

BIBLICAL CONCEPTS THROUGH THE LENS OF A CONTEMPORARY ETHNIC CULTURE

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I. Introduction

1. Purpose of the Paper

This paper will try to address the following: distillation of the message of a biblical text to an ethnic culture, minus an intervening culture with its respective ethnocentricities; comparing and contrasting select biblical yet universal concepts that have parallels in a contemporary ethnic culture in order to surface the non-negotiable; listing the challenges for the interpreter when Bible truth is at variance with the beliefs of the recipient culture; identifying the factors that determine what dominates; and finally making some proposals for ethnic interpreters.

2. Operational Definition of Terms

Biblical concepts: For this paper, the concepts to be covered are limited to those of God; worship, particularly sacrifice and offering; and suffering and sickness.

Contemporary ethnic culture: The focus is on the two main tribes of Benguet Province, in the mountainous region of northern Luzon, Philippines, namely the *Ibaloi* and *Kankanai*. Their belief system is rooted in spirit-ancestral worship and overlaid with Roman Catholic sentiments.

Culture: This generally covers the way of life and thinking, normative behavior and actions of individuals, which are all combined to make the person the way he or she is, and this expands to the unit of society, to which the person belongs. For this paper, it will be limited to the culture of the *Ibaloi* or *Kankanai* tribes and in a very limited sense, it refers to non-biblical practices in the culture that have strong associations with ancestral worship.

Lens: This is to be taken figuratively and refers to the grid by which any information is accepted or rejected in the thought processes of an individual.

3. Presuppositions and Limitations

- a. This paper does not promise to give a thorough study on the subject of interpretation but will give attention to what its title suggests while espousing a grammatical-historical-contextual (theological) method of interpretation.
- b. The goal is to "enable interpreters to arrive at the meaning of the text that the biblical or editors intended their readers to understand."¹

¹ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 153.

- c. Getting the message of a biblical text across to a target audience involves a minimum of three cultures: the culture of the original text and its audience; the culture of the interpreter; and the culture of the target audience. When the interpreter himself or herself is from the same ethnic culture as the target audience, there is an easier translation and communication of Bible truths and concepts.
- d. This paper will limit its investigation to select biblical concepts that have parallels (but not necessarily a direct connection) to the *Ibaloi* and *Kankanai* culture.
- e. With a century of missionary enterprise in Benguet Province, the ground has been prepared for ethnic interpreters to rise up and expound the Scriptures for their own people, allowing them to develop methods that are consistent with the Bible and yet not coming across as foreign to their culture.

4. Review of Literature

The primary sources for the data on this paper are the results of the interviews, which this writer conducted from January to September 2009 with the fifteen pastors of Benguet Province. On issues of interpretation and contextualization, she referred to the works of Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard² as well as Kraft³ and Nida.⁴ As for the practices in Benguet Province, the works of Malanes⁵ and Sacla⁶ were consulted.

² Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*.

³ Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Biblical Theologizing in Cross Cultural Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005).

⁴ Eugene Nida, *Customs, Culture, and Christianity* (London: Tyndale, 1954).

⁵ Maurice Malanes, *Power from the Mountains* (Baguio City: TOPLINQ, 2002).

⁶ Wasing D. Sacla, *Treasury of Belief and Home Rituals of Benguet* (Baguio City: BCF Printing Press, 1987).

5. Methodology of Research

Biblical concepts that are universal in nature and which have parallels in the *Ibaloi* and *Kankanai* cultures were chosen as the basis for discussion. The writer formulated a few questions concerning these concepts and prepared questionnaires, which served as the instrument to interview the fifteen pastors from Benguet Province.⁷ Their responses were transcribed, analyzed and now form a major part of this paper.

6. Overview of the Content

This study will be presented as follows:

- I. Introduction
- II. Parallel Concepts: The Bible and a Contemporary Ethnic Culture
- III. The Challenges When Culture is at Variance with Bible Truth
- IV. Factors that Decide What Dominates When Bible Truth Confronts a Contemporary Ethnic Culture
- V. Proposals for Ethnic Interpreters

II. Parallel Concepts: Bible and a Contemporary Ethnic Culture

This section identifies and discusses select universal concepts that are biblical and which have some parallels in the *Ibaloi* and *Kankanai* culture. It then compares and contrasts these concepts and seeks to surface where they converge.

⁷ See attached questionnaires in the appendix.

1. Culture in the Process of Interpretation

A person's perception, understanding, and reception of truth and ideas are often influenced by his or her own culture; but what is culture and what does it do? Nida defines culture as "all learned behavior which is usually acquired, that is, the material and nonmaterial traits which are passed on from one generation to another."⁸ Here is a random definition of culture in one of the faculty discussions on this subject at the International Graduate School of Leadership (IGSL):

It is the operating system of our lives since it defines our identity and values. It determines how we think, respond, interpret, feel, speak, and act. It dictates how we live and gives clues on what to do or not to do or how to do it. It gives a sense of belonging as it bonds people together. It provides continuity and consistency in regard to traditions. It distinguishes one group from another. It gives us our flavor.⁹

From these definitions, it is clear that culture provides identity, a platform, and cohesion among the members. That being the case, the interpreter will need to make some inroads in the culture of his audience before he can bring to them a message, which is doubly insulated by his own culture, that is drawn from an ancient text and culture.

Earlier in the introductory section of this paper, I mentioned that the interpretation of a biblical text involves three cultures: that of the biblical text and original audience; the culture of the interpreter; and the culture of the target audience.¹⁰ If the culture of the target audience

⁸ Nida, *Customs, Culture, and Christianity*, 28.

⁹ This is not IGSL's definition of culture *per se*, but a summary of a discussion on the subject. IGSL, "Minutes of the meeting," (Quezon City, Philippines: June 10, 2009).

¹⁰ Scholars refer to the first culture as the first horizon, the second culture as second horizon, and the third culture as the third horizon. See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Obeying the Word: The Cultural Use of the Bible," in *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, eds. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 179.

is not the same as that of the interpreter, then the target audience will have to wade through three cultures to get through the core message of the biblical text. On the contrary, if the culture of the target audience *is the same* as the culture of the interpreter, then the target audience will only wade through two cultures. This is an advantage in that the reception of the message is hastened. Moreover, the interpreter has some freedom to give due recognition to practices in the cultural context of the Bible that have some parallels in his or her ethnic culture, but which most interpreters outside of the ethnic culture could not easily relate to. When these practices are identified and maximized they help the interpreter connect much better with the target audience.

We will now analyze and distill the message of the selected concepts from the point of view of the Bible; compare and contrast these concepts with what the *Ibalois* and *Kankanais* believe and practice; identify some of the common grounds; then synthesize their implications. It is hoped that through this exercise, we can draw a miniature model, which an interpreter may use to distill and communicate the message of a biblical text to a contemporary ethnic culture, especially one that is similar to his or hers. As we do this, we remember the possible directions, which according to Kaiser, one may take when doing cultural interpretation: (1) retain both the theology taught along with the cultural-historical expression of the principle; (2) retain the theology of a passage but replace the behavioral expression with some more recent, but equally meaningful, expression; or (3) replace both the principle and practice.¹¹ Whatever step the interpreter takes, he or she must stay committed to the message of the text and mindful of its impact on a contemporary audience.

¹¹ Kaiser, "Obeying the Word," 184. See also 134-35.

2. The Concept of God

Joshua 24:14-24¹² concludes Joshua's final words to the new generation of Israel. His instructions included a command to reverentially fear and obey the LORD and then¹³ put away the gods, whom their forefathers had served beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt (Jos 24:14). Two places are mentioned to describe the locale of their former gods. The first is *beyond the Euphrates River*. What should interest us with regard to the *Euphrates River*? Close to this river is the city of Ur (of the Chaldees),¹⁴ believed to be the birthplace and origin of Abram (c. 2166-1991)¹⁵ as recorded in the Bible (Ge 11:31). The gods which they worshipped at that time included *Anu* (sky god), *Enlil* (wind and earth god), *Shamash* (the sun god), *Nannar-Sin* (moon god), and even the family and ancestral deities,¹⁶ though *Nannar-Sin* was the primary deity. What has this to do with Abram? Merrill explains, "It is certain that Abram and his family were faithful

¹² There are better chapters in the Bible to consider in describing the incomparable God like Isaiah 40, Job 38, and even the whole Book of Exodus. But Joshua 24 was chosen due to the following: (1) Conceptual parallels in the practices that Joshua wanted his audience to denounce as regard the worship of other gods create a ready common ground. (2) Joshua reviewed Israel's history and acknowledged their forefather's pagan background then challenged the people to worship the True and Living God. (3) Joshua 24 itself outlines how to challenge individuals from a pagan background to worship the True and Living God. (4) In fact, it can serve as a paradigm to compose a commitment to serve the Living God.

¹³ There are four imperatives in this verse. The verbal construction allows for the second, third, or fourth of these to be the result of the first command.

¹⁴ Ur was a famous Sumerian city, located by the Euphrates River, and about 150 miles northwest of the present coast of the Persian Gulf. See Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 25. Rasmussen thinks this is probably *Tell-el Muqayyar*, 190 miles South East of Baghdad in South East Iraq. See Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 255.

¹⁵ Merrill believes that the most satisfactory reconstruction of biblical chronology places the birth of Abram at 2166 B.C. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 31.

¹⁶ "Ur," Encyclopedia Britannica Online, <http://www.britannica.com/EBChecked/topic/618946> (accessed October 8, 2009). See also Isaac Mendelshon, *Religions of the Ancient Near East* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1955), xi-xviii. Although dated, one can still find his explanation about the gods engaging.

devotees of Sin and his coterie of fellow deities."¹⁷ However, the Living God took Abram out of Ur and brought him to Canaan (Jos 24:3) to form a new and unique nation.

