

**An Anthropologist  
Looks at Worldviews:  
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How can we as Anabaptists live in our North American social and cultural systems without becoming captive to them? We have briefly examined the modern social systems in which we live. We need now to look at the cultural systems of the West.

Today North America is navigating a cultural sea change that threatens to capsize it. On the surface, cross-waves of debate occur between technological advance and ecological preservation, between the claims of science and the affirmation of other cultures, and between the uniqueness of Christianity and the recognition of other religions. Below the surface the deep currents of traditionalism, modernity and post-modernity; of globalism and particularism; and of truth and relativism collide in different ways in different communities in our land. As Christian theologians and leaders we seek to be rooted in biblical thought, but we live in human contexts that profoundly shape our thoughts. It should not surprise us that we are influenced by these cultural currents around us.

Underlying this sea change is a clash of worldviews. The cognitive assumptions of modernity on which the West was built are being challenged by post-modernism [or late modernism] on the one hand, and by the revival of traditionalism and fundamentalism on the other. To give a biblical critique and response in these confusing times, it is important that we understand the cultures and worldviews that underlie these various movements and our own theologies.

## **Cultural Systems**

A second system we will use in analyzing our North American context is *culture*. In ordinary English, we use this term to refer to the beliefs and behavior of the elite. For example, a "cultured person" is one who listens to Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, not the Beatles, Bugs and Bombs. I will use an anthropological approach, and define it as "the more or less integrated systems of beliefs, feelings, values and worldview shared by a group of people, and expressed by means of their systems of symbols." We need to unpack this definition further.

### Dimensions of Culture

Culture is made up of beliefs, feelings and values. Beliefs--the cognitive dimension--include the ideas and knowledge shared by the members of a group or society without which communication and community life are impossible. For example, Americans speak of malaria, smallpox, diphtheria and cancer, and believe these are produced by "natural causes". Indians speak of "hot diseases" that produce fevers and "cold diseases" that produce chills, and attribute them to the anger of female spirits such as Maisamma, and Poshamma. The Tiv of Nigeria attribute many of their diseases to angry ancestors. Our cultural knowledge tell us how to repair and drive cars, how to bake cakes, how to raise a child, how to make an atomic bomb and how to worship God.

The affective dimension of culture has to do with the feelings people have --with their attitudes, notions of beauty, tastes in food and dress, likes and dislikes and ways of expressing joy and sorrow. People in one culture like their food hot, in another sweet or bland. Members of some societies like to express their emotions and are aggressive; in others they learn to be self-

controlled and calm. Some religions encourage the use of meditation, mysticism and drugs in order to achieve inner peace and tranquility. Others stress ecstasy through dance, drums and self-torture. Still others evoke feelings of awe and fear.

Aesthetics play an important role in most areas of life. We want clothes that are not only functional, but also beautiful. We want food that tastes good. We decorate our homes, paint our bodies and create art, literature, dance, drama, entertainment and other forms of 'expressive culture.' Emotions also play an important part in human relationships. We communicate love, hate, scorn and a dozen other attitudes by our facial expressions, tones of voice and gestures. In short, cultures vary greatly in how they deal with the emotional sides of human life.

The evaluative dimension of culture includes its values and primary allegiances. Each culture has standards by which it judges acts and people. It ranks some occupations high and others low, some ways of eating proper and other ways unacceptable, some actions moral and others immoral.

In planting churches we need to keep the three dimensions of culture in our minds, for the gospel has to do with all of them. All three are essential in Christian conversion and transformation. We need to know that Jesus is the Son of God, but that knowledge alone is not enough. Satan knows well enough that Jesus is the God incarnate. We also need feelings of affection and loyalty to him. As Christian leaders, we often overlook the importance of the affective dimension of life. We stress the preaching of cognitive truth in church services and downplay the importance of feelings of worship. We rationally push to get work done, and don't see the emotional distress caused by our actions. But knowledge and feelings must lead us to a decision to turn to Christ as our Savior and to obey him as the lord of our lives. As Anabaptists, we have always held that faith includes our response to what we know and feel. All three

dimensions are also important in building the church. In our services we need sound doctrine, deep feelings and responses. We do not proclaim the gospel simply to inform people or to make them feel good. We are calling them to become followers of Jesus Christ.

### Levels of Culture

Culture has different levels. On the surface, we see people's behavior and hear what they say. Beneath these are the symbol systems, beliefs and worldviews that generate their actions.

### Symbols

Human beings are unique among earthly creatures because we have the ability to create mental images or maps of the external world which we use to think about the world, and to choose a course of action. We can also manipulate these maps to think of other possibilities and to work to achieve them. We imagine a house and built it. We think of distant friends and phone them. In short, we use our mental maps to understand the past, live in the present and plan for the future.

