

Sets and Fuzzy Sets: Two Cultural Worlds

SETS AND FUZZY SETS: TWO CULTURAL WORLDS

Paul G. Hiebert

The analysis of categories, both social and cultural, has been a key method of anthropological investigation throughout much of its history. Studies of kinship terms (Morgan 1871), color categories (Rivers 1901; Berlin and Kay 1969), folk classifications (Malinowski 1922; Evans-Pritchard 1937), linguistic structures (Sapir 1949), and, more recently of componential domains (Goodenough 1956), lexical/semantic relations (Greenberg 1963; Fraake 1964; Werner 1972), social boundaries (Barth 1969) and cognitive categories (Leach 1961; Douglas 1966; Turner 1964) have all investigated relationships between categories. Central to their discussions has been the role of boundaries in creating and differentiating categories.

Fine grained studies have shown that category boundaries are not always sharply defined. Sanjek found considerable ambiguity in the use of Brazilian racial terms (1971:1126-1143). Even such relatively "ordered" domains as American kinship, when subjected to a minimal quantitative analysis, show penumbras of ambiguity and disagreement (Schneider and Homans 1955; Wallace and Atkins 1960; Romney and D'Andrade 1964; Goodenough 1965; Harris 1968:586-588).

There are two very different bases upon which these ambiguities can rest. First, they may be explained in terms of probability theory - the fact that different observers of the same phenomenon will show a normal range of variation in their descriptions of the phenomenon. One

would normally expect a group of people to disagree somewhat in drawing boundaries, particularly when the phenomenon does not lend itself to sharply defined categories, as in the case of color. Wallace goes even further and terms fallacious the assumption that "the society may be regarded as culturally homogeneous and that the individuals will be expected to share a uniform nuclear character" (Wallace 1961:26). He contrasts this position with the "organization of diversity" model, and demonstrates logically that shared cognitive patterns are not a functional prerequisite of society.

Ambiguities based on variations within a population are matters of definition and do not alter the structural logical by which the categories are related to one another. As Kaufmann points out (1975:253), probability theory is related to theory of boolean lattices and well defined sets which serves as the basis for modern algebra and logic. In other words, people may disagree on where to draw a boundary, but still think according to the logic of ordinary set theory.

Zadeh (1965), Kaufmann (1975) and others have given us a second basis upon which semantic ambiguities may rest, namely the theory of fuzzy sets.¹ Fuzzy sets are related to the theory of vector rather than boolean lattices. Consequently the logic and operations of fuzzy sets differ from those related to well defined sets. One can speak, therefore, of "fuzzy logic," "fuzzy properties," "fuzzy relationships," and even "fuzzy numbers."

For those raised to think in formal systems, to associate the word fuzzy with logic is shocking. Logic, in the ordinary sense of the word, is a conceptualization of the mechanisms of thought that may never be fuzzy.

but always rigorous and formal. But as Kaufmann points out,

Mathematicians researching these mechanisms of thought have noted . . . that it is not a matter of having, in fact, one unique logic (for example boolean logic), but having as many logics as one wishes; it all depends on the axiomatization chosen. Of course, once the axioms have been selected, all the propositions that are built upon them must be linked together rigorously according to the stated rules of this axiomatization, without contradiction.

Boolean logic is the logic associated with the boolean theory of sets: fuzzy logic is associated in the same manner with the theory of fuzzy subsets . . . [T]here is no unique theory of fuzzy subsets, one may construct as many as one wishes (1975:191).

As Kaufmann goes on to show, fuzzy logic does not rest on truth tables as does formal logic, but upon operations realized on fuzzy subsets. Moreover, in fuzzy logic there is an implicit notion of hierarchy not present in ordinary logic. Thus one may consider the ranking of the fuzzy set "tall men" or of "good decisions."

There is, therefore, a fundamental difference between ambiguities based on probability theory and those based on fuzzy set theory. In the former people manifest a normal variation in the way they perceive phenomena but they think in terms of ordinary sets. In the latter people think in terms of fuzzy sets. The difference between these lies at the deepest levels of the ways cultures organize their worlds. Bright and Bright (1967:249-258) seem intuitively to have sensed the difference, but it remained for Zaide and others to develop the mathematical and logical implications of fuzzy sets.

It should be noted here that this distinction between ordinary and fuzzy sets is not directly related to Whorf's distinction between mass nouns, aggregate nouns and individual nouns (cf. Malhotra 1962:340-350). Whorf's classification has to do with perceptions of the internal characteristics of sets and not with the sets themselves.

What implications does fuzzy set theory have for our understanding of cultures? And are there other ways by which we create the categories we use to order our experiences? It will be suggested here that many of the differences between the cultures of India and the west rest precisely upon the alternate logics of ordinary and fuzzy set theories, and of intrinsically and extrinsically defined sets.

TWO DIMENSIONS OF CATEGORY FORMATION

As we have noted, Zadeh introduced the distinction between well formed or ordinary and fuzzy sets. A second distinction should be made, namely between intrinsically and extrinsically defined sets. The intersection of these provides us with a fourfold typology of sets or categories.

Well Defined and Fuzzy Sets

The essential distinction between well defined and fuzzy sets has to do with their notions of membership. Technically speaking, in well defined sets $X:X = 0,1$. In other words, an element is either a member of the set or it is not. The result is a sharply defined boundary and a tendency to think of the world in "either/or" terms. There is also a tendency to think in terms of polar opposites. On the other hand, in fuzzy sets $X:X = 0 - 1$. There are an infinite number of degrees of participation within a set ranging from 0 through .1, .23, .467, etc. to 1. In other words, an element can be a member a little, somewhat, strongly or fully.

Well defined taxonomies based on ordinary sets are made up of categories that do not overlap and that exhaust the domain. The result is the law of the excluded middle. Elements cannot belong and not belong to

the same set, or belong to two opposite sets at the same time. The result is a tidy, well ordered world. As Peirce observed (1955:371), logic within such a system allows for only one conclusion to be drawn from any given set of premises.² The result, he adds, is a strong sense of the certitude of knowledge (1955:356).

In taxonomies based on fuzzy sets, there are no sharp boundaries between categories, no law of the excluded middle. An element may be partly a member and partly a nonmember of a set at the same time. Moreover, it may belong in differing proportions to two opposite categories. There is a tendency, therefore, to think in terms of continuums rather than in terms of discrete categories. Moreover, more than one valid set of conclusions can be drawn from the same set of premises (cf. Peirce 1955:371, and Kaufmann 1975:243-250).

The difference between ordinary and fuzzy set categories can be illustrated in the way people see ethnic differences. Many Americans, using the logic of ordinary sets and modern algebra within which they have been raised, tend to make clear distinctions between "whites," "blacks," "hispanics," and so on. In the past a person with seven white ancestors and one black was classified as an "octroon" and classified as "black." Seen from a fuzzy set perspective, people are ranked along a continuum from white to black to hispanic (see figure 1).

Regarding the relationship between sets as cognitive categories, whether well formed or fuzzy, and the external world, Zadeh writes (Kaufmann 1975:ix):

The theory of fuzzy subsets is, in effect, a step toward a rapprochement between the precision of classical mathematics and the pervasive

imprecision of the real world - a rapprochement born of the incessant human quest for a better understanding of mental processes and cognition. . . . We have been slow in coming to the realization that much, perhaps most, of human cognition and interaction with the outside world involves constructs which are not sets in the classical sense, but rather "fuzzy sets" (or subsets). . . . Indeed, it may be argued that much of the logic of human reasoning is not the classical two-valued or even multivalued logic but a logic with fuzzy truths, fuzzy connectives, and fuzzy rules of inference. . . . In our quest for precision, we have attempted to fit the real world to mathematical models that make no provision for fuzziness. We have tried to describe the laws governing the behavior of humans, both singly and in groups, in mathematical terms similar to those employed in the analysis of inanimate systems. This, in my view, has been and will continue to be a misdirected effort, comparable to our long-forgotten searches for the perpetuum mobile and the philosopher's stone.

Peirce probably would have disagreed with the phrase "imprecision of the real world" for in his doctrine of synechism he held that the real world itself is characterized by continuity and that it is our human knowledge of it that is imprecise and fallible, in part because we must force it into a limited number of categories of our own making (1955:354-360).

Intrinsically and Extrinsically Defined Sets

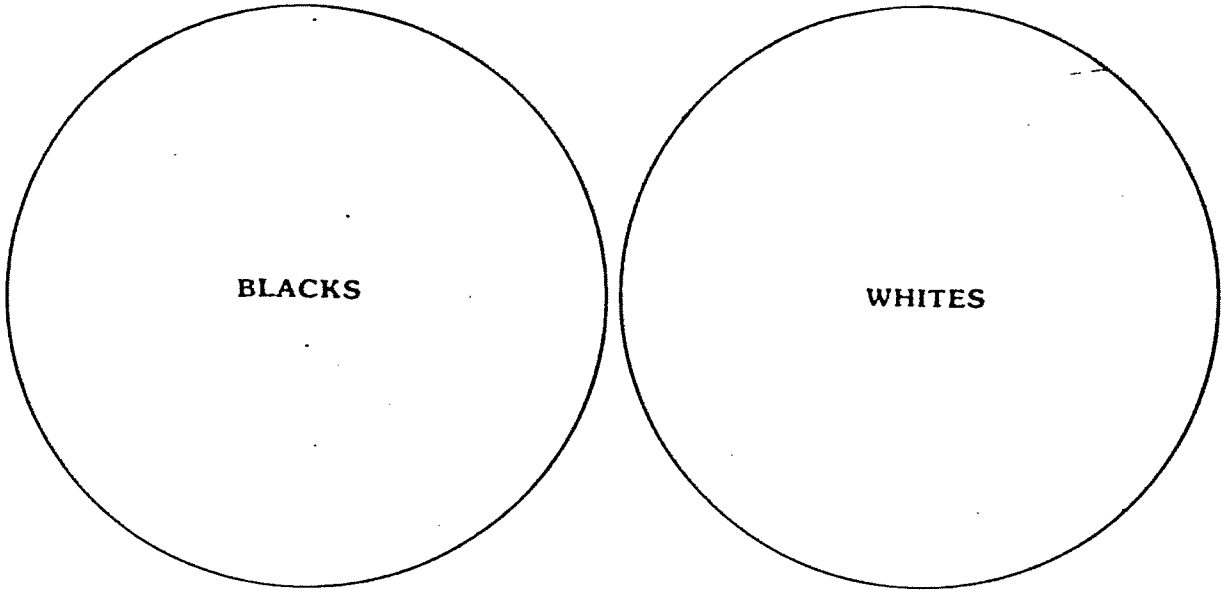
A second distinction should be made between sets defined on the basis of the intrinsic characteristics of the members, and sets defined on the basis of the relationships members have to external reference systems. For example, a woman is a "female" on the basis of what she is, but a "daughter" on the basis of her relationship to someone else - her "mother." This distinction should not be confused with Saussure's observation that all categories are defined by their place within a cognitive system (1966).

Many, if not most, English nouns are based on intrinsic definitions. For instance, a "dog" is defined as "a highly variable carnivorous domesticated mammal" (Webster 1961:246). So too is the definition of the scientific equivalent, canis familiaris.

