Beyond Anti-Colonialism to Globalism

PAUL G. HIEBERT

Missions has always had to deal with cultural and religious pluralism. In the past its response has often been colonial. In recent years there has been a strong reaction that has sought to eradicate the ethnocentrism and arrogance of the previous era. This reaction is an important corrective, but in itself leads us into pragmatism, relativism, and a superficial acceptance of the other. We need to go beyond anti-colonialism to find a solid base for affirming the truth of the gospel, and for guiding us in missions, and in our relationship to people of other religions.

Western missionaries and anthropologists, like all humans, have worldviews, and when those worldviews change, their thinking is affected. I would like to examine two fundamental worldview shifts precipitated by their encounter with other peoples and cultures, and their growing awareness that in many ways these were radically different from their own. In other words, it is a worldview transformation precipitated by their encounter with OTHERS—with people from other races, cultures, religions and societies; and, at a deeper level, with OTHERNESS.

Shifts in worldview do not come easily, for groups or individuals. Wilbert Shenk points out,

Rapid transition brings trauma and disintegration. Old values appear obsolete to many people, and they reach for new but untried alternatives. Other people recoil and attempt to reinforce the traditions against encroaching [change]. . . . [A change in eras is a] moment in history when profound change occurs and we move from one order to another—a change in ethos, in values, in myths, in political relationships, in economic systems. (1980:34)

I suggest that there are three historical eras in the West’s reaction to pluralism, particularly cultural pluralism, as traders, government officials, missionaries, and anthropologists encountered it at increasingly deeper levels of awareness and relationship. Underlying each is a worldview that profoundly shaped the way Westerners related to other peoples, and the ways they did missions.

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In a secondary sense, these are stages North American churches are now experiencing as they encounter foreigners in their midst. They are also stages we experience as individuals when we move into cultures different from our own.

As is the case with all general schema, this one is simplistic, but all general maps must be in order to make sense of an infinitely complex world. It is important to keep in mind that this is not a chronological history, but a schema of the development of worldviews in contemporary Western thought. In fact, many people and agencies still operate in a colonial mode, and others in reaction to that paradigm. A few have begun the difficult task of moving on to deeper relationships of mutuality with those of other races and cultures.

Also, this schema is presented not as a firm answer, but as a tentative proposal that calls for further discussion and the formulation of other, more accurate, understandings of ourselves and our times.

The Colonial Era: First Encounters with an Other Kind

Aside from a few daring travelers returning with strange tales, the first serious encounter by Westerners of radically different cultures began with the age of exploration and trade. This led to foreign settlements, missions, and eventually Western colonial rule. With these came a growing awareness in the West of the "otherness" of the peoples, cultures, and religions in other parts of the world.

Traders and Governments

The first response of Western traders and governments to these racial and cultural differences was a sense of their own superiority. Western science and technology were becoming increasingly powerful, and their superiority to the sciences and technologies of other cultures seemed self-evident. Moreover, Western governments were conquering other nations and making them colonies.

It is not surprising that in this context the idea of "progress" found ready acceptance as an explanation of cultural differences. Clearly the West was "civilized" and the rest of the world was "primitive." It was the "white man's burden," therefore, to educate the world.

Missions

Missionaries, too, were affected by the spirit of their times. They equated Christianity with Western culture, and the latter's obvious superiority over other cultures proved the superiority of Christianity over pagan religions. Shenk notes,

The seventeenth-century New England Puritan missionaries largely set the course for modern missions. They defined their task as preaching the gospel so that Native Americans would be converted and receive personal salvation. But early in their missionary experience these New Englanders concluded that Indian converts could only be Christians if they were "civilized." The model
by which they measured their converts was English Puritan civilization. The missionaries felt compassion and responsibility for their converts. They gathered these new Christians into churches for nurture and discipline and set up programs to transform Christian Indians into English Puritans. (1980:35)

In 1890, Rev. T. W. Pearce pointed out that merely introducing Christianity to China was not enough. Western civilization, in its entirety, had to “overcome” Chinese civilization (Chao 1987:12).

Later, missionaries sought to end slavery, and came to believe that commerce was the only lasting solution. Christianity, civilization, and commerce became the “threefold flag under which the missionary ship sailed for the next generations” (Shenk 1980:36).

During this era the missionaries stressed biblically defined needs: divine judgment of sin, repentance, and eternal salvation. They also advocated Western medicine, education, worship styles, architecture, and even dress. They translated the Bible literally, assuming that meanings were tied to forms. They measured communication by what they said, not by what people heard.

Missionaries often came as outsiders, living on compounds where they tried to recreate their Western-Christian cultures. Given the sense of racial superiority that pervaded their times, they often kept themselves apart from the national Christians. They also remained in charge of most things.

