

# Biblical Missiology: The Transcultural Message

By Pastor Bob Bixby

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

**Date:** Sunday, October 11, 2009

**Series:** Biblical Missiology

## Tabernacle Baptist Church

7020 Barrington Road

Hanover Park, Illinois 60133

**Website:** [www.GodCentered.info](http://www.GodCentered.info)

## Review

- Contextualization: There is no conversation without contextualizing.
- “Your theology dictates the way you are going to proceed with your contextualization.” (Hesselgrave)
- Our contextualizing must be governed by God’s holiness and humility.

To contextualize the communication of God’s holiness and humility is the burden of our ambassadorial work.

**culture:** *the attitude and behavior characteristic of a particular social group*

**Culture:** “shared understandings made manifest in act and artifact” (Redfield)

## Artifact

- Stuff
- Blue jeans
- iPhone OR Blackberry!
- Pulpit
- Drums
- Guitar
- Pew
- Painting
- Wedding ring
- Surplice
- Building
- Computer
- Coffee maker
- Tie

We have to communicate the universal missionary message in the context of cultures!

“If we have to succinctly summarize our missionary task, one of the best words available to us is the word communication” (Hesselgrave).

## 1 Corinthians 9:19 – 23

“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of

God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means

I might save some. 23 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings” (ESV).

## Communicating Cross-culturally

Communicating to Collectives, Cultures and sub-cultures is the Universal Conundrum

### The Mind of the Soul, Gary Zukav & Linda Francis

“Individuals define themselves by their collectives. A white, American, Christian, businessman, for example, sees himself in those terms. When the collectives that an individual uses to define himself are different from the collectives of another, a gap appears. That gap is fear. The white, American, Christian, businessman relates easily to white, American, Christian, military men, and also to white, German, Christian, businesswomen, because they participate in most of his collectives. He relates less easily with yellow, Chinese, Confucian, businesspeople, and even less easily with black, African, Muslim, bricklayers. The more differences there are between collectives that define individuals, the more fear exists between those individuals... In other words, the more differences there are between collectives, the more fear exists between them. **The glue that holds collectives together is not language, skin color, belief, or common experience. It is fear.** That is why collectives cannot unify humanity, but can only divide it further. **The more frightened an individual is, the more he will identify with his collective, and the more violently he will defend it.** Nazis, the Ku Klux Klan, and fundamentalist movements, for example, are collectives of individuals who are so frightened they cannot tolerate even minor differences”.<sup>1</sup>

“Virtually every kind of modern collectivity, moreover, seems to depend at one time or another on integrative processes that create some sense of shared identity, even if these are forged, as they all too often are, in opposition to simplistic constructions of those who are putatively on the other side.”<sup>2</sup>

What are these authors conclusion? Collectives are bad!

### What does the Bible say about collectives?

The major metaphors of the Bible for the Church of Jesus Christ consistently hammer home the idea of a unique collective!

What the “Experts” say: *Fear is the glue that holds collectives together, thus that must be the case for Christians.*

Bible: “and not frightened in anything by your opponents” (Philippians 1:28)

---

<sup>1</sup> Zukav, *Mind of Soul*, 27-28

<sup>2</sup> Jeffery C. Alexander, “Social Performance Between Ritual and Strategy” Jeffery C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, Jason L. Mast, ed. *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 31.

# City of Man (All Sinners) vs. City of God (God's Collective)

## What is God's Collective described as in the Bible?

- Flock
- Branches
- Church
- New Humanity
- Body

The two cities are “commingled and, as it were, entangled together” - Augustine

## Paul's epistolary greetings

- “to all who are beloved of God in Rome” (1:7)
- “to the churches of Galatia” (1:2)
- “to the saints who are at Ephesus” (1:1)
- “to all the saints who are in Christ Jesus at Philippi” (1:1)
- “to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colossae” (1:2)
- Paul's epistolary greetings
- “to the church of the Thessalonians” (1:1)
- “to the church of the Thessalonians” (1:1)

How does Paul greet the sectarian, partisan, collectivistic Corinthian church? “To the church **of God**, which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, **with all** who in **every place** call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, **both theirs and ours**” (1:2).

### I. The Question of *Possession*

“to the church of God that is in Corinth”

“you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Tim. 3:15)

“In the last two or three decades evangelicals have discovered culture. . . What they want to know about culture is simple and easy to unearth. They want to know what the trends and fashions are that are ruffling the surface of contemporary life. They have no interest at all in what lies beneath the trends, none on how our modernized culture in the West shapes personal horizons, produces appetites, and provides us ways of processing meaning. All that seems like pretty complex and useless stuff. Pragmatist to the last drop of blood, these evangelicals are now in the cultural waters, not to understand what is there, but to get some movement. They are there with their surfboards trying to get a little forward motion as each tiny ripple makes its way toward the shore. This quest for success. . . passes under the language of ‘relevance’. . . Again and again the issue that has emerged, as a result, is whether evangelicals will build their churches *sola Scriptura* or *sola cultura*”.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> David Wells, *Protestant*, 3

God transcends cultures.

Truth transcends cultures.

II. The Question of *Place*

“We are appointed by God to a place and time in history. To know our place and our time is to be responsible stewards of our responsibility. This demands thoughtful contextualization that is biblically faithful. It is important to remember that culture does not give the church its agenda. All it gives to the church is its context” (David Wells, *Protestant* 98).

Contextualizers realize that the Christian message is not communicated best by using the same form or formula in all cultures (Hesselgrave).

III. A Question of *People*

God owns the Church. As His set-apart people, commissioned with ambassadorial responsibilities, we are assigned a place and time in history.

**City of God (God’s Collective)**

- Flock
- Branches
- Church
- New Humanity
- Body

God’s Flock which is under the care of the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10) meets in little flocks under the care of “under-shepherds” (1 Pt. 5). God’s Body meets in little bodies. God’s Church meets in little churches.

The little collectives are part of the Larger Collective. Therefore, the little collectives must develop a church context that is trans-cultural.

The local church is a collective. Thus, we need to **collectively** modify/ change/ adapt/ submit/ yield our culture to effectively do our ambassadorial work in the context where God has placed us.

**NOT** the Homogenous Unit Principle

**The Homogenous Unit Principle:**

- “People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers” (Moreau).
- “It takes no great acumen to see that when marked differences of of color, stature, income, cleanliness, and education are present, men understand the gospel better when expounded by their own kind of people. They prefer to join churches whose members look, talk, and act like themselves” (McGavran).

The Homogenous Principle of the CGM endorses a type of monoculturalism in the church (i.e. Saddleback Sam).

#### IV. The Question of *Principle*

**prin.ci.ple:** *the fundamental truth or proposition that serves as the foundation for a system of belief or behavior or for a chain of reasoning*

There is no other name by which men shall be saved than the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and all those saved thereby are under His Lordship.

The culturally relevant church of Jesus Christ is not monocultural (the homogenous unit principle), it cannot be acultural, nor is it necessarily multicultural. But it must always be **transcultural**.

### **Music illustration**

- Content. This addresses the Question of Principle. The truth of God is primary.
- Continuity. This addresses the Question of People. We are part of the One Body, thus we sing songs that connect us to our great heritage.
- Contemporaneity. This addresses the Question of Place. We are 21st Century Westerners, thus we sing songs that contextualize.