

RUNNING HEAD: DO VALUES COUNT?

Redemption as Life-Giving Cultural Change

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Introduction

Values count. There is absolutely nothing we can do in this world that is value-free. Values permeate everything from our educational system, to our agricultural systems, from the way we raise our children to what we eat for dinner. We often do not see them. We usually misunderstand them but we must face them if we are to be agents of positive change on our planet earth.

I completely agree with Bradshaw when he states that, "Development has always been based on the value premises of some culture (p. 142)." His shocking story of AIDS in the Rakai district of Uganda is a powerful portrayal of how change and values cannot be separated. The belief that educational services, such as providing information on the spread of AIDS, can be value-free and neutral is very ethnocentric in that it is based upon a Western value that says scientific information and knowledge is all that is needed to affect change.

In the following discussion I will highlight some of the ideas of cultural relativism that I believe we must preserve. I add to Bradshaw's ideas by highlighting the fact that cultures that hold significant power have a moral responsibility to tread lightly around other, more vulnerable cultures. I then seek to redeem Bradshaw's ideas about redemption even after I highlight a potentially fatal flaw in his argument. To finish I look at how sustainable cultural change happens best from inside a culture and should not be imposed from the outside. In this case, what is the role of the outside change agent?

Cultural Relativity

I would have to say that I hold many of the ideas found in cultural relativity. I value cultures and I believe they are a part of God's creation. But like most of creation; cultures have

been corrupted. I believe that every culture has many wonderful and positive elements that need to be protected but that they also have elements that must be changed, redeemed.

The first step in treading lightly and respecting other cultures is understanding our own. “We must define the sources of our ethics (p. 145).”

I disagree with Bradshaw when he states that cultural relativism is obsolete. I believe that cultural relativism in its most extreme form is obsolete but many of its tenets still hold true and must still be respected. I agree with his statement that cultural boundaries are permeable and that cultures never have been, and never should be, static. But this does not mean that we have the right to effect whatever change we want. We must still respect and honor the culture and values of others.

The need to respect other cultures is stronger for the north than for the south. We as members of the most influential and powerful cultures on earth must tread very lightly when dealing with other cultures. We have influence and power over other cultures that they in turn do not have over us. For example, if Peru’s President Allen Garcia went to Washington and proclaimed that all Americans must stop eating hamburgers, nothing would happen. Nobody would take him seriously. If President Bush came to Lima and proclaimed that all Peruvians must stop eating guinea pigs, there would be massive riots, American businesses would be destroyed and Americans (and Canadians) in Peru would be in extreme danger.

This same principle is applicable to the Peruvian national culture which imposes itself on the indigenous peoples. The same principle must be applied by the powerful northern culture in Sudan over its southern inhabitants. Around the world and throughout history powerful cultures have imposed their values on others. We in the north cannot avoid our values getting wrapped up

in the way we aid and empower the south and the east but we can minimize the negative effects that our actions have. As Bradshaw notes, we must become managers of cultural change.

Redemption

Bradshaw seems to argue that as managers of cultural change we must seek to preserve the underlying values and simply change, redeem, the behaviour or custom. When referring to the case study on AIDS he states, “The community identified hospitality and gender relationships as the central values that perpetuate the practice (p. 157).” He goes on to talk about the need to address these two values. He seems to suggest that we simply need to replace the practice with another practice that still addresses these values.

But I see a major flaw in his argument. Gender relationships are not a cultural value. It is simply a cultural category in which we place many values. The cultural value is that women are objects to be used by men. The cultural value says women are nothing. You cannot simply change the practice, you must, in this case, change the underlying value along with the practice. In the case of hospitality this is a value that can be redeemed. It would be possible to introduce a new practice that would preserve this value.

Bradshaw goes on to talk about Appreciative Inquiry and states that by using appreciative inquiry we can come to understand the values underlying customs and behaviours. Once we understand these values they can be preserved when the behaviours and customs change.

