

Lecture 4- Christian History as Translation (6); Matthew 28:18-20 (7); Culture (8)

Cross-cultural boundaries are accorded an intrinsic status in the proclamation of the Gospel, and Christians who stood at such frontiers acquired a critical comparative perspective on their own cultural identity.

-Sanneh, p. 30

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

-Matthew 28:18-20 – 18

Christian life is indelibly marked with the stamp of culture.... Paul was a cultural iconoclast in his defiance of the absolutist tendencies in culture, but he was not a cultural cynic, for in his view God's purposes are mediated through particular cultural streams.

-Sanneh, p.47

Key Terms

Relativization & destigmatization; diffusion & translation; mission & regulation; quarantine, syncretize, reform; transcendence & particularization; authority; mandate; promise; Great Commission in context; missionary community; different from; committed to; discipleship vs. making disciples; culture; invention; stages of mission

Lecture Objectives

- Describe the differences among the various grouped terms listed in the key terms, noting the implications of the differences described.
- Compare and contrast your own understanding of the Gospel's relationship to your own culture in light of the groupings listed in the key terms.
- Identify implications of these discussions for your understanding of the ministry to which you have been called.
- Describe and evaluate biblically the key elements of Matthew 28:18-20 as presented by Verkuyl.
- Compare and contrast this presentation with other presentations you have heard.
- Identify implications of today's discussion for the ministry of the local church.
- Identify and describe some key characteristics of "culture."
- Begin to identify key points of contact between "culture" and the "work of the Gospel."
- Identify some specific cultural dynamics/characteristics within which you currently live and how they are impacting you and the work to which you have been called.

Christian History As Translation

I. "The Gospel is unscrambled from one cultural yoke in order to take firm hold in a different culture."

-Sanneh, p.25.

A. Cultural relativization and destigmatization

B. Mission by diffusion vs. by translation

1. "The Gospel demands a plural frontier for its diffusion, looking with alarm at the notion of a hermetically sealed culture as the exclusive conveyance of God's truth." p.30.

2. "God is not an interchangeable cultural concept, a pious embodiment of cultural self-regard. But neither is God an abstract force who is encountered outside the limits of cultural self-understanding." p.30.
- C. Urges to mission and to regulate
- D. Quarantine, syncretism, prophetic reform
1. "Rather than being an abstract code imposed from a predetermined vantage point, reform grows out of the experience of a worshipping community with a profound stake in the world" pp.40-41.
 2. "Prophetic action in history is the active participation of believers in the sign and promise of God rather than surrender to the world as the ultimate destiny." p.41.
 3. "Christianity entered the multiple world of cross-cultural encounter with an open mind and a firm faith. The risk that it took with the first step it exploited with the second." p.44.
 4. "The Jewish-Gentile frontier became a paradigm not only of God's universal reality, though that was crucial, but also of the reform impulse, which cleansed syncretism without allowing it to lapse into the predestined utopia of quarantine. There was now not one cultural center but a multiple frontier across which God was the center of gravity." p.45.
- E. Current wrestling points
1. "No one is beyond this error of assuming a built-in advantage for culture, especially when culture is underpinned by economic and political power." p.27.
 2. "Cross-cultural boundaries are accorded an intrinsic status in the proclamation of the Gospel, and Christians who stood at such frontiers acquired a critical comparative perspective on their own cultural identity." p.30.
 3. "When he stressed faith over against works, Paul was intending to enunciate the inclusive principle of God's right and freedom to choose us without regard to our cultural trophies. Faith, as the absolute gift of a loving, gracious God, is the relativizing leaven in culture. Western psychology and its theological variants have unjustifiably subjectivized the issue, pitting inward assurance against social engagement. In fact, Paul desired above all to safeguard the cultural particularity of Jew as Jew and Gentile as Gentile, though challenging both Jew and Gentiles to find in Jesus Christ their true affirmation." p.47.
- II. "The divine Word was expressed under the conditions of a particular human society; the divine Word was, as it were, translated. And since the divine Word is for all humanity, he is translated again in terms of every culture where he finds acceptance among its people." Walls, p.47.
- A. "Throughout Christian history two forces are distinguishable in constant tension. One is the indigenizing principle, a homing instinct, which creates in diverse communities a sense that the Church belongs there, that it is 'ours.' The other is a 'pilgrim' principle that creates within the Christian community the sense that it is not fully at home in this world, so that it comes into tension with its society from its loyalty to Christ. The one tends to localize the vision of the Church, the other to universalize it." pp.53-54.
- B. "One result is the rich diversity of Christian life and experience. Another is the new transcendent commonality, shared across diverse communities." p.54

Matthew 28:18-20

I. General Comments on Matthew 28:18-20

- A. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father

and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

II. Verkuyl, pp.106-109 (not required)

- A. Jesus' authority
- B. Jesus' continuing mandate to mission
- C. Jesus' promise

III. Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991. pp.56-83.

- A. “Matthew 28:18-20 has to be interpreted against the background of Matthew's gospel as a whole...No exegesis of the 'Great Commission' divorced from its moorings in this gospel can be valid.” (p.57)
- B. “Matthew is not interested in missionary terminology as such; he sets out to describe the missionary practice of Jesus and the disciples and, by implication, of the community of his own time and of later times...A missionary community is one that understands itself as being both different from and committed to its environment; it exists within its context in a way which is both winsome and challenging.” (p.83)

IV. Walls, Andrew F. *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996. p.27.

“Christ, God's translated speech, is re-translated from the Palestinian Jewish original. The words of the Great Commission require that the various nations are to be made disciples of Christ. [n: Mt.28:19. Note that it is the nations, not some people within the nations, who are to be discipled.] In other words, national distinctives, the things that mark out each nation, the shared consciousness and shared traditions, and shared mental processes and patterns of relationship, are within the scope of discipleship.”

cf. Walls, pp.48ff.

Culture

I. Understanding “Culture” (see www.unesco.org)

“One of the most important advancements in contemporary social and anthropological theory is a movement away from unified theories of culture, as symbolized in the concept of worldview, to theories that emphasize the ‘duality of culture’.... Cultural system comprises the knowledge, beliefs, theories, and conceptual schemes, that is, the sum of knowledge and the logical relations that persons bring to social interaction. The sociocultural level, in contrast, focuses upon people and the causal relations between groups and individuals in the social context.... Cultural system and sociocultural level [must] be held conceptually distinct from one another. If we are to understand culture adequately we must examine the logical properties and the causal processes of both the cultural system and the sociocultural level. Each aspect is independent of the other and an adequate understanding of them will arise only out of the careful assessment of each as separate components.”

Lingenfelter, Sherwood. *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1992. pp.204-205.

II. Three Varieties of Mission – Shenk, pp.48-58

- A. The “invention” of culture
- B. Three stages of mission in Protestant experience