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Gospel, Culture and Communication: In Search of a New Paradigm

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Christian movement, throughout the centuries has seen a continual tension, whether in the form of synthesis of gospel, culture and communication, or separation of gospel from culture and communication. The conservatives ask the question, must one become civilized before communicating the gospel, or should one concentrate on communicating the gospel, confident that civilization will follow? They were committed to the culture of the West, which they communicated equally along with the Gospel. In the light of this view on the intertwining of the gospel, culture and communication, we understand that the gospel has been communicated to people in cultural robes. There is no such thing as 'pure' gospel isolated from culture. The gospel did not come in its pure form, but was already acculturated in Hebraic, Greco-Latin and later European cultures. "*The gospel had the trade-mark of western Christianity.*"¹ Therefore, along with the gospel, 'a foreign-oriented' culture has been communicated to India. Having realized this fact, many Indian thinkers tried to 'transplant' Christianity from the Western soil and plant it in Indian fertile soil and allow it to grow with the aim "*let the Indian Church be Indian*". In the mean time, the communication technological revolution took place. First, it was considered as an evil and Christians advocated not to use the electronic media. Then, they slowly understood it as a gift of God and at least slowly, started using them in communicating the gospel. Now, media has taken a commercial shape and media owners think that they can sell any product by using 'persuasive model' of communication. Like, the form in which the gospel has been preached in India, media technology too made an entry in to India along with a heavy dose of Western cultural images, norms, values and information. Until recently efforts were made to study the relationship between the 'gospel and culture' with a view towards acculturation. Today, a new trend has emerged that goes 'beyond acculturation' and includes communication as a part and parcel of gospel and culture. This paper is an attempt to study, how gospel, culture and communication interact with each other with the aim of developing a new paradigm for the mission of the church in India.

Historical Overview

An in depth study of the history of communication from a cultural perspective depicts the shifts that have taken place in the cultural systems, norms and values. In the oral communication stage, the social transmission of culture took place predominantly in face-to-

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face interaction, where knowledge was directed towards maintaining the existing social relations. The shift from the oral communication to the written form involved the storage of knowledge in written forms. This process led to a critical study of the subjects. Culture became an object in writing and therefore, the receivers became unknown to the writer, which developed the possibility of critical forms of reception. When printing was invented, it had an individualizing and specializing effect upon culture and created a hierarchy of knowledge and social relations. Writing did not replace so much the oral face-to-face culture as print did. McLuhan accepted this development viewing it negatively as producing sensorily impoverished, uniform and homogenous forms of life.² Goody studied this process positively and emphasized the communicative possibilities that were opened up by print. Nick Stevenson along with Goody says, "*Print culture is best represented dialectically. While it certainly had a rationalizing impact on the production of knowledge, it also secured the reflexive grounds for counter-factual forms of engagement that have transformed the trajectory of modern cultures.*"³ The developments of media technologies like radio, television, cable TV, computer, satellite and global broadcasting, the rapid emergence of diverse magazine market, the commercialization of air waves and the growth in the number of homes with video equipment have changed the root of cultural production. All these concerns lead us towards writing a history of 'culture' in terms of the development of communication technologies. It has to be kept in mind that the different stages of the development of the understanding of 'culture' are not watertight compartments and the transition from one stage to another has been a gradual process.

From concept of the people to the concept of the class

During the second half of the 19th century, the transformation of the concept of the people into the concept of the class occupied an important place in the debate between the anarchists and Marxists. The Anarchists adopted certain features of the Romantic concept in their revolutionary theory and practice while Marxists picked up the logic of Enlightenment. They both broke with culturism by politicizing the concept of the people. This politicising process took place in two ways: the division of societies in social classes and rooting the divisions in the oppression by the bourgeoisie. Anarchists held the view that people defined their identity through a structural confrontation and struggle against the bourgeoisie, but refused to identify the people with the proletariat in the strict sense of the term as it has in Marxism. The crucial point of difference between the anarchists and Marxists is "*the memory of the people and in particular, the memory of the struggles.*"⁴ Anarchists have emphasized that political action as an activity of articulation of whatever forms of struggles that the people bring forward. This reveals how the anarchists developed a new notion of the relation of people and culture. Barbero writes, "*This awareness took concrete shape in a political culture that not only promoted institutions for workers' education to channel their hunger for knowledge, but had a fine sensibility for transforming the pedagogical models then available... They perceived the profound relationship between the virtues of the people and the demands of Christian piety which link the liberation described in the gospels with social liberation.*"⁵ Marxism denied this view of the anarchists by emphasising that the proletariat is a social class, and it is impossible to speak of a working class outside of the relationship with capital. Oppression and the strategy of class struggle can be explained only in terms of economics and production.

From Class to Crowd

During the last quarter of the 19th century, the classes were confounded with the proletariat whose obscene presence shadowed the bourgeois domination. In 1895, after the invention of the basis of cinema by Lumiere brothers Gustave Le Bon published *“La Psychologie de foules.”*⁶ This was the first attempt to interpret the people as crowds. He began with the affirmation that industrial revolution was impossible without the crowds. He defined ‘crowd’ as a psychological phenomenon in which individuals with different life styles, occupations and characters were given a collective soul that made them behave in a manner completely different from the way they would behave individually. This process of formation of the collective soul is possible by regressing to a primitive state where moral inhibitions disappear and affections and feelings take over. Then they emerge as primitive, impulsive and irritable and break laws, ignore authority and are used as tools for destruction. Le Bon was worried about this process and he called it as a *“return to a dark past, a return to superstition”*.⁷

Later David Riesman in his book *“The Lonely Crowd”*⁸ attempted to understand the core characteristics of a society, which was emerging from another sort of revolution – a whole range of social developments that were associated with a shift from the era of production to the era of consumption. Benjamin approached the relationship between the mass and the crowd in different literary images.⁹ The first image is ‘*conspiracy*’, in which various groups form together as a rebellious crowd joins with unemployed workers, writers and protest against society. The second image is ‘*disappearing footprints*’, that is the mass as the erasure of the identifying footprints of individuals within the crowds of a great city. With industrialization, the cities grew and were filled with masses that wiped away their personal marks and joined with the crowd. The third image is ‘*the experience of the multitude*’, that is the ability to take pleasure in the crowd. This does not mean that the multitude is an external mass but a part of one’s own being. In the crowd, one discovers a new sense of perception, which does not take away from the crowd their social reality. Commercialization of culture seems to reach its most extreme form when social reality fragments and leads to many contradictory perceptions.

