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COMMENT EVALUER LA CULTURE DU POINT DE VU BIBLIQUE

HOW TO EVALUATE CULTURE FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

G. Paul Hiebert dit : "la culture est un ensemble plus ou moins cohérent d'idées, de sentiment et de valeur en association avec des modèles de comportement et des produits"¹ ou encore "c'est ce que partage un groupe structuré et contrôlé..."²

Pour beaucoup de personnes, le mot "culture" signifie, littérature, théâtre, cinéma, lettres classiques, peinture, musique et aussi le savoir-vivre. Ce n'est pas de cette façon que les anthropologues vont définir ce mot. Pour eux, la culture signifie "tout comportement acquis socialement" ou encore "ensemble des traits matériels ou non qui sont transmis d'une génération à l'autre"³. Ces traits sont à la fois, transmissibles et accumulés. Ils sont culturels dans la mesure où ils sont inculqués par la société et non pas par les gènes (chromosome).

Ainsi, comment évaluer une culture du point de vue biblique? Nous sommes tentés d'affirmer que la contextualisation serait une bonne piste pour évaluer une culture du point de vue biblique.

Dans les lignes qui vont suivre nous allons d'abord présenter le rapport entre la culture et la Bible ; puis nous allons dire comment

Introduction

Paul G. Hiebert says: " Culture is the more or less integrated systems of beliefs, feelings and values, and their associated symbols, patterns of behavior and products shared by a group of people who organize and regulate what they think, feel, and do." (Hiebert, Mission et Culture, 2002, p. 30)

For many people, the word "culture" means, literature, theater, cinema, classical letters, painting, music, and good manners. This is not the way that anthropologists will define this word. For them, culture means "any socially acquired behavior" or "all the material and non-material traits that are transmitted from one generation to another."(Ibid.,33) These traits are both transmissible and accumulated. They are cultural insofar as they are inculcated by society and not by genes.

So, how do we evaluate a culture from the Biblical point of view? We are tempted to say that contextualization would be a good way to evaluate a culture from a biblical perspective.

In the following article we will first present the relationship between culture and the Bible; then we will say how to evaluate the culture from the biblical point of view by taking contextualization as a paradigm.

¹ G. Paul HIEBERT, Mission et culture, Saint-Legier, Emmaüs, 2002.p.30.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.,p. 33.

évaluer la culture du point de vu biblique en prenant comme paradigme la contextualisation.

La Culture et la Bible

Tous les êtres humains sont créés à l'image de Dieu, tous doivent être éclairés par la lumière qui est Jésus-Christ, dans la mission chrétienne d'évangélisation, cela doit être prouvé que la bonté tendre de Dieu est pour toutes ses œuvres.

Même si Christ est un personnage supra culturel et que sa mission était une sorte d'inclusion de toutes les cultures ; cette réalité n'exclut pas le jugement. A ce propos Lesslie NEWBIGIN pense en ces termes : "... la venue de la lumière qui illumine tout le monde est en même temps dévoilement de tout ce qui n'est pas lumière. Et nous ne pouvons pas esquiver cet élément précis du jugement qui est présent dans le Nouveau Testament."¹ En préfaçant le livre Ype Shaaf, André Karamaga, se pose cette question : "La logique humaine ne voudrait-elle pas que la parole de Dieu soit extra-culturelle, universelle et pré adapté à tous les temps ?"² La Bible doit être considérée comme un document supra culturel. C'est pourquoi elle reste une référence absolue dans la recherche de la persuasion dans l'évangélisation. La parole de Dieu dans la Bible sous forme de prédication qui "n'est un simple commentaire, ni une étude biblique, ni une rhétorique influencée par la Bible. On n'utilise pas les textes pour inviter l'assemblée à imaginer ce qui s'est passé dans le temps ancien, mais lui permettre de rencontrer aujourd'hui, le Dieu de la Bible, son jugement et sa promesse."³

Comment évaluer la culture du point de vu biblique : la contextualisation.

