

Culture is about Spiritual Life

I often heard people saying 'what a wonderful cultural night', 'we are spoiled with multicultural feast', 'multicultural singing and dancing', 'my congregation is a multi cultural church' and so on.

Culture for most of people is about action, exotic color and little bit words that are not English.

No wonder when we say we are a multi cultural church, what in our mind is a congregation with many languages, with different ways of talking and behaving.

The whole quest is about what we do in order to be part of a multi cultural church.

I believe that culture by definition is not about what we do or how we do things. Culture is basically a reflection of our spiritual life. Culture is the ways we express our spiritual life. Culture is a concrete experience of our spiritual life. Culture is a form of spiritual life. Culture is basically about spiritual life.

I would like to take you to re-imagine the journey of understanding culture in some stories in the Bible as our basis of re-imagine together church in 2020.

The Journey begins from the book of Acts chapter ten.

The beginning of the church at Pentecost was a fellowship primarily for the Jews. The Jerusalem church was mono cultural church. But something amazing happened at this chapter. When Peter was praying at noon and he was also very hungry – while he was waiting for eating, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened. There were unclean animals came down and the voice asked him to kill and eat. But Peter as a good and faithful Jew, could not do it because these animals were unclean. The voice spoke three times saying that don't consider anything unclean that God has declared clean. Then the animals were taken back up into heaven. Peter was wondering about the meaning of this vision. Peter finally understood the meaning of this vision when he met with the Roman man Cornelius. Cornelius was a stranger; he was the 'otherness' side of Peter's cultural identity. The vision helps Peter to realize that God treats everyone (every culture, every nation, every tribe) on the same basis. Because those who worship God and do what is right are acceptable to God, no matter what race (culture or language) they belong.

This is the journey from Jerusalem Church (church for the Jews) to church for all nations. It is a journey from mono cultural church into a multi cultural church.

The form or expression of multi cultural church can be a church with many languages, traditions and ethnicities. But a community with many languages, traditions or ethnicities not automatically is a true reflection of multi cultural church.

The journey started with prayer and ended with praising God for the inclusion of all people. The journey from mono cultural into a multi cultural church is a result

of spiritual growth. Peter has grown in his spiritual life. He extended his margin grace to include those who didn't part of his church before.

The Second Story is from the book of Daniel, particularly in chapter one.

They were four young educated men from the kingdom of Judah taken away to Babylon. They were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. In the new country, they had to learn new language, new tradition, and new way of doing things and even given new names by the authority (Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego). They were in somehow immersed into a new society. But they would not defile themselves with the royal food and wine. These four young people trusted God and believe that God would protect them. Their action was a reflection of what they belief.

This story is a reflection of a journey from mono culture community (the kingdom of Judah) into a multi faith society of Babylon. They were immersed into the 'do' things in a new country but there was also very clear-cut when it came to their core belief. They were happily learned new language and literature but when it came to the essential part of their spiritual life, they would not do it. They were basically communicated their belief in a multi faith society.

So far we have three different form of community: mono culture community, multi culture community and multi faith community.

Culture is about spiritual life. It is not about what we do but what we belief. When we live in a multi cultural and a multi faith society what we need is our willingness and our courage to enter into a relationship with others. The next two forms of community are inter cultural community and inter faith community. Inter cultural community is a dynamic engagement / relationship within a multi cultural community. While inter faith community is a dynamic respectful relationship within a multi faith community.

Journey in 2020 (before and after)

The church always lives and witnesses in a multi cultural and a multi faith society.

For those who want to become a multi cultural church and an inter cultural church, the foundation is not about what we do (in language or dancing or singing or eating) but the primary understanding is about our spiritual life / grow. It is about prayer, witness, worship and commitment to God in Jesus Christ.

A congregation needs to grow spiritually to become a multi cultural church. It takes more than programs to become inter cultural community. It takes time to grow and mature in our spiritual life. We of course can help to create a healthy environment for a congregation to grow from mono cultural to a multi cultural then into inter cultural community.

A multi cultural church is where every person has the same value and opportunity to participate, lead and teach regardless their language, tradition or ethnicity.