Most missionaries saw Christianity as true and other religions as false and “pagan.” With many notable exceptions, missionaries saw no need to study the local cultures or to contextualize their message. Other religions had to be displaced, and because these religions pervaded every area of life, local cultures, too, had to be changed.

**Anthropology**

In this context of cross-cultural encounters, anthropology emerged as the science for the study of “otherness.” Like other scientists, anthropologists had a positivist view of their discipline. They believed their findings were objective truth. Moreover, like other scientists, they sought to construct one “Grand Unified Theory” (GUT) to integrate all data into a single system of knowledge.

Anthropologists believed, too, that their theories were unaffected by the historical, cultural, and personal contexts of science or the anthropologist. Their truth was universal truth.

The first anthropological theories had to do with the “otherness” of race. During the last half of the nineteenth century, anthropologists tried to account for racial variations by the theory of biological evolution. Behind their search lay the assumption that the white race was superior to other races. This justified the segregation of whites from other races overseas and slavery at home. When scientific evidence did not support this assumption, anthropologists turned their attention to cultural differences.

Here the response was the theory of cultural evolution. On the one hand, this affirmed the unity of humankind and of culture. Lewis Henry Morgan (1877:vi) wrote, “The history of the human race is one in source, one in experience and one in progress.” Anthropologists spoke of “culture,” not
"cultures." On the other hand, evolution accounted for cultural variations by arranging them along a scale from "primitive," and "pre-logical" to "civilized" with the West at the top. It was assumed that left to themselves, the lower cultures would eventually develop civilization. With Western help, however, this time could be shortened. Evolution enabled anthropologists to affirm both unity and diversity in one grand unified theory.

These theories of evolution justified the initial response of Westerners to other peoples and cultures. They "proved" Western superiority, and gave scientific support for colonial rule, and for efforts to "civilize" other peoples.

Theology

The Enlightenment divided human experience into two spheres: public and private (Newbigin 1986, 1989). The former is the domain of universal, objective, rational truth. Here science and formal logic rule. The latter is the domain of subjective beliefs and emotions. Here the humanities and arts express their particularist views of reality.

During the colonial era, biblical scholars and theologians sought to give their disciplines credibility as objective truth by claiming that these were "sciences." Most systematic theologies written before 1950 began with the claim that theology is, in fact, the queen of the sciences.

Like scientists, theologians had a positivist view of their discipline. It was objective truth encoded in formal statements and unaffected by the personality and culture of the theologian. Moreover, they sought to develop a comprehensive, systematic theology based on facts and reason. Disagreements led to heated arguments.

Like scientists, theologians focused their attention on universals. They gave little thought to the relationship of the gospel to the concrete particularities of history and culture in which it was revealed or proclaimed.

Epistemology

At the worldview level, the epistemology that emerged during this era was positivism (sometimes called naive realism): the belief that science was a new and unique type of knowledge. Its knowledge, carefully tested and proved, was assumed to be timeless, objective, universal truth. Other systems of knowledge (and many included religion here) were superstitions based on pre-logical thought. People in other cultures had no science.

In positivism, scientific knowledge was thought to be an accurate photograph of reality. Scientists believed that as new facts were added, the whole picture of reality would become clear. Disagreements often led to confrontations, because if one theory was right, the other had to be wrong.

Results

What did the colonial era produce? On the positive side, a great many people benefitted from the medical, educational, and agricultural advances of the West. Colonialism also reduced the internecine wars that plagued many parts of the world and introduced ideas of nationhood and the welfare state.

In missions, driven by deep convictions regarding the truth of the gospel,
Beyond Anti-Colonialism

a small cadre of missionaries braved what at times seemed impossible conditions to plant churches in the most remote regions of the world, to translate the Bible into a thousand tongues, and to lay the foundations for the medical and educational systems for many young nations. The global church today is a testimony to God's blessing of their work despite their too often colonial ways.

On the negative side, the colonial era was one of arrogance and segregation. Few Westerners took other cultures seriously or sought to understand them in their own terms. Many saw themselves as superior to the peoples they met.

In the end, the colonial era contained within it the seeds of its own demise. Education prepared people to run their own countries, and Westerners began to interact with people of other cultures in deeper ways, which called into question their ethnocentrism. They were forced to take others, and otherness more seriously than they had so far before.

The Anti-Colonial Era: Taking the Other Seriously

Intense interaction with others produced in the West a reaction against colonialism and the arrogance and cultural oppression it exhibited. This anti-colonialism appeared first among sensitive missionaries and anthropologists who worked most closely with people in other cultures. It spread to governments and led to the collapse of the colonial empires after World War II. It is now spreading to business, education, theology, medicine, and other areas of life.

What is the nature of this anti-colonial revolution, and how does it affect missions, anthropology, theology, and epistemology?

