Evangelism to group-oriented people

by Sharon Uyeda Fong

Group ——————————————— **Individual**

The above continuum represents two basic orientations towards life. All cultures contain some combination of the two, but usually emphasize one more than the other. Understanding these orientations and the values that accompany them will help us better understand how the gospel can be most effectively communicated to each group.

Group-oriented people believe that the needs of the group are more important than the needs of any individual in the group. They believe that greater success can be achieved by working as a team than by individual endeavors. Relationships are very important to them. They value harmony and are very sensitive to what others are thinking and feeling. Groups that are formed tend to last a long time and members tend to share a long-time commitment and sense of belonging.

Individual-oriented people, on the other hand, believe that the needs of the individual are more important than the needs of the group. They place high value on individual initiative and though they appreciate team work, they often see it as cumbersome and time-consuming. They believe that it is important to think for oneself and to stand up for what one believes.

Though each culture contains elements of both orientations, we believe that on the whole, Japanese are more group-oriented and Westerners are more individual-oriented. What implications does this have for evangelism to people of Japanese ancestry?

When we share the gospel with people who are group-oriented, we need to emphasize those things which would be especially meaningful to them. Because they are very relational, we need to emphasize that through Christ, our relationship with our heavenly Father is restored. Harmony exists where there was once discord and we can experience reconciliation and peace. We should also share that when we become Christians, we become part of the *family of God*, with brothers, sisters and a father who loves and accepts us unconditionally. We could also use the analogy of the *body of Christ* to illustrate how those in God's family work together and help each other so that all may benefit.

With reference to how such a message might be shared, corporate witness seems to be important. A tangible, ongoing group to which a non-Christian can belong and experience acceptance and caring may be very effective. A group that centers around an activity such as running or crafts is less threatening to non-Christians than a Bible study or Sunday School. Much of the gospel can be communicated through non-verbal means as they see how we live and respond to life. Since group-oriented individuals are relational, the personal approach is often necessary. As the relationship with the non-Christian grows closer, the potential for influence and impact grows—the soil in which the seed is planted becomes more fertile. As the group-oriented person sees the harmony, reconciliation, corporate identity and sense of belonging lived out through the group that represents part of the body of Christ, he or she will recognize how Christ fulfills the deepest of human needs. □

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