

INSTITUTE FOR CHRISTIAN TEACHING

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GOSPEL AND CULTURE

Some cultural issues faced by Seventh-day Adventists
Educators and Pastors in teaching Bible in Africa

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children, that we may do all the words of this law" Deut 29:29

As the Bible teacher in the classroom and the church pastor in homes confront themselves with the conflict between Gospel and Culture, the main problem for them remains : what importance should be given to the saying of Jesus and his apostles in a given issue ? Is there any clear and sound biblical doctrine in the matter ? If yes can the words of Paul or the words of Jesus be considered as normative ? What should then be our attitude as Seventh-day Adventist educators and ministers ?

Three main groups of cultural issues can then be observed :

- 1-Cultural issues whose solutions are not clearly stated in the Bible, but which are faced in our day-to-day ministry. Music, folklore dancing, dowry payment, church decoration belong to this group.
- 2-Cultural issues which can be understood from the biblical standards, even though the biblical writers did not address themselves to the issue in a clear way. Polygamy belongs to this group.
- 3-Cultural elements whose solutions are quite clearly stated in the Bible through revealed messages. The state of the dead, the divorce and the priesthood of women belong to this third group.

Our purpose, therefore, is to find out what teaching approach should be given to each one of these three categories of cultural issues, both in the classroom and in the church and homes settings.

CHAPTER ONE

Cultural issues not clearly mentioned in the Bible.

1-Definition

We understand by "cultural issues not clearly mentioned in the Bible", those cultural issues whose solutions are not clearly given in the Scriptures. Of course, the Bible does speak about music, dancing, dowry...etc, but the Bible does not tell us if these elements are good or bad, and what aspect of

them is suitable for worship. Likewise, the Bible does not tell us if a national flag or a huge cross should be found inside the church building, or if this is idolatry. All the cultural issues belonging to this category can positively be used for the spiritual growth of the church. But they can also be used by the devil to mislead careless men and women in the church.

2-The teaching approach:

It is to say that the church leadership has here a key role to play in both the school and the home settings.

a) In the school setting : The school is by nature the thinking place. Scholars are first of all thinkers. As Dr Humberto Rasi suggested in his lectures, they should critically deal with this kind of cultural issues in three steps: (1) separation, (2) affirmation and (3) transformation. Separation implies the rejection of cultural elements which just cannot be compatible with the authentic christian worship. Affirmation implies the recognition and the acceptance of positive and potentially good elements which can fit with the church service. These two steps fit better with the school situation.

b) In the home and church setting: If the school is where critical thinking takes place, the home and the church are where practical application should be endeavored. It is where Dr Rasi's third step, namely transformation should occur. Transformation implies a growing process. The useful and positive elements will be progressively transformed in a practical way. The music director of the church, the head of the choir, the elders and the pastor himself have here a tremendous challenge with which to deal.

Ultimately, the worship atmosphere should reach the point where Americans, Africans or Japanese can feel at home in the church. They should feel truly Americans, truly Japanese, truly Africans and, at the same time, truly Seventh-day Adventists. Such cultural elements can show a relative outlook, but the inner spirit, the tone, the atmosphere, the nurturing process have to be universal. From the cultural point of view, unity in diversity becomes a reality.

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CHAPTER TWO

Cultural issues whose solutions can be reached from the biblical standards.

1-Definition:

By this second group of cultural elements, we understand those which are, like polygamy, obviously mentioned in Scripture as social features. But neither Jesus himself, nor his disciples, did not clearly or directly address themselves to the issue. Nevertheless, it is quite clear, from both the Old and the New Testament teachings that the ideal marriage is monogamy. Monogamy is therefore the God-given standard for marriage - one man, one woman.

2-The teaching approach:

a) doctrine assessment: It is obvious that a good teacher must first of all clearly understand what he is supposed to teach. Likewise, it is obvious that we are not ministers of ourselves, or ministers of our countries, of our cultures and our ideas, but ministers of the SDA worldwide church. The Holy Bible being the rock upon which the SDA doctrine is built, no doctrine can be taught if it does not have both the biblical foundation and the approval of the General Conference.