Missions

Because of their close relationships to people in other cultures, many missionaries began to react to colonial attitudes and to take otherness seriously. Early on Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson called for the planting of indigenous churches that were self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. These three "selves" became the watchwords for progressive missions and led to the development of autonomous churches around the world.

Since the 1970s the question of the fourth self has become the center of mission debates. Do churches in other cultures have the right, even responsibility, of reading and interpreting the Scriptures in their own historical and cultural contexts? The contextualization of theology is a more explosive issue than the earlier questions of indigenization which had to do more with church polity and worship symbols. Contextualization has to do with the very nature of the gospel itself. Is there one gospel or many? Do we speak of theology or theologies? Do other religions have truth in them, or are they all false? Is Christianity unique, or is it one among many valid religions?

Reacting to earlier missionaries who equated Christianity with Western culture, theology with Western theology, and the church with Western churches, missionaries began to encourage young churches to develop their
own theologies. Some began to study other religions to find bridges of communication to them. A few sought areas of common faith such as worship forms and beliefs in a transcendent God, to join leaders in other religions to oppose secularism and other evils in the modern world. Those who opposed contextualization were labeled colonial.

In the end, contextualization often became an uncritical process in which the good in other cultures was affirmed, but the evil in them was left unchallenged. Young churches were free to interpret the Scripture as they saw fit, unchecked by the church in other parts of the world or through history. The emphasis moved to local theologizing.

In communication, the emphasis shifted from what the missionary said to what the people understood. It became clear that people reinterpreted messages in terms of their own cultural contexts. In Bible translation, attention turned to dynamic equivalent translations. Here a distinction was made between the forms and meanings of words. Good translations were those that preserved the meanings, even if this meant changing the forms.

With the shift to context and receptor came an emphasis on “felt needs.” The needs missionaries should address were now defined by the people being served, rather than by the missionary or even by the Scriptures.

In their encounter with other religions, missionaries began to move away from confrontation and radical displacement, which now seemed colonial and arrogant, to dialogue. Other religions were accepted as valid systems of belief having their own internal logic and understandings of truth. It was important, therefore, for missionaries to understand and respect them. The anti-colonial stance is essentially laissez-faire.

Such a situation calls for “dialogue,” not proclamation. On one level, dialogue is a way to understand other religions so as to make the gospel known clearly to people in those religions. In anti-colonialism, however, it came to mean the process by which we learn from other religions or seek a religious synthesis that eliminates our differences. Such a consensus is often found first in common worship services, spiritual exercises, and theologies of God and Creation. What is sacrificed is the uniqueness of Christ and his salvation, because this is an offense to non-Christians.

Anthropology

The serious acceptance of other people as fully human and other cultures as having their own logic and integrity began in anthropology with British Structural Functionalism, and with New Anthropology and its emphasis on ethno-semantics, ethno-musicology, ethno-hermeneutics, and so on. Each society was seen as an integrated whole. Each had its own culture or conceptual “paradigm.” No society had the right to judge another by its own values. To do so was cultural arrogance. Ethnocentrism became the cardinal sin, and cultural relativism the acknowledged good.

Unwilling to judge other cultures by Western standards, and lacking any transcultural basis for making ontological judgments between cultures, anthropology was reduced to phenomenology—to describing and explaining societies in terms of their own truths and values. It focused on emics—on
helping us understand other cultures from within. Moreover, lacking criteria for critiquing cultures, it no longer became an advocate of culture change, particularly of change initiated from without.

Anthropology now focused first on social and then on cultural diversity. Each society was seen as an autonomous group with its own social organization. Its culture and worldview had its own internal logic, and had to be understood from within. Ethnographies and ethno-semantic studies of various people and cultures became the hallmark of sociocultural anthropology.

Communication, in this view, was measured not by what the message meant to the sender, but by how it was understood by the receiver, who reinterpreted it in the categories and logic of his or her own culture. Carried to the extreme, human knowledge becomes totally subjective. Ronald Sukenick wrote,

> All versions of "reality" are of the nature of fiction. There's your story and my story, there's the journalist's story and the historian's story, there's the philosopher's story and the scientist's story... Our common world is only a description... reality is imagined. (1976:113)

Societies and cultures, too, become islands of subjectivity. True deep understanding across cultural boundaries was seen as virtually impossible. In the end, some anthropologists argued that anthropology said more about the cognitive pilgrimages of the anthropologists than about other cultures.

This view of knowledge as culture-bound and subjective was reinforced by a theory of language that divided words and other symbols into forms and meanings, and saw the link between these as purely arbitrary. What was important was meanings, and these existed in the minds of people.

