

Split-level Christianity

SPLIT-LEVEL CHRISTIANITY

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Introduction:

- we present the Gospel to Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists
- we find most Hindus are folk Hindus, most Muslims are folk Muslims
- we also find many Christians are 'split-level' Christians

A Model for Understanding Religious Beliefs:

1. **Root metaphors: the horizontal dimension**

1.1 Organic analogy:

- like living beings
- life processes
- relational
- ethical in nature

Mechanical analogy:

- like machines
- impersonal forces
- controlling, formulaic
- amoral in nature

1.2 Examples of beings: high god, lesser gods and goddesses, demons, rakshasas, spirits, jinn, kami, ghosts, bhutams, witches, ancestors, saints, humans, sub-humans, animals, plants, sun, moon, earth, rivers.

1.3 Examples of forces: mana, magic, evil eye, omens, taboos, astrology, medicines, chemical forces, physical forces, gravity, electro-magnetism.

2. **Scale: the vertical dimension**

2.1 Immanent: this world—seen [empirical]. The domain of science.

2.2 Transcendent: other worlds-unseen [transempirical]. The domain of formal religion

2.3 'Middle Zone': this world-unseen [earth spirits, magic, territorial gods, etc.]. The domain of 'folk religion'

3. **The Model: combining the dimensions**

4. **Formal Religion:**

- religious leaders: philosophers, theologians, prophets, priests
- search for absolutes and truth
- answer ultimate questions
- claim to be universal, timeless
- unified, logically consistent
- written texts
- great and little traditions
- formal organization
- goal: cosmic salvation

5. **Folk Religion:**

- religion of the common people
- search for power and control
- answer the immediate questions of everyday life

- existential, territorial
- pragmatic problem solving, use many solutions, not concerned with logical consistency
- oral tradition
- localized
- taught through apprenticeship
- goal: good life, health, wealth, success

6. Key Questions:

6.1 Formal religion: ultimate origin, purpose and destiny of self, society, universe.

6.2 Folk religion:

- meaning in this life – the problem of death for the living
- well being in this life – the problem of crises, sickness, droughts, disasters
- guidance in knowledge – the problem of the unknown
- the desire for justice and purity – the reality of injustice and pollution

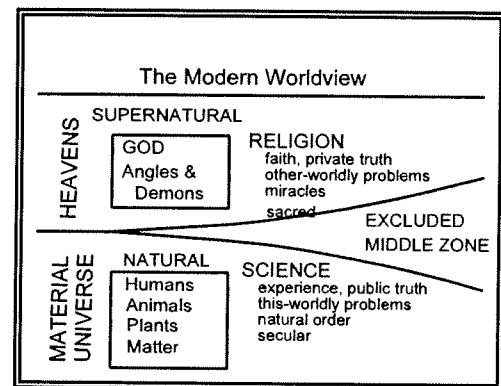
6.3 Folk science: control of nature, ordering of human relationships.

7. The Flaw of the ‘Excluded Middle’:

- the rise of modern Cartesian dualism:
Natural and Supernatural
- stress on the material world, and relegation of spiritual realities to other worlds

8. Towards a theology of the ‘middle zone’:

- a theology of the invisible
- a trinitarian view of God’s acts in everyday life
- a theology of the Kingdom of God
- a theology of power and the Cross
- a whole gospel
- a biblically balanced Christianity
- a theology of discernment
- an anticipatory eschatology
- a theology of suffering and death
- a theology of the church as a caring community



9. Dangers in dealing with the ‘middle zone’:

- syncretism: Christo-paganism – a Christian animism
- weak view of sin and seeing people as innocent victims, not active participants in sin
- human centeredness – concern with our own well being, not a lost world around us
- experience-based theology
- reinforcing secularism – see God only in ‘miracles,’ not in everyday life
- generating false guilt in those who are not healed or successful
- imbalance – focus on our existential human needs rather than on ultimate needs
- faith in leaders rather than in God

Unity and Diversity in the Church

1. Identity Theory:

- we have many identities which are context specific
- when these come in conflict, we rank them according to depth of our identity.

2. Unity in Diversity:

- our human tendency is to note differences, build walls, differentiate
- attempts at unity by building bridges fail because when the chasms grow too deep the bridges collapse.

3. Diversity in Unity:

- we must start with recognizing our common humanity.
- then we can celebrate our differences without being threatened by hostility and breaks.

4. Discipling Process:

- we begin by adding our Christian identity on a middle level
- must work to move it deeper. Seek reconciliation, unity, harmony
- psychological sinful stress to be superior, privileged, better than. must fight this.

Unity and Diversity in the Church

1. Theological Assumptions:

1.1 As humans we are one humanity

1.2 As Christians we are one in Christ

1.3 Diversity as a divisive issue is a result of sin and the curse at Babel

1.4 New converts come as they are an need 1) conversion and 2) discipling into Christian maturity which means into recognizing the three above.

- identity theory

1.5 If we start theologically with our differences as most fundamental to our identity we will build bridges of fellowship and reconciliation, but these will break when stress sets in: Eg. Rwanda and Uganda, U.S. denominational unity,

1.6 If we start with our oneness, we can celebrate differences because these will not threaten our unity.

2. Human Assumptions

Diversity is based on the human condition and is found in several dimensions:

- 2.1 Geography: We are willing to let geography separate the church into groups
- 2.2 Linguistics: we are willing to let linguistics separate the church into groups
- 2.3 Social: are we willing to take these divisions seriously?
- 2.4 Cultural: how do we deal with cultural differences: worship styles, cultural differences, etc.
- 2.5 Spiritual: levels of maturity and theological differences?

3. Building the Unity of the Church:

- 3.1 We can begin by planting homogeneous churches, but from the start we must build into the plans the movement to Christian maturity and unity. It will be there in heaven whether we like it or not. Must spend eternity together with the memories of how we treated each other on earth. Keep that in mind.
- 3.2 We must begin to build unity at the top by creating a small team of leaders from the different kinds of churches who worship, fellowship and discuss openly and freely the issues of unity. Model, our Japan mission leadership fellowship which had Japanese and American leaders in it. Not mission separate from the nationals. That is North European racism.
- 3.3 We must organize celebrational gatherings of the people from different congregations to celebrate their unity:
 - this must be in neutral territory. Churches belong to one or another group and give them power. Or it must rotate and be cases of true 'hospitality' in the biblical sense of the term
 - the people must be taught to relate. It won't happen, it only segregates them further. Teach them how to ask questions about person issues, not middle class issues like cars, sports, etc. Ask family matters, cultural rituals etc.
 - after the gathering have the congregations discuss their experiences
 - feedback from this must be brought by leaders to the central gathering, and then shared by the other leaders with their groups.
 - plans for future celebrations must be clearly made to foster integration
 - often this can be done by celebrating cultural differences: eg. song styles and languages, and clothing
 - there must be symbolic expressions of unity and reconciliation and forgiveness. This can include the Lord's Supper and baptisms. The model here can be reconciliation ministries.

3.4 We need to develop common mission tasks that enable people to work together, and learn to know each other in the process. Simply sitting to build relationships to each other is not an end in itself. We must seek to build bridges through entering the same battle, doing a common job.

- here we need to have partnership at all levels:

1) defining the problem, 2) planning the solution, 3) gathering the resources, 4) doing the work, and 5) evaluating the outcome. This is not equal contribution but each brings the best and the gifts they have.