This ability to construct mental worlds that reflect the outside world is based on our ability to create symbols. A symbol is anything that stands for something else in the minds of a person or group of people. For example, we see real trees and have a mental image of them. We create the spoken word "tree" to represent them. Thereafter, when we hear the word "tree" we retrieve mental images of the real trees we have seen. Because symbols link thoughts with external forms that can be experienced by other human beings, such as words and pictures, we are able to communicate our thoughts to them.

Each culture organizes its symbolic world in different ways. For example, in English, we speak of six colors in the rainbow. Telugu speakers in South India speak of two. We use bells to warn us of danger. Other cultures use them in worship.

### Belief Systems

Each culture has many belief systems which the people use to deal with different areas of their lives. In the West, these systems would include our beliefs regarding medicine, physics, chemistry, car repair, cooking, child rearing, house decoration, business and theology, to name a few. Belief systems are what people think about and discuss. They are essential for human life.

### Worldview

Beneath the symbols and belief systems of a culture seem to lie certain 'givens' about the way the world is put together. These are the basic assumptions people make about the nature of things, and the categories and logic they use to form a coherent understanding of reality. Existential assumptions provide a culture with the fundamental cognitive structures people use to explain reality. In the West they include such things as atoms, viruses and gravity. In South India they include *rakshasas*, *apsaras*, *bhutams*, and other spirit beings. In the West we assume that time runs like a straight line from a beginning to an end, that it can be divided into uniform intervals such as years, days, minutes and seconds, and that it never repeats itself. Other cultures see time as cyclical: a never-ending repetition of summer and winter; day and night, and birth, death and rebirth.

Affective assumptions underlie notions of beauty and style, and influence the people's tastes in music, art, dress, food and architecture as well as they ways they feel about themselves

and life in general. For example, in cultures influenced by Theravad Buddhism life is equated with suffering. By contrast, in the U.S. after World War II, many people were optimistic and believed that by hard work and planning they could achieve a happy, comfortable life.

Evaluative assumptions provide the standards people use to make judgments about right and wrong. For instance, North Americans assume that honesty means telling people the way things are, even if doing so hurts their feelings. In other countries, it means telling people what they want to hear, for it is more important that they be encouraged than for them to know the facts.

Taken together these assumptions provide people with a way of looking at the world that makes sense out of it, a *worldview* that gives them a feeling of being at home, and that reassures them that they are right--what Martin Marty calls "the mental furnished apartment in which one lives (1991)."

Worldview are largely implicit. Like glasses, they shape how we see the world around us--they are what we look *with*, not what we look *at*. And like the glasses we wear, it is hard for us to see our own worldview--others often see it better than we do ourselves. Our worldview assures us that what we see is the way things really are. Those who disagree with us are not wrong, they are crazy and out of touch with reality. If our worldview is shaken, we are deeply disturbed because the world no longer makes sense to us. As Clifford Geertz points out (1979, 83), there is no fear greater than meaninglessness--of not understanding the world in which we live. Even death itself can be endured if it has meaning.

Worldviews serve several important functions. On the cognitive level our worldview gives us a rational justification for our beliefs and integrates them into a more or less unified

view of reality. On the level of feelings, it provides us with emotional security. On the level of values, it validates our deepest cultural norms. In short, our worldview is our basic map *of* reality, and the map we use *for* living our lives. Finally our worldview monitors our responses to culture change. We are constantly confronted with new ideas, behavior and products that come from within our society or from without. Our worldview helps us select those that fit our culture and reject those that do not. It also helps us reinterpret those we adopt so that they fit into our overall cultural pattern.

Worldviews change over time. New ideas may challenge our fundamental assumptions, and internal inconsistencies in our beliefs create tensions. To reduce the stress we modify or drop some of our assumptions. The result is a gradual worldview transformation of which we ourselves may not even be aware. At times our worldview no longer makes sense of our world. If another and more adequate one is presented to us, we may reject the old and adopt the new. For example, Muslims and Hindus may decide that Christianity offers better answers to their questions than do their old religions. Such worldview shifts are at the heart of what we call conversion and transformation.

#### More or less integrated

Cultures are more or less integrated. By this we mean that they provide us with a more or less coherent way of looking at things. If our belief systems contradict one another too much, we are torn by cognitive dissonance and the fear of meaninglessness.

Cultural integration is never complete. In part, this is true because cultures constantly change. New ideas are introduced that run counter to some old ideas and tensions emerge. For



instance, the development of new methods of birth control led to an increase in premarital sex in North America and to rising immorality. Another reason cultures are not fully integrated is that different groups in a culture often hold different beliefs. The rich, for example, see things differently than the poor, and one ethnic group than another. There are differences between the folk beliefs of the common people and the theories of the specialists in such fields as medicine and religion.

