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CROSS-CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION  
AND THE NEW MISSIONARY

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## ABSTRACT

### CROSS-CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION AND THE NEW MISSIONARY

This study attempts to examine the situation surrounding new missionaries in cross-cultural context. In doing this, cultural factors and interpersonal relationship were surveyed as outstanding problems of new missionaries. It was therefore argued that cross-cultural identification could be used by new missionaries to ameliorate the initial problems on the field in order to create a conducive atmosphere for effective mission work. Thus incarnational model of ministry is seen as most effective in carrying out the divine mission mandate.

Chapter one is a general introduction to the thesis. This includes the statement of the problem, the purpose, of the study, methodology, the scope of the study, and definition of terms. Chapter two deals with culture shock as an initial problem of new missionaries. In it a brief introduction to culture shock is given. Then the discussion continues through various aspects of culture shock and its implications for new missionaries, including the nature of culture, different stages of culture shock, causes of culture shock and symptoms

of culture shock. Chapter three discusses ways to cope with culture shock. It opens with a short introduction and goes on through incarnation as a theological basis for identification, the need for new missionaries to learn the culture of the people and how to go about doing that, as well as what new missionaries could do to adjust to the situation. Chapter four deals with the analysis of questionnaires.

Chapter five is the conclusion and recommendations. The conclusions are based on the insight gained from the ideas derived from the development of the thesis. A number of recommendations are made for cross-cultural missionaries and their mission agencies to help lessen the severity of the initial problems confronting missionaries in cross-cultural context. This was done with the hope that when the recommendations are implemented the gospel will more readily take root among people, thereby producing indigenous churches that would contextualize the gospel message in the various cultures.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conclusions

Missionary outreach is the key to the spread of Christianity as missionaries and mission agencies are instrumental in the spread of Christianity throughout the ages. Otherwise, the Christian faith would have been like "Zoroastrianism; it would be an obscure religion of the ancients, studied by scholars but known little beyond the borders of its homeland."<sup>1</sup> Mission work spread far and wide because of availability of missionaries and their approach to the work.

Cross-cultural identification and the new missionary is an issue of great importance in cross-cultural Christian ministry which calls for proper attention by missionaries and their mission agencies. The various aspects of the subject as discussed in the thesis should be of major concern to missionaries if they are to be successful in their career.

Mission agencies are interested in the welfare of their missionaries as well as in the salvation, Christian nurture and maturity of the target groups. To be able

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth A. Tucker, From Jerusalem to Irian-Jaya (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p. 25.

to realize that objective of mission agencies and their agents, there must be an ongoing mutual relationship between missionaries and nationals. Hence missionaries need to make use of the benefits offered through cross-cultural identification while relating to the people with whom they are working.

It could be seen from earlier discussion in the thesis that the initial period of arrival of missionaries in a new culture presents some difficult problems which, if not properly addressed, could lead new missionaries to be so frustrated to the point of withdrawal from the field and perhaps from a missionary career. If that happens, the mission agency of the ones who withdrew would suffer a serious loss. Diekhoff quoted Tucker who estimated the cost of pre-mature withdrawal of a cross-cultural missionary to be about "two and one-half times the lost individual's base pay."<sup>2</sup> He went further to say that Lindquist based his argument on Tucker's estimate to conclude that ". . . if only 10% of American missionaries return home prematurely, then \$13 million is lost each year to overseas missionary attrition."<sup>3</sup>

Cross-cultural missionary activities in the past which did not emphasize cross-cultural identification often harmed the culture and the people that were meant to be evangelized. In such situations, mere "church goers"

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<sup>2</sup>George M. Diekhoff and others, "The Ideal Overseas Missionary: A Cross-Cultural Comparison," Journal of Psychology and Theology, 19, 1991, p. 178, citing Tucker, "Cross-Cultural Adjustment and Effectiveness," Paper Presented at the meeting of the Society for International Education, Training and Research, Long Beach, California.

<sup>3</sup>Diekhoff, citing Lindquist, Journal of Psychology and Christianity, 4, pp. 10-14.

were produced out of the people instead of producing disciples of Jesus Christ. Moreover, such past missionary activities succeeded mainly in transplanting the beliefs and practices of their home churches or missions to foreign lands. In **other** words, such churches have no bearings on the culture of the people. This led people to regard Christianity as a "white man's religion."

Donovan wrote:

Many misgivings, fears and suspicions revolve around the whole missionary movement and missionary history - the violence done to the cultures, customs, and consciousness of peoples, and callousness and narrow-mindedness found in that history.<sup>4</sup>

It is those types of abnormalities caused by past missionary activities that cross-cultural identification seeks to redress.

Thus the essence of missionary cultural identification rests on the ultimate goal of missionaries which is "to present the supra-cultural message of the gospel in culturally relevant terms."<sup>5</sup> The process by which that goal can be realized is beclouded with some problems which could be overcome by missionaries through cross-cultural identification.

Those problems inherent in the cross-cultural missionary task can be viewed from two basic perspectives. One

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<sup>4</sup>Vincent J. Donovan, Christianity Rediscovered (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, Contextualization (Leicester: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 1.

is the danger for missionaries to clothe the gospel message with some elements of their cultures with disregard to the culture of the target group. The second is the danger of indiscriminate imposition of the host cultural elements on the biblical message - which is syncretistic tendency.

In order to check against those basic dangers, such as the problems of cultural factors and interpersonal relationships often encountered by new missionaries, an emphasis on cross-cultural identification seeks to give orientation to new missionaries on how to handle the problems confronting them at the initial period of their arrival in a new culture. In doing that, cultural factors and the problems they pose to new missionaries were identified and analysed, and some solutions suggested to the problems.

Culture shock was thus identified as the initial problem of new missionaries. That phenomenon surfaces through cultural factors due to differences in their meanings and applications which are capable of causing psychological, physical and spiritual imbalance to foreigners. When this happens to missionaries, they could have the tendency to go back home. Other contributing factors can be the loss of familiar cues, friends, roles, and inability to communicate meaningfully with the people and their culture.

