

## Traditional Customs

**H**ow should new Christians deal with the beliefs and customs of their cultural past? What should they do with the drums, dances, dramas, songs, initiation rites and funerals, carved images, art, and banana or palm beer that are a part of their non-Christian tradition? And who should make the decision regarding these practices—the missionary, the church leaders, or the people?

When the gospel comes to a new society, it comes to a people who already have all the essential cultural traits necessary for maintaining their lives. They have their own ideas about food and housing, disease and medicine, and spirits and gods. They know how to build canoes, fight battles, and cast spells on their rivals. They have their own leaders, doctors, and religious practitioners. In other words, the church never enters or exists in a cultural vacuum. How, then, should it relate to the culture around it?

In the past, decisions regarding existing customs were often made by the missionaries. Faced with practices they did not understand, they frequently branded them all “pagan,” and forbade their practice in the church. Thus, drums were often prohibited in Africa, dramas in India, and dances in the South Sea Islands.

Several difficulties arose from this sweeping rejection of old ways. First, when the old ways were rejected, new ways were brought in to replace them. Most of the missionaries came from the West, many assumed that Western customs were basically “Christian.” Consequently they introduced their own cultural practices to replace the old. Because of this, the gospel became unnecessarily foreign, and Christianity was identified as a Western religion. This foreignness has been a major barrier in the spread of the gospel among people who love their own cultural ways. Although the gospel does call people and cultures to change, this change must not be equated with adopting Western ways.

Second, this approach turned the missionaries into policemen who had to enforce the rules they made. Because the new Christians were not directly involved in the decision making, they often did not understand or agree with the new rules. These rules, therefore, had to be enforced by those in authority. Because the people were not taught to make decisions, the churches were often full of merely nominal Christians.

Third, this approach did not eliminate the old customs. People simply practiced them in private, where the missionaries and church leaders could not see them. A Christian wedding was held in the church, and then the people went to the village or forest to dance and drink beer. Or mothers continued to tie magical charms to their children to protect them, but now hid them under the children’s clothes. In time, customs continued in private infiltrated public Christian practices. The result was syncretism.

Reacting to the colonialism and ethnocentrism implicit in this uncritical rejection of traditional practices, some missionaries and church leaders advocated an almost uncritical acceptance of the old ways. All cultures were seen as basically good because they provided for

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the ongoing existence of their societies. To become Christians, therefore, little had to change in the lives of the people. The danger of this approach is that old customs are uncritically accepted into the church, and the result again is syncretism.

What other approach can we take? There is a growing awareness that what we need is a “critical contextualization,” in which the old ways are studied and then judged in the light of biblical teaching. The missionary or church leaders must first lead their congregations in a study of the old ways and their meanings. Then the leaders provide biblical teaching on the subject at hand. Finally, they lead the people in testing the old ways in the light of Scripture. The people will usually decide that as Christians they can keep many of their old ways, that they do not necessarily have to discard all their old songs, stories, or eating practices. They may decide that some of their customs are evil and must be condemned and that other traditions must be changed to make them acceptable. New words can be given to old tunes, new and meanings to old rites. The people may also choose to borrow some of the practices of the missionaries’ church. Finally, they may create new practices to express their new faith. In the end they will create new, indigenous, Christian rituals, and they will have learned Christian discernment. Because the Christians as a community make the decisions, the missionaries and leaders will not need to police them.

The question of how the church should relate to its cultural surroundings is not confined to mission settings. It applies equally to old, established churches. Unfortunately, where the church has existed for a long time, it too often adapts to the culture around it and loses its prophetic critique of that society. Even where it has kept its critical voice, the question remains as to what in the surrounding culture it should adopt and what it should reject. Should the church in the West resist the spread of divorce? And if so, how? Should it accommodate to Western materialism, capitalism, nationalism, militarism, expensive funerals, or shrinking swimming suits? If the church ceases to critique the culture around it, it is in danger of becoming a “civil religion”—a religion that serves to justify the status quo. On the other hand, if it totally withdraws from the world around it, it ceases to be heard.

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## Can a Christian Celebrate Diwali?

Simon P David

It was Diwali time in India. As dusk began to settle over the village of Dipri in Uttar Pradesh, Victor Pakraj, a Christian missionary from Madras, trudged along the street to his home. His troubled mood was not lightened by the lights twinkling merrily from the little clay-pot lamps that decorated most of the homes he passed. In fact, they were part of his problem! He was trying to find an answer for the question Dhuwarak Prasad had asked him the night before. Dhuwarak's voice had been respectful as always, but his eyes held almost a pleading look when he asked, "Why can't we light our house with beautiful little lamps and decorate our rooms at Diwali? Or, if we can't do it at our Hindu festival, could we do it at Christmas time?"

Two years had passed since Mr. and Mrs. Pakraj had come to Dipri from Tamilnadu. They had started their mission ministry by conducting Vacation Bible School. A handful of students participated, all of them from the Harijan community (untouchable caste that ranks at the bottom of the village society). During the summer, a number of them had accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord. Among these was twelve-year-old Dhuwarak Prasad. Dhuwarak's parents were happy for their son's conversion because they could see a real change in his life. In time, Mr. and Mrs. Prasad also wanted to become Christians, so they had come to the missionaries and were led to the Lord.

This had happened a few months before the annual Hindu festival of Diwali, which celebrates the victory of the god Siva over the powers of the evil god Narakhasura. The missionaries were encouraged by the Prasads' conversion and did their best to strengthen them in the faith. They visited the Prasads often and invited them to their own home as well. The Prasads had been socially ostracized by the other Harijans when they became Christians, so they especially needed the fellowship of the missionaries and felt quite lonely when Victor Pakraj and his wife went to minister in other villages.

As Diwali approached, the villagers began to decorate their homes and prepare the many lamps they would place around them. They thatched their huts with new grass and bought new clothing to celebrate the festival, but this year, it was a depressing time for the Prasad family. Their own home was dark and undecorated. They were lonely and anxious for Mr. and Mrs. Pakraj to return from their ministry in a neighboring village. The missionaries finally returned on the evening of the day before the festival was to begin. The Prasad family had immediately gone to their house to welcome them home. It was while they were sitting together and Mrs. Pakraj was preparing the evening meal that Dhuwarak

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had asked the disturbing question. Mr. Pakraj had answered that he would think and pray about it. He invited the Prasad family to come again the following evening, and they would discuss it more.

As Mr. Pakraj neared his own home the next evening, he still was not sure exactly what he would say. He remembered that the first Christians in Europe had begun to celebrate the birth of Christ during the time of a pagan Festival of Winter because they were servants, and their masters gave them holidays at that time. After a while, the Christians had taken the pagan symbol of the evergreen tree decorated with lights and turned it into a symbol of their own evergreen hope for eternal life because of Jesus' coming into the world. Could the same kind of reinterpretation be applied to the Hindu festival of Diwali? Perhaps.

Victor Pakraj knew very well how important it was for new converts to make a clean break with Hinduism. If they did not really understand the difference, the Christian community might be absorbed back under the umbrella of Hinduism. Then its distinctiveness and its evangelical witness would be lost.

On the other hand, Mr. Pakraj also knew that he must help the Prasad family find a way to restore the joy of their salvation. He wondered just how he could do that.

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## Fit for the Kingdom?

Robert D. Newton

**M**issionary, what do you think? Should Sabado keep the vow he made before he became a Christian out of respect for his father? Or should he postpone his baptism?" The question had caught Eric by surprise. A special service had been planned for the following day, during which twenty-two of the thirty-five families of the village would be baptized. Eric had visited the village of Bicol (Papua New Guinea) many times in preparation for the event, but until today he was unaware that there was a problem.

Earlier, after arriving at Bicol, Eric and five others had seated themselves quietly around the fire while they sipped hot coffee from tin cups. It felt good to be out of the cold wind, relaxing with friends after a long day of hiking. Three of the men were elders of the village. The other three, two lay evangelists and Eric, had come from the Christian village of Tanu, a five-hour hike downriver. For the past six months they had faithfully come to meet with village leaders and their families, sharing with them about Jesus Christ. Particularly fascinating to these animistic people were the stories of Christ's power over spirits and the natural forces of wind, rain, thunder, and lightning. Though all of the people were pagans when the evangelistic team first came to Bicol, many now believed in the Lord Jesus and wanted to be baptized.

Finally, Dante, one of the village elders, had broken the silence. "Missionary, it is good that you brought us the gospel about Jesus. We are happy to know him and be a part of his clan. We also hope that soon all our village will follow with us so that we are like your families in Tanu. All of them are in God's clan. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, it is true. All of the families in Tanu are Christian. It brings strength and peace to the village when everyone walks together. At least that is what the people of Tanu tell me. But, Ama Dante, I am a little ashamed that you thank me for bringing God's love to you. I have done little to teach you. You know how hard it is for me to speak in your language. If my brothers here had not shared the message with you, I think you would still be in darkness."

"Missionary, what you say is true. So perhaps all of you will again help us with our problem. You have given sound advice before." "Ama," Felipe, one of the evangelists, answered, using a term of high respect, "Our advice comes from the Book that God's servants wrote. We will look in the Book to help you with your problem if you want." "Yes, that is what we want. The problem we have is hard. It

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concerns one of the elders in our village who wants to follow with us. The problem has to do with Sabado and his father, the *mabonong* [pagan priest]. What is your opinion of Sabado?"

"Wasn't he one of the first men in Bicol to believe the gospel?"

"Yes," Ama Dante answered. "He was the first to believe. He was also the one who told many of us about the gospel and explained some things that were too deep for us to understand the first time. It was his joy and faith that caused many of us to want to learn more about Christ. He has been looking forward to baptism for a long time. His wife and five children are also ready to be baptized. That is why this problem is so hard."

"Tell us the problem, Ama Dante," Eric answered. "We, too, have a burden in our hearts if Sabado is having a hard time. He was the first to open his house to us and encouraged us more than anyone else to continue to teach about Christ. We have met very few people who thirst to learn about God's Word the way Sabado does."

"Yes, he has been an example to all of us who want to be Christians," Ama Dante replied. "So I think you will understand that this is a problem we are all facing. I will tell you the story about this problem, and then you will give us good advice about what to do."

"The problem with Sabado started over one year ago, before you came and brought us the Good News. Sabado was sick with a high fever, and the hospital medicine could not help him. His father knew that it was a spirit that was causing the sickness, so he divined to find out the exact problem. It came out that Sabado's uncle, who had died during the war, was in need of a new blanket. His place in the other world was cold, and his blanket had become thin with age. Sabado's father called a feast, and they butchered fifteen pigs, two cows and a carabao. The day after the last pig was butchered, the fever left Sabado and did not come back. In thanksgiving, Sabado butchered a pig, and made a vow to his father that he would butcher another pig on the anniversary of his healing. The anniversary has come, and now Sabado's father is insisting that Sabado finish his vow. The father believes that if Sabado does not finish his vow, the uncle will bring sickness again, not only on Sabado, but also to him. He knows that he is accountable to the uncle to ensure that Sabado will butcher another pig."

"Sabado is stuck in the middle. He does not want to do this pagan thing. He does not believe that the uncle's spirit has power over him, because Jesus is stronger. But he is also afraid for his father. His father is afraid of the spirits and rightly so he is not under the protection of Jesus. Sabado sometimes thinks he should postpone his baptism, finish the vow he made to his father, and then reapply for baptism. Other times he thinks that postponing his baptism will put a stumbling block in front of the young Christians."

"We have discussed this problem over and over, but we still do not have a satisfactory answer. We believe that if Sabado butchers the animal, he is going against Jesus. If he refuses to butcher the animal, he will go against his father. Both of those ways are not good to us. Does God want us to spit on our fathers in order to become his followers?"

"Sometimes we must go against our fathers in order to be Christians," Felipe answered quickly. "It says in the Book that we must be willing to forsake all, even our fathers, if we want to be fit for the kingdom."

Ama Geteb, the other evangelist, responded next: "Yes, you speak correctly Felipe, when you say we must forsake all for Jesus. But the problem is not so easy. The Book also says that we must honor our fathers and fulfill our vows. That is what is troubling Sabado. Because he loves

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Jesus, he also wants to show love by honoring his father's request that he finish his vow. Anyway, Sabado does not have to be the one to butcher the pig. He only has to give the pig to his father to butcher. Maybe that is not wrong for a Christian to do."

"What do the other families in the village think about this problem?" Eric asked. "Maybe they can give us an idea."

"That is also a problem," Ama Dante answered. "The families who follow the ways of Jesus are divided. Some say that he should obey his father, and the others say he should push ahead and be baptized with them tomorrow. The pagan families are not divided. They all know that Sabado must follow the ways of our people and honor his father. The pagan families are mocking us because they are of one mind, but we are not. They say that Jesus has come to destroy our village, not to make it strong."