### The Relationship between Society and Culture

Social and cultural systems are symbiotically related. Neither can exist without the other. On the one hand, societies shape cultures. We talk to one another and in so doing reinforce and change our language. We organize activities and create rules to do so. We make computers and soon think of the mind as a super-computer. In the context of everyday life we create and recreate our culture.

On the other hand, culture shapes society. Culture is the maps we use to live our lives. Without these maps, the world is meaningless and chaotic. We try to act as good fathers and mothers by doing what our culture tells us "good fathers and mothers" do. We kneel, bow or hold up our hands in prayer because our culture tells us that is how to worship God. Our cultural knowledge enables us to produce food, make tools, heal the sick, build cars and fly airplanes. These, in turn, alter radically the way we live and relate to one another. In short, culture makes social life possible.

Because of this constant interaction between how we live, and how our culture tells us to live, it is not always easy to distinguish between what is social and what is cultural.

Nevertheless, it is helpful for analytical purposes to do so. For example, each culture prescribes how good fathers and mothers should raise their children. A particular couple may, in fact, act differently from the norm. If their social behavior differs too much from the cultural norms, however, other people in the society will act to stop it.

### Engaging Cultures

How should the Brethren in Christ engage the American culture? Too often as Christians we deal with it on the surface level of behavior and practices. As signs of orthodoxy we check whether members drink alcohol, smoke and commit adultery, and whether they attend church services regularly, particularly Wednesday night prayer meetings. We should expect behavioral changes to occur on conversion, and more to follow in Christian growth, but are these sufficient to produce a faithful Christian community in our world? New converts often show little change in their lives at first, and many people learn to act like Christians, but lack the personal inner faith necessary for salvation. How do we measure faithfulness?

In recent years we have gone deeper to examine orthodoxy in terms of right beliefs. True Christians must affirm the virgin birth, the death and the resurrection of Christ, as well as their lost condition and their dependence on Christ for salvation. Orthodox beliefs are essential in maintaining the Christian faith over time, but often these are hijacked by the worldview around them. We may speak a Christian language, but the meanings of the words, and the values in which they are embedded are secular and modern.

It is increasingly clear that we must deal with Christian faith on the worldview level. If we do not do so, the church will be come captive to the surrounding culture, just as early

Christianity was received into Rome, and not Rome into Christianity. The danger for the church over time is not under-contextualization, but of over-contextualization. No humanly constructed worldview is adequate to fully explicate the Gospel. All of them fall short of the worldview we find in Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

It is increasingly clear that for true Christianity to continue over the generations there must be a transformation in the worldviews people have in the light of biblical revelation. An analogy may help us here. Culture is like an iceberg. Behavior and beliefs are what we see above the surface of the ocean. The worldview is the large hidden mass beneath the surface that holds the whole iceberg up. If we convert only beliefs and behavior, in time the worldview will take the Christian beliefs captive. The result is “Christo-paganism.”

### **The North American Worldview**

What are the cultural systems of modern North America? Following Morris Opler (1945), I will examine a few North American 'worldview themes' by way of illustration. It should not surprise us that these intertwine with the themes we have already explored in the social

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<sup>1</sup> There is not enough space here to debate whether there is or is not a 'biblical worldview'. My position is that in the Old Testament God prepared a people to be his witnesses, and a worldview through which he could adequately communicate the Gospel. If the Gospel does not have to do with matters of worldview, it remains surface and transitory. Worldview are foundational. They determine our understandings of reality and truth. To the argument that there are several worldviews in the Old Testament, my response is that worldviews do change over time, but that at the deepest levels they continue over many generations. Just as we as modern humans live in essentially a Greek worldview, so the worldview of Christ and the early church was built on the growing understandings of God, sin, sacrifice, salvation and other key concepts in the historical progression of the Old Testament. Christ built on Abraham, Moses and the prophets. He did not introduce *de novo* a totally new worldview.

systems, because the two are in constant interaction: social systems shaping worldviews, and worldviews shaping social systems.

### Dualism: The Split between Natural and Supernatural

One modern worldview theme is the split between spirit and matter; between subject and object; and therefore between subjective faith and objective truth. This came from the Platonic dualism of supernatural and natural, spirit and matter, mind and body, and replaced the biblical contingent dualism of Creator and Creation after the twelfth century. In theology this found expression in Thomas Aquinas. In science it appeared in the Cartesian split of the world into **res cogitans** (mind) and **res extensa** (matter).