Egypt is the second locale of the gods whom Joshua said the ancestors of the Israelites have worshipped. Egypt itself worshipped many gods including animals, the astral deities, and even the pharaoh himself.¹⁸ For instance, Lichtheim argued that *Amun* of Thebes in the 18th dynasty had gotten himself assimilated to the level of the supreme god, the sun-god *Re*, whose most visible manifestation was the sun disk (*Aten*).¹⁹ But the sky goddess *Nut* (Ex 9:13-35), the gods *Re and Horus* (Ex 10:21-29), and *Osiris*, the god of crops and fertility (10:1-20),²⁰ were all disenfranchised when the LORD had a showdown with the gods of Egypt.

Joshua was very precise in describing to which God he was challenging the people to give their allegiance: the LORD, the holy God, who is "a jealous God" and who will not forgive rebellious sins (Jos 24:19; Ex 20:5; Dt 5:9). This basically means that God does not share His glory and allegiance with any other god.

a. A Contemporary Ethnic Culture

When an *Ibaloi* or *Kankanai* reads Joshua 24:14-24 and similar passages, what would be his or her reaction? How will his or her

¹⁷ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 26. In his other work Merrill reiterates that Abram's ancestors worshipped the moon god Sin. See Eugene H. Merrill, *An Historical Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 77.

¹⁸ For a cosmology of Egypt, refer to the work of John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 33-37.

¹⁹ Miriam Lichtheim, "Two Hymns to the Sun-God," in *The Context of Scripture*, ed. William Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 43-44. She added that the most comprehensive of Aten worship was inscribed in the tomb of the courtier Ay. See her other work "The Great Hymn to Aten," in the same volume, 44-46.

²⁰ See John D. Hannah, "Exodus," in *Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 120.

concept of God in the context of the culture impinge on the reception and interpretation of the text? We will answer these questions as we try to summarize the thoughts of the fifteen respondents to the interviews.

The *Ibaloi* and *Kankanai* culture is entrenched with polytheistic beliefs. For instance, some of the people still view *Kabunian* as their creator,²¹ whom they equate to the God of Christianity. They also believe, Paul Andres explained, that God is the *Adi Kaila* (the Unseen One) or the *agew* (the morning sun).²² Jacque Andres added that for the *Kankanais* and *Ibalois*, the spirits of the ancestors had become a god who can bless them.²³ Their concept of God therefore is a conglomeration of a belief in *Kabunian*, the spirits of the dead ancestors, and perhaps in the God of the Bible, depending on how much influence Roman Catholicism or Evangelical Christianity has had on them. The work of Sacla puts these gods and goddesses in a clear order. He classified them according to their hierarchy and actions. For instance, by hierarchy there is the maker of the universe called the Unseen One (*Kankanai: Adi Kaila*); the deity (gods and goddesses--*Kabunian*); the ancestral spirits (referred to as *ap-apo* in *Kankanai* or *ka-apuan* in *Ibaloi*= grand parents, or great-great grandparents who died); and the spirits that inhabit the earth (*anito*).²⁴

²¹ Jacque Andres, interview by author, 23 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

²² Paul Andres, interview by author, 23 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

²³ Jacque Andres, interview by author, 23 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

²⁴ Sacla, *Treasury of Beliefs and Home Rituals*, 10. In Sacla's classification, there is a being that is higher than *Kabunian* (variably spelled *Kabunyan* or *Cabunian*), which he referred to as the *Adi Kaila* or *Unseen One*. He created the universe. *Kabunian* on the other hand live in the sky world and have limited powers as they did not create the universe. From another standpoint, Pungayan and Picpican present *Kabunian* as the supreme and most powerful god of the *Ibalois* and *Kankanais*. See Eufronio L. Pungayan and Isaias T. Picpican, "Rituals and Worship among the Benguet Igorots," *SLU Research Journal* 9 (1969), 463. Baucas thinks otherwise. He presents that the *Ibalois* see *Apochius* (the Most High God) as the one who created the universe and human beings. See Bianco L. Baucas, *Traditional Beliefs and Cultural Practices in Benguet* (Baguio City, Benguet: New Baguio Offset Press, 2003), 6.

b. Interception

The culture and context out of which Abraham was taken and into which on entering Canaan his descendants were assimilated share some common ground with the *Ibaloi* and *Kankanai* culture in the sense that there was the worship of astral (the sun, moon) as well as local (Baal, Molech) deities.²⁵ How did this come about? Before the arrival of Roman Catholicism in the Philippines, the tribes of Benguet worshipped the sun, the moon, and many gods and goddesses either headed by or collectively known as *Kabunian*.²⁶ But what is also unique to the tribes of Benguet is a veneration that evolves into the worship of their dead great ancestors (*ap-apo/ kaapuan*) or those who died recently, referred to as the *kakaring* (*Ibaloi*) or *kakading* (*Kankanai*). Adherents to this cultural value sometimes deny this practice, but actions often betray that this is a prevalent belief, even with the coming of Roman Catholicism when *Kabunian* became equated to the Christian God.

c. Non-Negotiable

The non negotiable is: *Reverentially fear the LORD and serve Him wholly and faithfully then put away the gods whom your forefathers have served . . . to serve the LORD* (Jos 24:24). This verse can be stated for the *Ibaloi* or *Kankanai* as "Reverentially fear the LORD, the True and Living God, who made the heavens and the earth. Put away the gods or spirits, who neither created nor have the power to maintain the heavens and the earth. Serve the Living God."

²⁵ See a comprehensive discussion on the gods of Canaan in the work of William Foxwell Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 119-35. Check also "Canaanite Religion and Literature," in *The Middle East and the Aegean Region c. 1380-1000 BC.*, eds. I. E. S. Edwards et al., vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 148-60.

²⁶ *Kabunian* is from the noun *buni* (prayer). Derivatives include *mambuni* (a *nomen occupationis* for one who prays and mediates for others) and *kabunian* (literally, "the place where prayers are" or "to whom prayers are made").

d. Implications

To introduce the idea of worshipping the LORD God alone runs contrary to what *Ibalois* and *Kankanais* have been taught by their parents or elders. When these issues are not clarified, it will result in either one or all of the following: (1) confusion, (2) defiance, (3) simple accretion. What do I mean by the latter? Having been used to worshipping a conglomeration of gods along with the ancestral spirits, to add the God of the Bible to the list actually poses no problem for the *Ibalois* or *Kankanais*. However, there is a greater danger that God will be equated or relegated to just one of the local deities so that He will not be accorded the allegiance due Him.

e. Transitioning to the Introduction of the God of the Bible

The God of the Bible needs to be introduced by defining and explaining the concept of God with epithets that are uniquely His and consistent to what is recorded in the Bible. Why? Unless the God of the Bible is introduced and described in terms that distinctly separate Him from and make Him superior to all other gods; unless the *Ibaloi* and *Kankanai* understand that *Kabunian* cannot be equated to the True and Living God;²⁷ and unless the minds of the *Ibaloi* or *Kankanai* are transformed, they will continue in their confused idea of God. It is of interest that Joshua identified the LORD as the holy God who is jealous and who does not tolerate idolatry (Jos 24: 19-20). Earlier, he also listed the awesome acts of God in bringing, protecting, and providing for His people, even as far back as the time of Abraham (Jos 24:2-13). His predecessor, Moses, himself added epithets or other clarifying descriptions to the personal name of God, YHWH, when he described Him to the people. For instance, He is Yahweh *Rōphē*: The LORD who heals (Ex15:25-26); and Yahweh *Yir'eh*: The LORD who

²⁷ In another paper, I argued that *Kabunian* cannot be equated to the God of Christianity. He was a local hero who attained to such supremacy due to accretion. But I suggested that he can be used as a foil to introduce the True and Living God. See Mona P. Bias, "Kabunian: Could This Be A Distant Echo of the Christian God?" *Journal of Asian Mission* 10 (March-September 2008): 70.

provides (Ex 16:11-12).²⁸ In the New Testament, Paul introduced this same God in Athens by pointing out first to their objects of worship and then by singling out the one whom the Athenians had labeled as "the Unknown God." Paul proclaimed to them this God as the Creator of the world and everything in it; The Lord of heaven and earth; Giver of life and breath to every living being; Who multiplied the inhabitants of the earth out of one person; Who determines how long and where each person should live, for in Him we live, move, and exist; Who is calling people to repentance for He has fixed a judgment day through Jesus Christ, whom He has raised from the dead (Ac 17:22-31).

When an interpreter mentions the word God to an *Ibaloi* or *Kankanai*, he or she must never assume that the target audience is on the same page as he or she is. While the interpreter is thinking of the God of Christianity, the *Ibaloi* or the *Kankanai* might be thinking of *Kabunian* or on the periphery, the ancestral spirits. Clarify the issues before proceeding. Perhaps one way to do this is to follow the example of Kidao, a pastor among the *Ibalois*, who commented that whenever he prays, especially in the presence of the elders in the community, he would address his prayer to the God who created us,²⁹ thus making it clear to his audience that he was praying to the Living God and not to any other god.

3. Worship: Sacrifice and Offering

Scriptures teach that the LORD is the One and Only Unique God (Dt 6:4). To approach and maintain fellowship with Him, He instituted animal sacrifice, which can be traced back to when Adam and Eve sinned. At that time, the LORD God had to kill an animal to clothe them (Ge 3:21). That God gave prime importance to animal sacrifice is seen

²⁸ He is also the one and only, most holy and awesome God (Ex 19:9, 12-13, 18); The God who is compassionate, patient, kind, and faithful (Ex 34:6-7); The transcendent yet personal God (Ex 40:34-38).

²⁹ Gerlan Kidao, interview by author, 22 June 2009, Adoyunan, Atok, Benguet.

in how He accepted the animals that Abel offered to Him; but rejected Cain's offerings (Ge 4:4-5). Later, family heads (Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) offered animal sacrifices. Later in the time of Moses, however God had conferred this responsibility to priests. The purpose of sacrifice can be any of the following: a gift (or meal offering); an offering to acknowledge that everything belongs to God (Lev 2; Ro 12:1-2); for communion and fellowship (peace offering) between the believer and God (Lev 3); and as expiation (Lev 4-6).³⁰ The latter was the dominant aspect of the sacrifice, for in that time and legislation, animal sacrifice served as a substitute offering for the forgiveness of sins until the perfect and final sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Heb 7:27, 1Ti 2:5). The finality of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was marked by the rending into two of the curtain in the temple (Mt 27:50-51), which is symbolic of the new and free access to God in Jesus Christ.