It was then that Ama Dante had asked Eric the troubling question: "Missionary, should Sabado keep the vow he made before he became a Christian out of respect for his father? Or should he postpone his baptism?"

"Let's spend tonight praying about this problem," suggested Eric. "God will show us a good way to follow."

"Yes, this is true," answered Ama Dante. "We have tonight. Sabado will not come for our decision until the morning. But we must be ready to give him an answer when he comes."

Now, as he lay quietly on his mat, Eric wondered what was God's guidance in this matter.

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## Banana Beer in Burundi Nzohabonayo Ferdinand

The refreshing change caused by the beginning of the rainy season had given way to dreary days of endless drizzle. Muddy rivulets ran along the hillside paths, making them slippery and hazardous. The monotonous dripping from the banana leaves and grass roofs drummed into Missionary Coti's head and aggravated his anxious state of mind. What could he do to solve the banana-beer crisis that was brewing as the time for the Yearly Meeting in the month of June drew near? What would be the right verdict to pronounce? Should he give the green light to the use of the beer, or should he excommunicate two thousand church members? This decision was robbing him of his sleep and causing him to grow listless and thin.

"Ah, Bwana Cilisoni," he sighed, in his mind addressing the missionary who had preceded him with the title used by the Barundi (the people as a whole) that is equivalent to "Mister," with an added implication of "boss." "Why did you die in January instead of waiting until the Yearly Meeting was over?"

Cilisoni had been an easygoing man who had never gotten over his rather romantic view of Burundi and its people. The climate, with its average temperature of 70° F, suited him perfectly. The mountains are green all year because even in the dry season when the grass withers, the banana leaves remain green. The Cilisonis were delighted by the gifts of ripe bananas given to them as soon as they had learned to know some of the local people.

Coti smiled in spite of himself as he remembered Cilisoni's story about how he had discovered the banana-beer problem. One day Cilisoni had gone out to visit a Murundi (one Barundi person) by the name of Rugi. As he went along the hillside paths to his friend Rugi's house, Cilisoni had met many people who were obviously drunk. This puzzled and disturbed him, so he asked Rugi for an explanation. To Cilisoni's surprise, Rugi told him that the people were getting drunk on beer made from bananas. "Would you like to try some, Bwana Cilisoni?" he asked. Without waiting for an answer, Rugi asked his wife, Gati, to bring a calabash of banana beer for Bwana. Trying to hide his surprise, Cilisoni had politely refused to drink the beer.

Rugi had felt terribly hurt by the refusal, in spite of the missionary's effort to be tactful. By then, Rugi had considered the missionary to be his friend, and for a Murundi to refuse a drink

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offered by a friend is a great insult. Barundi babies are given beer during the first week of their life, and it is the center of all social activities among the people. Banana beer is used to entertain guests, to influence a superior, to pay a dowry, to stimulate discussions, and to give honor to those who have achieved status by doing good for the community. It can even be used to pay off debts incurred during initiation periods. And, if all that were not enough, it can be used to quench thirst. It is therefore almost impossible for a Murundi to understand a society where beer drinking is not the center of life and relationships.

Rugi got over the insult, however, when Bwana Cilisoni then invited him to be their houseboy. It was, after all, an opportunity for Rugi to become wealthy. Many other men living in the nearby hills had come looking for a job at the missionary's residence. They had also asked the Bwana to teach them to read and write. This pleased the missionary because he perceived their request as an opportunity to preach the gospel to them. Cilisoni agreed to teach them on three days of the week. During each lesson he told them more about Bwana Yesu who had died for their sins. For his part, Rugi spread the word that all who wanted to be Bwana Cilisoni's friend would have to deny that they drank banana beer.

Everyone wanted Bwana Cilisoni's friendship. Those who accepted Bwana Yesu as their Savior and denied drinking banana beer were treated well by the missionary. Soon hundreds were flocking to the mission house to hear the story of Bwana Yesu. Many of these were ready to lie to Cilisoni about their desire to become Christians, so that the *muzungu* (white man) would help them to get rich and pay their colonial taxes. It was a mutually rewarding arrangement. While the people benefited materially-and it must be said that some of them grew spiritually as well-Cilisoni could naively write glowing letters home about how the Holy Spirit was convincing these uneducated heathen to become Christians.

By 1940, ten years after the first missionaries arrived in Burundi, four thousand people gathered to celebrate Christmas. After the service, secondhand Western clothing was distributed to those who had faithfully attended Cilisoni's classes. Not long after that, Missionary Coti and his wife came to help the Cilisonis start more classes and organize more churches for the Barundi who said "Yes" to Bwana Yesu.

Very soon, however, it became clear that the missionaries could not provide enough jobs and materials for the ever-increasing number of believers. It had become apparent that the true followers of Jesus were those who continued to attend classes and church, even if there were few material benefits. Also, because converts had to say that they had forsaken the drinking of banana beer, abstinence became one of the main requirements of church membership. Even the drinking of banana juice was prohibited.

Rugi had continued to be very interested in church activities and developed many skills. Bwana Cilisoni soon asked him to become the first native catechist. When he accepted, Rugi knew that he had to make a radical decision about banana beer. He would have to teach against it, but he knew that although beer was still the center of the culture of Burundi, there were many church people who were tired of the double standard on this issue. They might be ready to actually enforce the sanctions against beer drinking.

A real test for Rugi came two years after he had become the catechist. One day, Gaya, the father of Baga, brought a pot of banana beer to Rugi with the request that Rugi give his daughter, Yaje, to Baga in marriage. Rugi was greatly disturbed by the situation, but after talking to his wife, he went ahead and drank the beer with Gaya to seal the marriage contract.

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Cilisoni died without knowing how hot the banana beer issue had become among the church people. Ironically, some people wanted to bring pots of banana beer to Cilisoni's home for mourning, and that is how Missionary Coti discovered it. They thought that perhaps Coti would be more lenient than Cilisoni and that the never-drink-bananabeer discipline might die with his predecessor. Pressured by members of the congregation, Rugi went to ask Bwana Coti to lift the sanction against beer drinking at the Yearly Meeting that would take place in June, the beginning of the dry season. Coti had not been able to conceal the shock he felt when Rugi came with the request. He had been totally unaware that the problem still existed and believed that all the banana trees that dotted the countryside were being used for nothing other than to provide income with which the population was paying its colonial taxes. After his initial shock, Coti was even more disconcerted to find that Rugi himself was not firmly against the beer drinking. Infact, Rugi informed him that more than half the members had sworn to leave Coti's church and join the Roman Catholics, or not attend church at all, rather than give up banana beer.

A noisy argument outside his window interrupted Coti's reverie. Two men whom he recognized as church members were in a fight with another, who was a stranger to him. The tone of their voices and their wild gesticulations told him more than he wanted to know. He would have to go and break up the fight so that these two would not be hauled into court. This was not the first time such disturbances had happened, as he had recently discovered. Coti started for the door with a mixture of righteous indignation and grim determination on his face. Perhaps he knew what he would say to the Yearly Meeting after all! However, as he negotiated the slippery path and got closer so that he could see the faces of the brawlers, he realized with a jolt that one of them was Rugi's son-in-law, Baga. "Oh God," he prayed, "how will this all end?"

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## The Communal Feast

Denis J. Green

Jim was aroused from his preparation for teaching at the next day's Bible School by his wife, who reminded him that evening had almost come. With a start, he remembered the dilemma facing him, one that would require a decision within the hour. Would he accept his neighbor's invitation delivered earlier in the afternoon to attend the *slametan* feast just after dark?

Jim and Anne West had lived in a small rural Javanese town for over a year now. Before coming, they had learned to speak Indonesian with reasonable fluency and later had acquainted themselves with Javanese culture through observing and mixing with the people.

After moving to the town, Jim and his family did their best to integrate themselves into the local community. Jim established good relationships with the local officials—the civil administrator, the military commander, the police chief, and the locally elected town mayor. His ability to speak Javanese gained him immediate respect, and his position as chief pastor of several congregations also gave him status in the community.

Jim and Anne also found that having a family of three young children helped to establish relationships with their immediate neighbors. Soon after their arrival, they had followed the local custom of inviting all the neighbors to a housewarming so that they could formally introduce themselves. Thereafter they took every opportunity to chat over the fence and strengthen relationships in other ways. Living on church property, however, meant that non-Christians did not always feel free to visit them. Jim understood their hesitancy in what was a nominally Muslim society, but it made him feel as though there was still a lack of complete acceptance on their part. Perhaps that was a situation that could never be overcome completely.

Jim's thoughts turned again to the invitation that had suddenly faced him with a difficult choice. When his neighbor's teenage son delivered the verbal invitation earlier, Jim's first reaction was one of excitement and joy, because this was a sign that his neighbors had really accepted him and regarded him as a part of the immediate community. There was no need for an immediate reply, for guests are expected to accept automatically unless they are unavoidably prevented from attending. The euphoria quickly passed, however, replaced by more sober reflections on the implications of accepting or rejecting the invitation.

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Jim had learned about the slametan during his language studies and by talking with other missionaries and members of the church. It was a simple meal arranged by a household at various times in connection with significant events in life, such as the birth of a child, circumcision of a male son, marriage, death, the building of a new house, the departure for a long journey, illness, or success in some important venture. In this case, their neighbor's wife had just given birth to a baby, and a son at that.

But Jim knew that the slametan held far deeper significance than just an expression of joy for another son in the family. Basic to the feast is the ritual designed to give protection from evil spirits. Even though the Javanese are nominally Muslim, their day-to-day lives are still very much influenced by fear of spirits and witchcraft. After the invited male neighbors gather (the slametan proper is an all-male affair, although women often gather in the kitchen or another room) and are seated cross-legged on woven-leaf mats spread around the perimeter of the room, the host begins with an introduction and an explanation of the reason for the gathering. Incense is burned and specially prepared food placed on mats in the center of the room. Normally the food consists of rice and two or three side dishes. In the center is placed a cone of rice representing a mountain, which in Javanese belief is regarded as the source of well-being.

The food is not primarily for the guests. It and the incense are offerings to the spirits. Sometimes, in his opening speech, the host mentions the various spirits, which are thought to be particularly concerned with this occasion and for which the food is intended.

After the speech is over, someone is called upon to offer a prayer, which is in the form of a Muslim chant in Arabic. Sometimes the local modin, or Muslim official, is specially invited for this purpose. At other times the prayer is offered by anyone present who has learned the appropriate recitation. Its intent is protection against the harm that the spirits might bring (in this case, against the newborn baby). The guests indicate their participation in the prayer by holding their hands out with palms upraised and by saying "amen" at each pause in the chant.

After the prayer the host invites the guests to eat the food dedicated to the spirits, for the spirits have already been satisfied with the smell of the incense and the aroma of the food. Each guest takes some rice and a small amount of the side dishes, which he eats immediately. The rest is taken home to be eaten later. With that, the ritual is over.

The slametan serves two basic purposes. First, it reinforces the social solidarity of the community by drawing the neighborhood together on all important occasions. Second, it fills a felt need for protection from any misfortune that might be caused by the spirits. In a sense, the feast preserves a state of social and spiritual equilibrium.

As he reflected on all this, Jim could see the pros and cons of accepting or rejecting this invitation. On the one hand, to accept would do much to cement his relationship with his neighbors and show that he identified with them in what they regarded to be an important event in their lives. To reject the invitation would imply rejection of them and their cultural values. On the other hand, Jim knew that many missionaries, and some national Christians, had adopted a policy of not attending the slametan. They felt that their attendance would implicitly affirm their neighbors' belief in the efficacy of the ritual as a protection against the spirits. How could they participate in the prayer offered to a different god from the Christian God? How could they eat food offered to the spirits? These were the issues with which Jim struggled as the darkness closed in. The time for reaching a decision could no longer be delayed.

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## To Drink or Not to Drink? Dennis Teague

It had been a long evening. What had started out as a real privilege had turned into a real disaster. John had already insulted and upset the Professor by refusing the aperitif, the wine, and the beer. Now, as they sat in the living room after the meal, Professor Piaget set a glass in front of John and began to pour the prized Brittany cider. Was it right for John to continue to anger, insult, and alienate his host-or would it be all right just this once to forget all that teaching in Bible College, forget his alcoholic father, forget what the Smiths would think and say, and drink a little cider, which did not contain much alcohol anyway?

John had spent the past two summers in France and now was enrolled at the University of Nantes. It was not an easy decision, but in obedience to what he felt to be the will of God, he returned in October and entered the beginning course in French. John had never studied French before. He found a room in the dormitory, hoping to make contacts with French students. He worked with the Smiths, who were starting a new church in Nantes. John had just graduated from a Bible College, a conservative school that took a strong stand against drinking alcoholic beverages. Besides, the Smiths had warned him about a few missionaries who had started drinking wine with the French and had later become alcoholics. John knew the suffering that alcoholism brought, because his father was an alcoholic.

