

## **The Future of Your Body** *Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians*

### **Has Christian Multiculturalism Failed?**

*1 Corinthians 9:19 – 22*

BCACF Winter Retreat 2011, Friday PM



#### **Introduction: Discussion – Why Have an Asian Christian Fellowship?**

While I was thinking about this, I wished that I was a comedian like Russell Peters, the Indian Canadian who does many Asian accents. And I wish that the topic of race is something that we can just laugh about and move on. But race, ethnicity, and culture have come up much more sobering ways in the last few months. The issue of immigration in Arizona sparked a national debate about race, language, culture, and even how we tell U.S. history. They are implicit and explicit thoughts when we think of the attempted murder of Arizona Democratic Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who stood against the recent immigration bill SB1070. I wish we could just laugh our way through this topic, but these are serious times.

Since we are talking about issues of race and culture, it's only fair to help us get started with acknowledging the obvious: What's up with an Asian fellowship talking about race? I'd like you to turn to 2 – 3 other people and talk about this question: Why do you think we have an Asian Christian Fellowship? Whether or not you would say that you're a part of ACF doesn't matter. Your opinion about it is what's important here. So, why do you think we have an Asian Christian Fellowship?

#### **The Problem and the Relevance**

When you boil it down, here are some questions you could ask: Is it the result of sin that we have an ACF? Maybe ours for segregating ourselves out? Maybe the dominant white culture as a whole for marginalizing Asians? Both sides? In this case, when we work from the concrete to the universal, we'll discover a lot more. What about US history? Do we need ethnic churches or racial churches? Is that the result of sin on someone's part? Either Asians, or whites or both? So how do we think about all this? In just a moment, you will have the chance to talk in groups about what your experience of your culture has been. I'm going to give you some background to that. We'll take this in small steps. Tonight, I'm only going to do two things. Fundamentally, I'm going to explain the connection between Jesus and culture. Then, I'll explain the difference between secular multiculturalism and Christian multiculturalism, and how that matters to us.

#### **Jesus and Culture**

## Jesus and Culture

- Jesus draws people from every tribe and tongue (Rev.5:9): different languages for eternity!
- Jesus expresses love in cultural ways: footwashing



Jesus respects cultural difference. Cultural differences will last into eternity, since we see a vision of people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation gathered around the throne of Jesus when he defeats evil at the turning of the ages (Rev.5:9). Language is a part of culture, so if languages carry on for eternity, cultures carry on for eternity. For the present, Jesus laid out a vision for human relationships and human behavior. But in some ways, he laid out principles that needed to be contextualized into different cultures. In one incident, Jesus washed his disciples' dusty feet (Jn.13). He said, 'Love one another like this.' Let me ask you: When was the last time you washed someone's feet? Why not? Jesus said to do it, right! Well, he said to love one another, but in our culture washing feet is probably not the best way to express love. Back in Jesus' day, there were dusty roads; people wore sandals; and there was a servant role in people's homes where the servant helped you wash your feet so you wouldn't track dust and mud into the house. For Jesus to take that servant role meant something. It is like if I came into your suite and said, 'Let me clean your bathroom.' There is a principle – love – and there is the cultural expression – washing feet, or cleaning bathrooms. Christian faith is always expressed through a culture.

This is amazing. In Islam, you have to learn Arabic because the Qur'an was written in Arabic, and make pilgrimages to Arabia because there is something special about that place and implicitly that culture. And as Clement said on Tuesday, there is beauty to admire in Arab culture. But in Christian faith, missionaries translate the Bible into your own language for you. You don't have to learn Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic. You don't have to make pilgrimages anywhere. There is a dynamic in Christian faith to engage each culture on its own terms. Why? Because the Christian God does that Himself.

## Jesus' Love: The Motivation to Engage Across Culture

- <sup>19</sup> For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; <sup>21</sup> to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

(Paul, 1 Corinthians 9:19 – 22)

The great Christian missionary and church planter Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians a great summary statement: <sup>1</sup> Cor.9:19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; <sup>21</sup> to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.' In other words, Paul recognized different cultures, and to some degree modified how he communicated as he crossed these cultures.

Now why does Paul say this? Why do the New Testament writers describe this pattern? Because they were totally gripped in their hearts and minds by Jesus' love for them and for every single person. Jesus led them to leave behind an old way of life to live in the power of Jesus' love and Jesus' Spirit. Jesus led them into a world that was totally different and uncomfortable.