From Crowd to Mass Society

The idea of mass society emerged in 1930s against the idea of crowd or mob, which threatened society with its barbarianism. This was introduced by De Tocqueville who began to see people as *“...tearing apart the fabric of the relations of power, eroding culture and causing the disintegration of the old order from within.”*¹⁰ He perceived with more clarity that the appearance of the mass society was the key to the beginning of modern democracy. For the first time the word ‘mass’ was used to label a movement that threatened the foundations of society and in a way which mystified the conflictive existence of the class, which threatened that order. However, the limitation of democracy is that the priority will be given only to the majority and the norm is not quality but quantity. The powerful will dominate the ignorant mass without any sense of moderation. For De Tocqueville, the convergence of the mechanization introduced by the industry and the democracy will inevitably lead to the self-degradation of society. He raised a fundamental question regarding modernization: Is it possible to separate the movement for social and political equality from cultural homogenization and standardization? His prophetic vision takes new shapes in understanding the problems, which

the democratic countries face today. John Stuart Mill, who supported this theory, holds the view that the idea of the masses shifts from the negative image of the multitude to the image of the vast and scattered aggregation of isolated individuals. He feels that this process would permit on the one hand a more organised society, and on the other hand, the destruction of the fabric of hierarchical relations that produces a social disintegration countered only by standardization. The development of new relationships between the mass and the media, in the recent years changed the whole concept of 'mass' and today mass is more understood in terms of global market

From Folklore to Mass Culture

The term 'folk culture' is applied to the culture of the pre-industrial societies. Such societies had certain distinguishing features in their culture. In folk culture, there was little division of labour. The communities were small and the social action was normally collective as opposed to individual. Folk culture was characterized by its simple form, its availability to all at no cost, owned by none, as it was a public domain. There was little differentiation between the producers and the consumers, and both were amateurs. Thus, folk culture was rooted in the everyday experience and beliefs of both the audience and the performer. Folk culture comprised the cultural life of the common people. In the post-industrial societies, in the place of a sturdy, self-reliant, self-created culture, which contain the whole value of the folk, we now have a weak and insipid mass culture, which is commercially produced and offered for the mass for their passive consumption. MacDonal while differentiating these two forms rightly says,

“Folk art grew from below. It was a spontaneous expression of the people, shaped by them, pretty much without the benefit of the high culture, to suit their own needs. Mass culture is imposed from above. Technicians hired by businessmen fabricate it; their audiences are passive consumers, their participation limited to the choice between buying and not buying.... Folk art was the people's own institution, their private little garden walled off from the great formal park of their masters' high culture. But mass culture breaks down the wall, integrating the masses into debased form of high culture and thus becoming an instrument of political domination.”¹¹

Their aspirations and demands for social democratic relations lead the mass to form of culture to popular culture.

From Mass culture to Popular culture

The shift from mass culture to popular culture took place gradually. This popular culture tends to become the culture of a class. John Fiske articulated the theory of popular culture. In his writing on popular culture, he made a distinction between instrumental forms of production that characterize capitalism, and the creative meanings invested in these products by the consumers. Also, there is a difference between the interests of the economic institutions that produce cultural forms and the audience. Fiske calls them as the distinction between the 'power bloc' and the 'people'. The power bloc produces and the people consume, including values and attitudes. The popular culture now receives serious cultural analysis as once high culture did. David Rowe defines popular culture as “*an ensemble of pleasurable forms, meanings and practices, whose constituents are neither static nor unambiguous, and which*

cannot be insulated from the social processes and structures in which they are imbedded."¹² Popular culture is capable of complex, sophisticated, subtle, popular expression within its social context. Popular culture is commercial culture.

Popular culture becomes the strategic space for the operation of hegemony. It becomes a mediating factor by covering the differences and reconciling the tastes. Jesus Martin-Barbero writes,

"The influence of mass mediation thus is found structurally linked to two important tendencies towards new forms of legitimacy which articulate culture: the social construction which gives the abstraction of the commercial form a concrete material existence in the technical logic of the factory and the newspaper; and the mediation which covers over the conflict between the classes by producing a uniting resolution at the level of imaginative symbols and assuring the active consent of the dominated."¹³

This is possible only when the mass culture becomes an activating and deforming force of the popular culture, and thus integrating itself into the commercial market.

From Commercial culture to Monoculture

In the course of the 20th century, the public cultures of social democracies were becoming both commercialized and marketised. In the place of the traditional cultures of different contexts, a more fragmented global culture built upon more popular pleasures emerged. Jurgen Habermas has made his contributions on issues related to media culture. His writing represents an epistemological break with the early Frankfurt school. Through the theory of communicative action, he was able to provide the philosophical basis for the reconstitution of the public sphere, in a way the Frankfurt school did not do. His thesis on colonization and cultural impoverishment explains the possibility of a cultural fragmentation that could be controlled democratically. The commercialization¹⁴ and commodification of media have undermined their ability to act as rational centres of debate, and have also contributed towards a form of cultural division, in which the depoliticized masses are excluded from central debates of our political culture. Commercial culture is consumed in private.

Globalization has become the vehicle of the cultural invasion. The objective of globalization is creating a monoculture through propagating a commercial culture. The process of globalization negates the culture of the vast majority and as a result communities are disintegrated. Globalization creates a monoculture. K.C. Abraham provides a sharp critique to this monoculture. He writes,

"By monoculture, we mean the undermining of economic, cultural and ecological diversity, the nearly universal acceptance of technological culture as developed in the West and its values. The indigenous culture and its potential for human development are vastly ignored. The tendency is to accept the efficiency with productivity without any concern for compassion or justice. Ruthless exploitation of nature without any reverence for nature which is an integral value of the traditional culture."¹⁵

It is also important to note that media globalization created a new class of entrepreneurs, new breed of scientists and intellectuals. What we need today is an alternative form of development that takes the interest of the poor as central and allows a room for their culture and religion.

