

# HEALING LIVES

  
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Redeeming  
Culture

SPRING 2023



## HEALING LIVES

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## from the Editorial Team

A popular song currently playing on Christian radio here in the States is “Be Alright” by Evan Craft and performed by Danny Gokey and Redimi2 (<https://youtu.be/9NLnIPs-m58> or click on the QR code to the right). If you have a moment, go there, listen and worship as I did when I first heard it.

The lyrics begin:

There’s a name that can silence every fear  
There’s a love that embraces  
The heartache, the pain, and the tears  
Through my faith and my doubting  
I know one thing for sure  
His word is unfailing  
His promise secure.

Medical Ambassadors ministers in 40 countries and 35 more through partnerships. We encounter many people groups, languages, beliefs and cultures. In this issue:

We affirm that *Family Beliefs Impact Culture and Can Change the World* (page 18) as we examine our own culture.



We are encouraged by *Esther’s Story* (page 16) and *Witnessing God’s Transforming Power* (page 22).

We examine our health in *Optimal Health May Counter Culture* (page 24).

We are challenged by the question *Do I want to be Right or to be Trusted?* (page 26).

And we rejoice with the new believers in the Congo. See *From Idolatry to the Worship of the True God* (page 20).

Let us celebrate cultures, for indeed, the Lord Jesus came to **redeem** the whole world, and we know “His word is unfailing and His promise secure.” As the song concludes, we agree that He’s got the whole wide world in His hands (Todo el mundo en su mano está).



# *Redeeming Culture: a case study from Guatemala*

*by Dr. Amy L. Sherman*

Although it's been almost 30 years, I can still close my eyes and picture the scene. I'm looking out the window of the six-seater airplane at the mountainous landscape below surrounding the Ixil village of Chajul in west-central Guatemala. It's easy to see the contrast in what's happening on two adjacent, tall hills. One is neatly terraced, with different colors and shapes indicating the variety of plants grown on multiple layers. The other one shows some rather raggedy corn and bean plants all over the mountain, interspersed with dry or rocky patches.

Once on the ground, I learn during my visit that most villagers in Chajul proper are farming the traditional way on "their" mountain. A smaller group of Ixil lives on the flat top of the nearby mountain, all of whom are Christ-followers (the fruit of a German Evangelical missionary's work in the area over several years). The mountain-top residents' homes are of noticeably better quality, and more children there are enrolled in school.

Various factors influence the socioeconomic conditions of the two sets of villagers. But a key one is that the traditional

farmers refuse to "cut into the face of the mountain god" for fear of his wrath. Not only did they reject the German missionary's agricultural training on terracing, they asked the god's indulgence as they sow their seeds, assuring it that they won't poke down too deeply into the soil. The result? Steady erosion as the rains cause the dirt to run down the incline, and poor harvests.

Meanwhile, just a 15-minute hike away, the Christ-following villagers have embraced the innovative practice of terracing and planting a wider variety of crops. They have more, better, healthier food to eat and sell.

Sitting among a group of shy, colorfully dressed women, my friendly young translator sets them at ease. The conversation shifts from farming practices to their husbands. Several report that when their spouses began following Jesus, they stopped spending limited household funds on alcohol. Others add that they have learned to save money too by using the local health clinic instead of paying curanderos (witchdoctors).

As a result of embracing new cultural patterns, these families' standard of living improved. The differences in their homes—tin roofs, better ventilation, and even some concrete rather than dirt floors—were visible testimonies of improved incomes.

I continued to be intrigued by the nexus between religion, culture, and economics long after I wrote a book based on my research throughout Guatemala. I led a U.S. urban ministry for several years and witnessed additional expressions of how cultural beliefs and practices produce multiple ripple effects at the individual, household, and community levels.

Today, some great books have been written on culture making (Andy Crouch) and culture care (Makoto Fujimura). Organizations like the Praxis, the Colson Center, and Made to Flourish are committed to helping Christians discern how their faith can influence the culture. Much of this teaching can be summarized into two complementary streams:

- Discerning God's creational purposes for various cultural institutions and fields and seeking to affirm and strengthen the practices aligned with those purposes; and
- Recognizing the ways in which cultural practices or an organization's values have been corrupted and distorted by human sin/idolatry—and seeking to resist and repair such patterns.

Tasks of "cultural evaluation" must be done from the foundation of *shalom*: God's normative intention for the world. All human cultures have elements that reflect or align with that *shalom* and all include aspects terribly deformed from that plumline. Tragically, some Western missionary practices assumed that Western culture was superior in its alignment and/or blindly equated "biblical culture" to their own practices and patterns. The echoes of the human suffering imposed by forcing people to discard their native culture as a condition of embracing Christianity remain with us today.

Curtis Chang, Executive Director of Redeeming Babel, offers a very helpful construct for practicing the art

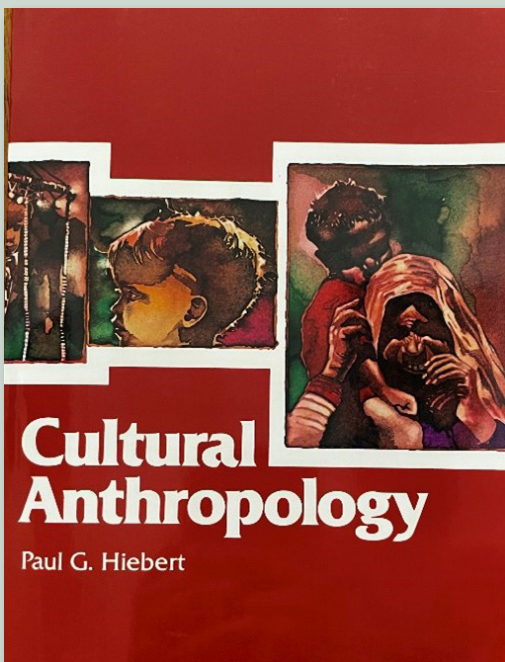
of discerning the good and resisting the bad in any organization's culture. He suggests Christians look for three aspects of "Trinitarian DNA": interdependence, overflowing love, and shared purpose. Where these are present, harmony, joy, beauty, and thriving are possible. But cultures are also infected by mutations of these Trinitarian "source codes." Sometimes, what is present instead is forced dependence, self-focused love, and corrupt purpose.

Any society is composed of interrelated six spheres: the Good (the realm of social mores and ethics); the True (the realm of human knowledge and learning); the Beautiful (the realm of aesthetics, creativity, and design); the Just and Well-Ordered (the realm of political and civic life); the Prosperous (the realm of economic life); and the Sustainable (the realm of human and natural health).<sup>i</sup> God is on a grand mission to renew all things—including all the institutions and practices within these spheres. Laboring to "redeem culture" is thus a worthy pursuit. The journey must be marked by deep humility, though. We must interrogate our own cultural values and patterns and recognize how easily blinded we are to "the way we just do things here." We must pray for the Spirit's guidance and carefully, persistently, probe Scripture to discover God's norms and purposes for these cultural spheres. Then we can ask King Jesus for eyes to see where He is already at work repairing and restoring, and how we might join Him.

<sup>i</sup> See the Human Ecology Framework from Thriving Cities Group.



Dr. Amy L. Sherman is author, most recently, of *Agents of Flourishing: Pursuing Shalom in Every Corner of Society* (IVP, 2022).



