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Editorial

Religious world views and values have always been a dominant factor in shaping national cultures. This is very obvious in Asian and African cultures. It is equally true in the West, though less visible and more subtle. The vacuum caused by the collapse of secular modernity—the child of the Enlightenment—is being filled by new spiritualities, whether overtly religious or not. In the West we recognize them as belonging to the family of New Age spirituality and ideologies. We are living through an age of massive cultural change, undergirded by religious and spiritual confusion with tragic moral and social consequences.

In this context the Gospel and the Church are being discredited, ignored and attacked by societies that are fundamentally or increasingly pagan. Christians worldwide need to prepare themselves for new waves of persecution. All this is a cause for rejoicing, not despair, for Jesus Christ is preeminent over all things and in hope and expectation we look for his kingly reign in the life of our churches and in the redemption of 'creation itself—a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness'. Our agenda is to be partners in the gospel transforming culture.

This issue of ERT seeks to grapple with some of these issues: how the gospel disturbs culture and Christians by maintaining their differences transform culture from within; a better understanding of the cultural assumptions of the biblical writers; the inclusiveness yet exclusiveness of the gospel; how the invisible God is uniquely made visible in Jesus Christ; what it means for Christians to enter into a living dialogue with people of other Faiths. It is indeed a privilege to be living in such an age!

When Gospel and Culture Intersect: Notes on the Nature of Christian Difference[1]

Miroslav Volf

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In this thought-provoking article on the relationship of the gospel to culture Dr Volf explores the different ways Christians have responded to being marginalised by society. The gospel is always about differences disturbing every culture and challenging Christians to piece-meal transform their own culture by remaining internal to it. He argues that marginalization is a cause for rejoicing and hope for the future—not a retreat to despair.
Editor

[1] This paper was prepared for 'The Gospel in Our Pluralistic Culture. A Theological Consultation on Missiology and Western Culture' in *Bad Urach*, Germany, July 4–8, 1994.

INTRODUCTION: IN PRAISE OF MARGINALITY

At the threshold of the 21st century, there is a profound sense of crisis in many churches in the West. Once they were dominant social forces; today they find themselves on the margins, with a past they like to boast about and future they seem to dread. Occasionally they still try to insert themselves as major players in the big social game. Invariably, however, they find out that none of the old tricks they knew so well works anymore; they trip over the ball, they don't know how to pass, let alone how to score. So the coaches put them on the bench where they either yell angry and fruitless shouts at the enemy or try to comfort the members of their own team when they come bruised from the field, all this while secretly hoping that they themselves will some day be allowed to step on to the field and present themselves to the world in all their glory. Increasingly, however, there is less and less space for them even on the bench; other, more able players, are already occupying the space. And so the churches find themselves pushed up into the crowd of spectators, rooting for their favourite teams, scheming up ever new and useless ways to return to the field or reminiscing about the good old days when they were still young.

For anyone who remembers the days when the church *was* young and vigorous, there is something profoundly odd about the present sense of crisis. The early church was not simply on the sidelines, it was not even among the cheering spectators. A slandered, discriminated, even persecuted minority, a thorn in society's flesh. Yet, notwithstanding the temptation to backslide or accommodate, the early church celebrated hope in God and proclaimed fearlessly the resurrected Lord as she walked in the footsteps of the crucified Messiah. It was he who taught them: 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you' (Matt. 5:11). For the early church, to be on the margin was not a cause of alarm, but grounds for rejoicing. To be tucked in the dark corner of the public arena was not a sign of failure, but of keeping good company. Much like many persecuted churches in the world today, the early church had resources to deal with its marginality. We in the West do not. And so we despair as we find ourselves unwanted players in the large-scale social game.

The reasons the early church could rejoice in situations in which the contemporary western church moans are many and complex. To claim that there is a simple road that leads from where we are today to where they were then is not to engender hope but to sow seeds of more despair. There is, however, no doubt that one major reason for the difference between the early and contemporary churches lies in *expectations*: we have come to expect to be major players in the first league in our social world: the early church expected nothing more than to be left alone to play their own game, inviting their neighbours and friends to join in and learn the rules. The difference in expectations reflects the difference in attitudes toward culture at large, which in turn reflects social position in that culture. We have come to consider it our home and are frustrated to find ourselves losing control over it; for them it was a land occupied by a foreign force.