Culture and the Bible

All human beings are created in the image of God, but all must be enlightened by the light that is Jesus Christ. In the Christian mission of evangelization, it must be proved that the God's grace is for all His creation.

Even if Christ is a supra-cultural character and His mission was a kind of inclusion of all cultures; this reality does not exclude judgment. In this respect Lesslie Newbigin thinks in these terms: "... the coming of the light that illuminates everyone is at the same time the unveiling of all that is not light. And we cannot dodge this precise element of judgment that is present in the New Testament." (Newbigin, 2004, p. 15)

In the preface of the book *Ype Shaaf*, André Karamaga, asks himself this question: "Would not human logic expect the word of God to be extra-cultural, universal and pre-adapted to all times?" (Schaaf, 1994, p. 7) The Bible must be considered as a supra-cultural document. Therefore it remains an absolute reference in the search for persuasion in evangelization. The word of God in the Bible in the form of a preaching that "is not just a commentary, nor a Bible study, nor a Bible-influenced rhetoric. We do not use the texts to invite the assembly to imagine what happened in ancient times, but to allow it to meet us today, the God of the Bible, its judgment and its promise." (Stauffer, 2000, pp. 67-68)

How to Evaluate Culture From a Biblical Point of View: Contextualization

According to the Dictionary, the word "context" refers to "the set of circumstances in which something is situated, and which gives

¹ Lesslie NEWBIGIN, « confesser le Christ dans une société multiregieuse » in Hokma 85/2004, pp. 7.

² Ype Schaaf, L'Histoire et rôle de la Bible en Afrique GM, Lavigny, 1994, p.7.

³ S. Anita Stauffer, Culte et culture en relation, FLM, Genève, 2000, pp.67-68.

Selon Le dictionnaire de la langue française, le mot contexte désigne "l'ensemble des circonstances dans lesquelles se situe un fait, et qui lui confèrent sa valeur, sa signification."¹

Nous voulons dire ici comme Laurent Mpongo que le "terme contextualisation évoque le processus du dialogue entre une culture et l'Évangile en vue de l'émergence d'une culture encrée dans l'esprit du Christ. Il évoque aussi l'effort que l'Évangile doit faire pour pénétrer les réalités séculières..."²

La contextualisation renvoie beaucoup plus à un processus, à une activité qu'un théologien ou un chercheur doit entreprendre pour entrer en dialogue avec les cultures dans lesquelles il est appelé à œuvrer. Ainsi, il est donc incontestable que la contextualisation se présente ici comme un processus dynamique et non statique. Car elle reconnaît la nature continuellement variable de toutes les conditions humaines et la possibilité de mutation, qui ouvre ainsi la voie à l'avenir.³

La contextualisation fait référence à l'Évangile afin de prendre en charge la préoccupation de l'homme selon son milieu, sa situation concrète et son époque. Dans ce sens, évangéliser en Afrique, revient à dire qu'annoncer la Bonne Nouvelle en tenant compte des situations concrètes de ses interlocuteurs.⁴

L'idée de la contextualisation, force celui qui s'engage dans la mission à connaître le contexte de ses interlocuteurs ; par le fait que la culture et ses diverses expressions ont un caractère dynamique qui rend capable de sélectionner les éléments culturels qui peuvent marcher avec la foi chrétienne.⁵

it its value, its meaning." (Dictionnaire de la Langue Française Lexis, 2001, p. 415)

We mean here as Laurent Mpongo puts it, that the "term contextualization refers to the process of dialogue between a culture and the Gospel in view of the emergence of a culture inked in the spirit of Christ. It also evokes the effort that the Gospel must make to penetrate the secular realities ..." (Mpongo, 2000, p. 49)

Contextualization refers much more to a process, an activity that a theologian or researcher must undertake to enter into dialogue with the cultures in which he is called to work. Thus, it is undeniable that contextualization is presented here as a dynamic and non-static process because it recognizes the continuously changing nature of all human conditions and the possibility of mutation, which opens the way for the future.