Unfortunately Bradshaw based much of his argument about redemption, and appreciative inquiry, on this case study from Uganda. It is clear to me that he made a mistake when he tried to state that the underlying values needed to be preserved. The cultural value towards women must change, not just the outside behaviour, if the gender relationships in this culture are to be redeemed.

I really appreciated Bradshaw's ideas on redemption and appreciative inquiry and if he could address this error his argument could be redeemed.

Change from Within

As outside change agents, we as expatriate workers need to tread very lightly when we introduce change. As much as possible we must not introduce change in a vacuum or on our own.

The most effective change comes from within because those within are better positioned to question current values and introduce new values. For this reason an outside change agent must seek to become an insider. Yet in most cultures an outsider will have a difficult time becoming a true insider. For this reason the outside change agent must work closely with insiders who understand the issue of values and are better positioned to introduce change.

I do not believe that this argument diminishes the importance of an outside change agent. What it does do is diminish the importance of outside change agents that try to impose change from the outside, have not acquired an insider perspective and do not work within culturally appropriate systems.

An example of change from within

A change that is happening among the Quechua people where I work has to do with the cultural value of egalitarianism and community. The Quechua people hold to the value that no one person should get ahead of others. This is basic egalitarianism. Closely related to this is the value that they place on the community over the individual. For centuries the Quechuas have held annual fiestas (parties) to honor their local patron saint. These fiestas often last for up to a week and are very expensive by local standards. Each year one, or several people who have begun to accumulate money, are given the 'carga' (the burden) of sponsoring and paying for the

fiesta. In this way the community is united in a large festival and anyone who is gaining wealth is brought back down to the level of everyone else. The largest expense in one of these festivals is the alcohol.

In the past two decades the evangelical church has been growing among the Quechua people. As these new Christians have begun to mature they have turned away from these fiestas considering them to be sinful and idolatrous. Many have faced fierce backlashes from their community because they refuse to participate in the fiestas. But they still hold to the underlying value of community. In response to this value churches have developed their own tradition of annual church conventions where they experience community in a new way. Through the growth of these church conventions the value of community is being redeemed. In terms of the value of egalitarianism I am not sure how this plays out. I do not know of a specific leveling mechanism that has replaced the 'cargos' but this is not to say that it does not exist. Recently a Peruvian did a thesis on this topic and he argued that those communities that have become heavily evangelical are experiencing greater economic growth than those communities that are heavily involved in the traditional annual fiestas. I believe that the author argues that the leveling mechanism of cargos has not been replaced directly but that leveling naturally happens as one person gains wealth and spends it in his/her community which in turn supports further economic growth.

This change came from within in that no outsider introduced the change. But one could argue that the Holy Spirit was in fact the outside change agent. I believe this is a very significant point and in my own ministry I often do not enter into certain issues because I trust that the Holy Spirit will do a better job of bringing about the change, from the inside out. There are many elements of change that I do deal with but many of the grey areas that are intimately knit into the fabric of the local culture are better left to the Holy Spirit. For this reason I am spending my life

on ensuring that people like the Quechuas, have the Bible in their own language, can read it and understand it and can actually acquire a copy for themselves. In this way God will work through the local church to introduce change. I recognize that the act of introducing the scriptures is full of my own values. I will not deny the influence of my own culture on my actions. But I believe that the most profound change, that is sensitive to the local culture, can only come from the inside out. The most effective tool for this is the scriptures in the vernacular. It changes people from the inside out.

An example of the change process gone wrong comes from the South Pacific. Around the turn of the century many Western missionaries went to various South Pacific islands. On many of these islands polygamy was common. These western missionaries saw the act of polygamy through their western values and promptly began condemning its practice. As a result many men abandoned polygamy and abandoned all but one of their wives. As a result many women and children were left fatherless and destitute. Many of these women could not survive on their own and so they began to resort to prostitution to survive. This change was riddled with western values, did not respect the local culture and as a result it left the local culture in a worse position than in the beginning.

Conclusion

God wants to redeem people, cultures and all that encompasses them. In most cases this means that customs will change in such a way that the good underlying values are preserved. But redemption also means a fundamental change in many values that a culture holds to and not just an external change in behaviours and customs.