Reviews by Ravi I. Jayakaran

I had the privilege of learning directly from the late Dr. Paul Hiebert when I was going through my advanced leadership training in the mid-1980s. Here are two books I highly recommend: (1) *Cultural Anthropology* by Paul G. Hiebert (ISBN: 0-8010-4273-9/Baker Books 1983) is an excellent resource for those with a serious interest in wanting to go deeper into the subject of culture. This book is a “deep dive” into the subject and offers helpful perspectives on engaging with communities, understanding them, and facilitating transformation.

The following chapters are especially useful:

- More on Culture
- Material Culture: Description & Explanation
- Cultural Ecology
- World Views
- Expressive Culture
- Sociocultural Change
- Culture and the person

2nd book review by Ravi is on page 15

# BEARING FRUIT in TOUGH SOIL

by the South Asia Team

In some parts of the world, receptiveness to the good news of God’s Kingdom comes quickly. In other places, like South Asia, the seeds of this good news take time to germinate.

Diversity—that’s South Asia. It holds twenty-four and a half percent of the world’s *population* (1.9 billion people; seven times the world average of people per square kilometer; so yes, it’s crowded). The world’s major religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism all have origins here. (Islam came later but is prominent.) It even has Christian influence from 2,000 years ago. Now, think about *languages* and your tongue gets tied: 1,700 mother tongues are spoken (Wikipedia). *Christians comprise an estimated three to four percent of the population.*

In that context, Medical Ambassador’s efforts may seem like a drop in the bucket. Yet we know that God is accomplishing His purposes through the CHE teams in India, Pakistan, and Nepal, and through their influence in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, despite frequent and varied opposition.

Fruitfulness in communities grows from roots of *relationships*. Our team members in these countries abound in their God-given ability to love and connect with people. Those relationships *build trust* in the communities, are *evidence of God’s love* in the teams, and together with the Holy Spirit *bring results* of wholistic transformation: the fruit of individual lives and communities that are attracted to and move into God’s Kingdom.

We could tell you stories about how, in Pakistan, communities of a neglected people-group are experiencing the love of God and learning their worth to Him as they are taught the prevention of disease and promotion of good health. During the Covid-19 surge, the team visited all the nearby communities and shared



how to stay safe, distributing face masks stitched by a local CHE sewing club. And how in the past months they made friends in new communities due to their help with flood-relief life-saving items. These friends now want CHE training, through which they will learn about the One True God.

We'd share about Premi, a pastor's wife, who joined our CHE team and began a church-based outreach into a semi-urban community in northern India near a fundamental Hindu area. Unemployment, alcoholism, drugs and illnesses run rampant in the area. The church began reaching out to leaders in various parts of town, asking those leaders what issues were important to them and raising awareness about those matters. Excited participation came from



many town women, who were fed up with those problems. Premi is a gentle, humble pillar of faith, yet she is firm in vision and persistence. God is honoring her and the growing number of people coming to the Lord as they tackle, with their own resources, the

community issues resulting from the devil's stronghold on people. Indeed, this brings direct opposition at times. Yet, they stand unmoved "by the grace of God." Many are the stories we could share of another CHE team that ministers with people living with disabilities and with slum dwellers. They raise awareness in their communities on "good health" (*Shalom*), explaining how God values them, and teaching them how to work together to bring about God's intention for His Kingdom in their midst.

Then there are the outstanding advances in Nepal among isolated hill people with low education levels, who are gifted in their farming, yet open to learning about new agricultural options. Farming cooperatives and savings groups teach small business principles as well as Kingdom values through Bible stories. Issues on health brought up by the members are also discussed, and participants share new knowledge with their neighbors between meetings. God is working in this small mountainous country, and numerous churches have been planted, literally and uniquely, through the CHE ministry.

*It is this tough "soil" in which our faithful and tenacious CHE teams minister.*

*Thank you for lifting these dear brothers and sisters up to the Lord.*



## Encountering a New Culture as Jesus Did

*Culture and Transformational Development: MAI Academy*

by **Galen Dalrymple**, COO & Dean of MAI Academy

Missions, by definition, involve the clashing of cultures. The interaction of people from different races, languages, tribes, customs, and traditions inevitably will cause at the very least confusion, and in far too many cases, hurts and wounds. While these are not intentional, they are very real and painful and can be detrimental to the sharing of the gospel.

Within every culture, there is good and bad, truth and lies, virtue and unethical behavior. Before one can begin to redeem culture, we must first understand what culture is and study the culture where we will be working and living. Webster's definition of culture seems a good one to me: "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time and the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization."

To begin to understand what it is like to be suddenly confronted with a new "culture," think about the incarnation of Jesus. What do you think it was like for Him when He suddenly woke up in a feeding trough after having been in eternal glory forever? I'd imagine He was cold, the sounds were far different from what He'd known in heaven, He had physical senses as a result of taking on flesh, and He'd become subject to space and time and the limitations of a physical body. Perhaps most significantly, He began to die even as He uttered his first cry.

Jesus, however, didn't come just to experience a new culture (like we do when we travel on vacation outside of our own country), He came to change and redeem human culture. How did Jesus do that? I think there are several clues for us in Scripture:

- He entered our world as a learner, not a know-it-all. We are told He grew in wisdom and stature

and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:51-52). He also had to learn obedience by what He suffered (Hebrews 5:8).

- Though He had every right to demand people bow and serve Him, He came to our culture to serve (Matthew 20:28).

With these things in mind, what do we need to do if we hope to have some possibility of entering successfully into another culture? Consider:

- Philippians 2:5-8: we need to cultivate Jesus' attitude of emptying ourselves, becoming servants, and being obedient – even if it costs our life;
- 1 Peter 2:21: we should work as hard to adapt to foreign culture as Jesus did to become a human and a Jewish rabbi;
- Matthew 16:24: we need to be not only willing but to deny ourselves as Jesus did;
- 1 Corinthians 9:22-23: we need to be willing to be flexible and change, to become all things to all men to win the lost rather than stubbornly clinging to our native culture and thinking it is superior.

Sharing in the culture where we visit, work, and serve accomplishes some very important things:

- It allows us to establish families and friendships.
- We can reach agreements and settle disputes in God-honoring ways.
- We can work together to fulfill mutually beneficial things.
- It allows us to be accepted (or rejected if we do it poorly!) by others.

Not understanding culture also has serious ramifications:

- We may build walls that enclose those who think and act like we do but that exclude others.
- We may become afraid of or shocked by those who are not like us and by what they do.

This subject can be very difficult for some to understand. We



can easily be led to think that the North American way is smarter, better, more scientifically sound, and superior to a less educated and “sophisticated” culture. But think about this: if you were suddenly dropped into the jungles of Africa, how long do you think you’d survive? People have lived there for millennia and the knowledge they have allows them to continue to successfully live there today, whereas we would probably die because we don’t understand that culture and environment nor how to survive in it.

MAI and our people try to learn, understand, and value the cultures we encounter. It’s a challenge and sometimes we get it right and other times we get it wrong. This is one reason why we believe so strongly in nationals leading programs in their own villages and cities. They know their culture far better than an outsider ever will, and they can work more effectively in it.

MAI Academy has some tools available to help us better understand how to form partnerships for kingdom purposes, including the “Kingdom Partnerships” video series by Phil Butler, an author and partnership consultant with time spent at Vision Synergy, InterDev, and InterCristo. Another is the video series “Resourcing Urban Transformation Webinar Series” from William Carey International University. We encourage you to check them out at [www.maiacademy.thinkific.com](http://www.maiacademy.thinkific.com).