One day John received an invitation to have dinner with his professor, along with three other foreign students. Professor Piaget had very graciously opened his home to them. John realized that it was a real privilege in France for French students to be invited to a professor's home, and an even greater honor for foreign students. When the night arrived for the dinner, the Smiths loaned John their car so that he could pick up his Japanese friend, Isao. The two students were excited as they arrived at the house. Little did John suspect that this would turn out to be such a problematic experience.

Dr. and Mrs. Piaget were very friendly and cordial. John spoke less French than any of the other students, but they had been very patient with him. After all the students arrived, Professor Piaget offered everyone an aperitif. Everyone accepted except John. He wanted to be a good witness for his Lord, so he refused. John thought the professor seemed ill at ease, because

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for a moment he appeared not to know what to do. After an uneasy silence he offered John some lemon drink and it was accepted. The awkwardness of the moment passed and John breathed a sigh of relief.

When dinner was served, John partook heartily of the beans and roast beef. But when Dr. Piaget began filling the guests' glasses with the customary wine, John politely refused his share. It was clear that this time the professor felt not only awkward but somewhat angry at this foreigner in his house who refused his hospitality. Though he offered John a Coke instead, the atmosphere had changed. Due to the length of French meals and the thirst of the people there, the host soon got more wine. Again it was only refused by John.

Dinner being finished, everyone sat around the table and discussed various subjects. Mrs. Piaget cleared the table of the last remains of dessert and coffee. It had been a great time for everyone except John and perhaps his host. John wondered, "Was it right to offend Professor Piaget the way I did? Was the Lord really pleased with what had taken place? Will I ever be able to share my faith in Christ with Dr. Piaget? Is it really so bad to drink just a little wine, and is it not worse to build a barrier between oneself and someone who does not know the Lord?" All these questions and more had run through John's mind throughout the meal and particularly now, when everyone was enjoying the conversation and relaxing.

It was then that Professor Piaget excused himself. He was gone for a few minutes but reappeared carrying a tray. On it was a large flask surrounded by neat-looking glasses. He began to tell his guests how good the Brittany cider was and, especially for John's benefit, that it contained only a little alcohol. The host set glasses in front of everyone and began to pour.

John became anxious as the professor moved closer. Should he refuse once again, even though the professor had pointed out for his sake that it contained little alcohol? Was he going to build an even-higher barrier between his teacher and himself? Or should he ignore the teachings of the Bible College and the warnings of the Smiths? When Professor Piaget paused before John and put a glass before him with a smile, John ...

# 22

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## The Triumph of the Chiefmakers Wilson Awasu

**D**ake had just returned to his home village in Africa. He had carefully avoided coming home for a number of years because of his Christian faith, but now he was sure there was nothing to worry about. It had not even occurred to him that this was Chiefmaking season.

After the usual exuberant reunion with uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, and cousins, Dake decided to visit the old palace where he had grown up. His father had been the reigning chief of their royal line. Dake, however, was not allowed to daydream for long. He had barely seated himself in the palace when he heard the war cries at the gate. There was an onslaught of people surrounding the palace. Every outlet was blocked-there was no escape. The Chiefmakers were upon him!

Almost before he knew what hit him, Dake was smeared with white clay. A goat was slaughtered and the blood was sprinkled on him. The cries of triumph ascended and a stampede ensued.

The village had just installed him as its new chief. It was too late for Dake to regret coming home! It was all over. Dake was the new chief, and there was no way to undo what had been done.

The Council of Chiefmakers had not acted impetuously-they were carrying out a long-overdue assignment. As the youngest son of the reigning chief, Dake had been chosen for royal succession when he was only three years old. Until now, however, circumstances had prevented the council from carrying out their duties.

Dake's great-great-great-grandfather had won royal status for their lineage among these warlike people who lived in the mountains and had their own language. Dake's ancestor was made chief because of his bravery in battle against the dread Ashanti, whose forces were defeated and forced to retreat. He was made chief of a jurisdiction that included seventeen villages. Dake was the youngest son of the fourth chief of this royal line. He was carefully groomed in the intrigue and tradition necessary to carry out the duties of a chief.

Even when Dake was a boy, however, the royal succession was threatened. His mother was a Christian and had done everything she could to instill Christian principles in her son. Her

## The Triumph of the Chiefmakers

great desire was that Dake would become a fine Christian man, educated and trained for Christian service. Her wishes began to be realized when Dake became a Christian during his high-school years.

Just a year after Dake's conversion, his father died. That was when the trouble started. Everyone expected that after the eight weeks of funeral ritual, Dake would be installed as the new chief. He would be expected to take part in all the rituals, beginning with the invocation of the ancestral spirits, through the veneration of his late father, the dances, the offerings, and the purifications. He would play his part by following, in shadow fashion, the movements of a senior elder, who traditionally replaces the old chief until a new one is installed.

Dake and his mother faced these proceedings with a great deal of consternation. How could he pour libations to the spirits and lead his people in the worship of ancestors now that he was a Christian?

A solution for them came with the help of Dake's mother's brother. This uncle was sympathetic and did not believe Dake should have to become chief against his will. At the dawn of the final day of the funeral, Dake's uncle whisked him away from the village.

Dake's absence became obvious immediately, and the funeral rites could not be completed satisfactorily. Dake's mother was blamed, and everyone expected that the ancestors would exact the normal penalty of death for the interruption of the traditional procedures. But that expectation decreased after two years passed without Dake or his mother being taken.

In the meantime, a regent occupied the throne. Dake, for his part, avoided the palace area during the special seasons when it is appropriate to enthrone a chief. He wondered if this would be the pattern for the rest of his life.

Dake went abroad for college and graduate school. He completed a Master of Divinity degree and then pressed on for a Ph.D. in theology. When he returned home from abroad, Dake married a woman from a tribe who were traditional enemies of his own. She was a medical doctor.

On the morning that Dake returned to his village, he felt quite safe from the Chiefmakers. It had been years since his father died. He was now a trained Christian theologian who had violated the "orders" and angered the ancestors. His wife was from an enemy tribe; she did not even come from a royal family. Surely his people would not want anyone like him for the throne! The ancestors would have to be pacified, and there was just too much against him in other ways as well.

Now, however, Dake's world had been completely shattered. He had been trapped and made chief. His people would expect him to pacify the ancestors as well as lead them in all aspects of the traditional religion. His marriage would be seriously threatened. What about his Christian faith and theological training? Could he force his people to accept Christianity? It seemed out of the question. What in God's name should he do?

# 23

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## The Threat of the Spirit Dancers

Georgia R. Grimes

Grace Mead had just come back to the village after three weeks at mission headquarters in Vancouver. The local people had been unhappy when Grace told them she had been ordered by her mission to leave, although the tribal elders agreed that it was dangerous for her to stay. Now she had returned, but the question—after what had happened before she left—was whether it ever would be safe for her to live in the village again.

Now Grace sat in the Big House, looking around at the people with whom she had lived for eleven years. Could she expect that they would ever give up the Spirit Dancing that was such a major aspect of their decimated native culture? After observing the dancing closely, she knew there was no other option if they were to become Christians. And what should be her own role in that process? Did God want her, a single woman, to stand here alone against this powerful force?

Grace had come to bring the gospel to a group of Coast Indians in western Canada in 1974. She had done her best with the help of two language informants to translate the Bible for them. The work had been hard, and for a long time Grace saw very few results. Finally, two years before, a breakthrough occurred when Joy, one of her language helpers, decided to follow Jesus. She was slowly growing in faith and in the understanding of the Christian Way. Joy's common-law husband, Daniel, who was the other language informant, had not yet become a Christian. He still had many questions and some old resentments, but he did allow Bible reading and prayer in their home.

Joy and Daniel came from very influential Indian families. Joy's father had been the last practitioner of native Indian medicine in the village. Before his death, he had passed on many of his skills and secrets to Joy. Daniel came from a large, prominent family and had ten children of his own. Seven of these already were Spirit Dancers.

It was the Spirit Dance Society that was a threat to Grace and her continued ministry in the village. This group enforces the norms of the culture by disciplining those who are not conforming to Indian ways. Initiates to the Society have no choice in the matter; usually they are chosen by close relatives who feel they are responsible to correct the erring ones. The initiation is so feared that even the threat of it is enough to bring some offenders back under the authority of the culture.

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Grace knew quite a lot about the Spirit Dances. She had been allowed to attend many ceremonies during the dance season, which lasted from November to April. These took place in the Big Houses, the old-style dwellings that could accommodate up to a thousand people at a time. It was only the final part of the initiation process, where absolutely no outsiders are allowed, that Grace had not witnessed. She had heard enough about it, however, to know it was a terrible thing.

The group of men and women who initiate new dancers are called germans. In order to qualify, they must have been dancers themselves for at least four seasons. Just before “grabbing” the ones to be initiated, the germans meet, usually at night, and paint their faces with a mixture of burned bees’ nests and petroleum jelly. All dancers wear facial paint, either the common black variety or a “more powerful” red color.

The leader of the germans carries a three-foot-long carved stick called the klutsmeen. As he faces the one to be initiated, he or she faints or is hit by the stick and knocked out. The initiate is then carried to the Big House to be ceremonially “worked on” for four days. This is the part no outsiders are allowed to witness, but most of the village gathers to watch.

An atmosphere of fear mixed with anticipation pervades the village during this time. The anticipation is for the dance and the powerful song (siyawun) that will be given to the initiate by the spirits. The fear is for the physical safety of the initiates. During the time Grace had been in the village, seven people from surrounding villages had died from the initiation rites.

The “work” goes on until the initiate quns-sings a song. It may take up to four days for this to happen. In the meantime, the initiate is kept on a strict diet of only lukewarm water or weak tea and no food. More severe treatment is administered to those who take more than four days to *qun*.

In 1977, a fifty-year-old man was “grabbed” by arrangement with his eighty-year-old mother. He endured four hours of torture before his son could get the government to send the Royal Canadian Mounted Police into the Big House to rescue him.

“My sides were like hamburger and my testicles were the size of lemons so that I could hardly walk,” the man told Grace later. “My back was badly burned and the pain was terrible. My only relief came when I thought of Jesus with my mind. Then I would be aware of everything that was happening, but I was free from pain.”

After an initiate quns and the germans learn his or her song, the new dancer is ceremonially “stood up.” This is the critical time when a song and dance are put together for the first time. It ends with the initiate dancing around the fire alone. The family of the dancer watches anxiously to see if he or she has enough strength left to perform the dance. Everyone in the Big House sings the song of the initiate as he or she dances.

Grace had been present in a Big House several times when new initiates were stood up by the germans after they had qunned. She vividly remembered one occasion when a woman had been stood up. Her eyes had dilated, her face became contorted, and her mouth dropped open. The woman began to drool as she cried out her song. Her nose began to run and tears streamed down her face. The song, coming from deep within, became louder and stronger. Two other women had helped her up. Then she danced around the fire as if stalking someone, darting first one way and then rushing back the other, with arms outstretched and hands clenched like the feet of a bird on a thick limb.

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Later that same night, a strong young man had clutched the edge of the bench with both hands and began to bounce up and down. Then he began to cry out in deep, strong yells with a pause between each. His head shook after each yell as the power within him grew stronger. Two men came and stood him up to dance.

The young man leapt around the fire as if someone held him by the shoulders and was bouncing him up and down. At times, he danced in a crouched position with one arm stretched out and downward, the other arm close to his face. As he pounced in one direction and then the other, his hands made motions like a striking eagle's talons. After dancing around the fire four times, he ran in a tight circle and then shot full speed ahead toward the men who had stood him up. They were waiting by his seat for him to "run home." They caught him in their arms and kept him from running headlong into the seats. It was nearly an hour before he became calm and stopped his deep, rhythmic yells.

The reason the mission had insisted that Grace leave the village for three weeks was that Grace herself was in danger of being grabbed for initiation. The risk remained if she decided to continue working here. The trouble had started several months before, when there was an attempt to grab Joy, Grace's language informant. One cold Sunday afternoon in early January, Grace had been in Joy and Daniel's home reading the Bible with them. The phone rang, and someone on the line told them that the *germans* were coming to grab Joy.

The family went wild with fear. They took time for prayer and then Daniel told Grace to leave for her own safety. She ran next door to the house where she lived with Joy's seventy-two-year-old sister, Gwen. There Grace continued to pray with Gwen as the sounds of the dance grew louder and more frenzied.

Grace learned later that Daniel had tried to hide Joy in the attic above the ceiling, but she had fallen through and hurt her head. Then, in desperation, they had run out the back door, and he had driven Joy and their teenage daughter into a forested area some miles away. After leaving them there, Daniel had driven back to the house to face the *germans*.