**Theology**

Theology, too, was confronted by pluralism (Tracy 1979). With the emergence of Liberation Theology, Indian Theology, local theologies, and other theologies, it became more difficult to speak of a single comprehensive systematic theology. It also became more difficult to speak of truth and theological absolutes.

The anti-colonial reaction led to a deconstructionism that tied theologies to specific cultural and historical contexts. They were seen as solutions to particular problems such as oppression, racism, and sexism. It was important, therefore, to understand the contexts in which theologies emerged in order to understand the problems they addressed. Here the theologians turned to the social sciences for help. In some cases, theories of language, religion, and culture became the foundations for theological discourse.

But deconstructionism went further. Theologians soon realized that not only the questions, but also the very categories in which a theology was cast, was determined by the cultural frame of the theologian. Theologizing was seen, therefore, as a subjective human process, and theologies as human creations. The result was theological relativism. One could no longer speak
of Theology because there was no basis for judging between theologies to determine their truth or falsehood.

The logical conclusion to the progression was the denial of the uniqueness of Christ as the only way to salvation (Ariaraja 1985, Hick and Knitter 1987, Swidler 1990; for a review of many recent works on the subject see Clooney 1989, and Knitter 1989).

In the end, deconstructionism at the level of the common folk reduced theology to problem solving. As Bibby points out (1987), many Christians have no integrated theology by which to understand reality. Rather, they have a toolbox of disparate theologies which they used to solve different problems in their lives.

Because theologies were seen as culture and person-specific, to seek to convert others to one's own faith was seen as religious imperialism. Mutual affirmation and peaceful coexistence, not debate, were affirmed.

**Epistemology**

Underlying these shifts in anthropology, missions, and theology is a shift in epistemology—in how we look at systems of human knowledge. With the growing awareness of others and of the contextual nature of all human knowledge, it was hard to defend the positivism of the colonial era. To take others seriously, we had to take their beliefs seriously.

The epistemological foundation for anti-colonialism was instrumentalism (Hiebert 1985a). This allowed for a real external world but reduced knowledge to subjective speculations about that world, speculations shaped by our cultures and histories. There is no way to show that our knowledge is objectively true. At best, we can say that it works and helps us solve our daily problems. The result is a pragmatic rather than an ontological approach to knowledge and life.

In instrumentalism, knowledge is subjective, encased in Kuhnian paradigms (Kuhn 1970). It makes good sense to those operating in the paradigm but is largely unintelligible to those in another one. Because all observers are locked in paradigms and have no external vantage point to see reality, there is no way they can test whether one or another paradigm is true or false. Paradigms can be judged only from within.

True communication between Kuhnian paradigms is essentially impossible. Meaning is found in people's heads and in cultures. People can understand external messages only in terms of their own paradigms. Communication must, therefore, be measured not by what the sender means, but by what the receptor understands.

One consequence of instrumentalism is deconstructionism—giving up the search for one grand unifying theory of knowledge, and celebrating pluralism and diversity despite their incongruity and lack of coherence. Jean-Francois Lyotard and other post-modernists see the world as fragmented and unpresentable. They detest the idea of what Habermas called "the unity of experience" and celebrate pluralism and contradiction (cf. Harvey 1984 and Arac 1986). In this spirit Lyotard declares,
It must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality but to invent illusion to the conceivable which cannot be presented. And it is not to be expected that this task will effect the last reconciliation between language games (which, under the name of faculties, Kant knew to be separated by a chasm), and that only the transcendental illusion (that of Hegel) can hope to totalize then into a real unity... Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences... (1984:80-81)

Linda Hutcheon (1980:xiii) notes, “Willfully contradictory, then, post modern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within.”

In post-modernity, there is no basis for debate over truth. We must tolerate differences and celebrate diversity. To seek to convert others to our beliefs is arrogance.

Another consequence of instrumentalism is relativism and pragmatism. We do not choose theories on the basis of truth. Rather our choices are determined by historical accidents such as birth, by our participation in social groups that shape our thinking, and by our personal idiosyncrasies. The only rational basis for selecting theories is their usefulness to us.

Results

The anti-colonial reaction was a necessary corrective. It called into question Western cultural arrogance, and it forced Western Christians to differentiate between the gospel and their culture.

In itself, however, anti-colonialism does not provide us with a basis for relating intimately with “others.” It moves us beyond our initial prejudices to mutual respect but leaves us as separate islands of subjective being. Furthermore, it lives in reaction, not proaction. Its agenda is to root out the last vestiges of colonialism, but this does little to help us work together to solve the global crises facing humankind.

Finally, anti-colonialism brings us to theological relativism. Paul Knitter says (Swidler 1990: back cover), “[I]n our contemporary world, in which we are aware of the presence of others and the absence of absolutes, Christian theology, to be truly Christian, can no longer be only Christian [italics in the original].”

