

# **The Social Sciences and Missions**

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Paul G. Hiebert

The history of relationships between missions and anthropology is a long and checkered one. After the Emancipation Act of 1833 that ended slavery in England, the abolitionists turned their attention to the welfare of the native peoples in the colonial dependencies. In 1838 they organized the Aborigines Protection Society in London. Early in its history a split took place between those, mostly missionaries and humanitarians, who wanted to help the 'natives' by bringing them the 'privileges' of European civilization such as education, medicine and the Gospel, and those who wanted to study the people and to protect them from western incursion. The latter group organized the Ethnological Society of London in 1843 for the study of human biological diversity (Reining 1962). By the 1880s anthropology had gained acceptance in the academic community.

In recent years the relationship between anthropologists, and missionaries has been that of half-siblings--drawing on one another and frequently quarreling. Both work with people abroad. Both struggle with the questions of 'Others' and 'Otherness' (Hiebert 1995a). Many anthropologists have lived with and gotten much of their field data from missionaries, and missionaries have benefited from anthropological findings. Nevertheless, the relationship has remained a strained one (Salamone 1986).

Let us examine this relationship briefly and look at the ways the social sciences, particularly anthropology, have influenced evangelical mission for good and for bad (table 1).<sup>1</sup>

### **The Theory of Evolution (1840 - 1930 A.D.)**

The discovery of a new world populated by previously unknown creatures raised profound theological economic, political and scientific questions. Were these creatures humans, and in need of salvation? Could they be enslaved or ruled? And what accounted for their diversity? The academic community's response was **anthropology**--the science of Others and Otherness. The church's response was **missions**--ministry to these Others.

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic missiology has had a long history of interaction with anthropology. During the evolutionary period the Vienna School led by Father Schmidt and Father Grabner played a leading role in showing that the majority of simple tribal societies have a high God concept, thereby discrediting the prevailing theory that the high God and monotheism were late in the evolution of religion. Later Louis Luzbetack has played a key role in giving Catholic Missiology a solid anthropological foundation.

One grand unifying theory emerged in anthropology to explain the diversity of human beings. Comte proposed a theory of cultural evolution from savagery to barbarism and finally to civilization. Darwin extended this to the theory of biological evolution. The two together formed a secular history designed to explain human diversity.

### Biological Evolution

The central question from 1840 to 1900 had to do with the great biological diversity among humans. Missionaries, on the basis of Genesis One, affirmed the biological unity of all human beings, and the need to bring the Gospel to them. Anthropologists split over the issue of human origins. In 1863 the Anthropological Society of Britain broke with the Ethnological Society, arguing that Africans and other 'natives' were descendent from lower primates than Europeans. Because of its views the Anthropological Society found it difficult to condemn the brutal slaughter of the aborigines of Queensland and Tasmania going on at that time (Reining 1962,5). In 1871 the two organizations merged to form the Anthropological Society, which now affirmed the unity of humankind.

A second question now arose--if all human are one species, how can we explain the racial differences. The answer, according to anthropologists, lay in biological evolution--human are the same species but some are more evolved than others. This accounted for their differences. It also justified slavery and colonialism. Europeans had the moral responsibility to help backward 'natives' become fully human beings.

Most missionaries rejected the theory of biological evolution, but they were not immune to the spirit of the time that upheld the superiority of the white race. Stephen Neill writes,

Missionaries in the nineteenth century had to some extent yielded to the colonial complex. Only western man was man in the full sense of the word; he was wise and good, and members of other races, in so far as they became westernized, might share in this wisdom and goodness. But western man was the leader, and would remain so for a very long time, perhaps for ever. (Neill 1982, 259)

Unlike Spanish Catholics who often settled abroad and intermarried with the local people (as in Goa and Latin America), North European missionaries saw their 'home' as the country from which they came, often lived lives segregated from the 'natives', and discouraged the marriage of their children with the local people. They looked forward to furloughs and retirement 'at home'. Western mission agencies also resisted sending African-Americans as missionaries abroad. Even now most African-Americans find it hard to gain acceptance by them.

Another example of racism was the preaching by missionaries in Africa as late as the 1950s that the Africans are under the curse of Ham, and therefore are incapable of ruling themselves (Lumeah 1985). We today reject this interpretation of Scripture, but as Nzash Lumeah points out, it is still widespread among the Africans themselves, many of whom believe that Christian institutions will prosper only a white person present. As Billy Graham points out, racism is still a deep sin in European and North American churches and missions which we must confront honestly and openly. All peoples have a sense of racial superiority, but we as whites have a particularly bad dose of it.

### Cultural Evolution

When studies of race failed to define distinct races and the superiority of one over another, anthropologists turned their attention to cultural differences. Here the grand unifying theory was Cultural Evolution, a secular imitation of the biblical cosmic history. All humans were incorporated into one cosmic story of progress from simple to complex, from savagery to civilization, and from prelogical to logical. The superiority of Western technology and life was self-evident. It enabled the west to conquer and rule the world. It justified the modern Enlightenment view of history.

