

# Integrity

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## EDITORIAL STAFF:

Hoy Ledbetter, *Editor-in-Chief*  
Frank Rester  
Dean A. Thoroman

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# Aspects of Christian Discipline

## PART TWO: OTHER FORMS OF AVOIDANCE

### HOY LEDBETTER

In my treatment of excommunication last month I stated that several passages which are often thought to enforce that extreme type of discipline actually suggest a milder—and sometimes a considerably milder—form of avoidance. One such passage is 2 Thess. 3:6: “Now we command you, brethren . . . that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.” Verses 14-15 add: “If any one refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”

“Keep away (from)” represents a Greek word (*stellesthai*, elsewhere in NT only in 2 Cor. 8:20 where it refers to *seeking to avoid* blame in administering the contribution) which may be translated “hold aloof from” or “steer clear of.” Because of its common, though not strictly, nautical use, William Neil’s comment is apt: “The picture is of a ship taking in sail to avoid some danger. We should say ‘steer clear’ of him or ‘give him a wide berth’—a suitable word in writing to a seaport.”

### Important Differences . . .

“Have nothing to do with (him)” renders the Greek *sunanamignusthai*, which does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament except in 1 Cor. 5:9, 11, in a passage which

enjoins excommunication. But the word itself does not imply excommunication, and there are some significant differences between 2 Thess. 3 and 1 Cor. 5. The Corinthians were told “not even to eat with such a one,” whereas the Thessalonians were given no such prohibition. On the other hand, the Thessalonians, unlike the Corinthians, were urged to be moderate: “Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”

Such differences have caused the majority of commentators to see in 2 Thess. 3 a milder form of avoidance than that of 1 Cor. 5. William Hendriksen says: “One might expect that Paul would long ago have lost his patience with them, and would now advise their excommunication. However, we find nothing of the kind.” But if not, then what should be one’s precise attitude toward the idler? Hendriksen replies that the “members must not associate with such an individual *on intimate terms*. They should not welcome him into the company of *close friends*, agreeing with him, approving of his conduct, etc.” To which we may add Rengstorf’s assertion that “the text itself does not suggest either formal excommunication from the church or the suspension of table fellowship, cf. 1 Cor. 5:11. . . . The rule which Paul propounds includes a disciplinary measure but is designed especially to make mature Christians willing and able to protect themselves, and to do so by following the apostle. Its purpose is to keep the community pure

rather than to purge it from unhealthy elements. This is possible only if in certain circumstances one may ‘hold aloof’ even from a Christian brother” (*TDNT*, VII, 590).

The discipline urged upon the Thessalonians is also less severe than that in Mt. 18. F.F. Bruce provides an exemplary comment: “It is not formal excommunication that is enjoined, but such practical expression of disapproval as will make the ‘loafers’ ashamed of themselves and mend their ways. But they are not to be treated as outsiders, ‘as a Gentile and a tax collector’ (Mt. 18:17); they are still brethren, members of the Christian community, responsive (it is hoped) to the brotherly discipline.”

The foregoing distinctions are supported by such other reputable commentators as J.E. Frame, E.J. Bicknell, J.B. Lightfoot, Leon Morris, William Neil, Alfred Plummer, R.C.H. Lenski, and Henry Alford.

### Other Considerations . . .

Frame and others see in verse 13 (“do not be weary in well-doing”) a possible implication that the Thessalonians had become impatient and tactless in warning the idlers—a view which is encouraged by the emphatic position of “do not look on” in verse 15. However that may be, the tenor of the passage constitutes a warning against undue severity in disciplinary action.

Much has been made of “note that man” in verse 14. It has been the launching pad for a great deal of public censure and exposes in religious journals. But Paul’s language hardly inspires such harsh action. The original word for “note” (*sēmeioomai*, here only in NT) ranges in meaning from writing (oneself) a note to various kinds of marking. It can mean to “designate” (either publicly or privately), but it may denote nothing

more than making oneself a note, such as, for example, one would use in shopping. In this context it apparently urges the Thessalonians to “take special notice of” (so Arndt and Gingrich) the idlers because they presented a special challenge. But our zeal to protect the brotherhood must not be allowed to destroy our sense of brotherhood. The vital attitude of fraternal tenderness must not be overcome by eagerness for drastic action.