From Cultural Imperialism to Dependency

Mono-culture led in the long run to a cultural imperialism by the media. Until recently, the term media imperialism is more familiar to many of us. Imperialism is strongly associated with the act of territorial annexation for the purpose of formal political control. Michael B. Salwen defines cultural imperialism as “*an ideologically loaded term frequently invoked to describe the effects of Western mass media on foreign audiences.*”¹⁶ This theory has its roots in dependency theory, which asserts that “*core*” nations keep “*periphery*” nations perpetually dependent upon the core media for their cultural existence.¹⁷ It also asserts that national sovereignty is not a sufficient safeguard against the possibility of a de facto control of a nation’s economy by alien interests. In Marxist theory, imperialism is regarded as an inevitable outcome of capitalism.

Cultural imperialism is a tool, by using this; core nations maintain domination over periphery nations. Cees Hamelink preferred to call cultural imperialism as ‘*cultural synchronization*’, which implies that a particular type of cultural development is persuasively communicated to other countries.¹⁸ The ruling class of the West can define cultural imperialism as the systematic penetration and domination of the cultural life of the popular classes. In order to reorder the values, behaviour, institutions and identity of the oppressed peoples to conform with the interests of the imperial classes. In the recent years cultural imperialism is oriented toward attracting mass audiences by allowing television invading the houses and promotes symbols and interests according to the imperial power. Mass media serves as vehicle of cultural imperialism. The impact of cultural imperialism is found in the third world countries by uprooting people from their cultural roots and traditions of solidarity and by replacing them with media created needs. It prevents exploited individuals from responding collectively to their deteriorating conditions. Imperialism not only encourages material benefits, but also through mass media captures the intellectual and the political class. A typical example of cultural imperialism is the penetration of Hollywood movies in to Indian towns and gets attraction of the people. Mowlana identifies different stages in the mass communication process. In each stage, he shows mass communication as having hardware and a software aspect of potential dependency. He developed a model with two dimensions, such as the technology axis (hardware versus software) and the communication axis (production versus distribution).¹⁹ In this process, the whole production stage is carried out in one rich country and distribution of what is so produced takes place in another poor country. This model depicts the condition of multiple dependencies in the flow of communication from the more developed to the less developed countries. The poor countries are often dependent for both the hardware and the software. This situation can be explained in terms of a ‘centre-periphery’ model of communication.²⁰ According to this model, the world is divided into either dominant central or dependent peripheral lands, with a predominant news flow from the centre to the periphery.

Present day cultural imperialism is different from that of the past. Presently, it is more of dependency. It is oriented towards capturing the mass audience through the powerful medium of television and making them dependent. Under this dependency, the political interests of the imperial power are projected. This has uprooted and divided people from their cultural roots and traditions of solidarity, replacing them with the media created cultures of selfish individualism. Few countries dominate the international flow of news and culture.

This historical survey reveals that culture is not accidental; culture was there even before we were born. Time to time it has faced changes through various kinds of influences from within and without. These changes depict the cultural ideological shifts. It is important to note that cultural changes affected the methods of communicating the gospel. At present, a revolutionary transformation of cultural values is taking place at the grass-roots level in the struggle against dependency. This process is however not yet reflected sufficiently in the theories and strategies of either the gospel or the culture or the communication.

The Gospel, Culture and Communication interactions

The encounter between gospel and culture is a process. Christians in India are considered, as they are not culturally integrated. There are reasons for this. Christians themselves are not at home culturally in their own country. Their symbols of worship, traditions, patterns of understanding, doctrines and dogmas, festivals etc. are very much different from the people of other faiths. Having felt the need for an interaction between gospel and culture, Robert de Nobili (15 & 16 centuries) asserted the right of the Indians to follow their own social and cultural way of life. Though his methods did not gain much appreciation, it provided a basic attitude in the early centuries. Later, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907), Sadhu Sunder Singh (1889-1929) Abbe Jules Monchanin later known as Swami Parama Arupi Anandam (1895-1957) and Dom Henri Le Saux, known as Swami Abhishiktananda (1910-1973) attempted at least at the intellectual level, to live their Christian faith in the Indian tradition.²¹ Hindu reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi tried to integrate the teachings of Jesus in their own Hindu tradition.²² The second Vatican Council took this issue of culture and limited it to the tension between tradition and modernity, to the conflict between modern technological culture and faith leading to secularization, to the rightful autonomy of culture. In the National Seminar in India held immediately after the council, the main issue was on the task of church becoming Indian. Three main areas were focused: liturgy, spirituality and theology. Efforts were made in these three areas to make relevant the gospel to the Indian situation. Hendrik Kraemer, in his preparatory volume for the Tambaram International Missionary Conference (1938) titled, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London, 1938) in which he developed a discontinuity approach between gospel and culture. He questioned some of the Indian missionary theologians such as J.N.Farquhar who developed a view that Christianity as *The Crown of Hinduism* (Oxford, 1913). But, later rejecting Kraemer's view, P.D.Devanandan moved forward and affirmed that gospel as a message of renewal has the power to redeem cultures. The Modern Ecumenical Movement involved itself in the gospel-culture discussions and identified several central issues. Wesley Ariarajah points out that the Nairobi Assembly (1975) made significant contribution to gospel and culture.²³ Others saw all these efforts of acculturation as 'hinduisation' rather than 'indigenization'.

