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Foreword

In this lucid study, Meg Kraft leads us to the heart of the mission task - the communication of the Gospel within the context of another culture. In the first place, she makes us aware of the fact that this process is not so simple as many would have us believe. It is not enough simply to declare the message of God in our own terms. The message must be translated into forms that the people understand and are willing to trust. There must be the translation from one language to another, from one set of social structures to another, and from one form of communication to another. But even this is not enough. At the deepest level, in missions the Gospel must be translated into a new worldview if the church is to become truly indigenous. But this is often threatening. On the one hand, there is the real danger of syncretism, particularly if we are not careful to preserve the essence of the Gospel. On the other hand, in an attempt to avoid such syncretism, we may tie the Gospel so closely to our own cultural expressions of Christianity, or to our own theological interpretations which have arisen as we read the Scriptures from the perspective of our own culture and times, that it remains totally foreign to the people we serve. However, in doing so, we, in effect, close to them the door of salvation, not because they reject the Word, but because we have added so heavy a cultural load to the requirements for becoming a Christian.

In the second place, Kraft provides us with an excellent case study of how the Gospel can be translated into another culture. There are many who, when faced with an awareness of the difficulties of cross-cultural communication, throw up their hands in

despair that the task can ever be done. Kraft here skillfully takes us into the worldview of the Kamwə and shows us how the Gospel can be translated into forms that the Kamwə understand. And she does so not only on the level of language and communication, but also in social structures and conceptual frameworks. Enroute, she makes us aware of the fact that we too have received the Gospel within a set of cultural forms, and that our understanding and application of the Scriptures is incomplete. As we see the Gospel at work in the Kamwə context, we realize that in some ways they understand the message of the Bible better than we. We need a stronger theology of family, of corporate responsibility, of worship, and of the forces of evil against which we contend. God has, indeed, given His Spirit to His people throughout the world, and has given to them unique understandings of Himself. And we have much to gain if we listen to one another and share the insights God has given us.

But this book is more than a case study. It is a model that can be used in other mission contexts. Kraft makes explicit the theoretical framework she is using, and shows us how it can be practically applied to real life situations. This wedding of theory and reality makes the study valuable not only to those studying missions, but also those involved in it. Not all will agree with her conclusions at every point, but everyone in missions should come to grips with the questions she has raised and consider seriously the insights she shares. Today in a post-colonial era, more than ever before the church must be deeply aware of the intercultural nature of its mission, and must explore what that has to say about the nature of the church itself. We have the beginnings of an answer in this book, but a great many more serious studies of missions like this one are needed to give us an understanding of the church around the world today.

Paul G. Hiebert
Associate Professor of Anthropology
and South Asian Studies
School of World Mission, Pasadena

Preface

Dr. Kraft's study of the Kamwə worldview is of great value to both anthropology and missiology, and something quite new in the area between those two disciplines. It shows how much anthropology may learn from missiology and vice versa.

Here we meet many key concepts of anthropology--group awareness, the notion of the family as the basic unit, and the interdependence of groups and persons (tradesmen and commoners, young and old, male and female) and we are shown how these features hold the society in equilibrium.

Dr. Kraft uses the techniques of ethnoscience to ascertain the dominant linguistic (and therefore cultural) components of the society. This causes her to focus on four dynamic themes in the Kamwə worldview--the mountain orientation, the guinea corn complex, the ideal person and the supernatural with its practitioners, paraphernalia and performances.

This valuable assembly of anthropological information forms the background for her missiology and missiological strategy. How is the Christian gospel communicated to people with such a worldview? This question brings her into communication theory and indigenous theology, two fields in which she has some considerable knowledge.

The Kamwə worldview becomes her point of reference for a study of church planting and growth, which naturally requires some time depth for analysis. For this Dr. Kraft arranges her data on an ethnohistorical structure of the cultural continuum type, probing her data at three points of time--the mid-1950's,