**Galen Dalrymple** is the Chief Operating Officer of MAI and serves as the Dean of the MAI Academy. Galen and his wife, Laurel, have recently moved to Redmond, Oregon. They have three children and six grandchildren. They are dog lovers and share their home with a mini-golden doodle named Rosie.



# Cross-Cultural Challenges

by **Dr. Bibiana Mac Leod**

Technical Advisor for Disaster Response, Orality & Special Projects

For the past six years MAI has been partnering with a local mission organization that serves an aboriginal group in South America. Gloria (*all names are fictitious, to protect privacy of team members and friends*) is an aboriginal missionary young woman who moved to this country to expand Community Health Evangelism (CHE) among oral cultures. Although she is from a different country, she is from the same ethnic group, though with a different language. People have accepted her more than those coming from the same country but with different cultural backgrounds.

As a result of Gloria's ministry several young men from one village came to the Lord, and animistic practices have been challenged by their newly found faith in Jesus. Some of the old spiritual rites did not feel right anymore. The story of Creation according to Genesis 1 was gladly received when these new believers shared it with neighbors and family members. Very slowly they introduced more stories, taking time to discuss the Spanish meaning of words, adapting them to their culture and finding equivalent ideas in their native language.

Sam and Leah, national missionaries, joined the CHE training team two years ago. The local partner organization went through major changes due to COVID. Some people left, some had to adopt new roles. Meanwhile, natives that had accepted Jesus' sacrifice for themselves had their own challenges, ups and downs.

My husband Alexander and I visited them last March. We were received warmly by Thomas, one of the young believers, who is a second chief. Thomas shared with us how he wants his people to experience God in their own cultural framework, decide how to worship Him and learn from His Word what HE wants from them.

Thomas' wife was expecting a child. As is customary, she traveled to her home in another village to be assisted by a local birth attendant. Since I did not hear from them, by the end of June I asked Sam and Leah if they had any news about the baby. Sam explained that during the time Thomas was waiting to hear of the baby's arrival, one of his wife's uncles brought information about a "terrible outcome." The child had been sacrificed due to a birth defect. No details. Just facts.

Sam and Leah, as proud parents of a little girl born last February, were horrified. This is a cultural practice none of us were aware of. Thomas had just completed the translation of one of our key lessons on the Great commission and the Great commandment. The lesson unpacks the relationship between these passages, that use repeatedly the word "ALL."

*Go therefore and make disciples of **all** nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe **all** that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)*

*You shall love the Lord you God with **all** your heart, and with **all** your soul, and with **all** your strength, and with **all** your mind; (Luke 10:27)*

Thomas and Sam discussed what is needed to accomplish these verses in one's life: a Great Commitment to BE what we teach. Does Thomas see the murdering of handicapped children as God sees it? Would he have been able to prevent the death of his child?

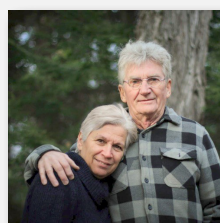
Gloria, who is away from the field this quarter, is starting CHE among her own ethnic group. She is a third-generation believer. Her grandfather would have been the "Thomas" of his day when he was confronted with the truth of the Gospel, and unhealthy aspects of cultural practices had to be seen in the light of his new faith. Many of the animistic ideas disappear when confronted with the biblical truth. However, Gloria tells us that when bad things happen, even today, churchgoers attribute to the spiritual world events that have medical reasons, like Chagas disease. When someone dies suddenly, probably due to an enlarged heart and arrhythmias, they think of spirits and curses. In our own worldview, we also have cultural biases that need redemption, maybe not from the animistic perspective, but from materialistic values that are also unhealthy.

So, how has MAI dealt with these challenges? The team that specializes in adapting CHE material to Oral cultures



provides direction and support to partner missionaries, who also translate CHE lessons into indigenous languages. We meet regularly with training teams, missionaries that are culturally closer to the ethnic group we serve. We pray together, search for God's wisdom and in this case, visit and train in love and awareness of cultural sensitivity. How can a people group that has not yet recognized God the Creator as their King discern what He thinks of the murder of their babies born with disabilities?

All life is precious to God. He has not rejected those who have special needs. Our hearts ache with Thomas and his wife, and we pray this curse will be broken in this generation.



Dr. Bibiana Mac Leod is MAI's Technical Advisor for special projects including Oral Cultures, Disaster Response, Anti-Human Trafficking and Trauma Healing. Bibiana, who is originally from Argentina is a Medical Doctor and lives in Nova Scotia, Canada with her husband, Alexander. They have four grown children and six grandchildren.



In Matthew 10 Jesus sets in motion a bold plan. You might remember He's been traveling around Galilee now for several months, teaching, preaching, and healing. He's stirred the masses, restored the broken, and mystified the authorities. Though Jesus has directly impacted thousands, He knows His time is limited, so He thoughtfully invests in a few. During His earthly ministry, they never fully grasp His plan and message, but despite their weak understanding, feeble character, and lacking credentials, Jesus entrusts and empowers them. He cycles through moments of mentoring, sending, and empowering until His ascension. Jesus' plan to redeem the world included His trust in the potential of those He called to follow.

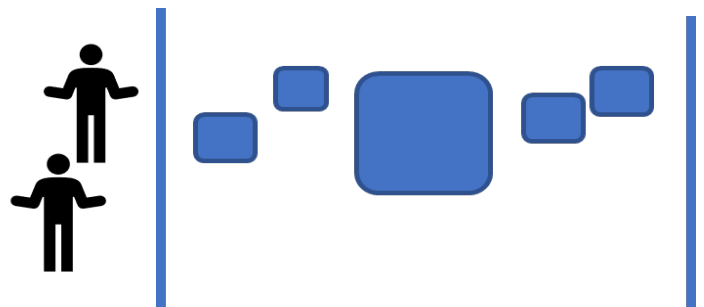
Jesus still works through imperfect people and conditions by the power of His Holy Spirit to redeem and transform culture. He calls us to partner with Him in redeeming culture by demonstrating compassion, challenging mindsets, and making disciples of ourselves. Cultures change from the inside out as God's Spirit transforms the heart, renews the mind, and releases His people as multiplying agents of change.

**CHALLENGE:** In our community development efforts, we use the following participatory lesson to challenge mindsets and transform communities. We invite you to gather a small group, act out the following activity and discuss your observations together. Have fun and

send us a note sharing your discoveries, challenges, or questions!

**READY:** Find masking tape, 8 pieces of paper and 3 actors.

**SET:** Tape off 2 lines on the floor, symbolizing a river with the masking tape. Make the simulated river about 5-6 feet in length and 5 feet wide. Next, arrange the paper in the river with each piece symbolizing a stepping stone. For the middle stone, tape 4 pieces of paper together to make it a larger size.



**GO:** Act out the following scene. Two local people come to a rapidly flowing river and need to cross but they don't swim. The current is strong, and they are afraid, so they wait at the shoreline unsure what to do.

Next, an outsider comes along and sees their difficulty. He offers to help them cross using the stones, but they are still afraid. To help, the outsider offers to carry one person on his back. When the outsider reaches the larger stone in

the middle, he's exhausted so he sets the 1st local person down on the island and leaves the person in the middle of the river.