We now focus on the Day of Atonement as recorded in Leviticus 16.³¹ The LORD instructed Moses on what the High Priest must do on the Day of Atonement. The High Priest was to wear special linen garments and prepare a bull and two goats (Lev 16: 5-10). He was to offer and slaughter the bull for his sins and that of his family; burn incense to cover the atonement plate³² with smoke; and sprinkles some of the blood of the bull on surface of the atonement plate. After

³⁰ *šēgāgā* refers to inadvertent sins or unintentional mistakes by the individual or the community, which can be expiated by sacrifice (Lev 4:2; 13; 5:4; Nu 15:22). See L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stramm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994-1999 (*HALOT*), s.v. "*šēgāgā*." It is the opposite of sins of rebellion (*b'yād rāmāh*) and defiance (Nu 15:30-31), including the violation of the Ten Commandments, which are dealt with differently. The person is either excommunicated or put to death unless the Lord intervenes. For instance, there was no provision in the Law for the willful sin of David with Bathsheba. Only God's grace and intervention delivered David (Ps 51).

³¹ For a detailed explanation of the outline and significance of each rite on the Day of Atonement, see the work of John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentaries, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word, 1992), 216-46.

³² This Net Bible rendition of the word *kappōret* (from the Hebrew word *kāpar*) is preferred to the older translations mercy seat, throne of atonement, or throne of the cherubim. See *HALOT*, s.v. "*kappōret*."

this, he was to slaughter the goat for the sins of the people, taking its blood and sprinkling some on the atonement plate to make atonement for,³³ in the sense of purifying or cleansing the holy place from Israel's sins (Lev 16: 12-16).

After performing the rite at the Holiest Place, the High Priest makes atonement for the altar and tent of meeting (Lev 16: 18-19). Then he offers the scapegoat by laying both his hand on the head of the goat and simultaneously confessing all of Israel's sins over it. When this is done, he sends the scapegoat with the help of a trusted attendant away into the wilderness, carrying with it the sins of the people (Lev 16: 20-22). Then High Priest takes off his linen garments, washes, changes, and then offers the burnt offerings for himself and the people (Lev 16: 23-25). To summarize, on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest makes atonement on behalf of the people and for the cleansing and consecration of the Holiest Place, the tent of meeting, and the altar.

a. A Contemporary Ethnic Culture

Maxion outlined the usual program for animal sacrifice in the native culture:

The native priest opens in prayer (*madmad*).

He takes rice wine (*tapuey*) using a native cup (usually made of bamboo) and pours some of the wine on the ground while simultaneously praying to *Kabunian* and inviting the ancestral spirits to participate.

He invites the host and family members to drink of the wine. The significance of this is that the ancestral spirits are now believed to be drinking the wine with them.

³³ The phrase *atone for* comes from the Hebrew word *kāpar*, which can have the following meanings: to cover, smear, paint, atone, appease, make amends, wipe off, or clean something ritually. See *HALOT*, s.v. "kāpar." For a detailed discussion on this phrase, see W.A. VanGemeren ed., *New International Dictionary of the Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) (*NIDOTTE*), s.v. "kāpar."

He gives the cue for the animals to be butchered.³⁴

He checks the liver and "reads" the bile of the animal. If all is well, there is no need for another animal. In cases where the bile is empty or too full (as in the culture, this is a bad omen), the native priest will usually ask the host to replace the animal.

The sacrificed animal is cooked and eaten by all those present.

This program demonstrates that a priest as mediator, an animal sacrifice, and prayers are very much a part of the belief system, worship, and practices of the *Ibalois* and *Kankanais*. Tabon commented that among the *Kankanais*, the offering of animals is still prominent.³⁵ This is equally true of the *Ibalois*, especially in areas where there are available native priests to offer the sacrifices. Bensosan explained that for the present generation, 70% of the *Ibalois* are educated but 30% belong to the older generation who still consult the *mambunong* (a native priest, who is responsible for conducting the rituals).³⁶

What is the purpose of these animal sacrifices in the native culture? Jackie Andres explained that during *cañao* (a ritual feast), they butcher animals to offer them to their god and the ancestral spirits. They also put the blood of the pig on the foreheads of the children and on the faces of the adults,³⁷ but what is the greater reason behind the rite? The pastors suggested different reasons: (1) To appease or to provide for the needs of the gods or ancestral spirits. Paul Andres reasoned that when a person gets sick or has had a bad dream it is often believed that a dead ancestor caused the illness. Therefore that person

³⁴ Roger Maxion, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Bila, Bokod, Benguet.

³⁵ Paul Tabon, interview by author, 22 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

³⁶ There are three kinds of native priests who perform different functions: the *Mankot-om* who interprets the omens and signs; the *Mansip-ok* who determines the cause of illness and prescribes the ritual cure; and the *Mambunong* who administers the ritual cure.

³⁷ Jacques Andres, interview by author, 23 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

must butcher a pig or a chicken.³⁸ Busilan elucidated this: "Perhaps a dead relative is requesting that his corpse be moved to another place for any of the following reasons: it has accumulated termites; the coffin is dirty; the burial mound accumulated water; or roots of plants have set in."³⁹ They will then unearth the corpse and move it to a better place in the hope that the ancestral spirit will stop pestering his descendants.⁴⁰ (2) It is for thanksgiving purposes. Kidao related that for the *Ibalois*, animal sacrifice is the key to blessing. In a family, each of the members contributes an animal for the dead to whom the native priest makes the offering, saying, "Thank you that you helped me. I am therefore bringing these offerings."⁴¹ (3) Recognizing some similarities to the animal sacrifice of the Old Testament, Albas gave these reasons: to counter witchcraft; for a fruitful harvest; and as a psychological cleansing ritual.⁴²

b. Interception

The culture of the Bible included animal sacrifice from the time of Adam and Eve through to the time of Moses. Its main purpose was either thanksgiving or atonement. The latter was clarified further in the Book of Leviticus, especially chapter 16. On the side of the *Ibalois* and *Kankanais*, animal sacrifice, along with a native priest to offer the animals, is not a new construct. However, to whom is the sacrifice offered? Acdaman, a native priest among the *Ibalois*, admitted that he usually calls on the dead parents of his client, the previous and current *mambunongs*, and then *Kabunian*, though mostly he does not mention *Kabunian* at all.⁴³ As to the animals to be offered, Coloma

³⁸ Paul Andres, interview by author, 23 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

³⁹ Barny Busilan, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Poblacion, Kabayan, Benguet.

⁴⁰ Busilan, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Poblacion, Kabayan, Benguet.

⁴¹ Kidao, interview by author, 22 June 2009, Adoyunan, Atok, Benguet.

⁴² Emerita Albas, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Ambangueg, Bokod, Benguet. She added that animal sacrifice is not practical now a days as it is expensive.

⁴³ Cochero Acdaman, interview by author, 21 January 2007, Ambangueg, Bokod, Benguet.

explained that the native priest offers chicken if only a few anito came, a pig if more, and a cow if there is a larger number.⁴⁴ Clearly, it is the native priest who determines the number and the kind of animals to be offered, whereas in the Bible, animal sacrifices were offered to God who also prescribed the number and kind of animals to be used.

The Israelites continued with animal sacrifice up to the coming of Jesus Christ, though interrupted during the exile. But the official sacrifice stopped when the second temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. For believers animal sacrifice for the purpose of atonement ceased permanently after the final sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ (Jn 1:29). Among the *Ibalois* and *Kankanais*, animal sacrifice is still performed by some of the adherents to the native religion. What can be done about this ongoing practice, especially for those who have become believers in Jesus Christ?

c. Non-Negotiable

Animal sacrifice was offered as a temporary substitute for the atonement of sins before Jesus Christ came, but this is no longer necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29), fulfilled all the requirements necessary to appease the Living God against whom humanity had sinned. He is God's final word (Heb 1:2); the merciful, faithful (2:17), and eternal High priest (5:10; 6:20; 7:17) who is the guarantee of a better covenant (7:22). He is the Savior (7:25) who secured eternal redemption for us (9:12); the Mediator of the new covenant (9:15, 12:24); and the final sacrifice for the remission of sin (10:9, 14).

d. Implications

To perform animal sacrifice without understanding how God intended it to be and for the wrong reasons give people something

⁴⁴ Samuel Coloma, interview by author, 7 September 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

to do, but leads them nowhere. In matters of faith, they will end up missing the mark. Believers in Jesus Christ do not need to perform animal sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins; but those who have not understood the meaning and implications of the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ will continue or attempt to do so. For instance, there is the increasing desire in some segment of Israeli society to resume animal sacrifice in the temple. Shragai, a Haaretz correspondent reported in February 2007 that "The present-day Sanhedrin Court decided . . . to purchase a herd of sheep for ritual sacrifice at the site of the Temple on the eve of Passover, conditions on the Temple Mount permitting."⁴⁵ The seriousness of this intent can be inferred from the fact that "the 71 members of the Sanhedrin have all the required elements necessary for Temple sacrifice, including the ritual altar, and said they want to begin sacrificing animals again, despite the absence of the Temple."⁴⁶

e. Transitioning to the Ultimate Sacrifice

Afidchao explained that mature believers in Jesus do not have any more connections with the pagan culture--that is to say they no longer practice cultural traditions that engage in ancestral worship--but less mature believers still offer animal sacrifices when instructed or forced to by their grandparents, though this was already less by the 1970's and 1980's.⁴⁷ How are we to address this issue? First, clarify the Old Testament purpose for animal sacrifice. Second, differentiate between offering animal sacrifices for the atonement of sins and for thanksgiving purposes. The former *cannot* be continued while the latter *may* yet be retained.

⁴⁵ Nadav Shragai, "Present-day Sanhedrin court seeks to revive ancient Temple rituals," Haaretz.com., <http://www.haaretz.com> (accessed August 15, 2009).

