

Intro to Missions

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Video

The principle of "redemptive analogy" -- of finding customs and traditions within a culture that can be used to present the Gospel in an understandable and non-foreign way as a logical outcome of what that culture already believes -- is at the heart of this story featuring Don Richardson and his wife playing themselves. The book on which this is based was published in the January 1976 Book Section of *Reader's Digest*

Key Words or Concepts

This video helped fulfill the purpose of this course by . . .

What struck me most . . .

For centuries, the Sawi lived as cannibal-headhunters, each Sawi village warring with the others. Ordinary murder was nothing to them. To be a "legend maker," you had to create a special scenario in which you pretend to make peace with someone, then kill him when his guard is down. This Sawi ideal is called "tuwi asonai man" which means "to fatten with friendship for unexpected slaughter" as one would fatten a pig.

When missionary Don Richardson told the Sawis the story of Jesus, they brightened at the part where Judas betrayed Jesus. To Richardson's disappointment, the Sawi culture led them to view Judas as a super-Sawi and the real hero of the biblical account.

Even though the Richardsons hadn't found a key to effectively announcing the Gospel among the Sawi, Don and his wife decided to leave their area because of dangerous ongoing tribal warfare. Distressed at losing a source of modern medicine and steel axes, the Sawi warriors said they would make peace.

Because the Sawis idealize treachery, Richardson wondered how there could be a guaranteed real peace. He found out that the one guarantee honored by the Sawi was an exchange of infants between villages. An exchanged infant was a "Tarop Tim" or "Peace Child". As long as the Peace Child lived, peace was guaranteed. That was a key idea or redemptive analogy which the Richardsons had been looking for. Don saw that Jesus could be proclaimed as God's Peace Child who will never die and who therefore could guarantee everlasting peace.

Richardson turned this event into a book, *Peace Child*. That book created quite a stir, even becoming a monthly Book Section for *Reader's Digest*. The book covers in detail several things not shown in this half-hour video. For instance, one Sawi could impose his will on another by means of a "waness" bind. Closely related to the "waness" bind was the practice of "gefam ason," a mourning ritual practiced over dead bodies of relatives. Sawi boys were raised without having to obey their fathers. This "discipline in reverse" created violent, strong-willed men. Sure, they beat their wives and bristled at every real or imagined injustice, but they were also ready to go to war at a moment's notice.

Sawi tradition contained prophecies that someday the Words of "Remon" [Regeneration / Immortality] would arrive. Richardson realized that some Sawi customs might actually be an attempt to reach such a high degree of collective sorrow that the Words of Remon would come more quickly. For those who believed that the Richardsons arrival with the Gospel story meant that the Words of Remon had arrived, the old customs became unnecessary -- an old covenant was supplanted by a new one.

The principle of preserving everything that is good and valuable in another person's culture, and of finding keys within that culture to make the Gospel understandable is quite Biblical. The Apostle Paul often quoted Greek authors. At Mars' Hill in Athens, Paul quoted or alluded to Aeschylus' Eumenides, Plato's Republic and Plato's Phaedo, as well as Epimenides, Aratus and Euripides. By showing that he knew what his hearers already believed, Paul was able to lead them from familiar concepts to unfamiliar ones. In Acts 21:39, after being nearly killed by a mob, Paul got a Roman officer's attention by quoting Euripides (using the phrase "no mean city"). In his letter to Titus, Paul quoted Epimenides of Knossos, a Cretian who had unflattering but true things to say about his own countrymen.