The error of the Thessalonians was an idleness (RSV) which defied Paul’s previous instruction that “if any one will not work, let him not eat.” Not only were they begging support from other Christians, but they also were “busybodies” (Moffatt brings out the original word play: “busybodies instead of busy”). So their error was in the realm of conduct (“walk”) and not doctrine. This is not to say that they did not hold a false view, but that was not the problem Paul dealt with. Their sin consisted in idleness and consequent penury and meddling demands for support.

Another passage which enjoins aloofness but not excommunication is Rom. 16:17-18: “I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who create dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.”

“Take note of” (*skopeō*: “look (out) for, notice, keep one’s eyes on”) is rendered “mark” in KJV, and the latter has often been taken to enjoin branding. This interpretation has compelled some brethren to widely circulate stigmatizing notices so that the objects of their discipline will be properly branded. Not only is such a practice to

be suspected on humanitarian and fraternal grounds; it is also unwarranted by correct exegesis.

Exegetical light is thrown on this passage by another which employs the same original verb: "Mark those who so live as you have an example in us" (Phil. 3:17). In both passages the idea is that of keeping one's eye on an object, in one case (Romans) to avoid, in the other (Philippians) to imitate. And one no more requires branding than the other.

The avoidance enjoined in Rom. 16 is not excommunication, but the sort of turning away (*ekklinō*: "bend away from") that precludes support or encouragement of the corrupting and divisive practices and doctrines the deviationists brought. Good reason for such avoidance may be found in their *fruits* ("dissensions and difficulties [enticements to sin]"), their *motivation* ("do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites"), and their *method* ("by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded"). Obviously they were people who practiced and defended immorality in the name of Christian liberty.

### Antinomian Tendencies . . .

This passage has bemused some expositors who find nothing elsewhere in Romans to indicate its pertinence. However, Paul earlier had anticipated that the theme of his epistle would be misunderstood and distorted, so he asked, "Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!" (6:15). There were some then (and not a few today) who could see no middle ground between legalism and license. Since it was impossible to prevent libertines from corrupting Paul's pure doctrine, the Christians needed to be alert for them and avoid them. Such antinomians would divide

*A tyrant must put on the appearance of uncommon devotion to religion. Subjects are less apprehensive of illegal treatment from a ruler whom they consider godfearing and pious. On the other hand, they do less easily move against him, believing that he has the gods on his side.*  
—Aristotle

the brethren into rival sects ("dissensions") and entice them to sin. The problem was basically one of immoral behavior.

In the Pastoral Epistles we find a group of moral reprobates who are arrogant, abusive, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, who hold a form of religion but deny the power of it (to mention just a few vices). Timothy is told to "avoid (*apotrepō*) such people" (2 Tim. 3:5). He is also told to "avoid (*ektrepō*) the godless chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20). And again, "Avoid (*periistēmi*: "go around so as to avoid") such godless chatter" (2 Tim. 2:16). None of these words denotes excommunication, but a significant occurrence of the last one is in Tit. 3:9: "But *avoid* stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile." To which Paul adds the familiar instruction: "As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful; he is self-condemned" (10-11).

Since the factious man (*hairetikos*) in the KJV is called a "heretic"—a word subject to misunderstanding—we should look carefully at what this term denotes. The root from which it comes means "to choose," and a "heretic" is one who makes a choice. In the Bible a *hairesis* is a body of people built around the same choice; hence a sect or party. Although the English word heresy

is associated with the one who holds an unorthodox doctrine, this meaning is not found in the Bible. Even in 2 Pet. 2:1 (the only passage in which the RSV uses the word) it does not seem to denote unorthodox doctrine.

The heresies ("factions") in 1 Cor. 11:19 result from separatists who do not recognize the inherent oneness of the body. The original word is properly rendered "party spirit" in Gal. 5:20. Thus Biblical usage emphasizes the evil of dividing the body. Therefore the "factious" man in Tit. 3:10 is one who creates division by the manner in which he holds his theological opinions, even though those opinions may not be actually "heretical" in the modern sense.