Contextualization presents the Gospel in a way to demonstrate its relevance to man's concerns in his current environment, his concrete situation and his time. In this sense, to evangelize in Africa, is to announce the Good News taking into account the concrete situations of the African people. (Van Den Toren, 2010)

The idea of contextualization forces those who engage in mission to know the context of the people they are trying to reach; in that culture and its various expressions have a dynamic character that makes it possible to select the cultural elements that can assist in the effective communication of the Christian faith. (Mpongo, 2000, p. 49)

¹ Dictionnaire de la langue française lexis, Paris, 2001, p.415.

² Laurent Mpongo, Nos ancêtre dans l'aujourd'hui du Christ, Sodalité. S. Pierre Claver, Rome, 2000, p.49.

³ Paul « .. » in Revue d'éthique et théologie morale 2 1995.

⁴ Benno Van Den Toren « La contextualisation de l'Évangile et de la doctrine chrétienne » in Hokma 98/2010.

⁵ Mpongo, Inculturation-Contextualisation face à la théologie classique, Op. Cit. p.49.

Parlant de l'importance de la contextualisation dans la théologie, Benno Van Den Toren cite David F. Wells en ces termes :

C'est donc la tâche de la théologie de découvrir ce que Dieu a dit dans et à travers l'Écriture et de le revêtir d'une conceptualité qui appartient à notre ère propre. L'Écriture comme son terminus a quo doit être dé-contextualisé pour pouvoir comprendre son contenu transculturel, et doit être re-contextualisée afin que son contenu puisse concorder avec les suppositions et les structures sociales de notre temps.¹

Si les cultures constituent les manières dont différents peuples pensent et ressentent les choses. En cela, quelle culture devrions-nous adopter pour devenir chrétien ? Même si dans cet article VAN DEN TOREN cite WELLS dans le cadre théologique simplement sans parler dialogue apologétique, mais nous pouvons appliquer ce concept dans le cadre de dialogue entre adhérent du christianisme et l'africain qui vit dans son milieu, sous l'influence de sa culture.

Nous disons comme Benno Van Den Toren, "pour que l'Évangile soit vraiment une Bonne Nouvelle, toute la théologie doit être contextualisée et, tout particulièrement, le centre de son message. Des confessions centrales telles que "Jésus est Seigneur et Sauveur" doivent s'appliquer à chaque contexte culturel."²

Dans ce sens, l'évangélisation qui est une manière de présenter Christ doit être contextuel. C'est-à-dire tenir du contexte de son interlocuteur.

Speaking of the importance of contextualization in theology, Benno Van Den Toren quotes David F. Wells as follows:

It is the task of theology, then, to discover what God has said in and through Scripture and to clothe that in a conceptuality which is native to our own age. Scripture, at its terminus a quo, needs to be de-contextualized in order to grasp its transcultural content, and it needs to be re-contextualized in order that its content may be meshed with the cognitive assumptions and social patterns of our own time. (as cited in Van Den Toren, 2010, 64-65)

If cultures are the ways in which different peoples think and feel things, what culture should we adopt to become a Christian? Although in this article Van Den Toren quotes Wells within the theological framework without reference to apologetic dialogue, we can apply this concept in the framework of dialogue between adherents of Christianity and the African who lives in his environment, under the influence of his culture.

Like Benno Van Den Toren we say "For the gospel to be truly good news, all theology must be contextualized and, in particular, the center of its message. Central doctrines such as "Jesus is Lord and Savior" must apply to every cultural context." (Van Den Toren, op. cit., 62)

In this sense, evangelism, which is a way of presenting Christ, must be contextual. That is to say, presented within the context of his audience.

This is why in the approach of cultural beliefs, and especially in the case of the dialogue

¹ David F. Wells cite par Benno VAN DEN TOREN «La contextualisation de l'Évangile et de la doctrine chrétienne » in Hokma Op. Cit, pp. 64-65.

² Benno Van Den Toren «La contextualisation de l'Évangile et de la doctrine chrétienne » in Hokma Op. Cit., in Hokma 98/2010, p.62.

