

CELEBRATING THE FULLNESS OF LIFE



More than seventy years ago, on the banks of a small river eight kilometres northwest of Denpasar on the island of Bali, the Protestant Christian Church in Bali (*Gereja Kristen Protestan di Bali*) baptized its first 12 members. Today the church has over 8,000 members.

In the beginning, the newly converted separated themselves from Balinese customs and traditions. They wanted to leave every thing behind, hoping to find happiness in their new faith. Among the first generation of Balinese Christians was a man named Made Rungu. He became the first Balinese minister.

Rungu believed that to be a Christian he must avoid anything associated with his previous life. He was not simply following the advice of missionaries, but his own understanding of scripture, basing himself on Ephesians 4.22-24: “put away your former way of life, your old self ... clothe yourselves with the new self”.

Rungu left it all behind. He abandoned not only his bad habits like fighting and stealing, but also his beloved Balinese Gamelan music. He changed his way of interacting with people, seeking to be more humble, for he was known to be an arrogant man. He changed his way of dressing. He no longer wore Balinese clothes, but European clothes. He built a church using European architecture.

Made Rungu lived in a totally new culture. However, in spite of all the changes, he still talked and thought like a Balinese. Moreover, he felt and acted as a Balinese. So after more than twenty-five years of being a Christian, somehow he was a stranger on his own island. This made him unhappy.

Most of all, he missed the songs and dances of his island culture. He asked if Christians were allowed to play Gamelan music and to dance traditional Balinese dances. A missionary friend suggested that not only is it allowed, but also

traditional arts could be used to share the gospel, even in worship.

In the early 1960s, Made Rungu began using Balinese shadow puppets to communicate with the people in his village, Christians and others. At first he used the puppets to tell local stories. Later he began to tell Christian stories. Eventually, the church began to sing Gamelan melodies and to dance in the traditional way, even in worship.

Today, for second and third generation of Balinese Christians, the incorporation of traditional culture in worship is normal and even expected. Churches are built using Balinese architecture. On special occasions, traditional dance and music are used to proclaim God’s word. Pastors wear traditional Balinese clothing to celebrate communion. During Christmas and Easter, Balinese decorations are used to brighten the homes of Christian families.

The fullness of life in Christ is expressed not only through the proclamation of the gospel, but through the richness of Balinese culture, even in worship.

SOUND THE TRUMPETS AND THE HORNS (1 CHRONICLES 15.16-16.6)

When the ark of the covenant was brought from the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem, David rejoiced and danced, while all of Israel shouted “to the sound of the horn, trumpets, and cymbals, and made loud music on harp and lyres.”

The first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem failed because the ark had not been properly cared for. Uzzah, who so angered the Lord by touching the ark, was struck down (1 Chr 13.10). David was so afraid of God that he took the ark to the house of Obed-Edom where it rested for three months. Only when the ark was cared for as Moses had



commanded, according to the word of the Lord, was David able to bring it safely to Jerusalem (1 Chr 15.13-15).

It was a great day of celebration and sacrifice. David did not command the musicians to sing and dance because it pleased him. Rather, he knew how hard the journey had been. Not all of the people were happy to see King David dancing and making merry, but God was pleased.

It is not enough to worship God with mind and soul only. If it were, we might as well stay at home, because it would not be necessary to worship with other people, to go to church or to make worship a celebration of life and faith.

Although the Bible, especially the Old Testament, speaks of many acts and symbols used to worship God, neither is it enough to worship God in act and symbol alone. We are called to worship God with our whole being, with all of life.

Scripture teaches that worship should be expressed in “everyday” acts rather than “religious” acts. “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?” (Is 58.6-7). Moreover, “religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (Jas 1.27).

QUESTIONS

1. IS IT GOD’S WILL THAT WE CELEBRATE THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD ACCORDING TO OUR CULTURE, WITH TRADITIONAL INSTRUMENTS, MELODIES AND

DANCE; WITH TRADITIONAL DECORATIONS AND ARCHITECTURE; ACCORDING TO THE DAILY LIFE OF OUR SOCIETY?

2. ARE THERE RISKS WE SHOULD BE AWARE OF WHEN USING ELEMENTS OF TRADITIONAL CULTURE TO WORSHIP GOD?

3. ARE THERE ELEMENTS IN YOUR CULTURE THAT CONFLICT WITH THE CALL TO SHARE THE GOSPEL AND WORSHIP GOD?

4. BY WHAT CRITERIA DO YOU JUDGE WORSHIP TO BE HOLY AND ACCEPTABLE TO GOD?

PRAYER

God of all creation, we praise your name, for you are almighty and holy. You are the merciful one, who lifted us up from the shadow of death and gave us new life. God of love, who brought us together from many different cultures and backgrounds, unite us in the one body of Christ in which we may live together in harmony. Keep us from discouraging others. Make us instruments of courage and peace. Give us your wisdom that we may live in peace with all of humanity and with the whole of your creation, that all may have life in fullness. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

AUTHOR

Ketut Waspada is from Indonesia and a minister in the Protestant Christian Church in Bali. A former bishop of the Bali church, he now serves a congregation in Kuta.