In this paradigm, the others were not just prelogical primitives, they were our 'ancestors'--*human fossils*. Joseph Conrad captures this view in his description of his trip in Africa, We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. . . . But suddenly as we struggled around a bend, there would be a glimpse of peaked grass roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands, clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying. . . . It was unearthly, and the men were--No, they were not inhuman. . . . They howled and leaped . . . but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity--like yours--the thought of your remote kinship (1950, 105)

Regarding E. V. Tyler (1832-1917), one of the founders of anthropology, McGrane writes, It's as though Tyler saw the whole world as a museum-drama: on stage one, in the Amazon, for instance we can see act one. Simultaneously, on stage two, in New Guinea, we can see act two, etc. The people of the world act out the story of *our* history, and the only audience who can understand the play is, of course, "us." We have the benefit of hindsight: we know how the story ends, we *are* how the story ends (1989, 95).

Many missionaries rejected the theory of cultural evolution, but the ideas which were a part of its Zeitgeist were absorbed with the air they breathed. Charles Taber 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). The key word here is 'civilization.' During this era the word 'culture' was not used in the ways we use it today.

This Enlightenment agenda shaped the modern mission movement in several ways. First, it led to the westernization of the church. 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).

Many missionaries accepted the superiority of western civilization, and saw it their task to Civilize and Commercialize as well as Christianize the people they served. They built schools and hospitals alongside churches, and saw science as essential a part of the curriculum as the Gospel. This equation of the Gospel with western civilization made the Gospel unnecessarily foreign in other cultures.

Second, missions exported the Enlightenment split between Supernatural and Natural realities. Evolutionists argued that prelogical humans created animism to explain their world. This was full of earth bound spirits, witchcraft and magical powers. As humans evolved, they developed high, philosophical religions, more logical in character, which displaced animism. Finally they developed science as a new kind of knowledge based on reason, which, in time, would replace religious thought. Missionaries rejected the displacement of religion by science, but assumed that Christianity would automatically displace animism with its belief in earthly spirits and powers. For the most part, they did not take seriously the people's beliefs in spirit possession, witchcraft, divination and magic, and simply denied the reality of these. As a result, many of the old beliefs went underground because the missionaries had not dealt with them or provided Christian solutions to the problems these addressed. Today these underground beliefs are resurfacing around the world and creating havoc in young churches.

Third, the Supernatural/Natural split contributed to the secularization of nature. Many western Christians turned to religion to deal with eternal matters such as creation, sin and salvation, and to science to explain the events of everyday life. Diseases were attributed to germs, personality disorders to psychological distortions. Missionaries brought the Gospel and planted churches. They also established schools and hospitals. Too often these were seen as based on science. Many who studied in mission schools and hospitals rejected the Gospel they heard, but

adopted science. As a result, as Newbiggin (1966) points out, Christian missions have been a great secularizing force in the non-Christian world.

How do we evaluate the effects of the theory of cultural evolution on missions. On the positive side--and there was a positive side--we must remember that the modern mission era witnessed the greatest Christian outreach the world has ever seen. Too often we in the west feel so guilty about the colonial era that we forget that the missionaries, like explorers, traders, colonial government rulers and even anthropologists were people of their times. Moreover, as Lamin Sanneh (1993) points out, the missionaries gave the people dignity and empowered them by translating Scripture into their languages. We must retell the stories of the thousands of young people who felt the call of God and went to the ends of the earth, suffering great hardships and often laying down their lives. Exploration, colonialism and *pax Britannica* did open the doors for missionaries to serve and plant churches in most remote corners of the earth. God used imperfect people with imperfect understandings in imperfect conditions to carry out His work in remarkable ways.

Another positive side of this era was the affirmation of the unity of humanity. In missionary circles there was no doubt that all humans are created in the image of God, have are fallen and lost, and need salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. It was this deep conviction that drove missionaries to sacrifice their whole lives for the salvation of people they did not know. It was this that led them to build schools, hospitals and agricultural training centers, call for justice and moral rectitude, strive to end infanticide, widow burning, intertribal wars, and identify with the poor and oppressed. As Youssufu Turaki points out, their concern to help the people stood in sharp contrast to the colonial rulers who sought mainly to exploit the people and lands they ruled. In our day, we do not have this driving passion or sacrificial commitment that turned the world upside-down.

On the negative side, the theory of cultural evolution gave rise to western arrogance, ethnocentrism and colonialism. It also led to a separation (even segregation) between missions (made up of westerners) and churches (made up of 'natives'). The result was the domination of young churches by western missions, and the inability of young churches to mature into full equals. A hundred years of the founding of the Batak Church in Indonesia, Theodor Müller-Krülger wrote,

So the missionary became the patriarch, who was readily obeyed, and under whose leadership it was confidently believed that all would go well. Is it surprising that this position of the missionary was taken for granted and reflected in the order of the Church as this developed. The patriarchal structure of the

Church was accepted as the only means by which its stability and its future could be safeguarded (Neill 1982, 257, citing Theodor Müller-Krüdger. 1961. Gemacht zu seinem Volk. Centenary volume of the Batak Church. p. 33).

A second consequence was that many missionaries saw little good in the people's cultures on which missionaries could build. Consequently, every aspect of traditional cultures had to be destroyed before Christianity could be built up.

A third consequence was that missionaries increasingly saw Christianity the same as other religions, but also their fulfillment. 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)

### **Social Anthropology (1920 - present)**

Two movements displaced Cultural Evolutionism in the nineteen-twenties, both emerging out of closer encounters with Others in the process of studying them. The first of these was British Structural Functionalism started in England by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955), and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942). Both (Radcliffe-Brown in particular) were influenced by the newly emerging science of sociology started by Emile Durkheim in France. Both did anthropological fieldwork and learned to know the Others personally as fully human beings.