There is no need here to trace historically the road which brought us to where we are today. Instead, I wish to look toward the future, to re-imagine the relation between the gospel and multiple cultures in contemporary societies, to explore the nature of Christian presence in these societies. My desire is to defuse the sense of crisis and generate new hope for the church facing the 21st century—both a more modest and a more robust hope than the churches in the West have had in recent history. To state my goal more pointedly, *I want to make us more comfortable with our marginality so that from there we can*

influence the multiple centres of our societies, more at home with our irrelevance so that from there we can gain new confidence about our relevance.

My outline is simple. First I will point out four major features of contemporary societies and the kinds of relations between church and culture these societies do or do not allow. Second, I will name three inadequate ways to live as Christians in these societies. Third, I will tell you a better way. And finally, I will draw some implications for mission and theology.

I. SOCIAL CONTEXT

Before I reflect about the nature of Christian presence in modern societies, let me indicate briefly four features of these societies. They describe the framework in which we need to place our discussion about Christian identity and difference.

(1) *Voluntarism*. Churches can come into existence and continue to live only through the decisions—choices—of their members. Certainly, it takes more to have a church than the will of its members to belong to a church. Furthermore, much in ecclesiology depends on how we understand theologically the decisions of its members to be a church. Still, without the conscious will of the people to belong to a church, churches cannot exist as social realities. No amount of talk about rediscovery of community and tradition can negate this fact; the community that is being rediscovered today is a (post-modern?) *intentional* community, not a pre-modern 'natural' community.

(2) *Difference*. Churches will be able to survive in modern societies only if they attend to their 'difference' from the surrounding cultures. Without difference, churches will dissolve. This is something one can complain about or celebrate, depending upon one's theological scruples. Irrespective of our scruples, the following principle stands: whoever wants the church must want its difference from the surrounding culture. The dispute between those who want the church can intelligently take place only regarding what ecclesial difference should look like, not whether one should actively pursue it or not.

(3) *Plurality*. According to Ernst Troeltsch 'church' affirms the world whereas 'sect' denies it. Today, however, the one world which 'church' could affirm or 'sect' deny, has splintered into a plurality of worlds that exist in an overarching social framework. These worlds are partly compatible and partly incompatible, partly mutually dependent and partly independent; they form partly overlapping social spaces and create ever-changing hybrid cultures. Simple denial or affirmation of 'the world' will not do. Similarly, the simple claim that the Christian message is (or can be made) intelligible to 'the world' will not do. More complex ways of relating to multiple cultures will have to be developed to take into account the complexity of the social worlds that make up modern societies.

(4) *Self-sufficiency*. What sociologists call functional differentiation of society—the fact that various sub-systems specialize in performing particular functions, such as economic, educational, or communication activity—implies (relative) self-sufficiency and self-perpetuation of social sub- systems. And self-perpetuation means that the sub-systems resist influence through outside values. Contrary to the situation in traditional societies, there is no symbolic or actual centre holding societies together, through which influence on the whole can be exerted. To be adequate to the nature of contemporary societies, reflection on the social influence of the church will have to take into account this (relative) self-sufficiency and self-perpetuation of social systems. Otherwise our rhetoric will give us a fleeting sense

that we are doing something significant, but in the long run only engender frustration. The result will be increased marginalization of the church in modern societies.

II. THE LIBERAL PROGRAMME: ACCOMMODATION

How should we think of the presence of the Christian church in the world, given these four features of contemporary societies? Let me first look at what I have come to think are misplaced proposals; in critiquing them, I will be paving the road for getting at what I think is a better way to think about the relation between gospel and culture, church and society in contemporary western societies.

The liberal answer to this question about the nature of Christian presence runs something like this: translate the message into the conceptualities of the culture in which one lives, accommodate to the social practices of the surrounding modern culture. If you do not, you will be run by it. It is not hard to see why Christians would be tempted to reduce distance from their social environments by acculturating. The place of Christian communities in modern societies has become problematic. They appear socially superfluous. Things go their own way, with churches or without them. Being close to a particular culture and its centres of power would let us 'push' things in God's direction—or so it would seem.