### Limits of Secular Multiculturalism: No Motivation, No Moral Center

#### Secular vs. Christian Multiculturalism

- Motivation to love?
- Framework for good and evil?

Right away we run up against the problem that secular multiculturalism faces. What's the motivation for people to cross over to another table in Mac and adapt to another culture? Maybe romance, homework help, or curiosity. And some people do, including some of you. But if you don't have those motivations, do we have a real reason to stretch yourselves? Especially because when we do that, we feel stupid and incompetent. We don't know what people are talking about. And this is why many of us feel a tension at BC.

Illus: Or you could just feel like a token person. When I was a freshman, during the first term, I hung out a lot with one of my two roommates – I was in a triple with one white guy from Kentucky, and one Jewish guy from New York. My Jewish roommate was immediately recruited by a Jewish fraternity called AEPi. So for a while, I hung out with my other roommate, my first white friend from Kentucky. The circle of friends he had was a fun bunch. We went to a concert together; we went up to Tahoe to ski together; we drove up from Stanford in a Volkswagon bug and somehow crammed seven people into the tiny car. But I felt very unknown, often left out of the conversation, partly because their culture was so different from mine so their humor was different, partly because I wasn't used to just inserting myself into the conversation, and partly because they didn't ask questions. They accepted me, but I just felt like an honorary white person.

That can easily go in the other direction where non-Asians feel like the honorary Asian person. You feel like an honorary guest who's unwelcomed and unknown. Those comments point to a second problem, a deeper problem: secular multiculturalism is based on relativism. So you can't say what is good and what is evil. Let's say someone reads the controversial article in the Wall Street Journal, *Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior*, by Amy Chua. You probably said, 'My mom is kind of like that.' Let's say that a non-Asian person says to you, 'Your culture abuses children.' Here's a snippet from that article: 'In one study of 50 Western American mothers and 48 Chinese immigrant mothers, almost 70% of the Western mothers said either that 'stressing academic success is not good for children' or that 'parents need to foster the idea that learning is fun.' By contrast, roughly 0% of the Chinese mothers felt the same way. Instead, the vast majority of the Chinese mothers said that they believe their children can be 'the best' students, that 'academic achievement reflects successful parenting,' and that if children did not excel at school then there was 'a problem' and parents 'were not doing their job.' Other studies indicate that compared to Western parents, Chinese parents spend approximately 10 times as long every day drilling academic activities with their children. By contrast, Western kids are more likely to participate in sports teams. What Chinese parents understand is that nothing is fun until you're good at it. To get good at anything you have to work, and children on their own never want to work, which is why it is crucial to override their preferences. This often requires fortitude on the part of the parents because the child will resist; things are always hardest at the beginning, which is where Western parents tend to give up.' And she goes on to say how she would force her kids to do things, and punish them pretty hard. Can a white person say whether Chinese culture abuses children or not? Can a Chinese person say whether white American culture is way too lenient?

That's why some people start saying, 'You can't judge my culture because...*it's my culture!* My culture is just as valid as your culture. So you just have to take it in the name of multiculturalism. You think that my culture oppresses women, or oppresses you. But hey, that's just your *perspective.*' If you go to China and say, 'You're committing human rights violations,' and they respond, 'Well, what are human rights exactly? And who are you to define them? Isn't that just a part of your culture? It may or may not be a part of ours. So you just have to take it in the name of multiculturalism.' If you go to certain tribes in Africa and say, 'You're mutilating female genitals, and that's wrong. You're circumcising teenage boys with unwashed razors and giving them AIDS. You need to change that.' And they respond, 'Well, who are you to say that? This is the way our culture does it. It's fine for your culture to do it differently, but you just have to accept us in the name of multiculturalism.' If that happens too many times, our tendency is to say, 'Forget it. I'm not engaging with *your* culture. I'm just sticking to *mine.*' You feel unsafe, because you're not sure how to deal with cultural difference. At Tufts in April 2009, a freshman guy, a young white man got into a fight with Korean-Americans practicing a cultural dance. He called the dance stupid, spit on one person, then physically assaulted them, and on his way out racist remarks, telling them to go back to China. The whole campus was surprised and upset. Understandably. But Tufts as a campus really couldn't do anything except threaten him with expulsion. It was a power response because when relativism can't anchor good and evil in anything, it has to fall back on the use of power.