### Some Views of Scholars . . .

This definition of the heretic is supported by numerous commentators, some of whom I think it wise to quote. "The *heretic* is the sort of man who introduces foolish speculations and quarrels, but the term used refers not so much to incorrectness of theological opinion as to factiousness of manner" (C.K. Barrett). "*Hairetikos* . . . means rather 'one who causes divisions' than 'one who holds false doctrine,' a meaning which the word did not connote until a later date" (J.H. Bernard). "In the second century [*hairesis*] came to connote false theological doctrine, and *hairetikos* the holder of such doctrine, i.e. 'heretic' in the modern sense. There is, however, no sound reason for giving *hairetikos* this later meaning in the present context" (J.N.D. Kelly). "*Hairesis* involved the formation of a separate society, not merely the holding of aberrant opinions, or the favouring a policy different from that of the Church rulers" (N.J.D. White). "A heretic is simply a man who has decided that he is

*How can what an Englishman believes be heresy? It is a contradiction in terms.*  
—George Bernard Shaw

right and everybody else is wrong. Paul's warning is a warning against the man who has made his own ideas the test and standard of all truth" (William Barclay).

So the word at this stage had nothing to do with orthodoxy of teaching. In fact, one may be thoroughly orthodox and thoroughly factious (a heretic) at the same time. His intolerance of the beliefs of others causes him to cut off from fellowship those who disagree with him. If the climate is right, the heretic will resort to various forms of persecution. Shakespeare correctly said: "It is a heretic that makes the fire, not she which burns in 't" (*The Winter's Tale*, II.iii.114). The real heretics in any inquisition are those who create their own societies and force others to conform. Much withdrawing of fellowship, practiced under the banner of defending the truth, is sheer heresy.

But what should be done with the factious man? The measures enjoined are unexpectedly mild. If "admonishing him once or twice" fails, then "have nothing more to do with him." This imperative employs a Greek word (*paraiteomai*) which, although it can connote repudiation, is widely used in the sense of "begging" or "begging off." It is used three times in Lk. 14 of those who *excused themselves* from the great banquet; in the Pastorals it indicates refusal to become involved with "godless and silly myths" (1 Tim. 4:7) and "stupid, senseless controversies" (2 Tim. 2:23), as well as refusing to enroll younger widows (1 Tim. 5:11).

In Tit. 3 "*paraiteisthai* has no reference to anything like formal excommunication; the counsel here offered to Titus is simply to avoid persons who cause strife by their

*A man may be a heretic in the truth; and if he believes things only because his pastor says so, or the assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy.*  
—John Milton

unedifying disputations and theories” (J.H. Bernard). C.K. Barrett concurs: “This is not a technical term for excommunication . . . Titus must not waste time and energy in disputing with men whom patience (two warnings) has failed to win over.” Donald Guthrie calls it “a vague term which does not convey the idea of excommunication, but means merely ‘to leave out of account.’ The lenience advocated is striking . . .”

If the factious man is ultimately to be excommunicated, the ground for such action must be sought elsewhere; all this passage requires is to “have nothing more to do with him.” That is, excuse yourself from the separatist, refuse to be part of a party, do not support or become mixed up with one who defies the fundamental oneness of the church. Do not expel him, but leave him out of account.

### Heresy Personified . . .

A classic example of heresy is Diotrephes. “I have written something to the church; but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, prating against me with evil words. And not content with that, he refuses himself to welcome the brethren, and also stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church” (3 Jn. 9-10).

We may guess that Diotrephes controlled the mail and that the church never got to hear John’s communication. (The letter has

been lost; perhaps Diotrephes destroyed it.) Heretics show little patience with alternative viewpoints. But a man of John’s stature could not be ignored, and Diotrephes attacked him with two devices which have always been the bosom companions of factious men.

The first was slander. “He lays baseless and spiteful charges against us” (NEB). This should not surprise us. Ambitious men do not hesitate to make senseless, malicious charges—even against apostles—and the transparent baselessness of their charges does not seem to keep them from obtaining a following.

The second was excommunication. He “withdrew fellowship” from the apostle and his companions and demanded that the congregation follow suit, even going so far as to excommunicate all who welcomed the missionaries. He was strikingly similar to the Jews who “agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue” (Jn. 9:22). Some people have a terrible fear of being put out of the synagogue; many “even of the authorities” were too scared to confess their belief in Christ (Jn. 12:42). Diotrephes knew that a few “withdrawals” would bring the more timid brethren into line, and they would thenceforth either rationalize their doubts or nurse them in silence. There is often more heresy than virtue in excommunication.