In connection with the polygamy issue, two questions have to be answered: (1) Does the polygamy issue have a biblical foundation and (2) what says the General Conference of SDA about it ?

The answer to the first question is quite clear. Polygamy is rooted in the biblical ground, not at all as an expression of the ideal will of God for mankind which doubtless remains monogamy, but as tolerance, concession, as one of the best example of progressive revelation. Obviously, God did slowly and progressively bring the Israelites from their condition of slavery (where their psychological and spiritual powers were being destroyed) to the fullness of social and spiritual maturity. Quite a number of outstanding Old Testament leaders (i.e. Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon) had more than one woman in their sexual lives. This did not prevent the Lord from remaining the God of Abraham, the God of Jacob, the God of David. Obviously, God tolerated polygamy. This was one aspect of the progressive revelation. For a given time and for a given people, a concession was made to the to the spiritual standard in man-woman relationships.

The question which remains, therefore is : should the church tolerate polygamy as God himself did ? and this in some specific areas, where social conditions and culture are very much like those of our biblical patriarchs ?

This brings us to the second question, the position of the SDA General Conference. Outstanding scholars, like Dr Russell Staples, have advocated in favour of tolerance towards polygamy, but the G.C. does not seem ready to follow, in spite of the strong arguments in favour of tolerating polygamy. Let us mention a few of them through practical examples :

First example: Here is a 60-years-old African who meets Jesus for the first time. He is touched by the message and decides to become a Seventh-day Adventist. But he has 10 wives and 60 children, because he married his wives before knowing the truth. The terrible question is to know if it is christlike to ask him to divorce ^{other} the nine women ? Their social condition would even be worse, and the 60 children would be in big trouble.

Second example: Some African countries are officially muslim countries, with polygamy as an official law. Most of the men are, therefore, polygamous. Should the three angels message reach these people, or shall the church consider these countries as lost for the Lord ?

Third example adapted from Trobisch

Here is a young polygamous with two wives. As it ^{is} accepted now by the SDA policy, the two wives meet the Lord and become very active and outstanding SDA church members. Then comes a new evangelistic effort. The husband, through the prayers of the preacher, is about to be converted to Christ. But at the very same time, the two women kneel down and prayerfully ask the Lord to not let their husband become an Adventist, because he will be forced to divorce one of them. The question is, which one of the two prayers the Lord will, most likely answer ; the prayer of the preacher or the prayer of the women ?

b) the school setting: It is to say that the polygamy question is quite a challenge to christians in Africa. There is no way to hide facts in a learning and thinking setting. In teaching Bible in secondary and college level, the polygamy issue must be handled with frankness. Monogamy must be presented to young people as the God-given standard for marriage. In the same time, honesty commands to let them analyse the polygamous

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status of their parents through the light of progressive revelation. Nevertheless, the dangers of polygamy have also to be taught. The first one, indeed, is to know if the church leaders, for the sake of soul-winning endeavours, should lower the biblical standards without jeopardizing the purity of the Gospel in moving from compromise to compromission. The second one, in accepting in the church very old polygamous men, is what to do with very younger polygamous men who became polygamous before they knew the truth. Should they be considered as "second class church members" ?

c) the church and home setting : These questions cannot be avoided in the home studies where practical and living examples are met every day. It must, however, be kept in mind that the General Conference of SDA has addressed itself to the issue, and the fear of jeopardizing the purity of the Gospel and the unity of the worldwide church seems to have been stronger than the growth of the church in some specific areas of Africa and Asia. The issue remains open. SDA African ministers must be faithful to the Church as organization and every single case of polygamy baptism cannot be realized without careful study and the approval of the mission committee, up to the day the G.C. will decide otherwise. Meanwhile, bible studies and discussion panels must be prayerfully conducted in connection with family life seminars.