At first social anthropologists, such as Sir Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard, sought to give detailed objective descriptions and explanations of other cultures, but they did so using the categories and methods of anthropology. These *etic* analyses viewed human cultures as objects to be studied scientifically.

Bronislaw Malinowski went a step further. He argued that to understand Others we must enter their world, and see it in their categories (*emically*) rather than ours. We must be Participants-as-observers. We must cross the line and identify ourselves primarily with the people rather than the academy. In so doing he made us aware of the tension between being a participant and an observer at the same time--an insider-outsider, a scientist-native, an observer who knows the native language but speaks in English. After Malinowski, in-depth fieldwork became the hallmark of anthropological methodology.

Social anthropologists studied tribes in Africa and the South Pacific Islands in which tribes were living, functioning realities. They saw each society as unique and wholly *sui generis*--a unique, bounded and more or less successful adaptation to a particular environment. Each was made up of parts that 'function' to maintain a harmonious, balanced whole. Each was homogeneous and uniform. Each could be explained fully in terms of "social facts". Religions were seen as social constructs needed to maintain the social order. There was nothing 'true' about them. Moreover societies were seen as morally neutral. For people in one society to judge those in another was seen as ethnocentrism and imperialism. There were no supra cultural moral or cognitive universals by which cultures could be evaluated.

Social anthropology has had a profound impact on missions in recent years. The major impact of sociology and social anthropology on mission thinking was through the writings of Donald McGavran, Allen Tippett and the Church Growth School. McGavran showed how social dynamics play a major role in the growth and organization of the church. He introduced such concepts as homogeneous groups, people movements, social receptivity/resistance, and social barriers into the mission literature. The results have been a major paradigm shift in modern mission strategizing.

More recent applications of social theory to missions is the People Group movement that defines some seventeen thousand people groups and seeks to plant churches in each of them (in part through the Adopt-a-People movement), and the Ten-Forty Window which focuses on resistant peoples.

How should we evaluate this impact of social theory on missions? On the positive side, it has made us think in terms of social systems. Prior to this, mission think was based largely on geographical thinking. Mission agencies went to Africa, India or China. There they divided the country on the basis of comity, and each mission divided its territory into mission fields with one missionary stationed in each. Missionaries were given responsibility to evangelize a certain number of villages, and toured the countryside holding evangelistic services in each of them. But as McGavran pointed out, geographic distances are not the only, or even major barrier to the proclamation of the Gospel. Invisible social walls are very real. People may live a few hundred feet from one another, but socially be a hundred miles apart. We need to understand social structures and social dynamics to understand how churches grow.

A second contribution of Church Growth thinking was to focus the mission task on planting churches as socially viable institutions that could sustain and proclaim the faith. In this it



is an heir of the legacy of H. Venn, R. Anderson and Roland Allen with their stress on indigenous churches. Missions too often had focused on evangelism. Today the goal of many missions is not simply individual conversions, but the planting of living, reproducing churches.

A third contribution was the renewed stress on evangelism and the growth of the church during a time when institutionalization had diverted many missions from their central task. Maintaining churches schools, and hospitals took up most of the efforts of the majority of missions.

On the negative side, the Church Growth and People Groups movements are in danger of social reductionism. Understanding and applying social principles are essential to mission outreach. It is hard, however, for us to integrate these with prayer divine guidance, and spiritual living because they are based on a notion of social engineering. If we know the social dynamics, we can bring about success. Moreover, success is measured largely in quantitative terms--in terms of numbers of professed converts. How does fit with the biblical emphases on faithfulness, hardship, suffering and persecution.

A second limitation is that of the early theories of sociology.<sup>2</sup> The concept of People Groups fits best tribal societies, like those social anthropologists used as the basis for their studies. But peasant and urban societies cannot be cut up into distinct, bounded people groups without seriously distorting the picture. Individuals participate in many different groups and cultural frames (Geertz) and do not fully identify with any one of them. Associations, institutions, and networks are the middle level organizing principles in urban societies. The major exceptions are recent immigrants who may form distinct ethnic communities. Consequently, we cannot really speak of distinct 'people groups' among old time urbanites, nor can we hope to generate people movements to Christ in mature city contexts.

A third weakness is a static view of societies. Healthy ones are organic wholes striving for stasis. There is no place for change or conflict. In mission terms this has led to calls for conversion with a minimum amount of social change, and to an uncritical approach to contextualization. People should be allowed to become Christians with a minimum of social dislocation. All social systems are seen as good if they maintain social order. They cannot be judged as sinful. Consequently, sin is reduced to personal sins, and conversion is to primarily

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<sup>2</sup> Church Growth is based largely on social theories of the 1930s - 1950s. It has drawn little from more recent conflict and dynamic oriented theories of social systems.

inner personal transformations. But societies are not static, or harmonious. Nor are they inherently good. To argue that they are is to ignore corporate sin and to see the world through the eyes of the dominant parties. All this does not fit well with Paul's call for radical social transformation in the lives of the new believers. Moreover, this approach often produces large but theologically shallow churches.<sup>3</sup>

A fourth weakness is a truncated view of culture. British Structural Functionalism and its offspring including Church Growth have a strong sense of social organization, and how this plays itself out in the lives of people. This includes such concepts as 'homogeneous groups,' 'people movements,' and 'receptivity-resistance axis.' It is also the basis for defining 'church growth'. But these theories have very weak understandings of culture--of the symbol systems, rituals and myths, belief systems and worldviews that shape a people's thinking. Consequently, they do not deal with the questions of cross-cultural communication, contextualization and theologizing in different cultural settings. This explains, in part, the limited role that theology plays in Church Growth theory.