This sectarian had one basic fault: “he liked to put himself first.” He did not belong among the disciples, where “whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all,” but in the world, where “their great men make them feel the weight of authority” (Mk. 10:42-44). This is the fault of all heretics.

But how would John deal with such heresy? In a surprising statement, he says, “If

I come, I will bring up what he is doing.” “Bring up” does not seem to be a very strong remedy for so serious a malady. However, I detect here a characteristic of apostolic behavior. The apostles had learned well Jesus’ lessons about greatness and priority in the kingdom; we never find them imposing their authority on the body of believers. Paul had refused to lord it over the faith of the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:24), Peter had warned elders not to domineer over those in their charge (1 Pet. 5:3), and John wished to deal with Diotrephes without assuming his methods.

One other passage should be discussed in this connection. It concerns Paul’s relationship with the synagogue in Ephesus. “But when some were stubborn and disbelieved, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9). Obviously this separation was forced upon Paul against his wishes. Those who opposed him apparently were in the minority and lacked power to expel him from the synagogue, so they used the only method available: they spoke evil of the Way before the congregation. This forced Paul into either remaining in the synagogue and having his work frustrated by constant opposition, or withdrawing himself and his disciples to more congenial territory. He wisely chose the latter alternative, but this course left him open to the charge of “splitting the church.” His example shows us that involuntary dividing of the church may at times be the only tolerable alternative to having one’s work destroyed by subjecting it to unremitting assault.

### Some Conclusions . . .

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum. There is a form of avoidance

*Better heresy of doctrine, than heresy of heart.*  
—John Greenleaf Whittier

short of excommunication which we must employ in some situations. We must “keep our eyes on” and “bend away from” those who divide the body and threaten to turn the grace of God into licentiousness by distorting Christian liberty. We must not “become mixed up with” those who refuse to work, become a burden to others, and evolve into meddling troublemakers. We must “shun” those who lack Christian graces (are arrogant, inhuman, implacable, etc.), love only themselves, and hold to a form of religion but deny its power. We must “go around” stupid, senseless controversies and prolonged arguments over matters of no significance to real religion. And we must “excuse ourselves” from those who would divide the church into parties.

But I must express my conviction that much so-called discipline today lacks Biblical support. Often it is mere pressure to maintain sects and to destroy independent study. It is based on the false premise that maintenance of fellowship requires conformity in thinking—something the New Testament churches never achieved. We have much to learn from our spiritual forefathers in this respect.

Those who love the brethren will exercise precisely the sort of discipline Christian love demands, no more and no less. They will work diligently to heal ruptures, salve spiritual wounds, and promote brotherhood. Although alert for conditions which threaten the soundness of the body, they will never “break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick.” Such was the spirit of Christ, and such must be ours today. □

# The Lord's Supper and Problems of Cultural Adaptation

MEL BYERS

Stayton, Oregon

The tendency to alternate or misinterpret transferred custom has always presented missionaries with a problem, for no people take an alien trait without altering it to some degree. This is seen in the Chinese weaver who portrayed Jesus in a portrait rug as a veritable Chinese shepherd tending a goat. A more ridiculous presentation was made by a Chinese merchant who displayed Santa Claus hanging on a cross. Often the native finds himself at a loss, for he has no means of interpreting a new belief or custom except in terms of the old.

A fundamental anthropological fact is that in cultural transference a trait or complex will be evaluated and rejected or accepted and modified in terms of the meaning it has for the receiving people. It is also one of the most difficult principles for professional civilizers (be they teachers, officials or missionaries) to perceive and apply.<sup>1</sup>

The inability of the missionary to be sensitive to the "selecting processes" of an alien culture has subjected the Christian message and its symbols to much unnecessary abuse. Fearing that the original content of the message will be lost or compromised in the "adopting process," many feel

bound to impose a strict "original" western concept. Even so, it is generally recognized that in any communication, even when there has been no attempt at indigenization, there is a tendency toward syncretism.<sup>2</sup>

*It seems desirable then that the Christian message be "allowed" to express itself in the most natural and meaningful manner, even if at times it appears a bit strange to our western way of thinking.*

Unquestionably the problems involved in communicating the gospel into an alien culture are complex. Eugene Nida has given us an insight into some of these complexities:

... the message as given to us in Greek and Hebrew is communicated to us in English, and we in turn must communicate it to others—which means the use of a foreign language often in an utterly divergent cultural context. This in turn requires adjusting to some sub-culture or distinct ethnic, social or educational group, each of which has its own use of the language and its particular adaptation of the "world view."<sup>3</sup>

No translator or scholar can completely reject his own background and enter fully into the experience and familiarity of the New Testament situation. In cultural inter-

change as well as translation, the processes of selection, rejection and alteration are taking place. So the missionary finds himself solidly oriented to an "original" New Testament Christianity which has been thoroughly altered and modified by an extreme western culture.