C'est pourquoi dans l'approche des croyances culturelles, et surtout dans le cas du dialogue entre la Religion Traditionnelle Africaine et le christianisme les cinq pistes suivantes révèlent une grande importance:¹

- 1) La relation entre création rédemption : montrer à l'interlocuteur que Jésus comme parole de Dieu, il nous vient de Dieu, il a été présent dans l'œuvre de la création (Jn. 1 : 1-3), le monde ne lui est pas étranger (Jn. 1 :11) le monde lui appartient. Il doit sauver les hommes qu'il a créés puisqu'il les connaît;
- 2) La plus grande perte de l'homme sera son rejet de ce rédempteur;²
- 3) L'identité chrétienne et l'intégrité de la conversion : l'Évangile doit nous parler en tenant compte des réalités de l'homme, c'est une question de l'identité de l'interlocuteur. Il est une personne qui ne sort pas du néant. Son intégrité et son identité restent valables même après la conversion;
- 4) La Seigneurie du Christ ; Même si le converti confesse Christ comme son sauveur (Mat. 28 : 18 ; Rm. 10 :9). Il doit aussi vivre sous la Seigneurie du Christ. Il doit voir et comprendre quel est le vrai Dieu parmi toutes les autres divinités;
- 5) L'exemple normatif de l'incarnation : même si dans la religion il y a plusieurs évidences de la présence de Dieu ou de la connaissance de Dieu. Mais dans le processus de la contextualisation, le missionnaire chrétien doit persuader son interlocuteur que la possibilité la plus

between African Traditional Religion and Christianity the five following tracks reveal a great importance:

1. The relation between creation and redemption: To show to the audience Jesus as the Word of God, He comes to us from God, He was present in the work of creation (John 1: 1-3), the world is no stranger to Him (John 1:11) the world belongs to him. He must save the people he created because He knows them;
2. The greatest loss of man will be his rejection of this redeemer:
3. Christian identity and the integrity of conversion: The Gospel must speak to us in the light of the realities of man. It is a question of the identity of the audience. They are people who do not come out of nothingness. Their integrity and identity remain valid even after conversion;
4. The Lordship of Christ; even if the convert confesses Christ as his Savior (Matt 28:18, Rom 10: 9), he must also live under the lordship of Christ. He must see and understand who the true God is among all other deities;
5. The normative example of the incarnation: Even if in religion there are several evidences of the presence of God or the knowledge of God. But in the process of contextualization, the Christian missionary must persuade his hearers that the most normative possibility of knowing God remains his incarnation in Christ.

¹ Ibid.

² P. O Bernard Entretiens sur l'essence du christianisme DESCLEE, Paris, 1937, p.183 Cet auteur dit : « Si nous avons compris la force de cette résurrection, toute notre destinée est suspendue à celle de Jésus. Chacun de nous peut dire à son tour : » et fait référence à l'épître de Paul aux Galates et aux Philippiens : «Ma vie dans mortelle, c'est une vie dans la foi au Christ immortel. Je vis, non, ce n'est plus moi qui vis, c'est lui qui vit en moi. Vivre pour moi c'est le Christ et mourir m'est un gain, puisque c'est encore davantage recouvrer le Christ. »

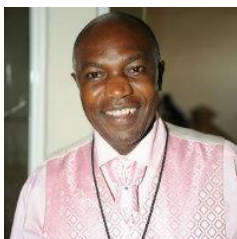
normative de la connaissance de Dieu reste son incarnation en Christ.

Conclusion

En conclusion nous confirmons que La contextualisation est un processus qui diminue la distance historique du fait biblique qui permet de bien évaluer la culture du point de vu Biblique.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, we confirm that contextualization is a process that diminishes the historical distance of the Biblical fact that makes it possible to evaluate culture from Biblical point of view.

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COMMUNICATING THE DOCTRINE OF HOLINESS IN AFRICA

Over two thousand, five hundred years ago, the Most High God and Creator of the universe dethroned King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and reduced him to the status of an animal (Daniel 4:25). God's purpose was so that the King might acknowledge "that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men" (Daniel 4:25-37). King Nebuchadnezzar made this acknowledgement - "At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever" (Daniel 4:34 NIV). Earlier, Daniel advised the king to renounce his sins and his wickedness by doing the right thing and showing kindness to the oppressed (Daniel 4:27).