This leads us to deny the uniqueness of Christ and his salvation, and destroys the foundations of Christianity itself. It also undermines evangelism and missions and, in the end, precipitates the demise of missiology as a discipline of study.

The Global Era: Hard Love

Anti-colonialism is a corrective to colonialism with its cultural arrogance, but it does not provide us with the foundations for working with or relating intimately to people different from ourselves.

There are two responses to anti-colonialism. Some, sensing the void of relativism, turn back, looking for certainty in more subtle forms of neo-colonialism. Others look forward, past the present relativizing experience of pluralism for deeper foundations beyond. Berger’s metaphor is helpful. In positivism we stand on the firm ground of absolutes. When we enter the
river of pluralism, the water rises to our necks. Some retreat in fear to the solid bank behind them. Some continue on and are swept away by the river. Some swim to the firm bank beyond. What is that bank beyond? How does it affect missions, anthropology, theology, and epistemology?

**Missions**

What are the consequences of a global perspective for missions and for our relationship to other religions?

*A reevaluation of mission history.* To move beyond anti-colonialism, we need to reassess the history of missions. Colonial writers presented Western missionaries in a totally positive light. Anti-colonial writers paint them as servants of colonialism and destroyers of cultures.

In recent years, historians such as Lamin Sanneh (1991) have begun to reinterpret mission history from a global perspective. They see both the good and the bad in the modern missionary movement. They recognize that, despite its weaknesses, the movement did plant the church throughout the world.

**Critical contextualization.** The response of colonial missionaries to other cultures was often one of radical displacement. Consequently, to become Christian, the people had to become Western.

In reaction, anti-colonial advocates called for contextualization. People should keep their cultures and social systems when they become Christian. This affirmation of other cultures and societies is an important correction, but carried too far it produces an uncritical contextualization that compromises the gospel.

A global response calls for an ongoing process of critical contextualization (see Hiebert 1987). The gospel is not a part of any culture. It comes as the message of salvation, not from West to East, but from God to people in all cultures. For them to hear and believe, the gospel must be communicated in ways they understand and value.

The gospel calls us all to follow Christ. In doing so, however, it also stands in prophetic judgment on all our societies and cultures. It affirms what is good in each, but condemns what is evil: our corporate idolatries and rebellions against God and our sins of oppression and injustice. As William Dyrness points out (1989), our concern to communicate the gospel in culturally sensitive ways must be guided by two commitments: to effective communication and to biblical truth.

**Double translation.** During the colonial era, Bible translation was formal. It was assumed that if one translated the forms, the meanings would follow. Further analysis showed that this assumption was not true. People reinterpret what they hear in terms of their own cultures and worldviews. Care has to be taken if meanings are to be preserved in cross-cultural communication. This concern led to dynamic equivalence translations that sought to preserve meanings by changing forms.

This view of symbols can reduce meanings to subjective perceptions in the heads of people. There is no objective reality against which to test meanings. Moreover, there is little recognition of the fact that changing forms to preserve meanings introduces another type of distortion into the message
The solution offered by the newly emerging field of semiotics which we examine below is "double translation." The translator seeks to preserve the connection between meanings, forms, and realities in the translation (Pike 1982). For example, information needed to make a passage clear in another culture may be added as a commentary note (i.e., shekels are not translated into dollars, but a footnote gives the approximate value of a shekel in dollars for readers who have no idea of what a shekel is worth). In this way care is given to both form and meaning.

Semiotics recognizes that forms and meanings are linked to realities and that meaning lies in our understanding of reality. This is related to the correspondence between our mental maps and those realities. Communication, therefore, is measured, not by what the sender means or the receptor comprehends, but by the correspondence between what the sender and the receptor experience and understand about reality.

**Incarnational witness.** Given a global perspective, how do we respond to other religions? We cannot assume a colonial stance of prejudice and arrogance. Nor can we take the anti-colonial position that all of them are equally good. We must enter into dialogue with those of other faiths, with both humility and sensitivity, and critique and challenge (Stott 1985). The purpose of this dialogue is not a Hegelian search for a synthesis of our faiths. Nor is it even a way to make mutual understanding and communication possible. Ultimately, it is to point people to Christ, who stands not on our ground or the ground of any other culture. His ground defines the reality of all other grounds. Our desire is not to win arguments but to persuade people to follow Christ.

Our witness must be incarnational in nature. We must go where people are, speak their language, and become one with them as far as our consciences allow and we are psychologically able. People need to hear the gospel in their heart language and see it lived in us. Incarnational also means, however, that there is something outside their language and culture in the gospel and its messengers.