The outsider returns to shore where the 2nd local is still waiting. The 2nd local asks for help as well, but the outsider refuses to carry that person because he is so tired. Instead, the outsider suggests showing the 2nd local how to use the stones to cross on their own. Halfway across, the 2nd local feels confident enough to manage the rest of the way without the outsider. Meanwhile the 1st local remains stuck in the middle and afraid. The 1st local shouts and waves for help, so the outsider sends the 2nd local back to teach the one stranded how to use the stones to cross on their own.

### DISCUSS:

1. What did you see? What was happening?
2. Discuss the experiences of the two locals?
3. Can you think of a similar situation from real life?
4. What does this lesson teach us about helping others?
5. What happens when we teach someone rather than do it for them? What are we thinking about that person?

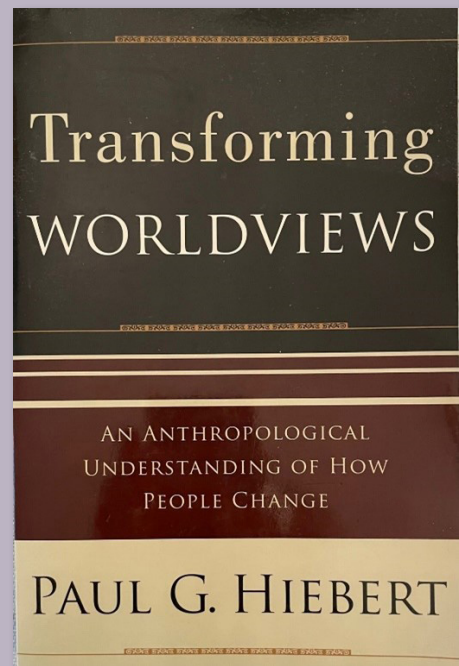
### SUMMARY:

A development mindset sees, builds up, and releases potential that dignifies and leads to local ownership

A rescuer mindset seems compassionate, but often minimizes local capacity, creates dependence on others and leads to short-term change.



**Steve Otradovec** is the Global Coordinator for Medical Ambassadors International. He's the husband of his amazing wife Lucy and the father of two talented daughters. He also served as a missionary to Cambodia, a leader in biotech, an English teacher, a Toastmaster, a community development instigator, and a novice ukulele player.



Dr. Paul Hiebert grew up as a missionary kid in India and presents an academic perspective about the various influencers that shape a person's worldview. A precursor to transformation is a change in one's worldview, or the frame through which one views, understands, and interprets one's context. These perspectives then influence the person's attitude and behavior. Over time, the collective view becomes embedded in culture, which in turn, reinforces the view until it gets locked into unshakably expected behavioral patterns.

New influences that are compatible with these perspectives get accepted, and those that don't, get rejected. Transforming worldviews and culture is therefore often a challenging and uphill task. However, it is very encouraging to know that God, who is the author of transformation is at work in individuals and communities to redeem their culture to be in alignment to His original intent with creation. So, to quote Henry Blackaby, "Find out what God is doing, and join Him."

*Ravi J. Jayakaran*



# A Stewardship Approach to Cultural Witness

by Dr. Scott Rodin

In 1975, Bill Bright and Loren Cunningham believed that God had shown them seven sectors of society, or “mountains,” which needed godly people to influence them, thereby influencing untold millions. These mountains were business, education, politics, media, arts and entertainment, family, and religion. A movement began to encourage and equip Christians to become influencers within these seven sectors in order to redeem our culture through the gospel.

I would propose that our goal and strategy for influencing the “mountains” of business, education, politics, media, and arts and entertainment must be re-thought in 2023. If we have learned anything from the declining role of the church and the diminishing presence and impact of the Christian voice in our public square, it’s that strategies must adapt if they are to result in kingdom outcomes. I believe it’s time to rethink our “culture-redeeming” strategies and consider what it would mean, instead, to

be faithful stewards of our witness within these spheres of society, even if they do not change.

Why focus on being stewards of our witness? Three reasons. First, Jesus called us to be witnesses.

*He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:7-8*

Second, Paul admonishes us to focus on the natural work and leave the supernatural to God.

*I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7*

Third, what Bright and Cunningham labeled “mountains” in 1975 today may be more accurately labeled “crumbling towers.” Each is imploding under the pressure of our cultural moral collapse. Having jettisoned God, and with Him the foundational morality that long guided our country’s mores, these edifices are being shaken to their core. Redeeming them is God’s work; ours is to stand as faithful stewards of a witness to a radically different worldview in each sphere.

To do so we must build on the recent development of a biblical theology of work. Over the last twenty years considerable work has been done to rediscover the Bible’s teaching on the value of work. This theology has helped us reject the false dichotomies of secular vs. sacred, or work life vs. spiritual life and see all work and every vocation as a place where faithful witnesses can make God’s presence known. This is our calling, to be witnesses to the light wherever our work takes us, and that is the hope of redeeming our culture.

In each of these spheres of culture, being such a faithful witness is not without cost. And in our present social context that cost escalates almost daily. Consider:

- Those who seek to be faithful witnesses in the arts and entertainment world are being **blacklisted**.<sup>1</sup>
- As more corporations embrace anti-Christian ideologues, being a witness in the world of business is costing people careers and reputations.<sup>2</sup>
- While there remain many faithful believers in politics, the cost of standing firm on biblical principles is costing many people their seat at the table in the major debates of our day, and for some even their political posts.
- The ideological divide in the media has isolated both sides from any meaningful civil engagement around the most pressing issues of our times, and both sides are in need of a faithful witness to the gospel. Put another way, the gospel exposes the deep sin embedded in the biases that drive the motivations behind every angle of our nightly news.<sup>3</sup>
- Perhaps nowhere in our culture has the rejection of Judeo-Christian values been more coarsely expressed

than in our education systems. Few in our culture pay a higher price for their faithful witness to Jesus than those willing to take their stand in our nation’s school boards, colleges, and universities.<sup>4</sup>

What does it look like to steward our witness within these cultural spheres? I believe it requires us to know what we believe (1 Peter 3:15), speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), love our neighbor (Mark 12:31) and be ready to stand firm against the backlash that will come (Matthew 10:24-29).

I believe we are called, as followers of Jesus, to stand as faithful witnesses to His continued reign in a world crumbling around us. If God chooses to use our witness to redeem culture, to Him be the glory. For our part, let us steward this moment by letting His light shine in us and through us in whatever vocation God has placed us.

<sup>1</sup>For example: <https://www.faithpot.com/neal-mcdonough-faith/>

<sup>2</sup>For example: <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/mar/31/christian-business-owners-who-show-evidence-of-fai/>

<sup>3</sup>For example: <https://www.breakpoint.org/hurricane-anti-christian-media-coverage/>

<sup>4</sup>For example: [https://www.realcleareducation.com/articles/2022/12/21/christian\\_teacher\\_fired\\_over\\_transgender\\_pronouns\\_sues\\_110803.html](https://www.realcleareducation.com/articles/2022/12/21/christian_teacher_fired_over_transgender_pronouns_sues_110803.html) and <https://www.christianpost.com/voices/will-christians-become-outcasts-at-public-universities.html>



Dr. Scott Rodin (PhD, University of Aberdeen, Scotland) has a passion for helping God’s people discover the freedom and joy of the faithful steward. He is the Steward Leader Content Expert for the Center for Steward Leader Studies and Senior Consultant and Chief Strategy Officer for The FOCUS Group. Dr. Rodin has authored seventeen books and he blogs at [www.thestewardsjourney.com](http://www.thestewardsjourney.com).