This division between natural and supernatural realities led to the separation between science, which deals with the material world in mechanistic terms, and religion, which has to do with spiritual realities. Nature came to be seen as an autonomous domain, made up matter and energy which operate according to impersonal 'natural' laws. The supernatural is the domain of religion, and deals with God, spirits, miracles, feelings and morality.

A second consequence of the dualism is the shift to the mechanistic view of the natural world which we saw in our analysis of American social systems. Regarding the Cartesian dualism, Alwyn Jones (1987:236-40) writes,

[It] allows scientists to treat matter as dead and completely separate from themselves. and to see the material world as a multitude of different objects assembled into a huge machine. . . . Priority is . . . given to the parts over the whole, the presumption being that a knowledge of the whole can gradually be built up from a detailed understanding of the relationship between the parts. The model of reality which emerges from this is a vast machine whose fundamental characteristics can be understood by an analysis of its parts and the laws which govern their working. . . . This has led to the "searchlight" effect - of high specialization but not seeing the whole.

A third consequence of this dualism is the emergence of the modern welfare state, and with it civil religion. In the middle ages, the state dealt primarily with matters of defense and trade. The church and other institutions took responsibility for the well-being of humans. They established hospitals, schools, orphanages and poor homes. In the nineteenth century, the welfare state came to be the central institution ultimately responsible for the well-being of its citizens. It took control of education, medicine and welfare, and set the limits of religion. It also demanded total allegiance, particularly in times of war. Unfortunately, the church was an all too willing partner in this reorganization of loyalties and responsibilities. Increasingly it saw its primary responsibilities to be in the private sphere having to do with feelings, values, family life, entertainment and the women's world.

The effect of this dualism on Christianity in the West has been devastating. Christianity has been privatized and relegated to personal piety, while science controls public truth and life. In Christianity, it has led to a division between evangelism and social concern. It has also led to a growing secularism in the church. God is largely confined to the Supernatural domain--to salvation and the Kingdom of God defined in spiritual terms. He is not immediately involved in the natural order of things, which is better understood in scientific terms. Consequently, in the church we look for miracles for these are signs of God's presence among us.

### Individualism, Freedom and Rights

As Robert Bellah and his associates have shown (1985), another North American theme is individualism. The idea of the individual as an autonomous, self-made person is a product of modernity. Allen Bloom (1987) traces the shift from the word 'soul'--which connotes

dependence on God, to 'self'--which carries the idea of an autonomous being. This shift gave rise to the notions of self-fulfillment, self-achievement, and self-realization. With it comes an emphasis on personal freedom and rights, and a strong emphasis on private ownership of property and a capitalistic worldview.

The impact of this individualism on Christians and the church is far reaching. Lamin Sanneh notes, "Our modern tendency to see the Church in terms of individual healthy-mindedness, as a selfhood that is vulnerable to bouts of low self-esteem, is light-years removed from the Church as a fellowship of faithfulness to God's promises (1993, 221)." The erosion of the church from being a covenant community, along with its transformation into a crowd, club or corporation, has made Christianity largely a spectator sport or a business activity. Here the Brethren in Christ have much to offer the larger evangelical church. It has a strong ecclesiology, and a heritage of the priority of the church as a corporate body over the Christian as an individual believer. It will be very hard to maintain this emphasis in the corrosive individualism of our modern world.

#### Myth of Redemptive Violence

Underlying much of the American worldview is the Indo-European myth of redemptive violence. According to it, the world is a cosmic battleground between the forces of Good and Evil. Before Good can establish the rule of righteousness, it must defeat Evil by might or evil will reign (Wink 1992). 4

The Indo-European religions largely died in the West, but as Walter Wink points out (1992), the Indo-European cosmic myth dominates modern American thought. It is the basis for

our westerns, detective stories, murder mysteries, and science fiction. Our children see it each week on TV. Bluto tries to grab Daisy, and Popie comes to the rescue. Bluto beats Popie into a pulp, but Popie manages to get some spinach and knocks Bluto out of the picture. The same story is repeated week after week, but we never get tired of it. Bluto never learns to leave Popie alone, and Popie never learns to take his spinach before he attacks Bluto. The same plot underlies Superman, Spider man, Super Chicken, Underdog, and most of our cartoons. It is reenacted in “Star Wars” movies, dramatized in video games, and taught in the New Age movement. It is played out in football, basketball, and tennis. The fundamental message of this myth is that life is based on competition and battle, that the victors gain control and establish order, and that the result is progress. This message lies at the heart of our theory of evolution, our faith in democracy, and our worship of capitalism.