### Secular vs. Christian Multiculturalism

- Motivation to love?
- Framework for good and evil?
- People giving up on secular multiculturalism
  - 2004: UK
  - 2006: Australia
  - 2010: Germany

And when you have enough of that, you get ready to give up. Apparently a lot of other people around the world are ready to give up, too. In 2004, the chairman of the UK's Commission for Racial Equality, Trevor Philips, said that multiculturalism was from another era and ought to be scrapped in the UK.<sup>1</sup> In 2006, Australia gave up on their multicultural policy.<sup>2</sup> And then Angela Merkel in Germany said in October, 2010, 'Multiculturalism has utterly failed in Germany.'<sup>3</sup> Speaking about Muslim Turkish immigrants to Germany, various German officials said that they use up social services and contribute more to crime, and then they don't learn German, and on top of that, they treat women differently.

Secular multiculturalism comes from Enlightenment optimism about human nature, as if we're all good or will become good, however 'good' is defined. Christian multiculturalism says we're all corrupted by evil, we have Jesus to define what is good, we need Jesus to transform us personally from evil to good, Jesus affirms and critiques all aspects of our cultures, we love others who disagree with the love of Jesus, and with Jesus we must respect the separation of truth and power, that is, a separation between church and state. Secular multiculturalism flows from relativism and leads to tolerance at best. Christian multiculturalism flows from Jesus and leads to love and mission. Jesus is the motivation to engage. Jesus brings personal transformation and cultural transformation as the good aspects of our culture become used in expressing his love, and the bad aspects of our culture get dismantled. That's why Jesus calls us to come with him to engage *the world.* Some Christians at Tufts Christian Fellowship, including Koreans, quietly sent him an email saying, 'Hey, we all struggle with things like this to some degree, so if you want to talk about this, we're here.' The response was different. Jesus gives us a clear foundation for understanding good and evil, yet approaches it with love.

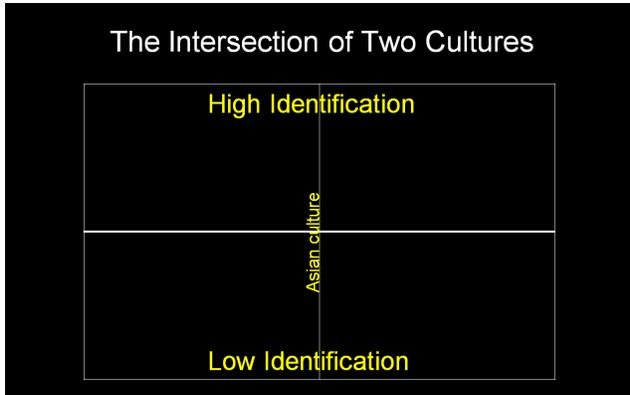
<sup>1</sup> [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article544921.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article544921.ece)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/culture-is-more-than-just-a-national-costume-20101021-16vhj.html>

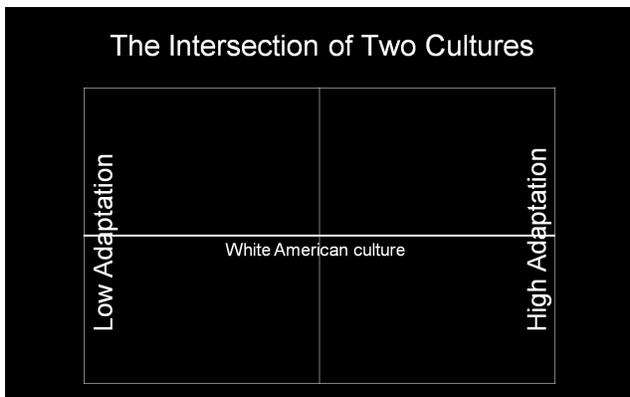
<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11559451>

## Understanding Ourselves

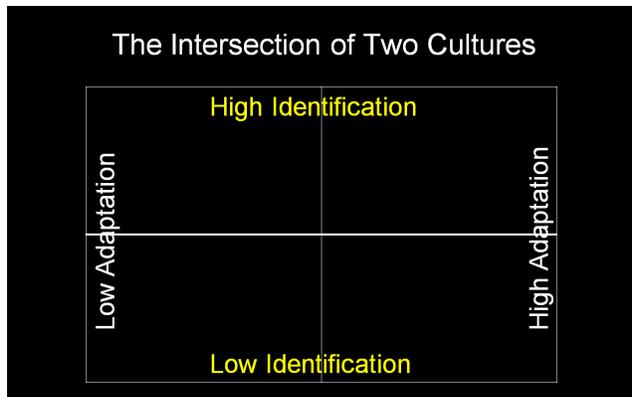
So what does Jesus actually call us to do? Where do we start? We'll have to look at Jesus more, which we'll do throughout our time. But we also have to look at ourselves. Who are we?