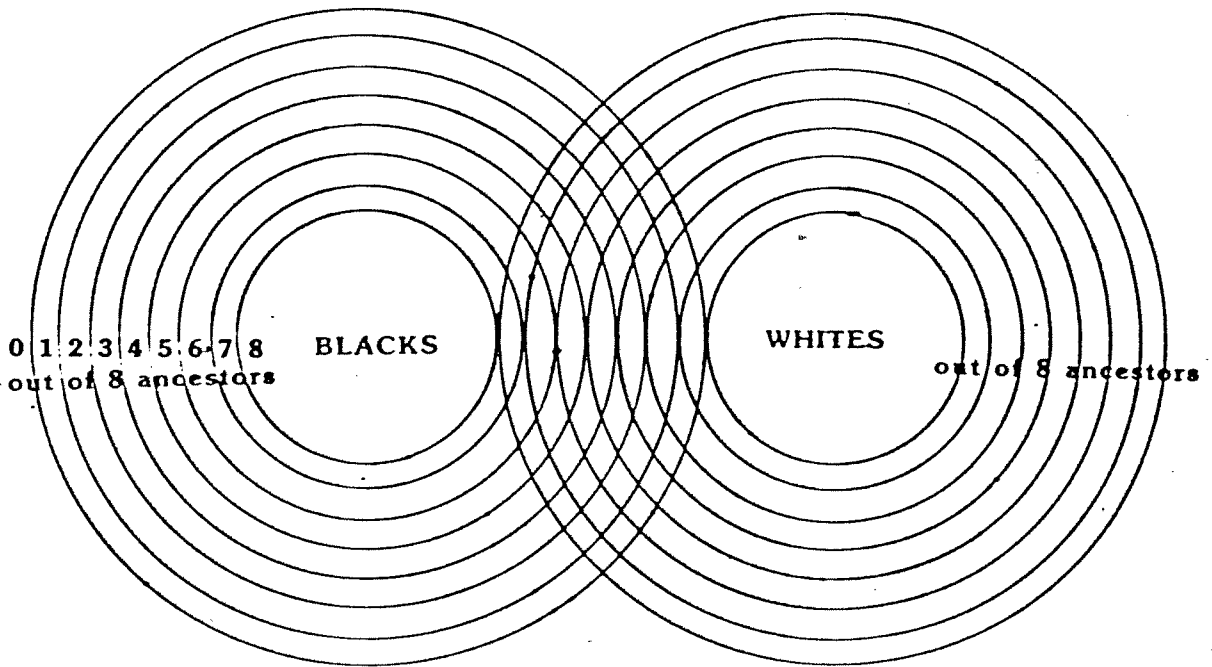
FIGURE 1

Perception of Ethnic Groups In Well Formed and Fuzzy Set Terms

In Well Formed Sets:



In Fuzzy Sets:



The word "north," on the other hand, is defined as "in the direction of the north terrestrial pole" (Webster 1961:575). The external reference here is a point, the north pole. Similarly, the term "forty-five degrees north" refers to a set of points, but their reference is the equator. In music the term "mi" is defined with regard to "do" where ever "do" is set, and the term "third" to the relationship between two notes. In social organization, most roles such as "teacher," "father," and "disciple" are defined in extrinsic terms.

A TYPOLOGY OF CATEGORY FORMATION

Combining these two dimensions, we have a simple cross-break that can serve as a taxonomy of set formation (figure 2). Each type of set has certain basic structural characteristics that influence the way reality is perceived when viewed through sets of that type.

Intrinsic - Well Defined Sets

Sets defined on the basis of the intrinsic characteristics of their members, and marked by clear boundaries order reality in several ways:

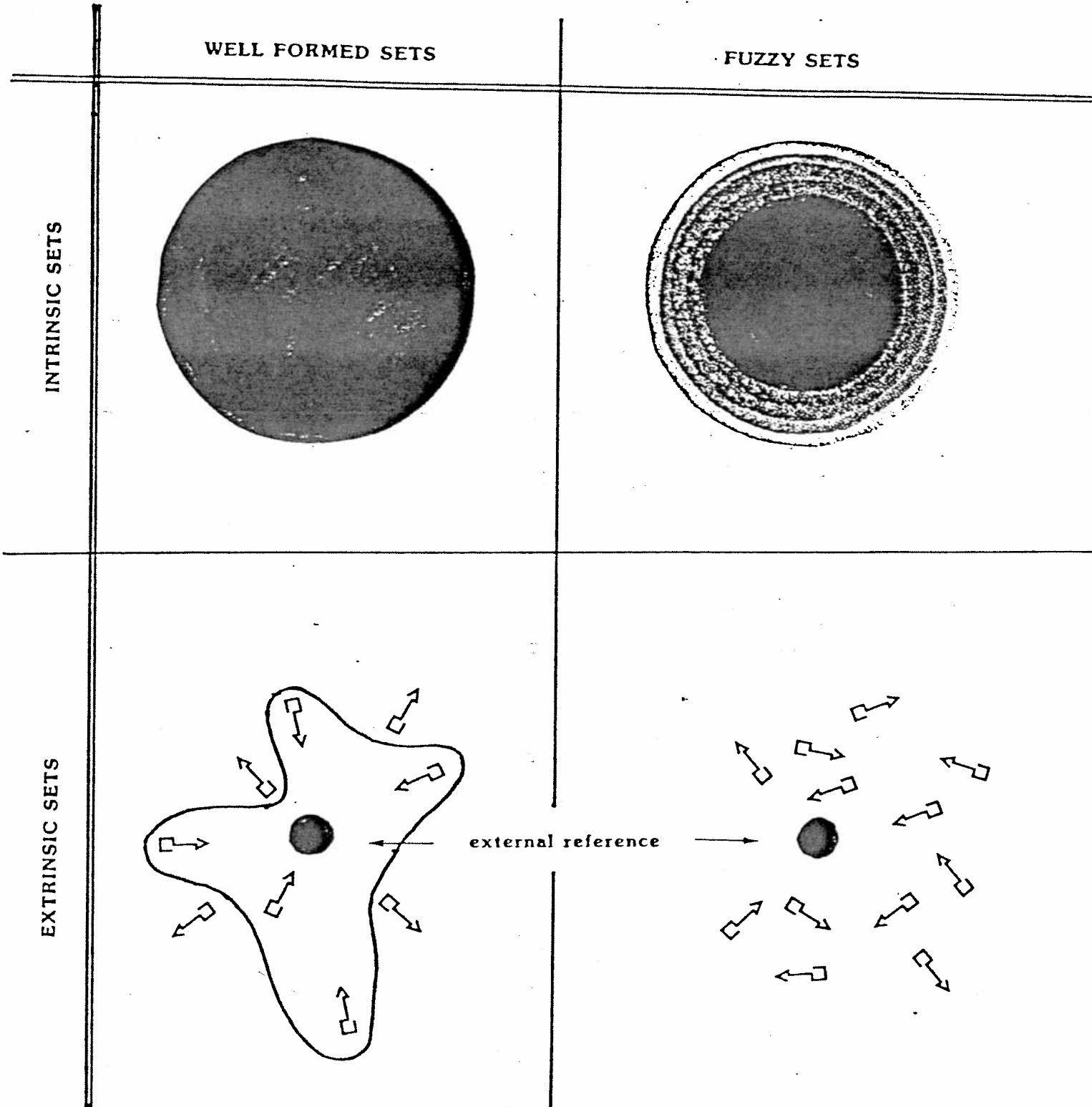
a. The central focus is on the essence of things - on what they are. The definitive characteristics are stated in terms of the intrinsic quality of things.

b. The set has a clear boundary. In fact, it is the boundary that structurally creates the category. Consequently boundary maintenance is essential, for if the boundary ceases to exist, the set no longer exists.

c. Members within a set are seen as essentially uniform in character. Because they must have all of the defining characteristics, and because these characteristics can only be present or absent, members of a set are the same,

FIGURE 2

A Typology of Sets



at least in matters related to the formation of the set. For example, in this way of thinking there may be small dogs and big ones, black ones and white, but all are fully "dog". An animal cannot be half dog and half cat.

d. Seen dynamically, the only changes that can take place in elements without altering the structures of the sets themselves is for elements to move from outside to inside the set or vice versa. A dog ceases to be a dog when its life and body are destroyed. Moreover, there is a sharp disjunction at the point of change, not a process.

Examples of intrinsic-well formed sets in the area of western culture are scientific taxonomies of animals and plants, certain types of social organization such as clubs and associations with clear membership lists, and religions. For many in the west, religious affiliation is defined in terms of orthodoxy and/or orthoproaxy (intrinsic characteristics), and is seen as mutually exclusive.

Extrinsic - Well Defined Sets

The structural characteristic of this type of set are:

a. Membership is defined on the basis of relationships elements have to an external center or frame of reference. The focus is on relationships.

b. As in the case of intrinsic - well formed sets, there is a clear boundary setting off the set based on the presence or absence of definitive relationships.

c. Members within a set are seen as essentially uniform in character - they are all equally members of the set. However, because of their relational nature, these sets are often organized into complex taxonomies, grids and ordinal and interval scales such as temperatures. In the latter the point

of reference may be arbitrary as in the case of the Centigrade scale, or absolute as in the case of the Kelvin scale.

d. Viewed dynamically, two types of changes are possible: changes in the presence or absence of relationship, and changes in the nature or intensity of the relationship. A case at point is citizenship which one may have or not have, but also which varies in character between individuals (eg. criminals).

Intrinsic - Fuzzy Sets

Intrinsic-fuzzy sets share some characteristics with intrinsic-well formed sets, but differ from them primarily in terms of their boundaries.

a. Like the latter, intrinsic-fuzzy sets are defined on the basis of the intrinsic characteristics of the elements.

b. Unlike them, intrinsic-fuzzy sets have fuzzy boundaries. Things may vary in the degrees to which they are members of a set, and elements may belong to two or more sets at the same time. There is no law of the excluded middle. The result is a second type of logic that differs significantly from that based on well formed sets.

c. Because things vary in the extent to which they are members of a set, they are not uniform or equal. There is an implicit hierarchy in fuzzy sets.

d. Change is possible as elements move into or out of the set, but this transition may be gradual or by degrees.

Examples of intrinsic-fuzzy sets are many words in ordinary language (Hintikka 1973; Lear 1977), and English adjectives and adverbs that have comparative forms such as "sweet," "sweeter," and "sweetest."

In social organization, examples include crowds, mobs and friendship cliques. Folk sports, such as sandlot baseball, are often characterized by fuzzy boundaries and fuzzy rules.

Extrinsic - Fuzzy Sets

Extrinsic-fuzzy sets combine the extrinsic characteristics of well defined-extrinsic sets and the fuzzy boundaries of fuzzy sets.

- a. They are defined by the relationship of members to some external system of reference.
- b. They have fuzzy boundaries. Consequently they operate by fuzzy logic.
- c. Because there are degrees of inclusion in the set, differences are recognized between members in the fuzzy set.
- d. Change is viewed as a process rather than as a disjunctive transformation. Moreover, secondary variables related to the nature and intensity of the relationship become part of the structure of the set.

Examples of such sets are ratio numerical scales, spectator audiences and Indian durbars.

SETS AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Do cultures differ in the types of sets they use to order their worlds? Systematic ethnographic analysis of specific cultures is needed before a definitive answer can be given, but some tentative hypotheses can be drawn from a general comparison of Indian and American cultures. Although both make use of sets of all four types, they seem to differ in the way they form their more fundamental categories.

American culture places great emphasis on well defined categories and either/or thinking (Arensberg and Niehoff 1964:159-161) Positive value is

placed on roads bounded by curbs and well marked lanes; on edged lawns uniformly planted with one kind of grass; on rooms with clear borders and moldings separating walls, doors, ceilings and floors; on silverware trays that keep forks, spoons and knives separated; and on well ordered desks in offices. Schools, churches and other associations are concerned with membership lists. Bureaucracies work towards separation of statuses into uniform, standardized job descriptions with well defined role relationships between them (Berger 1974). And stores use fixed prices.

In many ways Indian culture makes use of fuzzy sets. Roads, particularly in the countryside, have fuzzy boundaries. The central portion may be paved but on either side are gravel and dirt shoulders used by carts, animals, pedestrians and, when necessary, motor vehicles. There is little effort to keep traffic on roadways segregated into uniform categories. Trucks, cars, cycles, rickshaws, carts, animals and pedestrians compete for the use of the same space (Hiebert 1976). The basis for economic exchange is bargaining in which relationships and variable prices play key roles.