Notice, however, what one needs to do in order to maintain closeness to a given culture in contemporary societies—one must be involved in constant reconstruction of the patterns of belief and practice to make them fit the changing plausibilities of that culture. What one gains is that the message appears plausible in a given context. This important gain does not come, however, without a significant loss. In modern societies churches are no longer capable of shaping plausibility structures of the cultures in which they live; other, more powerful forces are at work. So you have to acculturate to what you have not helped to shape. As a consequence, all reconstructions which are guided by existing plausibility structures carry in themselves seeds of Christian self-destruction (Berger 1992, pp. 3ff.). As Hauerwas and Willimon put it: 'Alas, in leaning over to speak to the modern world, we had fallen in. We had lost the theological resources to resist, lost the resources even to see that there was something worth resisting' (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, p. 27). In the best case, what remains for churches to do is to appear after a non-Christian show and repeat the performance in their own way for a few remaining visitors with Christian scruples. The voice of the church is an echo of a voice that is not their own.

III. THE POST-LIBERAL PROGRAMME: REVERSING THE DIRECTION OF CONFORMATION

The post-liberal answer to the question about how we should think of the presence of the Christian churches in modern societies comes out of profound dissatisfaction with the liberal answer. In the words of Nicholas Wolterstorff it consists in 'reversing the direction of conformation' (Wolterstorff 1993, p. 2). Instead of translating biblical message into the conceptuality of the social world that one inhabits, as modern theology has done, Christians should describe anew the social world they inhabit with the help of the biblical story.

But when one has nested oneself into the biblical story, what happens to conversation with the culture at large? Has one not closed oneself from it? The post-liberal answer to this question would be, of course, 'no'. But for the 'no' to stick, two conditions need to be

satisfied—two conditions to which post-liberals such as George Lindbeck or Hans Frei have not given sufficient attention.

First, there must be at least some significant symbolic compatibility between the Christian communities and the non-Christian cultural worlds. Even when the churches need to say something that does not quite make sense to the cultural worlds they inhabit, they must still say it in the language of their culture. Churches are distinct communities of discourse, yet they do not speak their own language. Rather, they use *the existing language in a different way*. Religious language of Christians does not come in place of the language of the wider culture, neither does it exist side by side with it. Religious language is rather *a way of using the language of one's culture* (hopefully not an obsolete dialect of that language!). Second, conversation with non-Christians presupposes readiness to listen and learn on the part of Christians. It would be not only arrogant but also foolish of churches to interpret their social environments from their own perspective, not paying attention to how these social environments interpret themselves or how they interpret the churches. Here we come up against the limits of the metaphor or 'reversing the direction of conformation'. Wolterstorff asks rightly:

> But is the relation of the Church theologian to the non-theological disciplines exclusively that of melting down gold taken from the Egyptians? Isn't some of the statuary of the Egyptians quite OK as it is? Does it all reek of idolatry? Isn't there something for the Church theologian to learn from the non-theological disciplines? (Wolterstorff 1993, p. 45)

A more selective approach to the question of conformation seems required than what the metaphor of 'reversal of conformation' suggests. Christians ought to be able to decide case by case in which direction the conformation should go. From some neutral standpoint? Such a standpoint is not available. No, from the standpoint we have taken: God's revelation in Christ as mediated to us through the community of faith. God's word in Jesus Christ is 'final and decisive for us'. Yet we occasionally need to revise our understanding of God's revelation in the light of what transpires, say, in the sciences (while at the same time being alert to the functioning of sciences as an instrument of domination rather than simply as a neutral tool for finding the 'truth').

It would seem that the two conditions for Christian conversation with non-Christian cultural worlds call into question the difference of Christian communities, their distance. Both the partial symbolic compatibility and the readiness to learn require a good deal of closeness. If we take these conditions seriously, what happens to distance? Do not the dangers of accommodation lurk around the corner? Yet it would be rather bizarre for Christians to run the risk of parroting as soon as they opened their mouths to speak and ears to hear. So we come up against the important issue of how we should think about the *presence* of the Christian difference in modern societies.

IV. THE SEPARATIST PROGRAMME: RETREAT FROM THE WORLD

One way to think about the *presence* of Christian difference 'in the world', is to imagine churches as Christian islands in the sea of worldliness. They would then have their own territory that is as clearly set apart from the social environment as are the rocks that protrude from the waters.