Let's take an Asian culture. I understand that each Asian culture is different, and that it's American race dynamics that lump all Asians together. There is a spectrum of how any given Asian-American relates to that Asian culture. He or she can be highly identified with the culture of origin, or less identified with it. For example, I've heard about a study about twenty years ago of second generation Asian-Americans. 30% of all second generation Japanese Americans speak Japanese. That's less identified. 50% of all second generation Chinese Americans speak Chinese, though that's probably gone up now. 70% of all second generation Korean Americans speak Korean. That's highly identified. I don't know what the stats are for second generation Vietnamese and Filipinos. I'd be very interested if anyone knows those figures. So for now, just think of one of those cultures.

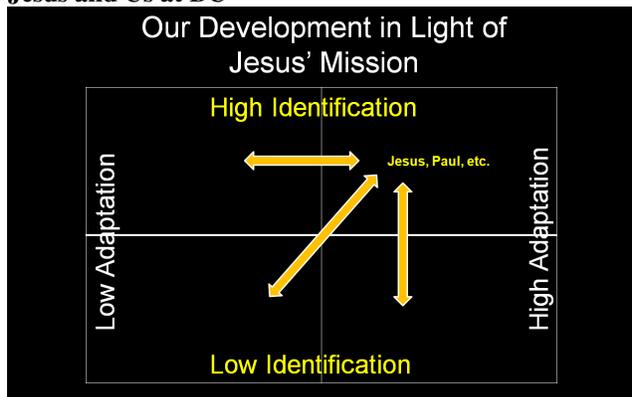


Now let's take white American culture. Here you also have a spectrum of how a second generation Asian-American relates to white American culture. He or she can be high on the adapted or low on the adapted spectrum. Now let's make a diagram. If you cross those two spectrums, you have four quadrants. And this is what makes it complex, and sometimes hurtful, but also sometimes fun.



In the upper left quadrant, you have people who are highly identified with the Asian culture that they're from, and less adapted to white American culture. Who are those people? If you're in this quadrant, you might be called FOB's. Or, you might be the Asian pride people. You might be the activist type, politically involved. In the lower right quadrant, you have people who are less identified with their Asian culture, and more adapted to white American culture. And if you're in this quadrant, you know that usually, other Asians have unpleasant names for you. You're called a banana or twinkie, for being yellow on the outside, and white on the inside. You might be the ones who grew up in mostly white communities and distanced yourself from your parents for whatever reason. In the upper right quadrant, you have people who are truly bicultural. If you are in this quadrant, you can travel in both worlds, and go fairly far. You know that when you go over to your white friends' house, you might call their friends' parents by their *first* name. But when you bring friends over to your own home, they take their shoes off and call your parents by your *last* name, Mr. and Mrs.! There are many more examples than that. In the lower left quadrant, you have people who do not identify with their own Asian culture, nor do they adapt much to white American culture. Instead, they are drawn to another culture. Perhaps it's urban black American hip-hop culture, with rap, baggy clothes, and so on. Now you may be wondering which quadrant you're in. There is no test that I know of that answers that. This is more art than science.

### Jesus and Us at BC



Here's the question that I want us to engage with: Does Jesus want us in one of these quadrants? Yes. Over time, he wants us in the upper right. There may be other cultures you get exposed to also. But in terms of the majority culture and your own ethnic culture, I do think Jesus calls us to be both highly identified and highly adaptable. After all, Paul said, 'I become all things to all people, so that by all possible means I might save some.' That's a huge statement, and it has huge implications. You are called by Christ, with his love and power, to reach your own community and others. Not the whole world at once, since it's not like we can suddenly become culturally competent with everyone, but it does mean that we cannot stay in only one culture throughout our lives. Whenever we encounter another people's culture, Jesus calls us to engage with it somehow. Not necessarily to spend all our time there, but some, because of his mission. I'm not saying that I should *lose* my Japaneseness or that you *lose* your background. I am not saying that non-white people should be white, or anything else for that matter. We all have a culture, and I still prefer some Japanese/Asian ways of doing things. I'm sure that other people feel the same

about their own cultural heritage. But I am saying that Jesus always leads us to engage with people who are different.