Most missionaries, like the majority of ordinary human beings, are unable to emancipate themselves from the cultural, mental, emotional and social frames in which they are accustomed to live and express their religious life. They consider their own theological approach, their own forms of ecclesiastical life and worship, etc., in the main those that are normal for the African and Asiatic Christians as well.<sup>4</sup>

Hence many missionaries still persist under the illusion that if Asians had only a Bible in their possession without any western influence they would naturally come into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through the steps of faith, repentance, confession and immersion into water for the remission of sins (as interpreted by their own denominational bias). These new believers, it is thought, would automatically stop smoking, set aside the Lord's day and faithfully "go to church" (complete with pews, pulpit and preacher), where they would observe the traditional worship service, faithfully tithe and celebrate the Lord's supper. There would be, it is believed, a natural tendency to give up "native customs" and gradually take on the customs of the more highly civilized west. They would call themselves the "Church of Christ," live upright lives and in general prove that "restorationism" is in fact a New Testament phenomenon.

Unfortunately it is never safe to trust in illusions. As a matter of fact, if a Thai had

only a Bible to guide him, he would have difficulty discovering any of the aforementioned western innovations. In his Bible the word for "baptism" is transliterated and hence subject to vague and varied meaning. There is no mention of the "Lord's supper" (the word "supper" is omitted in 1 Cor. 11:20; however, a new translation restores it with "the feast of the Lord"). Moreover the western concepts of "Sunday" and "morning worship service" are nowhere described in the New Testament, nor is anything said about smoking, tithing, outline for steps of salvation, etc.

Kraemer has summed it up very well:

Too much of genuine Christianity has been concealed through the unimaginative use of standard dogmatic terminology that is largely unintelligible to those who listen to it. Doctrinal rigidity and lack of missionary and apostolic flexibility are causes of this widespread and lamentable condition. To be a missionary, to be a messenger of the Gospel means everywhere and always and in all kinds of work (not least in the case of spoken and written presentation) to interpret, to translate, that is to say, to impart the content of the Christian revelation to those concerned, but in a way we find correct according to our doctrinal standards, but in a way that can convey meaning to their minds and consciences and that expresses intelligibly the contents of that revelation.<sup>5</sup>

Because of the "selecting processes" of culture New Testament Christianity has been greatly modified through the years to meet the complex demands of western culture. This "liberty" in adaptation should also be granted to other cultures. *Some, however, believing that they preach and practice a germinal New Testament truth, feel compelled to rigidly impose these "modified"*

1 E. Adamson Hoebel, *Man in the Primitive World* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 2nd ed. 1958), p. 108.

2 Eugene A. Nida, *Message and Mission* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 185.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

4 Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1956), p. 316.

5 Hendrik Kraemer, *loc. cit.*, p. 334.

concepts on other cultures without any freedom for cultural adaptation.

Let us analyze some of the inconsistencies and problems involved in the practice of the Lord's supper in alien cultures.

### Misplaced Labels . . .

"The breaking of bread" is rightly called the Lord's *supper* since it was an evening meal. It began in the "upper room" where Jesus and his disciples had gathered to celebrate the traditional Paschal feast. Soon after the Lord's ascension his disciples met together to share in love the evening meal, remembering the new significance the Lord himself had placed upon the "eating" and "drinking" of this meal.<sup>6</sup> The Amplified Version says very well: "They steadfastly persevered, devoting themselves constantly to the instruction and fellowship of the apostles, to the breaking of bread (including the Lord's supper) and prayers" (Acts 2:42).

The thought involved no doubt has universal application, for it is hard to conceive of any culture which does not engage in the custom of eating an evening meal (commonly referred to as "supper"). Now an evening meal is an evening meal (although it may have special significance, as did the Passover in memory of Israel's deliverance, and as does a fellowship dinner in which the broken bread and the wine stir up memories as to the source of one's true spiritual life).