A fifth weakness is the problem of cultural relativism. British Structural Functionalism began with the much needed correction of viewing other cultures in western terms. It ended in the 1950s with pragmatism and cultural relativism which reject all notions of social evil and cultural untruth. In missions this has led us to seek to preserve cultures at almost any cost, and to avoid judging the corporate sin found in all of them. In our western churches, the spread of this attitude has cut at the central nerve of Christian missions. Many are no longer certain that Christ is the only way to salvation, and that those who reject him are lost. More see missions as cultural imperialism and see few ways to avoid it.

Finally, social missiology tends to have a weak view of history. It is concerned with synchronic models of social organization--with how societies are put together, how they function, and how they change. It has little awareness of the fact that cultures are always changing, and full of internal tensions and conflict.

### **American Historicism (1910 - present)**

A second theoretical challenge to the theory of Cultural Evolution emerged in North

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<sup>3</sup> Examples of this are North East India, Ruwanda and South India where large people movements have led to large churches, but where corruption, hostility and killing have continued, little affected by the Gospel's power to transform not only lives but whole societies.

America, and came to be known as American Historicism. It was pioneered by Franz Boas (1858-1942), A. L. Kroeber (1876-1960) and their disciples. They studied the North American Indians whose cultures had been scattered, and who were now living largely on reservations. For the American Historicists, the questions of change and the history of change were central. How had the Indians survived in the midst of such cultural turmoil? Why had some of them acculturated to the new ways introduced by western settlers?

American Historicists rejected the arrogance and ethnocentrism associated with the word "Civilization," and replaced it with the word "culture." This shift in terms reflects profound changes in how anthropologists began to view other peoples. McGrane writes,

The emergence of the concept "culture" has made possible the democratization of differences. . . . The twentieth-century concept of "culture" has rescued the non-European Other from the depths of the past and prehistory and reasserted him in the present; he is, once again contemporary with us. Twentieth-century "culture" was a concept forged in the teeth of "evolution," in a struggle to the death with "evolution" and the hierarchical scheme implicit in it (McGrane 1989, 114)

The anthropologists used the plural form 'cultures' not only to affirm their autonomy but also their diversity.

For American Historicists culture was not a bounded, tightly integrated whole. Rather, they described cultural cores and areas in the same way linguists were defining linguistic families and regions. Moreover, they saw culture as constantly changing, and change as potentially good. The American Historical school gave rise to a number of subdisciplines that have impacted missiology.

### Descriptive Linguistics

The emergence of descriptive linguistics in anthropology to enable scholars to learn oral languages and to reduce them to writing has played a key role in the modern Bible translation movement in the last fifty years. The American Bible Society team led by Eugene Nida and including a number of outstanding linguists such as William Smalley, William Reyerburn, and Jacob Loewen contributed greatly to the development of linguistics and to translation theory. They also pioneered the concept of dynamic-equivalence translations which are based on a diadic view of signs as made up of forms and meanings. Wycliffe Bible translators led by Kenneth Pike and including a long list of solid linguists such as Dan Shaw and Jon Aarson, have contributed much to our understanding of semantic analysis.

The positive contributions of these Bible translators can not be over stated. Their fresh approach to reducing languages to writing, and to translate and publish more readable and

understandable biblical texts has contributed greatly to the world church. They have also served as pioneer church planters in areas where no other missionaries are serving.

The introduction of dynamic-equivalence Bible translation has raised a number of questions. First, the use of a dyadic view of symbols as made up of form and meaning, and the location of meaning in the heads of people renders the message totally subjective.<sup>4</sup> There is no way to check such meaning against experiences of the external world and objective reality. Consequently, communication is receptor oriented. While this is a good correction to the sender oriented communication of the earlier formal translation theory, it removes any objective criteria for testing truth or for communicating it accurately. We need to return to a modified reference theory of signs that affirms that we can speak about truth. It is here that the recent interest in Charles Peirce's theory of signs is helpful (1958). He points out the triadic nature of signs--the mental concept, the cultural symbol and the objective or external reality--to which that concept and symbol refer. Communication in Peircian terms is measured by the correspondence between what the speaker says and the hearer understands. This can be determined, in part, by both checking with the external realities to which they refer.<sup>5</sup>

Second, there is a danger of linguistic reductionism. Because communication is so central to human life, it is easy to use it as the model for understanding all human systems. This overlooks the social, economic, political and legal dimension of societies, and the complex relationships between social and cultural system. It also ignores the fact that communication is ultimately about something--namely events in history. In missions this can lead us to focus on the communication of the Gospel, and to overlook the central question, "What is the Gospel?"

### Acculturation Theory and Applied Anthropology

Some American Historicists focused their studies on culture change and culture collision. They were interested in applying anthropology to social engineering and global development.