## Jesus and Us at BC

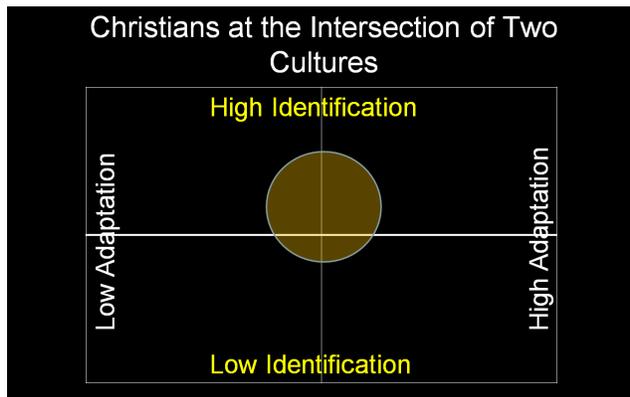
- Jesus' work in us
- Knowing and articulating our culture, for the sake of Jesus' mission
- Critiquing our culture, for the sake of Jesus' mission

Why? First, it all starts with Jesus. Jesus in his humanity responds to God's love for the whole world. So he did something for us that we could not do on our own. It's the way he lived and gave his life for the world. And now, Jesus calls us to himself, heals and transforms us, and gives us his mission to call others to him, too. Not by ourselves or in our own strength, but with his love and his power. It is supernatural. If you're going to love Jesus, which I hope you do, you have to know that his love for the world will eventually become your love.

Illus: I grew up in high school surrounded by my mostly Chinese-, Japanese-, and Korean-American friends. When I went to college, I roomed with mostly Asian guys who made up the first pledge class of an Asian fraternity called Lambda Phi Epsilon. I got involved with the Asian Students Association. And I went to an Asian-American Christian Fellowship. I'm glad I did all these things. But I left the Japanese-American church to go to a white church because there was better teaching and better evangelism happening. I played a part in five of my Asian-American friends coming to Jesus, and I brought them to my Asian-American campus fellowship and my white church. While I was at this church, I met Jose and Jennifer Espinosa, a Mexican and white couple. I began to tutor a Mexican boy in their neighborhood. When I graduated, I moved into East Palo Alto, where Jose and Jennifer lived, into an apartment complex of very poor but very beautiful Mexican immigrant families. I moved in and introduced myself, 'Hi, my name is Mako.' The kids chuckled and the parents raised their eyebrows. I went back to Jose and Jennifer and asked them about this reaction. Jose said, 'Oh, it's because your name Mako is close to the Spanish word moco which means boogers.' I said, 'Great. Should I go by my full name, Makoto?' He said, 'No, you don't want to do that. In Spanish, the -ito ending means small. The -oto ending means big. So Makoto is close to mocoto which means big boogers!' I thought, 'I guess it's just a drop in the ocean of what Jesus went through. My name Makoto means 'truth' but it sounds in Spanish like 'big boogers.' Jesus went from being God to being human. So I lived for four years among Mexican immigrant families, and I got to know Jesus better because of that similarity. I listened to my mentor Jose retell some of the stories that Jesus told – parables in the Jewish context – using Mexican culture as the context. So he retold Jesus' story of the prodigal son. He said that when the younger son came home, the father threw a big fiesta with a piñata. I didn't know you could tell the story that way. I thought about my Japanese mom. And I retold the story of the prodigal son using a daughter who runs from her home on the farm in pre-World War II Japan to become a geisha in the city, who then comes back to a loving father. And it was one of the first times that my mom and I had a really good conversation about Jesus. It was stepping outside of my culture that helped me understand it, articulate it, know it more, and love it more. That is a work of Jesus in me.

In the Catholic Church, you are reminded of this at every mass. The term *mass* comes from the Latin word *missa*, meaning *dismissal*, a word used in the concluding formula of Mass in Latin: 'Ite, missa est.' It means 'Go; it is the dismissal.' Pope Benedict XVI said in *Sacramentum caritatis*, 'The word 'dismissal' has come to imply a 'mission.' These few words succinctly express the *missionary* nature of the Church' (Pope Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, 51). *Mass* means *mission*. Catholic means *universal*. So the *Catholic mass* means the *universal mission*. Jesus is the bread of life who gave himself on behalf of the whole world. When you receive communion, you partake of Jesus, and you go with his Spirit powering you, for it is his *universal mission*! Jesus' mission drives

everything about the church and about us. So the first thing is that Jesus calls into himself spiritually and into his mission.