So difficulty arises when you inform the unsuspecting believer that you are now going

to eat the Lord's supper—having just finished breakfast! This ambiguity does not seem to bother the missionary, for he is already conditioned to accept any number of inconsistencies and cultural modifications—especially regarding the Lord's supper—since "no culture can take an alien trait without altering it to some degree."<sup>7</sup> Accordingly the westerner can unblushingly refer to a token supper in ritual form as a "supper"—referring to what took place in the upper room. Taking this liberty in the natural processes of "cultural selection" while still using New Testament labels leads to much mischief on the mission field.

Under the handicap of western modifications to which he is oriented the missionary honestly tries to make the Lord's supper indigenous. Since bread and grape juice are not common in Thai culture, some have substituted a "puffed rice cracker" for the bread and tea for the juice. This is commendable; but a problem arises when the westerner looks upon these emblems and the ritual performance through his own cultural frame rather than that of the New Testament and its relation to Thai culture. The outcome is something like this. During the morning worship service it is announced that we are going to observe the custom<sup>8</sup> of the Lord's supper. Tiny pieces of broken "puffed rice cracker" are displayed with the statement that "this bread" broken from a common loaf represents the body of Christ. Take and eat it! The "glass" containing some tea is referred to as a "small cup" containing "the fruit of the vine" and represents

the blood of Christ. Take and drink it!

Thus, by what is to us normal Christian behavior, we give to the alien a religious form which leaves him religiously awed but spiritually confused. Words, symbols and action no longer match; meaning becomes flippantly arbitrary. Upon this flimsy structure many a missionary proclaims original Christianity. Still thinking in terms of our own culture, we mistakenly accept the ritual of a western style worship service as the original pattern of the Lord's supper (as if placing a label on a certain act makes it so). The only similarity with what took place in the upper room or among the early disciples is in terminology. Western culture has taken the freedom to mismatch these terms with a ritual; hence a real evening fellowship meal eaten in remembrance of Him becomes a "token supper."

### From Mystery to Magic . . .

This kind of religious hocus-pocus lends itself readily to "less developed cultures," where religion is expected to be a little mysterious and contrary to ordinary rules. The mystery is deepened by the fact it is usually administered by a foreign missionary. In his hands a supper becomes a "token" to be eaten after breakfast; crumbled puffed rice crackers become "bread" broken from a "loaf"; tea in a glass becomes the "fruit of the vine" in a "cup." By means of half understood prayer all this becomes the body and blood of Jesus. The white man's religion is a strong medicine—a religious magic appealing to most alien cultures.

The tendency to ascribe magical notions to Christianity has been recognized by most

missionaries. Animists as a whole are very apt

to connect the partaking of Christ's body and blood with the old notions of appropriating the soul stuff of another by eating it.

[To the] Christians among the Dutch East Indies, in the days of the East India Company, it appeared that anyone who himself could not be present at the Lord's table would send his slave as a substitute; that the Ambonesian Christians did not eat the bread at the supper, but took it home and used it afterwards as a kind of charm. A black pastor of the Gold Coast observed that the communicants retained the communion cards in order to put them in the hands of the dying, as a kind of a pass to heaven. And in another case a missionary writes, "one must call upon the Chinese at the Lord's supper to eat, eat, because they want to conceal the bread in their sleeves and use it for superstitious purposes."<sup>9</sup>

### Flesh of Fish and Orange Pop . . .

Although the custom of eating is universal, the kind of food is not. Bread is not looked upon as being "the staff of life" in rice eating countries; it does not convey the idea of that which sustains life (cf. Jn. 6:49, 51). To say that "Jesus is the rice of life" would no doubt have more meaning. In northern Thailand bread is usually associated with the foreigner. Sometimes it is thought of as a dessert or cookie. Grape juice is an oddity simply because grapes are virtually unknown and hence unattainable. The habit of the northern Thai is not to drink anything during a meal. Thus the idea of drinking grape juice and eating bread is strange and wholly a foreign concept.

Throughout the world everything from rice crackers to the flesh of fish has been used for the bread; and everything from

<sup>9</sup> John Warneck, *The Living Christ and Dying Heathenism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), p. 292.