In the Indo-European worldview, the battle is the center of the story. People pay to see a football game. When the battle is over, everyone goes home and waits for the next battle. Francis Fukuyama, a policy planner in the U.S. State Department, sees the end of the Cold War as “the end of history,” leaving the world with no master plot, and only “centuries of boredom” stretching ahead like a superhighway to nowhere. When the battle is over, the real story is finished. The final words are “and they won (or were married) and lived happily ever after.” But there is no story worth telling concerning the “happily ever after.” The adventure and thrill is in the battle, and it is to this we return again and again.

Morality in these power encounters is based not on a cosmic moral order of righteousness and sin, but on the notion of fairness and equal opportunity. To be “fair” the conflict must be between those thought to be more or less equal in might. In other words, the outcome of the

battle must be uncertain. It is “unfair” to pit a seasoned gunman against a youngster, or the Los Angeles Rams against a high school football team. “Equal opportunity” means that both sides must be able to use the same means to gain victory. The defendants of good cannot use evil means first, but if the evil side does, they can too. In westerns, the sheriff cannot draw first, but when outlaws do, he can gun them down without trial--acting as judge, jury and executioner at the same time. He is justified in using evil means because his enemies do, because he is acting in ‘self defense,’ and because these are necessary to win the battle. The primary good is victory, the greatest evil is defeat. Righteousness and love reign only after victory is won by means of violence.

In contrast to the Indo-European myth with its stress on violence and battle to gain control, the Biblical story is clear. There is no question that God indeed rules and that his methods are love, reconciliation, cooperation and peace, not competition and warfare. His aim is to win his opponents, not defeat them.

The myth of redemptive violence is the foundation for the theories of evolution, capitalism and democracy. Competition leads to the survival of the fittest, and this leads to advance. The theory of cultural evolution has influenced the West in several ways. The first is a deep belief in progress.<sup>2</sup> Most Westerners assume the superiority of western peoples and western civilization. Members of other races might share in their goodness and wisdom, but westerners are the leaders, and will remain so for a very long time. This led to the Enlightenment agenda that it is the ‘White Man’s burden’ to educate and civilize the ‘natives’.

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<sup>2</sup> Rollo May (1991) traces the myth of progress in the popular myths of North America such as Horatio Alger and the American Dream, the therapist and deliverance from hell, romance and the chase of love, and the myth of patriarchal power. We need more analysis of how these give meaning to the life stories of many Americans.



Closely related to the notion of progress is that of development. Peter Berger points out that, "Underlying the major ideological models for social change are two powerful myths--the myth of growth and development, and the myth of revolution (1974, xi)." North America is committed to the first of these. It assumes change through incremental improvement through competition and the success of the strongest, brightest and best adapted. This competition gives rise to the enlightenment assumptions of progress, autonomous individualism, faith in reason and innate goodness of humans. Jon Bonk writes,

The West continues to be the standard against which "development" is measured; and western aid and efforts have, until quite recently, been fueled by the certainty that given enough money, time and Western expertise, the rest of the world can become what the West now is--"developed" (1991, 20).

The Enlightenment concept of progress had a deep effect American Christianity. Many Christians rejected the theory of evolution, but the general ideas which were part of the evolutionary *Zeitgeist* were absorbed with the air they breathed. Charles Tabor notes,

The superiority of Western civilization as the culmination of human development, the attribution of that superiority to the prolonged dominance of Christianity, the duty of Christians to share civilization and the gospel with the "benighted heathen"--these were the chief intellectual currency of their lives (1991, 71).

Wilbert Shenk writes,

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. The model by which they measured their converts was English Puritan civilization. . . . 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 the past missionaries, as people of their times, sought to both Civilize and Christianize people around the world. They build schools and hospitals alongside churches, and see science as

essential a part of the curriculum as the Gospel. This equation of the gospel with western culture has made the Gospel unnecessarily foreign in other cultures.

On the other hand, Western missionaries often saw traditional religions--with their fear of spirits, witchcraft and magical powers--as animistic superstitions, and assumed that these would die out as people accept Christianity and science. They saw little need to study these religions, or provide Christian answers to the questions they addressed. Consequently, many of the old beliefs went underground, but today they are resurfacing around the world and creating havoc in young churches.