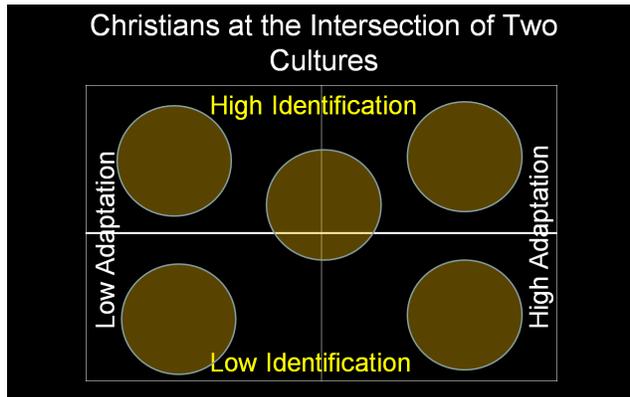


Second, we have to be honest about what our culture currently is so that we can better carry out that mission. If you're new to ACF, I want you to know this, because I think it will help you know us, in our strengths, but also our limitations. And it'll help you understand your own current strengths and limitations as well. I'm going to throw out there my observation that ACF in general is more highly identified in Korean and Chinese culture than less. I think most of you are 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean and Chinese; you speak Korean or Chinese; you miss your food at BC; you identify with your parents' culture and aspirations to a significant degree; you're ambitious like your parents; your ideas about life are very similar to theirs; you watch Korean and Chinese dramas; and over time, you come to appreciate your parents, even though you may disagree with them on some things or maybe you were embarrassed by them while you were younger – as you get older you are coming to appreciate your parents and their culture. I also think most of you are mid range in your adaptation to white American culture. You can function well in white America but you don't feel completely at home. You're not as individualistic, probably, as your white friends, but you're much more than your parents. Most of you. What does that mean? Well, it means a lot.

It means that we are good at some things, and some of that is cultural. I think we do a pretty good job having fun. A lot of you know games that you played in Chinese-American and Korean-American church youth groups. That makes us fun. As you have stopped being embarrassed about and just invited people in, you've discovered that you don't have to have alcohol to have fun. People in ACF have had cheesecake baking parties, cookie making parties, Asian shaved ice dessert night, movie night, and last semester an Iron Chef competition and a Harry Potter wand making party. That is awesome for the campus because for years, Asian Christians were intimidated by the alcohol culture of BC and hid our light under a basket. Nowadays, many of you are more courageous in putting yourselves out there to care for other people on campus. The love comes from *Jesus*, but the expression of that love comes from our *culture*. Also, a lot of us play musical instruments because our parents made us. That makes our musical worship pretty good. Our sister fellowship, IVCF, which is mostly white, does not have as much musical talent or bench strength. We do, and we don't have to worry about having musical talent. It's part of our culture. Also, a lot of us care about freshmen. It comes from our culture. As we get older, we have a sense of love for younger people, and we reach out more as big brothers and big sisters. I have been impressed at how the Frosh Mentors have allowed themselves to be stretched and to grow in order to have something to pass down to the frosh. It is a commitment of love, one that probably started in your family culture, and now is transformed and lifted higher by Jesus. Also, from my experience, Asian Christians tend to have a higher regard for Jesus' authority than white American Christians. Why? Because we were raised with a higher sense that our parents are authorities. Now that can become a problem in other ways, which I'll get to. But when we allow Jesus to transform that and lift it higher, it becomes an expression of our worship of Jesus.

On the flip side, it may mean that we need to embrace our own culture in a more explicit way. For example, we are sometimes not good at articulating our culture. Maybe because we're embarrassed about it, or because we don't understand it ourselves. But we do have to articulate our culture. When my kids become teenagers, and have their friends over, they're going to have to interpret me and my wife to their friends. They're going to have to say, 'We take our shoes off in the house. We eat these foods. Mom and Dad are competitive at games like Scrabble or Grabble – don't worry, it's not you, it's just them. Mom and Dad will ask you lots of questions, because that's their

way of getting to know you.’ They will have to interpret our family culture to their friends. It’s okay to be higher identity Asians, and love Korean or Chinese culture. But what we have to do is help other people understand what that means. To the extent that outsiders come into your circles, you tend to make them the honorary Korean person, or the honorary Chinese person. You have to help them understand why your humor is this way, what growing up was like, what family stories and ethnic history were told to you. That will help people enter in. That is hospitality: Articulating our own culture so someone else can understand it and enter it and feel welcomed in. You’ll have a chance to do that in a moment.



