

CASE THREE

UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH

Paul Hiebert

In the early summer of 1879 John Thompson argued wearily with himself as he looked out the tent at the hot road baked by the South India sun, and at the dust swirling around an oxcart passing under the shade of a large bayon tree. In a few minutes the delegation of elders from the Farmer Caste led by Venkat Reddy would be there to hear his decision — would he force them to take a defiled untouchables into their new church, or would he ask the untouchables to start their own church near their own hamlet?

As he reflected, John thought back over the past few years. He and his wife Shirley had come to India six years earlier. Their mission board had assigned them to pioneer work in the villages south of Hyderabad. They had managed to build a small bungalow and to hire three Indian evangelists to begin the work. For six to seven months each year — after the intense field work following the monsoon rains let up — they toured the villages with the evangelists, camping in tents, and preaching in the village squares at night. In the mornings they visited homes, and Shirley was often invited into the inner rooms reserved for women. In the afternoons John held Bible studies with the evangelists and curious inquirers from the villages. After preaching one or two nights in a village they moved on to the next for John was responsible for evangelizing more than five hundred villages.

The pace was grueling — particularly in the hot summer months, but there were rewards. At first, few were interested in the Gospel, but prayer and faithful witness had borne fruit. A number of families from the village of Konduru who belonged to the Farmer caste had publically become Christians and wanted John to teach them more about their new religion. The Farmer caste was a clean caste and ranked high in the village hierarchy of castes. John spent a week with them teaching them from the Bible, but he was concerned about their growth. Only two of them, an old man and a young boy who had been to the city could read and write. However, there were other villages in which the people had never heard the Gospel, so he had to move on.

A year later, John returned to Konduru to hold meetings in the untouchable hamlet a furlong outside the village. He had come to realize that if he preached in the main village, only people from the clean castes would attend. The untouchables who made up more than twenty per cent of the population rarely showed up in such public places in the clean caste village because they were considered ritually defiling. A clean caste person who touched one of them had to take a ceremonial bath before he could eat or enter the temple. If John wanted to evangelize the untouchables, he would have to go to their hamlets that were located outside the main villages.

John's meetings in the untouchable hamlet at Konduru went well even though the Farmer Christians had not attended. They said they were too busy at the time with field work. Their church had grown to about fifteen families and they had built a small church building at the edge of the village near their homes where they met fairly regularly for worship services.

The second night, after the meeting in the hamlet, several elders of the Leatherworker caste led by Pappoyya had come to John and asked whether untouchables, too, could become Christians. John had joyfully told them that the Gospel was for every person. Over the next few days six families of Leatherworkers had publically converted to Christianity. John had been very happy.

However, when John told this to Venket Reddy and the elders of the Christian Farmers, and had asked them to accept the new converts into their church, they had been shocked. How could they as clean caste people permit untouchables to enter into their church. They would be defiled and their fellow castemen would put them out of caste. They would be shunned by their friends and relatives. They would not be able to visit or witness them, to eat with them, or to exchange brides and grooms with them. They would have no place to marry their children.

John told them that the Gospel made all people one, but they said that if he forced them to take the untouchables into their church, they would return to Hinduism. They said he did not understand their place in the caste system in the village. They would return the next day to hear his answer on the matter.

John had spent the afternoon and next morning in prayer and the study of the Bible. He reviewed its teachings about the unity of the body of Christ, but he also realized that the early church faced similar problems in the tensions between the Jewish and Gentile Christians in the book of Acts. He also thought about the realities of life in the Indian village and the ways in which the social structures of the village affected the growth of the church. Now the Farmer elders would be coming for his answer. What should he say to them and to the elders of the Leatherworker Christians. Should he force them to form a single church? If he did, the Farmers would probably return to their old faith. Or should he encourage them to form separate churches and then to build the fellowship between them over time? But then where was the unity of the body of Christ? These arguments were rushing through his head as he saw the Farmer elders come down the road.

Bill 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 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

What Price the Gospel?

Carl K. Kinoshita

At exactly the appointed hour, Second Lieutenant Seichi Miyazaki knocked on the office door of Carter Jackson, pastor of the Kalakaua Baptist Church. With military discharge only eight months away, Seichi needed the pastor's advice on a decision crucial to his future.

In the over thirty years he had been a pastor and missionary in China and Hawaii, Jackson had counseled many men about entering the Christian ministry. From what he had learned about Seichi since they first met three years ago, Jackson did not think the decision would be difficult to make. After all, the twenty-two-year-old air-force officer had made good grades in college, was popular as a Sunday-school teacher and counselor of junior-age boys, and was an active leader in the young people's department of the church. And although Seichi had been a Christian and church member for just two and a half years, more than a few members had expressed their feeling that he should consider the ministry as a vocation.