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<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm von Humboldt, one of the fathers of linguistics, differentiated between the "inner" and "outer" dimensions of symbols such as words. The former, he said, was the mental concept associated with a word, the latter its oral or written form. His student, Ferdinand de Saussure, labeled these as the "form" and the "meaning" of a word. Here "meaning" no longer is found in words that directly represent reality, but in the ideas and images in our heads. However, as Ludwig Wittgenstein points out, meanings are not private. Earlier Charles Peirce had noted that symbols are triadic and have an objective referent.

<sup>5</sup> For an example of such checking see Brent Berlin and Paul Kay's cross-cultural studies on color (1969).

After some rough beginnings, applied anthropologists today are widely used in government and nongovernment development agencies.

Christian applied anthropologists have contributed to mission programs involving development with agencies such as World Vision (Harley Schrech), and Mennonite Central Committee (Eloise Meneses). Missions have been slow in drawing on the insights provided by applied anthropology. The main danger here is to be pulled into a form of social engineering in which humans are in charge, and a social gospel that forgets the priority of sin and salvation. An example of this is the current interest in "meeting felt needs," and Maslow's hierarchy which puts spiritual needs at the end of a long list of human needs.<sup>6</sup>

### Ethnoscience

Following the lead of Malinowski, many anthropologists began to in-depth field based research in which they sought to "enter inside the head" of their informants (cf. Conklin 1955, Frake 1961) using linguistic rather than psychological models. The result was ethnoscience and componential analysis. Both seek to use the linguistic categories of their informants. Several subfields emerged including 'ethnomusicology,' 'ethnobotany,' 'ethnopsychology' and so forth. The advantage over previous ethnographies is that the method can be precisely described so that studies can be replicated and verified.

The new ethnologists have been relatively silent about the possibilities of cross-cultural comparisons. If each culture is described in its own terms, how can cultures be compared? Many ethnoscientists argue that valid comparison is impossible. One possible answer is to compare principles of cognition found in different cultures in order to find human universals, a tack taken by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Ethnoscience has contributed missiological thought through the work on ethnotheology by Chuck Kraft and on ethnomusicology by Roberta King. Others have applied the methods of ethnoscience to our emic understandings of cultures and worldviews. The strength of the

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<sup>6</sup> Maslow's hierarchy of human needs has been widely cited uncritically in evangelical circles. It assumes a linear progression--from felt need for food, to shelter, psychological well being, social belonging and finally spiritual meaning. If we follow this in missions, we will spend all our time on low level needs and never get to conversion. Moreover, it treats spiritual life as a desirable but not ultimately important need. We need to use a systems approach to human needs and recognize that immediate needs may be doors leading us to deal with the ultimate spiritual needs of people.

approach are a systematic methodology that allows replication of findings, and its ability to help us 'enter into the heads of other peoples.' Moreover it enables us to get out, at least in part, from our own linguistic-cultural categories and penetrate deeply into the think of other peoples.

But ethnoscience has failed to remake anthropology. It is now one of the many streams in the discipline. In part, this failure is due to the fact that it has failed to provide us with a basis for cross-cultural comparison and for formulating generalizations. In the end, we are in danger of being locked up in different cultural prisons with no way out. Any attempts to develop meta-cultural grids for comparison are accused of being ethnocentric and a new imperialism. Lamin Sanneh accuses such accusers of being cultural believers and cultural prophets (1993).

Second, ethnoscientists tend to reduce everything to cognitive systems and communication. There is often a weak view of social systems and their power in shaping cultures and persons. There is also a neglect of history as the reality behind cultures, societies and persons.

Third, the cognitive model used in most ethnoscience treats knowledge as totally subjective, as existing only in the heads of people. As we have seen, this is based on the belief that symbols consist of forms and meanings. The result is receptor oriented communication.

Fourth, in applying ethnoscience to missions there is a danger is letting the context determine the text of Scripture. Scripture then becomes what people believe it to be, not a communication from outside. Ultimately this leads us to an uncritical contextualization that is willing to bend the Gospel to fit each culture, and to a neglect of its prophetic call for all cultures, societies and people to be transformed by the power of God. This subjectivism, rooted as it is in an instrumentalist epistemology (Hiebert 1995a, 19-52), ultimately leaves us with total cognitive relativism and an inability to determine the truth. In this, ethnoscience is more a product of the instrumentalist of postmodern science that has emerged as a reaction to the positivism of modern science. However, like positivism, instrumentalist perpetuates the divorce of cognitive processes from morality and affective dimensions of human systems.

### **Contemporary Anthropological Theories (1970-present)**

For the most, part we in missions are about twenty years behind the current thinking in the social sciences. While we are still debating social and cultural systems, the growing edges of anthropology have moved on. Let me suggest a few that may have significance for us in missions.

## Symbolic Anthropology and Semiotics

Some of the new insights into human realities have been the works of Clifford Geertz, Mary Douglas and Victor Turner. Geertz provides us with good models for fine grained ethnographies built on 'thick descriptions' that integrate social, cultural and personal analyses of particular human events, and, in so doing, help us to see them more wholistically and avoid reductionism.