It was just after midnight when eight Indian Spirit Dancers left the Big House and walked up the hill to Joy and Daniel's home. They found Daniel sitting in a chair facing the door with a loaded rifle on his lap. One of the dancers, who happened to be Joy's niece, asked where she was and then searched the house when Daniel refused to tell her. When they didn't find Joy, the *germans* went next door and threatened to grab Grace and Gwen if they refused to tell them where Joy was hiding.

Grace would always remember the calm that came over her and the way the words seemed to come to her without effort. She truly had experienced the grace that is promised to apostles in Matthew 10:19-20. It was not she who spoke, but the Spirit of her Father speaking through her.

As if one part of her was detached, she heard her own voice saying, "I will probably die if you grab me. The Holy Spirit of God lives within me. That Spirit will not allow any other power to control me. I don't want you to be responsible for my death. I want you to turn away from the evil spirits and worship the true God who can fill you with the Holy Spirit."

At these words, the *germans* melted away into the darkness. They satisfied themselves, however, by grabbing two of Joy's nieces, who then were duly initiated.

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It turned out that Joy herself was never grabbed; she and Daniel therefore became the first members of the tribe to stand successfully against Spirit Dancing. Surprisingly enough, after a few weeks, Joy's sister-in-law, the old woman who had started the whole thing, came to apologize. She admitted that she was wrong for trying to grab Joy without first consulting Daniel, and she even accepted the blame for the injury to Joy when she had fallen through the ceiling.

It seemed as if Christianity had won a "power encounter" with the traditional religion. The question was whether it would have a lasting effect on the local people.

Just after this incident, the mission had insisted that Grace leave the village. During her time away, she prayed fervently about her future. She had dedicated herself to bringing the gospel to the Coast Indians and translating the Scripture for them. Would it not be a defeat for the cause of Christ if her personal safety kept her from going back? Or would God provide for the work to be carried on some other way? After all, she was a woman alone. Was it tempting God against good common sense for her to expect protection under the circumstances?

The mission executives in Vancouver told her that the final decision would be up to her, although they were quite concerned that they would not always be able to guarantee her safety, because of their distant location from the village. They would stand behind her with prayer, however, and use whatever avenues of influence that were open to them on her behalf.

At the end of the three weeks, Grace still had not made a final decision. She decided to go back to the village and put her case to the Indian people themselves.

The day after she arrived, Grace approached the elders. "God has put it in my heart to speak to the whole village to tell them why I want to live here," she said. "Will you give me permission to do that?"

The elders advised her to put on a dinner for the whole village at the Big House and, after everyone had eaten, she could talk to them. So that is what she had done.

About 150 people came to the dinner. Even while they ate, there was dancing going on in the other part of the Big House. After most people had eaten, one of the elders got up and told the people that Grace had serious words to say to them.

Grace stood and spoke to the people with an intensity that they never before had heard in her voice. As simply and as comprehensively as possible, she explained the gospel message to them. Then she told them that she must decide whether God wanted her to stay with them any longer. But now she was asking them how they felt about it. Their answer would help her to understand God's will for her.

After Grace finished, another of the elders got up and translated what she had said into the native Indian tongue. He concluded by adding a few words of his own. If Grace did not stay with them, he said, they would not only lose a friend, they would lose strong prayers, too.

Several other elders got up when he was finished and spoke, first in the native tongue and then in English. They all expressed the desire for Grace to stay and teach them. One woman even got up to apologize for the resentment she had felt against Grace during the last four years.

Another more-educated, middle-aged woman, however, got up to say that the Spirit Dancing was all they had left of their culture. The government and the church had taken everything else away from them. After she had spoken, there was a general murmur of

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agreement from the crowd.

Grace realized then that the answer for her question would have to come from a higher source. Should she stay? “Please show me, Lord,” she prayed silently as, one by one, a number of her Indian friends slipped silently away to join the dancing at the other end of the Big House.

# 24

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## How Should Bashir Be Buried?

Syed Ratique Uddin

**T**ahir sat in a state of total shock. The wailing of his wife reached his ears, but he was helpless to respond to her or to even look on the too-tranquil face of his beloved only child, Bashir.

What a joy the eight-month-old baby had been to the whole family! Bashir was the first grandchild of Tahir's parents. How could any of them have guessed that their joy was going to be so short-lived? Just three days previously, the baby developed diarrhea. His bowel movements and vomiting had been uncontrollable. Bashir had died in the early hours of this morning. Tahir was finally roused from his stupor when his father spoke to him: "We must begin the preparations for burial. We must call the Imam [local Islamic priest] and send some people to dig a grave in the graveyard. Bashir should be laid to rest beside his other grandmother."

Tahir now faced a problem he had never anticipated. He and his wife had very recently become followers of Hazrat Isa (Jesus Christ). Would it be right for them to bury their son in the old Islamic way? Should they pray the Namaz-e-Janaza (Muslim burial prayer) over his body? If not, what should they do? How do the people following the path of Hazrat Isa bury their dead?

Tahir wished fervently that he could talk with Maulana Ahmed Ali. But today was Monday, and the Maulana (teacher) would not come until Friday. The burial must be done today, and his father was waiting for a response from him.

"Please be patient with me, father," Tahir said. "My grief has overcome me. Give me a few moments to control myself." His father nodded sympathetically and went into another part of the house.

As Tahir watched him go, the enormity of the situation almost overwhelmed him. His own parents were not even aware of his decision to follow the way of Isa. He had never told them about the fateful day four months before, when a teacher whose name was Ahmed Ali had come into his shop. The Maulana had been passing by and stopped to buy some puffed rice and sweets. He then sat down on the bench on the front veranda of the shop and began to eat. It was a hot day, so Tahir gave him a glass of water to drink.

Ahmed Ali lingered on the veranda to talk with Tahir. He asked Tahir if he prayed five times daily. Tahir mumbled that some days he did. Then the Maulana asked him if he was

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interested in learning how to pray so that he would get answers to the prayers. That interested Tahir, so Ahmed Ali invited him to come to Aminur Rehman's home on the next Friday, when he would be discussing the matter of the five-time prayer and how to receive answers.

Tahir was a shopowner and always interested in making more money in his business. However, since he always closed his shop on Friday like all the other merchants, he decided to go to Aminur Rehman's home to hear the talk about answers to prayer. Once there, Tahir found the Maulana had many new things to say-not only about prayer, but other things as well. He talked at length about Allah and his love for humankind. Then he introduced Hazrat Isa. This Isa (Jesus), said the teacher, was the Word of Allah. Tahir was quite surprised when the teacher was able to prove this from the Quran (Koran). He explained that Isa was the true revelation of Allah, and that no one could approach Allah except through Hazrat Isa.

The teacher also showed them the Injil Sharif (New Testament Bible). It was all quite astonishing to Tahir. Nevertheless, both he and Aminur Rehman agreed that after each Namaz (liturgical prayer) they would pray to Allah in the name of Isa Masih (Jesus Messiah) as the Maulana had taught them to do.

For a whole week, in fact, Tahir did exactly that. He prayed to Allah five times a day in the name of Hazrat Isa. Sure enough, his sales gradually increased as more and more people came to his shop. The jealousy of some of the other shopowners only served to sweeten the taste of his new success.

Gratefully, Tahir continued regularly to attend the Friday Jama'at (assembly) and prayers in the house of Aminur Rehman. Tahir was amazed at the Maulana's knowledge of various matters of religion. Each time, he learned more about Hazrat Isa. The teacher explained that Hazrat Isa had really died on the cross. That was very hard for Tahir to understand. He had always been told that Jesus was never crucified, that when he was being held by the Jews, Allah had miraculously delivered him. It was true that a crucifixion took place the following day, but the man who was crucified was not Jesus but another man who happened to look like him.

However, Maulana Ahmed Ali insisted that it was Isa who was crucified and that he had to die because of human sin. Tahir was deeply impressed when the teacher showed from the Quran that Jesus had actually predicted his own death. When the teacher asked him if he believed that Isa is the way, the truth, and the sacrifice for sin, Tahir asserted that he did believe it.

Tahir's wife, Amina, and Aminur Rehman's wife, Rukhsana, began listening to the teachings of the Maulana, too. They hid on the other side of a bamboo fence that divided the room where the men sat.

After about ten Fridays, the two men and their wives all decided to become followers of Hazrat Isa. They submitted to the ceremonial bath and washing. Maulana Ahmed Ali administered this to the two men, and they in turn did it for their respective wives.

And then, like a bolt of lightning from heaven, this catastrophe came upon Tahir and his wife: Allah took away their only son, Bashir. What about the prayers that had gone up to Allah in the name of Hazrat Isa for the well-being of their family? Their teacher, Ahmed Ali, had promised that they would be heard and answered.

As Tahir reflected on these things this morning, however, he remembered another teaching of the Maulana. It was the story of Hazrat Ayub (Job). The teacher had explained that in

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the time of terrible disaster, Allah remains present through his Spirit. How did these two teachings fit together? Tahir was not only in anguish, he was also very confused. If only the teacher were here to talk with him.

His father's voice in another part of the house brought Tahir back to the immediate problem he faced. How should Bashir be buried? To do it the Christian way, should not the Maulana be present? If the Imam did it in the Islamic way, of course, the prayers would be sent to Allah in the name of Mohammed. Had he not promised Maulana that his prayers would now all be in the name of Hazrat Isa?

Thinking of the local Islamic priest brought more anxiety to Tahir. What would he say to him? Any disclosure of his new faith at this time could only bring disastrous results. The Imam would refuse to bury his son. The entire village might decide to ostracize Tahir's whole family. His father, who was very old and weak, might actually die of shock if Tahir revealed that he had departed from Islam, the only true and straight path to Allah. Even the forthcoming marriages of his sisters would be put in jeopardy. If people came to know that their brother had changed his faith, the parents would not want such women to marry their sons.

Tahir sat with his head in his hands and heard with dread the approaching footsteps of his father. What would he say to him?

## **Postscript**

The burial was done in the Islamic way. There was great controversy among the followers of the path of Hazrat Isa because of it. Some said it was wrong to bury the dead in the Muslim graveyard and in the Islamic manner. Others said it was all right to do so because the Bible does not give specific instructions about the burial of the body. In any case, each village has only one graveyard, so they really had no other choice.

## Sickness and Death

The concept of missions is built, in part, on a love for people and a desire to minister to them in their needs. What these needs are, however, is often a point of discussion. The missionaries think of the need for salvation and eternal life, and for holiness and Christian community here on earth. The people to whom they minister think mainly about their need for food and shelter, for success in business or school, for good marriage partners, for protection from spirits, witchcraft and the evil eye, for healing from illnesses, and for comfort and meaning in death. These are the concerns that preoccupy much of their daily lives.

Certainly the primary message of the gospel has to do with eternal matters—with our relationship to God and the establishment of his kingdom in the heavens. But it also has to do with earthly matters with our relationship to our fellow humans and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus became human not only to die for our sins, but also to minister to those around him. Similarly, in missions, we have a dual responsibility: to proclaim the Good News of salvation, and to minister to humans in their felt needs. Often, after we help people deal with the crises they face, they are ready to listen to what we have to say.

But what is the message we bring to people in their earthly needs? What do we say to people when they are gathered after the death of a

sick child, a young man killed in battle, or an aged mother loved by all? What do we say when a young person is critically wounded in an accident or a young mother is dying in childbirth? What do we say when an earthquake strikes or a drought sets in and famine stalks the land? What do we say when people are oppressed and poor, forced to live in cardboard shanties and exploited by the powerful? These are the daily questions that all missionaries face if they identify closely with the people to whom they minister.

God does work in extraordinary ways, and we are called to pray for people in their needs. But even here questions arise. Does God answer the prayers of non-Christians for protection and healing? What do we say when God does not heal the sick for whom we pray? Is it the will of God that this young Christian die? Are we powerless? Or does this young Christian lack faith? What is the place in missions for modern medicine, agricultural technology, relief, development, and education? These questions and many more are the ones we face when we seek answers for people in their needs.

Here Christ's incarnation must be our example. He was fully God and brought us salvation. He became fully human and ministered to us in our earthly needs. That tension between eternal and earthly needs lies at the heart of our ministry in planting new churches.

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# 25

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## Nemon's Death

Joanne A. Wagner

**P**eter stepped out of the hut of his friend Besi, his heart heavy and confused. Besi was ill and convinced he was dying. Peter felt a trip to the coastal hospital, a two-hour drive away, would restore his health. However, because of what had happened earlier, he did not know whether he dared suggest the trip and what the effect would be on his attempts to plant a church in the village if his advice failed again. As he stood looking out across the valley bathed in morning sun, Peter's thoughts went back several months to the time when he was leaving the hut of Nemon, his co-translator and dear friend, who had just died.