# Esther's Story

by Tirus & Winnie Githaka,  
Regional Coordinators, East Africa

When Kenyans think of Illumanthi village, what comes to mind is a dry, unproductive, semi-arid area, devoid of life. This community is viewed by its neighbors as destitute and inferior. Our initial efforts to start a CHE program in the area were discouraged by the many community challenges faced by its residents.

Apart from the drought of the environment, the spiritual atmosphere was parched. In some cases, local churches refused to work together since some pastors had orchestrated church splits in order to grow their own congregations.

However, after conducting a vision seminar with the church leaders, we received an invitation to start a CHE program. We agreed that the church leaders would mobilize members from their congregations to attend the different trainings.

Esther was one of the people selected by her church to attend the training and to multiply it to others. Sessions took place every Tuesday for a period of three months. Although the training was slow due to COVID restrictions in the community, Esther never missed a session but continually showed eagerness to bring change in her community.

At the end of the training, the participants set up an action plan for their own healthy home improvements so that they could be role models in their community. As part of this action plan, the members agreed to each plant five trees, construct a rubbish pit, and set up a kitchen garden where they would plant kale, spinach and onions. They were also supposed to set up a simple hand-washing station (called a tippy-tap) near the latrine. Daily family devotions and eating together as a family were other important parts of having a healthy home. In this community, eating together as a family was discouraged by local traditions where men were served their food separately from the rest of the family. The wife was supposed to eat in the kitchen and the husband in the sitting room alone. This was a way of showing him respect.

Esther promptly implemented the physical changes required. However, overcoming the spiritual challenges was more problematic. Esther lived with her daughter-in-law, the wife of her first son. Their



Prayer Walk



Planting Trees



Esther's Tippy Tap



Esther (in green) at CHE meeting

relationship had been strained for a long time, and it did not help the situation that her son worked away from home for months at a time. Esther and her daughter-in-law would argue periodically, causing tension in the home. The local elders tried to reconcile them without success.

Esther sought for advice on the way forward regarding her relationship with her daughter-in-law. She longed for her family to pray and eat together every evening. Esther therefore decided to approach her daughter-in-law and to seek her forgiveness and reconciliation. To her surprise, this was received positively. The two started praying together and reading the Word of God as a family, which brought further healing within the family. Due to the reconciliation, her son—who had been avoiding coming home due to the conflict—has increased the frequency of his home visits.

When the CHE trainers visited Esther, she was full of joy and testified that unity and peace in her family came through her CHE training and God’s conviction of the need for forgiveness.

Today, Esther is thrilled with the changes in her own home. She has also committed herself to finish the remaining modules of the CHE training series so she can have an impact in the community as she shares what God can do for their homes as well.

## “I have brought my pain to the cross of Christ”

by Flor & Hiran De Leon  
Sub-regional Coordinators for Caribbean

During a *Healing the Wounds of the Heart* workshop one of the most impacting testimonies was that of Colonel Epafanio Muñoz. He was in Angola during a war in which his home island sent soldiers to reinforce the Angolan army.

“War is a field of dehumanization and savagery; I did a lot of damage to many souls, including women and girls. Upon returning to my country, we were given consultations with psychiatrists to help us overcome the events we experienced. But nothing helped me much. I met Christ as my Savior fifteen years ago. Despite preaching the gospel constantly, I have carried guilt in my heart for a long time.

Today I am grateful that in this CHE workshop you have helped me to bring my pain to the cross of Christ, and I can move forward to save souls through the wholistic gospel. Thank you for helping me to see things from the perspective of God’s forgiveness. I am ready to continue preaching; the devil can no longer accuse me of things that have been already forgiven by Christ. And now I will share the vision of CHE in my community.”

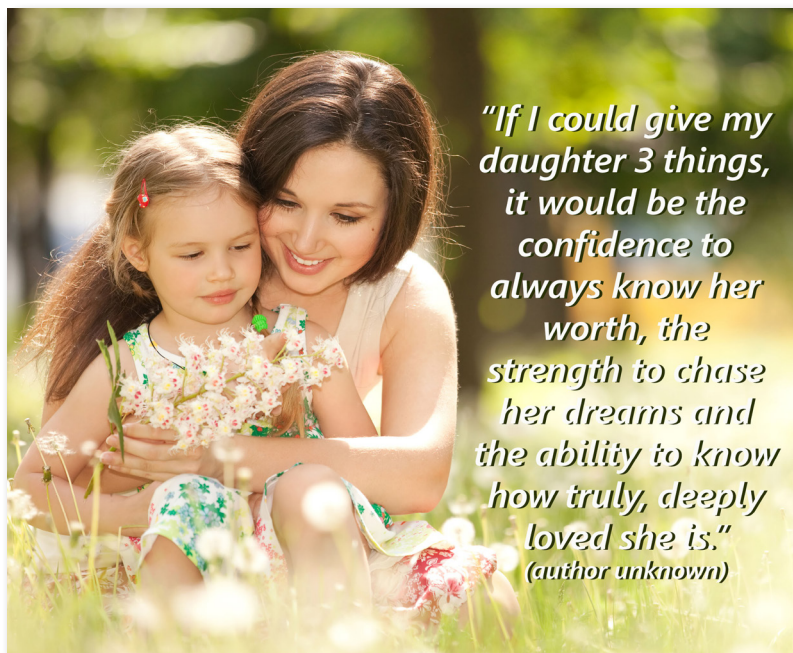


Tirus & Winnie Githaka are the co-Regional Coordinators of MAI programs in East Africa. Tirus and Winnie live in Nairobi, Kenya. They have two teenage sons Tori & Tugi.



# Family Beliefs Impact Culture and Can Change the World!

by Maggie Conrad, Women's Health and  
Healthy Families CHE International



Families are all about culture and traditions. The family is where our earliest impressions are formed: where our sense of well-being, safety, connection, and value (or lack thereof) is developed. Beyond the natural God-given physiological and genetic influences on our lives, there are also the powerful effects of spiritual, emotional, relational, economic, and cultural legacies that are passed on, often through multiple generations.

What role does the family play when it comes to some of the horrific issues that societies and cultures face, like sexual abuse and human trafficking? How do the beliefs and values of a family alter a daughter's vulnerability and affect her resilience in the face of such evils?

Recently some MAI staff and I met with a woman from South America who is working in anti-trafficking efforts. Her words rang true with us: "Labor trafficking and sexual trafficking are not caused primarily by poverty, but by a lack of self-esteem."

Sexual abuse of women and children is one issue that the family can influence by building a strong sense of worth within their daughters as well as their sons. We live in a fallen world where evil occurs all the time. We can't protect our children (and ourselves) from every harm, but we can often lessen the risk.

Glaringly, a woman's position within her society in much of the developing world (and to a lesser extent in the

developed world) continues to be lower than that of men, making her more vulnerable to abuse by others. Medical Ambassador's trained CHE facilitators around the world frequently use lessons from the Healthy Families CHE curriculum to share the Biblical principle that God values women as much as men. Both men and women learn that in God's eyes, women are not less, but equal in worth to men.

This revelation is powerful and life-changing for many girls and women as they begin to allow this truth to take hold in their lives. Women rise in their self-esteem and capability, resulting in a positive impact on others. Men notice, and though some may find this threatening, others grow in respect for the women in their lives. Girls grow in their understanding of their self-worth and, as a result, make better decisions not driven so much by the need for significance and the need to be loved. They have



already begun to internalize a love beyond measure—a love from God, family, and others who really know them.