Culture and communication grew side by side as gospel and culture as we have seen in the previous section. From the time of oral communication, to the written, printed up to the technological era, communication has influenced human culture. Although media are assumed to be powerful shapers of culture and communication, Joshua Meyrowitz has argued that media have effectively contributed to social change.²⁴ He sees media as the 'missing link' between culture and society. He points out that electronic media have led to a radical restructuring of social life and activities, and therefore, the divided social spheres are linked

together. For him, culture is placeless. To an extent, his views are true that electronic mediated interactions are reshaping both the social situations and the social identities. However, the communication media which once built a mass audience by looking for commonalities, today they may actually reinforce differences between groups. In this perspective, culture, therefore, can be defined as what groups of people feel, think, say and do. It is not people but the communication that links them together. From these discussions we understand that culture is something which one inherits, which have a tradition, therefore it is the influence of the past. There is another form of culture called 'imported culture', which gives much importance to certain technologies and productive processes. While in the traditional society, religion was formulating the core values of society, the value patterns in the modern society have become more diversified under the influence of mass media, which have become powerful tools for the capitalists. However, religious values still play a dominant role at the individual level. But under the modern conditions the incongruence is felt much stronger, because the technological and economic as well as the social changes occur at an accelerated pace and the secular values are in an open competition with religious values, and the imported values with the traditional values. In discussing the relationship between communication and culture, it is important to remember that culture influences communication just as communication influences culture. If we see culture as the sum total of the ways in which a society adopts to its environment and also as the way in which individuals in society interact with one another and regulate social behaviour, it follows that communication should be seen as an essential aspect of culture. Communication can be deemed to be culturally determined. It is a carrier of culture, being the means through which the social or cultural heritage is transmitted from one generation to another. It helps in the definition, promotion and dissemination of behaviour patterns. Communication can bring cultural integration or alienation. In the case of mass media communication, it is not the question of the transmission of culture for the media themselves does shape cultural experience and in fact create a new culture. The relationship between culture and communication, which was once feeding on each other, influencing and determining each other and was determined by each other has undergone dramatic changes in the modern era. It has become multi-faced, complex, ever changing and problematic. Having realized the link between culture and communication, the Sean Mac Bride Commission that was appointed to study the issues related to the Third World communication, recommends policies that foster cultural identity and cultural dialogue. It recommends for the establishment of national cultural policies, which should foster cultural identity and creativity, and the involvement of the media in these tasks and that such policies should also contain guidelines for safeguarding national cultural development while promoting knowledge of other cultures. It is in this relation to the others that each culture can enhance its own identity.

Gospel is the content of Christian communication. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, more importance was given to verbal symbols than visual images. The prophets could hear the voice of God and thus the prophetic formula is 'Thus says the Lord'. They believed that God could not be seen, but he could be heard in the still, small voice. This shows that verbal communication was an integral element of revelation. The God of the Bible is a God who speaks. One of the well-known, outstanding characteristics of the Bible is the great recurrence of the expression: the word of God coming to human. Hendrik Kraemer writes, "*The word is the symbol par excellence that stands in human intercourse for communication.*"²⁵ When we say God speaks, as Jacques Ellul writes, "*it does not mean that he has a vocabulary and*

follows syntactical rules. This comparison is used of course to help us to understand the action and person of God."²⁶ Ellul holds the view that God cannot be directly grasped or contemplated face to face. The only channel of revelation is the Word. The unknowable God chooses this way to make Himself known. Ellul writes, "*This Word spoken to us and for us thus testifies to the fact that God is no stranger; he is truly with us.*"²⁷ The relationship between Adam and God is not a silent, abstract, inactive contemplation, but it is a dialogue and word. God who creates through Word also identifies Himself with creation, especially relates Himself with Adam who could respond to God in a dialogue. Here we must understand the fundamental difference between the Word of God and the human word. Word of God is not just a sound, it does not pass by, and rather it leaves a sure trace of its passage. Genesis 1:3 records that the Word resounded and light came into being as a permanent witness of the Word spoken. Word of God is not just language it is a person. Ellul quotes Karl Barth who writes, "*The Word of God is not something that can be described, but neither it is a concept one can define. It is neither an objective content nor an idea. It is not an object; it is the only object, in the sense that it is the only subject-God the subject.*"²⁸ Ellul relates the Word of God with the Word incarnate, because he believes that the Word of God has been effectively revealed in the incarnation of Jesus – the Word became flesh.

The inter-relationship between gospel, culture and communication shows that they are not just concepts rather they are movements. All the three are God's gift to humanity. They are all needed to maintain the social fabric of society. They are linked with each other. They point to relationship, fellowship and commonality. It is impossible to separate one from the other, from the implications of mutual involvement and relationship and the development of commonality between people. But today, communication and new media technologies which are presented for public consumption are misused to propagate lies, omit truths and distort the facts about our lives, cultures, values and hopes. Though, gospel, culture and communication are interlinked, communication has the power to create new forms of values and culture which are against the gospel values. Due to the inflow of alien cultural values, Indian culture is in a crisis.

The rise of global media culture

Global culture, a fashionable concept today, "implies the existence of a common culture that is shared by a majority of countries in the world and that is somehow coalescing from national and regional cultures."²⁹ Today, particular types of cultures are promoted in other countries through global communication systems, distributing different cultural values in many different countries, which becomes a major factor in the expansion of the global culture.³⁰ Globalization of culture is not homogenization of culture. It is sad to note that national governments act as gatekeepers mediating cultural flows. They face difficult tasks as on the one hand they facilitate the inflow of global culture and on the other hand they are to protect elements of their own cultural heritage. This struggle we observe in the Indian context.

Cultural diversity is a social reality that is not alien in the Indian context. India has cradled great civilizations and for centuries caused people to interact with each other in the context of a '*bazaar of cultures*'. It has a long history of harmonious co-existence of several cultures. However, in the recent years, there has been an upsurge in the assertion in the cultural identities. Sebastian Kappen after analyzing the cultural situation in India,

writes,

“India is in the thick of a cultural crisis all would readily concede. Many and varied are its symptoms: the all too frequent strikes, gheraos, and demonstrations; the recurrence of atrocities against the Dalits, the repeated outbreak of communal violence, the arrogance and the callousness of the bureaucracy, the floor-crossings and defections indulged in by politicians, the shameless subservience of the intellectual elite to whoever happens to be in power, the ruthless pursuit of profit by traders and by big business, and the cynicism pervading the nation as a whole.”³¹

In this situation we place media. The two major perspectives from which media were viewed were functionalism and Marxism. Functionalism theory viewed media as neutral instruments for transmitting information and values. Marxist theory took the opposite position that media were not neutral; rather they transmitted the perspectives of the high caste, class elites in the form of mass culture that was accepted uncritically by the mass. But during 20th century, both these approaches were found inadequate. Society consists of numerous groups with several interests that cannot be reduced to economic interests. Hall defines the ideological functions of the media.³² Media provides an inventory of life styles and ideologies presenting the various lifestyles and behaviours of different social groups. Then media classifies these materials and interprets them to convince the people. By doing this media perform a major role in defining reality for all members of society, within the framework of dominant ideology. Media influence on culture is a serious issue today. Pop and rock culture is on an onslaught on the traditional culture of the people. The new generation has grown up nurtured by its messages and fantasies at the cost of a richer and more profound past. The New Year celebrations in Indian urban centers show that how people are proud to term them as modern.