A number of specific contrasts illustrate the different types of sets the two cultures use in similar settings. The first has to do with legal decision making. As Unnithan (1965) and others point out, western legislatures, courts and juries have well defined memberships. Consequently decisions can be made on the basis of voting. In a traditional Indian panchayat there is no clear membership. Those recognized as senior elders sit in the center surrounded by lesser elders and bystanders. All participate in the discussions, but the words of the senior elders carry greater weight. Voting in such a situation has little meaning and decisions are based on a consensus dominated by the elders.

A second contrast is musical scales. The well tempered scale of the West is made up of twelve semi-tones. These are extrinsic-well formed sets related to the key of C which is now set at 454 cycles per second. Notations are made on staves that depict a limited number of clearly differentiated notes, and many instruments such as pianos and organs can not play between them. There is some room for vibratos and, in more modern music, for slides but the basic structure calls for clearly bounded notes.

Indian music is based on 22 microtonal intervals (shrutis) that acquire their pitch and emotional qualities as soon as the key note (shadja) to which they are all related is fixed. There is no standard key note, no fixed scale. While each note constitutes a definite set of sounds, variations in pitch are recognized in each of them. The result, as Ranade points out (1960:40), is that European scholars have treated Indian music as uncritical or primitive. The problem is that western musicians tend not to think in fuzzy set terms. On the other hand, the artistic style of an Indian musician lies in part in his ability to use gamakas or the dynamic shading of pitches. Parshvadeva, a medieval authority, defines gamaka as follows:

When in a song a note peeps over from the region of its own legitimate shrutis a shade into the region of its (higher or lower) neighbours a gamaka is there (Ranade 1960:42).

Both Ranade (1960) and Shukla (1960) point out that the player uses this shading of pitch not only to maintain a subjective sense of pitch (for as the volume of a sound increases, its pitch seems to rise), but also to add color and feeling to the note by bringing it into the range of adjacent notes and thereby producing a contrast with the unheard note. Consequently, the glide becomes the hallmark of Indian music. Ratanjankar notes (1960:55),

An Indian musician, vocalist or instrumentalist, will never produce his 'sa' straight on its pitch. He will always start it on the 'ni' or 'pa' of the mandra saptak, or on the ga or ri of the madhya saptak and glide in an expressive way to the proper pitch of 'sa'. Every note is linked up with its precedent and subsequent notes. . . Individual notes have no meaning in Indian music.

A third illustration is religion. Westerners tend to see religions as mutually exclusive. A person may be a Jew, Christian, Muslim or Hindu, but not more than one of these at a time. In Hinduism, a person may participate in the worship of several different gods without contradiction. It is not uncommon for Hindus to stop at the shrine of a Muslim saint to offer incense and cocoanuts. It is the exclusivity of Islam and Christianity that is the greatest offense to Hindu thought. In philosophy, it may be the differences between well formed and fuzzy sets that underlie the western emphasis on exclusivity and the law of the excluded middle, and Indian inclusivity with its "both/and" approach to reality.

Another contrast must be presented as a tentative hypothesis at best, namely the predominant nature of nouns and adjectives in the languages of the two cultures. For example, an American may ask for a "ripe banana." The noun, the essential word, is banana - an intrinsic-well formed category. "Ripe," on the other hand, is a fuzzy set for there are degrees of ripeness. In South India, a Telugu speaker asks for a "banana ripe." The essential term here is "ripe" (pandu). "Banana" (arati) here is the modifier. One can simply ask for a ripe, for ripes can be eaten without cooking. To the question, what kind of ripe, one may respond, an apple ripe, an orange ripe or a banana ripe.

A final contrast is more difficult to analyse, that between class and caste as forms of social organization and hierarchy. In western

classes a group of people share similar wealth, values and life styles. People belong to Indian jatis because they are linked to one another by certain biological and substance ties (cf. Marriott and Inden 1965). The extrinsic nature of the jati is illustrated further by the fact that castes are not seen as a series of independent groups that happen to coexist in the same area. They are castes only because they are complementary members of a single unitary body or society.

The question of boundaries is more difficult to analyse. Western scholars have not reached a consensus either on the number of classes or on the nature of the boundaries between them. A strong case can be made, however, that classes are more comparable to varnas than to jatis, for both classes and varnas are broad societal categories that determine social hierarchies. Jatis, on the other hand, are of the order of western associations in that both are social groups formed within these broader hierarchies (cf. Hsu 1963). An Indian acquires status by belonging to a jati that has a certain rank within the varna system, an American by joining associations such as clubs, churches and neighborhoods that are ranked within the class system. Viewed this way, it is interesting that western associations strive for clear membership boundaries. Jatis have fuzzy boundaries. As Dumont (1970) points out, there are degrees of purity within each caste. As an interesting aside, Kaufman points out (1975:7-8) that hierarchy and dominance are fundamental to fuzzy set relationships. On the other hand, uniformity and equality are characteristic of well formed sets. It may well be that here lie the deep roots of the West's idealization of egalitarianism and of India's stress on hierarchy.

CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of fuzzy set theory and logic as a formal alternative to ordinary set theory and logic has important significance for world view theory, and for our understandings of social structures, linguistics and symbolic analysis. Of equal importance is the fact that fuzzy set theory makes us aware of structural biases that, so far, have been largely implicit in western thought, and consequently in anthropology. Science has sought for ever greater precision in definitions, and has, in recent years, drawn heavily upon boolean mathematics and logic in which, as Alfred de Musset notes, "it is necessary that a door be open or closed." This may have blinded us to the fact that underlying other cultures, which we may label uncritical or primitive, there may be a different, but equally formal and valid, system of logic based on fuzzy sets.

FOOTNOTES

1. Technically the term is fuzzy subsets. Here, for convenience, the term fuzzy sets will be used.
2. Peirce seems to anticipate fuzzy logic in his reference to "logic of relatives." His statement is:

"That from given premisses only one conclusion can logically be drawn, is one of the false notions which have come from logicians' confining their attention to that Nantucket of thought, the logic of non-relative terms. In the logic of relatives, it does not hold good. (1955:371),

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Conversion: A Sociocultural Analysis

CONVERSION: A SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS

Paul G. Hiebert

Salvation is the work of God in the life of a sinner, making him or her a child of God and a citizen of the Kingdom of God. Because it is the work of God, we cannot fully comprehend it. Only in heaven will we begin to understand its magnitude - and cost. Yet we must seek to understand, even though as through a glass darkly, the divine nature of salvation.

Because salvation involves sinners, there is also a human dimension to it. People are called to respond to God's initiative, and when they do they are transformed in their lives. Spiritual changes have earthly consequences, just as earthly changes have spiritual consequences. Humans cannot be divided into spirits that act independently of their bodies. As John Stott points out, they are 'body-souls-in communities'.

Salvation and conversion refer to the same reality, but the former focuses more on the divine side of things, and the latter on the human dimension (Matt. 18:3; Luke 22:32; Acts 3:19). In Scripture, conversion involves a "change of lords." People are called to leave their false gods, and their self-idolatry with its obsession for wealth, power, pride, sex and race, and to return to God their creator. Biblical conversion has to do with real people, consequently it is always in history. Furthermore, it is both individual and corporate, for people do not exist outside of societies and cultures. It is our purpose here to examine the human side of conversion: the historical and sociocultural processes involved.

We must keep in mind that our analysis is from a human point of view. God sees the human heart and knows what is ultimately real. We, on the other hand, must base our knowledge on what people say and do. Even our understanding of Scripture is affected by our culture. Consequently, we must approach our study with humility, and with a willingness to learn from scripture, and from one another.

As humans, we begin with phenomenology: with what can we learn about salvation by talking to people and by observing their lives. At this level, conversions take place in all religions. They also take place in the secular world. A person converts to a new tooth paste, oil is converted into gasoline in catalytic converters, and cars that can fold down their tops are convertibles. We will focus here on religious conversion - specifically on conversion to Christ.

We must, however, move beyond phenomenology to ontology: to determining what is true and real. Not every humans claim is real, not every doctrine true, not all who say to Christ "Lord, Lord" are saved (Matt. 7:21). The task of discerning the 'really real' is no simple one. For us as evangelicals it begins with theology - with seeking to understand truth as it is revealed to us by God through Christ and the Scriptures. It also includes 'reality testing' - seeking to differentiate between genuine and spurious commitments, true and false statements, and authentic and inauthentic behavior. As humans, our judgments may be in error, but judge we must. To stop at the phenomenological level is to end in relativism and nihilism (Berger 1970).

Finally, we must move to missiology: to the questions of helping people move from where they are (phenomenology) to where God wants them (ontology)? Here the principle of incarnation comes into play. We must begin with people where they are, not where they should be. People come to Christ with four wives, with divorces, with drug habits, with murder records. We, too, came as sinners, not the righteous we sometimes thought we were. The church is not a group of saints avoiding those who fall into the mud puddles of sin, but sinners under God helping each other out of these puddles.

CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF CONVERSION

In analyzing conversion from a social science perspective, we must deal with two central concepts: culture and society. Culture has to do with the way people see things - with their beliefs, feelings and values. Society has to do with human relationships - with the way people organize groups and societies. We will leave psychological analyses of conversion to another paper.

Definition of conversion

Concepts and definitions are at the core of every culture. Cultures differ, however, not only on the concepts they create, but also on the way they create concepts. This raises an important question, how do we define 'conversion', and to what extent is our definition influenced by our cultural ways of creating categories?

Phenomenological analysis All cultures order human thought and experience by dividing them into categories. For example, English speakers divide the rainbow into six colors: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet (some add indigo). Telugu speakers, on the other hand, divide it into two: hot colors (red, orange and part of yellow) and cold colors (the rest of yellow, green, blue, violet). They use adjectives to make finer distinctions.

On a deeper level, however, different cultures, and the same cultures in different settings, create their categories in different ways (Hiebert 1980, 1983). The categories we are most familiar with in the west are technically known as 'well-formed' or binary sets ($x:x=0,1$). We will refer to them here as 'bounded sets'.

Well-formed sets are formed by placing the 'same kind' of things together to form a single category. Thus we put together fruit of one kind and call them 'apples', and fruit of another kind and call them 'oranges'. We put together people who have one set of beliefs and call them 'Christians', and differentiate them from 'Hindus', 'Buddhists', and 'Muslims'. Most English nouns are created in this way.

If we use this method to order our thinking, conversion has to do with the boundaries between categories. It is to move from one category to another. Thus we speak of 'converting' dollars into yen, or of turning carbon monoxide into carbon dioxide in catalytic converters. In religious terms it is changing from being non-Christian to being Christian.

In this mode of thought it becomes very important to define exactly what we mean by Christian, and we must do so in intrinsic terms (what a person is in himself or herself), for that definition draws the boundary between those who are Christian and those who are not. What is it that makes Christians 'one kind' of people in contrast to people who are of 'other kinds'?

Most of us begin by defining Christian in terms of beliefs. A Christian is one who believes certain things: the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, and so on. We argue over what must be included: should this be minimal (but does this not lead to cheap grace?), or high (who then can enter?). And we spend much time in worship making certain people's beliefs are right.

Some of us are not content with creedal orthodoxy. Christians must also live godly lives. Thus abstinence from smoking, drinking alcohol, drugs, dancing and other vices, or the presence of glossolalia and prophecy become signs that a person is 'true' Christian.

In recent years scholars have begun to explore other ways people use to create categories. One of these is 'fuzzy sets'.¹ Fuzzy sets are analogical ($x:x=0 \rightarrow 1$), and have no sharp boundaries. The boundary is a continuum from being totally in to being totally out. In between are various degrees of being in/out.