One such example is that of an active MAI CHE trainer's family (names changed). Daniel, the trainer, is married; he has a 19-year-old daughter, Amara, and two younger sons, Samuel and Victor. Daniel and his family have been involved in CHE for several years. Amara has grown to be a bright, responsible, and capable young woman. She is a follower of Jesus and has learned her value in the eyes of God.

During the Covid pandemic, funds were especially tight for Daniel's family as well as for his more financially desperate neighbors. One neighbor, Damion, was a friend and spiritual mentee of Daniel's; he was struggling to feed his family. Damion and Daniel brainstormed how they could provide for their families in this time of shortage. They decided to raise pigs and were able to build an enclosed pen and buy piglets. The two men envisioned producing large hogs that they could sell.



The endeavor was going well until Daniel became very ill with Covid and couldn't care for the pigs. His daughter, Amara, wanted to help, so she took on the "pig care" duties. One evening, as she was alone feeding the pigs, Damion came by and suddenly made forceful sexual advances toward Amara. Amara was stunned...and then terrified. She pulled away and RAN from him, arriving home, shaking in fear. Damion had been a trusted man in her life. Amara was traumatized but was physically unharmed.

Her father, Daniel, was beside himself, devastated that this had happened to his daughter. It was even more

painful that a man he had disciplined in faith and thought he knew well would do this! The family was reeling in the aftermath. Daniel felt he had somehow failed his daughter. And yet, had he? His daughter was safe, though struggling emotionally from the threat.

Would it have been the same if Amara didn't know her value? If she didn't have a family who loved her and who had shown her how greatly her Creator loved her? She KNEW she was cherished and wasn't about to allow this man to take advantage of her. She had the confidence to try to escape. She knew she didn't deserve this abuse. Her family had raised her to know her worth. Unfortunately, not all stories end this way. And certainly, it is not the fault of the victim nor the family if they are unable to escape.

We can lower the risks in our families and communities by learning ways to prevent abuse and, when identified, not allowing it to go on. Of course, we need God's help and wisdom. Damion was confronted, confessed, and had to face the consequences of his actions. Amara was strong enough to flee and her family had learned, with the help of CHE, how to create a culture where their daughter knew she was precious and worthy of protection.

Unfortunately, this is a common story around our world. Many have worse endings. Some organizations attempt to break the cycle of poverty to combat abuse, but the issue is complex. There are destructive spiritual forces at work. At Medical Ambassadors International, the redeeming work of our awesome God is at the center of all we do. He is the one who can change the hearts of all who seek Him. As we share His love with families, including daughters, they can begin to see how special they are. It can take time to internalize and really believe in that depth of love. Pray along with us as we seek to bring truth and hope to those who have not yet embraced their value and the overwhelming love of our Heavenly Father.

Want to learn more? Ravi Jayakaran recommends the following: [Not for Sale](#) (Revised Edition): The Return of the Global Slave Trade--and [How We Can Fight It](#) - David Batstone, Harper-Collins, 2010.



## From Idolatry to the Worship of the True God

by Dr. Nzuzi Mukawa  
Regional Coordinator for Central Africa

*In late 2022, Dr. Mukawa and his small team of Congolese trainers made a missionary trip to an area of the Democratic Republic of Congo where they had never been. They planned to stay four weeks in Kwango Province but extended their time to seven weeks because of the powerful work of God's Spirit in that place. This is Nzuzi's report:*

It was a long trip for our team as we traveled to the province of Kwango—1800 kilometers south from the Congolese capital! The region is populated by three major tribes: the YAKA, the SUKU, and the TSOKWE. During our stay, we traveled through fifteen large villages and about thirty small ones.

This region faces major challenges. There are no roads, no health centers, no viable schools, and the villagers live in total poverty.

In addition to physical and emotional neediness, the spiritual poverty of the people is enormous. Around 1925, western missionaries evangelized this area. They planted

churches, which remained under their control and care until about 1985. Catholic, Protestant and independent denominations were represented, but they had no trained pastors, no Christian literature available—not even Bibles—and no schools of biblical and theological formation.

In all these villages, the people have now returned to the idolatry of their ancestors, living in darkness, fear and consultations with magicians and sorcerers. Poverty and death ravage all the inhabitants.

The strategy the Holy Spirit gave us as we entered these villages made a great impact. We showed the *Jesus* film at night, and spent the days in evangelization, leadership training, praise, worship, baptisms, and in the collecting and burning of fetishes and objects of idol worship as the people brought them to us.

We reached so many people with the gospel of Jesus! Seven hundred eighty-five people confessed their faith



How lovely on the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings  
good news, who announces  
peace and brings good news of  
happiness, who announces  
salvation, and says to Zion,  
“Your God reigns!”  
Isaiah 52:7

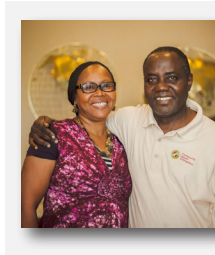
in Jesus Christ, and more than 300 new church leaders were commissioned. The churches became transformed, communities were affected by the messages of Christ’s transformation, several kinds of Christian literature were distributed and many acts of compassion were observed. We were surprised by the impact of the gospel in these villages. The old people, the mothers, the clan and village leaders, the young boys and girls brought their fetishes, asking us to burn them. They refused to follow the practices and customs of their ancestors. Every morning they took prayer walks to cast out demons. Those who brought fetishes did so the very same day, as soon as services were concluded at night.

The power of Jesus delivered thousands of men and women. Under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, they sang “YESU KAKA,” meaning “Only Jesus.” No more worship of evil spirits and idols. With the training in community development, they decided to start new initiatives. They are building better

houses, supporting their children, and they have returned to working in the fields.

Praise God with us for what He has done! And pray for the follow-up of this work—that those who have accepted Christ may be established in their faith, that people will be completely freed from Satan’s domain and that training may continue.

We pray that God will continue to open new doors for us. We want to go back to strengthen God’s people and reach new villages.



**Dr. Nzuzi Mukawa** is the Regional Coordinator for MAI programs in Central Africa. Nzuzi has a PhD from Trinity International University in Illinois. He and his wife, Chantal, live in Kinshasha, DRC. They have 3 children who are studying in the United States.



# Witnessing God's Transforming Power

by Dayo & Tope Obaweya  
Regional Coordinators for West Africa

God created mankind for His glory, to serve Him, live in community and flourish. Satan, who is the father of lies, only seeks to steal, kill and destroy. He sows discord and sets people against each other to destroy the harmony in God's beautiful creation.

The Igbosi community in Nigeria was this kind of community, one that had been battered by Satan. The community had a history of conflict between the generations. There were unstable homes, characterized by rancor and acrimony, and leading to many separations. There were poor relationships among spouses. Poverty was rampant due to lack of sustainable income and the use of primitive agricultural methods. Many elderly people within the community were sick. The environment was dirty and neglected. The only source of water was an unprotected stream, exposing the people to waterborne diseases.

In 2010 CHE was launched in this community by Gbenga Obaweya, Benson Lawani, Sesan Lawal, Yemi Olabode, Dayo Obaweya, Tope Obaweya, Olurotimi Akin and partners from Christian Heritage Ministry.

