THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE: THE GOSPEL MAKES ITSELF AT HOME

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This is the second in a series of posts expanding my thoughts on contextualisation of the Gospel which you can find here.

In the first post in this series, I suggested that the Gospel is Homeless, that is there is no such thing as a the definitive Christian language or culture. However, the opposite side of the equation is also true and the Christian message is able to be lived and expressed in every language and culture. However...

> *...You can be an English Christian, a Chinese Christian or a Kouya Christian, but your cultural background must be conformed to the Scriptures, not the other way round.*

Translated Scriptures, indigenous music and architecture along with different social attitudes and customs mean that the expression of Christian life varies from one culture to another. A Christian gathering in rural Papua New Guinea bears little resemblance to evensong in an English parish church - but both are authentically Christian. However, while the expression of the Gospel may change, the core reality, rooted in God's reconciling work through Christ, does not change.

Where there is a conflict between the values of the Gospel and indigenous cultural values, it should be the Gospel which wins - the Gospel does change cultures. When the homeless Gospel comes into a culture as a guest, it is an awkward guest - quite rude in fact. Rather than just settling down to do things your way, the Gospel starts to move the furniture around and redecorate the house.

But this does not mean that a dominant culture can force its values onto another one; the imposition of Western cultural norms in the name of Christianity is wrong (we will return to this in a later post).

The challenge that the Gospel poses to a culture are ongoing and the church needs to be attentive to the challenge. It is easy for Westerners to fall into the trap of thinking that it is cultures which have only recently received the Gospel which need to change. However, the call to seek first the Kingdom of God places a huge challenge on the consumerism which we so easily accept and take for granted in our culture. More fundamentally, our culture tends to make a clear distinction between the spiritual and physical worlds, between sacred and secular. Because of this, we often fail to even recognise the way in which Jesus calls us to a radically changed lifestyle. Often we *spritiualize* Jesus' words - letting ourselves off the hook. Saying that something doesn't fit the English temperament is not sufficient reason not to conform to a Gospel imperative.