

GEERTZ, CLIFFORD

I. Biographical information

Born 1926, San Francisco

B.A. Philosophy, Antioch College (1950)

Ph.D. Anthropology, Harvard (1956)

Teaching appointments:

University of California, Berkely (1958-60)

University of Chicago (1960-70)

Princeton, Institute for Advanced Studies (1970-present)

Currently Harold F. Linder Professor of Social Science, Institute for Advanced Studies, Princeton

II. Major fieldwork and research

Extensive fieldwork with wife Hildred in the town of Pare, Java (1952-4) and Bali (1957-8), studies on religion, agriculture, economy, social history, ecology and kinship.

He first traveled to the town of Sefrou, Morocco in 1963 to begin developing a comparative approach to religion and to processes of social change in the Third World as viewed from a culturalogical or interpretative perspective.

Geertz visited both of these towns several times through 1986.

III. Most significant publications (see pages 3 and 4).

IV. Geertz's anthropological approach: "Semantic anthropology".

- A. 2 contrasting approaches to the study of religion
- B. Durkheim and Weber's influence on Geertz

IV. Major theoretical positions held by Geertz

- A. Culture as a system of symbols. Religion as culture

Geertz defines religion:

Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasiev and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (1975:90)

1. Maps and Models : *of = for* Truth + Teleology
2. Structure: core of extreme variations
3. Culture ecology

B. Anthropology is a 2-step operation.

C. Social change

D. Etic or Emic (*interpretation*) or ANTH. IS NEW IMPERIALISM

E. Common Sense as Culture

F. "Thick Description" *Gilbert Ryle. - deeper meanings below surface*

{ Absorption
Pride
Sanctity

Religion & Power

} Religion & Power;

- G. Religion as Divisive
- H. The impact of the concept of culture on the concept of man

V. Implications for Missions

- A. Incarnational involvement is a prerequisite for credibility and impact in a cross cultural setting. *Humility, learners, meaning & understanding des.*
- B. Analysis of language, customs, symbols is essential for missionary effectiveness in a cross cultural or inter cultural setting.
- C. Willingness to be flexible on applications in light of context. Respecting and affirming the ability of those who are within those cultural settings to set the agenda is critical.
- D. Descriptive research is not a luxury as one can get to it or afford to do it but lays and essential foundation for involvement and interaction.
- E. Utilizing a systems approach to cultural understanding and interpretation will help the missionary to understand the significance of the various contextual issues whether it be in the area of politics, economics, scientific development, etc. and how all of these factors are interrelated with one another in terms of their impact on the cultural context we conduct our ministry.

7/27/85

Sources consulted:

Geertz. Culture and Social Change: The Indonesian Case. Man. Vol. 19, 1984. pp. 511-530.

_____. Politics and the Archaeology of Meaning. Western Political Quarterly. Vol. 39. pp. 548-63.

_____. Distinguished Lecture: Anti-antirelativism. American Anthropologist. Vol. 86. June 1984. pp. 263-78.

_____. Common Sense as Cultural System. Antioch Review. Vol. 50, 1992. pp. 221-241.

Hiebert, Paul. Epistemological Foundations for Science and Technology. Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin. March-April 1985, vol. 8. No. 4, pp. 5-10.

_____. The Missiological Implications of an Epistemological Shift. Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin. May-June 1985. Vol. 8. No. 5, pp. 12-18.

The books listed on the following two pages were also used as references.

Geertz's Major Literary Contributions

1960. The Religion of Java. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

His first major work, this study is the result of his two years of research in Modjokuto in east central Java (1952-54). Describes beliefs and practices of what Geertz identifies as three world views.

1966. Religion as a Cultural System. In Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, ed. M. Banton. London: Tavistock Publications Ltd.

Considered a classic article, it was later included in The Interpretation of Cultures. In it Geertz defines religion as a “system of symbols”.

1968. Islam Observed. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Explores religious developments in Indonesia and Morocco. An exercise in macrosociology, in the style of Weber (Morris, 1987: 318). He begins the book by suggesting that “the aim of a systematic study of religion is, or anyway ought to be, not just to describe ideas, acts, and institutions, but to determine just how and in what way particular ideas, acts, and institutions sustain, fail to sustain, or even inhibit religious faith” and to ascertain “what happens to faith when its vehicle alters”(Geertz, 2).

1973. The Interpretation of Cultures; Selected Essays. New York: Basic Books.

Perhaps his landmark book, Geertz's opening chapter “Thick Description” outlines his views on the aim of ethnographic research, while the last chapter of the book “Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight” illustrates his claims. This book was received instantly as a classic, winning the Sorokin Award of the American Sociological Association. It has been widely translated.

1983. Local Knowledge. New York: Basic Books.

Geertz (3) compares this book to the previous one: “He who says A must say B The essays below are the result.” Deals with the reshaping of categories; discusses the possible outcome of anthropological discussions of modern culture, and asserts interpretative anthropology's viability lies in being able to teach us to see ourselves as “amongst others”, vs. seeing ourselves as others see us or seeing others as sharing a nature with ourselves.

1988. Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author. Cambridge: Polity Press.

The main body of this book consists of four chapters on the literary rhetorical forms of Levi-Strauss, Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski, and Benedict. It makes two claims: 1) that rhetorical forms can be found in the ethnographic works of anthropologists, and 2) that attention to these literary issues is a partial antidote to “epistemological hypochondria”(Geertz, 71). Geertz proposes that the point of ethnography is to achieve intercultural communication (Geertz, 147).

1995. After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (Series: The Jerusalem-Harvard lectures)

A brand new book. Glenn Peterson reviews it in Library Journal, vol. 119, issue 19:73.

“This is a memoir of sorts, a quasi-autobiographical summing up of what may well be the most eminent career in the post-Margaret Mead era of American anthropology. Geertz, always an elegant stylist as well as an innovative thinker, unfortunately continues his habit of maddening circumspection; the volume is filled with allusion, indirection, and pregnant pauses. It is perhaps best read with a copy close at hand of his earlier, parallel examination of other anthropological careers, Works and Lives . . . to offer hints for navigating the maze. Nevertheless, the volume provides considerable insight into decades’ worth of celebrated ethnographic research in Indonesia and Morocco by master ethnographer.”