In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes churches as being 'in the midst of the world' but as those who are 'taken out of the world' (Bonhoeffer 1963, p. 311). Their environment is 'a foreign land' to them. Or, using a more dynamic image, he thought of Christians as strangers 'only passing through the country' (p. 303), like a 'sealed train', as he put it. Bonhoeffer continues,

> At any moment they may receive the signal to move on. Then they will strike tents, leaving behind them all their worldly friends and connections, and following only the voice of their Lord who calls. They leave the land of their exile, and start their homeward trek to heaven.

In writing these words, Bonhoeffer was, of course, giving pastoral advice to a church facing a godless Nazi regime. If one extracts them from the situation and elevates them to a programme for Christian presence in the world, serious problems arise. One could ask: Where would Christians go when they strike tents and leave the land of exile? Literally to heaven, like Enoch? Did Enoch not walk with God for 300 years before 'he was no more, because God took him' (Gen. 5:24)? Do not Christians rather move at the bidding of their Lord to a different place *in the land of exile*? And how is it that the homeward trek starts *after* leaving the land and not while still in it? This is because the Bonhoeffer of *The Cost of Discipleship* thinks of Christian presence as *passage*—as the 'wandering on earth' of those who 'live in heaven' (p. 304).

If Christian communities only wander on earth but live in heaven, if they are like islands surrounded by a sea of worldliness, then they will have their own truth and their own values that are determined alone by the 'story' of Jesus Christ and that have nothing to do with truth and value outside of their boundaries. Christian difference would then be in a given social world, but would remain completely external to it; one would be 'in God' but could not be at the same time 'in Thessaloniki' (1 Thess. 1:1; see 1 Cor. 1:2)—in Lima, Lose Angeles, Delhi or Nairobi, at least not as its genuine citizen.

The trouble with such an external view of Christian presence in the world is a wrong notion of 'Thessaloniki'. It presupposes that the social environment in which churches live is a foreign country pure and simple. Yet this certainly is not the case. The God who gave Christians the new birth is not only the 'Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 1:3) but also the creator and sustainer of the universe. From that perspective, the environment in which Christians live *is not a foreign country, but rather their own proper homeland*, property of their God. If they are alien in it, it is because and in so far *as their own land has been occupied by a foreign power*; if they are estranged from the world, it is because and in so far as the world is estranged from God.

Every social world is God's territory. Hence Christians should not seek to leave it and establish a settlement outside. Rather they should remain in it and change it—subvert the power of the foreign force and bring their environment back from the estrangement into communion with God. Put more abstractly, Christian difference must be always *internal* to a given cultural world.

V. METAPHORIZING THE DOMINANT ORDER

How should we imagine Christian presence as *internal* difference? Here I find some aspects of Michel de Certeau's thought helpful. Reflecting on the uses people make of cultural goods that are produced for them he writes:

> (u)sers make innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules (de Cetea 1984, xiv).

He explains this creativity of users by looking at that painful process which started on October 12, 1492 when the Spaniard ships sailed up to the shores of Latin America—at the colonization of the indigenous Indian population. We sometimes fail to see that in spite of their oppression and powerlessness, the indigenous population were not simply passive recipients of an imposed culture. He writes:

> . . . the Indians often used the laws, practices, and representations that were imposed on them by force or by fascination to ends other than those of their conquerors; they made something else out of them; they subverted them from within—not by rejecting them or by transforming them (though that occurred as well), but by many different ways of using them in the service of rules, customs or convictions foreign to the colonization which they could not escape. They metaphorized the dominant order: they made it function in another register. They remained other within the system which they assimilated and which assimilated them externally. They diverted without leaving. Procedures of consumption maintained their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing (p. 32).

The image of conquest and colonization is certainly not adequate to describe the relation between cultures and churches. For one, it inverts the direction of the process: cultures do not colonize churches, but churches spring up within the existing cultures. They can be more or less distant from the culture, but they certainly do not first exist outside of culture so as to be able then to be colonized by it. Second, the culture is not simply a negative power against which one has to fight, but a space in which one lives, the air one breathes. Apart from such inadequacies, however, the image of metaphorizing the culture, subverting it from within is helpful. It rightly suggests that churches should neither abandon nor dominate their cultural environments, but rather live differently *in* them, that their difference should be internal not simply to the cultural space, but to cultural forms.