CHAPTER THREE

Cultural elements clearly stated in the Bible.

1-Definition:

We understand by this third group those issues whose solutions have been clearly given in the Bible. The biblical writers have had enough time to address themselves to the issue and they claimed, with insistence, that their statements are God-given ones:

"But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:11,12.)

It is to say that some cultural issues are quite clearly stated in the Bible, and the biblical point of view becomes, therefore, normative. The state of the dead, the divorce, the priesthood of women belong to this group.

If the Bible is for SDA the authority and the norm, then

there is no case. Paul has spoken, Jesus himself has spoken. The only consistent behavior that remains is therefore obedience.

Unfortunately, our cultural background is somehow so powerful that we begin to argue against the Holy Spirit. In Africa, for example, the tradition teaches us that people continue to live after death. It is a challenge to continue to be an African, deeply rooted in the tradition, and to agree with the Bible that life does not at all exist after death. Likewise, westerners are very often prisoners of their culture. The feminist movements, especially in USA, have reached their climax. Women want to be absolutely equal to men in everything, including priesthood, in such a way that some clear and sound teaching of Paul are regarded with suspicion. Equalitarian westerners are therefore culturally tempted to justify the claims of their ladies.

2-The teaching approach :

For the sake of clearness, we will study each one of the issues mentioned above in a threefolded movement : (1) doctrine assessment, (2) in the school setting and (3) in the home and church setting.

A)THE STATE OF THE DEAD

a)doctrine assessment: As an ordained minister and an evangelist, I have, personally conducted many evangelistic crusades in Douala and Yaounde, the main towns of Cameroon. The evening I presented the biblical views of the state of the dead, the meeting very often became a battle-field, for people found it hard to believe that a dead body has nothing to do with the living ones anymore. This hurts their main cultural beliefs, their day-to-day experience, especially when spirits, ghosts and ancestors come into the picture. Cameroonians believe that there is a mysterious and powerful organisation of evil spirits, which take innocent persons from this world to the unseen world, where they work hard as slaves for the benefit of rich criminals. The Beti tribe call this organisation "kong" and the Bamileke tribe call it "famla". In such conditions, to tell these people that there is no life after death, seems a joke.

But the revealed word of God, the Bible, is the norm which judges cultures and beliefs. From Genesis to Revelation, there is a consistent teaching that dead people are truly dead. They have no more connection with the living. They sleep.

" For the living at least know that they will die. But the dead know nothing. They don't even have their memories.

"Whatever they did in their lifetime—loving, hating, envying—is long gone, and they have no part in anything here on earth any more" (Ecc 9:5-6, The Living Bible).

Other biblical authors reinforce the same idea (cf Ps 88:10-12, Job 14:10-14, Ps 31:12, Ec 1:2:6, Isa 38:10 etc).

b) the school setting: Young people are usually open to new ideas. The Bible teacher shall first reinforce their confidence in the Word of God. Once the authority of the Scriptures is rooted in their mind and hearts, let them discover the revealed words of God on the matter. Nothing is more important than their personal contact with the Bible. Discussion panels can therefore follow and complementary studies on spiritualism will reveal the true nature of traditional beliefs like "kong" or "famla". Their fear of ghosts shall then fade away.

c) the church and home setting: Adult and old people are deeply rooted in traditional beliefs and practice. Experience has shown that intellectual knowledge of biblical verses on the issue is not enough. Many of them, once baptized mixt up christianity and paganism, the fear of ancestors punishments being somehow stronger ^{than} God's protection. The first objective of the minister of the Word is to strengthen the powerful care of the Lord. People must believe that evil spirits have no power over them any longer if they dwell in Jesus Christ.

B) THE DIVORCE

a) doctrine assessment : In ancient times in Africa, divorce ^{almost} was unknown. Polygamy was generally the easiest way to solve the problems of women misbehavior. In some cases, to repudiate a woman could bring war ~~between~~ the two tribes involved, the woman's tribe feeling offended because their daughter has been dishonoured. But the coming of western culture has radically changed the situation, and divorce rate increases dramatically. The influence of the United States playing here a key role.