Mary Douglas and Victor Turner lead us further into the study of signs, symbols and symbol systems, and show how these relate cognitive to social and personal systems. Here we begin to see the importance of sacred symbols and rituals in shaping and maintaining religious beliefs and communities. Given our western rejection of formal symbols and rituals in our search for individual expression, many of us view symbols and rituals in other cultures as empty, dead formalism that needs to be destroyed in order for true inner Christian faith to find expression. But it is we who are impoverished without nondiscursive languages to speak of the transcendent. As Turner and Douglas show, it is difficult to construct and maintain sacred beliefs if these are not linked to the sacred community of the church and to sacred rites that give corporate expression to our faith. While retaining our emphasis on personal faith and piety, we need in the west to learn how to express our faith in the church using living sacred symbols and rites that renew and transform us individually and corporately. The awareness of the importance of rituals in religious life is particularly important in missions where we deal with societies for whom rituals are central to the people's lives.

Another new frontier in symbolic anthropology is the study of worldviews and their formative powers. We have often communicated the Gospel in terms of surface behavior [don't drink alcohol, attend church regularly . . .] and conscious beliefs [Christ the incarnate son of God died for our sins. . . .] Too often we have been unaware that beneath these forms and beliefs lie largely implicit worldviews that order the categories **we think with**, and the logic we use. Too often, we find young churches talk the right talk, but somehow we get the feeling that they are not saying the same thing--that prayer becomes a new form of magic, that the church becomes another arena for community infighting. There remains much to be done in the study of worldviews and in the definition of a biblical worldview.

## Religion

Another new field in anthropology is the study of religions and religious movements. Tylor, Frazer and Morgan recognized the importance of religions as systems of belief, but discounted them as prelogical forms of thought. Social anthropologists have tended to follow Durkheim and seen religion as epiphenomenal--as the creations of societies to hold people

together, and to enforce the community rules. They do not take religious seriously as **belief systems which the people are convinced are true statements of reality**.

Starting with Evans-Pritchard, some anthropologists have begun to take religious belief systems seriously, and to show that these are not prelogical or fantasies and projections of corporate minds. In recent years Robin Horton has done much to help us understand that the logic behind traditional religions is not some foreign logic, but rooted in human experience and in universal thought patterns common to us all. In so doing, he helps us take science off of its modern pedestal and to see it as one system of beliefs alongside other systems of belief.

Along another line of enquiry, A. F. C. Wallace (1958) has provided us with a preliminary framework for understanding religious movements. Building on his insights, Harold Turner has analyzed the impact of Christianity on primal religions and the emergence of New Emerging Religious Movements (1981). Much more study is needed, however, to help us understand the explosion of new and new-new religious movements around the world today, and the implications they have for Christian missions.

Taking religions seriously is an important step forward in anthropology, but so far no anthropologist has raise the next, and most vital question, which of these belief systems is true. All are afraid to move beyond phenomenology to ontology--to questions of what is really real--because they fear accusations of ethnocentrism and imperialism if they do. We can learn much from the recent studies of religion from a social science perspective, but they do not take spiritual matters seriously, and they fail to point us beyond phenomenology, leaving us by default in a relativistic morass. But as Peter Berger and others have pointed out, at some point we must confront the questions of truth and falsehood, righteousness and evil, or we are dilettantes and cretins who watch the world crumble and do nothing about it.

### **A Model of Missions for the 21st Century**

Where does this leave us in missiology? Clearly we have learned much from the social sciences regarding the exegesis of human contexts, the communication of the Gospel, the planting of churches, and shaping of Christian worship, and there is more we can mine from social science theories. But we face a real danger. In recent years in evangelical missions, we have been so fascinated by the power of the social sciences that we have are in danger of leaving our biblical foundations, and, in the process, of losing the heart and soul of mission. We need to return to Scriptures to lay the foundations for a theology of mission for the next century (Köstenberger 1995). Let me suggest a few directions which I believe we must move.



## 1. Return to the Priority of Revelation, Theology and Mission

For all the contributions anthropology has made to missions, it can never be the foundation for missions. If we start with anthropology, we become anthropologists, not missionaries. We will never be driven by our social science insights to give our lives for others. We will reduce mission to what we can do for God by strategizing, management and effort. Only a personal experience of the Gospel, a deep sense of God's call and the support of a community of believers will motivate us to go, and sustain us in the difficult times when we face loneliness, persecution, and even death. Only Scripture offers us a message of salvation for a lost world.

It is imperative at this juncture that we rebuild missiology on a biblical worldview. Like the early scientists, most of whom were Christians, we need to see the sciences, including anthropology, as branches of theology--as thinking the thoughts of God after him, not theology as the division of science having to do with God. In the latter view, spiritual realities are relegated to one discipline, and all the other sciences are totally secular. We must begin again with God and his divine revelation through his Word, his works and his Son.

We must also build missiology on theology--but not any theology.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, many who study theology in our schools do not hear the call to missions. They become pastors and professional theologians. Few departments of theology have missiology as an essential field in their discipline, or offer courses on the theology of mission. We must begin with a theology in which mission has a central place, if for no other reason than the fact that the Bible is essentially and centrally a book about mission. Neither missions nor theology will be revitalized in our day until they both are brought back together. Interestingly enough, when we begin as missionaries, we must become both theologians who exegete scripture, and anthropologists who exegete human beings. As Martin Kähler said eight decades ago: Mission is "the mother of theology" (in Bosch 1991, 16). Paul was the first Christian theologian precisely because he was the first Christian missionary, and it is intrinsically wrong to differentiate his mission and his theology (Dahl 1977, 70). Paul's mission did not flow from his theology--his theology is a missionary theology (Hultgren 1985, 145).