An example of fuzzy sets is the edge of a mountain. The peak and steep slopes are clearly 'mountain'. The plains below are clearly not. But between there is a gradual transition from mountains to plains. Similarly, 'day' and 'night' are fuzzy sets. One moves into the other without a sharp break.

In fuzzy sets things are what they are because of the characteristics they possess, but they may possess varying degrees of these characteristics. For instance, in death various body processes cease. Yet a person may 'live on' if sustained by medical equipment. Similarly, 'parts' become a 'car' by stages. Interestingly, fuzzy sets are often used to emphasize processes rather than states.

Fuzzy sets play important parts in other societies such as India.² In the west, influenced by Greek thought with its emphasis on the state of things, we tend to use them not as nouns but as adjectives. Thus we speak of 'big', 'bigger', 'biggest', and 'sweet', 'sweeter', 'sweetest'. But our nouns are basically well-formed sets emphasizing steady states. Even the term 'black' when applied to race is a bounded set. We divide people into 'white' and 'black', as if there were a sharp boundary between them. In reality, many people, both white and black, are of mixed ancestry. A person may be one-eighth black and seven-eighths white (during the slave era they were classified as 'blacks' and called 'octroons'), one-quarter black ('quadroon'), three-eighths black and so on.

If we apply fuzzy set theory to conversion, the picture looks different. The process of converting from Hindu to Christianity becomes a process in which the change may take place gradually. In the transition the person is three-quarters Hindu/one-quarter Christian, half and half, one quarter and three-quarters, and finally one hundred percent Christian. The

steps may be defined either in terms of a growing knowledge and acceptance of Christian beliefs (orthodoxy) or changes in life (orthopraxy).

A fuzzy set approach to conversion raises difficult theological problems. It is true that many people seem to move through a series of stages in their conversion to Christ - that conversion must be seen as a process. But is there no moment of salvation? Can a person be both Hindu and Christian at the same time? We who look at the outside may not see a point of conversion, but what about God who looks at the heart? In the end, fuzzy sets push us towards religious syncretism and relativism.

A third way of creating categories has to do not with what things are in themselves (intrinsic definitions), but with their relationships to something else (extrinsic definitions). We will refer to these as 'centered or relational sets'.

In a centered set things related to the same 'center' or reference point are grouped together. Thus 'children' refers to people who are related to 'parents'; 'husbands' are men related to 'wives'; and a positive magnetic pole is one that is attracted to a negative pole (such as the north magnetic pole of the earth). A particular group of people are brothers and sisters not because of what they are intrinsically, but because they are offspring of the same parents.

In centered set thinking, conversion is to change directions or relationships. It is to leave one relationship for another. In religious terms it is to turn from one god to another. In Christian terms it is to turn from the god of self, or any other god, and to make Jesus the Lord of one's life.

There are two processes at work here: turning around and moving towards. Christian conversion begins with a change in direction, with an allegiance to a new center, namely Christ. But having turned a person continues to move towards Him. Making Christ lord in our lives is not a single decision, it is a decision that all subsequent decisions be made in obedience to God's leading. In theological terms, justification and sanctification are parts of the same salvation, not divorced from each other.

One can also speak of distance from the center. A person may be far from Christ in understanding and life, yet turn and move towards Him, as in the case of Mary Magdalene. Or a person may know much about Christ and be close to Him, yet moving away as in the case of the Pharisees.

Seen in this light, sin is fundamentally idolatry (the deification of self, or something other than God), and broken relationships; and conversion is turning from (repentance) other gods to God who forgives us, and growing in this new relationship with God.

Theological critique How should we define conversion? Given the great influence of Greek thought on western culture since the renaissance, most of us from the west tend to think in terms of bounded sets, and emphasize precise definitions and clear boundaries. In doing so we define conversion in intrinsic terms - in what people are in and of themselves. The danger is that we think of salvation as something people do or achieve.

While verbally denying salvation by works, we are in danger of ignoring the fact that it is first and foremost the work of God.

Recently, some theologians, influenced in part by eastern thought, have begun to define conversion in fuzzy set terms (Hick 1974; Cobb 1982; Eusden 1981). The challenge of this to Christ's claim to be the only way to salvation is obvious to us all.

What about the biblical approach to categories? Centered or relational sets were fundamental to Hebrew thought. The emphasis is not on what things are in themselves, but what things are in relationship to other things and to history. This is true, for example, of the term *shuv* or conversion (used 1056 times in the O.T.) which conveys the idea of turning, turning away and turning back. Christoph Barth writes (1967:310),

The Hebrew word *shuv* refers to the occurrence of "turning" in the opposite direction. The direction in which a man went or looked and which determined his plans and actions is changed into a new, the opposite direction. It means the "re-orientation" towards a goal from which one has moved away previously. Equally in relation both to concrete and abstract things, *shuv* indicates a "return"; geographically it means returning to a former position; circumstantially, it means "restoring a former state.

These meanings are clearly illustrated in Jeremiah 8:4b-6:

If one turns away (*shuv*) does he not return (*shuv*)? Why then has this people turned away (*shuv*) in perpetual backsliding (*shuv*)? They hold fast to deceit, they refuse to return (*shuv*) in perpetual backsliding (*shuv*). I have given heed and listened, but they have not spoken aright; no man repents of his wickedness, saying "What have I done?" Every one turns (*shuv*). (Translated by Hans Kasdorf, 1980:42-43. Note the 3 pairs of the term referring to turning away, turning towards).

The prophets continually called Israel to turn from its worship of idols and return to Jahweh, the true and living God.

Similarly the New Testament words for conversion, *metanoein* and *epistrephein* mean 'to turn around,' 'to proceed in a new direction.' Although he is writing in Greek with its emphasis on static categories, Luke uses dynamic terms such as *epistrephein* (nearly 20 times) denoting physical movement. Paul uses terms like *apostrephein* and *anastrephein* (Eph. 4:22, I Tim. 1:12), both of which carry the idea of turning and then walking (Friedrich 1971, VII:726).

We need to return to a biblical view of conversion which is both a point and a process, which has simple beginnings (a person can turn wherever he or she is) but has radical, lifelong consequences. It is not simply a mental assent to a set of metaphysical beliefs, nor is it solely a positive feeling towards God. It is to enter a life of obedience and discipleship within the historical settings in which we live.

Implications for missions How we define conversion determines how we go about evangelism and missions. If, in bounded set terms, becoming a Christian means acquiring a certain amount of knowledge, or changing certain

behavioral patterns, how much of each is needed? For example, can Papayya, a Hindu who has never heard the Gospel, become a Christian after hearing it for the first time during an evangelistic service in the village square (Hiebert 1979)? Obviously he has acquired only a minimal knowledge of Christ - certainly not enough to be even considered marginally orthodox. Nor is there much change in his behavior. If we say "yes, he can become a Christian," are we not in danger of preaching a cheap grace that leads in the end to Christian nominalism? On the other hand, if we say, "no, he cannot become a Christian," are we not making it impossible for people without Christian upbringing to be saved? And are we not likely to divorce justification from sanctification, and evangelize the lost but leave the task of nurturing up to others?

A 'fuzzy set' approach to missions solves some of these problems by allowing conversion to be a process. A person may make many decisions, no one of which is decisive, but all of which, taken cumulatively, make the person a Christian. This fits our human view of things. There are people who are clearly Christians, others who are not. But many seem to be in between. Moreover, many Christians report no one decision that marked their conversion. But, as we have seen, a fuzzy set approach raises difficult theological questions having to do with the Christian claims that Christ alone is the only way to salvation.

These problems disappear if we return to a Hebraic approach to category formation. Conversion then is a point - a turning around. This turning may involve a minimal amount of information regarding Christ, but it does involve a change in relationship to him - a commitment to follow him, to learn more, and to obey him. But conversion is also a process - a series of decisions that grow out of this initial turning. Viewed in this way Papayya can become a Christian after hearing the Gospel once, but there must be a great deal of follow-up to root him solidly in his new faith. He may grow in faith. He may also 'backslide.' But he remains a Christian as long as faces towards Christ. In this view, we cannot divorce evangelism from nurture, or conversion from the church.

Dimensions of conversion

A second question regarding conversion has to do with its dimensions. Social scientists commonly speak of the three dimensions of culture and of personality: cognitive (beliefs), affective (feelings) and evaluative (decisions. cf. Parsons and Shils 1952). Conversion has to do with each of these.

Conversion and cognition The reformers, and more recently the evangelicals, have stressed the importance of correct beliefs to conversion. They have emphasized the importance of defending the truth against heresy. Certainly truth does play an important part in conversion. As Christians we are concerned not with conversion in general, but with conversion to Jesus Christ. And not to Jesus a good man, but the Jesus of the Bible - the Son of God who became human, died and rose to save people from their sins.

Jim Engel emphasizes the importance of knowledge in his conversion scale (1975).³ A person with minimal knowledge of Christ may seek more, and eventually have enough to make a meaningful decision regarding Him. But

what must one know to be saved, and what knowledge can be left to spiritual growth? Often we require too much at conversion, possibly because we use a bounded set approach that places great emphasis on entering the category and little on growth once one is in. Moreover, knowledge alone is not enough. Satan knows Jesus is Lord, yet he is not saved because he is not willing to follow Him.

Conversion and affectivity In recent years the pentecostal and charismatic movements have reminded us of the importance of feelings in conversion. It is not enough to have a full head, one must have a full heart.

This is not to say that Evangelicals and other Protestants neglected the affective side of conversion completely. As Rudolph Otto points out (1959), the sense of awe and mystery in the face of an infinite, transcendent God has been the classical feeling associated with conversion. This can be seen particularly in the 'high church' with its cathedral, its kneeling and bowing, and its emphasis on repentance and forgiveness. Evangelical churches influenced by Pietism, on the other hand, have tended to stress the feeling of peace a person gets at conversion. This is seen in their emphasis on silence, order, reconciliation with God and admission into the fellowship of the congregation. The Pentecostals and Charismatics have focused on ecstasy that manifests itself in freedom of expression, raised hands, glossolalia, and the imminence of God.

Feelings are often more difficult to convert than cognitions, but they, like knowledge, are means, not ends in the process of conversion.

Conversion and decisions There is a growing awareness that the heart of conversion is evaluative - it has to do with judgments, choices and allegiances. As Pierce (1966) says, faith is that upon which we act, not that which we mentally affirm or feel strongly about. It is knowledge and feelings that lead to decisions and response.

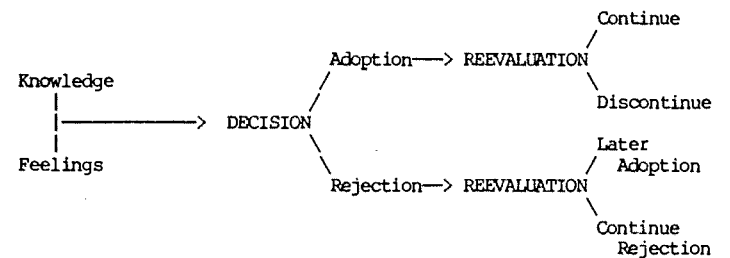
Decisions involve both conscious and unconscious, personal and group dynamics. They are based on an interaction of knowledge and feelings. Some decisions we make have a high level of knowledge, and little emotions (such as solving math problems in class - although for some this carries high emotions). Others spring out of high emotion and low knowledge (such as cheering at a football game). Still others require little of both (like buying pencils), or much of both (like getting married). Moreover, we vary from one type of decision to another, from person to person, and from culture to culture.

The extent to which knowledge and feelings play a role in the decision to convert also varies according to personality and culture. Those of us educated in schools are taught to place great importance on knowledge, but conversion testimonies among so called 'common folk' show that emotions played a key role in many of them (cf. James 1902, Jones 1959).