⁴⁶ See the article, "Rabbis attempt to resume animal sacrifices on the Temple Mount," Israel Today, <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/default.aspx?tabid=178&nid=11808> (accessed December 14, 2009).

⁴⁷ Maurice Afidchao, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

We summarize the thoughts of some pastors and a native priest regarding this matter. Maxion pointed out that the practice of offering animal sacrifices by pagans is right, but they offer it to someone else,⁴⁸ not to the Living God. Kidao expresses that *cañao*, which involves animal sacrifice, is good if this is offered to God.⁴⁹ Similarly, Na-ag agrees to the continuation of animal sacrifice, provided *it is not* offered to the *anito*.⁵⁰ On the side of the elders who prefer to stay with the native religion, I asked this question of Demo: What are your expectations of an *Ibaloi* who becomes a believer in Jesus Christ? He responded, "He should no longer butcher animals."⁵¹ I voiced my disagreement and explained that butchering animals when somebody dies is a practice that cannot be done away with easily. This is so because in the *Ibaloi* and *Kankanaï* culture, it is part of the family's responsibility to feed the people who come to the wake and often this involves butchering a number of animals.

How may we reconcile and translate this to the contemporary situation? When someone performs a *cañao*, especially among believers, it is necessary to clarify the purpose first. If the intent is the forgiveness of sins, remind the person of the Ultimate Sacrifice, Jesus Christ who abrogated all other sacrifices on the basis of His sacrifice for humanity's sin. If the purpose is for thanksgiving, make sure it is offered to God and this is clear both to the host and to those attending the feast. Thus, butchering animals may be retained for non-*soteriological* purposes, provided it is offered to God, and is performed in a way that does not encourage syncretism.

⁴⁸ Maxion, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Bila, Bokod, Benguet.

⁴⁹ Kidao, interview by author, 22 June 2009, Adoyunan, Atok, Benguet.

⁵⁰ Jimmy Na-ag, interview by author, 27 June 2009, Sayangan, Atok, Benguet.

⁵¹ Salcedo Demo, interview by author, 22 January 2007, Binga, Itogon, Benguet.

4. Suffering and Sickness

Suffering is and has always been universal. This is true in other places as it is in Asia. A perusal of the biblical explanation of suffering and sickness reveals the following: the root cause is sin and disobedience to God, which started in the Garden of Eden (Ge 3:13-17, 23-24). It is the consequence of personal sin (Ps 119:67, 71, 75); for discipline (Heb 12:5-11); to warn and give a chance to the ungodly (Pr 29:1; 1Pe 3:9); and to display the power and glory of God (Jn 9:1-12). It is also a part of a spiritual battle between light and darkness, between God and Satan, in which people and nations are caught up (Eph 6:12).

The Book of Job presents a perfect example of this type of struggle. If sin was not the reason for Job's suffering, then what could it have been? Job was righteous, godly, and unblemished in his character, yet unforeseen calamity hit him, including the loss of his children, all of his possessions (Job 1:13-22), and even his health (2:1-13). The effect of all these on Job was such that he lost his appetite (6:5-7). He desired (6:8-13) and in fact prepared for death (17:10-16). His friends came supposedly to comfort him but Job found no comfort in them as they were "encouragers without substance" (6:14-23) and devoid of empathy (6:24-30). They tried to analyze Job's situation and find explanations for his suffering: Bildad explained that Job lost everything because he had sinned against God by forgetting Him (8:1-7, 11-19). Zophar intimated that Job had been unfaithful to God (11:13-20). Eliphaz became so personal that he accused Job of abandoning the reverential fear of God and of blaspheming the Almighty (15:1-6). He foresaw that Job would certainly experience adversity. In fact, Eliphaz imagined that God would destroy Job before his time (15:17-35). According to his friends' evaluation, Job had sinned against God, hence the calamity; but was this necessarily the reason? Did Job sin? No. Unknown to Job, there was a spiritual battle going on between God and Satan (1:1-2:7). As it was, Job was put to the test and passed it. The LORD vindicated and doubly blessed him. One twist to the story was that the LORD even asked Job to mediate for his friends (42:10-16).

a. A Contemporary Ethnic Culture

Let us turn again to the *Ibalois* and *Kankanais*. To whom do they usually attribute suffering and sickness? Of the fifteen pastors that I interviewed, fourteen explained that people usually attribute suffering and sickness to a dead relative. Na-ag for instance said that for the *Kankanais*, suffering and sickness was caused by the ancestral spirits, and they believe that they will only be healed through animal sacrifice.⁵² As for the *Ibalois*, Busilan affirmed that people often associate their sickness with their dead relatives,⁵³ especially if they had failed in their responsibilities, such as not butchering enough animals during the wake.⁵⁴

Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and even education have all failed to eradicate this belief that sickness is caused by ancestral spirits. Kimao explained, "When sickness comes, instead of going to hospital, they go to a native priest and offer sacrifices with the accompaniment of gongs and a *solibao* (elongated percussion instrument) as they have been taught."⁵⁵ Even believers can be tempted to do the same. Afidchao observed, "Immature Christians (2 years in the faith), especially if they had had experiences (of pagan practices like *cañao*) in the past, tend to go back to them."⁵⁶ By this he meant they perform again animal sacrifice for the purpose of healing or to ease the suffering.

⁵² Na-ag, interview by author, 27 June 2009, Sayangan, Atok, Benguet.

⁵³ Busilan, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Poblacion, Kabayan, Benguet.

⁵⁴ Nazaro Bayas, interview by author, 24 June 2009, Natubleng, Buguias, Benguet.

⁵⁵ Rufino Kimao, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Tumol, Kabayan, Benguet.

⁵⁶ Afidchao, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

b. Interception

What is common to both the biblical and the *Ibaloi* and *Kankanaï*'s view of suffering and sickness is that there is a cause for the suffering, which is sometimes (if not often) outside and beyond the victim's understanding. What differentiates the two? For the *Ibalois* and *Kankanaï*s, sickness and suffering are attributed mostly to the ancestral spirits.

c. Non-Negotiable

There are valid reasons for suffering: the effect of living in a fallen world; consequences of personal sin; natural calamities; and one that it is allowed by God. *However, this one thing is certain: it must never be attributed to the spirits of the dead ancestors.*⁵⁷

d. Implications

To reject this cultural value (belief in ancestral spirits) promises freedom or fear. Freedom in that there is no need to offer sacrifices to the dead ancestors each time somebody gets sick. Economically, the person will be freed of possible debts (from offering large animals each time there is sickness) and be able to send his or her children to school. Fear because the family may disown and accuse him or her of not caring for the dead relatives. He or she may in fact experience some sense of guilt for failing to offer sacrifices to them.

e. Transitioning to a Truer View of Sickness and Suffering

We cannot discount the experiences of those who continue to fear the spirits of their dead ancestors as these are real to them and some

⁵⁷ One passage that can clarify what happens when someone dies is Luke 16:19-31. Through a parable, Jesus Christ explained that once a person dies, either he goes to the presence of God (Abraham's bosom) or Hell. Between these two places there is a great chasm that allows no one to cross over to the other side. From this parable, it can be inferred that there is no way the ancestral spirits would come to disturb the living relatives.

have had encounters with the "spirits of the dead." However, we can acknowledge the possibility of a spiritual battle, as was the case with Job (Job 1:1-2:7). Even in the New Testament, Paul acknowledged a spiritual battle against evil forces (Eph 6:12). We can also choose to believe that something beautiful can come out of the suffering (Ro 8:28), especially for believers, but we need to be open to the fact that sometimes, God can also use the situation to cause people to seek for a better solution. For instance, in the experience of Kidao, he explained that when culture (i.e., practice of animal sacrifice to the dead for healing) does not work, many become believers. They readily open up to older believers (former practitioners of *cañao*) who come to encourage and witness to them.⁵⁸ This was attested further by Agoyos who shared that believers in his parish no longer believe in the *ampasit* (a spirit) as the cause of sickness. The Bible has become their source of information so that they now use herbal medicine and then go to God.⁵⁹

5. Conclusion

The concept of God, sacrifice and offering, as well as suffering and sickness are core issues that are interrelated and of prime importance to the *Ibalois* or *Kankanais*. If these are dealt with early on, it will be easier to deal with other peripheral issues later.

What do we do next? It is not enough to outline the history of the concept; compare and contrast these; discover the common grounds; and settle on what is non-negotiable. At some point and at the right time, the interpreter must challenge the audience for a commitment. Recall that after Joshua outlined what God had done for Israel, he challenged them for a commitment saying, "If it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether

⁵⁸ Bayas, interview by author, 24 June 2009, Natubleng, Buguias, Benguet.

⁵⁹ Roldan Agoyos, interview by author, 6 September 2009, Suyoc, Tublay, Benguet.

the gods whom your forefathers have served beyond the Jordan or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you live, but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD (Jos 24:15)." When the people verbally expressed that they would serve the LORD, Joshua made a covenant with them.

III. The Challenges When Culture is at Variance with Bible Truth

1. Introduction

When asked how much of the *Ibaloi* and *Kankanai* culture continues to influence the values, expressions, and actions of the people, those interviewed gave the following responses: Maxion opined that the *Ibaloi* culture has 80% pagan influence.⁶⁰ Regarding nominal Christians, Afidchao commented, "Pagan traditions and Roman Catholicism have a great influence in their lives in that they mix religious beliefs with pagan superstitions, for instance, the *cañao* remains a sacred practice."⁶¹ As to young believers, Canuto explained, "Culture has a greater hold on those who were exposed to the culture and did not grow up in church."⁶² This being the case, a clash between biblical truth and culture is to be expected. When culture is at variance with biblical truth, there are challenges for the interpreter, which includes the following: (1) The resistance or acculturation of the recipient; (2) a slow rate in life transformation; (3) finding appropriate dynamic equivalences; and (4) syncretism.

⁶⁰ Maxion, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Bila, Bokod, Benguet.