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<sup>7</sup> We must remember that systematic theology as we now know it was born during the twelfth century as Europe rediscovered Aristotle's works which the crusaders brought back from Egypt and the Near East (Finger 1985, 18-29). It was based on the same epistemological foundations as science, and many theologians such as A. Hodge, L. Schafer, W. Shedd and A. Strong defined theology as a kind of science. Like the science, systematic theology takes a synchronic approach to truth and seeks for unchanging universals that underlie all reality.

How can we bring theology and mission back together? Let me suggest three steps. The first is **phenomenology**--to carefully study the people in their contexts in order to understand them. Here anthropology can help us a great deal to see and grasp realities beyond our own cultural frames. One of our great weaknesses in missions in the past is that we often knew little of what was going on either in the local cultures or in the thoughts and lives of new believers.

The social science can help us understand humans, but they can also distort our vision by defining the categories, the logic and the theories we use to analyze human realities. We must constantly test these against Scripture. For example, the concept of 'culture' as we now use it is a powerful tool in the study of people, but we are in danger of becoming culture believers. Like 'mission' and 'incarnation' the term is not found in Scripture. The closes terms in the New Testament are *archeon* and *sarks* which carry quite different meanings. Does this we must get rid of all these terms. No, but we must make certain that they fit with biblical teaching.

The social sciences stop with phenomenology, but we must move on to **ontology**--to judge our preliminary understandings in the light of Scripture. Here theology plays a central role, for it helps us understand truth and righteousness from God's perspective, and helps us communicate these to people in vastly different historical and cultural contexts.

The third step is **missiology**--leading people to faith and to the truth revealed in Scripture. We cannot simply condemn the existing beliefs and practices of new converts, and expect these to die. We must explicitly deal with old ways and lead the believers in one area of life and then another into Christian truth and maturity.

These steps do not form a linear formula, rather they are part of an on-going process of reflection and ministry in missions. We are challenged by our reading of Scripture, and by what we see around us. We apply these learnings to our ministry, but in the process we face new questions, see new things, evaluate them and apply our conclusions in our ministry. In missions research and ministry must go together, each informing the other.

In this cycle of reflection and ministry, we need to bring back feelings and morals back into the picture. The Enlightenment divorced scientific knowledge from both in an attempt to make knowledge objective, but in doing so it has reduced knowledge to correct information and led to a moral collapse. Scripture makes it clear, truth calls us to respond, and faith is not faith until we act upon what we believe.

Underlying this process of study and ministry must be the constant, careful study of Scripture on our knees, open to hearing it change our preconceived ideas; ongoing prayer that God will make his truth known to us through the Holy Spirit; and humble listening to and learning from our brothers and sisters in faith who can help us see the deep biases which we have hidden from ourselves. These brothers and sisters include those who have gone before us, those who are our associates, and the new church that God is planting where we serve.

## 2. Develop A Full Orbed Frame for Understanding Humans

One of the main problems with the social sciences has been that each focuses on one or another aspect of human existence, and tends to reduce all explanations to this system of explanation. Psychologists tend to reduce everything to psychological dynamics, social scientists to social explanations and cultural anthropologists to symbol systems and culture. In missions we have followed this lead and seen one or another aspect of human life as determinative of the others. In so doing we have suffered the weaknesses of reductionism.

In recent years there has been a move to see humans as part of several intersecting systems--or a system of systems. We can examine them as psychological beings, as members in communities that are shaped by social dynamics, and as creators of cultures which shape the ways in which they see and live in the world. We need also to include the biophysical system of which we are a part. Above all we need to add the spiritual or divine dimension to the model or we are in danger of a radical secularism (figure 1).

Second, we need to look at the way these systems affect each other. For example, living in known sin can lead to psychological stress and social problems. Similarly, social tensions can lead us to spiritual doubts. We are whole persons, and to reduce us to one or another system of explanation leads us astray. This wholistic view also helps us understand the far reaching consequences of sin which affects all these area and leads to ideological bondage, social oppression and personal sin. This view also helps us see the greatness of our salvation in Christ which transforms all of these areas in our lives.

A full orb ed model requires that we include both synchronic and diachronic models of human existence. The social sciences have focused on the structure of human life, history on the story of human life. Too often in missions we have been either ahistorical, or astructural in our models. These are complementary, and we need both. Ultimately, Scripture root s reality and meaning in the larger story of God's works. If in our fascination with systems of human life we lose sight of the human story, we lose the central truths of the Gospel.

### 3. Formulate a Biblical Worldview

It is increasingly clear that we cannot integrate the insights of the social sciences and theology until both of them are imbedded in the same biblical worldview. It is impossible to truly integrate a secular theories of humans with the biblical teaching that affirms their divine origin and image. We must base our theological and social theories on the assumptions, categories and logic of a biblical worldview.