Western Christians also saw Christianity as the fulfillment of other religions (cf. Dennis 1897, 1899, 1906). David Bosch notes,

It was, however, not until the arrival on the scene of the theory of evolution in the nineteenth century, the rise of liberal theology, and the birth of the new discipline of comparative religion, that the stage was set for an approach according to which religions could be compared and graded in an ascending scale. In the Western world there was no doubt, however, about which religion stood at the pinnacle. In almost every respect every other religion--even if it might be termed a *praeparatio evangelica*--was deficient when compared with Christianity . . . (1991, 479).<sup>3</sup>

Although colonialism has collapsed around the world, the Western church must deal with the feelings of arrogance, superiority and triumphalism that still runs deep within it and underlie our racism, and classism. Too often these attitudes give rise to a 'rescue' mentality in our ministries to those in need., and to our effort to export our church polity, religious practices and

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<sup>3</sup> All this must be said, but as Lamin Sanneh (1993) points out, the missionaries were concerned with communicating the Gospel to the people. They lived with the people and often defended them against oppression by business and government. Moreover, by translating the Bible into native languages, communicating to them a universal gospel, and baptizing the converts into the global church, the missionaries dignified the people and helped them more than other westerners to preserve their cultural identities.

organizational skills as the right way to do things. Regarding the Baptists' work in Africa, Lloyd Kwast writes,

Baptist missionaries introduced the form of church government they knew best--the kind they used back in London, Berlin or Chicago. The fact that Baptists have historically fought, suffered and even died for their Baptist "distinctive" almost gives them a sacredness for most Baptists, concepts such as soul liberty, the separation of Church and State, a congregational form of church government have little, if any, meaning for Africans, who are largely ignorant of European context in which these concepts first found meaning. Nevertheless, African Baptists were taught that the "Christian" way to govern the Church was by congregational and democratic processes conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order. In theory Baptist polity calls for the complete autonomy of the local congregation, but in practice considerable control is exercised by the mission or the convention over congregations (this inconsistency between theory and practices still has many untutored Cameroonians confused) (1971, 159)."

The same can be said of most Western missions around the world.

### **Post-Modernity**

It is increasingly that a paradigm shift is taking place in North American culture. Some argue that modernity is dying and a post-modern era is being born, others that we are entering the late stage of high modernity. In either case, the church is facing new challenges which is must address.

### Pluralism

The social cause of post-modernity is the growing pluralism of western societies, and encounter with different peoples and cultures. No longer does one community dominate North American culture. Increasingly a myriad of other voices are clamoring for rights and power. This is particularly true in our cities. For example, in Los Angeles, public school classes are now being taught in more than eighty different languages!

But post-modernity is more than the fact of cultural and ethnic pluralism. It is the acceptance of pluralism as the ideal way to organize society. No longer do we speak of the assimilation of immigrant communities into our dominant society. Rather we encourage them to maintain their distinct identities.

The implications of pluralism for the church are far reaching. Should the church bless difference by baptizing 'homogeneous unit' churches, or should it advocate unity based on uniformity? Should it speak of Theology or theologies? What is the motive for missions if we are to affirm other communities and their religious beliefs? And are there more ways than one to the Kingdom of God and eternal salvation?

#### Deconstructionism, relativism and pragmatism

One fundamental consequence of pluralism is deconstructionism. Not only does this argue against coherent plots and perspectives in art (Gunn 1987), and distinct styles in architecture, it also argues against any single system of objective truth. All truth, it holds, is perspectival, including science. In this sense it breaks down the public-private dualism of modernity, and reduces everything to the private sphere. Anthony Giddens points out (1990)

... post-modernity refers to a shift away from attempts to ground epistemology and from faith in humanly engineered progress. The condition of post-modernity is distinguished by an evaporating of the 'grand narrative' -- the overarching 'story line' by means of which we are placed in history as beings having a definite past and a predictable future. The post-modern outlook sees a plurality of heterogeneous claims to knowledge, in which science does not have a privileged place.

David Harvey adds (1984),

I begin with what appears to be the most startling fact about postmodernism: its total acceptance of the ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity, and the chaotic

. . . but postmodernism . . . does not try to transcend it, contradict it, or even to define the 'eternal and immutable' elements that might lie within it. Postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is.

Post-modernists such as Linda Hutcheon see pluralism and contradiction as inherently good. She writes (1980:xiii),

Willfully contradictory, then, post modern culture uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape the implications of the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) domains of its time. There is no outside. All it can do is question from within.

Post-modernists are open in their attack on science and its search for a unified theory, and on Habermas and his idea of "unity of experience." Lyotard writes (1984:80-81),

We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. . . The answer is: Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name.

The result of pluralism and deconstructionism is relativism. We can no longer speak of objective truth. All beliefs, including science, are subjective and private. The effects of this are now being seen in our western response to other religions. A long list of authors now affirm that our task is not to convert others to Christianity, but to affirm the good in all religions.