Peter and Lillian had come to Kwili village in Papua New Guinea to translate the Bible and plant a church. There they came to love Nemon, a national co-translator who helped them with their work. Then, on one occasion when they returned after an absence of a few weeks, Nemon was not at the door with his usual warm welcome. The villagers told the missionaries that Nemon was suffering from much pain and that he had been ill for two weeks. Lillian and Peter were shocked and saddened to see Nemon with a swollen jaw, a high fever, and in obvious pain. When they talked to his wife, Swenge, she told them that Nemon, a fine Christian leader in the village, was convinced that this sickness was going to kill him, and he had resigned himself to death.

Ruth, a nurse who had accompanied Lillian and Peter to the village, examined Nemon and diagnosed the case as an abscessed tooth. She recommended strongly that he be taken to the coastal hospital where he could see a dentist and receive medical care. When Peter relayed her recommendation to Nemon's family and reinforced it with his own, their reaction was negative. Nemon's kin felt that if he was taken to the haus sik, he would surely die. Moreover, he had already announced to them that he was going to die, and they did not want the death to take place away from the village, which would bring it a bad reputation. Among their people it was important for the mental well-being of the kinsmen and the person involved that he or she be at home when death came.

Nemon remained in his home, and his condition continued to deteriorate. Peter persevered in his attempt to convince the family that hospitalization was necessary for Nemon's

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survival. Finally they consented. Peter, Lillian, Swenge, and Nemon hastily departed on the two-hour drive to the coast.

It was Friday afternoon when they arrived, and Lillian felt a profound sense of relief when they admitted their friend to the hospital. Now, she felt, he was in good hands and would be cured. With confident hearts she and Peter drove back to the village, leaving Swenge to remain at the hospital with Nemon.

However, it was a weekend, and few of the medical staff were on duty at the hospital. Consequently the care Nemon received was minimal. He did not see a dentist, but an appointment was made for Tuesday morning. In the meantime the nurses tried to keep him comfortable. However, on Sunday evening, the abscess in Nemon's jaw burst, sending toxins to his brain, and he died.

When his body was brought back to the village, Lillian and Peter were shocked and grieved. Nemon's family was angry at them, claiming that Nemon died because they took him away to the hospital. Only when an influential relative of Swenge's rebuked the people for blaming the missionaries for the death did the accusations stop. Moreover, when the family observed the genuine grief experienced by the translators as they shared in the burial ceremonies in the village, they concluded that Peter and Lillian were not to blame for their relative's death. Later the family placed the blame on Jeremiah, a member of an enemy clan who had been a close friend of the deceased. Jeremiah, already stricken with grief at the death of his companion, was finally forced to leave the area and seek residence elsewhere because of the pressures placed on him by Nemon's embittered clan.

Peter's thoughts returned to the present as he heard Besi moan with pain. "No," he thought, "it is not a clear-cut matter. Should I try to influence Besi to go to the hospital-or should I step back and not interfere in this case?"

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### The Death of Manuel Vasquez

Larry W. Caldwell

Greg Baxter sat dejectedly in the driver's seat of the Land-Rover, parked in the shade of some coconut palm trees to avoid the intense heat of the Filipino sun. Even though it was only midmorning, his *barong* was soaked. It was an inner debate that caused his perspiring, the same debate that had kept him awake most of the previous night. What was he going to say to Agnes Vasquez? Even now her family members were but a hundred feet away in her simple bamboo and thatch house, preparing her husband's body for the funeral. Greg, having the only vehicle in the area, had readily agreed to take Manuel's body to the cemetery. Manuel had died of tuberculosis despite Greg's prayer for healing. He had died a Christian, led to the Lord by Greg himself just a few days before his death. Agnes had refused to become a Christian at that time. She had instead made Manuel's healing the prerequisite for her own turning to Christ. Now Manuel was dead, and in a few minutes the family would place his body in the Land-Rover. What was Greg to say to Agnes and the rest of the family?

As he waited, Greg thought back over the past few months. Fresh out of seminary, he and his wife, Betty, and their year-old son had arrived in the Philippines, just eight months before. They had been assigned by their mission board to teach in Evangel Theological College, the mission's training school for national pastors and church workers. They had spent the first two months in Cebu City at their mission's headquarters. Here they adjusted to the climate and culture, underwent language study, and prepared for their move to E.T.C. The school, located in a rather remote area of the island and three hours' drive from Cebu City, was under total national administration. Greg and Betty would be the only missionaries on campus. They arrived at E.T.C. early in March, arranged their living quarters in faculty housing, and continued in intensive language study, aided by one of the Filipino faculty members.

It was during this time that they met Agnes Vasquez. One morning in late March, when Greg was at a meeting, Agnes knocked at the door of their house, selling papaya. Betty used this opportunity to practice her Cebuano, and quickly a friendship developed between them. During that first rather stilted conversation, the women discovered that they were both the same age and had been married the same number of years. Agnes, however, had two small children and was expecting her third in September. From that morning on, Betty often invited Agnes to the house for language practice during the mid-morning break. Since the Vasquezes lived just outside the

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E.T.C. campus, on the other side of a sugarcane field, it was convenient for Agnes to stop by regularly.

Despite the women's friendship, neither Betty nor Greg was invited to the Vasquezes' house. They discovered early on that this was because Agnes's husband, Manuej, was bedridden with an advanced case of tuberculosis. Twice Greg drove Manuel in the Land-Rover to the clinic ten miles away for X-rays and examinations. Each time, the doctor's prognosis was discouraging: Manuel was dying. Greg used the opportunities that these trips provided to explain the gospel to Manuel. Greg did give him a Good News New Testament in Cebuano, and Manuel agreed to read it during his long hours in bed.

June came quickly, and Greg and Betty were thrown headlong into the many activities of E.T.C. Greg had to teach four classes, and Betty had two of her own. As a result, their time with the Vasquezes was greatly reduced, though Betty tried to have Agnes over to the house at least once a week.

One morning in late July, after Agnes had visited their house, Betty found Greg and told him that Manuel was having violent coughing spells. Agnes had asked if Greg would again take Manuel to the clinic for more medicine. Greg immediately dropped what he was doing and rushed Manuel to the clinic. There the doctor gave Manuel some medication for temporary relief but told him that death was close at hand. At most he had but a few weeks to live, and there was nothing more the clinic could do. It was best for him just to go home and try to remain as comfortable as possible.

During the drive back to E.T.C., Manuel told Greg that he had been reading the Bible Greg had given him. He also said that he wished to become a follower of Christ before he died. Filled with joy, Greg pulled the Land-Rover over to the side of the bumpy road. Then and there Greg led Manuel in a prayer for salvation. Upon arriving back home, Manuel greeted Agnes with the words, "I will soon die, but then I will go to heaven. I have become a Christian." Agnes looked hard at Greg but did not speak. Once the two of them had gotten Manuej back into his bed, she brought Greg outside the house to talk.

"As you know," she began, "Manuel and I have two small children, and I am now big with a third child. Manuej will die soon, but he cannot! How will I and the children live on without him? I am desperate. So now I will make an agreement with God, with you as my witness. If God will heal Manuel and allow him to live, I, too, will become a Christian. But if he dies, I will turn my back on God forever."

Agnes's words, and the earnest look on her face convinced Greg of the sincerity of what she said. He tried, with his limited Cebuano, to explain to her that God could not be bargained with, that perhaps it was God's will for Manuel to die at such a time as this, and that, regardless, she herself needed to become a Christian. His words were in vain. Agnes refused. She ended the conversation with the words, "Will you not pray to God for my husband's healing?" Greg replied that he would seriously consider it and would pray about whether or not he should make that request of God.

Through discussions that day and the next with Betty and the other members of the E.T.C. faculty, and through his own prayer and Bible study, Greg became convinced that Manuej should be prayed for according to the model found in the Epistle of James. They all came to the consensus that Manuel's healing would be a form of "power encounter." It might convince both

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Agnes and others living in the area of the truth of Christianity. The following day, after fasting and prayer, Greg and two other faculty members went to the Vasquezes' house and explained to Manuel and Agnes what they were going to do. Manuel was greatly encouraged by their words. After the prayer he seemed better already. As they were leaving, Agnes reminded them of her "arrangement" with God. Again, they tried to explain to her the same things Greg had a few days before.

Three days later Manuel died. Greg and Betty heard Agnes's loud wail carry over the sugarcane field. They knew instinctively what had happened and they both began to cry. After composing themselves and saying a short prayer for Agnes and her children, they ran up the dirt road to the Vasquezes' house. By now, other neighbors had also arrived, and a crowd had gathered at the entrance. Inside, Agnes was being comforted by her older sister, Alice, who had arrived from the village the day after their prayer for Manuel's healing. When Greg and Betty came into the house, Alice motioned for Greg to leave. He left Betty there and went outside to wait for her. After a few minutes Betty came out and explained to Greg that Agnes could not bear to see him right now. Since the prayer for Manuel had failed, Agnes was blaming God and, indirectly, Greg. Not knowing how to respond, Greg returned home. Betty remained to help out as best she could.

The rest of that day was a terrible one for Greg. In between his classes, he spent the time in prayer and Bible reading. The same questions kept repeating themselves over and over in his mind: Should they have prayed for Manuel's healing? Why had God not answered the prayer? Why had Greg come to the mission field at all? What would he say to Agnes? Despite his fervent prayers, no easy answers came. Discussions with the other faculty members did not prove helpful either.

That evening, Betty tried to give Greg further information about Agnes's reluctance to see him. Betty related how she had unsuccessfully tried to explain things to Agnes, who still blamed God and Greg because the prayer for Manuel's healing had failed. Both Greg and Betty expressed their bewilderment at Agnes's reaction. When Greg shared with Betty his questions, together they sought the Lord in prayer. Still no answers came. They went to bed discouraged.

Now it was morning and Greg sat in the Land-Rover, waiting to take Manuel's body to the cemetery. Various responses to Agnes continued to fill his head. The funeral procession moved toward him from the house, carrying the wooden box that contained Manuel's body. Greg got out quickly and opened the tailgate. The box was placed on the floor of the vehicle. Agnes was helped into the passenger's side by Alice, who then sat beside her. Greg got in on the driver's side and closed the door. He turned to Agnes. The widow's eyes, red and swollen from crying and lack of sleep, looked up into his. Greg looked at her, and said....

## 27

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# What Is Wrong with Auntie Mansah?

## Daniel Tei-Kwabla

**K**ofi Ankomah was more than ready to leave the village and return to the city of Accra with his wife, Elizabeth, and their son, Andrew, when things suddenly fell apart. He had been looking in vain for his cousin, who had promised to give them a ride back, when they heard screams from the kitchen. Everyone came running. “It’s Auntie Man sah!” someone shouted. “She has fainted!” By the time Kofi got there, the kitchen was full of people who were desperately trying to bring the old woman back to consciousness. They moved aside to make room for Kofi and he was suddenly aware that every eye in the room was fixed on him. In that instant it seemed that the two very different worlds he inhabited with varying degrees of discomfort came crashing together. Reading the looks on the faces around him was no problem. He knew they expected him to use the powers of his costly Western education to exorcise the evil spirit from Auntie Mansah.

The problem was that his education in Western theology had assumed a world in which there were no spirits. His Western self agreed with that; his African self wasn’t so sure. But there was no doubt that he stood now in an African kitchen surrounded by people who lived in an African world. Perspiration beaded his forehead and he began to think he should never have come home.

It was 1969, and Kofi Ankomah had recently returned to Ghana after ten years of theological study abroad. His homecoming was the realization of the dreams and hard work of many people in his family.

Kofi was the second of four sons. His father, Opanian Buafu, had inherited a large cocoa farm. As head of the extended family Opanian was responsible for his brothers and their families, for his divorced sister, Mansah, as well as for his own wife and children.

Auntie Mansah, as Kofi’s father’s sister was called by everyone in the extended family, had become a wealthy trader in cloth. In her travels, she had come to know about the Presbyterian mission in the market town some fifty miles away. After a while, she began taking classes in the mission school and was baptized as a Christian.

Auntie Mansah pleaded with Kofi’s father to let him attend the mission school. At first her brother resisted, but when she brought back a new ready-made school uniform for Kofi as a Christmas gift, Opanian was quite impressed. “We must make Kofi a `white man’s child,’”

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Mansah said. “That is how he can become a wealthy and prestigious man in the tribe.” Opanian did not argue; he agreed to let Kofi attend the mission school.

Kofi studied hard. He was in the top of his class and the headmaster took a special interest in him. Gradually, he also became interested in church activities, and a few years later he was baptized. Kofi’s mother, brothers, and sisters were baptized at the same time. Opanian, his father, had refused baptism. He was sympathetic to Christianity, but he felt that as head of the extended family he must keep up his responsibilities as priest in the ancestor cult.

