

## **How do the cultures differ from one another? How can we get in touch with each other?**

### 1) The being and doing as our culture differences

A good way to illustrate the contrasting values represented by being and doing is to consider the case of a newborn baby into any family. A newborn baby is being valued because of what it is. If parents value their baby on a scale of 1-10 (1 for poor and 10 for excellent), they will give it a 10 just for being. A tiny infant is not expected to have any skills. As a baby grows older, the basis upon which it is evaluated, changes. Parents begin to expect performances from the child. By the time it is ten years old, an amazing transformation has taken place. Doing has now joined being as a way to evaluate its offspring. If the child does not perform too well in school, its parents certainly will not give him a 10 for it. If the child is disobedient or not helpful around the home, they might give him a 4 or 5 on the scale. While this evaluative method may vary from culture to culture, people of all cultures tend to treat a newborn baby differently from a growing child. Even though a newborn baby has no ability to contribute to the family, it has a high place as a human being in their midst.

The "third world" nations continue to place a higher value on being than on doing even after an individual reaches maturity. In the technological world like in Germany, people place a high priority on doing. I do not mean to interfere that this is right, but I simply want to say that the world opinion seems to reward these societies where productivity resulting in materialism is valued. Doing is important to "third world" people, too, but it is often considered less important than being. Societies whose people emphasize the appreciation of the human being are those who see any small development as an important factor. For us, being-in-becoming is not something fixed by birth. It is a combination of being born and then moving in a process towards change. Becoming is something you can earn. Being is not something you earn. It is what you are, the way you were born. Over 70% of immigrants living in Germany have the being as a priority because of their cultural background.

### 2) Man as a machine

The view of man as a machine is very common in our world, today. We live in an age when man has made many amazing technological advances. These advances have developed at such a rapid rate that individuals are forced to limit their concentration to one small area of knowledge. This is called specialization. When a society's organization is based on specialization, people tend to identify one another by what they do rather than what they are. The tendency, then, is to value people for what they can contribute or how useful they are to us rather than by the kinds of persons they are. We come to regard people as means to an end rather than as people who are important in their own right. We treat people like a machine or a valuable object as long as they serve a useful function. Our discussion so far may sound rather abstract and removed from reality. But let me remind you that even as Christians are sometimes guilty of treating their fellow Christians- not to mention fellow men- in this way. Do we not pay more attention to the rich businessman in our church because he has greater potential for giving? Are we afraid to speak the truth for fear of offending that influential member of our church? James tells us that to show favoritism is a mark of false religion (James 2: 1-10). It is false because we put a false value on people. We think the rich deserve better treatment than the poor. But true religion, says James, is to recognize that even those who are not an asset to us- the orphans and widows- are valuable as persons (James 1:27). We will come close to one another if we guard ourselves against treating people as machines.

### 3) How Christians can make a difference

It is interesting to note how Christians coming from "doing societies" will emphasize passages in Scripture that relate to doing. For example, Christ said in John 9:4: "As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no man can work". On the other hand, people from "being cultures" find great value in the words of Christ when He talked about bearing fruit. They emphasize that just as physical fruit is produced naturally, so our spiritual fruit is what we are rather than what we do. I am not implying that there is no relationship between being and doing. Of course, there is. But I want to suggest that there is a priority in the Scriptures relating to these two concepts. It is „being“ before „doing“. Christ said: "Remain in

me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches... apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4.5). I think in our Christian global village the East can help the West, and the South can help the North to see a new perspective in the Scriptures regarding the being and doing. Let us be patient with one another just as God is patient with all of us!

Yours Pastor Peter Arthur from Ghana/ West Africa,  
Pastor of the intercultural church Akebulan- Global Mission e.V. ([www.akebulan-gm.org](http://www.akebulan-gm.org))  
in the name of the Forum Intercultural Relationships from Together for Berlin e.V.