Our two ~~main~~ questions have to be answered, namely (1) What says the Bible about divorce and (2) what says the General Conference of SDA about it ?

Like in the polygamy issue, the biblical answer to the first question is here quite clear. Divorce is indeed rooted in the biblical ground, not at all as the ideal will of God for mankind, but as a tolerance, a concession, as one of the best example of progressive revelation. In fact, there is no room for divorce in the ideal will of God. The dicussion between Christ and the pharisees on

the issue is clear enough :

" Do you permit divorce ? they asked. Don't you read the Scriptures he replied. In them it is written that in the beginning God created man and woman and that a man should leave his father and mother, and be forever united to his wife. The two shall become one - no longer two, but one ! And no man may divorce what God has joined together." Matt 19:3-6 The Living Bible. The King James version says "What therefore God has joined LET NO MAN PUT ASUNDER".

Of course, God has tolerated divorce " because of the hardness of your hearts", said Jesus to the Pharesees. But this is no longer authorized for the followers of Jesus.

The so-called exception made by Jesus " for cause of fornication (porneia) is far from being compulsory, because porneia does not mean adultery, but an illegitimate and abnormal and sinful togetherness between a man and a woman. In other words, Jesus simply taught His disciples that a marriage should not be broken down, except if it is an irregular and illegitimate union, therefore a wrong marriage in the sight of God (example to take a woman of your father or to have a concubine). The disciples understood it and expressed their concern "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry" (Matt 19:20). Following the footprints of his master Jesus, the apostle Paul says : "Now for those who are married I have a command, not just a suggestion. And it is not a command from me, for this is what the Lord has said : A WIFE MUST NOT LEAVE HER HUSBAND. But if she is separated from him, let her remain single or else go back to him. AND THE HUSBAND MUST NOT DIVORCE HIS WIFE" (1 Cor 7:10-11 The Living Bible.) "Art thou bound unto a wife ? Seek not to be loosed" (1 Cor 7:25) " The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth, but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. (1 Cor 7:39). The teaching of Christ and the teaching of Paul completely agree : there is no room for divorce among the followers of Jesus-Christ.

Then comes our second question : What says the General Conference of SDA about it ? Although there is a strong evidence and a sound biblical teaching that there is no room for divorce in the ideal will of God, the SDA Bible commentary, vol 5, pp 333 and 454

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however, concedes that[^]is a Christ-given legal cause of divorce. In the scope of this paper, it is not possible to discuss in length all the reasons why adultery cannot be a compulsory or a legitimate cause of divorce. Let us mention some :

1. There are two main greek words in connection to sexual misbehavior : moikheia (adultery) and porneia (fornication). The biblical author, under the suggestion of the Holy Spirit, selected the word porneia which completely agrees with the general thought of Matt 19. If Jesus wanted to refer to the 7th law of God, moikheia doubtless would have been the best word.

2. Porneia implies a wide range of illegitimate and immoral unions and it is only when repeatedly and steadily committed that moikheia can become porneia.

3. It is NOT AT ALL CHRISTLIKE that only one of the ten commandments be a cause of divorce while nine others (i.e. murder) are not, unless we assume that only adultery affects family life !

4. A heavy load of biblical verses from Jesus and from Paul clearly indicate that there is no room for divorce in the ideal will of God. The so-called exception of Jesus becomes, comparatively, weak and contradictory.

5. The roots of adultery involve so often both the husband and the wife, that it would be too easy to put the blame on one partner only.

