WWC Publications, 1996 — Gospels and cultures pamphlets 7-12:
* Israel Selvanayagam — Tamilnadu, (Gospel and Cultures Pamphlet 7), 54 pages. Price: US $ 5.50
* Ambrose Moyo — Zimbabwe, (Gospel and Cultures Pamphlet 8), 49 pages. Price: US $ 5.50
* John Pobee — West Africa, (Gospel and Cultures Pamphlet 9), 52 pages. Price US $ 5.50
* Lewin L Williams — The Caribbean, (Gospel and Cultures Pamphlet 10), Price US $ 3.95
* Donald E Meek — The Scottish Highlands, (Gospel and Cultures Pamphlet 11), 69 pages. Price: US $ 3.50
* Allan K Davidson — Aotearoa New Zealand, (Gospel and Cultures Pamphlet 12), 63 pages. Price: US $ 5.50

Geneva: WCC Publishers

Reviewer: Gafie van Wyk

In these six pamphlets, from the series ‘Gospel and cultures’, authors from a diversity of cultural contexts describe and reflect on what it has meant for the gospel to be proclaimed and lived out within the setting of different cultures, thus pointing to both the richness and challenges of these encounters. The cultures discussed in the six pamphlets on hand are those of the South Indian state of Tamilnadu, Zimbabwe, West Africa, The Caribbean, the Scottish Highlands and New Zealand. Other titles in the series include The First Nations of Canada, Romania, Wales, Panjab and Secularized Europe. The first volume in the series is a pamphlet entitled An Ongoing Discussion in the Ecumenical Movement.

The question ‘How is the one gospel related to the many cultures of the world?’ is the focus of all these pamphlets published by the World Council of Churches. While the cultural roots of many societies are rich and varied, they share the reality of having had not only the gospel, but with it also European culture imposed on them. The processes of the indigenisation of the gospel in different societies lead to tensions because of the radical and sometimes destructive forms of the disengagement of society from earlier cultural patterns. In many cases the tensions remain because of the continuing appeal of pre-colonial religious patterns. On the one hand the focus of these six pamphlets is on these tensions. On the other hand the studies also confront the reader with the realities of secularism in the different communities and seek new ways to proclaim the gospel in the realities of the present.

Culture is not static. It is always changing. The church always faces the growth, decline and rejection of cultures in the changing world of today. How is it possible to proclaim the gospel in an ever-changing world so that it expresses itself in an authentically indigenous way and yet be biblical, apostolic and catholic? In this regard the pamphlets call for dialogical openness not only between the church and societies but also between the past, present and future.

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Each pamphlet has a different point of departure depending on the subject it covers, but all the authors plead for dialogical openness. Each of the pamphlets contains a rich source of information on a specific culture. I can recommend the pamphlets to anyone who is interested in the gospel-culture dialogue. Because of the different backgrounds of the authors of the pamphlets, they make for very interesting reading. Although some of the contributions presume some theological and ecumenical background, the pamphlets are nevertheless also accessible to a wider audience.


Bria, I, 1995 — Romania: Orthodox Identity at a Crossroads of Europe


Reviewer: Rev P C Swanepoel

The focus of the World Council of Churches’ 1996 world conference on mission and evangelism was the question: ‘How is the one gospel related to the many cultures of the world?’ These two pamphlets deals with that question, each from its own perspective.

Pamphlet 2 deals with the question from the perspective of the so-called ‘First Nations’ of Canada, the aboriginal communities. The authors of this pamphlet, McKay and Silman, are both members of the aboriginal communities and ministers of the United Church of Canada.

Their approach in dealing with the above question is an interesting one. They tell the story of the mission to the aboriginals in Canada in the form of a conversation between them. By doing this they are being faithful to the oral tradition of their people.

The story (of the history of mission in Canada) is a sad reflection on the mistakes made by the Christian Church in its missionary endeavour. One of the mistakes that comes to the fore in the pamphlet is that ‘Christianity’ and ‘civilization’ were considered to be inseperable. ‘The predominant ideology and theology seemed to be a complete fusion of Christianity with the Anglo-European way of life’. (16)

The authors recall the historical effort to take away the language, tradition and culture of the aboriginals in the effort to christianize them. But they also tell the story of the re-emerging of language, tradition and culture of the aboriginal people and of the very conscious effort to integrate their culture with the story of the gospel. They tell of the ‘newness that Christianity brings’ (48) to their traditional ways, and that newness is Jesus Christ! But then this is a Jesus who is not distorted by a ‘Western civilized’ image, but a Jesus as the Bible reveals him and interpreted by the aboriginal culture for the aboriginal people.