When Kofi began to attain physical maturity, his Auntie Mansah began to tease him about girls. She was quite serious, however, when she would urge him to be careful about “those Fanti girls.” “Don’t allow them to lead you astray,” she said. “We will see to it that you get the most beautiful girl from our own Adukrom tribe.” Kofi did not pay much attention at the time, for he was too preoccupied with his studies.

In the summer of 1953, a calamity struck the happy family. Opanian had worked all day in the cocoa field planting seedlings. It had begun to rain, but he continued his work because the planting had to be finished. That night he complained of having a cold, but no one took much notice of him. When the condition became worse, however, the family called the local pharmacist, who gave Opanian some medicines. These did not help, so Opanian insisted that they call the medicine man.

Auntie Mansah did not want to do this. Finally they asked a relative who was an elder in the church what they should do. He said that it would be all right to call the medicine man as long as they did not let the minister hear about it. Reluctantly, Auntie Mansah went with some non-Christian relatives to consult the diviner. He told them that Opanian had offended the spirits of the ancestors and that he must sacrifice a goat to pacify them. The diviner had agreed to come the next day to perform the sacrifice, but he was too late. Opanian had died during the night.

After Opanian’s death, Kofi’s mother wanted him to leave school and return to the farm, but Auntie Mansah held out against her. “What will the whole village say when your educated son returns to work in the fields? You will lose face, and our family will lose its hope of raising their prestige in the community,” Mansah argued.

Kofi’s mother gave in, but she told Kofi that he was lazy and useless and that it was time for him to raise his own family. His mother’s attitude hurt him badly, and he decided that only Auntie Mansah understood him. Then he made up his mind to continue school, and he returned home only infrequently after that.

After Kofi’s graduation, the mission made him a teacher in the market town. Soon after that, impressed by his performance, they granted him a scholarship to study in England. His departure caused a big stir in the village. The family called a prayer meeting in their home, and the pastor cited a prophecy: “The people that sat in darkness have seen a great light.”

Turning to Kofi, the pastor said, “In the past, our tribe would have required you to fight in her wars and to bring home human heads as trophies. But we have been delivered by the blood of the Lamb. Today we send you to seek knowledge. Remember, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. I have heard of young men from other towns,” the pastor continued, “who went to the white man’s country. But instead of bravely facing their studies, they went after the sweet things of the flesh. Some even married white women.” The crowd gathered around him murmured its strong disapproval of such behavior. “A man who does that,” concluded the pastor,

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“is lost to his people. He is like rain wasted on the forest. I would have suggested that you take a wife before you leave, but the time is too short.”

Kofi remembered his pastor’s words and studied hard in England. He acquired a Ph.D. in Theology at Oxford University. He was also a good student of the culture and soon was as adept socially as he was outstanding in his academic achievement. Apparently he forgot to heed his pastor’s advice when it came to his social life. His British acculturation was crowned by marriage to a beautiful young woman from that country. In this matter, he quite forgot the pastor and his oldfashioned sermon.

After ten years, when it was time at last to go home, Kofi’s excitement and anticipation of the homecoming knew no bounds. He sent a cablegram to inform his family of the time of his arrival.

Auntie Mansah headed the small delegation of relatives at the airport in Accra. Her first words to Kofi expressed her pride in welcoming him home as a “big man.” If only Kofi’s parents had survived to see this day!

The first sign of trouble came when Kofi’s relatives realized that he had not come alone. His European wife, Elizabeth, and their son, Andrew, were with him. Then Kofi disappointed them even more. He said that they would not be coming directly to the village. Kofi had reserved a hotel room in the city; they would spend the night there and come to the village the next day. This was a bitter disappointment, particularly for Auntie Mansah, who had taken the responsibility for Kofi since the death of his mother.

Trying to make the best of it, Kofi’s relatives returned to the village without him. Early the next morning, they began for a second time to make preparations for the welcoming feast. They had killed two fat sheep and a number of chickens for the feast, but because of the delay, much of the cooking would have to be done over again.

A big crowd gathered in spite of the fact that Kofi’s kinsmen were complaining because they had not gone to their farms for two days. The Reverend Doctor Kofi Ankomah and his family did not appear until late afternoon. The Adukrom brass band was in attendance. It was nothing short of a festival. Old Pastor Mintah was there with all the rest and opened the service with prayer. Auntie Mansah’s second son, who had finished high school, gave a brief welcoming address that praised his cousin for his brilliant academic achievements. Then the celebrations began in earnest with eating, dancing, and drinking.

The festivities showed no signs of coming to an end that evening when Kofi and his wife announced that it was time for them to return to Accra. It was while he was searching for the cousin who was going to take them back that Aunt Mansah collapsed in the kitchen.

Instinctively, Kofi sent one of his relatives to look for transportation to rush his aunt to the hospital. When the older folk heard what he was planning to do, they objected violently. “Auntie Mansah cannot be helped in a European hospital,” one old man said contemptuously. “This is a case of spirit possession; someone must exorcise the spirit.” As he spoke, all eyes turned to the Reverend Doctor Ankomah as if to say, “Well this is your opportunity; show us your newly acquired spiritual power.”

Kofi was still determined that they would take Auntie Mansah to the hospital when his cousin returned with the news that there was no transportation available. He was trapped! There seemed to be nothing to cover a situation like this in the kind of Western theology that he had

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studied so hard. That theology demythologized all transcendent phenomena such as spirits and demons.

As these thoughts raced through his mind, and as if to add to his confusion, Kofi remembered the circumstances of his father's death. Were the African spirits only in the African's head? Or was Christianity powerless against the African spirits? Kofi wished at that moment that he had never come home. And yet, here he was, standing over his beloved Auntie, who was lying rigid on the floor while everyone in the village watched him carefully. What in heaven's name should he do?

# 28

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## A Sacrifice to the Goddess of Smallpox

Paul G. Hiebert

Venkayya felt the burning forehead of his young daughter. He had prayed fervently all afternoon, and still the fever mounted. The angry red spots on the child's face and body left no doubt that she had smallpox. Would she die like so many other children in the village? Did God really care? Or would giving one paisa to the goddess Misamma spare her life? Should he listen to his younger brothers and give in to the village pressure? What did the Bible mean when it said that a Christian should have no other gods but God?

Venkayya's problems began when a plague of smallpox came to Muchintala, a small village south of Hyderabad, in South India. The village elders called the government doctor; he distributed medicines and gave shots, but these had little effect on the disease. When a number of children died, the elders called the village diviner to determine the reason for the plague. He announced that Misamma, the goddess of smallpox who lived in a rock under a tree outside the village, was angry with the village. The villagers had offered her only two goats instead of the usual water buffalo at her festival five years before.} Since then no feast had been held, and Misamma expected a sacrifice from the village every three or four years.

When the elders heard this, they hastily made arrangements for a, water-buffalo sacrifice. Messengers were sent to every house in the village to gather donations to purchase the animal, since every house, hold was expected to contribute something to satisfy the goddess.

When a messenger came to the house where Venkayya and his two younger brothers lived, Venkayya told the man that he and his brothers had become Christians three years earlier, so they could not make a contribution for the sacrifice. It was against their religious beliefs. The messenger reported this to the high-caste elders, who became very angry. How could anyone in the village, especially an "untouchable" such as Venkayya, disobey their orders? They summoned Venkayya and demanded an explanation. He told them that he and his brothers had become Christians, and that Christians worshiped no gods but the God of the Bible. He would take care of them.

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The elders said that they did not object if Venkayya and his family worshiped the Christian God. Everyone had a right to worship his or her own god (ishta devata). But this was something different. Misamma was not a god like Rama, Allah, or the Christian God, who live in the heavens. She was only an earthly spirit who lived near their village. If the village did not keep her satisfied, she would continue to plague the children. Everyone in the village had to contribute something or she would be displeased. Besides, giving her something to eat was not worship. Even the Muslims, who worship only one god, gave money to buy the water buffalo so that their children would not die.

When Venkayya told the elders that a Christian could not offer a sacrifice, even to local spirits, they grew more angry. It was all right, they said, if he killed his own children by refusing to make the sacrifice, but he was to blame if other children in the village died. Moreover, he was disobeying the village elders, and that was an unforgivable offense. To show their authority and pressure him to change his mind, the elders placed Venkayya, his brothers, and their families under a village ban. No one in the village could talk to them, sell them goods, or marry their children-or he or she, too, would come under the ban.

The next week was difficult for the new Christians. They had to walk to the next village to buy food. Because they were forbidden to go to their caste well, the women had to fetch water from the stream a halfmile outside of town.

When more children died, the elders summoned Venkayya and told him that if he did not contribute a few paisa (cents) for the offering, they would bar him from working his fields. Again Venkayya held fast to his convictions.

The following week was unbearable. The young men of the village prevented Venkayya and his brothers from irrigating their pitifully small rice fields. Under the hot sun, the paddy began to wilt. If something was not done soon, there would be no harvest and nothing to live on next year.

Finally, Rangayya and Pullayya, Venkayya's younger brothers, came to him and said, "We must give in to the pressures of the elders or we will all die. God will understand if we give them a few paisa. We will tell him we did not give it as an offering to the spirit-but as a tax demanded by the village elders. Besides, Misamma is not a goddess living in the heavens. She is only a local godling living in a rock. Offering her a sacrifice is not worship. It is only food to placate her anger. It is like giving something to a belligerent official to keep the peace."

Four days later, his own little daughter came down with the dread disease that was taking so many in the village. Venkayya began to doubt his own judgment, so he went to see the missionary living forty miles away. The missionary prayed for the child and exhorted Venkayya to stand firm in his refusal to contribute to the sacrifice.

Today, he and the family had prayed all afternoon, but God seemed so far away. The medicine the doctor gave him made little difference to the girl's rising fever. Was he wrong in refusing to contribute even a few paisa to the elders? Clearly, local spirits like Misamma were not gods like Jehovah. Was it wrong, therefore, to feed them to keep them happy? They were little different from the officials who made life hard for everyone in the village and needed to be placated with gifts. Maybe the missionary was wrong. He really did not understand the village or

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the local spirits. Why couldn't he, as a father, pray for God's healing of his child, and give a paisa for the sacrifice at the same time?

As night came, Venkayya looked at his wife as she pleaded with God for the life of her child. Would God heal the little girl? And if God did not, what would he say when villagers scoffed at his God? Maybe his brothers were right. Maybe he should go to the village headman and give him one paisa to help buy a water buffalo for Misamma. Then his daughter might live. And even if she did not, he would not be blamed for the deaths of other children. Then he could work the fields and his family live in the village in peace.

# 29

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## Drought

R. T.

**T**he fine dust was everywhere-on the floor, the pews, and the pulpit. Pastor Joseph knew that no matter how often he dusted it off, it would return. There had been no rain to speak of for three years, and the fields had turned into gray powder that penetrated everything when the wind blew. With the drought came dry wells and famine, and with the famine came death. Why had God not heard the prayers of his people? Was this his judgment? Or was he testing their faith and teaching them to depend on him? Did he not see their suffering and starvation? Did he not see the tensions this was causing in the church? And what should he as the pastor say about the village sacrifice scheduled for next week? As he prepared for the next day's sermon, Joseph cried to God for guidance.

The crisis began in 1976, when a drought hit parts of East Africa. When it continued a second year, the people used up the last of their reserves. When no rains fell the third year, the people had nowhere to turn. Their cattle died and their crops were blighted.

The elders of Kangoi village blamed it on the Christians. In old times, they said, they had never had a famine like this. Now that some of the people had forsaken their ancestors and tribal gods to worship a foreign god, the ancestors and spirits were showing their anger. To show them that they were not forgotten, the elders had arranged for a sacrifice on the high hill east of the village the following Wednesday. They sent word to all the houses that at dawn the able members of each family were to go to the hill. There the elders would slaughter a sheep. Its blood, mixed with the milk of a cow, would be sprinkled in the air with a cow's tail to show the ancestors and spirits that the village needed rain. Then the people would say together, "Let it be so," to show the spirits that they were all in one accord.

The decision brought divisions to homes with Christians. Kipkorir's younger wife, Jesang, and her children were faithful church members and close friends of the Christians. She said that she could not take part in the sacrifice. Jerubet, his older wife, was not a Christian and had no problem with the decision of the village elders. Kipkorir was torn. If he joined the village leaders, he would lose his Christian friends; if he sided with the church, he would be accused by the nonChristians of making matters worse. Either way, his family would be divided. Other families in similar situations faced rising tensions as the days passed. The issue was on the tongue of every villager.

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The decision also caused division in the church. The new Christians questioned their new God. If he was powerful and loving, why did he not answer the many prayers of their church? Was he powerless in the face of their tribal gods? And could they not take part in the sacrifice to appease the ancestors and still continue to worship the Christian God? Was God against their ancestors?