India is experiencing a cultural war between the traditional and the capitalist culture. The power of the capitalist culture is slowly eliminating the traditional culture. The unorganized poor follow the traditional value of simplicity, whereas the rich work for a maximum profit. The caste inequality continues along with the inequalities in distribution of power. The organized sector employees often threaten the unorganized sector employees. The three social institutions, which disseminated traditional culture such as family, temple, and caste, propagate the capitalist ideas and values in an indirect way. From this analysis we find that the traditional culture has lost its original purity. This has intensified the crisis in Indian society in many ways. This cultural crisis demands that we should approach this problem from many perspectives, including biblical and theological.

Gospel, Culture and Communication: Biblical and Theological Exposition

This present crisis demands a cultural revolution, which S.Kappen calls as “counter-culture.”³³ This demands the transformation of all the values of today. He writes,

“What is needed is nothing less than the creation of a new society in which the good of all will consist in the full flowering of each person, and the good of each person is the well being of all. It will have to be a society in which cooperation will replace competition, love will replace aggression, quality will have primacy over quantity, and the aesthetic will subsume the useful. In that society, freedom will be realized, not in spite of, but through one’s fellowmen, justice will determine not merely interactions within a given system but

the system itself, commodities will take on the quality of gifts, the products of labour will have the value only in the measure in which they are sacraments of human togetherness, and the materialism of consumption will give way to the humanism of communion. In that society, each man will be open to another and in that openness also open to the absolute, to the dimension of transcendence. A culture revolution of this type can not be brought about without a radical restructuring of the entire social system.”³⁴

For this ‘counter-culture’ movement, the Bible provides us the base.

God communicates within culture

“*Culture as God’s dwelling place*” is a powerful expression made by George Pattery. The Word took a form in Jesus, in a particular culture. Every self-gift and self-disclosure of God has an incarnation pattern. George Pattery quotes Samuel Rayan who says, “*He (Jesus) was a deeply historical, densely human reality, a sharer in our bodily existence and earthly conditions, flesh of our flesh, man among men, like us in all things though never sinning, never closing himself to God. (His) body sprang from the depths of our earth and from the depth of a woman, a dear sister of ours.*”³⁵ Jesus was critical of the unjust, oppressive, dehumanizing elements in the culture. He was critical about his own culture and demanded transformation.

God communicates through culture

God starts working with human beings where they are, based on their commitment to God. God communicates through culture. The dynamics of God’s self-revelation in human culture is the way God works within the limitations of human culture. God’s choice to work within such limitations, plus God’s method of starting where people are, led to the introduction of a model called ‘starting-point-plus-process model’. There are at least two ways in which this model deals with both the starting point and the process. First, is the focus on the positioning and the second is focus on the direction of movement involved in the process. The first focus gives a grouping or what mathematicians call a set made up of the items positioned at the various points. A border can be drawn around those groupings to distinguish it from any other grouping, or set of points. The second focus leads to a categorizing of items in terms of the directions in which they are moving with respect to that central point or goal. God interacts or reveals himself to human beings in a directional basis rather than in a positional one. Faith is the starting point and the process for a continuing relationship with God.

Jesus: The Prophet of Counter-Culture

Kappen uses Jesus’ tradition as relevant to the Indian counter-culture movement. He found that Jesus’ tradition, particularly, Jesus’ prophetic protest as relevant to the Indian cultural crisis. Jesus used counter-culture-communication methods in his movement of cultural revolution. Palestine, at the time of Jesus was under a cultural domination. From 3rd century BC, a process of cultural symbiosis had been at work between Judaism and Hellenism. The Romans, the Greeks, the Syrians had their influence on the Jewish world. More than this, oppressed people Judaism itself. Jesus lived at a time when cult, law and apocalypticism had supplanted prophecy. There was no one to defend the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

Jesus by His own birth created a counter-culture, because His birth was a shocking event for the powerful aristocrats. Mary's song prophesied a norm and goal of a counter-culture, as she sings, "*He has stretched out his mighty arm and scattered the proud with all their plans. He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away with empty hands.*" (Luke 1:51-53) When Jesus was presented in the temple, Simeon thanked God by saying, "*A light to reveal your will to the gentiles and bring glory to your people Israel.*" (Luke 2:32). The message of Jesus marks the emergence of a radically new vision of the ultimate possibility open to humankind. He announced that the future reign of God was already germinating in the present. (Mt. 13: 33; Mk. 2: 22; 4:31-32). He rejected the existing view that human action is of no avail in determining the course of history. He asks his disciples to seek God's kingdom and its justice even to the point of death. (Mt. 5: 11; 6:33) For Jesus the values in God's rule are the values of the gospels. For Jesus, "*the new way of evaluating things, persons, events, customs and actions shaped his social praxis. He became a contesteer of the polar social relations in which traditional perception of values had crystallized: the rich vs the poor, the great vs. the least, man vs woman, parents vs. children, the Jew vs. the Gentile, the wise vs the simple, the pure vs impure and so on.*"³⁶ Jesus opted for the poor. (Mt. 5: 3; Lk. 6: 20). Because the poor were exploited, they were open to the future God had planned for them. On the contrary, the rich were closed to the new order of a society. (Mk. 10: 25; Mt. 6: 24). Jesus was on the side of the least (Lk. 13: 30), rejected the wisdom of the wise (Mt. 11: 25), associated freely with women (Jn. 4: 27), cultivated their friendship (Lk. 10: 38-42) and showed that the powerless were more open to the new humanity in which the oppressive culture will be transformed into a new culture of love and equality. He motivated his disciples to be the agents of this cultural revolution. The early Christian community was the highest manifestation of this counter-culture in which the believers held everything in common, to be distributed to each according to their need (Acts 4: 32-35). Jesus inaugurated this movement of counter-culture.