Recent studies show that an initial conversion is generally followed by a period of evaluation during which the new way of life is critically examined. If the new is no better than the old, or the cost of adopting it too high, the person or group turns back traditional ways (Rogers and Shoemaker 1971). On the other hand, those who initially reject Christianity

often later reevaluate their decision, and may be open to conversion (see Figure 1)

FIGURE ONE
THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS



(Adapted from Rogers and Shoemaker 1971)

The implications of this re-evaluation process for evangelism and missions are far reaching. Follow-up becomes crucial in nurturing faith. It is not enough to lead people to Christ and to move on. Furthermore, we must not be discouraged with initial rejection. Often the greatest turnings to Christ have occurred after many years of faithful witness.

If conversion is a decision - a response to God's invitation to salvation - what are the evidences of that decision? God knows who are his, but we must look for outward manifestations of a decision. Verbal affirmations and feelings are not enough. There must be evidences of discipleship - repentance and turning towards God, changed lives, and the fruit of the Spirit. Wallis writes (1981:4),

Correct intellectual belief was a major concern of the Greeks. The early Christians, in contrast, were more concerned with transformation. The first evangelists did not simply ask people what they believed about Jesus; they called upon their listeners to forsake all and to follow him. To embrace his kingdom meant a radical change not only in outlook but in posture, not only in mind but in heart, not only in world view but in behavior, not only in thoughts but in actions. Conversion for them was more than a changed intellectual position. It was a whole new beginning. Thus conversion is far more than an emotional release and much more than an intellectual adherence to correct doctrine. It is a basic change in life direction.

Christian conversion cannot be divorced from life and ethics.

Conversion and world view

Recent studies have made us aware that underlying our conscious beliefs lie largely implicit assumptions - the 'givens' that are the foundations for these beliefs (Kearney 1984). Or, to change the metaphor, the lenses

through which we see our cognitive, affective and evaluative world. Just as those with glasses find it almost impossible to see the lenses (unless these are dirty), so it is almost impossible to see our own assumptions unless we in a sense step out of our own culture and view it from outside. The assumptions of a culture, taken together, are called its 'world view.'

The implications of world view theory for conversion are far reaching. Here we will look briefly at two. The first has to do with conversion at the world view level. In the past we emphasized change in conscious beliefs: accepting Christ as Lord, studying the Bible, and living new lives. But we left the unconscious assumptions largely unchallenged. We did not examine the local world views. We did not realize that every language has in it philosophical and theological assumptions about the nature of reality. The result, therefore, was often syncretism at a deep level. While conscious beliefs were changed, the hidden assumptions upon which they rested were not. In time those assumptions remolded the new conscious beliefs into the shape of the old world view.

We must, therefore, speak not only of the conversions of individuals, but of the church as a community living as a counter-culture in the world around it. Individuals come with their world views, and these are rarely changed radically at conversion. But the church as a community has a shared world view, and that continues from generation to generation. If the world view of the church is essentially pagan, in time the church will lose its vital Christian faith. We need to speak of the conversion of Christian communities to Biblical world views.

We need, also, to consciously convert old world views when people become Christians. This raises the second issue, namely, how can we change a people's world view? Certainly change at the level of conscious beliefs, in time, infiltrates and brings about change at the world view level. The relationship is two ways: world views mold conscious beliefs, and conscious beliefs reshape world views. Another way is to make explicit the assumptions we leave largely unexamined, and to consciously change them. For example, in teaching theology in seminaries we need to begin by examining the basic categories of the culture in which we live, such as those for God, sin, salvation, incarnation, and the like. Then we must show how the Biblical view of these concepts differs from that of the local culture. Moreover, we must continue to do this in the life of the church, for if we are not careful, the church is a small minority in Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and materialist culture, the surrounding culture will control the definitions of these concepts. The result will be syncretism or (as in the west) civil religion.

Conversion and ritual

A third area in which the social sciences help us to understand conversion has to do with its importance as ritual. Those of us from the west, particularly Protestants, tend to be anti-ritual. For us the term carries negative connotations - of dead, meaningless forms, and of idolatry. But this only shows how far we have reduced symbols to communication, particularly verbal communication, and divorced forms from meanings.

Living rituals speak of the transcendent - of our deepest beliefs, feelings and values. We take ordinary symbols and bracket them to show that we are speaking of extra-ordinary things. Thus we sing or chant ordinary words. We put on special clothes, and go to special places at special times. We say "Our father" and end with "Amen". We bow our heads, kneel or raise our hands. Even the most 'informal' worship services, we use many hidden rituals to speak of God and worship. To mark important events in our lives such as conversion, we need living rituals that speak of the sacred. Without them we reduce these events to ordinary experiences.

But living rituals are also performance - in the doing they transform us. When a judge pronounces, "You are guilty," he is not simply communicating a message. He is transforming the defendant into a criminal. When the minister says, "I declare you husband and wife", he changes the social, legal, and, for us, religious status of the persons from single to married.

The extent to which we have lost the importance of ritual in modern society can be seen in marriage. In high church rituals, the marriage pronouncement not only reflects a covenant between two persons, it marks a change in their ontological status in the order of heaven itself. They are now 'married in the sight of God' - in the books of heaven. This is why divorce is so heinous. In our society the vows have largely become contracts between two individuals with little ontological or social significance, and they can be broken when either party fails to live up to the agreement.

Our western anti-ritual stance can also be seen in our attitude to Sunday morning services. We say "I go to church in order to worship." If we do not 'feel' like we have worshipped, we call the service a dead ritual. People with a high view of rituals say "In going to church I am worshipping." The fact that they get up, put on special clothes, go to church and participate are all acts of worship that express their beliefs and feelings, and proclaim these to the world around them.

Given our anti-ritual bias, we in the west often overlook the importance of ritual in conversion. For us baptism has become divorced from conversion and now marks admission into church membership. We rarely baptize a person at the time of conversion. We may ask people to raise their hands in a meeting, or come to the front, but even these we down-play. Conversion has become a very private individual matter - a thing of the heart in which there are few social and public symbols.

We must ask, then, has our western view and practice of conversion become truncated and weak because we have no real rituals by which we can express it meaningfully to ourselves and to the world around us? With no clear living ritual, religious conversion becomes simply another ordinary decision, like the many other decisions we make every day. There is nothing to mark its life transforming nature. Furthermore, the fact that we find it difficult to determine when conversion takes place reflects, in part, the extent to which we have internalized and privatized it.

In much of the world decisions, especially religious decisions, are public affairs and must be marked by symbols that both perform and communicate. This is why baptism, not an inner personal affirmation of

faith, is often the crucial issue in mission churches. Persons may express a private faith in Christ and remain in the community, but when they are baptized, they are excommunicated from the group. In such cases we face the difficult question, is conversion an private inner affirmation, or is it public obedience to the call to follow Christ?

SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF CONVERSION

So far we have looked at some of the cultural dynamics involved in conversion. What about social dynamics having to do with the webs of relationships that tie us together as families, associations, neighborhoods, clans, institutions, ethnic groups, classes, tribes and nations? Decisions are personal, but most of them have social consequences and we take these consequences into account when we make our choices. Moreover, conversion often involves a break with our old community. Certainly it involves entering the new covenant community Jesus came to establish. We are not individuals before God. We are individuals-in-community before God.⁵

In the west with our emphasis on individualism and individual choice we often overlook the importance of group dynamics in conversion. We ask individuals to make personal decisions for Christ without considering what consequences these have, particularly in societies where it is the group, not the individual, that is most important.

Multi-personal decisions and mass movements

One characteristic in strong group societies related to conversion has to do with the processes of decision-making. In many societies, particularly tribal and peasant societies, not only must individuals take the reactions of their group into account when making important decisions, the decisions themselves must be made by the group. Young people do not choose their spouses, places to live, vocations or friends. Their parents, and clan heads make these choices. Decisions having to do with the group as a whole, such as conducting religious festivals, moving to new camps, and going to war are made by the tribe or village elders after hearing the discussion of the community. Only unimportant decisions are left up to the individual.

In particular, choosing one's religion is not a personal right. It is a most serious decision, for it involves not only the individual but also his or her family and clan, and not only the living, but the ancestors and unborn as well. If individuals are allowed to convert, the very existence of the group is threatened.

In these societies important decisions are made by a corporate process involving the whole group. People talk about matters and eventually the elders become involved. Finally, the group as a whole, led by the chief or elders, makes a decision based on these discussions, often after consulting with the ancestors and unborn. Not all agree with the decision, but everyone is expected to go along with it to affirm identity with the group. Later individuals are permitted to disagree and still remain members of the group.

It should not surprise us that in these societies, converting to Christianity is a group process. A few individuals, marginal to the society, may be willing initially to convert, but no significant growth of the church will take place until the group as a whole either converts or gives permission for its members to convert. In other societies, with strong family but weaker tribal cohesion the conversion process involves whole families, but not necessarily whole villages or tribes.⁶

Conversion in these societies often takes the form of 'mass movements'. Whole extended families, villages, even clans decide to become Christian. Other families and villages hear that their relatives and friends have done so and begin to discuss converting themselves. The Gospel is 'gossiped' down mountain trails and flatland roads.

Missiologial response How should we respond to such movements? Often in the past western missionaries, with their emphasis on individual decisions, rejected such movements and required that people come one-by-one. This usually killed the movements. To immediately baptize the whole group, however, opens the door to syncretism. Many in the group do not agree with the decision, and few, if any, have more than a cursory understanding of Christianity. Furthermore, there is the danger that Christianity become equated with an ethnic group, and baptism with initiation into the group.

Group decisions, however, do open the door for further teaching. In a sense, the people are saying, "tell us more about your gospel." Follow-up, therefore, is most crucial in mass movements. The greatest hindrance to the spread of the Gospel when such a movement takes place is usually the shortage of trained workers to teach new converts what it means to be Christians.

The initial group decision is followed by a time of reassessment. Those who disagree are now permitted to leave the church without fear of ostracism. They have affirmed their identity with the group in the initial decision. After a period of several months of teaching, the group divides naturally into those who wish to remain Christians and those who wish to return to their old ways. Baptisms should be delayed until after this division takes place.

Are conversions in mass movements genuine? Allan Tippett points out that while the group acts as a corporate body, individuals within it also make their own decisions, particularly in the second stage of the movement. Consequently, he says, we should speak of "multi-individual decisions" (1971:123-241). Orlando Costas adds (1974:128),

The concept of multi-individual decisions gives a sociological orientation to the experience of conversion because it affirms that conversion, which depends on a personal act of faith in Christ, can take place in a group setting, where all the members of a given group (family, clan, tribe or mutual interest group) participate in a similar experience with Christ after considering it together and deciding to turn to Christ at the same time.

Such movements remind us in the west that conversion is not only a personal or psychological response. It is affected by and in turn affects our social relationships to others.

Do mass conversions have lasting results? Pickett in a classical study examined the consequences of the mass movements in South India (1933). He found that not only were people's lives transformed, but also their decisions were reinforced by their new Christian community. Individuals were not torn out of their existing social networks. Rather whole communities were changed. There are, indeed, problems unique to the process, but the overall evaluation has been positive.

If this is the case, are there ways to encourage group decisions? More study is needed here, but a few preliminary examples may help us think about the matter. In the late 19th century some Baptist missionaries in South India sought to baptize whole families. Husbands and wives who converted were not immediately baptized. Rather they were encouraged to win their spouses. Normally, only when both came together were they baptized.

In recent years one evangelist in Asia has sought to use group dynamics to get villagers to discuss the Gospel. Each night, instead of giving an alter call, he announces that everyone will have to make a decision for or against Christ on the last night. By the end of the series of meetings everyone knows that the evening of decision has arrived, and they will be asked to respond. They have discussed the decision with family and friends all week, so their decisions have been socially processed.

A third illustration comes again from the Baptists in South India. During three years of famine, the missionaries were deeply involved in distributing food and medicines, and creating work for the people. Afraid that the people might become 'Christians' in order to get food and work, the missionaries placed a moratorium on baptisms. Only after life had returned to normal in the villages did they resume baptizing converts. But by now people had had much time to talk about the gospel, and the untouchables responded in great numbers. In three days the missionaries baptized 3,536 adults, and before the end of the year the total had increased to 9,606.

