

Book review on

[Religion](#), [Jesus](#)



BOOK REVIEW ON " CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY" DMSC 920: Communicating Christ: Barriers and Bridges Name: Lalrosiem Songate Book Title: CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY Author: Duane Elmer Publisher: IVP Academic an imprint of Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois. Overall Purpose of the Book: The purpose of the book as explained by the writer himself is " to clarify issues in intercultural and interracial conflict, to provide insights on the different ways people of various cultures handled conflict, to evaluate these according to the Scripture and to provide practical guidelines for (1) helping us live more harmoniously with our cultural differences, (2) developing a positive strategy for dealing with conflict and (3)communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ more effectively and ministering the nurturing grace of God" (p. 22). Contents of the Book: The book is divided into three sections. Section-I talks about Understanding Conflict and Culture. Section-II talks about Cultural Diversity and Conflict Resolution and section-III talks about the Implication for the Gospel message. The first section talks about the fact of cultural diversity and that this diversity is the creation of God Himself. " After completing the creation, God looked around, saw a vast array of diversity in all he had created and declared it " very good" (Gen. 1: 31). Diversity is rooted in the creative activity of God" (p. 23). Naturally diversity is likely to breed conflict and division but the unity in the midst of diversity is what brings out the glory of God. Christians need to see the diverse culture and the potential for conflict that such diversity can bring about but at the same time learned to be equipped to promote unity in diversity according to the will of God. The second section deals with the role

of mediator in conflict resolution which is used effectively in the Asian and African countries and also the various forms of approach to conflict resolution bringing out biblical guidelines for the same. The third section deals with the implication of cross-cultural conflict resolution to the gospel message. As Christians, our responsibility is to preach the gospel to other people which normally involves other cultures which again naturally brings out cultural tensions and conflicts. Bringing out its Christian relevance through the description of the conflict between God and humanity and the steps God himself initiated in order to resolve our conflict by sending his son Jesus Christ to mediate between God and humanity, he brings out the Christian principles of cross-cultural conflict resolution which can greatly enhance the effectiveness of our missionary efforts. Evaluation of the Book: I will describe briefly my evaluation of the book as follows: First, mission basically means sharing the gospel with someone who do not know. This normally involves a contact with others who are of a different culture. In any kind of intercultural contact, whether it is a business contact, a political contact or even in a religious contact, conflicts are bound to occur because of the cultural differences. This cultural differences is an important issue especially in a Christian mission enterprise because a lot of one's effectiveness depends on how well one respond to this issue . This is where the value of this subject covered in the book comes in. The following statement is worth noting; The better we are at interpreting the culture, the fewer conflicts we will experience, the more we will be able to build authentic relationships, and the greater will be our ability to communicate God's truth" (p. 14). Secondly, the presentation of Western cultures versus

two-third world cultures clearly brings out the vastness of differences in cultures and the books is basically written for Western audience to help them understand this cultural differences. It may be noted however, that even within the areas covered by the two-third world group, there are again various different cultures and the people within this group have their own struggles in their intercultural relationships. Thirdly, the writer is able to bring out from his vast knowledge and experience the intricate complexity of human culture which in itself is a great asset for anyone intending to venture out for any form of intercultural exposure. It will also be to their benefit to take note of the various methods and approaches to solve cultural conflicts. Fourthly, the statement of the writer " Diversity is rooted in the creative activity of God" (p. 23), most probably need a deeper investigation. The main cause of human cultural diversity begins with the Babel dispersion when God suddenly made them speak in different languages and they could not understand each other anymore (Gen. 11 & 12). Since the language breakup is evidently caused by their evil intention, should the language breakup be considered a curse or a boon? While instances of God's acknowledgement and appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversities are plenty in the bible, a proper connection or explanation need to be made with the origin of human languages at the Babel dispersion. Fourthly, the method of Bruce Olson, a missionary to the Indians in Colombo, in helping the witch doctor to heal the eyesore with Terramycin in order to avoid a possible conflict with her seems to pose certain complication. In such culture witch doctors are feared and respected because they are known to possess evil power. They are often opposed to the work of the missionaries as their successful ministries

naturally means they will lose their followers. The battle is usually the witch doctor versus the missionaries. In such a situation helping the witch doctor to heal the eyesores with medicine may definitely help save the witch doctor's face and avoid the possible conflict. But on the other hand, Bruce Olson is helping the witch doctor to gain more trust from her people while as a missionary one of his responsibilities should have been delivering the people from the clutches of such witch doctors. Appreciation: My reading of this book has led me to look at intercultural conflict in a different perspective. Being from the north east part of India where intercultural relation is a very delicate issue, we never look from a missions point of view. As church leaders, our concern is in building peaceful relations between various ethnic groups in order to avoid a possible flare up of ethnic war and initiate peaceful negotiations in the event that conflict arise between ethnic groups. This book has not only helped me see conflict resolution from a mission perspective but also helps me realize the importance of the issue of conflict resolution in a much wider scope. Secondly, I am amazed how the writer has been able to bring out the relevance of conflict resolution for Christians from the bible itself. From the statement that " God was, in fact, involved in the greatest conflict in history, a conflict that was cosmic in scope...." (p. 77), the subsequent description of Jesus' death on the cross to resolve the conflict between God and man and also references to many biblical instances of conflict resolution is definitely helpful. In a setting where I come from many Christians are of the opinion that negotiating peace between two conflicting groups can only be solved by the government and the church need not be involved. This is true in a sense that the government

has the resources to come up with some financial packages to compensate the loss suffered due to the conflict which the church is often unable to do. Thirdly, all third world countries will be well aware of the practice of bribes in having things done in offices. Many Christians in these countries have taken this as normative and no longer regard it as something sinful. However, the way the writer presents the importance of not to give in to such practices and coming up with an idea of " within forty-eight hours of obtaining your request you return to that official expressing your gratitude and possibly with a gift that would be fitting to his or her status and service to you" (p. 91) is a very practical way of dealing with the issue of bribe. Fourthly, one thing that makes this book so credible is the numerous case studies used to prove and explain the points. The case study of the Israelites in the matter of the construction of an altar by the two and half tribes mentioned in chapter 11 of the book helps me learn one lesson. As the famous English proverb says, " A stitch in time saves nine" a timely few words of explanation of intent to Joshua would have avoided the unnecessary initial anger and confrontation even though it did not result in a conflict. We need to learn that many unnecessary hurt and conflict could be avoided if we all take time to speak and share things to the people concern. Relevance: This book managed to bring out one of the most important dimension of Christian mission. In fact, it may not be an exaggeration to say that the success of one's ministry in a cross-cultural setting will depend a lot on how well we master and practice this art of cross-cultural conflict resolution. Therefore as long as human beings exist in various cultural situations and as long as the need for intercultural interaction is required, the book will continue to remain an asset

for anyone who is serious about his or her business. This book is a must-read for every Christian leader, pastors and missionaries.