### Subjectivism, idealism and existentialism

A second consequence of pluralism is that the realities we know are created by our minds, not by external verities. The new epistemological foundations are either instrumentalism or idealism.<sup>4</sup> The world we live in is a construction of our minds. Walter Anderson writes (1990),

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<sup>4</sup> While instrumentalism is a form of realism, and therefore stands in contrast to idealism, the two act in much the same way. Instrumentalism says that there is a real world outside us, but

In recent decades we have passed, like Alice slipping through the looking glass, into a new world. This postmodern world looks and feels in many ways like the modern world that preceded it; we still have the belief systems that gave form to the modern world, and indeed we also have remnants of many of the belief systems of premodern societies. If there is anything we have plenty of, it is belief systems. But we also have something else: a growing suspicion that all belief systems -- all ideas about human reality -- are social constructions.

The logical consequence of this idealism is self-centeredness. We create the world in which we live. Therefore, we must be gods. Another consequence is existentialism. We are the center of existence, so we should live for ourselves today. We are no longer interested in history, only in News.

The impact of post-modern subjectivism is widely felt in the church where, increasingly, 'experience' is the arbiter of truth, and individual beliefs take priority over church confessions. In part, this is a corrective to the modern emphasis on truth as cognitive affirmation, but it leaves us with theological and religious relativism. We need to affirm again the Truth of the Gospel, not as part of western culture, but as divine revelation given to all human and that stands in judgment on all human systems. Here again our Anabaptist vision of the church as a counter cultural community that stands as a prophetic voice of God's Kingdom helps us, for this keeps us from equating the Gospel with any human culture. All humans must hear and interpret the Scripture, and all stand under its call to personal and corporate transformation.

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that we cannot know anything about it for certain. Consequently, we must reject notions of truth and accept science and other forms of knowledge as useful constructs that help us live. Pragmatism and utilitarianism are the results. Idealism denies that there is a real world outside and says that we mentally construct the worlds in which we live. In both we are left ultimately with images in the mind.

### Therapeutic society

A second central theme of post-modernity is a stress on therapy and health. R. Fox and T.

J. Lears note (1983, 4),

[There is] the beginning of a shift from a Protestant ethos of salvation through self-denial toward a therapeutic ethos stressing self-realization in this world - an ethos characterized by an almost obsessive concern with psychic and physical health defined in sweeping terms. . . . In earlier times and other places, the quest for health had occurred within larger communal, ethical or religious frameworks of meaning. By the late nineteenth century those frameworks were eroding. The quest for health has become an entirely secular and self-referential project, rooted in peculiar modern emotional needs - above all the need to renew a sense of selfhood that had grown fragmented, diffuse, and somehow "unreal."

This search for the 'self' is a reaction to modernity with its depersonalization of human beings.

Lamin Sanneh notes,

Our new orthodoxies are now constructed and validated as psychological uplift, self-esteem and other versions of emotional quick-fix, in the name of all of which we would make sacrifices that we would begrudge Church and fellowship (1993, 221).

The shift to therapy and healing as the root metaphors, has led to a decline in concepts such as sin and salvation. People are not rebels against God but victims of society, or of evil spirits. They need health, defined primarily in terms of feelings, not an objective reconciliation with God. What we need is deliverance and self-realization, not justice and peace. Harry Emerson Fosdick pointed out (Fox and Lears 1983, 14) that "multitudes of people are living not bad but frittered lives - split, scattered, uncoordinated." The problem, in other words, is not morality but morale. Robert Bellah (1985) traces some of the consequences of this theme on contemporary American life.

The therapeutic view of reality has had a deep impact on the church. Today psychology and counseling are often seen as more 'scientific' ways of dealing with the human dilemma, and referring to sin and judgment is often political incorrect. As committed Christians, we must reaffirm our belief that we are individually and corporately sinners, for only then is there hope of a true salvation through Christ. Here our pietistic roots provide us theological foundations both for repentance and for holy living.

### **Gospel in Our Culture**

What is the Gospel in our North American culture? I have not given any answers. I have only tried to lay out an agenda for future study. I am convinced that the solutions lie not in a prophet who will lead us through the land, but in a community of committed Christians who are willing not only to hear the Gospel together in our countries, but also to pay the price that obedience to that Gospel will demand. Our radical stress on authority of Scripture, the priesthood of all believers, and church as a hermeneutical community that stands in check of individual misinterpretations provides us a meta-theology (Hiebert 1988)--a theology of how we should do theology. This enables us to constantly reflect on and respond to the changing world in which we live.

Our task is a two-fold one. We must address both our social order, and our cultural order, particularly our worldview. To challenge one or the other is not enough, for the two systems are interlocked. We need, therefore, teaching and action. We need to remember that the systems of North America are not all evil (Wink 1992). Individualism, mechanism, technique and the rest are beneficial if they are kept in check by higher values and social systems. Groupism,



organicism and relationalism carried to the extreme are equally destructive. The greatest danger is that we accept our social organization and our culture without being aware of it, and become its captive. All human systems need to be brought under the lordship of Christ and his Kingdom.