⁶¹ Afidchao, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

⁶² Bill Canuto, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

2. Resist or Acculturate

Pastors Coloma and Paul Andres expressed that the relationship between culture and Christianity is a current problem in their respective churches.⁶³ Tension arises because there is so much respect for the ancestral tradition and culture. For instance, "*Kankanais* believe that tradition and culture are best, for these were taught and carried on by their ancestors."⁶⁴ Afidchao argued that introducing new concepts "may create some confusion."⁶⁵ Resistance of some sort is expected and one reason for this is the persistent claim that the Bible came from "somewhere outside," and not from within the culture.⁶⁶ Consequently, people will always see the Bible and Christianity as a foreign religion, but not everyone will be resistant to the Bible truth. Some will acculturate because they either understood the Bible text and its message or they simply want to try out a new religion and go with the flow.

3. Slow Rate in Life Transformation

Protestantism reached the Philippines at the end of the 19th century. Verora listed the evangelical groups that came, beginning with the Presbyterians in 1899, who within a five year period were followed by the Methodists, Northern Baptists, Disciples for Christ, Episcopalians, Congregationalists, the Christian Missionary Alliance, and Seventh Day Adventists. Of interest, however, is the United Brethren group that in 1901 was assigned to the Mountain Province (to which Benguet Province was then a sub-province). A century has come and

⁶³ Paul Andres, interview by author, 23 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet; Coloma, interview by author, 7 September 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

⁶⁴ Paul Andres, interview by author, 23 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet; Coloma, interview by author, 7 September 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

⁶⁵ Afidchao, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

⁶⁶ Busilan, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Poblacion, Kabayan, Benguet.

gone; but to date, it cannot be claimed that the *Ibalois* and *Kankanaïs* of Benguet have been reached with and transformed by the gospel. The National Statistics Office took a census in May 2000 and released the information that only 8.85% of the people of the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR, the larger region to which the province of Benguet belongs) are evangelicals out of a total population of 1,360, 611.⁶⁷ Then in terms of practice, even some of those who claim to be believers retain, or go back to the native religion when under extreme pressure and when they cannot find in Christianity the solutions to their problems. Taray has this to say:

The uncompromising efforts of the missionaries to evangelize the local inhabitants resulted in the acceptance of Christianity by the Benguet majority. Contrary to the missionaries' expectations, however, those who accepted Christianity retained many of their indigenous beliefs and practices. For example, ancestor reverence continues to persist among contemporary Benguet Christians and traditionalists alike. Such persistence indicates the taken-for-granted existence of an acculturated syncretized form of religion, creating tensions and conflicts, which are seldom openly addressed.⁶⁸

Education has helped to lessen this cultural value of ancestor reverence among the *Ibalois* and *Kankanaïs*; but by itself provides no guarantee of a total understanding of what this cultural value involves and how much it affects their world view. One should not be surprised to find a nurse or an engineer consulting a *mambunong* to find out which of the ancestral spirits has caused an unexplained illness.

⁶⁷ National Statistics Office, "Cordillera Administrative Region: The Least Populous Region in the Philippines," <http://www.census.gov.ph/data/pressrelease/2002/pr02199tx.html> (accessed October 2, 2009)

⁶⁸ Leonila L. Taray, "Understanding Ancestor Reverence in the Benguet Tradition," *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review* (2008): 62. Taray is a professor of religion at Saint Louis University, one of the leading universities in Baguio City, Philippines.

4. Syncretism

No syncretism has been so blatantly admitted to me as in the confession of Domeris. He explained that there is no difference between the native religion and Roman Catholicism in that there are also twenty four gods and goddesses in the native religion. They represent the twelve disciples and their respective wives. Only this time, there is a change in names.⁶⁹ Jacque Andres had a similar observation that when people become believers, they can easily pray only to the name of *Kabunian*, which they have changed to Father, Jesus, and Holy Spirit.⁷⁰ As these statements show, there is an apparent switching of names without necessarily changing the concepts associated to the worship of a god in the native religion.

Syncretism occurs when truths or concepts that are diametrically opposed to each other are mixed: in this case, biblical truth with cultural beliefs and practices. For interpreters, this is doubly complicated when what is fundamental (non-negotiable) and what is peripheral (negotiable) are not made clear. Coloma related one of the cultural practices of Benguet: one year after a person dies, it is expected of the family to butcher some animals to remember the dead and officially mark the end of the mourning period. If believers continue in this tradition, regardless of how they refurbish it, Coloma commented that the elders in the community will misinterpret this and say, "It is good that they have not forgotten the old tradition."⁷¹ That statement is pregnant with meaning. It validates Coloma's ambivalence that when this is not clarified, the host might be misconstrued as acquiescing to an idolatrous part of his culture.⁷²

⁶⁹ Joseph Domeris, interview by author, 31 December 2006, Adoyunan, Atok Benguet. He is one of the priests of the native religion.

⁷⁰ Jacque Andres, interview by author, 23 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

⁷¹ Coloma, interview by author, 7 September 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

⁷² Coloma, interview by author, 7 September 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

One danger of syncretism is that it results in further blurring the Bible message. When forms of expressing the biblical truth are copied but the message of the Bible is missed, a false security sets in where the receptor may think that he is doing well when in fact he is not. So how should the interpreter deal with the situation? Canuto commented: explain when culture cannot be in agreement with the Bible.⁷³ Define what is negotiable (forms) and what is non-negotiable (theological truths).

5. Finding Appropriate Dynamic Equivalences

The term dynamic equivalence was first coined by Richardson when he explained that God has prepared redemptive analogies and dynamic equivalences in every culture for the evangelization of its own people.⁷⁴ The challenge for the outside interpreter of a culture is to find these dynamic equivalences. It will take a few years to get to know the culture, understand its idiosyncrasies, and come up with viable dynamic equivalencies. The challenge is greater if the interpreter is not of the same culture as the target audience. Sometimes there is immediate success and at other times there is none, especially when there is a mismatch in the chosen dynamic equivalence. An error committed at this stage may take the next generation to rectify it. For instance, I observed that researches outside of the evangelical circle report that *Kabunian* is equivalent to the Christian God,⁷⁵ but *Kabunian* must not be equated to the Christian God. He was a local hero who was accorded supremacy due to accretion. A better dynamic equivalence would be *Apo Dios* (the Supreme God).⁷⁶

⁷³ Canuto, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

⁷⁴ Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1974), 10. See also his other work, *Eternity in their Hearts*, rev. ed. (Ventura: Regal Books, 1984).

⁷⁵ Malanes, *Power from the Mountains*, 10. For another listing of the gods of Benguet, see Pungayan and Picpican, "Rituals and Worship among the Benguet Igorots," 463-68.

⁷⁶ See my treatment on the issue in Bias, "*Kabunian*," 57-74.

Ethnocentrism can be a major reason for workers not to try to find appropriate dynamic equivalences for presenting the Gospel message to a particular ethnic group. Other causes include failure to understand and appreciate the ethnic culture whether consciously or unconsciously. Taray made this comment: "The early Christian missionaries to Benguet viewed the local beliefs and practices as a manifestation of a people's ignorance and superstition, paganism, and backwardness."⁷⁷ If workers continue in this view of the *Ibalois* and *Kankanais* and, in the guise of communicating Scripture to them, make it their primary goal to divest them of their pagan beliefs, then they are unknowingly building roadblocks to their future work. The above mentioned reasons are the challenges for workers or interpreters of the biblical text who try to communicate its meaning to their audience. However, there are other challenges that their audience will also have to face before eventually considering and appropriating (or rejecting) the truths of the Bible.

6. Fear of the Unknown

Culture and the accompanying cultural beliefs and practices form, in one way or the other, a safety net for the *Ibalois* and the *Kankanais*. Remove this from them or remove them from the said culture and it unsettles them. For some, this is tantamount to losing their identity. So, when an interpreter challenges his audience to reject its culture to take on the Christian God, a great struggle looms on the horizon. This is quite understandable. Yet the question now is, when a person becomes a believer in the Living God, must he or she necessarily give up all of his or her culture? The wise interpreter will say, "They must only give up that which directly contradicts the commands of the Living God."

⁷⁷ Taray, "Understanding Ancestor Reverence in the Benguet Tradition," 62.

7. Community Pressure

It is hard for new believers to extricate themselves from cultural practices that have been theirs since time immemorial. After they have conquered the fear of the unknown, they will be confronted by community pressure both from the living and from the *dead ancestors*. Tabon acknowledged that one reason why it is hard for new believers to give up cultural beliefs and practices is exactly this: they fear what people will say to them and especially of what *Kabunian* and the spirits of the dead will do, saying "*Inayan si Kabunian. Sumgir di spirits di nat-natey* (Woe is me by *Kabunian*. The spirits of the dead will recompense.)"⁷⁸ This concern is illustrated in the following practice. The *Ibalois* and *Kankanais* firmly believe that when parents die, the children who survive them must keep a light burning in the house, especially in the cooking area to signify that someone is at home whenever an ancestral spirit drops by to visit. Failure to maintain the light may incur the wrath of the ancestors which may mean deprivation of "would-be blessings" that an ancestral spirit would have brought home. This pressure is one of the reasons why it is hard for people to give up the native religion or why they prefer a split-level Christianity. Perhaps this is the underlying reason to Busilan's explanation that parents usually allow their children to attend church and Bible studies, provided they do not get baptized.⁷⁹ The parents know that baptism is a serious commitment. If the parents are traditionalists, their greater fear is that nobody will offer sacrifices for them in their afterlife.

⁷⁸ Tabon, interview by author, 22 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

⁷⁹ Busilan, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Poblacion, Kabayan, Benguet.

8. Conclusion

A slow rate in life transformation, syncretism, finding appropriate dynamic equivalences, and community pressure are just a few of the challenges that both the interpreter and receptor have to overcome. In facing these challenges, it is wise for the interpreter to select and deal first with the major issues like the concept of God. When these have been clarified, they will naturally impinge on other related issues. For instance, when the receptor realizes that the God of the Bible is the True and Living God (Dt 5:23; Job 38; Jer 10:10) who is more powerful than *Kabunian* and the spirits of the dead, then the fear of what the ancestral spirits could do to him or her is minimized until the point is reached that he or she will fear no longer the spirits of the dead, but only the Living God, who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell (Mt 10:28).