Jesus' pedagogy was counter-cultural

First, *parables* were counter-cultural hermeneutical tools, used by Jesus to reinterpret the existing faith in terms of the existing realities around Him through an aesthetic story format. They are found to have an interactive communication process in which the speaker used and interpreted shared faith³⁷ in terms of issues in the shared realities³⁸ through a well-known story format or a familiar imagery³⁹ and allowed the hearer to imagine and to play the role in the story. In the communication process, it is not only the content but also the people who participate in making it have to be analyzed together.⁴⁰ So, it is not the parable in itself, which gives the meaning, but the context in which the speaker and the hearer share the meaning contributes also to the understanding of the parables. Jesus' parables were not as the disciples expected, they were powerful and down-to-earth. To list a few parables such as fasting (Mk. 2: 19-20), the children playing (Mt.11:16-19), the unshrunk cloth and new wine (Mt. 9: 16-17), the Christian scribe (Mt.13: 52), the divided kingdom and house (Mk.3: 22-27), the strong man bound (Lk.11: 14-23) and the return of the evil spirit (Lk.11: 24-26), the narrow gate (Mt.7: 13-14), the rich man and Lazarus (Lk.16: 19-31) show the nature of Jesus' revolutionary messages through the parables. The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk.10: 25-37) is a typical example of Jesus' counter-cultural revolution.

Secondly, the *miracles* which Jesus did, were counter-cultural. Ellul gives a different meaning for Jesus' miracles and says that they are signs of the word. Miracles are always accomplished by word. During his ministry Jesus spoke.⁴¹ Ellul also writes that Jesus himself bears the word of God, so that he could say, 'I am the truth' means I incarnate the creative word (John 14: 6) and '*I am the life*' means the word is a guide.⁴² Jesus' miracles were evidences of the overthrow of evil. His miracles affected not only people's diseases, but through miracles he broke through social barriers, bringing together Jews and Samaritans, man and women and the rich and the poor and also their relationships. The healing of lepers (Mt.8: 1-4), the healing of the paralytic (Mt.9: 1-8), the healing of the man with a withered hand (Lk.14: 3-5) and number of other miracles performed by Jesus were counter-cultural.

Jesus' methodology is also communicative and counter-cultural. He shared his message of the kingdom of God and called for repentance wherever he went. He used both verbal and nonverbal communications of his time and culture. In short

"Through the ordinary stories and languages, the images of the people's own lives, Jesus spoke of the kingdom that was open to all the people – outcasts of the society, the socially, culturally and economically powerless and oppressed people – who could accept it. In his words, silence, prayer and gestures, Jesus communicated within the culture of his time, the conviction that the kingdom they did not know was at hand. This ministry of service, the unveiling of God, sharing the presence of the kingdom within the lives of the people of His own day, has given Jesus the title – "the Word of God" – the very communication of God amidst His people."⁴³

In his communication, Jesus always started from the life and life experiences of his people. He was receiver-audience oriented but at the same time, rooted in his mission from the Father. His communication was embedded in scripture. Questions must be considered as an integral element of Jesus' own teaching. He also communicated in the dialectic way especially in the Sermon on the Mount. He reminded and admonished people on their dignity, their duties; and that the Father loved them. He encouraged and invited to unity and oneness with God and others. He restored the communication, which was blocked by sin.⁴⁴ Jesus was against the oppressive culture. Sam Mathew examines the reaction of Jesus to the purity system in Mark's Gospel and brings out 'the anger of Jesus to purity system'⁴⁵ as a model. Jesus laid down two essential principles of a culture: equality and love. He was angry where and when equality was denied to the least. Jesus' message was counter-cultural.

This incarnation aspect is also counter-cultural. Christian communication calls for incarnating God's redeeming actions into modern daily life and into different cultures. As Jesus incarnated the love of the Father, his followers are also to continue to communicate this redemption in the verbal and non-verbal communications. The incarnation of the Word goes on every day anew in human lives and the different human lives. Kappen takes Jesus' incarnation as a powerful method for counter-culture, which the church, the body of Christ today must continue to practice. He writes,

"If it (incarnation) means that Jesus' message of the new age must assume the idiom and language of the people, none would disagree. If, further, it means that the church herself must become enfleshed in the culture of India, we need not overvalue the church's role of redeeming cultures. Such role is implicit in the official pronouncement of the church...

Hence our option to focus on the historical Jesus, who is the embodiment of counter-culture.”⁴⁶

Christ liberates Culture

This model of Christ liberating culture depends on two specific biblical and theological arguments. First, is God’s preferential option for the poor and the oppressed.⁴⁷ After liberation theology took this seriously in its articulation. Gustavo Gutierrez formulates this as a hermeneutical privilege wherein the Bible reveals God’s option for the poor. Secondly, this model identifies justice as a primary analogue for faith. Christ liberating culture as the model of the relationship of Christianity to the world depends on this understanding of God.

A new holistic paradigm is necessary while making a search for alternatives. Any new paradigm should pay greater attention to the relationship between gospel, culture and communication. Humanity can be understood as gospel plus culture plus communication. By joining the gospel, culture and communication a holistic approach can be developed. This calls for a dialogical living with people of different cultures, and faith communities, building up of a relationship of true mutuality, allowing room for interpretation and mutual correction. This paradigm emphasizes an image of the media as a social system. This perspective suggests that the impact of media on public is not totally predictable. George Pattery, when talks about culture, faith and liberation, developed a paradigm of ‘incultured liberation’⁴⁸ and he believes that this will be more relevant in the Indian context. An ‘uncultured liberation paradigm’ will truly liberate the domination of each one over the other and serve the purpose of liberation of the humanity.