What does this mean concretely? What are some paradigmatic options open to churches? First, it will be possible for Christians simply to adopt some elements of the cultures in which they live, possibly putting them to different use guided by the values that stem from their being 'in God'. They may live in the same kind of houses, drive the same kinds of cars; they might listen to the same music and enjoy some of the same visual or culinary arts. What Christians might do differently, is put their houses, cars, or musical arts to partly different uses from those of non-Christian neighbours. A house can be a vehicle of service, a meal an occasion of worship.

Sometimes putting things to different uses will require changes in the things themselves. To be a good vehicle of service, a house might need a guest room and larger community room. Or some type of technology might foster more humane kinds of work if it is constructed in a certain way. Which brings me to the second possible way of living Christian difference within a given culture: the majority of the elements of a culture will be taken up but transformed from inside. For instance, one would be using the same words as the general culture does, but their semantic fields would be occupied by new contents that partly change and partly replace the old ones. Take a basic term in Christian vocabulary such as 'God'. It is a term that Christians did not invent; they inherited it from the Hebrew people of God, and these in turn from their environment. Yet just as for Jews the term 'God' came to mean the God of Abraham and Sarah, the God of Moses and Miriam, so also for Christians the semantic field of the term 'God' was partly changed to mean 'the God of Jesus Christ'. A host of other Christian terms would show similar inner transformation. The same is true of Christian practices. Christians take part in particular culturally defined practices, but shape them on the basis of their dominant values. Take marriage, for instance. Many of its elements are the same for Christians as they are for anybody else—or so I take it. Yet for Christians the love between partners in marriage is informed by the sacrificial love of Christ for the church.

Third, there might be some elements of a given culture that Christians will have to discard and possibly replace by other elements. Take slavery. It simply had to be discarded. Since in Christ there is 'no longer slave or free', but 'we all are children of God through faith' (Gal. 3:26–28), the runaway slave Onesimus should be received by

Philemon as 'a beloved brother', and that not only 'in the Lord', but also 'in flesh' (Philm. 16). The gospel required an inner transformation of this cultural institution of such magnitude that it eventually amounted to discarding the institution itself.

Taking these three complementary ways of relating to culture together we can say that *Christian difference is always a complex and flexible network of small and large refusals, divergences, subversions, and more or less radical alternative proposals, surrounded by the acceptance of many cultural givens. There is no single correct way to relate to a given culture as a whole, or even to its dominant thrust; there are only numerous ways of accepting, transforming, or replacing various aspects of a given culture from within*. This is what it means for Christian difference to be *internal* to a given culture.

VI. SOME IMPLICATIONS

The notion of Christian presence as an internal difference has radical implications for mission and theology. I will name here only four.

(1) Strictly speaking, Christians never have their own proper and exclusive cultural territory—their own proper language, their own proper values, their proper rationality. To be more precise, their own proper territory is always already inhabited by somebody else: they speak the language they have learned from their neighbours, though they metaphorize its meaning from within; they have inherited the value structure of the culture at large, yet they change more or less radically some of its elements and refuse to accept others; they take up the rules of what makes sense in a given culture, and yet they subvert them and occasionally refuse to follow where they lead. They belong, and yet do not belong; they are present, and yet distant. To become Christian means to divert without leaving; to live as a Christian means to insert a 'difference' into a given culture without ever stepping completely outside to do so.

(2) For Christian difference to be internal to a given culture means that Christian have no place from which to transform the *whole culture they inhabit*—no place from which to undertake that eminently modern project of restructuring the whole social and intellectual life, no virgin soil on which to start building a new, radically different city. No revolutions are possible; all transformations are piece-meal—transformation of some elements, at some points, for some time with some gain and possibly some loss. These transformations are reconstructions of the structures that must be inhabited as the reconstruction is going on. As a result, what Christians end up helping to build resembles much less a suburban development project, all planned out in advance in architectural bureaus, than an ancient city with its 'maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses'. This, it will be remembered, is how Ludwig Wittgenstein described our language; and this is how we should think of the results of the insertion of Christian difference into a given culture.