IV. Factors That Decide What Dominates When Bible Truth Confronts a Contemporary Ethnic Culture

1. Introduction

The *Ibaloi* and *Kankanai* concept of God is a conglomeration of the Malayan belief in many gods, the Chinese belief in ancestral worship,⁸⁰ and on top of this, Roman Catholic or Protestant influences.

⁸⁰ Cheng discussed the cultural influences of the Chinese on the Cordillera, particularly by Limahong and his men toward the end of the A.D. 1574. Cheng explained that the *anito* in the Benguet belief system is the counterpart of the *Ning* or *Shein* in the Chinese belief system. Practices in Benguet like exhuming the dead and aerial burial are of Chinese origin. See Charles L. Cheng and Katherine V. Bersamira, *The Ethnic Chinese in Baguio and in the Cordillera Philippines: The Untold Story of the Pioneers* (Baguio City: Unique Printing Press, 1997), 71-100.

What they value in these beliefs is often consolidated in their minds and finds expression in their attitudes and actions; but when biblical truth confronts these values and beliefs, what happens in the mind of the recipient? How does this affect his or her attitudes and actions? Several factors may dictate what will dominate for a period of time.

2. The Grip of the Cultural Value on the Interpreter

I posed this question to some pastors in Benguet: When Bible truth confronts culture, what factors usually decide what dominates in the end? Afidchao commented, "It depends on the situation. If from childhood to adulthood the person has remained illiterate, the culture dominates."⁸¹ He added that for the younger pastors the grip of culture is not so strong anymore, for they have recognized the high cost of *cañao* and the advantages of medical technology.⁸² Agoyos opined that there are believers who automatically throw away the cultural practices at once, but some do so little by little because they are still young in the faith and are fearful of what their relatives will say.⁸³ Busilan explained, "Nowadays in Kabayan, they have thrown away the old culture, but it is still in the peripheral areas, though this has been lessened with the coming of the Gospel."⁸⁴ He related that he has a church member who professes to be a Christian, yet who often refers to his experiences in the native religion and claims them to be equally real. Most of the people who tend to revert back to the native religion are the "old folks" who grew up in that type of environment.⁸⁵ It appears that individuals from the older generation still find it hard to give up components of the culture⁸⁶ that are precious to them.

⁸¹ Afidchao, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

⁸² Afidchao, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

⁸³ Agoyos, interview by author, 6 September 2009, Suyoc, Tublay, Benguet.

⁸⁴ Busilan, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Poblacion, Kabayan, Benguet. Kabayan is one of the thirteen municipalities of Benguet.

⁸⁵ Busilan, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Poblacion, Kabayan, Benguet..

⁸⁶ The pastors have here in mind the practices of offering to the ancestral spirits or consulting a *mambunong* (native priest) to seek the will of *Kabunian*.

3. The Rate and Extent of Renewing the Mind and Transformation

Kraft recognized that "the changing of worldview, while radical often takes a long time. The accompanying revision of habitual behavior results from such worldview change is likely to be a slow process."⁸⁷ The rate or extent of the renewal of the mind is directly related to the grip of cultural values on individuals. The lesser the hold, the faster is the rate of transformation; the greater the hold the slower the rate of transformation. The interviews surfaced the following responses:

a. Immediate Change

Speaking for himself and of his conversion, Kimao explained, "Our former life was very pagan. We worshipped no one but *Kabunian*. We danced and offered animals; but when the preaching of the Gospel came, it changed. We gave up animal sacrifices for the work of God."⁸⁸ He added, "We now pray and consult the doctor instead of performing a *cañao*."⁸⁹ Agoyos also testified that the moment he believed in God, he no longer submitted to pagan cultural traditions. He acknowledged the presence of evil spirits; but indicated that God is more powerful.⁹⁰ Afidchao stated that other younger workers had a faster rate of transformation. Studies confirm that those convinced of the truth also change faster.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 269.

⁸⁸ Kimao, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Tumol, Kabayan, Benguet.

⁸⁹ Kimao, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Tumol, Kabayan, Benguet.

⁹⁰ Agoyos, interview by author, 6 September 2009, Suyoc, Tublay, Benguet.

⁹¹ By young workers, he is referring to those who were born in the 70's and 80's who have been less influenced by the polytheistic beliefs of their forefathers.

b. It Needs Time

Jacque Andres explained that some believers do have a hard time changing their way of thinking, but through discipleship they "can be renewed in their belief."⁹² Referring to beliefs and practices that do not please God, Coloma affirmed, "Regarding culture, it needs teaching until they understand and are able to see the difference, at which time, they will drop it."⁹³

c. A Trial and Error Process

Bayas observed that many times the people first resort to culture. If it does not work, they then consult the church. However, if the culture works, they do not bother to go to the church.⁹⁴ As a general rule, Paul Andres commented that "a person who comes to know Jesus Christ as his Savior is willing to forsake his tradition or culture because he finds a better way of living, but culture and tradition will remain with the nominal Christian."⁹⁵

As interpreters expound the Word of God, they expect some change in mindsets and actions. However, until the receptor's worldview has been addressed or changed, the chances are that the cultural value will dominate for a while. Perhaps Kraft's model will help elucidate this process of change: (1) a change of allegiance that issues in (2) a concomitant change in the evaluation principles within the person's/group's worldview, and (3) a resultant series of new habits or behavior.⁹⁶ To expect the third to happen without a change in allegiance and world view is quite premature. As the accounts of the workers interviewed show, life transformation in response to Bible teaching can be immediate; some need time; others just do it on a trial and error basis. Disappointments of some sort await the interpreter who expects instant results.

⁹² Jacque Andres, interview by author, 23 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

⁹³ Coloma, interview by author, 7 September 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

⁹⁴ Bayas, interview by author, 24 June 2009, Natubleng, Buguias, Benguet.

⁹⁵ Paul Andres, interview by author, 23 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

⁹⁶ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 272.

4. The Knowledge and Experience of God

Referring to the knowledge of biblical truth, Afidchao expressed that "The less knowledge, the harder it is for the truth to prevail. With greater knowledge, one is able to relate to the culture."⁹⁷ There are those who continue on in the faith once they believe, while others are not as committed. Busilan related, "There was a native priest who understood the Gospel and believed, but on the other hand there was another who claimed to be a Christian, but went back to the old tradition."⁹⁸ We can think of a thousand reasons why there are those who go back to the old tradition and those who do not want to believe God. I will mention only two of them. The first reason rests with the person himself because he does not want to give up old traditional beliefs. For instance, in a conversation a native priest said: "The *ap- apo* would not allow me to do that. They'll strike me with sickness. Besides, all my brothers and sisters became Christians. If I become a Christian too, then no one would be left to be a *liw-liwa* (one who brings delight) to my parents. They won't have a place to rest when they come to visit us. No one would give sacrifices for them."⁹⁹ No amount of teaching will change the mind of the person who has already made up his mind not to respond to the Gospel and to the teaching of the Bible. In effect, he/she refuses the chance to know God and thereby experience and enjoy all that God offers.

The second reason why someone returns to his old traditions rests with the messenger. If the receptor's first "encounter" with God was through the messenger, who allowed his culture to interfere, it can happen that there would be a conversion to the interpreter's culture instead of to Jesus Christ. We refer back to Kraft who has indicated this when he listed the three-step process of change that accompanies conversion: (1) change of allegiance; (2) new principles

⁹⁷ Afidchao, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

⁹⁸ Busilan, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Poblacion, Kabayan, Benguet.

⁹⁹ Mariano Cayat, interview by author, November 1986, Bakun, Benguet.

of evaluation and interpretation; and (3) transformation with the Holy Spirit's guidance within their culture.¹⁰⁰ When the interpreter's culture intercepts steps 2 and 3, or he fails to do cultural exegesis to communicate the biblical text in forms that are consistent with the original context and yet dynamically equivalent to the forms and cultural frameworks of his audience, then the direct transformation and guidance in the life of the new convert as the Holy Spirit intended can be circumvented. Consequently, the interpreter's or receptor's culture will dominate for some time. Often, this has some bearing on a person's progress in knowing and enjoying God.

5. Conviction of the Priority of Biblical Truth over Culture

a. The Bible Is above Culture

Busilan believes that the Bible takes priority over culture but added that a cultural practice should not be thrown away if it is based in the Word of God. Tabon argued,

There are truths even in pagan beliefs; but culture should not have priority over Biblical truth. Check and affirm the truth in the culture, but it should not be the culture that is affirming the Bible. Do not emphasize experience over the Bible. Rather, let the Bible affirm the experience. Personally, I believe that God is above culture; but at the same time, He is within the culture. If God is above culture, then God will transform what is less beneficial in the culture. Culture is not necessarily evil. The culture of the community, if transformed, is beneficial to the people and becomes a God-honoring culture.¹⁰¹

Kidao elucidated that something can still be retained in the culture, like for instance butchering animals, if they are offered to God; but the segment where the animal is offered to the idols or dead

¹⁰⁰ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 269.

¹⁰¹ Tabon, interview by author, 22 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

ancestors must be abandoned.¹⁰² The same thought was expressed by Coloma who said, "Retain the culture that does not cause one to sin against God; but when it is outside of God's culture discard it. The views of paganism cannot be mixed with the Word of God."¹⁰³

These workers strongly believe that Bible truth is above culture; though they seem to add that a cultural practice may be retained if it does not contradict the commands of God and the teachings of the Bible.

b. Culture Is above Scripture

According to Bensosan, the municipality of Bokod is the bastion of *Ibaloi* cultural beliefs and traditions in Benguet. Their past traditions continue to the present and it is these that dominate.¹⁰⁴ As for the *Kankana'is*, Tabon explained that, among them generally culture is above Scripture because of a lack in understanding of the Bible. For instance, even if you are educated, it is disgraceful to teach the elders, unless you studied religion and you lived with them. This is a taboo because culturally the elders are to instruct the younger ones and this practice must not be reversed.¹⁰⁵

As a general rule, believers place the Bible above culture while nominal Christians gravitate toward elevating cultural practices. Continued biblical teaching is therefore important for the receptor to understand and develop the ability to differentiate that which is of God and must be obeyed and that which is of culture that must be rejected. Coloma said, with the conviction of the Holy Spirit even the receptors themselves will realize the truth¹⁰⁶ and so act accordingly.

