

Interaction Paper

Rynkiewicz's Soul, Self, and Society Chapter 4

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Introduction

In chapter number four of Rynkiewicz's book *Soul, Self, and Society*, the author introduced a discipline within the anthology which is cultural ecology. This discipline is divided into three categories called culture, social, and ecology preservative. Cultural, social, and ecological perspectives describe people's lives. The cultural viewpoint examines how individuals see, feel, and prioritize the world around them. The social viewpoint examines identity, social ties, and group formation. The ecological viewpoint examines resource availability, perception, usage, and how humans generate, distribute, and consume environmental goods.¹ There is also a historical viewpoint that examines cultural adaptations, changing patterns, and previous influences on the present and future. The author suggests that if someone wants to be a missionary then they should take out the time and research all the different viewpoints of the community they are visiting on a consistent basis since communities change over time.

Rynkiewicz explains that the viewpoints of Western society and Eastern society are different from each other. Western society focuses more on the individual when the Eastern society focused more on how the community function as a whole. But overall, the author explains that anthropology has yet to properly explore the subject of what a person is, and how a person is produced in a specific community, while missiology mostly disregards the topic altogether.²

Next Rynkiewicz explains that in each society, every person has a status and a role. But it is much more complicated than that. He explains that in every society, there is a different set of statuses that people or groups can achieve or earn.³ The process of assigning social status might be more stringent and ingrained in certain cultures than in others.⁴ Age, gender, and family ties

¹ Rynkiewicz, pg. 122

² Pg. 125

³ Pg. 128

⁴ Pg. 127

are just a few of the factors that may be used to determine social standing.⁵ Generally, every culture assigns and receives a status, although the relative importance of the two may vary widely from one to the next.⁶ However here in Western society, especially in the USA, many believe that personal connections are more important than academic credentials when it comes to career success or rising to a higher status or role.⁷ Rynkiewicz explains the issues between having multiple statutes and roles and how there can be “role confusion”⁸ as well as the difference between guilt and shame societies. The author explains that when a missionary understands a community’s understanding of guilty or shame, their approach to sharing the gospels needs to be presented in a way that people can understand. In other words, the answer is to teach people that they are sinners.⁹

Personal Interaction

The author stated that there is a common conception among missionaries that social status or position is the same in all cultures.¹⁰ He explains that is not true at all since throughout the world, people have multiple relationships which can be simple or complex. I agree with the author here. There are many missionaries that I know who understand that each community is different and based on their experiences alone, they have learned that when visiting a community, one cannot be biased but have an open mind since there are many different beliefs, viewpoints, and traditions on the views of relationships, statues, and roles. They understand that people are just not that simple. I believe this conception among missionaries comes from not having an open mind and not doing research on the different communities they are visiting. Throughout this

⁵ Pg.127

⁶ Pg. 129

⁷ Pg. 129

⁸ Pg. 131

⁹ Pg.133

¹⁰ Pg.129

whole chapter, what was interesting to me was the difference between guilt and shame. In my mind, both terms are similar to each other. I thought that when you have guilt it would also bring some sort of shame. But Rynkiewicz explains that guilt and shame are very different from each other. He sums it up by stating that the feeling of guilt comes from breaking a rule, while shame comes from a lack of character, guilt means you should be punished or pay for it, but shame means you are fundamentally flawed and need to fix yourself, shame is the feeling that you are not a good person in the eyes of other people and that you are under pressure to keep yourself from getting hurt.¹¹ This really opens my eyes, and help me understand the society I am part of here in the West. Since NYC is a melting pot of many different cultures, I believe there is a blend of guilt and shame viewpoints. But I have noticed that many street preachers and pastors that I have met said something similar to the effect that we are all sinners and we are in need of a Savior.

Conclusion

While reading this chapter, I have only one question that keeps coming to my mind. The question is “what is my role and status in the society I am a part of and do each role and status reflect my Lord and Savior?”. Since I am a child of God, everything about who I am as a person should reflect Christ. But since I am human and am bound to make some mistakes in this life, I just want to be sure that when I met someone new they see Jesus and not me.

¹¹ Pg.134