<sup>6</sup> See an interesting use of the term "fellowship meal" in Acts 2:42; 20:7 in *Today's English Version*.

<sup>7</sup> E. Adamson Hoebel, *loc. cit.*, p. 602.

<sup>8</sup> In Thai language, 1 Cor. 11:23 and Acts 20:7, the "remembrance" or "breaking of bread" is preceded by the words *pi-tee* and *seen*, which can be translated "ritual," "custom," or "sacrament." This misconception tends to accentuate the ritualistic form of the Lord's supper even more. In 1 Cor. 11:23, the new translation has dropped this form.

orange pop to tea and roselles for the fruit of the vine. If we are to employ elements indigenous to the land, what are we to use? What are the criteria for substitution? How are those in alien cultures to engage in the custom of "breaking bread" when all they eat is rice? How shall they understand it as a supper?

To impose western oriented concepts would also mean that we teach them to raise wheat, make bread and grow grapes! If we grant the freedom of a "token supper," then why not a "token baptism" also? In other words, what are the criteria? Who is to judge? The "selecting processes" of our own culture have freely altered and modified New Testament concepts; why then should we not allow the same liberty in other cultures? "The Christian message and content cannot exist in a vacuum but must be clothed and shaped by some form of culture and society."<sup>10</sup> Herein is the burden and need for wisdom on the part of the missionary. *The natural selecting processes under the influence of the Holy Spirit must be allowed to work in terms of a germinal New Testament truth—not what the extreme western modifications of truth may dictate.*

### Worship Service and Crying Babies . . .

Most of us are well conditioned to the "token supper" celebrated as communion during the morning Lord's day worship service. There is the traditional church building, soft music, everything properly positioned and timed, the shiny trays, ushers, familiar passages of scripture, the coughing and shifting about when the service is completed and people get set for the next item on the program. Fellowship is replaced with a worship

service—one hour of programmed "service." The Lord's supper is ultimately associated with this service. If for no other reason, this alone has divorced the Lord's supper from its primary meaning, and most missionaries have not been able to emancipate themselves from this cultural bias.

Imposing this mold upon the cultures of Asia has added further distortion to the Lord's supper. Being unaccustomed to the foreigners' strange ideas of a "worship service," people of alien cultures simply do not follow the rules. Meeting in a village home where there are no pews, people sit on the floor, against a wall, or on the outer porch according to convenience. In new areas there will on occasion be as many unbelievers as believers. Crowding in close are the naked and semi-naked village children, whose attention span is about 15 seconds unless singing all the time. Mothers nurse their babies, who faithfully urinate all over the floor and set up periodic howling. Children fight and argue easily with no concern for the "worship service." People come and go according to the impulse of the moment, which also necessitates a formal greeting and response on the part of the speaker. Thus the morning worship service gets under way.

Songs are sung, prayers are offered, punctuated with this confusion. Into this indigenous setting is forced the foreign concept of a ritual type observance of a token Lord's supper. Under such circumstances the observance will invariably draw forth comments from the unbelievers—usually in a joking manner. They usually feel slighted because some of the "refreshments" were not passed to them!

Even so, the missionary is satisfied that he has faithfully observed the Lord's supper,

which in reality is only a further distortion of the truth. It is a religious mystery quite meaningless to the native. This kind of service may be culturally tailored for the western style worship service, but when transplanted into an alien culture it very often becomes ridiculous. Whereas it should become a blessing, it has become an abuse.

### Whose Responsibility?

By forcing these western innovations upon the native, the missionary has become the formidable high priest, who alone has the power to dispense such a mysterious ritual. This is not always the missionaries' desire, but even so the Lord's supper is usually foreign, and the native believer just can't bring himself around to handling it.

Many questions face the missionary who labors in a new area. How can the Lord's supper become meaningful to new believers? How often should it be observed? Is it to be a "token supper" or a real meal? Who is to be responsible for preparing the emblems? Some will do it only if the missionary supplies the "bread" and the bottled grape juice, which cannot be obtained otherwise. Some will take the responsibility if they are prompted by the missionary. Unfortunately in many places a slight suggestion on the part of the missionary is equivalent to a command, and the native does it out of courtesy and obedience to the wishes of the missionary. This, of course, reduces the whole service to a form right from the start.