**Felt and real needs.** Colonial missions focused on the ultimate human need for salvation; anti-colonial missions on felt needs such as food, material well-being, and self-esteem. Today we realize we may need to start with felt needs, but we must move to the ultimate needs which the gospel addresses: salvation, reconciliation, justice, and peace.

**Anthropology**

The anti-colonial era in anthropology challenged the ethnocentrism of earlier theories and led anthropologists to understand other cultures in greater depth. The emphasis on understanding cultures from within helped us see reality as people in those cultures see it.

But in anti-colonialism, truly understanding other people from within is impossible. Cultures are like Kuhnian islands. Only those raised on them know their way around. Outsiders, such as anthropologists, bring their own questions, categories, and other biases. Consequently, they never gain a
complete or an accurate view of the local terrain.

Carried to the extreme, this means anthropological fieldwork is not about understanding another culture, but about understanding our own mental response to the encounter of other cultures. Anthropology is then not an objective analysis of human cultures, but autobiographies of the personal pilgrimages of anthropologists entering other cultures.

This instrumentalist view destroyed any claims anthropology had to objective knowledge. Science, too, was reduced to one view among many. In the end, instrumentalism relativized not only cultures, but all systems of human knowledge.

In anthropology this has led, since the 1970s, to a rejection of relativism. The move has been so strong that Clifford Geertz (1984), in his presidential address to the American Anthropological Association, reminded us that the theory of cultural relativism had been, in fact, a helpful corrective at one stage in the development of anthropological theory. But what replaces relativism? The answer in anthropology is a semiotic view of symbols and a critical realist view of knowledge.

**Semiotics.** To forge a new global view of humanity we must reexamine the nature of symbols. In instrumentalism symbols are defined in terms of forms and meanings. Knowledge, therefore, is totally subjective. In semiotics symbols stand for realities and are defined in terms of realities (objects), forms (representamen), and meanings (interpretants) (Peirce 1955. See Figure 1). Semiotics begins with a real world with a real history and sees symbols as the links between that world and our mental maps of it (Pike 1980, 1987).

Symbols, therefore, have both objective and subjective dimensions to them. Truth and meaning lie not in the head, but in the correspondence between our maps or models, and reality. This means we must test our knowledge (which is symbolic) against reality by careful examination and independent verification. We must also recognize that our knowledge is partial and biased. In short, we see through a glass darkly, but we do see. We are not totally blind.

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**Old Linguistics**

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<th>Meanings (inside heads)</th>
<th>Forms (external representations)</th>
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<td>[symbols are totally subjective]</td>
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**Semiotics**

<table>
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<th>Forms (symbolic representations)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maps (inside heads)</td>
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<td>Realities (external realities being mapped)</td>
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[symbols link subjective knowledge to objective realities]

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**Figure 1. The Nature of Symbols**
**Complementarity.** Semiotics is linked to a critical realist epistemology. In this we recognize the complimentary nature of human knowledge. Because our minds are incapable of comprehending the whole of reality at once, we must break our knowledge of it down into different maps or blueprints. Each of these asks different questions and uses different methods of analysis to examine reality, and each contributes to our understanding of the whole. Different maps help us see different things, but because they map the same reality, they cannot contradict one another (Hiebert 1985a). Disagreements lead not to polemical debate, but to further analysis to correct one or both of the maps.

One area of complimentarity in anthropology is the relationship between emic (inside) and etic (outside) analyses (Berry 1990). We need emic studies to help us understand the maps people have of the world, for these are real maps. On the other hand, we need etic analyses to compare these maps with the maps of other peoples and with reality. We need good ethnographies and good comparative studies to understand the nature and range of human cultures.

Another area of complimentarity is the relationship between anthropology, sociology, psychology, biology, the other sciences, and the humanities. Each contributes something to our understanding of humans. We need them all to get a more complete picture.

To these, as Christians, we would add the need for theological insights into the nature of reality. Theology, however, is not simply a system of beliefs to be added alongside the others. It is the master blueprint on which all other blueprints are mapped. But we must go further. All systems of knowledge must be understood within the biblical worldview. It is divine revelation in Scriptures that ultimately defines the questions, provides the categories, and outlines the methods that help us see reality. It is this world known by God, not the worlds we create, that is the real world. All other systems of knowledge, including the sciences, must emerge out of this biblical realism.

A third area of complimentarity is insights from different cultures regarding humanity. Our Western perspectives are colored by our Western worldview, and there is much we can learn from other peoples. Both our knowledge and theirs need to be tested against reality and biblical revelation.

**Unity and diversity.** Critical realism in anthropology also affects our views of the unity and diversity of humankind. The colonial era stressed our common humanity with the other. The anti-colonial era stressed the differences between us. Today anthropologists are emphasizing again the underlying oneness of human beings, while recognizing our diversity. We all share common mental processes and common human experiences such as birth, maturation, and death. The ways these are understood and expressed, however, varies greatly from culture to culture.