6. Matt 18:15-17 is the answer to adultery, and not divorce.

7. Divorce is a drama, a failure and a sin. If it happens, it should be treated as such and the author of the divorce should not marry again (1Cor 7:10)

8. Divorce and polygamy are indeed two good examples of progressive revelation. God obviously tolerated both of them, not because they express his ideal will for mankind, but because^{of} his holy magnanimity. If the SDA church wants to follow the footprints of the Lord , divorce and polygamy should be treated equally: whether the church does not want to lower the spiritual standards (then both of them have to be forbidden) , whether the church wants to save the weak (then both of them have to be tolerated.), otherwise the SDA church will not be fair between the American culture (highest rate of divorce) and the African culture (highest rate of polygamy).

b) the school setting: Divorce is mainly a problem for adult people. However secondary school and college students shall be

trained positively. By this we mean that christian standards should be kept very high in their minds. Youngsters should then learn that christ followers get married for life. Marriage is a lifetime commitment, not a game. In Matt 19 Jesus did not lower the ideal will of God for marriage commitment, but he set it very high: "Let no one put asunder what God has joined together". To reinforce this biblical truth, two aspects of divorce can be developed:

-socially speaking divorce is a dramatic failure. The psychological wounds affect the entire life of spouses and children.

-spiritually, divorce is a sin and as such cannot be approved by God and by Jesus.

A careful study of the complete set of biblical verses against divorce will prevent youngster from the temptation of considering marriage as a play.

b) the church and home setting: Usually, people interested in divorce issue are those already divorced or involved in divorce process. For these people, evil has been done. They are in trouble. On this life there are some situations in which to move backward is just impossible. Each case should then be studied distinctly, keeping in mind that love, faithfulness, forgiveness are much better than anger, bitterness and hatred.

For people who are not yet involved in divorce but may have or not some problems, let them know that there is no room for divorce in the ideal will of God for couples.

In a practical way, the church should organize family life seminars in which only couples are invited and in which social and spiritual aspects of divorce can be discussed in a christlike manner. At the end of each seminar, couple should feel that their love and confidence in one another is reinforced and that they are decided by the grace of God to remain together for life.

C) THE PRIESTHOOD OF WOMEN

a) doctrine assessment: The question of the priesthood of women is obviously one of the best example of cultural pressure over the church. The basic rationale of those who fight for it is that what Paul wrote two thousands years ago about the behavior of women in the church is simply remote and hurts our modern conception of human rights. The emancipation of women implies radical equalitarianism. Women are indeed free beings, strictly equal to men in every thing. Some are even more intelligent and more effective than men.

The time when women were considered as slaves and inferior is over. This may be tolerable for Africans or Asians, who still live in the middle-age era, but this is not at all acceptable for modern and educated westerners. Many well-educated Africans feel the same way. They have got a secondary or a higher education in the USA, France or England and they feel very strongly that the submissiveness of women to men's leadership is an insult to the modern concept of human rights.

What says the Bible about it ?

The very first principle which needs to be underlined is , as far as human rights to salvation are concerned, that all human beings are strictly equal in the sight of God. Having in mind salvation as free gift of God to all men and women over the world, Paul said to Galatians : " We are no longer Jews or Greeks or slaves or free men or even merely men or women, but we are christians, we are all the same, we are one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28 The Living Bible). This radical equality is on the ground of being saved and not at all on the ground of social leadership in homes and in the church. For the trouble comes from a voluntary confusion between right and responsibility. I have a 10 years old son and I also have a mother, the founder of the family. As far as human rights and acces to salvation are concerned, we are strictly equal, but we do not carry the same load of responsibilities in family affairs. Equality of rights and equality of responsibilities are two different things.

The second biblical principle to point out is, as far as family and church affairs are concerned, that leadership has been given to men. Clear statements can be mentioned :

Genesis 3:16 : " Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; AND THY DESIRE SHALL BE TO THY HUSBAND, AND HE SHALL RULE OVER THEE".

The question is : Is this statement remote ? Who is the source of that remoteness ? The answer will clarify if we are no longer evangelical and fundamentalist.

The same principle can apply to the following statements :

1 Tim 2: 11-12 : " Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection but I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

1 Cor 11:3-5 : " I would have you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying having his head

covered dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head." Let us notice here that nothing is wrong for a woman to pray or to prophesy, but something is wrong when she fights for church leadership (church elder or church pastor). It can likewise be noticed that a well educated man will not attend a church service with his hat on the head. Why well educated women want to attend church service like men just for the sake of equalitarianism ?