These launch activities were preceded by a prayer walk through the community followed by village-wide meetings on health and hygiene. The core team of facilitators worked with the community to help them identify their resources and needs. Out of these discoveries emerged topics for training. Participatory agriculture development was launched with support being provided to obtain and use improved seeds and improved farming equipment. The community learned about simple ways to purify water. Married people took part in marriage seminars. At every turn, people were taught about a God who loves them and offers a new life through Jesus.

## CHE: Transformation "without too much noise"

Pastor Arturo Ulloa had heard about Community Health Evangelism (CHE). He had authorized some of his church members to participate in the trainings offered in his community, but he had not been able to personally join the trainings.

He had observed changes in the service and attitude of the church members. United in a community committee, they were serving with other neighboring churches in harmony, in order to bring CHE to the community, and in their own lives and homes.

The committee organized a dinner to share and strengthen relationships. Pastor Ulloa attended for the first time and said these words: "I want to congratulate Hiran and Flor De León, and encourage them not to stop what they are doing. You are bringing transformation without making too much noise.

"I know of other organizations that have visited our community, and after a few events, they pull out and there is no change. Thanks for CHE—I like what I am looking at."



Hiran and Flor De León  
Sub-Regional Coordinators,  
Caribbean



Within a two-year period, changes started happening in the community. Many families rededicated themselves to God, and some of the couples that had separated reunited. Quarrels and misunderstandings were resolved between elders and youth, which brought joy to the community residents. The long-abandoned Community Hall was restored for meetings and used for regular training programs. Water purification through initial protection of water sources was carried out, and two new wells were installed.

Even the local government officials acknowledged the self-development initiative of the community and encouraged the local government departments to continue with sanitation works thereby reducing incidences of sickness and diseases. With the help of MAI leaders and other partners, cottage Industries were started by adding value to the available raw materials: making peanut butter from peanuts and peppermint tea from the leaves that were growing like weeds everywhere in the community.

Church attendance improved tremendously, as many residents accepted the Lord as their Savior. Bible study classes were established. Some Bible study groups became full-time churches as group members continued to meet faithfully. Some of the local youth that had become CHE trainers are now leading churches. Many parents have begun to appreciate the value of education and have started sending their children to school.

Today, the community has a well-established conflict-resolution method and also manages its own development activities. The influence of the Igbo community has extended beyond its boundaries as neighboring communities have started emulating their example by calling on the trainers to start CHE programs in their villages too. A few of the youth have sought and obtained jobs in the local government.

God is on the move in a special way in Igbo community and its surrounding areas. He is beginning to redeem the culture for His glory!



**Dayo Obaweya** is the Regional Coordinator for MAI's West Africa region that coordinates and oversees the CHE ministry in 17 countries. Dayo joined MAI in 2002 and serves along with his wife, Tope Obaweya (a retired school principal). They make their home in Akure, Nigeria, and have two sons, who work in the Netherlands and the UK.



# Optimal Health may Counter Culture

by Dr. Robert Sullivan, Area Coordinator

As an experienced missionary doctor serving in a variety of cultures, I have observed that most disease and illness is preventable. Despite having internet access and mobile phones, which can access up-to-date health information, there is still a lack of awareness as to how to optimize good health in the developing world.

Community Health Evangelism (CHE) accomplishes this by empowering individuals to be responsible for their own health as well as the health needs of the community. Whereas patients rarely implement the instructions given to them at the clinic, they often will make the needed changes for better health through group-facilitated CHE lessons.

Most of the serious infectious disease health issues in developing countries are preventable through CHE lessons on clean water, hygiene, sanitation, mosquito nets, etc.

But what has been surprising to me is that even in these predominantly poor countries, the majority of patients seen in the clinic are suffering from hypertension, type-2 diabetes, obesity, lung disease from smoking, and digestive distress. Patients are treated with medications, but they have trouble affording them. For that reason, or because of side effects, they often discontinue the medications, and their condition worsens. Treatment with medication also fails to get to the root of many of these health problems. The root cause is usually related to poor diet, lifestyle, stress, and lack of exercise.

Clinic instructions regarding changes in these areas are frequently not followed because they oppose the prevailing culture. For example, in cultures that experience periods of extreme heat, a sedentary lifestyle is predominant. The cooler periods of the day are occupied with social activities,



eating and sleeping—and not with physical activities. In some cultures, it is not even appropriate for women to go out walking unless there is a necessary errand. A lack of walking and exercise results in loss of muscle strength, weak bones, weight gain, insulin resistance, loss of endurance, and decline in health. From lack of sun exposure, women also suffer from low vitamin D levels which leads to poor bone health and a compromised immune system.

Another cultural norm that interferes with good health is staying awake until very late into the evening and then consuming a meal before going to bed. As a result, many suffer from digestive disorders. Eating should be completed at least 3 hours before bedtime to allow for complete digestion before sleeping. The needed hours for sleeping are insufficient because bedtime is after midnight and parents need to get children to school early in the morning. Adults tend to get 4-6 hours per night instead of the recommended 7-8 hours. Lack of sleep prohibits the body from doing its nightly cleansing and repairs.

God has blessed all cultures with a variety of delicious foods. But in modern cultures, people have turned from consuming healthy vegetables and fruits to consuming man-made processed food.

Highly processed foods are high in sugar and low in nutrients, fiber and protein. These “junk” foods are

cheaper, readily available, and more convenient to eat than healthy, fresh foods. Adults and children are not aware that they can prevent much of their sickness and diseases by what they put into their bodies.

From CHE lessons, families learn to grow vegetable gardens, raise chickens and goats, make their own yogurt, reduce sugar, drink plenty of clean water, avoid junk foods, and begin an exercise program, even if it is simply walking.

As scientists learn more about what prevents illness, they find our choice of food has a huge effect on the state of our gut and the “good” bacteria there. Foods that promote a healthy gut microbiome bring direct health benefits. This includes food made from whole plant sources as well as fermented products that were part of most cultures before the days of refrigeration. When we return to following God’s natural laws for eating, He has amazingly designed the body for wellness and healing of many illnesses.

Yet cultural lifestyle behaviors, especially regarding diet and exercise, are not easily changed. Fortunately, through the strategy of CHE and the use of interactive lessons, empowerment takes place for these behavior changes at both the individual level and throughout the community. These group lessons first bring awareness to the need. This, then, is followed by group discussion that leads to ownership, and finally equipping for optimal health.

# Do I want to be Right or to be Trusted?

by Dr. Bibiana MacLeod

Technical Advisor for Disaster Response,  
Orality & Special Projects

We were introducing the First Thousand Days program to a brand-new group of CHE trainers among indigenous people groups in Colombia. Participating trainers came from different backgrounds, some from an animistic culture and some from the non-aboriginal community. They all had limited access to education and were loaded with grandmothers' stories and traditions— especially when talking about pregnancy, what to eat and what not to eat. The 1000 days program helps pregnant women and new mothers to provide a healthy basis for life through good nutrition in the first 1000 days—from conception to a child's second birthday.

Facilitators had covered lessons on the three groups of foods, and the needs of pregnant women to have a balanced diet. How we ended up talking about eggs, I do not recall. But suddenly I was confronted with this question: "Why are eggs harmful to pregnant women?" My fears immediately started to mount. Might I lose the audience if I drowned them in a scientific explanation of the value of eggs? Do I win the discussion with a strong statement of my opinion, or do I keep them engaged with a softer answer?