Seichi and Jackson had talked about all of these things two months earlier. But today the more information Seichi shared about his family, the more Jackson understood the reason for the worried look on the young man's face. These were some of the data Seichi gave his pastor. . . . He was the first of seven children born to Kazuo and Matsue Miyazaki and was raised on Molaka, a small island of predominantly Japanese and Filipino people who worked for the most part as laborers for the Del Monte Pineapple Company on the island of Oahu. He was taken to the Buddhist temple most Sundays until his years at the high school he attended in Honolulu on the island of Oahu. At this point in

his story, Seichi stressed the fact that his mother started working in the pineapple fields to help pay for his education at Lolani School, a private, college-prep, boarding institution. Upon finishing there, Seichi had enrolled at the University of Hawaii and lived with an aunt in Honolulu. In the meantime, his family moved to Kahaluu, a rural community on Oahu, and leased five acres of land for truck farming. But when heavy rains ruined the crops on two consecutive years and put Mr. Miyazaki near bankruptcy, Seichi decided to drop out of college, find a full-time job, and help his family financially. But Mr. Miyazaki insisted that Seichi remain in school in pursuit of a business-administration degree, an order impossible to disobey after being reminded of three facts: (1) for a quarter of a century Seichi's father (whose own parents had died while he was still in his teens) had dreamed of running a family-owned store; (2) the second son, Fumio, who was a year younger than Seichi, was born mentally retarded; and (3) the last son and youngest child, Hitoshi, was also showing signs of mental retardation.

Relating the incident of two weeks ago was most painful for Seichi. His mother's father had died, and a Buddhist funeral service was held at the Kukui Mortuary. At the part of the service when family members and, later, everyone else in attendance were asked to light the incense sticks, Seichi had refused to participate. What he did out of a strongly felt loyalty to Christ resulted in severe criticism of his parents by relatives. And that, Seichi said, had hurt him deeply.

Until today, Pastor Jackson had known very few of these details. Now he realized that no longer was Seichi's dilemma just a matter of discovering God's call to a Christian vocation. How could he help the young man sort out the conflicting demands on his loyalty in a way that would be true to his Christian commitment?

A Group Conversion

Paul G. Hiebert

Mark looked at the chief and elders before him and at the more than two hundred men, women, and children crowding behind them. "Have they all *really* become Christians? I can't baptize them if they don't each decide for themselves!" he said to Judy, his wife.

Mark and Judy Zabel had come to Borneo under the Malay Baptist Mission to start a new work in the highlands. They spent the first year building a thatched house, learning the language, and making friends with the people. The second year they began to make short treks into the interior to villages that had never heard the gospel. The people were respectful, but with a few exceptions none had shown any real interest in the gospel. Woofak was always around and had been from the beginning. In time he had become a believer, but few of the others took him seriously. He was something of a village maverick. And there had been Tarobo and his wife and four others. By the end of the third year, the worship services were made up of these seven baptized believers, Mark and Judy, a few passersby, and a dozen children.

That year an epidemic had spread through the highlands. For weeks Judy and Mark went through the villages, praying with the sick and dispensing medicines, until they thought they could go on no more. They wept with families faced with death and told them of the God who loved them and had conquered death itself. One village in particular had suffered greatly from the disease. Though the people seemed to appreciate the love shown by the two missionaries, they had shown no particular interest in the gospel.

Three months later, two elders from this village had come to the mission home, wanting to see the missionaries. "Can you come to our village and tell us more about your God?" they asked. "We want to know more about him."

Mark and Judy were excited. Their many hours on the trail in the rain and the weary days of ministering to the people were bearing fruit. Taking some food, water, changes of clothes, cots and nets, they set out for the distant village.

It was almost dark when they arrived. The village chief invited Mark into the men's long house where all the adult males of the village were gathered. Judy joined the women, who sat in front of their huts

discussing the decision the village elders were about to make. She sensed that there had been much discussion in the village before she and Mark had been invited to come. Now there was a feeling of excitement and uncertainty in the air. Some of the women wanted to know more about this new God. Others said that it was best to stay with their ancestors who cared for them in the spirit world, and with the tribal gods who had helped them to be victorious over their enemies in the past.

In the long house the chief asked Mark to tell them more about his God. For three hours Mark told the men about the Jesus Way and answered their questions. Then the chief asked Mark to sit down on a log. Mark noticed that the men broke up into smaller groups, each made up of men from the same lineage. For half an hour there was a loud debate as men argued for and against following the new God. The arguments died down, and then the leaders from the various lineages gathered with the chief. Again there was a heated discussion. Finally the chief came to Mark and said, "We have all decided to follow the Jesus Way. We want to be baptized like Woofak and Tarobo."

Although it was late, neither Mark nor Judy could sleep after the meeting. The decision of the village, especially the way it was made, had caught them totally by surprise. They knew that tribal people often made important decisions, such as moving their villages or raiding neighboring tribes, by discussion and group consensus. But they never dreamed that people might use this method to choose a new god. All their theological training in their church and Bible College had taught the young missionaries that people had to make personal decisions to become followers of Christ. Here the group leaders had decided for all. What did that mean? Was it a valid decision, especially when it was clear from the debates that some had opposed the choice? How could they baptize the whole village when not all were agreed? Then again, what did it mean in Acts when the jailer believed and Paul immediately baptized him and his whole household? Moreover, if they did not accept the villagers as Christians, the villagers might return to their old gods. Judy and Mark knew that they had to do something before they left the next day.

As Mark and Judy searched for an answer, suddenly the great spirit gong in the men's long house rang out. Hurrying over to find out what was going on, Mark found the chief and asked him why they were summoning the tribal spirits, now that they had become Christians. "Don't worry," the chief said. "We are calling them to tell them to go away because now we have a new God."

Judy and Mark were still uncertain as they finally fell asleep, bone-tired and knowing that they would have to give the chief and the village an answer in the morning.