Even the elders of the church were divided by their responses to the sacrifice. Some took a strong stand against participating in rituals they had forsaken when they became Christians. Peter, an old church elder who had participated in the tribal rituals before his conversion, explained the meaning of the sacrifice to the church members. He pointed out that the sacrifice was offered to the spirits and the dead, and that such practices would make God angry. He quoted 1 Corinthians 10:20-21 to show that Christians had to make a clear choice between God and the devils, and he urged them not to be lured into participating in such practices, which would lead them astray.

Other elders disagreed. Kiprop, formerly one of the leaders in the village, told people that there were various forms of worship and prayer and that the form itself did not matter. What was important was the spirit of the people when they prayed. He said that since God looks at the hearts and desires of the people, Christians could join the others on the hill but worship their own God while there. Moreover, both Christians and non-Christians needed rain, and God in the past had sent his rain on Christians and non-Christians without discriminating against the prayers of the non-Christians who prayed for rain. He said that it was God who gave the rain, and it was the ignorance of the non-Christians that needed their compassion, mercy, and forgiveness. Kiprop's allies quoted Romans 2:14-15 to show that even non-Christians can do what is right. They compared their tribal sacrifices to the Hebrew sacrifices in the Old Testament and concluded by saying that although Jesus Christ had become the end of all sacrifices, that does not mean that God refuses to hear the prayers of those who pray in Old Testament ways. Finally Kiprop pointed out that if Christians joined the village in the ceremony, the non-Christians would not be hardened against Christ.

Some of the younger men took a middle position. They argued that it was important for the Christians to identify with their fellow villagers in their common suffering, so all should go to the hill to pray for rain. But then the Christians could leave and the non-Christians could remain for the sacrifice. They wanted to preserve both Christianity and their tribal identity and heritage.

Two meetings of the church elders had produced no consensus. Each group became more entrenched in its own beliefs. Pastor Joseph heard that a few Christians had begun to question their faith in the Christian God. Maybe their non-Christian relatives were right. Maybe the ancestors were angry with them for having neglected them. Others were arguing that the Christians should do both: worship in church and sacrifice to their ancestors. One old Christian said that the drought was the judgment of God because the Christians had not broken totally from their old ways. Many of the children were confused by the accusations and uncertainty. No one could explain why the drought continued, and no one knew what to do about it. The people were becoming more and more confused by the continuing crisis.

All this went through Pastor Joseph's mind as he sought to prepare his message. Where was God and why had he forgotten them? What would God want him to say to his church on

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tomorrow's Lord's Day especially to those who lived in homes divided by different faiths? And what should they say to their non-Christian relatives and friends who ridiculed their God?

## Finances and Bribery

**W**hat is a bribe, what is a tip, and what is a gift? Mentally and theologically, we Western Christians draw a sharp line between them. Gifts have high value, higher than contractual exchanges or enforced payments. Their chief function is not economic gain but the building of social relationships, since the unsolicited exchange of economic goods is symbolic of affection and goodwill. Tips are a form of expected gift. Bribes, on the other hand, are evil. By giving such a private “gift,” one person seeks to persuade another to give him or her special advantage in some economic or political decision. A man may try to bribe a judge. A woman may give the shopkeeper an added sum to hide some rice for her when it is in short supply. In a sense, a bribe is an attempt to circumvent the normal cultural rules for one’s own benefit. It is to take unfair advantage of others.

So much for theory. What about real life? Here we face three problems. First, the distinction between gifts and bribes is often very fuzzy. Is it wrong for a landlord to rent an apartment to the person who gives him an extra sum in private? What if he adds this amount to the first month’s rent as a renter’s fee, much as a bank adds on “points” when granting a loan? What if he charges an outrageous rent simply because “the market will bear it.” Or, to take another case, is it wrong for a shopkeeper to keep some scarce food or gasoline to sell to his relatives and friends? This became a real issue during the gasoline shortage in the United States in the seventies. We must remember that such shortages are widespread and chronic in many parts of the world.

A second problem has to do with cultural differences. Western cultures emphasize what some have called “universal rules.” We believe that the same rules should be applied equally and impartially to all people. A government official should be given a ticket if he is caught speeding. He should not be exempt just because he is an official. Many cultures, however, have “particularist rules.” Such rules are applied selectively to different types of people. Ordinary people stand in line for their turn at the mission hospital. But when the mayor of the town comes for treatment, everyone (except possibly the missionary) expects him to go the head of the line. Similarly, during the colonial era, natives in India stood in line for railroad tickets, but a white man was invited in to visit with the stationmaster and given his tickets immediately. In these societies, what is seen as “fair play” is different from our Western concept. People are expected to give gifts to important people in certain situations, which to us might be seen as bribes. What is a biblical view of righteousness in such situations? Missionaries must maintain their integrity by being faithful to scriptural principles. On the other hand, must these always be interpreted in terms of universal rules and a Western sense of fair play?

A third problem in dealing with bribery is the fact that it has become a way of life in many parts of the world. The people in these cultures often agree on what is bribery and even admit that it is wrong. But what can a person do when everyone else is doing it? To get a driver’s

## Finances and Bribery

license, or permission to build a school building or import a car for mission work, the officials expect a personal payment. Then matters are expedited rapidly. Failure to give the amount, which is often small, leads to endless delays and wasted time. In such situations, how should a missionary act, particularly if she or he is in charge of a school or hospital and needs to construct a new building or get medical supplies? Is it wrong to give a little dash or bhaksheesh when everyone else is doing it? Here there is widespread disagreement, even among missionaries, on what to do.

A similar situation arises in countries that regulate their currencies. For example the official exchange rate inside a country may be five rupees to one American dollar. In the black market it may be ten to one. If you exchange money outside the country in the “gray” open market, it may be eight to one. But that nation may have a law making it illegal for you to bring rupees into the country. Can a mission agency with good moral conscience buy rupees in the black market or the open market and bring them in, on the moral rationalization that the local government is wrong in seeking to control its currency to its own advantage? After all, there will be twice as much money for the Lord’s work! Or should the mission abide by the local laws, even when they seem unjust?

When it comes to money and economics, the question of what is moral and what is immoral, what is right and what is wrong, is not an easy one to solve, particularly when we go to other cultures that have different beliefs and practices from our own.

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# 30

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## To Bribe or Not to Bribe?

Teg Chin Go

Pastor Luke looked with despair at the immigration official seated behind his large desk. He could offer the man a small sum of money and then receive the visa permitting Reverend John to enter the country, or he could refuse and no visa would be granted. The choice was his.

Pastor Luke was the elderly pastor of a large church with more than a thousand members among the Chinese in the Philippines. He had labored hard, but now he was in poor health and the load was too heavy. The people complained that they were being neglected, and he knew that the outreach of the church in the community had almost stopped. But where could he find help? He had searched widely throughout the Philippines for a younger assistant, but even in the Bible schools and seminaries there were almost no young Chinese training for the ministry. To find one in the country was almost out of the question.

In discussing the matter with other pastors, Pastor Luke found out that there were Taiwanese pastors willing to work in the Philippines. Their language abilities and cultural backgrounds were well suited to his Chinese-speaking congregation. So he and some church elders had traveled to Taiwan, where they found Reverend John, an able and willing worker.

However, when Pastor Luke applied for a work permit for the Taiwanese pastor, he ran into a serious problem. The officer in charge of immigration expected some money, and the pastor had heard that in some cases it had taken five to ten years for an application to be processed when no money was offered. With a suitable sum changing hands, the matter could be resolved in a matter of a few days.

When Pastor Luke brought the problem to the board of elders, most of them explained that the giving of money to an official should be thought of as a “gift” and not a “bribe.” Many of them were involved in business, and they admitted that giving “gifts” to those in authority was a cultural practice in the country. They faced similar situations in business, and if they did not follow the accepted pattern they could not continue their work. Pastor Luke raised an objection. Were they not in danger of compromising with evil, of not speaking out against corruption, no matter the cost? Was the giving of money to officials so much a part of the culture that they should accept it as a church and comply in order to carry out the work of the church? Or were the elders right when they said that it was only a “gift” to the officials for their assistance?

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Throughout the years, he had been firm in his preaching that Christians should not be involved in bribery.

When Pastor Luke hesitated to go along with the elders who asked him to pay the money, they threatened to remove him from office and install the new pastor in his place. If, however, he agreed to give the money, would he not compromise his own convictions and lose the respect of those in the congregation who knew of his firm stand on the issue? Pastor Luke looked at the official seated before him and said....

# 31

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## Elusive Justice

Keith Hinton

**B**ill looked at the police officer with uncertainty and frustration. The officer has asked him for 50,000 rupiahs for the return of his driver's license. It was Bill's twelfth weekly visit to the headquarters since the license had been confiscated, and his resentment rose as he faced the possibility of yet another wasted week clouded with uncertainty and unpleasantness, unable to use his car. Must he sacrifice his principles in order to resolve the matter?

The problem began when Bill had returned from a missionary assignment out of town. He was coming into Bandung, West Java, along the main highway from Tjirebon, the same road on which he had left the city two days before. The chaotic congestion was about normal in this heavily populated part of town. Animals, trishaws, and people were weaving their way in and out among the motorized traffic that crawled along the road toward the urban open market. For some time Bill had been caught behind a slow-moving, overcrowded bus, and there was little chance of getting past it, even when it stopped to allow passengers to alight.

Suddenly Bill was jolted to attention when something hit the side of the car. Before he knew what had happened, he caught sight of a policeman approaching the car and shaking his fist. By the time the officer had picked up his baton from the street, Bill was out of the car and prepared for the worst. Fellow missionaries had warned him never to tangle with the police. In fact, it was missionary policy not to call the police, even in the case of a house burglary. Experience had shown that it was cheaper to sustain the losses of robbery than to bear the frustration of red tape and the loss of further property taken to headquarters to test for fingerprints.

Bill did not have to wait long to find out what he had done wrong. For several hundred yards approaching the market area, the highway became a one-way street. Buses and other public vehicles were permitted to use it in both directions, but private vehicles had to detour around back streets and rejoin the highway several blocks beyond the market. Bill pleaded that he had seen no sign and had simply followed the bus. The officer walked Bill back twenty yards and pointed out to him a small, mud-spattered sign obscured by a large parked truck. This did not seem to concern the officer at all. There was a law and a sign-and Bill was guilty.

Officer Somojo escorted Bill to the local police post in the market. Five other officers materialized from the stalls in the market, so Somojo began to explain how very embarrassing it was for him to have to prosecute a foreigner, and how he regretted that Bill had put him in this

## Elusive Justice

difficult position. After some time, Somojo suggested that the whole thing might be smoothed over quietly and without further awkwardness if Bill would pay a token fine of 500 rupiah (U.S. \$1.20) on the spot. Bill had been expecting just such a request. Without even asking if it was a formal, legitimate fine for which a receipt would be given, Bill quickly protested that although he might be technically guilty Indonesian law had a system of justice and courts where such matters were to be settled. He would go through proper channels and requested to be allowed to do so. The officer scowled and told Bill that he would have to hold his driver's license until the case was settled. Bill could come to the police headquarters the following week to get it back. Since no receipt was issued for the license, Bill secretly feared that he would never see it again.

The following week, Bill went to the appointed office, only to be informed that the license had been sent to another department on the other side of the city. After a slow trip by trishaw, Bill finally found his way to the other office. The policeman in charge had a record of Bill's offense and said Bill could talk to the captain who would probably be prepared to settle the issue for 1,000 rupiah. Bill suspected dishonesty and requested an official receipt for the money. The man just smiled. Bill told the policeman that he had come to Indonesia to build efficiency, justice, and a high standard of morality in the country. He would prefer to go through official channels. At that, he was told to return in a week's time. So week followed weary week, with hours wasted in travel and more hours spent waiting in offices. Each time the amount requested for settlement rose higher.

Bill worried about what he should do. He didn't want to be a troublemaker, but as a missionary he had to take a stand for honesty. His Christian witness depended on it. His whole upbringing as the son of an evangelical pastor had been one of strict integrity, and he had managed, so far, to maintain this standard in previous encounters with immigration officers and postal clerks. Yet, while he felt he had done the right thing, he still felt uneasy, for he knew full well that government officials were so poorly paid that they had to make at least double their official salaries on the side if they were to feed and clothe their families. The whole system was unjust, and he was caught in it. Bill talked to some other missionaries. They just laughed and said, "Let us know how you get on!"

Now it was the twelfth week, and he still did not have his license. Moreover, the amount being asked to settle the case had risen to 50,000 rupiahs (U.S. \$120). Should he pay the official and end the case? Or should he appeal to a higher-level officer in hopes of a just settlement? Bill looked at the officer and said ....