**Metacultural grids.** We must reject the relativism of the anti-colonial era, but on what basis can we pass judgment on cultures without falling back into a colonial ethnocentrism? Anthropologists are increasingly aware that true participation with others at a deep level changes us. As we learn to see...
the world through the eyes of two cultures, we are forced to develop a "metacultural" framework above these cultures that enables us both to see them from without, and to compare them. We become both inside participants in and outside observers of the cultures. This "inside-outside" perspective enables us to translate from one to the other (cf. Berry 1990). It also gives us a more objective vantage point to compare and judge them both.

Metacultural perspective

Cultural perspective

![Figure 2. The Metacultural Grid](image)

The development of a metacultural grid is the hallmark of anthropologists and other bicultural people. Having participated deeply in other cultures, and having become both "empathetic insiders" and "comparing outsiders," they develop mental perspectives that enable them to relate to any number of other cultures.

**Theology**

What implications does a global view have for theology? During the colonial era theologians spoke of theology as a universal, objective system of truth. In the anti-colonial reaction they speak of "theologies" as particular subjective understandings of truth.

From a semiotic perspective, we must differentiate between God's revelation, and our understanding of it. Moreover, we recognize that God speaks to humans in specific contexts, but his message has universal truth and application. We must, therefore, speak of both theologies and Theology.

In semiotics, communication is not simply the sharing of information. It calls for a response in a real world. So also, God reveals himself to us in the context of history and our histories. His purpose is not simply to give us information, but to call us to discipleship and obedience. Theology, therefore, is more than information. It calls us to a new life in Christ.

**Text and contexts.** During the colonial era, scholars, missionaries, and pastors emphasized the text. They had little awareness of the ways cultural and historical contexts shaped the way they and their audiences understood the text, particularly in cross-cultural settings. During the anti-colonial era they focused on the contexts, and were in danger of losing sight of the text.

In a global perspective, we turn our attention again to the biblical texts, but seek to understand them in the contexts in which they occur, as well as their meaning in the many human contexts today. We also recognize that the gospel, like most messages, seeks to change the contexts in which it is communicated.

**Systematic theology and narrative theology.** One important area of complementarity in theology is that between systematic and narrative theologies.
The colonial era stressed the former. The anti-colonial era reacted against systematics in favor of particular narrative theologies. In a global perspective, we realize that in reading individual narratives we formulate universal and systematic views of reality. On the other hand, divorced from narrative realities, systematics can become arid. Globalism reminds us, however, that particular narratives have no ultimate meaning in themselves. They must be understood within one divine history that begins with Creation, includes the fall and God's redemptive acts, and ends in eternity.

Doing theology. How do we resolve the tension between theological absolutes and theological pluralism—between Theology and theologies? The answer lies, in part, in developing a theology of how to do theology. This theology must recognize the fact that different persons and different cultures understand the Scriptures differently. It must also enable them to work toward a common understanding of the truth of the Scriptures.

Theologizing must begin with Scripture, because it is God's revelation to us. It is not human reflections about God (although it contains these). It is God revealing himself to us from outside our human predicaments.

Theologizing must be led by the Holy Spirit, who instructs us in the truth. We need also to recognize that the same Holy Spirit at work in us is also at work in the lives of believers in other contexts. To deny them the right to interpret the Scriptures for themselves is to deny this fact. This work of the Spirit guards us from our cultural parochialisms, and from theologies based on human reason alone.

Finally, theology must be done in the community (Kraus 1979). It is ultimately the task not of individuals but the church. This corporate nature of the hermeneutical task helps guard us against the privatization of faith and from our personal misinterpretations of the Scriptures. Just as others see our sins before we see our own, so Christians in other cultures see our cultural biases and their impact on our theology more clearly than we see them ourselves.

Epistemology

Responding to Kuhn's subjectivism, Larry Laudin (1977) and others argue for a critical realism that takes both the objective and subjective nature of human knowledge into account. They argue that human perceptions are tied to external realities, but not with a one-to-one correspondence, as in photographs. Rather, the relationship is one of limited correspondence and analogy, as in maps and blueprints. Moreover, just as several maps are needed to help us understand reality, so different complimentary theories are needed to help us understand reality.

As we have seen, in critical realism we speak of the truth with reference to reality. We also speak of truth—our partial understandings of that greater Truth. Our understandings are both objective (to the extent they are tested against reality) and subjective (because they are ours as humans in our specific cultural and historical contexts).

Disagreements do not lead us into confrontation. On the other hand, we are not disinterested in contradictions. Dialogue between those with different
understandings does not lead to a subjective Hegelian synthesis, but to a search to determine whose map or model fits reality and truth most closely. If our road maps vary, we drive the streets to determine which is correct.