You might even choose to be part of another Christian group, either because you are part of another culture, or feel called to reach people from another culture. What happens when people go outside of a certain culture? Let me give you one example. A few years ago, Isaac Kim and Diane Lee (class of 2007) started a Korean speaking prayer group which reached out to international students from Korea. That grew from 4 people to 16 people. Isaac and Diane graduated and then Isaac worked as a volunteer staff with me. He supported the Korean speaking prayer group for a year. Then, it became its own ministry. It is now called Quiet Waters. I think it’s fantastic that Quiet Waters continues, and they reach out to the Korean international students. Some of us are relationally connected to them. We can be organizationally different but relationally connected and united in mission. If there is a better way to reach out to PSBC or SASA or SEASA from within ACF as a special group, or separately, I would be glad to help it. What matters to me is not what we call it; what matters is *that it happens*. Please talk to me if you have a heart for that. This is also why we partner with our friends in Multicultural Christian Fellowship and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. The Christian community is diverse, and should together be engaging all cultures. So it is not sinful that we have different Christian groups. In and of itself, it’s good! It’s part of God’s good design and His love for diversity. He loves to have people hear about Jesus and receive love in their heart language. We do need relationship, though, for the sake of our mission.

Third, we have to critique our culture in light of who Jesus is. Here’s an issue: We are not good at challenging our elders to be more faithful to Jesus. Do you ask, encourage, or challenge your elders to be more serious about Jesus’ mission? Scripture tells us to do so, since Paul told Timothy to do it (e.g. 1 Tim.5:1 – 2). We just tend to do what they say. Let me first give you a parallel. Why did Korean Airlines have almost the worst record of crashing planes in the 1990’s? The biggest factor was culture. The younger co-pilot has the job of challenging the older captain to make sure that the captain makes the right decision. But in Asian cultures, it’s extremely impolite to challenge someone older in authority. So the younger co-pilot would be really indirect and say things like, ‘Really foggy out there.’ What he really meant was, ‘The visibility is really bad. I don’t think we can land this plane. Let’s reroute.’ So the captain would crash the plane. Or on one occasion, the co-pilot would disagree with something the captain said, and the captain slapped him on the back of the head – that’s fairly unprofessional. Some consultants came in and diagnosed the problem as how power and hierarchy worked out in the cockpit. Problem solved. Korean Airlines has a good track record now, thankfully.

That happens in the church. When I was just over one year old as a Christian, during my senior year of high school, I noticed that my church, a Japanese-American church, celebrated dads and grads in June. It was Father’s Day for dads and graduation day for high school grads. What my church did was to bring the high school seniors to the front of the church during a service and announce where each person was going to college. I was heading to Stanford, and there were things people did and said to me that made me uncomfortable. Parents elbowed their kids in the

pews. A mom asked me to tutor her daughter. Plus, I knew people who were struggling in school. What if there was someone who didn't graduate? Or who wasn't going onto college? I felt like that element of the service just reinforced the academic idolatry and comparison-orientation of Asian culture. I knew I had to ask the pastor and other leaders to reconsider doing this. It took half a year for me to pray about it and read Scripture and think about what words I was going to say. But when I came back for Christmas break, I asked my pastor to meet with me, and I asked him why the church did that. To me, it seemed *cultural* but not *Christian*. And it was *cultural* in a sinful way that *could not be redeemed by Christ*. It was to be eliminated. I said so, and asked for his perspective. He said that I wasn't the only person to ask about that. He said he could see my point. After that, my church did not pull graduating students to the front. We prayed for people broadly speaking, and celebrated everyone's learning, but we did not celebrate graduation per se, and we certainly did not name all the colleges that people were going to.

How does this pertain to you? You too need to step back and separate *culture* from *Christ*, especially when we do *culture* in the *name of Christ*. In Asian churches, a lot of you don't ask people in authority in the church to more carefully consider the mission of the church. Mostly you just accept what happens as sacred, without ever questioning whether the church is serving Jesus' mission as well as it could. *But if the church is not serving the mission, then it's serving itself. And that is sinful.*<sup>4</sup> People are dying spiritually.