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## Fuel for the Water Pump

Anonymous

**D**on answered the knock at the door. It was Ngoy, the man who ran the water pump for the mission station. “Bwana, we have only one day’s supply of diesel fuel left for the pump. After tomorrow I will not be able to pump anymore.” Don thanked Ngoy for keeping him informed. Before leaving, Ngoy told him that the young men in the next village had diesel fuel for sale. Don said that he wanted to think about the matter before giving him an answer. He knew that that fuel had been stolen, yet he needed fuel to keep the seminary and the high schools going.

After Ngoy had left, Don sat down to think things over. The mission station was the largest educational center for his denomination in Angola. In it were two high schools with boarding students, and a seminary. To have no fuel meant that a thousand people would be without water. If it were the rainy season, there would be no problem, because the people could catch the rainwater off the roofs. But it was June, and the rains would not come until October. Fifteen years earlier they could have used the river, but it was now polluted by the mines that had sprung up in the region, and besides there was now *bilharzia* (schistosomiasis) in the water. For this reason the mission had the mine owners drill a well to tap the underground water stream. A diesel motor was used to pump it into the reservoirs of the station.

When Don had come to Angola to teach in the seminary, he was also made responsible for the pump. At first there had been no problems, because the mission treasurer in the city a hundred miles away sent him the diesel fuel. The church had a quota with the oil company, for fuel had to be imported into the country. However, during the last few months, when the treasurer went to get the fuel, he found it had been diverted to someone else.

Don knew that without fuel there would be no water. Without water they would have to close the station. The last time they had been without water some of the students went to the river and became sick. He had then bought fuel from the young men in the village, and that had saved the situation. It was only later, through casual conversation with the African director of the seminary, that he learned the source of the fuel. The young men had an arrangement with the drivers of the mine trucks. The drivers would stop at the village to eat, and the young men would siphon off some fuel from their tanks to sell at a high profit. Don remembered how guilty he felt after he found out how the fuel was obtained. He remembered his pious upbringing. His grandfather was a great leader in the holiness movement, and Don himself had been raised in an

## Fuel for the Water Pump

atmosphere that emphasized holy living. Keeping one's witness and credibility as a messenger for the gospel was one of the cardinal values in his life. He forgave himself for having bought the fuel the first time, because he did not know that the merchandise was stolen. But now he knew.

"Don, it's time for the radio call," his wife, June, called out from the kitchen, and he went to the shortwave radio with which he kept in contact with the other mission stations. Perhaps another station would have spare fuel he could use. But all the other stations were facing the same problem, since they all depended on the quota in the city for fuel.

Don decided to see if he could find fuel in other places. He drove to mining headquarters twenty-five miles away. When Don explained the situation to the manager, he said, "I am sorry, but our mine quota for fuel is only enough for our operations. We can't help you." Don then tried the construction company that had built the buildings at the station, but to no avail. He went to the merchants, but found that they were operating on stolen fuel.

Don drove back to the station pondering the decision. He would either have to close the station down, keep it open and risk the health of the people as they went to the river for water, or buy diesel fuel he knew had been stolen. As he drove up to the house, Ngoy was waiting. "Bwana, did you find any diesel fuel?"

"No, Ngoy, I haven't," he answered.

"Bwana, do you want me to get some fuel from the young men in the village?" Ngoy asked.

Don thought a moment and said ....

# 33

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## Bonanza or Black Market?

Paul G. Hiebert

Sarah put down the letter and looked at her missionary colleagues on the finance committee. “It’s up to us to decide,” she said. “The home board says it doesn’t know the situation well enough and wants us to make the decision.”

“I think we should go ahead,” said Philip. “It would be a real bonanza for our work, and we wouldn’t have to cut back on evangelism or the schools.”

Steve, the third member of the committee, was not so sure. “What if it’s illegal or immoral? If it becomes known, this could bring shame on the gospel and possibly put an end to our work.”

“What could be wrong with it?” Philip replied. “After all, we are only buying rupees on the open market, not the black market. Besides, there’s little chance of getting caught. There is so much to be done, and we need the money to expand the work. It’s the government that is robbing us by setting an unrealistic exchange rate for its currency. What do you think, Mary?”

Mary, the fourth member of the committee thought a long moment before she was ready to answer.

The Asian Evangelical Mission had begun work immediately after World War II and over a twenty-year period had managed to plant more than twenty small churches in the villages and towns. The mission had grown until it now had an annual budget of \$135,000, raised in North America. This supported ten missionary couples, two single missionary women, and nine evangelists. It also covered the operating costs for two dispensaries and a dozen small village schools run by the churches to train their people how to read.

Over the years the mission had exchanged its dollars for rupees through the government bank at the official exchange rate. This had created no problem, for the official exchange rate was only slightly below the rate available on the black market. In the past two years, however, inflation had sharply reduced the value of the rupee. The government had increased the number of rupees it gave for a U.S. dollar, but this had not kept up with the declining value of the rupee. Now the official rate was four and a half rupees for one American dollar, compared to eight rupees for a dollar on the black market. The mission had had to cut back on some of its work

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because it was not getting full value for its dollars. Missionary salaries, paid in rupees, had had to be raised significantly to keep up with inflation, but this took more dollars and left less for the rest of the work.

The mission finance committee had been struggling with its shrinking budget when Philip met the treasurer of another mission. “What are you doing to deal with the problem of inflation and poor exchange rates?” he asked.

“We now exchange our money on the open market,” the treasurer replied.

“Isn’t that illegal?” Philip asked.

“It is if you use the black market in the country,” the treasurer replied. “But we exchange our money in the States through an international exchange company.”

“But it is also illegal to bring rupees into the country. You have to declare them in customs when you enter. If you were caught, you might be prosecuted or deported,” said Philip. “Besides, if it were known, it would give Christianity a bad reputation.”

“We don’t bring them in,” the treasurer said. “We give the international company dollars in the United States and they send us their agent in the country to give us the rupees. I don’t know how they exchange the money, but I’m sure they know what they are doing. After all, the company advertises widely in American magazines and is well known on the international scene. Besides, we are not the ones bringing rupees into the country.”

When Philip returned home, he called the finance committee together and explained to them the “new way” to exchange money. “Just think,” he said, “if we use the free market, we would have plenty of money for our work. The government only gives us four and a half rupees for a dollar. The international agency gives us seven. That means we can get 945,000 rupees instead of 610,000. Each of our missionary couples gets \$600 a month. If they used the new exchange rate, they would get 4,200 rupees rather than 2,700. That would make living a lot easier. And we would have 390,000 rupees for evangelism and church ministries instead of 250,000. We wouldn’t have to cut back on the work. Or, if we as missionaries would be willing to live on 2,700 rupees a month, as we are now, we would have 590,000 rupees for evangelism and church planting—more than double what we now get. Think of all the things we could do with that money!”

Steve looked worried. “It sounds suspicious to me. The government is explicit. All money brought into the land must be exchanged through official government banks. It seems to me that somehow the international company is getting around the law. What if we are caught, and it is wrong? It would discredit Christianity in the whole country. You can imagine what the local religious fundamentalists would make out of that!”

“Other missions are doing it, and nothing has happened to them,” Philip countered. “Besides, the government has no right to take our money and give us only half its value. And even if it is illegal, we aren’t the ones bringing money into the country.”

“But we don’t want to give even the appearance of evil, for that would bring shame to Christ,” Steve replied.

The finance committee had brought the matter to the full missionary fellowship, but there, too, there had been a division of opinion. In the end, the fellowship sent the matter back to

## **Bonanza or Black Market?**

the finance committee to decide.

The committee had written to the home board for guidance, and now they had received its reply. Mary knew that she had the deciding vote and that the missionary fellowship would go along with the committee's recommendation. It would be wonderful to have more money, but was it ethical? Finally she said ....

# 34

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## The Price of Ordination

Anonymous

**P**astor Mulunda was confused and angry. The irony of the situation was incredible! The pastoral committee, representing the institution that stood most strongly against bribery in his culture, had just asked him for what amounted to a bribe. He had met with them for most of the morning. Now they had recessed for lunch, but later in the afternoon he would have to give them an answer. His ordination depended on his willingness to acquiesce to their request.

Three years before, Mulunda had heard a call from the Lord to minister in the poor, heavily populated capital city of his African country. He responded by beginning a three-year course of study at the national Protestant seminary. Mulunda's gifts were numerous, but academic achievement was not one of them. He persisted, however, with a dedication that he knew had been given him by the Lord. He often stayed up long into the night to complete his assignments while other students slept.

When he graduated, the pastoral committee assigned him to a large church in the capital city and also granted him a teaching position in one of the church's elementary schools. Since the congregation was poor and could provide Mulunda with only a fraction of even a modest income, a supplemental income was imperative. Most of his country's Protestant pastors were forced to do other things as well, because of the high incidence of poverty and unemployment in the country.

Mulunda knew, of course, that the choice placement and teaching position was no accident. The chairman of the pastoral committee, Elder Mukole, was also Mulunda's maternal uncle. As such, Mukole was simply fulfilling his obligation to his nephew by using whatever power or money was at his disposal to advance Mulunda's education and career possibilities. While Mulunda was at the seminary, Mukole supported him with tuition money and often with food. The latter became necessary when the seminary was unable to provide the students with their monthly ration of corn, manioc, sugar, and salt.

After his second year of studies, Mulunda married Mukaji. Again, it was his uncle who contributed heavily to the wedding dowry of goats, money, and bolts of cloth. He had done this in spite of the fact that many of the clan were upset because Mukaji was from a different tribe.

## The Price of Ordination

The first eight months of his pastorate were not easy, but Mulunda faithfully worked with all groups in the previously divided congregation. He saw the Lord add greatly to the church in numbers of members as well as in the depth of their spiritual lives.

In the eighth month, the pastoral committee notified him that they felt he was qualified to undergo the church's ordination examinations. He anticipated these exams with great apprehension, but it turned out that he passed all four of them and was recommended by the committee for ordination. All went well as he proceeded through the ordination process right up until the end of this morning's meeting. That was when he first learned of the committee's condition.

"Brother Mulunda," began one of the pastors on the committee, "many of the members have traveled long distances to attend the four meetings of your ordination exam. To be ordained, it is customary for the new pastor to pay the committee one goat for the trouble and expense we have incurred."

Feeling stunned and almost betrayed, Mulunda looked at his uncle for help, but Mukole's eyes had met him with an icy stare. Uncle was not on his side this time.

Now, as he reflected on what had occurred, Mulunda still could hardly believe it. His own Christian leaders were asking for a payment—a bribe! Their comments after the meeting made it quite clear that he would not be ordained until he gave them the goat.

Financially, the goat represented over two month's wages. But ethically it meant so much more! The problem of matabishe (bribery) was endemic in the national culture, but most pastors and lay evangelists preached strongly against it. Many of Mulunda's class discussions at seminary had been directed toward the questions of honesty, bribery, and the Christian witness.

The church would view such a forced payment as a bribe if they learned about it, and Mulunda would be seen by his own congregation as a "man of two words"—a hypocrite. How devastating that would be to the new converts!

The foreign missionaries who brought the gospel to Mulunda's country were the ones who first condemned the matabishe. Later it was also declared illegal by the national government. In the culture at large, however, people winked at the custom, and it was still widely practiced.

Mulunda had always been outspoken against the matabishe system. But suddenly, as his confused mind raced in circles over the dilemma he now faced, something else occurred to Mulunda. Was his attitude shaped more by the American missionaries' views than by the gospel message? He had often been hurt by their insensitivity to the customs of his culture. They often seemed to condemn things just because they didn't understand them—like the tribal respect for their ancestors, the temptations of a polygamous marriage, and the older people's fear of the spirits of sickness and lightning.

Matabishe was apparently not a part of American culture. Was it possible that the missionaries had condemned this part of Mulunda's culture without real Scriptural justification, and only because it was not a part of Western culture?

Mulunda realized he would have to pay the amount if he were to be ordained, and he had been quite sure of his call to the pastorate. And, of course, he owed his church placement and teaching position to the pastoral committee. More importantly, to refuse to honor the committee

## **The Price of Ordination**

and its chairman-his own maternal uncle-was inexcusable. Why should a committee ordain a defiant candidate who would not submit to ecclesiastical authority? The non-Christians would soon hear about the disunity in the church, and that would seriously hinder their witness. No African wants to be associated with a fractured community.

Mulunda's mind raced over the teachings of Jesus; the Epistles; the Old Testament stories. Nothing seemed to speak to his situation.

But how could he pay what seemed to be a bribe to the committee and at the same time be exhorting his congregation to honesty? Was it bribery or was it gratuity?

Sweat rolled down Mulunda's forehead as the afternoon sun slipped downward through the hazy sky of the dry season. Outside he heard children racing noisily home from afternoon classes. Was there any way out of this dilemma that would satisfy both the committee and his own conscience?