The churches that emerge out of multi-personal movements are often indigenous in organization. They have a strong corporate identity and tend to have a polity based on their traditional patterns of social organization.⁷ In South India the leadership of many of these churches is patterned after the *panchayat* (council of village or caste elders) rather than an elected committee. In New Guinea, churches often used the principles of clan and tribal organization.

Power encounters

Multi-personal movements often involve 'power encounters'. The term has become a catch-word used to cover a multitude of confrontations. Here we will look only at two types of power encounter.

Confronting the powers The first type of power encounter occurs when the missionary challenges the existing religious establishment. The chief of a village may deny the missionary the right to enter and preach in the village. The local religious leaders may harass and even kill Christian converts.

In these cases the missionaries need not precipitate a confrontation. Their very presence is a threat to the traditional religious leaders. Occasionally missionaries have sought to precipitate a confrontation to attract attention. For example, Rev. Lowder, working among the Budu of southeast Africa, knew that the people believed in a powerful royal spirit said to reside in leopard skins. These skins were, therefore, reserved for use by tribal chiefs. Lowder, however, obtained such a skin and went village to village. At each he trampled on the skin to show that he was immune to its power. This created much commotion among the people and drew large audiences. Similarly, C.T. Studd ate plantains cooked in a fire fueled by the medicines used in witchcraft. That fact that he did not die instantly convinced the people that he had superior powers.

In some instances such demonstrations of power have convinced the people of the superiority of the Gospel and led to mass conversions. In most cases, however, the initial demonstration leads to increased opposition by the religious establishment, to persecution and even to death. This is clear in the case of Elijah. After he demonstrated God's power and killed the prophets of Baal, he fled to the desert. There he entered the most severe depression in his ministry. Moreover, the demonstration did not lead to a revival in Israel. Jezebel appointed new prophets of Baal and continued her persecution of God's people.

Similarly, Jesus' life was a constant confrontation of the Jewish religious establishment. He turned over the tables of the money changers in the temple (John 2); he talked to the leaders of the establishment (John 3); he challenged the teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees (John 4); he broke their laws regarding the sabbath (John 5); he challenged them by showing up at the feast in Jerusalem (John 6); he confronted their unforgiving legalism (John 8); and he showed their powerlessness (John 9). In return the religious leaders crucified him.

In Acts the same picture emerges (Table 1). So too in modern missions. Power confrontation is no easy answer, no quick fix, for evangelism. Just as conversion is both social and personal, so also opposition to the Gospel is both individual and corporate. We must be willing to pay the price when we challenge existing social and religious structures (cf. Berkhoff 1962, Yoder 1972).

TABLE 1

POWER ENCOUNTERS IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Chapter	Encounter	Initial Response	End of the Story
2	Pentecost	Ridicule	Some believe
3-4	Heal the cripple	Amazement	Jail
5:1-11	Lying by An. & Saph.		Death
5:12-42	Signs & wonders	Institutional reaction	Jail
6-8:3	Signs & wonders	Institutional reaction	Death
8:4-9	Sign Paul's opposition	Imitation Confrontation	Rebuke Conversion

10	Reluctant witness	Vision	Obedience
11-12:19	Prophecy	Institutional reaction	Death
12:20-23	Herod's deification	God's judgment	Death
13:4-12	Encounter with Elymas	Elymas becomes blind	Some believe
13:13-52	Preach	Many believe	Driven from city
14:1-7	Preach	Some believe	Driven from city
14:8-20	Heal crippled	Paul and Barnabas worshipped	Stoned and left for dead
16:16-40	Cast out demon	Attacked by crowd	Prison
17:1-9	Preached	Some believed	Attacked and had to flee
18:1-21	Preached	Jews oppose Paul	Persecution
19:8-20	Confront Jewish exorcists	Demon possessed overpowers them	Burning of books
21-28	Confrontation with establishment	Prison	Death in Rome

Destroying old gods A second type of power encounter takes place when new converts destroy their old gods. The confrontation is not between the missionary and the people, but between those who want to convert and those who do not, and, within individuals, between faith in Christ and fear of the old fetishes and medicines.

In these situations the pagan fetishes must be destroyed if Christ is to take their place. Allan Tippett writes (1971:169),

At the level of actual conversion from paganism . . . no matter how many elements may be woven into the conversion complex in communal society, the group action (which is not mass, but multi-individual) must fix itself in encounter at some material locus of power at some specific point in time. There must be a psychological moment or experience when the persons involved actually turn from the old god(s) to the new. There ought to be some ocular demonstration of this encounter, some specific act of faith. Both Christian and pagan alike frequently demand some such act to indicate the bona fide nature of conversion.

Such power encounters cannot be precipitated by the missionary. If he or she destroys the fetishes, the people will remake them. In fact, if the people only say that the gods have gone away, these gods may return. Only destroying them will do. Tippett notes (1971:203),

[N]one but the tribe can destroy the tribal fetish (the chief as representative, acting in the presence of the group), none but the family (with the family head as representative) can destroy a family god, and a personal fetish can only be destroyed by the individual himself.

An example of this is seen in Acts 19:17-20 where the converted sorcerers burned their scrolls.

To burn one's fetishes is a fearful experience. There is always doubt, is Christ really more powerful than the ancestors and old gods? Will he protect us from the evil spirits, give us game and heal us? In some instances a few members of the tribe burn their idols and medicines as a

test case, risking their lives for the rest. Illnesses and deaths during this early period of conversion are frequently taken to be signs that the old spirits and ancestors are angry, and that the Christian God is not more powerful than they. Special pastoral ministries are needed after people destroy their old gods.

Conversion and revitalization movements

Multi-personal conversion movements belong to what A. F. C. Wallace calls 'revitalization movements' (1956:264-281). These are movements in which a radical change takes place in the thinking of a group of people whose old beliefs no longer provide them with meaningful lives. Some of these movements are 'nativistic' - they seek to revive an old faith. Others are 'conversionist' - they call for faith in a new system of beliefs. Many lead to what Harold Turner has called New Emerging Religious Movements or NERMS (1981).

Contemporary religious history is full of revitalization movements. Over six thousand have been reported in Africa alone (Barrett 1968). Thousands of cargo cults and prophetic movements have risen in New Guinea and Oceania, and since the second world war, hundreds of new religions have appeared in Japan and the Philippines (see Worsley 1957; McFarland 1967; and Elwood 1968).

Turner points out that many of these movements are messianic or millenarian in character, the intended or unintended offspring of Christian missions. For example, the African Independent Churches and Indian Independent Churches range from thoroughly biblical movements indigenous to the local cultures to neopagan syncretistic movements with some Christian meanings and symbols.

Stages of revitalization Wallace defines five stages through which revitalization movements pass. While each movement is colored by local differences in culture, the basic structure of such movements is essentially the same.

The first is a steady state in which religion and culture provide people with more or less meaningful lives. There are normal personal stresses, but individuals are able to cope with these in culturally accepted ways. The people do not question their religion for it meets their needs.

The second stage is increased individual stress, often brought about by changes in the ecology, epidemics, military defeats, political subordination or the introduction of new ideas from without. While a culture remains relatively stable and integrated, many of the individuals in it experience high levels of stress, to the point of becoming neurotic. The old ways no longer adequately meet the peoples needs.

Here people begin to look for alternative solutions to their problems, but to do so also increases the stress. People are afraid that the new ways will be no better than the old, and that the new will destroy their existing beliefs and practices. There is anxiety in leaving the security of the old and familiar way of life, however imperfect it is, and striking out on a new and uncertain course.

The third stage is cultural distortion. As personal stress mounts, social tensions mount. Conflicts arise between various groups in the society, particularly between those who want change, and those who do not. In the end, the sociocultural order itself is threatened. If this process of deterioration is not stopped the society will die out or be defeated and absorbed by another society.

The fourth stage is revitalization. During times of high corporate stress, revitalization movements may emerge, many of them religious in nature. These offer new beliefs and ways of coping with life in more satisfactory ways, thus restoring meaning to the peoples existence and renewal to the culture.

Revitalization often begins with a dynamic person who has heard of a new way, or who has a vision or insight providing a new explanation to life and its possibilities. Others are converted and join the movement. Often there is opposition and a conflict arises between supporters of the old, and the new, further increasing the cultural stress. When the movement attracts a large portion of the population, a revitalization of faith and life take place. Personal and cultural stress are reduced and people live more purposeful lives.

The final stage is a new steady state. The acceptance and institutionalization of new religious beliefs enables people once again to cope with their stresses and find meaning in their existence.

Revitalization and conversion Wallace's theory throws considerable light on the multi-personal conversions that account for much of the expansion of Christianity through history. We have been most effective in winning tribal people when they first come into contact with the outside world. These contacts bring about rapid changes in their cultures. The result is high stress, and a search for new answers to felt needs. Often these felt needs have to do with 'cargo' - with material well-being. Certainly the Gospel does speak to matters of prosperity, health, and power, but there is a danger on focusing on these rather than on holiness, love and witness, for many revitalization movements end up as economic or political movements. But we must not forget God's care for people here and now, for the other danger is that revitalization movements become millenarian and have little concern for the quality of this life.

Evangelism has also been effective among those who are socially marginal or disposed, such as the poor, the untouchables and the alienated. These live in high cultural stress for they are not part of the central cultural systems and its rewards.

But what about cities? So far they have been largely immune to multi-personal conversions. This is probably due to the strong emphasis placed on individualism in most modern cities, and to the high mobility that corrodes the social bonds of family and group.

It is clear that people are particularly responsive to the Gospel when their are caught in the stress of rapid change and their old ways no longer meet their needs. It is clear, too, that we must know and address these needs.

Wallace's theory further reminds us that conversion itself is a stressful process. It is easier to stay with old familiar ways, no matter how inadequate they are, than to change. Inviting people to become followers of Jesus is a promise that in the future their lives will be more joyful and fulfilled. For the moment, however, it is a call to decision and such decisions create great anxiety. We need to be particularly sensitive to the anxieties of those converting to Christ.

We need also to realize that new converts often experience 'conversion shock'. Their initial reaction is often one of euphoria and joy. When this wears off, they begin the difficult task of learning to think and live like a Christian. They must learn a new language, behave in new ways, and form new relationships. In short, they must be socialized into their new community. During this period new converts often face periods of doubt and depression. They question their decision, and some return to their old beliefs.

During this time of reevaluation the support of the Christian community is most important. In mass movements, converts often form intense, inwardly looking groups in which they find most of their fulfillment. Consequently the movements often look like sects or cults. When individuals convert one-by-one, however, they often lack this group support, and only the most committed sustain their new faith outside of a supporting community of faith.

What about the orthodoxy of Christian revitalization movements such as the African Independent Churches? As Turner points out, many of these are the unintended, unwanted offspring of Christian missions. For the most part, such movements are culturally indigenous - they look to their traditional cultures for the symbols and forms by which they express their faith. They may use religious dance, drums and dress. They may draw on old rituals reinterpreted to fit the Christian message.

With regard to Christian faith, Turner notes that they range all the way from New Testament churches that focus on the person of Jesus Christ, through Old Testament churches that emphasize rituals and laws, to syncretistic neoprimal movements that cannot be called Christian despite their use of some Christian beliefs and symbols. During the colonial era, most missions refused to work with these AICs, but recently there has been a growing realization that there is a vital Christian faith in many of them.

Finally, Wallace's analysis reminds us that the church itself needs to undergo constant revitalization. Over the years religious movements become institutionalized. The second generation of converts do not pay the high price their parents paid to become Christians, but they are influenced by the vitality of their parents' faith. Nominalism begins to creep into the church by the third and fourth generations. Freytag notes (1961: 249),

Just as the pagans live in traditional practice which they inherited from their ancestors and imitated without ever critically questioning their validity, so there are church customs that have become an integral part of the religious way of life without ever seriously evaluating their value and, consequently, without the benefit of spiritual fruit.

