

Sociocultural Anthropology for Missionaries

Revision of the Cultural
Anthropology textbook

Dear Paul,

May God continue to make the news from treatment good for you.

I would very much like to see the MS of the book you're working on. Given the amount of stuff I have on my plate, I am not sure I'll get the leisure to bend my mind around the important and deep stuff you're dealing with and give you any intelligent criticism, but I will try. At a minimum, when the book is out, I'll have a head start on understanding you and using you in my own book.

Since I write this on Orbis time, I ought at least ask you if the MS is promised. I've become good friends with Steve Ayers at Baker and would not want to seem to poach. On the other hand, if you don't have an agreement, I'd love to consider it for us.

As I listened to myself talking with your Protestant brethren in McCall, I found myself thinking often about Ephesians 1:3-14. It's Deutero-Pauline according to the experts, and I have no reason to doubt them, but even given the complexity of the scriptural process, it's the Pauline Church's summation of Pauline theology. So many of the cognoscenti take a literary classification like Deutero-Pauline and then treat it as if it could be dismissed. What folly.

In Idaho we were meeting around Newbigin's legacy, as I said in the last email. George Hunsberger unifies Newbigin's theology around the notion of election, and I think that "election" does just about catch both Paul and Lesslie.

I had the Ephesians text on my clipboard because I needed it for something else. (Trying to help plan a series on Paul at our church this fall.) You probably remember it by heart, but it takes only one mouse click for me to drop it here:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 who has blessed us in Christ
 with every spiritual blessing in the heavens,
 as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world,
 to be holy and without blemish before him.
 In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ,
 in accord with the favor of his will,
 for the praise of the glory of his grace
 that he granted us in the beloved.
 In him we have redemption by his blood,
 the forgiveness of transgressions,
 in accord with the riches of his grace that he lavished upon us.
 In all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us
 the mystery of his will in accord with his favor
 that he set forth in him as a plan for the fullness of times,
 to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth.

In him we were also chosen,
 destined in accord with the purpose of the One
 who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will,
 so that we might exist for the praise of his glory,
 we who first hoped in Christ.

In him you also, who have heard the word of truth,
 the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him,
 were sealed with the promised holy Spirit,
 which is the first installment of our inheritance
 toward redemption as God's possession, to the praise of his glory.

Catholics will read that text in liturgical contexts when it's assigned, but it would have to rank near the bottom of a list of favorite texts on the part of most of my more liberal brothers and sisters, yet it's the foundation of any realistic missiology. Without the Corinthians evocation of the cross, it's still a pretty fantastical and paradoxical text. I found myself wondering in McCall whether the GOCN movement and our rump gathering of people formerly active in GOCN as a "missional church leadership think tank" aren't about as embarrassed by this sort of text as out and out liberals. What I liked in McCall was a willingness to acknowledge that this is what we are saying yes to in the act of faith and that that act is made possible by the internal action of the Spirit. But it sometimes seems that we move ever so quickly to rescuing the church or onward to mission without dwelling in that Word.

That dwelling in the Word, of course, is the contemplative dimension you talked about. It takes little imagination to think that it was pondering and dwelling in that Word that Jesus was about when he went off to pray. Funny, but only at 63 do I begin to understand the nature of that kind of prayer. I must be a slow learner.

I'm convinced, though, that good liturgy is one of the primary places where that process of dwelling in the Word has to begin. It doesn't have to be accompanied by Gregorian Chant or Bach, and I know temperaments vary enormously. Still, I find it hard to believe that a certain kind of Protestant concentration on the "essentials" doesn't miss the fact God is to be seen in the forest of our total experience. Catholicism has made the mistake of trying to jump on to the Protestant bandwagon just when it may have been showing signs of needing to stimulate the imagination in liturgy. Too bad we couldn't have had a bit of classical Lutheran sense of mystery. Instead we settled for what some of his great-great-great (to the nth power) grandchildren passed off as Protestantism.

Of course, you are being thought to have Anabaptist Catholic proclivities and you reside in the Independent traditions. I can see why some may worry about you. If it makes you feel better, one of the afflictions I face daily is that -- as someone who feels like certain of his Evangelical friends aren't just worth reading but worth befriending and truly learning from -- I'm suspect too.

Pax et bona!

