

Response

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We are indebted to the planners of this conference for including this vital aspect of “Social Holiness” in the programme. A theology of culture is often neglected. John Stott observes that, “...only, I suspect, as a result of the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974, has the evangelical constituency as a whole come to acknowledge the central importance of culture for effective communication of the Gospel.”¹

To Rev Langa we are grateful for being very specific in addressing a pervasive aspect of African culture, that is the traditional religious belief surrounding the ancestors, demons, and spirits. These animistic beliefs are then set against the claims of Christ and holiness. She then *prescribes* some changes that might be used within this context using a holiness lifestyle as correctives to the problem.

I would like to make several observations or disclaimers as I begin to respond. First, I am from a culture which has, in the past, relegated the animistic worldview to the level of superstition. My culture has a separation or dichotomy between the supernatural and the natural. I have had to learn in the classroom and by living in and observing animistic cultures how this impacts the life of the Church in Africa. Secondly, some of my observations may be more related to language expression than theological correctness. I admire a person who is expressing their thoughts in their third language of acquisition. Were the same thoughts given in the “mother tongue” perhaps some of my comments would be different or not applicable.

Summary and Agreement

Holiness is presented as the result of the experience of grace of entire sanctification. This comes as Christians give themselves fully to God. The subsequent lifestyle should conform more and more to the image of Christ and as a result, show new and observable qualities that reflect a Romans 12:2 non-conformity to the world’s cultural mold. It is, therefore, a religious prescriptive approach to culture.² This is a healthy approach with

only agreement coming from this respondent.

Culture Defined and Worldviews Noted

Culture is not defined by Rev Langa but rather some aspects are described. It will help if a definition is supplied here to get a better understanding of the dynamics between culture and the “mind of Christ” which is to be expressed in a holiness lifestyle. Missiologist Louis Luzbetak defines culture as “... a way of life; culture is the total plan for living; it is functionally organized into a system; it is acquired through learning; it is a way of life of a social group, not of an individual as such”.³

The worldview is the most important difference (often unseen) between cultures. How the people of a culture see the world determines how they set customs, values and beliefs, and these result in prescribed patterns of coping with nature or the total plan for living. Although there are thousands of cultures, each will take one of four major worldviews around which the characteristics of their culture are ordered. These are listed by Van Rheezen as: Secular worldview, Animistic worldview, Pantheistic worldview, and Theistic worldview.⁴

Rev Langa describes some of the animistic worldview’s belief systems which are based on manipulation of spiritual powers through the use of Shamans or witchdoctors with specific rituals designed to cause the ancestors (demons in reality; see Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalms 106:37-38; I Corinthians 10:19-20), spirits or ghosts to do their bidding.

Conflicts are Inevitable and Syncretism Results When Conflict is Resolved by Accommodation

Thus, we have the answer to the first question. “How can Nazarenes be dedicated to God without getting into conflict with their culture?” They cannot. Conflict is inevitable. However, what is described (“...their culture seems to push them into consecrating only their hearts, pressuring them to preserve the practices or the traditions, heritage and history of their people.”) is not a double minded man or a half dedicated Nazarene. Rather what is described is syncretism, mixing the Bible with dominant beliefs of the culture to accommodate the culture’s prescription rather than God’s. The Lord has provided a way or manner to view the world and it is against the very practices described (Isaiah 8:17-20). Again, a few paragraphs

later, after quoting Luke 16:13 about the impossibility of serving two masters, Rev Langa seems to be saying that a Christian can actually remain a Christian and serve two masters. Perhaps this is one of those areas where the language translation filter is not allowing the actual thought to come through?