Sometimes the many years of preparation to become a medical doctor and to save lives can become a hindrance to cross-cultural education. We may fail to communicate health practices to people from other cultures who for generations have embraced ideas that are contrary to our professional training. What might cause this failure? Our evidence-based best practices from the West collide with ancestral knowledge that has passed from the respected elderly to the unexperienced younger generations. We enter as guests into their world. We just have not gained enough trust to deserve their attention. And we question behavior that is based on trusted stories, testimonies, undisputed teaching passed on from generation to

generation. Who am I to them? What is my opposing message going to produce if I confront them with a choice between their family's old tales and mine? I feel this is risky ground, and more often than not, I feel sucked into this place, where a question comes to test my cultural intelligence.

Professor Moreau<sup>1</sup> says after the first shock of entering a new culture, we go from unconscious incompetence (we don't know how much we don't know or what mistakes we make) to falling into a conscious incompetence as we become aware of differences and our own limitations. Later on, we move to conscious competence, when we realize we may be able to contribute something of use if we are cautious about valuing "the other." Through the whole process, trust is built.



Going back to the egg: our participants were completely convinced that eating eggs would hurt milk production and be passed on to the baby with consequent sickness. What was I supposed to recommend

during a class on child growth and development? Should I just put the question aside?

I took a deep breath and thought of "travelling" together with the group into the intestines of the mother. "How does the egg get to the breast?" I asked. Nobody wanted to answer. So, I kept asking: "Can we imagine what happens to the egg once it arrives in the stomach with all its juices, acids and chemicals that are supposed to break down big pieces into small particles that can travel to tiny holes in the intestine walls and go into the blood stream? What is left of the egg when it gets to the blood stream of the mother?"

*continued on page 28*



So far, we were able to stand on common ground, and by that point we had already left the intestine and were on our way to the liver. Since they are mostly a rural community—used to care for livestock—I asked how many of them had seen the inner parts of an animal, the liver, the intestines, and if anyone had ever seen the cow’s breast. Several men responded affirmatively. They were excellent in describing the small lobes that can be seen in the liver and udder and that there is no evidence of whole pieces of food past the intestines. To them, through this short analogy, one single thing was clear: eggs have been already incorporated into the body as smaller pieces of material and do not stand a chance to get to the breast on their own. And we left it there. They were satisfied with the story, even when I did not directly answer the argument on damage of breast milk by eggs. A small step forward. We were able to think together about food and the ways enzymes break food down to obtain nutrients.

However, I did not feel the need to go any further, to nullify grandma’s teaching. I felt we had arrived at common ground by coming to a conclusion that starts to depart from the original idea of eggs getting into the mom’s milk and spoiling it. It is also true that we were far from my desired explanation of the great nutritional value of vitamins and minerals contained in eggs. But changes do not happen because of one single training session. Changes take time and relationships.

*To love is much more important than to be right.*

This is only one recent event that helps us analyze the importance of love and trust, beyond the correctness of our teaching. As we get to spend time with this group of trainers, we will continue to learn from them and be able to practice love and respect. We will hopefully be received and accepted. Then our voice will also be considered and valued. For now, I am happy that we are developing mutually transforming relationships. Our way forward is to continue to be present, allowing the Holy Spirit to work in all of us to exchange ideas and practices, and to promote abundant life in Jesus. He is the One that convinces and gives the power to change.

To love is much more important than to be right but when it is about saving lives, we make sure that the conversation is directed by God’s desire to provide abundant life. I will continue to fulfill my Hippocratic vow and restore people to health when I have the authority and the control to do so. But those two gifts, authority and control, are to be given and not taken for granted. However, in health teaching, I will be patient and respectful, so love is expressed in humble recognition of the “other” as we walk together.

To conclude, I want to share an excerpt from David Livermore’s book on cultural intelligence:

*Most of us probably don’t need much convincing that love for people is central to the Christian life. Loving and serving the Other has always been at the core of living out our God-given mission, even when the Other may be the “Flynt” to our “Falwell.”\* But today more than ever, we need cultural intelligence in order to authentically and effectively express our love for the people we encounter day in and day out.<sup>2</sup>*

\*Larry Flynt was publisher of Hustler Magazine and Jerry Falwell was the founder of the Moral Majority.

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2. David Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009.





# Bringing Cultural Change without Disrupting its Beauty

by Dr. Ravi I. Jayakaran



The Oxford English dictionary defines culture as “the customs and beliefs, art, way of life, and social organization of a particular country or group.”

I like to define culture as “the patent that ensures the continuance of a practice.” I chose to define it that way from the perspective of bringing changes in a community which spontaneously become the new way of doing things, long after we are gone.

So, what is the yardstick by which we determine the change that is desired? What predetermined criteria help us make that judgment? Do we have a community in mind that we think is “ideal” to which other communities should conform? Then again, who is to make this assessment of the “ideal model”?

When we—as believers—focus on redeeming culture, we start with an assumption that we want to see a community

become what the Lord intended it to be. In her article in this HL issue, Amy Sherman quotes Curtis Chang and his offer of a very helpful concept for discerning the good and resisting the bad in culture. Chang suggests Christians look for three “DNA aspects” of the Trinity: interdependence, overflowing love, and shared purpose. These are yardsticks with which to measure any culture. Where these are found, *Shalom* is the inevitable outcome.

If we want to bring changes for good in another culture, we must first be willing to see the flaws in our own culture and be willing to learn from that other culture, thus changing for the better. During my childhood, because of the nature of my dad’s job, I had the privilege of living in multiple cross-cultural situations. Though we are originally from the Southern part of India, we spent most of our lives growing up in different parts of Central, North and Northeastern India.

This involved getting used to different languages, food, living environments, and cultural practices. It soon became very easy for my siblings and me to adapt to changed environments and to live cross-culturally.



After starting a career, God moved my wife and me across country boundaries, as He took us from India to Cambodia, to China, to various parts of the Asia Pacific, and finally brought us to the US. This has fostered in our family a love for different cultures and a willingness to adapt and learn, becoming more transcultural.

As disciples of Christ who are catalysts for change, we must constantly fight the tendency to be drawn back into ethnocentric thoughts or behavior patterns. The Apostle Paul put it beautifully in I Corinthians 9:22-23: "... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." Let us pursue our efforts likewise, learning from culture, embracing what is good, and redeeming for God's Kingdom that which has digressed from His original intent.

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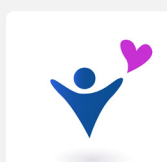
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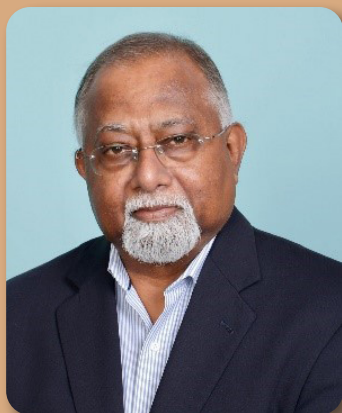
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**Dr. Ravi I. Jayakaran** has long-term leadership experience in international poverty reduction and strategic programming. He joined Medical Ambassadors International in May 2017 as the President. He is also the Catalyst for Integral Mission for the Lausanne Movement, part of the FTT (Finish The Task) Movement, and a Partner of The Barnabas Group (Sacramento, CA).

Ravi has worked in senior management positions in the corporate sector, International NGOs—including World Vision International, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). He has lived and worked long-term in India, Cambodia, China, and the US and provided technical support in more than 23 countries. Ravi and his wife, Vimla, live in Ripon, CA.

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