It is not enough to write of the conversion of Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists to Christianity. We must emphasize the fact that each generation growing up within the church must also be born again from above. Socially speaking, we bring our children to church and act as if they are Christians. We must be reminded that until they are converted, they too are pagans. Only then will the church experience a continued revitalization of its spiritual life from within.

There is a danger, over time, that even the conversion process itself becomes routinized. It becomes socially acceptable for young people to come to the altar, or respond at camp at a certain age. And when some do so out of genuine conviction, others do so with their friends, or to gain acceptance in the community. Not only must each generation be converted, but each generation must also rediscover afresh the meaning of conversion. It is here that we in the west fall far short of the biblical understanding of the salvation God offers us, and the response he seeks of us.

There is little doubt that we in the west need to rediscover the biblical meaning of conversion. Instead of life transforming experience beginning when we make Christ the true lord of our lives, continuing throughout life as we discover in the community of saints new areas of life over which his reign is extended, and ending when we see our Lord face to face, it has become an individual, private affirmation of truth and feeling of worship. And all of us for whom conversion has become routine in our churches need to learn the wonder and the cost of conversion from our brothers and sisters in many parts of the world where those who become Christian pay a high price, even their lives. Only then will we experience the freshness of new life and a genuine revival in our churches.

END NOTES

1. Fuzzy set theory was introduced by L.A. Zadeh in 1965. The most systematic treatment available today is by the Belgian mathematician A. Kaufmann titled Introduction to the Theory of Fuzzy Subsets.
2. A strong argument can be made that the foundation of Indian philosophy and culture is fuzzy sets. Indian music, for example, has sixty-four microsteps between Do and Re on the scale. The hallmark of Indian music is the slide and the quaver before attacking a note. Similarly, Indian philosophy does not begin with the 'either-or' and excluded middle of western philosophy. Consequently its tendency towards relativism.
3. The Engel scale needs to be modified to include an affective dimension. Sjoogard and others have suggested some revisions.
4. The term 'civil religion' was coined by Robert Bellah (see Richey and Jones 1967, and Bellah and Hammond 1981). For a good discussion of the implications for the evangelical church see Linder and Pierard's (1978) The Twilight of the Saints: Biblical Christianity and Civil Religion in America.
5. See C. Normal Kraus' The Community of the Spirit and The Authentic Witness (1979) for discussions of the nature of the new Christian community intended by God.
6. An example of this is the growth of the church among the Mizos of N.E. India. Prof. Hrangkuma of Mizoram points out that conversions rarely involved whole villages, but did take place within family groups.
7. Even more than technology the west today is exporting systems of leadership based on management principles. In the church we are increasingly aware of the need to contextualize the Gospel in other cultures. But we are often more willing to contextualize the Gospel than our forms of leadership and church organization.

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Some Notes

Indigenization. @TThe adjective "indigenous" is derived from the Latin compound in + de + gena (within + from + to beget) and means "produced, growing, or living naturally in a particular region or environment." It refers to that which is native or born from within, in contrast to that which is foreign or alien. The term indigenization is widely used in Christian #missions where it refers to making the Gospel understood in the language and thought forms of the local people and to efforts to make the church autonomous in its organization.

The idea that Christianity must, in some sense, adapt to the culture in which it finds itself is not new. Leaders in the early church disagreed over the extent to which the church should adopt Hellenistic practices. Some argued that the gospel challenges existing cultures because they are the creations of sinful humans, others believed that Christianity must accommodate to cultures in order to win people to the church. The picture changed radically when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire late in the 4th c. Church leaders acquired sociopolitical power, and often turned to the sword rather than to the cross to spread Christianity. The result was often a superficial conversion of the tribes on the frontiers of the empire. The Eastern Orthodox churches translated the liturgy into local vernacular languages in its extensive missionary outreach in Eastern Europe so that the people could worship in their own languages. In contrast, in western Europe the vernacular language initially was Latin and the liturgy needed no translating; eventually Latin developed into various Romance languages and the languages of worship, ecclesiastical Latin, slowly became largely unintelligible to the uneducated. This was even more true when Christianity spread outside the old borders of the Roman Empire to Germanic peoples of northern Europe.

In the 16th c. the modern Roman Catholic missionary movement was born. The Jesuits spoke of the need for accommodating Christianity to the Chinese and Indian cultures, while the Franciscans and Dominicans called for the total rejection of customs such as #caste, #ancestor veneration, and polygamy.

The Protestant Reformation came at a time of rising levels of literacy, which stimulated the translation of the Bible into western European languages by Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Luther. Protestants proclaimed the right of all Christians to read and interpret the gospel in their own cultural settings. Luther went further and insisted on the Germanization of Christianity. The reformers felt, however, the need for an ongoing partnership of sacred and secular powers.

The Anabaptists were more radical. They taught the priesthood of all believers within hermeneutical communities, thereby opening the door for local congregations to choose appropriate ways to express their faith. They also called for the separation of church and state, and held that the #kingdom of God, not earthly norms, is the standard by which all human orders, including the church, must be judged. The gospel must be proclaimed in ways the people understand; but it remains prophetic, judging some parts of their culture to be good (for as

humans they are created in the image of God), and some to be bad (for as sinners they create sinful cultures).

The early Protestant missionaries emphasized the need for establishing indigenous churches. In the 19th c., however, Protestant missionaries, including Mennonites, became increasingly identified with European colonialism, and a Western sense of superiority justified by the theory of cultural evolution. The result was young churches that were dependent on missions, and estranged from their cultural surroundings. Disturbed by the foreignness of the young churches, and their prolonged dependence on mission agencies, two mission leaders, Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn, urged missionaries to turn control of new churches over to native leadership as soon as possible. The goal of missions, they said, is the planting of self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches. When this is achieved the missionaries should disband or move on.

Despite this plea, the transfer of power from missions agencies to the newly planted churches was slow. Few national leaders were ordained as pastors and bishops, and finances for the Western-styled educational and medical institutions came largely from outside. This was true of most Mennonite missions, which were deeply influenced by the dominant missionary practices of the day. In the end, the emergence of nationalism and the collapse of colonialism led to the autonomy of most churches around the world.

The call for indigenization of the church raised another question: how should churches in other lands be organized and what types of leadership did they need? Most missionaries introduced the polity of their sending churches. Anglicans appointed priests and bishops, Mennonites introduced elections and paid ministers. In most cases, however, these organizational forms were foreign to the new Christians. Few attempts were made to use local patterns of organization based on kinship, elders, and lay ministries.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the need not only to indigenize the church as an organization, but also the gospel and its message. Mennonite missionaries have played important roles in Bible translation. However, influenced by other protestant missions, and fearful of syncretism (mixing of Christian and non-Christian practices and beliefs) they often resisted the use of local worship forms and practices. Western hymns of were translated and sung to Western tunes and little emphasis was placed on the development of local hymnologies. Western styles of prayer, preaching, dress, and church architecture were introduced, and drums, dramas, dances, and bardic orations were generally rejected as pagan. Traditional wedding and funeral rites were replaced with ceremonies patterned after Western customs. Polygamy, initiation rites, ancestor veneration, and other customs were condemned, often with little understanding of the social problems created by their elimination. Only in recent years have non-Western Mennonite churches begun to reevaluate their rites and practices in the light of scriptures and their own cultures.

In the late 1980s there is a growing concern with culturally appropriate methods of evangelism. In the past, most missions, including those sponsored by Mennonites, placed great emphasis on literacy as a means of church planting. Consequently extensive school systems were built. While recognizing the need for a literate church, many are beginning to use other, more indigenous methods for proclaiming the gospel such as oral communication in rural areas, and rallies and media in the cities.

The question of theological autonomy is also becoming more critical. Do young churches have the right to interpret the scriptures within their own historical and cultural contexts (theologies from impoverished peoples)? Does not a positive response to this question open the door to theological relativism and syncretism? Many Protestant churches have opposed the development of indigenous theologies because they view theology as a fixed creed. They have tended to equate their own theology with biblical truth, and to hold it above culture and history. Consequently, to change it is threatening. Non-Western churches, however face questions that Western theologies do not answer, and Western theologies are molded not only by the Bible, but also by the worldviews of Western cultures.

Given their radical view of the priesthood of all believers, and of discipleship as living daily in obedience to scripture, Mennonites view theologies as confessions--as human understandings of the Bible within different cultural contexts. They hold their theologies with deep conviction, but do not equate these with the whole of Biblical truth itself. They also recognize the need for theologies to change as new questions arise, and as each generation discovers what God is saying to it. They believe, however, that the theological task ultimately belongs to the church, not individuals.

Because of their view of theology as confession, not creed, and of the church as a hermeneutical community, Mennonite missionaries have been more open to, and, in some cases, have encouraged, the development of indigenous theologies. They have also been more willing to work with native churches that have sprung up on the edges of the Western missionary movement. An example of this is the pioneering work of Edwin and Irene Weaver, and the work of the African Inter-Mennonite Mission and other Mennonite missions. with African Independent Churches.

The concept of indigenization itself was the product of a particular period in mission history when missionaries went from the West to other lands. Now the church exists around the world, and the usefulness of the term is in question because it is tied to a unidirectional view of missions, and to the goal of independent churches.

Since 1972 missionary leaders have begun to use the term contextualization to move beyond the concept of indigenization. The new term carries the basic meanings of the old, but recognizes that the goal for churches, young and old, is interdependence and partnership, and that the gospel belongs to no one culture but judges them all in the light of the kingdom of God. Indigenization is achieved when every society has a church

native to its cultural setting. Contextualization is the ongoing process of a church seeking to live as Christ's body within its own cultural and historical setting.@NT@>PGH

@XP. J. Malagar, MC India (1981), 40-52.@NX

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19-FIN ED-DDM (ReturntoApprove)

NOTE: One paragraph on p. 1 and the top of p. 2 was modified to clarify the difference between the Eastern church's and Western church's attitude toward use of the vernacular. On the issue of the degree to which European peoples were fully Christianized, you might be interested in John Van Engen, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem," American Historical Review 91 (June 1986), 519-52. He argues that the common assertion by anthropologists and cultural historians that Europe was not completely Christianized rests on the improper use of improper sources. On the question of conversion by the sword; most historians I have read (Peter Brown and his students, among others) would argue that, although force and social pressure was used, the working of miracles played a much larger role, as indicated by the biography of St. Benedict or Martin of Tours. The forcible conversion of the Saxons by Charlemagne is the exception, not the rule. Exactly what happened under Clovis is unclear. DDM

21-165 (163) txt

6a-100

22-1 (1) bib

23-.6 percent

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Indigenization.

*E

to help people out in special times of need. What word then should one use? Bhagavanthudu? Ishvarudu? Parameshvarudu? All of these fit into the general Indian framework for life. There is in fact, no Telugu word that carries the connotations of God as other, as different from humans and animals. Gods in Telugu are like humans, only bigger and more powerful. But what happens to the Biblical concept of "God" when it is translated into Telugu. Unless we are aware of the deep structural differences between the Biblical and the Indian world views, we will not be aware of the problem and therefore will not deal with it. The result is often syncretism. In fact, our English tendency to lump God, angels and demons together as "supernatural beings" is itself unbiblical. The fundamental premise of the Bible is that God is all alone as Creator, and not to be equated with any other being. Angels and demons, are part of creation like humans, animals and plants.

