church, the One Holy Spirit help to bring about.

Successful achievement of cultural diversity within an unbreakable unity will accompany a surge of growth such as the church has never seen. We stand at the beginning of a great expansion of the Christian faith in all six continents. It may well be that the Carter Symposium will have played a part in helping to bring about that unprecedented spread of the liberating gospel.

GM Editorial Note: Excerpt of pages 225-243 from the out of print book, *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity*, Tetsunao Yamamori – editor was reprinted with permission. This book can be downloaded in its entirety in our Reviews & Previews section.