A synthesis of Gospel, Culture and Communication

Compartmentalization of the gospel, culture and communication is untenable, especially in the Indian context. The relationship between gospel, culture and communication take several forms. It can be classified as dominant, isolated and collaborative. In dominant relationship there will be a transaction of power in which one struggles to control the other to satisfy selfish needs. Today in reality, communication is determining culture and even the gospel. Often this leads to isolation from one another. There may not be any forms of relationship between them. What we need today is a collaboration of gospel, culture and communication. This relationship must be based on mutual trust and contribution to each other with respect. In obedience to the Word of God, they should recommit themselves to praxis-oriented partnership that will strengthen the communities in which they belong.

The synthesis model is a midway between the emphasis on gospel, culture and communication. This model relies on the Bible, because the biblical message emerged within the context of an ancient tradition and a contemporary culture. Synthetic model goes beyond the translation model and acknowledges the mutual enrichment of cultures. It takes pain to keep the integrity of the traditional culture, while acknowledging the importance of taking gospel, culture and communication seriously. This synthesis preserves the importance of the gospel message and the heritage of culture, and at the same time, acknowledges the vital role that culture has played, even to the setting of a holistic paradigm for communicating the gospel. Synthetic model reaches out to the resources of other cultures for both the model and the content of its articulation of faith. Synthesis is not compromising, but developing in a

creative dialectics, something that is acceptable to different viewpoints. In this sense, this model can be called a 'dialectical model'. This synthetic model is based on the composite nature of human culture in which the gospel is communicated to humanity. This view holds that every culture has unique elements that are held in common with other cultures. Every culture can borrow and learn from any other culture and still remain unique.

Synthesis model is dialogical. It is discovering new aspects that emerge from its encounter with new cultures. This may be better expressed as an ongoing dialogue between gospel and culture. M. Amaladoss writes, "*While the gospel has to be deeply involved in culture and provides it its basic meaning, in so far as culture has its autonomy and develops in different ways, the gospel has also to keep its freedom to stand apart and challenge culture. The relation between gospel and culture then becomes dialectical.*"⁴⁹ David J. Bosch views culture as the language, which God has been speaking to every people and the human's voice that shapes the response to the divine self-offer. He considers inculturation as the continuation of the work of Jesus Christ through the community of his disciples, so that every culture can be transformed into the kingdom reality. Communication must take this and promote a culture of kingdom values rather than promoting dehumanizing elements of culture.⁵⁰ As the church is facing many serious cultural threats, due to the communication explosion, the Church has to think beyond enculturation. Also, theoretically, in *kenosis* and in incarnation, the gospel took embodiment in various cultures. "*The option for the church today is not embodiment, but dialogue, which is ready to receive as well as to give.*"⁵¹ Michael Amaladoss asserts that 'Church must think of going beyond enculturation' in two levels. First, he writes,

"The encounter between gospel and culture is oriented not so much to the embodiment of the gospel in a given culture, but the transformation of that culture... A community that responds to the gospel does so in terms of the culture that shapes its life. But at the same time, as it is in dialogue with other cultures around it, it should not reduce the gospel to its limited expression, but make it prophetically present through dialogue also to other cultures."⁵² Second, he writes, "enculturation points to the need for every church to be an authentic local church, in which a community of people can respond freely to the gospel in a creative and relevant manner without importing, unnecessary, symbolic structures from elsewhere, which alienate them from their own culture and context."⁵³

We have come to a point today that we no longer can Christianise any culture; rather Christians can work for the gospel challenges every culture to transformation.

In the context of conflicting cultures, various cultures struggling to affirm their cultural and ethnic identities, caste identities, marginalization of the poor and the weak, is there a possibility to talk about ecumenism? I believe that an understanding of a 'wider ecumenism' will provide a direction towards the unity between cultures. In this effort, there must be a coalition of various cultures to explore and share their liberative elements. As K.C. Abraham says, "*We need to affirm that plurality is God's gift and diversity is in the very structure of God's creation.*" Plurality and diversity of cultures have to be seen in the light of God's continuing creative activity in the world. God works within a culture, through culture, and liberates the oppressive elements of culture. The communication of the liberative cultures has to be conceived today as an integral part of the message of the gospel. This liberative ecumenism leads to the articulation of a new paradigm, *Oikoumene* paradigm, which I believe

will provide a profound understanding about the need for the gospel, culture and communication taking a local face and interacting with the modern forms. The term *Oikoumene* derived from the word *oikos*, which means house. *Oikoumene* means 'the household of God'. The theology of *Oikoumene* challenges us to see the whole world as the house of God. The household of God consists of many cultures and many forms of communication both traditional and modern. They are all gifts of God. God expects that there must be a peaceful atmosphere in His household. One dominating the other or one suppressing the other is against God who is the Creator and Sustainer of *oikoumene*. Kosuke Koyama, a Taiwanese theologian, uses the imagery of a house to derive the message about dialogue in culture. He writes, "*The house of God is not a finished and closed house. It is being built upon the corner stone that is Christ... Into this house, peoples of all languages and cultures are invited to come. Without that invitation what is the meaning of the continuous creation of God?*"

Incarnation is God's communication of the good news in a particular cultural context. Incarnation happened in the household of God, *oikoumene*. Incarnation therefore must be seen as another foundation on which our plurality stands. God's incarnation is not primarily a physical event, but a historical and cultural happening. God pitched His tent and dwelt among us. *Oikoumene*, therefore, which consists of many cultures, becomes God's dwelling place. Incarnation is part of God's *Oikoumene*. Incarnation is a cultural paradigm. It is a *kenotic* paradigm. Paul writes, "*Though he was in form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of (hu) men*" (Phil.2:6-7). It is a life-centered paradigm. This implies that the Church too will have to follow the way of Jesus. An element of such following is certainly its readiness to throw off the cultural baggage that it has accumulated through history, without clinging to it, so as to encounter new cultures more effectively.

