

Cross-Cultural Leadership Challenges and Opportunities: A South African Perspective

Michael Cassidy has over 50 years of experience as the founder of African Enterprise, a non racial, interdenominational, Pan-African ministry into the cities and leadership circles of Africa, bringing a ministry in both word and deed in partnership with the church. Today A.E. has evangelistic teams in Congo (D.R.C.), Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Michael has been instrumental in calling together many major gatherings of church leaders over the years and also played a major and leading role in behind-the-scenes negotiations in the run up to the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994. From this depth of experiences, Michael will share lessons he has learned in cross-cultural leadership and partnerships for mission.

Michael Cassidy, the founder of African Enterprise, has been involved in evangelism, teaching and leadership ministries since 1962, the year he launched AE in Pietermaritzburg. Today, AE has evangelistic teams in Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. He has been instrumental in calling together several major gatherings of church leaders over the years and also played a leading role in behind-the-scenes negotiations in the run-up to the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994. Michael has written several books the latest being a treatise on John chapter 17, entitled *The Church Jesus Prayed For*. He is currently writing his memoirs. He is also an avid sports fan, particularly cricket, rugby, and tennis. He and his wife, Carol, live in Hilton, near Pietermaritzburg in South Africa. They have two daughters, a son, and eight grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION:

- Much of my life and ministry in Africa has been spent seeking to cope with cross-cultural realities and leadership challenges related to this, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. Yet, I feel my comprehension of these challenges and possibilities is still very limited and incomplete.
- However, the reality is that cultural or cross-cultural challenges are unavoidable given the fact that every time we relate to a person or group cross-culturally we are dealing with the totality of learned assumptions and worldviews, often unconsciously held, in the other person or group, which determines for them how life works and what behaviors are proper.
- Because these vary so much, there are huge potentials for misunderstanding, prejudice, and conflict.
- But with mutual understandings of one another's culture(s), plus the gospel's supra-cultural relevance, we can find our way into very productive relationships and shared cross-cultural labors for the Kingdom.

I. The Need to Understand the Principle of Each Person's Hermeneutical Grid

- A. Every person has a pre-understanding (German-vorverstandnis) or conceptual framework, which they bring into all of life.
- B. Each person wears interpretational lenses through which they view people and realities around them.

II. Options in Terms of Gospel and Culture

- A. We note first the Bible was given in different cultures but its basic message is above culture and speaks into culture.
- B. John Stott once wrote, “We must struggle to understand the contemporary scene...we aim to help Christians develop both a Christian critique of its assumptions, values, and standards, and a Christian response to its challenges.
- C. We note there is both good and evil in cultures. Human beings that occupy our world are God’s creation. But culture is humanity’s creation. Cultures reflect the people who live in them. Humans are made in the image of God, but sin has corrupted that image. Likewise, our cultures. A shadow of God’s good image is seen in all cultures, but so is the corruption, which is in all humans.
- D. Richard Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture* speaks of opposition to culture (Christ against culture), agreement between Christ and culture (Christ of culture), then, a combination that incorporates insights from both of these two views (Christ above culture).
- E. Thus, the gospel will sometimes affirm culture, or critique it, or judge it.
- F. We have to be aware of the perils of the “Attractional Church”, which so accommodates local culture so that it can attract people into the church with the minimum of moral or spiritual adjustment.

III. The Reality of Cultural Wars in Our Modern Settings

- A. In the West, the war is between Christianity and Secular Humanism where truth and morals are relative.
- B. In Africa the war is between Christianity and non-biblical aspects of African traditional religion (e.g. Christ alone as a mediator between God and man, or ancestors as mediators between God and man).

IV. Our Experiences

- A. Building African Enterprise as a non-racial and cross-cultural team.**
- B. Facing the apartheid context with its assorted cultural clashes:**
 - 1. Racial
 - 2. Nationalistic
 - 3. Ideological
 - 4. Political
 - 5. religious -- different understandings of what Scripture teaches (e.g. about race)

C. Evangelistic missions in cities with partnerships between our team and the local church:

1. Note challenges arising from a black/mixed fraternal in independent Africa inviting a team from apartheid South Africa, (e.g. Nairobi fraternal inviting A.E. for 1969 city-wide mission)
2. The need to demythologize one another's perceptions of the other
3. Necessity of coming as servants under local church authorities
4. The importance of being aware of local cultural sensitivities
5. Seeing mutuality and complementarity in one another's giftings
6. Keeping the focus on Christ and what we have in common (e.g. our human dignity, value, fallenness, fallibility and shared redemption in Christ)
7. Facing courageously the challenges thrown up by convulsed political situations, (e.g. #1 A.E.'s city-wide Mission '70 to Johannesburg amidst apartheid tensions and racial realities; e.g. #2 A.E. city-wide mission to Kigali in 1995 following Rwandan genocide and massive tribal tensions.

D. Creating counter-cultural communities:

1. Via major non racial and non denominational conferences drawing the church together cross-culturally to minister into a conflicted cultural/racial context
 - a) S.A. Congress on Mission and Evangelism -- 1973
 - b) Pan-African Leadership Assembly, Nairobi 1976
 - c) S.A. Christian Leadership Assembly, Pretoria, 1979
 - d) National Initiative for Reconciliation -- 1985 with calls for Pray Away, and touring from cross-cultural teams demonstrating cultural/racial/denominational unity
 - e) Mamelodi Encounter -- Mid '80's, a conference when whites were accommodated in black homes in a township, thus getting a first-hand taste of black life in a real black setting. We showed a model of what South African church and society should look like. Leadership partnerships for this worked very well and effectively.

E. Developing strategic partnerships:

1. Definition: "An association of two or more Christian autonomous bodies who have formed a trusting relationship, and fulfill agreed upon expectations by sharing complementary strengths and resources to reach their mutual goal." Luis Bush

2. Seven principles

- a) Agree on doctrine and ethical behavior
- b) Share common goals
- c) Develop attitude of equality
- d) Avoid dominance of one over the other
- e) Communicate openly
- f) Demonstrate trust and accountability
- g) Pray together

3. Potential problems

- a) Cultural misunderstandings
- b) Economic disparity
- c) Leadership -- who is in charge?

4. Example of African Enterprise working with Campus Crusade in city-wide mission to Nairobi -- mid '80's

5. Example of African Enterprise working with Scripture Union in missions to schools.

F. We have made many mistakes in the past; but have seen many blessings.

V. Conclusion

A. Working and leading cross-culturally is exceedingly difficult and demanding, spiritually, emotionally, and strategically.

B. But it is very exciting, rewarding, effective, and biblical.