Conclusions

Much has been written in recent years of the challenge of modernity to Christianity. It has led to a secularism that denies the existence of God, the deity of Christ, and the reality of the miracles recorded in the Bible. It has marginalized those who continue to hold religious convictions by relegating religion to the private sphere of personal opinions and feelings.

Today we face another challenge to Christian faith, namely post-modernity. Here spiritual experiences are no longer denied; they are all affirmed. The issue is not secularism but relativism and pragmatism. The debate centers about the uniqueness of Christ and his claim to be the only way to salvation (John 14:6). To deny this uniqueness, however, is to deny the truth of the gospel.

Many accuse us of religious arrogance when we proclaim Christ as the only Savior and Lord, but speaking the truth is not arrogance. Newbigin notes (1989:166), “To affirm the unique decisiveness of God’s action in Jesus Christ is no arrogance; it is the enduring bulwark against the arrogance of every culture to be itself the criterion by which others are judged.”

We must be careful to proclaim the gospel, not our culture. We must also speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). But biblical love is not superficial sentiment. It is a deep commitment to be for the other. This means we affirm their full dignity as humans created in the image of God. It also means we care enough to confront them when we believe they are wrong. Above all, we must continue to point people to Christ as the way, the truth, and the life.
Table 1
SHIFTS IN WESTERN THOUGHT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missions:</th>
<th>Colonial</th>
<th>Anti-Colonial</th>
<th>Global</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* other religions:</td>
<td>- displacement</td>
<td>- dialogue for consensus</td>
<td>- dialogue to find the truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* translation:</td>
<td>- formal</td>
<td>- dynamic equivalence</td>
<td>- double translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* symbols:</td>
<td>- form=meaning (formal linguistics)</td>
<td>- form/meaning (Saussurian linguistics)</td>
<td>- form &lt;-&gt; meaning (semiotics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* contextualization:</td>
<td>- non-contextualization</td>
<td>- uncritical contextualization</td>
<td>- critical contextualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* need:</td>
<td>- real need</td>
<td>- discovery from within</td>
<td>- from above to all cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* message:</td>
<td>- West to East</td>
<td>- discovery from within</td>
<td>- from above to all cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* missionary:</td>
<td>- outsider</td>
<td>- insider</td>
<td>- incarnational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* attitude:</td>
<td>- confrontational</td>
<td>- non-confrontational</td>
<td>- hard love, non-Hegelian</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anthropology:</th>
<th>Evolution</th>
<th>Functionalism</th>
<th>Post-functional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* culture &amp; humanity:</td>
<td>- unity (culture)</td>
<td>- diversity (cultures)</td>
<td>- unity/diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* view point:</td>
<td>- etic</td>
<td>- emic</td>
<td>- etic/emic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* truth:</td>
<td>- absolute</td>
<td>- relative</td>
<td>- absolute/relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* communication:</td>
<td>- sender oriented</td>
<td>- receptor oriented</td>
<td>- correspondence theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* theory:</td>
<td>- one comprehensive theory</td>
<td>- one particularistic theory</td>
<td>- integration of several complimentary theories</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theology:</th>
<th>Theology</th>
<th>Theologies</th>
<th>Metatheology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* nature:</td>
<td>- systematic, comprehensive</td>
<td>- deconstructionist, pluralist</td>
<td>- metatheology leading to community-based theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* focus:</td>
<td>- text (theology)</td>
<td>- context (social sciences)</td>
<td>- text/context (theology/social sciences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* hermeneutics:</td>
<td>- literal</td>
<td>- interpretive</td>
<td>- double horizon</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemology:</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Instrumentalism</th>
<th>Critical Realism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* goal:</td>
<td>- Truth</td>
<td>- pragmatism &amp; problem solving</td>
<td>- Truth/truth &amp; problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* nature of truth:</td>
<td>- absolute</td>
<td>- relative, perspectival</td>
<td>- absolute/relative, approximate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* knowledge:</td>
<td>- objective</td>
<td>- subjective</td>
<td>- objective/subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* unity:</td>
<td>- G.U.T.</td>
<td>- deconstructionist &amp; incommensurable Kuhnian paradigms</td>
<td>- complimentary models but interrelated, common human experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* view of reality:</td>
<td>- reductionist</td>
<td>- reductionist</td>
<td>- integrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* perspective:</td>
<td>-in culture A</td>
<td>- in culture B</td>
<td>- metacultural perspective</td>
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</table>
Note
1. This paper is based on the Van Dyke Lectures given at Calvin Seminary by Frances F. and Paul G. Hiebert, 1991. An earlier draft was presented at the Network of Christian Anthropologists, American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, December 1, 1990.

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