¹⁰² Kidao, interview by author, 22 June 2009, Adoyunan, Atok, Benguet.

¹⁰³ Coloma, interview by author, 7 September 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

¹⁰⁴ Lordi Bensosan, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

¹⁰⁵ Tabon, interview by author, 22 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

¹⁰⁶ Coloma, interview by author, 7 September 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

6. Conclusion

All of the fifteen pastors whom I interviewed maintained that the Bible is above culture. Ten of them also argued that if there is something in the culture that is good and is not contradictory to the Scriptures, like *bayanihan*¹⁰⁷ (a cultural value where the community helps someone in times of need), it must be retained. Conversely, cultural practices that are forbidden in the Bible or against clear biblical principles like the worship of¹⁰⁸ and offering to idols,¹⁰⁹ the *ap-apo/ kaapuan*, or the *anito*¹¹⁰ must be discarded. This goes to show that the interpreter needs to know what the Bible teaches on issues that relate to the culture and with the help of the Holy Spirit must communicate these in ways that are relevant and meaningful to his audience.

V. Proposals for Ethnic Interpreters

1. Introduction

This section lists some suggestions for the ethnic interpreter to ensure that the meaning of a Bible text is deciphered and communicated to a contemporary culture. They include clarity of purpose; definition of fundamentals (non-negotiable theological truths) and the peripherals (negotiable); focus on renewing and transforming the mind; contextualized interpretation; and the use of appropriate methodologies applied at the right time.

¹⁰⁷ Afidchao shared that in their town (as in other towns) during harvest time, individuals come and help their neighbors. Afidchao, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet. He added that mummification is okay if it is not offered to Satan.

¹⁰⁸ Agoyos, interview by author, 6 September 2009, Suyoc, Tublay, Benguet.

¹⁰⁹ Kidao, interview by author, 22 June 2009, Adoyunan, Atok, Benguet.

¹¹⁰ Na-ag, interview by author, 27 June 2009, Sayangan, Atok, Benguet.

2. Clarity of Purpose

Culture changes through time, but God and His Word remain constant as does His desire to enter into relationship with humankind without necessarily destroying the whole culture of a tribe or nation. In interpreting the biblical text to an ethnic culture, one needs to identify what the text meant; distill the timeless principle that is consistent to the original text; and communicate its meaning through forms that are relevant and meaningful to the target audience. However, the question remains: How does one identify the principle? Erickson noticed the lack of criteria for identifying this in the works of Robinson and Kaiser. Evaluating the suggestions of Goldingay and Tiessen he then listed his own criteria: (1) constancy across cultures; (2) universal setting; (3) a recognized permanent factor as a base; (4) an indissoluble link with an experience regarded as essential; and (5) the final position within progressive revelation.¹¹¹

3. Well Defined Fundamentals

One question that keeps coming back is this: How much of culture should a person discard when he or she becomes a believer? Situations vary from culture to culture. Forms of expressions that might be appropriate in Benguet might not be so for another province. On the premise that not all of culture is bad and to ask a new believer to throw away completely his cultural values and practices is tantamount to asking the person to discard his identity and security. Perhaps it is better to define some parameters that believers can intelligently apply in order to decide for themselves which part of culture may be kept and which part must be discarded: (1) Identify which specific component of culture must be given priority

¹¹¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspective on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 65-66.

for analysis.¹¹² (2) Surface the main theological issues in the ethnic culture and bring each one under the scrutiny of God's Word. For instance, because a main fault in the native culture of Benguet is that the dead person becomes deified, they need to investigate what the Bible says about this. (3) Evaluate all other activities in the native culture. Bensosan suggested that Christian workers should check what are sometimes labeled as pagan practices when they are actually practiced in the Bible such as praying. These may be retained as long as the Christian workers are careful to avoid syncretism and are cautious as they participate in community affairs.¹¹³ (4) Decide when is the best time to teach on the subject. (5) For check and balance, constantly ask this question: Does this cultural value and practice encourage commitment and devotion to the one and True and Living God?

4. Contextualized Interpretation

Dagdag, a non-native of Benguet but who is currently working among the *Ibalois*, suggested for pastors to do "contextualized interpretation."¹¹⁴ Simply put, it is to contextualize what the text meant. Kleins explains that the process of contextualization expresses anew the ideas presented in a biblical passage in the language of today so that they convey the same impact to the modern readers.¹¹⁵ The evaluation of Batterson is in this matter unfortunately negative, "Too many pastors are getting 'A's' in Biblical Exegesis and 'D's' in

¹¹² McGavran suggested that instead of talking in general terms about context and culture, which can be overwhelming to the new convert especially if he or she is required to throw away all of his or her culture, missionaries should begin talking about the components of culture, which should be accepted or rejected by the Church. See Donald McGavran, *The Clash Between Christianity and Culture* (Washington: Canon Press, 1974), 49.

¹¹³ Bensosan, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

¹¹⁴ Ermin Dagdag, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Ambanguag, Bokod, Benguet.

¹¹⁵ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 232.

cultural exegesis."¹¹⁶ Responsible interpreters would want to know their audience and how best to minister to them. Batterson continued, "If we divorce Biblical exegesis and cultural relevance we end up with dysfunctional truth. It doesn't do anybody good. Either we answer questions no one is asking, or we give the wrong answers."¹¹⁷ To rectify this as regards work among the *Ibalois* and *Kankanais*, Canuto's suggestion is well accepted, "Research biblical truth and earlier cultures to be able to relate to the culture now, because animal sacrifice is similar to the practices of contemporary paganism."¹¹⁸

One way to accomplish Canuto's suggestion is to make use of well-researched major biblical concepts that have natural dynamic equivalences in the ethnic culture. For our current purposes, this would include the concept of God, sacrifice and offering, as well as suffering and sickness. Na-ag underscored the fact that the *Kankanais* believe in a god, but they do not know how to address him. He suggested identifying and introducing the Living God to people as Paul did on the Areopagus¹¹⁹ (Ac 17:16-32), when he started a common ground by addressing their unknown God, then reasoning and debating in styles and terms that were familiar to them.

While doing an exegesis of both the Bible and culture, however, we need to check constantly that our interpretation is valid. Hirsch set out some criteria in his work in 1967, which can be stated as questions: (1) Is the reading permissible within the public norms of the language in which the text was composed? (2) Does the reading account for each linguistic component in the text? (3) Does the text follow the

¹¹⁶ Mark Batterson, "Carpe Culture: Redeeming Culture Lingo without Diluting the Gospel," *Evotional. Com.*, <http://www.evotional.com/2005/11/cultural-exegesis.html> (accessed September 10, 2009).

¹¹⁷ Mark Batterson, "Carpe Culture: Redeeming Culture Lingo without Diluting the Gospel".

¹¹⁸ Canuto, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

¹¹⁹ Na-ag, interview by author, 27 June 2009, Sayangan, Atok, Benguet.

conventions of the type of literature used? (4) Is it coherent or does it make sense?¹²⁰ These principles though dated are still useful and can serve the purpose we seek to accomplish. It is also wise to consider the warning of Goncalves:

If the Bible never explicitly refers to such interpretation; if the fathers of the Church never talked about such interpretation; if none of the confessions of the Church touches on such interpretations; if such interpretations appeared *de novo*, be extremely careful! After two millennia of biblical interpretation, it is unlikely that there are many unturned stones waiting for us.¹²¹

5. The Priority of Transforming and Renewing the Mind

As Isaiah 8:20 says, "If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." To expect a native of Benguet who has been exposed to the worship of ancestral spirits all his or her life to change allegiances along with new forms and structures immediately poses some problems. Realize that God is first perceived in terms of their culture. Unless they have had a personal encounter with the Living God, they will continue in that situation. Interpreters must therefore give attention to teaching biblical concepts of God and hope that the interaction between the Divine and the receptor will transform and renew their mind. Tabon reiterated, "Teach, but do not enforce. Teach, and then let God work. The Holy Spirit illumines the interpreter to be able to apply it properly."¹²²

¹²⁰ E. D. Hirsch, Jr. *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1967), 236.

¹²¹ Luiz Gustavo da Silva Goncalves, "The Deconstructing of the American Mind: An Analysis of Hermeneutical Implications of Postmodernism," in *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, ed. Michael Bauman and David Hall (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1995), 254.

¹²² Tabon, interview by author, 22 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

6. Appropriate Methodologies

Hegeman explained, "God allows human beings outside the Covenant Community to prosper in their cultural activities for the ultimate benefit and profit of the Church, His bride. Christians may appropriate some non-Christian objects, forms, and texts for their own cultural ends, but they must do so taking extreme care, ever sensitive to the norms and standard provided in Scripture."¹²³ That being the case, we now consider some suggestions: (1) Continue to educate with the biblical truth.¹²⁴ Constantly use comparisons to show what God is offering over and against that which the native religion offers. (2) In order to explain biblical concepts maximize neutral mediums of communication like music and *bakliw* (antiphonal singing), which is part of the culture. Regarding the use of dance and gongs in worship, Tabon made the point that a gong, which has been used for prayer and worship to the gods, if sanctified, may be used to worship God; but once it has been consecrated to God, it should be kept in the church so as not to create confusion.¹²⁵ He supported this argument by adding, "Some instruments were not made by Christians. However, we can use them for the glory of God. The same is true with pagan instruments."¹²⁶ As to dances, it is "a must" that the interpreter analyzes the meaning of the dance in its original and traditional context before incorporating this into the worship, and this must also be done with great caution. (3) Communicate in a manner that expresses biblical truth without compromise, yet do so in humility. Bensosan said, "In evangelism choose words carefully. Speak in a way that no one is insulted as long as you present the biblical truth."¹²⁷

¹²³ David Bruce Hegeman, *Plowing Hope: Toward A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Moscow: Canon Press, 2007), 77.