1 Pet 3:1-4 : "Likewise ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives."

We can lengthen the list of these verses. The point is clear. From the writings of Moses, of Paul and of Peter, the leadership in church affairs has not been given to women.

Of course, the social status at Paul's time did not allow a woman to play the first social role. The SDA Bible commentary recognizes it:

" Because the general lack of private and public rights then accorded to women, Paul felt it to be expedient to give this counsel to the church. Any severe breach of accepted social custom brings reproach upon the church"(Vol 7, p. 295).

But Paul does not stand solely on the social ground which is rather a consequence than a cause. He goes further : " For Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression"(1 Tim 2:13-14). Two theological reasons are given here :(1)By natural order the man is God's first born from whom the woman was withdrawn and (2) the submissiveness of a woman is the result of her sin and her being the one who introduced her husband to disobedience.

One may question Paul's rationale. Why not. But the apostle will reply : " But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus-Christ"(Gal 1:11-12).

The questions we asked earlier become necessary here : Is Paul's rationale remote ? Who is the source of that remoteness ? The answer will clarify if we are no longer men and women of the Written Word.

We have then reached the first conclusion: The authors of the Bible writings clearly certify that, as far as church(and family) affairs are concerned, the leadership has been given to men by God himself. For this reason a christian woman should not attempt "TO USURP AUTHORITY

OVER THE MAN"(1 Tim 2:12). This is enough to settle the ordination of women to priesthood.

If we are now aware of what the Bible says, let us know what is the official position of the SDA church on the issue. The general statement to be made here is that the General Conference of SDA still resists the strong pressure of the western culture. Officially the church acknowledges the fact that the doctrine of woman submissiveness is related to the social status of women in Paul's time. However, that submissiveness should be well understood :

" The subordination of Eve to Adam following the entrance of sin in no way reflected dishonour on her, but was intended to bring harmony and to contribute to her fullest happiness. As the husband is the head of the home, so he is the natural leader of a group of homes in a church congregation" (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7 p. 296).

It is to say that the SDA church recognizes that in church affairs, the Bible " argument for the submissiveness of women is that when Eve tried to assert leadership, she was beguiled". SDA Bible Commentary, ibid)

Under the pressure of north american culture, the General Conference of SDA has recently set a special commission to deal with the ordination of women issue. One member of the commission summarizes the findings :

" A special commission of the General Conference has reported during August, 1989 on the vexed question of the Ordination of Women to the Gospel Ministry. Presidents of world divisions reported their findings as follows. Based upon the extensive discussions, committees, commissions, surveys etc, there exists the probability that to approve the ordination of women would result in disunity, dissension and perhaps, even schism. Hence, the presidents came to these two conclusions:

1. A decision to ordain women as pastors would not be welcomed or meet with approval in most of the world church.
2. The provisions of the Church Manual and the G.C. Working Policy which allows only for male ordination to the Gospel Ministry on a world-wide basis have strong support from world divisions.

The Commission noted that in the North American Division,

"there seems to be wider support for the ordination of women". (J.J. Wortey, Ordination of Women, in AID Adventist Review vol 7 p. 2.)

Obviously, the priesthood of women is not a doctrine from the Bible, but the result of the American Emancipation of women movement whose objective is radical equalitarianism between men and women. This ideology attract african well educated women who are these days deeply involved in the women emancipation movement. The SDA church in Africa should have a balanced and healthy approach on the matter.

b) the school setting: To teach the biblical approach of leadership among students in african context requires first of all a clarification of concepts: (1) the concepts of leadership and submissiveness in the Bible and (2) the relation between rights and responsibilities. For the first clarification the teacher must underline the fact that leadership means service, care, sacrifice (cf John 13, 16). For the second clarification, he will point out that rights and duties go together.