This illustration points out the great importance of understanding other cultures if we wish to communicate the Gospel to them. Communication does not end when we have translated the Scriptures into their languages. Nor does it end when we have established self-supporting churches. If we do not understand the fundamental assumption and world-view of another culture, we are in danger unknowingly of putting the Gospel into an unChristian conceptual framework. We must realize that behind every language and culture there is a basic way of looking at the world, and that this may in part be antithetical to Christianity. If we do not, the result will be syncretism, and the loss of the essential message of the Gospel. If we want to plant churches that will remain true to Christ for generations, we must make certain that the Gospel is understood at its deepest levels.

Misunderstanding is a lack of comprehension - a lack of information and of understanding. It is a rational process. The answer then is to acquire information and to study the situation. One of the first things we need to become when we move abroad is students of the culture.

Ethnocentrism: A third problem raised by cultural differences is ethnocentrism. By this we mean the basic feeling that ultimately our cultural ways are right and that those of others are somehow primitive or less civilized. If misunderstanding is a rational process, ethnocentrism has to do with our basic assumptions about the very nature of things, and the deep feelings that reinforce these assumptions.

At the core of every culture are some unquestioned, and often implicit assumptions about what is and what is not, and about what is right or good and what is evil. For the most part, our customs are molded by these assumptions. For example, we assume that our fingers are somewhat dirty, so when we eat we use forks, spoons and knives. When we face other cultures, we judge their behavior by our basic assumptions and generally find them to be uncivilized. They, of course, do the same. Judged by the basic assumptions held by Indians, American behavior is crude and barbaric. One time at the University we took an Indian visitor out to eat at a restaurant. One of our American friends asked the invariable question, "In India do you really eat with your fingers?" Americans assume that eating with the fingers is basically dirty. There are exceptions - one can eat potato chips and hard foods with the fingers, presumably because they do not get dirty as fast. But soft foods must be handled with a fork or spoon. What would happen if at a Thanksgiving dinner you started to eat your mashed potatoes and gravy with your fingers? The Indian replied to the question, "Yes, we do. But we look at it in a different way. Before I eat I wash my hands, and so my hands are perfectly clean. Moreover, my fingers have

never been in anyone else's mouth. When I look at my fork and spoon I wonder how many other people have put it into their mouths and sucked on them in the past! Next time you eat, look at your spoon and reflect a moment on how many of your fellow Americans have put that very spoon in their mouths in the past.

Translation: Another problem created by cultural variance is that of translation. The Gospel which we have understood in the English language and culture must be translated into another language and thought forms before it will be understood by people in another culture.

Early Bible translation was careful to translate the formal meaning of words. For example, if the word in English or Greek is "sheep", then it must be translated as "sheep" in another language. If that language had no word for "sheep", as the case among some of the Eskimo, the English word was often used, even though it made no sense to the people. Formal translations run into serious problems. For instance, there are often no words in a language corresponding to those in the original Biblical language. What does one do then? A more serious problem is that of loss of the message in the translation. When Isaiah speaks of "white as snow" he is stressing the idea of "whiteness", not "snowness." What does one do in cultures where there is no snow and no word for snow? To try to explain "snow" would be to distract the reader from the message. Would it be proper to translate this "white as a lily" if lilies are what people consider to be the whitest object in their culture? Formal translations often lose the primary message of the text.

Let me give you an illustration of the shift in meaning that can occur with formal translations. A year ago I attended a Christmas program in India in which there was a dramatic presentation by the children of the birth of Christ. In the first scene, the shepherds appeared on stage - pretending to be dead drunk. To understand this, we must know that in India, shepherds are identified as drunkards. But what has happened to our idea of shepherds as quiet, godly men meditating in the fields? The problem was solved when the angels appeared and the shepherds were scared sober. But often the problem is not solved as easily as this. The fact is that a strict translation of the forms is often accompanied by a loose translation in the original message.

More recently there has been a move towards dynamic translations in which care is taken to preserve the original message, even if the form must be changed somewhat to do so. In an Indian village this might mean translating Isaiah as "white as milk". The approach has led to translations such as the Good News for Modern Man which are more clearly understood by the common person. Too often our translations abroad have been in high languages little understood by the people, and in formal translations in which some of the meanings have been lost. Modern translations aim at a clear understanding of the meaning of the message.

But dynamic translations have their problems. What happens when young people in the church abroad learn Greek and Hebrew and find that their Bibles are not exact translations of the text? Moreover, as Marshal McLewin points out, the form or media itself has a message. The word "milk" in India carries not only the connotation of "white" but of a great many other things. Today there is a move towards trying to preserve linguistic forms as much as possible without loss of meaning. We dare not deal lightly either with meaning or form when we translate the Scriptures.

Indigenization: The planting of the church in other cultures involves more than translating the Gospel into the local languages to that people can understand and believe. The Gospel must be expressed in cultural forms that the people understand and love - in indigenous music, art, drama, and even dance. The church must be organized in structures the people know how to operate. For example, church leadership patterns among Mennonite Brethren in the west is based on democratic principles. Everyone, new convert or old, has an equal say in the elections. But do democratic procedures work in other societies? One of our biggest problems abroad in the church has been with democratic processes. In many cases we would have done better to use indigenous types of leadership and organizational structures. Again let me use an illustration from India. There we organized our mission work according to "mission fields" based on geography. After seventy years of work we sought to unite these into one conference, but we now find that the old boundaries do not die so easily. Moreover, most of our converts came from two Harijan castes. Many of the current intercaste divisions in the India church are based upon the rivalries that have persisted within the church. One wonders what the church might have been like had we used the Indian form of leadership by wise old elders rather than democracy, and of churches organized along social rather than geographic lines. In going to a new culture, Christianity must be translated into new types of music, art, family structures, economic systems and social organizations. Translation of the Gospel into a new culture is a many and varied task.

Indigenization raises another question, namely that of social and cultural differences within a single region. In the past we have assumed that people within a geographical region are homogeneous, that they share the same culture. Today we are aware of the fact that that need not be true. By starting a church in one region, we can not assume that all of the people within that area will understand the Gospel or join the local church. For example, in India we have planted a large church. But almost one hundred percent of the people come from the Harijan castes. Culturally they are distant from the higher castes, and the higher caste people are often not willing to cross the cultural and social boundaries between themselves and the Harijans in order to join the church. Should the Gospel not become indigenous to their cultures as well? This raises, of course, the question of how a church planted among the upper castes should relate to that among the Harijans.

But there are others who are even more culturally distinct in the area to which we have committed ourselves in India. There are Muslims whose primary language is Urdu. And there are Arakalas, Lambadas, Chenchus and other transient tribal peoples who speak their own languages. For the most part they have not heard the Gospel in their own tongue. We have done virtually nothing to reach them, or to make the Gospel indigenous to their setting. The point here, is that we must stop thinking in purely geographic terms and begin to think in terms of cultures and cultural differences, and seek to make the Gospel heard within each culture in ways that it is clearly understood. Only then will people have an opportunity to make a clear response to its claims.

Theological variance: A final problem created by cultural variance, and one of the most difficult to solve, is that of theological variance. As the people read and understand the Scriptures within their own culture, and apply its message to their lives, they will develop their own theological interpretations of the Gospel as it relates to their needs and cultural setting. Just

as each of us gains insights into the Scriptures, so churches in different cultures will gain unique understandings of the Bible. But how do we deal with this theological proliferation and variance? What do we say to African theology, Latin American theology, Indian theology and Korean theology? We have been happy when new churches become self-supporting, and self-propagating. We have had more difficulty in letting them become self-governing. Today we must face the fact that they too have the Holy Spirit and can interpret the Scriptures - that to be mature churches they must be self-theologizing. But where then is the unity of the Gospel, and where is our common bond with them? In part it lies in our theology of the priesthood of all believers, and our differentiation between the Gospel and theology. We recognize that theologies are always human attempts to understand the Scriptures, and we place ultimate authority not in theological systems, but in the Bible itself. So long as others are willing to be followers of Christ, and go to the Bible as their authority, we can dialogue with them. We may disagree with their interpretations and they with ours, but at least there is a common meeting ground in our mutual search to understand and obey the Scriptures.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSION SERVICE

What implications does cultural variance have for missionary service? A number of these have already been noted, but it would be well here to make a number of principles explicit.

Incarnational Missions. In looking for a model for mission service, there is no better place to look than to Christ. Missions involves crossing the gulf between cultures. But there has been no greater chasm than that between heaven and earth, between God and humans. To save human beings and restore fellowship, God had to find a way to bridge that chasm. He did not call to us saying that he would accept us and asking us to build the bridge and join him. He did not even build the bridge half way and ask us to build the other half. He did not even build the bridge and invite us to come across. He built the bridge and came across to where we were. He lived among us. He spoke our language, ate our food and slept in our houses. Only by this means was it possible for us to understand and trust the message of salvation he brought. If ever there is culture shock, that Christ experienced in coming to earth must have been the greatest. If ever there are misunderstandings, ethnocentrism, mistranslations and foreignness, the possibilities and temptations for these must have been the greatest when Christ came to earth. Yet he overcame these in his incarnation.

This incarnational approach should be our model in missions. It requires that the Gospel be translated into the languages and cultures of all peoples so that they can understand if where they are (See Figure 5). It also requires that the missionary identify with the people. Incarnation does not mean denying who we are as Christians. Christ remained fully God. But it does call for full identification with those whom we serve, just as Christ became fully human.

Gospel and Culture. It is important in modern day missions to develop a clear theology of the relationship between the Gospel and culture. If we deny the cultural context within which the Gospel finds expression, we cannot communicate the Good News to humans. The Gospel must always be expressed to humans in words and other symbols. On the other hand, if we deny the Gospel, we have lost God's message to us.

As a starting point, I might note three principles that can help us to understand the relationship of Gospel to culture. First we must differentiate between Gospel and culture. To equate the two is to identify the Gospel with one single culture. Missions then becomes the dissemination of that culture. But the Gospel is supracultural. It can be expressed in any language and culture. Our failure to clearly differentiate between the two has often been a hinderance to the growth of the church, for to become Christian has too often meant becoming western. The Gospel is equated with clothes, western music, democracy and capitalism.

Second, we must realize that the Gospel must be expressed in cultural forms. It is impossible to communicate the Gospel to humans apart from words and other cultural symbols. We cannot communicate the Gospel in a cultural vacuum. This means the Gospel must be translated into different languages and become indigenous in different cultures. Only then will its message be heard and the church grow.

Finally, we should never seek to indigenize the Gospel so far that it loses its prophetic challenge to humans and their cultures. In other words, the Gospel always calls people and cultures from where they are to God's ideals. The Gospel stands in judgment upon sin, both in the life of individuals and in the structures of societies. In our search for indigenization we dare never mute this prophetic call. There is an "offense of the Gospel" that cannot be removed without destroying the essence of the Gospel. But we must be certain that the offense is that of the Gospel and not that of a particular cultural or social system. Indigenization yes, but not at the expense of the transforming power of the Gospel that takes us from where we are and molds us into Christ-likeness and changes institutions into those that conform more closely to the Kingdom of God.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR:

Question: What implications does the concept of "bonding" have for the way we orient our young missionaries to the field?

Response: Traditionally we have placed our young missionaries in a mission setting and consequently they have been bonded to the missionary culture rather than to that of the nationals. Using methods we now have, a missionary can learn to speak the language without accent, and like the people, and learn to understand and adapt to a new culture with a minimum of culture shock and a maximum of bonding to the people themselves. At present we throw them into the new culture to sink or swim, and give them little by way of training in how to fit into the new setting.

Question: Wouldn't the bonding of young missionaries to the people create some problems within the existing mission structures?

Response: So far we have been experimenting with bonding young people to a culture in a neutral setting. For example, we take them to Colombia to learn the culture there. I am sure that if we sought to change the way young missionaries are oriented to a new culture, we would face some stress. I am not sure how we can resolve the tensions that might arise, but I do not think that that should keep us from working towards an incarnational and post-colonial model of mission service. As missionaries our identification must be first with Christ, and then with the people to whom we minister, and not to our first culture.