Why does it seem difficult for the new believer to take upon himself this responsibility? Does he feel inadequate? Does he feel too awed by the missionaries' behavior? Is it because he does not love the Lord?

Hardly! Most of the problem must be laid at the feet of the missionary, who may be innocent but still quite guilty of imposing the cultural hybrids of the West as being New Testament truth. In an alien culture it becomes a religious oddity and quite sterile.

On the other hand, the missionary is not completely to blame, for he himself is but an extension of a western denominational concept. Often a denominational conscience is mistaken for a personal conscience.

### Conclusion . . .

The Lord's supper deeply imbedded in a western form of worship service does not lend itself easily to cultures deprived of our background and cultural conditioning. New Testament Christianity modified by western culture is not a pure form but is an extraneous truth which cannot exist outside its own denominational environment. Let us not deceive ourselves. Christianity in Asia is still a foreign religion, supplied and sustained under the sure hand of the foreigner and his money. Once again we need to heed the words of a well-educated pastor in one of the Bangkok churches who said:

The image in the Thai eyes of the Christian church is still an organization under "white men" with the Thai Christians as servants of the white man and you people still in control. This is how the church is seen by the Thai people. Therefore they always think of Christianity as the white man's religion. Christ, in their minds, has blond hair and looks exactly like an American.<sup>11</sup>

After 150 years in Thailand we still have a long way to go! □

Note: The foregoing is a revised version of an article originally published in *Christian Mission Today*.

<sup>10</sup> Hendrik Kraemer, *loc. cit.*, p. 312.

<sup>11</sup> *Practical Anthropology*, X/6 (November-December, 1963), p. 280.

# His Place

MARK IDE

St. Louis, Missouri

The tea is warm, and I need it. I feel cold from the January night air and rather depressed with a feeling of uselessness. We have just returned from a trip to the Jennings Police Department, because of an arrest that occurred 30 minutes before. (News travels fast in this neighborhood.)

We arrived at the station before the parents had been contacted, so the police would not give us any information. Two of the younger patrolmen were very unfriendly with us—almost hostile—but the lieutenant was a bit more congenial and tried to help. He took the information we had to offer. Two boys were being held for possession of drugs, one of whom had already been arrested several times for burglary, theft, assault and drugs. (An arrest to most of these boys and girls is as common as going to Sunday School for most of our children.) We felt sad, because we were sure he would not be visiting His Place for quite a while.

His Place? Oh, that's where I'm drinking the tea. While I sit here and sip on it, we're listening to three other boys, high on pot, talking about their last arrests. His Place is just a small hole in the wall between a bicycle shop and a motorcycle shop. Funny. Ironic really. The clientele of His Place are kids too old for bicycles and not old enough for motorcycles, yet old enough to be addicted to heroin and to be in need of His Place.

His Place is a "Contact Center for Youth" or really a place where kids from 12 to 18

can go, where someone cares, and because no one else does. They are the type that we usually think beyond help. They may never even have a chance at a "normal" life. At 13 or 14 all have used drugs; at 15 many are heroin addicts. The biggest pusher in the area is 15 years old. One girl, 15, was arrested with a 35 year old man. Prostitution. What can His Place do for her? *Love her!*

His Place is an oasis where these misfits are loved just as they are, just as Jesus would have loved them. Many good people (and some Christians) say to these kids, "If you'll change, then we'll love you." At His Place they are loved and accepted just as they are; and the love of God will bring them out of their present bondage.

The picture I have drawn isn't pretty, but it's true. (If you don't believe it, just go to any bus station in a large city at midnight and sit and watch.) The work being done at His Place is reaching people that no other evangelistic effort would or could reach; and the results are priceless.

Paul Boatman, the director of His Place, has been the main factor in its success. His easy-going nature, confidence, and genuine concern, together with the strength of God, have made His Place a real spot of hope.

When 15 year old girls are prostitutes, and 13 year olds are shooting junk into their arms, it's time for Christians to become real servants and get down in the gutters with people who can't pull themselves up to our levels. The apostle Paul told us to become all things to all men, and one type of man is the wretched man.

What is happening in the streets of St. Louis may also happen in your community. *Yet the ministry that is happening in St. Louis can happen where you live.* But only if you do it. If you need more information, please feel free to write to Paul Boatman, His Place, 7041 W. Florissant Rd., St. Louis, Missouri. □

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