We need to think through how many meetings our elders ask us to attend in light of Jesus' mission. I learned this by having a white mentor, and learning from the white church, while being in an Asian campus fellowship. Let's back up a little bit. On what day do Asian churches have youth group night? Friday. What day do white churches have youth group night? Tuesday or Wednesday. Why is there a difference? Because white parents don't want to compete with the social calendar on Friday nights: football games, school dances, and maybe parties. It's cultural. White culture does stuff on Friday nights, so they put youth group on some other night. Asian parents don't want their kids doing anything on a homework night, and they don't want their kids hanging out with the white kids, and they usually have adult meetings at church on Friday nights, maybe Saturday nights, and they want youth group for their kids. It's cultural. Now there are plusses and minuses to both. But the values you drink in if you grow up in an Asian church are: pray, read your Bible (those are Christian values), so you can do well in school, preserve your Asian culture, and not engage white people (cultural values). Now maybe some of that is okay while you're in high school. But when you come to *college*, you tend to carry in the *same values*: pray, read your Bible (Christian values), so you can do well in school, preserve your Asian culture, and not engage white people (cultural values). Is that ok? Does that contribute to Jesus' multicultural mission and the multicultural kingdom?

Ask yourself this: How many Christian meetings do you go to? How many hours do you spend? How many of those meetings and how many of those hours engage non-Christians as well? Are things interpreted for them so they can understand it in their language? So how was it different for me in a white church? It was very different. My college pastor, Dorman, made a special Sunday service for college students. His supervisors, the elders in the church, raised questions about whether college students should be part of the main service. He said, 'No, because people don't really interact in a service. Instead, let's do an 'adopt a student' program where older couples and families in the church invite college students over for dinner two or three times a semester.' That was way better, because we as students got to really know older people, and ask questions about dating, marriage, having kids, working, and stuff. They got to know us. And it wasn't a regular weekly thing. Dorman went for substance, not form. Looking back, I can see that white churches tend to not burn out their people, whereas Asian churches do. I had 2 hours a week of church, including the commute, and that was it for church. Dorman encouraged us to be involved in campus mission through the various campus fellowships. White churches tend to do that. Both our fellowship's Thursday LG and the Sunday college services were very accessible to my non-Christian friends. And, I did invite my friends to these; I played a role in 5 friends coming to Jesus because I had a lot more time to spend with people than you, especially non-Christians.

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<sup>4</sup> Theologian Karl Barth said, 'Where the life of the Church is exhausted in self-serving, it smacks of death; the decisive thing has been forgotten, that this whole life is lived only in the exercise of what we called the Church's service as ambassador, proclamation, kerygma. A Church that recognizes its commission will neither desire nor be able to petrify in any of its functions, to be the Church for its own sake... We may often have a distaste for the whole of Church life. If you do not know this oppression, if you simply feel well inside the Church's walls, you have certainly not seen the real dynamic in this matter.' (Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, Harper Torchbooks, 1959, p.146 – 7).

ACF has dismantled meetings, like last year, when we dismantled ACF family groups. We did that in order to free you up to be part of the club families and other things that are not Christian. How often do you hear of any Asian group, least of all an Asian Christian group, dismantling stuff? Meanwhile we put in more quality into missional mentoring and LG so you would be better equipped to do that. I have talked with many of the Asian pastors in the Boston area, asking them to do similar things for your sake and for the campus' sake. A few agreed. I've asked them if they could move all their Friday night meetings to campus instead of off campus, and whether they would want ACF large groups to be the starting point, the opening part, of all our times. That's an open discussion. But you are mature enough to play a role. I think that you need to go back and ask your elders these questions: Does this meeting develop my faith, character or skills for the mission of Jesus at BC? Is there a better way to do this, in partnership with this fellowship? Perhaps if you're a leader in one of the clubs, you can raise questions about how to know another culture more explicitly, personally, and truly? I raise these questions without knowing the answers. We'll see where this all goes. This I know for sure: You need to see that culture is always there, but sometimes culture gets in the way of Jesus. If we are going to care about multiculturalism, and we do, we have two options: secular multiculturalism and Christian multiculturalism. I don't think secular multiculturalism really works at all. I think Christian multiculturalism is the only real option standing. Christian multiculturalism has not failed. It was not really been tried. The question is, 'Will you try it?'

#### Questions for SG discussion

1. What stood out to you in the talk?
2. We want to get better at explaining our culture(s). What do you think it means to be [your ethnicity]?
  - a. What are some of the values you absorbed from your family?
  - b. How do you handle conflict?
  - c. How do you communicate?
3. How do you feel at BC?
4. *What do you think about secular multiculturalism vs. Christian multiculturalism?*
  - a. *The question of good and evil: is relativism enough?*
  - b. *The question of motivation: to tolerate vs. to love*
5. How do you feel about Jesus' mission to all being the foundation of Christian multiculturalism? In what ways is that good news? In what ways is it challenging?