I realize this is a controversial topic. Some will argue that there is no such thing as a biblical worldview. If not, then the Gospel deals only with limited cultural and social matters at the surface level. It does not transform the core of a society, namely its worldview. Others will say that there are several worldviews in the Bible. This is true, but I believe that throughout the Old Testament God was not only preparing a people to be his witnesses [and only a few did so], but also a worldview in which the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ could adequately be understood. For example, in the Old Testament, God began with the local word for gods, *el*, but he then transformed it, giving it new meaning through his revelations of himself to Abraham (*el shaddai*, *el elion*, etc.); through the sacrifices, festivals and temple rites; through Israel's history; and through the prophets--so that when Christ came, the Jewish concept of 'God' was no longer pagan, but adequate to communicate the biblical message about God Jehovah. Similarly, the concepts of sin, sacrifice, forgiveness, reconciliation, mercy and love were shaped throughout the O.T. in preparation for the coming of Christ who embodied them as fully as humans can comprehend.

### 4. Reaffirm the oneness of humanity, and of the church

Through anthropology we have learned much about the cultural diversity around the world. As Lamin Sanneh points out (1993), however, we are in danger of becoming culture believers and culture prophets--making culture the supreme value to be preserved at all costs. But this leads us to emphasize human differences, to justify ethnic pride, and ultimately to sanction segregation and ethnic cleansing.

One humanity As Christians we must look beneath the human differences that blind us from seeing all people as one humanity, equally created in the image of God. Parochialism kills the mission vision. The Scriptures leads us to a startling conclusion: *at the deepest level of our identity as humans, there are no others, there is only us*. On the surface we are males and females, blacks and whites, rich and poor, but beneath this we are one humanity.

Our oneness of humanity is declared in the creation account (Gen. 1:26), and affirmed by the universalism implicit in the Old Testament (Ps 148:11-13, Is 45:22, Micah 4:1-2). Bosch

writes,

The entire history of Israel unveils the continuation of God's involvement with the nations. The God of Israel is the Creator and Lord of the whole world. For this reason Israel can comprehend its own history only in continuity with the history of the nations, not as a separate history (Bosch 1991, 18).

The nations are waiting for Yahweh (Is 51:5), His glory will be revealed to them all (Is 40:5), His servant is a light to the Gentiles (Is 49:6), and they will worship in God's temple in Jerusalem (Ps 96:9)

It is in Christ and the New Testament that the implications of our common humanity are fully worked out. We see this in Christ's teaching when he said "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matt. 5:43-44 NRSV)." War demands that we hate our enemies and brand them as Other. Jesus says, our enemies are Us, therefore we must love them and give them the Good News of Salvation which is open to all (John 3:16).

If we start with the view that at the deepest level some people are Other, then our attempts to build bridges of reconciliation between "us" and "them" will ultimately fail. Beneath all the bridges we build, we know that there is still the chasm of Otherness which will separate us when things go bad. If we begin with the fact of our one humanity, we can celebrate our differences because they are secondary. We must recognize the importance of 'cultures' but realize that they do not constitute our ultimate identity.

In affirming the oneness of humanity, we do not deny the great difficulty in understanding people in other cultures. Far too often we claim to know what others are thinking and feeling, when, in fact, we are totally wrong. The more we study cultural differences the more we realize how difficult true cross-cultural communication really is. Learning to understand people in other cultures in a fallen world is a long and difficult process, but by listening, learning and living among them we can learn to know them not just as objects of our analysis, but as humans like ourselves. It is here that anthropology has much to offer us by its analysis of cultures and of cross-cultural communication.

One Body of Christ In our mission to plant churches we must recognize that *in the church there are no others, there are only us--members of the body of Christ*. Peter's amazement at what was taking place can be detected in his words in the house of Cornelius, "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality(Acts 10:34)!" Paul wrote, "[Christ] tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. . . Then he started over. Instead of continuing with two groups of

people separated by centuries of animosity and suspicion, he created a new kind of human being, a fresh start for everyone. ( Eph. 2:14-15 Peterson 1993, 404). It should come as no surprise that in the churches Paul planted Jews, Greeks, barbarians, Thracians, Egyptians, and Romans were able to feel at home. This mutual acceptance of Jews and Gentiles in the church was itself a testimony to the world of the transforming power of the Gospel. The unity of the church is not a product of the Good News, it is an essential part of that Gospel.

The Church in the World This raises a difficult question. How does our identity as Christians relate to our identity as humans? If, in mission, we come as 'Christians' to 'Non-Christians,' we are tempted to see ourselves as outsiders and superiors. If, for the sake of the Gospel, we identify with people in our common humanity, we come in humility, as one sinner inviting another to the salvation offer us all by Christ. Bosch notes,

We are not the "haves", the *beati possidentes*, standing over against spiritual "have nots", the *massa damnata*. We are all recipients of the same mercy, sharing in the same mystery (Bosch 1991, 484).

But the Church is not only called to identify with the world, but also to be a prophetic counter-cultural community calling people into the Kingdom of God. Berkhof notes, "[T]he church can be missionary only if its being-in-the-world is, at the same time, a being-different-from-the-world (Bosch 1991, 386)." This lies at the heart of mission. We cannot ignore the plight of our fellow humans, nor are we content to simply sit and commiserate with them in their miserable condition. We long to share the good news of salvation which was given to us, a salvation not based on who we are or what we have done, but on God. Therefore, we are compelled by the love of God, in every place and on every occasion, to invite everyone to join us in that salvation which God has prepared for all.

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