NOTES

1. D.S.Amalorpavadoss, *Gospel and Culture*, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1978,p.11.
2. Marshal McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, London:Routledge,1994,p.260.
3. Nick Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures*, London: SAGE, 1995, p.129.
4. J.Martin-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony*, London: SAGE, 1993, p.15.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.15-16.
6. Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of Popular Mind*, Eng.translation, New York: Penguin, 1977.
7. *Ibid.*, p.
8. David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.
9. Barbero, *Op.cit.*, pp. 50-52.
10. *Ibid.*, p.24.
11. Quoted by Tony Bennett, "Theories of the media, theories of society", in *Culture, Society and the Media*, ed. Michael Gurevitch, et.al., 1988,p.36.
12. Quoted by Michael R.Real, *Exploring Media Culture*, London: SAGE Pub., 1996,p.31.
13. Jesus Martin-Barbero, *Op.cit.*,p.122.
14. Nick Stevenson, *Understanding Media Cultures*, London: SAGE Pub., 1995,p.53.
15. K.C.Abraham, "Globalization and Liberative Solidarity", in *Globalization and its Impact on Human Rights*, ed. Mathews George Chunakara, Hong Kong: CCA,1998,p.135. See also Vandana Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind*, Malaysia: Third World Network,1995. In this book, she examines the current threats to the bio-diversity and its consequences by monocultur production. This rapidly

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accelerating process of technology and system transfer is impoverishing huge numbers of people; disrupting the social systems that provide them with security and dignity.

16. Michael B.Salwen, "Cultural Imperialism: A Media Effects Approach", in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol.8, No.1, March 1991,p.29.
17. *Ibid.*, 30.
18. Cited by Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi, "The Many Cultural Faces of Imperialism", in *Beyond Cultural Imperialism*, ed. Peter Golding & Phil Harris, London: SAGE,1997,p.49.
19. See Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, London: SAGE, 1994., pp.179-180.
20. *Ibid.*, p.180.
21. See Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, Delhi: ISPCK,1994. Also see M.M.Thomas and P.T.Thomas, *Towards an Indian Christian Theology: Life and Thoughts of some pioneers*, Tiruvalla: The New Day Publications of India, 1992.
22. See M.Amaladoss, *Becoming Indian: The Process of Inculturation*, Rome: CIIT, Bangalore: Dharmaram Pub. 1992, p.41.
23. S.Wesley Ariarajah, *Gospel and Culture: An Ongoing Discussion within the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva: WCC Pub., 1994.
24. Cited by Thomas K.Fitzgerald, "Media, Ethnicity and Identity", in *Culture and Power*, ed. Paddy Scannell, Philip Schlesinger, & Colin Sparks, London:SAGE,1992,p.112.
25. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Communication of the Christian Faith*, London: Lutterworth Press,191960, p.15.
26. Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, tr. from French by Joyce Main Hanks, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985,p.48.
27. *Ibid.*,p.50.
28. *Ibid.*,p.51.
29. Diana Crane, *The Production of Culture*, Newbury Park: SAGE Pub., 1992,p.161.
30. The Star TV programmes involve in this process of making global culture. The Fashion TV programmes though appear to expose diversity of fashions, ultimate intention is to promote a global culture, a culture of the West.
31. Quoted by L.Jeyaseelan, *Towards a Counter-Culture: Sebastian Kappen's Contribution*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1999, p.21.
32. Cited by Diana Crane, *The Production of Culture*, Newbury Park: SAGE Pub., 1992, p.17.
33. Quoted by L.Jeyaseelan, *Towards a Counter-Culture: Sebastian Kappen's Contribution*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1999, p.33. See S.Kappen, *Tradition Modernity Counter Culture*, Bangalore:Visthar,1994.
34. *Ibid.*, pp.33-34.
35. Quoted by George Pattery, "Culture, Faith and Liberation", in *Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol.35/ No.2, and Kolkata: Bishop's College, 1993,p.46.
36. L. Jeyaseelan, *Towards a Counter-Culture*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1999,p.44.
37. Faith shared both by the speaker and by the hearers. For example, faith in the Kingdom of God Lk.19: 11 and in the eternal life, Lk.10:25.
38. Social and cultural realities such as material prosperity Lk.16:14 and the rich and the poor distinction Lk. 21: 4, are shared by the speaker and the hearer in society.
39. B.H.Young, *Jesus and Jewish Parables, Rediscovering the Roots of Jesus' Teaching*, New York: Paulist Press, 1989,p.3.
40. J. Fisk, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, London: Routledge, 1982. Pp.24f. In all models of communication, Fisk identifies the basic structure as: who – says what – to whom.
41. Ellul writes that Jesus wrote only once. A mysterious text he wrote on the sand, but more than the written word, he spoke 'Let him who is without sin...'. The powerful spoken word liberated the woman. (Cf. Mk.2:5). See Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of the Word*, *Op.cit.*,p.55.
42. Jacques Ellul, *Op.cit.*,p.57.
43. Samuel W.Meshack, *Op.cit.*,p.48.
44. Many healing miracles must be seen as a renewal and re-establishment of communication. Cf. Lk.8:27;11:14; Mk.2:22ff).

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45. Sam P. Mathew, *Temple-Criticism in Mark's Gospel*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1999.
46. Sebastian Kappen, *Jesus and Cultural Revolution, An Asian Perspective*, Bombay: Build Publication, 1983, pp.19-27.
47. Exodus discloses God as a God of the people in history, interrelated through familial, religious, social, political and economic systems. The prophets criticized the social systems and revealed God as one who demanded justice and righteousness. In the New Testament, the Beatitudes – Blessed are the poor. These are few references which depict God's preferential option for the poor.
48. George Pattery, "Culture, Faith and Liberation, in *Indian Journal of Theology*, Vol.35/No.2, Kolkata: Bishop's College, 1993, p.45.
49. Amaladoss, *Becoming Indian: The Process of Inculturation*, Rome: CIIS, Bangalore: Dharmaram Pub., 1992, pp.5-6.
50. David J.Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology and Mission*, Mary Knoll: Orbis Books, 1994, pp.447-457.
51. Michael Amaladoss, *Beyond Inculturation: Can the Many be One?*, Delhi: Vidyajyoti & ISPCK, 1998, p.16.
52. *Ibid.*, p.16.
53. *Ibid.*, p.17.