Renouncing sins and wickedness are tantamount to biblical holiness/entire sanctification. God's key command to the congregation of Israel was that they walk with Him, worship Him and work for Him in holiness, because He was holy (Leviticus 11:44; 19:2). Job was not a Hebrew/Israelite. Yet, the Scripture describes him as a man who "was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). Blamelessness, uprightness and turning away from evil are also tantamount to holiness. Underpinning Job's holiness was his fear for God. I think that fearing God is a catalyst for shunning evils of various kinds, including African Traditional Religious (ATR) practices that are non-scriptural—consultation of ancestral spirits, consultation of oracular deities, divination, visiting ancestral shrines, using of demonic powers in ministry, wearing of protective amulets, etc.

In Leviticus (19:2; cf. 11:44) God commanded Israel to "Be holy because I,

the LORD your God, am holy". Leviticus 19:3-18 appears to list contents of this godly holiness:

- Respecting mother and father (v. 3)
- Refraining from idol worship (v. 4)
- Reaching out to help the needy (vv. 9, 10)
- Refraining from stealing (v. 11)
- Refraining from lying (v. 11)
- Refraining from deceit (v. 11)
- Refraining from swearing falsely (v. 12)
- Restraining from defrauding a neighbor (v. 13)
- Remunerate hired workers in time (v. 13)
- Refrain from cursing the blind (v. 14)
- Refrain from putting a stumbling block in front of the blind (v. 14)
- Refrain from perverting justice (v. 15)
- Refrain from showing partiality to the poor (v. 15)
- Refraining from showing favoritism to the great (v. 15)
- Refraining from slandering others (v. 16)
- Refraining from hatred (v. 17)
- Refraining from taking vengeance (v. 18)

A reading of this list shows that the holiness that Leviticus 19 speaks of is achievable. Additionally, it is universal. In other words, these requirements are also applicable to contemporary African Christians, particularly Christians of the "Holiness Tradition". God's mandate for holiness and the actualization for it cannot be updated or upgraded as we do with commodities. Thus, Peter (1 Peter 1:16) required the holiness of Leviticus 19:2 from his audience several

centuries later. It is required for 21st century Wesleyan Christians also.

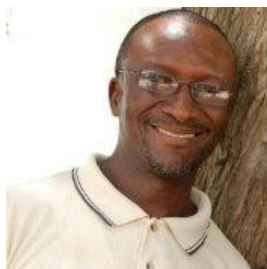
Holiness is not only required to walk with God, worship God and work for God. It is also required to see God's face some day (1 John 3:2, 3). In this passage John states, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (NIV). The phrase, "this hope", grammatically refers to seeing God as He is. Similarly, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews (12:14) told his audience that "without holiness no one will see the Lord". The words of the authors of Hebrews and the First Epistle of John cut across every nation, tribe, race, gender and socio-political status.

The primary meaning of holiness is separation from everything that God hates or that He does not approve. This separation is rightly called sanctification/entire sanctification in The Wesleyan Church. Our *Discipline* (§ 236) defines entire sanctification as "that work of the Holy Spirit by which the child of God is separated from sin unto God and is enabled to love God with all his heart and to walk in all His holy commandments blameless". In this sense, we might accept that Job was entirely sanctified (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). His life of entire sanctification was identifiable to the extent that God and Satan acknowledged it (Job 1:8-11; 2:3-5). Job's fear for God and love for Him caused him to praise God,

worship God and keep his life of integrity even during his time of loss and excruciating pains (Job 1:13-2:10).