Once these concepts are understood, the teacher will then study each text where the submissiveness of women is involved and underline that, for a new-born christian, submissiveness is by no way dishonour. At the contrary, it is a privilege, reason why Paul loved to call himself "the slave of Christ" (doulos tou christou).

Finally the students of college level shall be invited to have discussion panels on the different theories on biblical revelation. It will then be easier for them to understand why SDA are evangelical, fundamentalist and people of the Written Word of God.

c) the church and home setting: The approach will be more practical than theoretical. In one hand, a sound warning should be given to men who are eager to take advantage of their leadership position in homes and the church to bind their female mates into slavery. A text like Eph 5: 25-31 is well indicated here. In the other hand, woman should not attempt to "usurp authority over the man", as Paul put it, but glorify the Lord in the fullness of their womanhood. Finally, family life seminars should be held frequently. An emphasis should be given to the authority of the Bible. If the words of Jesus or Paul are no longer normative in our christian behavior, then we are no longer worth of being Seventh-day Adventists.

CULTURE, INTEGRATION OF FAITH AND LEARNING

At the end of these thoughts on the relationship between the Gospel and culture today in Africa, two main considerations have to be made :

1-The role of faith on cultural issues:

We really do need to know what weight we are going to give to the authority of the Holy Scriptures. This is not a matter of human reason, but a matter of faith.

It is said that one day, a highly educated young lady married a young man. They went to church for the wedding ceremony. In due time, the man of God opened his Bible on Eph 5:22 and read:

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your husbands, as unto the Lord, for the husband is the head of the woman..."

While the groom was listening carefully, the bride strongly reacted and shouted "No, Pastor, don't read that verse which is contrary to human rights, dignity and equality !".

It is doubtless, a matter of faith to accept that biblical revelations, even though they bluntly hurt our human reason and our culture, are blessings from the Lord and not curse.

There is no other way, but through faith, we can acknowledge and admit that Jonas, in spite of our scientific rationale, did really spend three nights and three days in the belly of a big fish !

How then can a traditional African , deeply rooted in his culture, believe that his mother, now lying on the bed as a dead body, does not hear him any more ? It is through faith.

How can an educated African lady acknowledge and admit that the familial and spiritual leadership of a man is not a disgrace to her, but a loving, caring and transcendant expression of the will of God for her. It is through faith. Then the verses like Gen 3:16, Eph 5:22, 1 Tim 2:11-12...etc will not be perceived as just good for uncivilised tribes and bushmen, but as a living part of the Gospel for modern men and women of Africa.

The integration of faith and learning in our culture, therefore means, practically, that we have to let the Holy Spirit rule over our cultural and traditional backgrounds. "Without faith, it is impossible to please Him" .(Heb 11:6).

2-The integration of faith and learning as a process:

Dr Humberto H. Rasi, in his lectures on "Integration of Faith and Learning Seminar" (Nairobi, Kenya, March 1990), mentioned the fact that the Integration of Faith and Learning is a process. In fact to match faith, learning and human behavior is not an achieved or realised status, but a growing process. This means that in cultural issues, our background will not be changed overnight. It is a matter of slow but effective movement. The SDA educator and minister in Africa have to adjust themselves to that fact.

Obviously, all Seventh-day Adventists in Africa do not grasp at once the practical implications of the biblical teachings on the state of the dead. Some do. Some will need more time. Likewise, in Cameroun, about 75% of women wear their head ties during church service. 25 % don't. In general terms, the transformation of an African from traditional life style to a christian life style is a growing process.

It is a growing process by the very fact that teaching is a nurturing process. The first objective to achieve is not, of course, to immediately disfellowship a person involved in divorce or a modern oriented woman. We are involved in the teaching ministry, and to teach means to start over and over again. Once more, Matt 18:15-17 is ^{the} Christ-given approach to follow.

Slowly, but gradually, the African church members will deeply root their faith in the Word of God, provided that the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, be given the appropriate and legitimate authority they deserve.

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