Twice more the concept of syncretism is raised: page 2, paragraphs 2 and 3. “Many Nazarenes have made the holiness message irrelevant... [by getting] involved in pagan rites and ceremonies...” (parenthesis mine). Similar to the above are the “...practice of masses that are held in memory of the dead... herbs, charms; self mutilation...” Again, such practices are set as conflicting with the holiness lifestyle. The final (dualistic) syncretistic sounding phrase is on page 3, paragraph 3. It is the first of a series of questions set forth for our consideration. “How can a person be used by God and Satan at the same time?” The answer is they cannot; however, it is left unsaid as are several other questions. Perhaps they are best thought of as rhetorical, although the preceding examples make this option seem unlikely.

The theological difficulty is that these are practices that must be given up by all those who wish to call themselves Christians. These practices of the dominant culture are not negotiable. They are not even to be tolerated on a temporary basis. These cultural practices which Rev Langa sets forth as barriers to a holy life are in fact barriers to being saved. Acts 26:18 gives the basis for our thought here: “to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God, and receive and share in the inheritance of the sanctified”. Each of these phases is not just a few degrees from where the person was without Christ; each represents a total paradigm shift.⁵

I supply a supposition at this juncture. And it is not with tongue-in-cheek: “Nazarene” as used in Rev Langa’s examples of participation in demoniac activities does not mean “Christian”. There is a high percentage of church members who continue to practice traditional customs and rituals. This causes an embarrassment for Christ and the Church.

A Caution: Different Paradigms Cannot be Made the Same

Rev Langa writes: “God wants to possess us in the same way that demons

will possess a person, but He does not want to do this by force” (page 1 paragraph 4). I am not being over-reactive at this point. While I think I understand the implied connotation, I believe we should stay away from this sort of analogy; it can only lead to confusion and similitude of other Christian activities causing them to look much like the animistic activities.⁶

The cleansing and in-filling with the Holy Spirit and the walking in the Spirit is not just a different “power” causing the difference in the life of the Christian. If God’s thoughts and ways are higher than ours and past our finding out, if only the Spirit of God searches the things of God, then we need to stay with biblical material revealed by the Spirit on how God reigns as Lord of our lives. How can we - why should we compare - the activity and work of God with the activity and work of the devil or demons?

The Prescriptive Aspects of the Paper

I do question that God protects his church from attack, at least as formulated. I quote: “...they will not be attacked by the enemy. The Nazarene can relax and be sure that there is Someone on his or her side ... Who will fight for him/her and bring the victory” (page 3 paragraph 1). Paul in Ephesians 6:10 - 20 tells us that we are in a battle, that we need offensive and defensive weapons to withstand the attack of principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. He tells us that we are with Christ and that we are thus above principalities and powers (Ephesians 1:20; 2:6).⁷ Because of this (above principalities and powers and being with Christ) we do not have to resort to animistic practices of manipulation of spirits and principalities. Being with Christ we have direct access to the Father and have the means to fight and win against these evil foes with spiritual warfare equipment God provides. All of this is possible because of the mighty victory of God in Christ on the cross; conquering sin, death, grave, and hell, and making the vanquished foes march in His victory parade (cf. Colossians 2:15). Christus Victor means the mission of Christ so defeated the devil and his evil forces that in Christ we can be free from the power and principle of sin, live a life that is pleasing and acceptable, entirely sanctified and truly Christian.⁸

In other words, I cannot be attacked in the same manner as a non-Christian which may lead to demonization and control or possession. Greater is He

that is in me than any of the foes He defeated. I believe Rev Langa would agree with me.

Concluding Remarks

This is a tough-love call for us to do more than we have done, not just expose the darkness and evils of African culture, but to set forth Bible based prescriptions that can meet and take the place of the traditional practices, to give Christian Nazarenes light that will be an aid in their holiness lifestyle. The Bible based prescriptions would then be dynamic equivalents to provide a way of ministering in areas that have been dominated by the devil. It is both a warning and a prophetic call to the church that our doctrine of holiness indeed be a social holiness.

Thank you Rev Langa for this call to action. I would like to see this expanded to a proper length and thus have room to develop your ideas and answer more of your questions and suggest further equivalents or substitutes for animistic practices.

Sources Used

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