Bill

-----Original Message-----

From: Paul G Hiebert [mailto:phiebert@juno.com]

Sent: Tuesday, July 11, 2006 8:08 PM

To: Burrows, Bill

Subject: Re: Prayers and Best Wishes

Dear Bill and Linda,

Many, many thanks for the letter of encouragement and of information regarding the ministries our Lord is using you in these days. I finished

my second chemo on Friday and am doing quite well--no nausea, a bit of tiredness after the third day when the steroids wear off. I'm on a crusade to get Congress to pass steroids for us old people.

I was delighted to hear of your vacation at Yellowstone. A wonderful place, and I know that the fellowship and meditation and being back in nature did much to refresh both of your souls. We protestants need to learn the power and importance of meditation, and I am learning it here these days. I have always leaned to the contemplative side due to my growing up in India, and its stress on spirituality.

Thanks for the comments on Newbigin. I am writing a book on transforming worldviews in which I lay out a theory based on Opler and develop it and then apply it to the modern worldview, the postmodern worldview, and the post--post modern worldview now emerging. Then a stab at a sketch of a 'Biblical worldview -- a few basic points where it differs from modernity and post-modernity. About 400 pages done. About 100 to go and then a lot of polishing. It will come at the topic from the theoretical vantage point of anthropology and sociology, not from theology. In the biblical worldview I draw heavily on Newbigin. We just had a German student defend a dissertation on Newbigin which was great. I had read many of his major works earlier, but this drew things together in a nice way.

I'm delighted to hear you find the concept of 'fuzzy' sets useful. The term and concept is not mine. Digital sets are the third level of power of numbers. Ratio (or sometimes called analogical) sets are the most powerful. Our world in the west is built on digital sets and concepts of law and order. We see it in our driving, our houses (frames everywhere to keep categories distinct, ties to cover the crack down the front of our shirts, spoons in the spoon bin, etc.) Moreover, after the Enlightenment we moved to intrinsic sets--you are what you are--male, chili, black, etc. India is more like many traditional societies. It is based on fuzzy sets. You see it in the driving (you straddle lanes to keep your options open) in music (64 steps between do and re and more if you need them so the slide not the run is the standard music rule). IT is also based on relational sets--you are a father, husband, pastor, etc. Male, age, etc. are less important. I elaborate on this in the book on worldview a little more.

Regarding challenging the modern, post-modern and post-post modern worldview, I make a stab at it and challenge us all to rethink the themes that underlie these different worldviews. I don't get down to how to implement this all in the local parish, or in mission in detail.

I am also working on a total reworking of my Cultural Anthropology text book which came out 30 years ago and is still going, but way out of date. So I have enough on my plate right now. I teach a full load here at TEDS in the fall semester and go to India to teach at a couple of seminaries in the spring. But probably won't go next spring unless things clear up a bit more. And I am prioritizing finishing my writing now. Like you say, we can write what we want and don't care about the criticism. I'd be happy if they fired me.

I value your friendships highly! You have been a great stimulus to me thinking in so many ways. My colleagues are sometimes suspecting that I

am Anabaptist-Catholic by now stressing the importance of good rituals and liturgy to communicate what words cannot about the gospel.

One other thing comes to mind from your discussion. I use a 'system of systems' approach to studying humans. They are made up of physical, biological psychological, social, cultural and spiritual systems. These are all part of one greater system of systems. This is a nonlinear model for explaining causality, and sees all as essential to being truly human. Here I am working off of Talcott Parsons, Clyde Kluckhohn, Edward Shils and others.

In this model cultural systems are separate from but interact with social systems(systems of relationships). Culture has three dimensions to it:

1) cognitive, 2) affective or feelings, and 3) moral. All human events and experiences include all three at the same time. In some situations one dominates, in others another but all are present. At the core, largely implicit, is the worldview-- the themes, root metaphors, and categories and logics we use to THINK WITH, not think about. The Enlightenment stress on Objective truth meant that it had to bracket out feelings and morals in order to maintain objectivity. Postmodernity shows that the scientists are very much a part of the scenes they study, and that they are driven as much by feelings and morals as they are by the search for truth. A biblical worldview, as I see it, brings all three together and says we think, feeling and pass moral judgments on things, then decide and act. So faith is not simply mental assent to some propositions. It is to leave all and follow Christ. A friend of mine working with the Charismatics noted that it is easier to raise our hands and speak in tongues than it is to sell all we have and give it to the poor!

Enough rambling. Enough to say that your friendship mean much to me. I was in chemo when ASM met that morning. Sorry to miss you.

Your brother in Christ,

Paul G. Hiebert

ps. if you want to see drafts of the worldview book, let me know. What I do need is sharp critique from friends before it goes to the lions.,