(3) Accommodation should not be a part of the Christian project. We are used to hearing that kind of a message from fundamentalists. And in this one thing they are right (though they often fail to live up to their own rhetoric of difference and accommodate in surprisingly banal ways). The children of fundamentalists no less than their older siblings, liberals, do not like to hear that. They like to be at the centre, to be mainstream—theologically and culturally. But we need to retrieve the stress on difference. *It is the difference that matters*. Erase the difference and

literally nothing will remain that *could* matter. Without boundaries groups dissolve. Our task should not be accommodation, but distance from a given culture—a critical distance, to be sure, not a naive distance unaware of its own captivity to what it thinks it has escaped, a productive distance, not a sterile self-insulating distance of those who let the world go to hell. Accommodation is a given; it takes place whether you want it or not. Difference is not given. It is rather an arduous task that needs to be accomplished all the time anew. *Difference*, not accommodation, is the reason why theology needs to be kept fresh.

(4) Except when the gospel crosses a cultural border for the first time, inculturation or indigenization *should not* be part of a *missionary* strategy. The process of inculturation presupposes that one stands outside a given culture and formulates the gospel in terms that are acceptable to that culture: one translates an (a) cultural message into the conceptualities, symbolic forms, or practices of the receptor culture. But Christians never stand outside of a culture and they never have a gospel that is not enshrined in categories of a particular culture. When the culturally mediated gospel reaches us we are part of a culture; we become Christians in that the insertion of Christian difference disrupts the equilibrium of our cultural identity. If one feels uncomfortable with that disruption, one might as well feel uncomfortable with becoming a Christian. *Without disruption there can be no Christian faith*.

It is, however, essential that the Christian difference remain *internal* to a given culture. This is the main thrust of my argument in this paper. In this sense I have no quarrels with inculturation and indigenization. What I deny is not in-culturation as a result, but inculturation as a theological programme done from the actual or presumed position of standing outside the culture. Theologians are good for many things, but not for formulating the gospel in terms of a culture at large (except, maybe, in terms of a limited intellectual culture of which they are a part). 'Inculturation' is best done by the faithful people of God themselves. *Western* theologians—or theologians trained in the West—are good for many things, but not for giving advice to non-western believers on the virtues of a particular kind of inculturation.[2] Inculturation takes place in that the people in their own contexts receive the one gospel of the crucified and resurrected Christ and run with it, living out and expressing the Christian difference in their own terms and symbols, and through their own practices. Theologians also have a role to play in the process, but it is a critical one rather than a creative one.

When the gospel comes into a culture, it always disrupts. If it comes in an authentic way, however, the disruption will remain internal to a given culture. Why? Because the people to whom it comes will remain part of their culture; they will divert without leaving. If they do, inculturation will take care of itself. The real question is not how to 'inculturate' the gospel. The key issue in missionary strategy within a given culture is how to maintain Christian difference from the culture of which we are a part and how to make that difference a leaven in the culture.

IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION: DIFFERENCE AND WHAT TO DO WITH IT

Let me conclude. I have sung the praises of difference and some of you may have been disturbed. You fear that the ghosts of obscurantism and fundamentalism will be attracted

[2] For an analysis of the problems associated with indigenization see (Harper, Susan Billington, 'Ironies of Indigenization: Some Cultural Repercussions of Mission in South India' Typescript 1994).

or that the demons will rush in that make things fall apart and the centre unable to hold. But consider once again, now more generally, the importance of difference. Level the difference and what you have left will be *nothing*—you yourself along with everything else will be drowned in the sea of undifferentiated 'stuff' that is indistinguishable from anything. To erase the difference is to undo the creation, that intricate pattern of separations that God established during those unique six days when the universe was formed out of *no-thing*. Literally *every-thing* depends on difference.

Now apply this claim about creation to the relation between gospel and culture. Here too, everything depends on difference. If you have difference, you can have the gospel; if you don't, you can't: you will either have just plain old culture or the reign of God, but you will not have the gospel. Gospel is always about difference; after all it means the good *news*. The trick is to know *what* the Christian difference is and where precisely it needs to surface and where not; the trick is how to keep ourselves open to God and God's reign and at the same time remain internal to a given culture. As I see it, *this* is what the problem of the relation between gospel and culture is all about.

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Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View

Kenneth E. Bailey

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With wit, clarity and courage, the author offers his solution to the controversial issue of the role of women in the leadership of the Church. Some readers will vehemently disagree