The scriptural teaching on entire sanctification vis-à-vis fearing God and loving Him with all our hearts, souls and minds are still relevant for the Church of Jesus Christ in Africa today. For example, understanding this doctrine will help African Christians to renounce the African Traditional Religious (ATR) practices, which are named above. Whereas there are pieces of evidence to show that pastors, bishops and general overseers across Africa adhere to these practices, Wesleyan pastors, leaders and members have renounced them because of entire sanctification. They have also been enabled to relinquish personal, lofty goals and commit to the Gospel wholeheartedly. Some of them are serving as spiritual leaders, pastors, leaders of auxiliaries and strong lay members in our Church in Africa.

I think that the Wesleyan Theology is true to the Scriptures and should be retained. What we should do is encourage our pastors to preach expository, biblical sermons, so that our congregations might be grounded in the Scriptures. Secondly, we should encourage our pastors to introduce the Inductive Bible Study Method in our Sunday schools, so that our people might learn the art of correctly reading, understanding, interpreting and applying the Scriptures to themselves. This will help them "stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:11).



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MARKS OF CHURCH MATURITY

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written and said about the importance of the five-fold ministries in the church – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph.4:11). What often gets lost in these discussions is the purpose for those ministries – “so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph.4:12b-13) God’s purpose for calling people to and gifting them for ministry is that his body, the church, might become mature or fully developed.

Discussions on spiritual maturity tend to focus on the maturity of individual members, and while that is critical, in addressing the Ephesians Paul is talking about the maturity of the body as a whole. Actually, individual and corporate maturity go hand in hand. A church composed of spiritually immature members will not be mature collectively.

Those of us involved in positions of leadership need to understand what a mature church looks like because it is the goal toward which we are working. We should be striving to see the following five characteristics of church maturity being developed within the churches that we lead.

1) Evangelistic Focus

The church exists to bring lost people into a relationship with Christ. A mature church never loses this focus and is always seeking for ways to connect with people who are not yet Christ followers in order to bring them into a relationship with Him. In a mature church evangelism is recognized to be the responsibility of all believers and not just

those with the gift of evangelism or those given evangelism as a ministry assignment. A mature church will regularly equip its members to share their faith with their friends and neighbors so “they are prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks them to give the reason for the hope that they have.” (I Pet.3:15) A mature church regularly schedules intentional outreach activities designed to bring the gospel to those who do not yet believe.

2) Deliberate Discipleship

In a mature church, individual believers are consciously encouraged to grow “to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”. (Eph.4:13) Discipleship is not left to chance, but is intentionally planned and organized. New believers are directed into an ongoing program for getting them established in the faith. Discipleship programs are provided for life-long development – from youth to old age. Discipleship programs focus on both spiritual development into the likeness of Christ in addition to equipping for ministry in line with each person’s giftedness.

3) Leadership Development

A mature church is involved in a continuous process of identifying and equipping those God has called and gifted to lead His church. People are given the opportunity to develop and exercise leadership gifts. Those with giftedness to serve beyond their own local church are encouraged and supported in being equipped through Bible College training and other training opportunities. A mature church has a pool of capable leaders it can call upon to exercise whatever leadership functions are needed and regularly releases such leaders to serve beyond their own local church.

4) Self-Sustainable

A mature church is able to function without dependence on outside sources of support while at the same time remaining dependent on God and interdependent with others. That is, the church is structured in such a manner that it does not require outside resources to function but sustain itself and its ministries through the resources God provides through its members. This enables the church to partner with other churches and organizations to engage in ministries that neither could accomplish on their own. Biblical stewardship is taught and practiced on a consistent basis.

5) Missionary Vision

A mature church actively responds to the Great Commission (Matt.28:19-20) to reach those “beyond”. Rather than inward looking

concerned about its own affairs, such churches are motivated and mobilized to reach those outside the doors of their church both near and far (Acts 1:8). This missionary vision is reflected in giving toward missionary activity, praying for the mission work supported by the church, as well as involvement in sending members to be part of actual missions endeavors. Such churches do not see themselves as part of the “mission field” but rather as part of the “missions task force”.

These are the characteristics that should be evident in a mature church. Do they describe our church? [In the next issue of the *African Leadership Letter* we will explore a way to use these five characteristics as a framework for evaluating the development of the church and identifying action steps.]



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