As a minority in the country, we as Christians must first experience transformation in ourselves and in our churches. Then we must act as salt in the land, subverting systems when they opposed the Kingdom of God. Newbigin puts it well (1991,82),

If I understand the teaching of the New Testament on this matter, I understand the role of the Christian as that of being neither a conservative nor an anarchist, but a subversive agent. When Paul says that Christ has disarmed the powers (not destroyed them), and when he speaks of the powers as being created in Christ and for Christ, and when he says that the Church is to make known the wisdom of God to the powers, I take it that this means that a Christian neither accepts them as some sort of eternal order which cannot be changed, nor seeks to destroy them because of the evil they do, but seeks to subvert them from within and thereby to bring them back under the allegiance of their true Lord.

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**Appendix 2**  
**History of Worldviews in the West**

	<u><i>Premodern</i></u>	<u><i>Modern</i></u>	<u><i>Postmodern</i></u>	<u><i>Global</i></u>
CENTER	- God centered and divine point of view	- human centered and human point of view	- individual centered, personal point of view	- human centered and human point of view
EPISTEMOLOGY	- revelationalism ecclesiastical authority acultural, ahistorical	- naive realism: positivism, science in a privileged position, ahistorical, acultural, foundationalism	- instrumentalism; idealism; science is part of culture and history, there is no privileged position, egalitarian--all stories are affirmed	- critical realism science is metacultural metahistorical {revelation}
REASON, FEELINGS, VALUES	- faith in tradition, religion	- faith in positivism, algorithmic reason, abstract systems, reason divorced from feelings and morality, disinterested, rejects intuition.	- distrust of algorithmic reason faith in experience and feelings, all knowledge is power based, hermeneutics of suspicion, affectivity and intuition affirmed	- algorithmic reason embedded in wisdom. Rational, affective, and evaluative combined
LOCUS OF AUTHORITY	- divine revelation, interpreted by the church, in religious and traditional orders, papacy	- individual discovery based on experience, lone scientist, group hermeneutics is bad	- networks: group hermeneutics based on power and privilege and self serving	- community hermeneutics is a corrective to and cultural biases
OBJECTIVITY/SUBJECTIVITY	- cosmic, absolute truth well founded, referential symbols,	- totally objective positive knowledge, well founded a photographic view of knowledge	- subjective knowledge, under determined, relativism a Rorschach view of knowledge	- knowledge is objective/subjective Peircian symbols, subject/ a model/map view of knowledge
SYMBOLS	- religious symbols	- referential symbols in which signs refer to external realities, meaning is referential	- Saussurian symbols, signs refer to mental images, meaning is in the head	- objectivism, approx. truth
PREMISE	- start with faith	- start with doubt	- start with doubt	- start with faith and critical reflection
COSMOLOGY	- biblical cosmology	- naturalism/supernatural division	- new spiritualism, alternative modes of reality, virtual reality	- secularism???
UNIFYING VISION	- sacred canopy, unified cosmos in which biography and history are embedded in cosmology	- science: GUT & grand narrative religion: systematic theology	- deconstruction, perspectival, many valid narratives, celebrate diversity, decentralized	- many narratives, meta-narrative, meta-theory, meta-theology
UNITY/	- wholistic	- dualistic: SN/N, mind/body,	- altered modes of reality,	- wholistic, meta-narrative,

DIVERSITY cultural		natural law/miracle, public  domain/private domain, material spiritual, science/religion	multiple narratives	meta-theology, meta-  grids
ROOT METAPHOR	- organic worldview relational, teleology, teleological causality,	- mechanistic vv. , uniformity mechaistic causality, formulaic, quantitative, order, hierarchy bureaucratic, efficiency, MBA, technique, planning, goals, profit, production, success segmented realities	- therapeutic relationalism, spiritualism, interconnectedness adhocracy, MBWA, freedom, creativity	- organic/mechanistic
ROOT PROBLEM AND CURE	- sin and redemption	- physical causes, physical and technological cures	- psychological problems, therapies	
TIME AND SPACE	- sacred time/space	- compression of natural time and space	- collapse of time/space	
FOCUS	- religion	- technology	- information	
SOCIAL ORDER	- feudal city state, monolithic	- welfare nation state, complexity, specialization	- regionalism/globalism entrepreneurialism	- globalism/regionalism
CULTURAL ORDER	- Christianity is superiority	- western civilization is superior	- cultural fundamentalism, affirm differences, little unity	- underlying common humanity, celebrate differences
SUPREME VALUES	- salvation, religious life	- freedom, rights, progress,	- experience, choices, anti-authoritarianism	- global peace and harmony, human rights, equality