¹²⁴ Bensosan, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

¹²⁵ Tabon, interview by author, 22 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

¹²⁶ Tabon, interview by author, 22 June 2009, La Trinidad, Benguet.

¹²⁷ Bensosan, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

We cannot compromise but we should study the culture well. Bayas added, "Explain slowly and gently. Mostly, it is hard to work with the *Ibaloi*."¹²⁸ (4) Give practical yet meaningful help. Bensosan expressed that it is important to minister to them and meet their needs where they can see the truth. Believers should show and share their faith.¹²⁹

7. Appropriate Time

When there are practices that must be discarded in the culture, it is still important to do so at the appropriate time and place. For instance, ambivalence in using the gong and dance as part of the worship is understandable. Maxion explained, "Here in the *Ibaloi* culture, you cannot just sound the gong without sacrificing a pig, for when the host dances, he dances and represents the dead relatives."¹³⁰ This is not the case in other provinces of similar culture where the gong is used for feasts and weddings, but in Benguet, it is used mainly for *cañao*, where the beating of the gong is a call to the gods or the spirits of the dead to participate in the feast. Every major position in the native dance has a meaning and significance.¹³¹ Simply adopting the dance in worship without knowing its history and checking if it is an appropriate medium for the communication of biblical truths might cause havoc.

Let me digress here and relate a sad incident with the Solid Rock Ministries, a growing church in the Baguio City, Benguet. In text messages, Bagano shared that on

¹²⁸ Bayas, interview by author, 24 June 2009, Natubleng, Buguias, Benguet.

¹²⁹ Bensosan, interview by author, 3 January 2009, Daclan, Bokod, Benguet.

¹³⁰ Maxion, interview by author, 26 June 2009, Bila, Bokod, Benguet.

¹³¹ Florentino S. Merino, *The Kabayan Mummies and the Bendiyon Cañao* (Kabayan, Benguet: [No publisher given], 1989), 38-45.

account of the concept of *redeeming culture*, the senior pastor wanted to maintain his native identity as an *Igorot* pastor by using gongs as part of the worship time, with *tayao* (a native dance), and costumes on special occasions such as anniversaries. *Kabunian* was named in the prayers. The focus was on the culture, not on the preaching of the Word. Even the physical arrangement of the church was changed to make it "ethnic" where the *dap-ay*, altar, and furniture were *Igorot* fixtures. This caused a split. Half of the members left. Some went to other churches, while the rest did not go to church anymore. One couple attended different churches: the husband stayed with the main church while the wife went with our group. The split could have been prevented if the culture of the people had been used to reach them while keeping the Word of God as the main focus. I have heard of a selective *redeeming the culture*, with the Bible still as the main authority.¹³²

The split of the church occurred in 1 August 2006. It is quite recent and I am assuming that the desire of the pastor to make everything in his church ethnic was a response to the call in many circles to redeem the culture. The wise interpreter who realizes the need to contextualize the biblical text must also be wise in discerning when (the appropriate time) to challenge the people to discard traditional beliefs that are idolatrous and practices that verge on idolatry. Equally, he or she must seriously seek God for the principles to apply in discerning which component of the culture may be retained and appropriated into the spiritual life of the church and the individual. To insist on changing or accommodating forms at the wrong time and without first changing the receptor's concept of God may undermine the missionary enterprise.

¹³² Cleofe Bagano-Panayo, text messages to author, 8 October 2009.

8. Conclusion

So, what then are key things for young pastors to keep in mind when they are urged to "engage the culture"? That was the question that Thomas asked Carson on the publication of the latter's book, *Christ and Culture Revisited*. This was Carson's response.

Know what the gospel is first, comprehensively, accurately, faithfully. Work out from there. Learn to preach to your own people, not to the aggregates set out by Barna and Wuthnow (though much can be learned from such books). Whether the "engagement" is part of how you engage people evangelistically, or part of how Christians in your church do good in your community, keep thinking through what the Bible itself says — and then try, like the men of Issachar, to understand your own times.¹³³

VI. CONCLUSION

In writing this paper, a simple outline developed on how to present the truths of the Bible to a contemporary ethnic culture so that the recipients would not feel that the Bible and Christianity is the foreigner's religion. Even as I say that, it is quite possible that some workers among the *Ibalois* and *Kankanaïs* of Benguet have followed a similar outline; but to date, I have not seen anything in written form.

Select universal concepts that are true of the Bible and the contemporary ethnic culture.

Analyze these concepts in their respective contexts.

Allow the recipients to compare and contrast the concepts.

Acknowledge where the concepts converge and identify common grounds.

¹³³ Derek Thomas, "Don Carson Talks About Culture," *Reformation* 21, <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/don-carson-talks-about-culture.php> (accessed October 7, 2009).

Acknowledge the points of departure and carefully decide the non-negotiable absolutes.

Discuss the implications.

Make a transition.

Challenge for a decision.

This outline is far from perfect, but it is a start. It is hoped that fellow workers among the *Ibalois* and *Kankanais* (and cultures of similar background) will take on the responsibility to (1) Seriously study the text of the Bible; (2) Understand and be proud of their own culture; and (3) Faithfully communicate to the recipients in their own culture the meaning of the Bible text as intended by the original authors.

Working on this paper has surfaced the following for me:

When the interpreter shares the same culture as the target audience, it is much easier to identify the issues that must be addressed. Important issues that are usually avoided or are less valued by outsiders to the ethnic culture can be equally and appropriately dealt with without bias.

Such an interpreter can easily identify with the struggles, and feel the undercurrents, that the target audience experiences when a Bible truth goes against their beliefs and practices.

If the target audience already shares the same culture as that of the interpreter, it only wades through a minimum of two cultures: his or her own culture and that of the culture of the Bible.

Instead of asking how much of culture should be thrown away, parameters and principles should be set so that the target audience can decide for themselves which practices they will accommodate or reject.

It is important to take the timing into consideration when appropriating (or rejecting) a cultural value that is once strongly associated with idolatrous cultural practices.

Appendix A

Bible Concepts through the Lens of a Contemporary Ethnic Culture

1. When and how did you become a believer?
2. How long have you been in full time Christian work? How long have you served the Lord with the *Ibaloi* tribe?
3. In your opinion, how much of the *Ibaloi* culture continues to influence the values, expressions, attitudes, and actions of the contemporary *Ibaloi*? Can you cite specific examples?
4. How does the *Ibaloi* culture continue to influence the following:
 - Concept of God
 - Worship: Sacrifice and offering
 - Suffering and sickness
5. When Bible Truth confronts culture, what factors usually decide what will dominate in the end? See what applies and number them according to the order of priority.
 - () Grip of the cultural value or tradition on the interpreter
Comment: _____
 - () Rate (or extent) of renewing the mind and transformation
Comment: _____
 - () Knowledge and experience of God
Comment: _____
 - () Conviction of the priority of Biblical truth over culture
Comment: _____
 - () Others: _____

6. When culture is at variance with Bible Truth, what are the expected challenges? What usually takes place in the mind of the interpreter? What are the issues raised if any?
7. From your experiences in the past, how did you deal with these challenges?
8. Should we allow culture to have priority over Bible Truth? If yes, when do we allow this? If no, why not?
9. Recognizing the difficulties in the interpretation process, what suggestions or proposals would you make for the interpreter to make sure that the meaning and message of the text is deciphered and communicated to the contemporary culture?

Appendix B

Bible Concepts through the Lens of a Contemporary Ethnic Culture

1. When and how did you become a believer?
2. How long have you been in full time Christian work? How long have you served the Lord with the *Kankanai tribe*?
3. In your opinion, how much of the *Kankanai* culture continues to influence the values, expressions, attitudes, and actions of the contemporary *Kankanai*? Can you cite specific examples?
4. How does the *Kankanai* culture continue to influence the following:

Concept of God

Worship: Sacrifice and offering

Suffering and sickness

5. When Bible Truth confronts culture, what factors usually decide what will dominate in the end? See what applies and number them according to the order of priority.

() Grip of the cultural value or tradition on the interpreter

Comment: _____

() Rate (or extent) of renewing the mind and transformation

Comment: _____

() Knowledge and experience of God

Comment: _____

() Conviction of the priority of Biblical truth over culture

Comment: _____

() Others: _____

6. When culture is at variance with Bible Truth, what are the expected challenges? What usually takes place in the mind of the interpreter? What are the issues raised if any?
7. From your experiences in the past, how did you deal with these challenges?
8. Should we allow culture to have priority over Bible Truth? If yes, when do we allow this? If no, why not?
9. Recognizing the difficulties in the interpretation process, what suggestions or proposals would you make for the interpreter to make sure that the meaning and message of the text is deciphered and communicated to the contemporary culture?

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the influence of a specific contemporary ethnic culture on its values, expressions, and actions as it weaves into its own culture select biblical concepts that already have parallels in it. It probes into the thoughts and considerations of ethnic interpreters when biblical truth confronts their culture; identifies some of their challenges; and presents proposals as they aim to distill the message of a biblical text and present it to a contemporary audience with similar if not the same effect as it did the original recipients.

撮 要

本文作者就價值觀、表達形式、行動來檢視某特殊當代民族文化，在融和這文化所選取的聖經概念時所造成的影響，而該文化已經存在所選取的聖經概念的平行例子。當聖經真理與文化出現對抗，該民族在詮釋聖經真理時，究竟思考和考慮甚麼？作者就此探索，進而辨別出該民族詮釋聖經真理所面對的挑戰，並且提出獻議，讓有關民族濾析某段聖經經文後，向當代聽眾陳述結果，這些結果即或與經文原初聽眾所領受不盡相同，但也很接近。