

My Worldview Pilgrimage

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Over the years studying other cultures and their worldviews I have experienced some significant changes in my own worldview. These are, in part, due to my living between India and the U.S., Hinduism and Christianity, and Anthropology and Theology. The following are a few of them:

1. Ontology:

Old: My old view was that reality is divided into the domains of Supernatural and Natural, and that Christianity dealt largely with the former, and science with the latter. This made it difficult to see God's hand at work in everyday life apart from miracles, or to take the reality of angels and of Satan and demons seriously in daily affairs.

New: My current view is that the Biblical division is between Creator [God], which leads to a contingent dualism: God as autonomous and eternal, creation as finite and continually dependent on the ongoing creation and providence of God. In this angels and demons are part of creation and therefore part of human affairs. Nature is not autonomous and run by natural laws. It is a contingent creation operating according to principles God place in creation to give it order and predictability. With out these at the level of the material world, meaningful life would be impossible. On the other hand, God can operate in unique ways without violating his principles because they are subject to him.

This view also takes the questions asked by folk religions seriously, and calls us to provide theological answers to these questions which are rooted in Scripture and tied to our formal theologies [systematic and biblical].

2. Epistemology: [Indian and Western philosophies]

Old: My old view was that science is based on positivistic realism, and that Christianity is based on idealism and faith.

New: My current view is that of critical realism as the foundation for both Christianity and science. This means that human knowledge is always partial and approximate, and never total and complete. Moreover, it holds that mystery is not simply a result of our currently imperfect state of knowledge and that it will decrease as our knowledge grows. It is part of the very nature of reality which far transcends our human abilities to understand that reality.

3. This World and Other Worlds:

Old: My old view was that this world is most important now and that I must focus on living meaningfully in it. Consequently, health, comfort and a 'good life' are important. The other world [heaven] is something I must think about, but it begins after death. [This

reflects Max Weber's comments that Protestantism moved from an 'other worldly' to a 'this worldly' emphasis.

New: My new view is that the other world is the dominant worldview theme, and that this world is the subordinate or counter theme. This life is important, but it must always be lived with the realization that it is the 'stage' not the ultimate 'reality' and that when we move 'off stage' we enter eternal reality. The eternal reality therefore exists now in the Christian though the outer manifestation is this worldly roles and relationships.

4. Individual and Group:

Old: My old view was that the individual is the central focus of human existence, and that human groups are collections of individuals that are made and broken.

New: My new view is that human groups are the focus of reality and that the individual is a subordinate theme. The church is not simply a club or corporation made of up individuals, it is a kinship body--a community linked together by a common new life. The family is more important than the individuals that make it up, and each must give up self in order to maintain the family. Because groups are important, we can speak of corporate structural sins [social systems such as segregation] and corporate blindness [ideologies such as Islam and Hinduism and Marxism and capitalism].

5. Bounded Sets and Fuzzy Sets: [Indian and American categorization]

Old: My old view was that the world is made up of clearly defined, digital sets ['bounded sets']. This meant that things were either good or bad, true or false, right or wrong.

New: My new view is that as a human my finiteness means that much of what I see is 'fuzzy' and that the subdominant theme is 'well formed' sets. There are some things I think I see clearly, but there are many areas where my finite mind and experience means I don't see things as God sees them. I believe he sees all things clearly.

6. Intrinsic Sets and Relational Sets:

Old: My old worldview was based on intrinsic sets. Relational sets were subdominant. Therefore, I had a mechanistic view that stressed maintaining order, control and human engineering that could make a better world.

New: My new worldview sees relational sets as dominant, and intrinsic sets as subdominant. This means that relationships must take priority over tasks and 'getting things done.' It means that I must live with a measure of chaos because all true relationships are inherently chaotic in the sense that one cannot control them. More chaos is not evil but can be unformed potential out of which relationships, beauty and order can be created.

7. Linear and Event Time:

Old: My old worldview was based on uniform interval linear time [the scientific view of time as the universal grid within which all reality exists].

New: In my new view event time is the dominant theme and linear time is subordinate. There needs to be sacred as well as secular time, and the Protestant effort to make all time sacred has, in fact, turned it all into secular time. We need rituals to remind us of sacred realities.

8. Rituals and Activities:

Old: My old view was that rituals and myths are old traditions that are dead and meaningless.

New: My new view is that rituals, myths and other nondiscursive signs are essential in maintaining a sense of transcendent realities and the awareness and relationship to God.

9. Cognitive, Affective and Evaluative:

Old: My old view was that the cognitive dimensions of life is the most important [truth] and that the affective and evaluative [allegiances and morality] are secondary.

New: My new view is that cognitive and affective processes are subordinate and that they lead to the dominant theme of evaluative-response. Therefore truth and feelings of worship must lead to obedience and discipleship to be true faith. We are called to know the truth in order to follow Christ. Faith and conversion, therefore, are defined ultimately in our response to truth and affectivity, not simply in affirmations of truth or in feelings of affection.

10. Logic and Wisdom:

Old: My old view was that logic is the true test of rationality, and that this logic is algorithmic and binary [1, 0]. This is the basis for modern science and is derived from Aristotle and the Greeks.

New: My new view is that logic is subdominant, and that wisdom is the dominant theme of life. Wisdom is the ability to evaluate and balance different truths and alternatives in order to come to the best solution possible.

11. Signs:

Old: My old view was that signs are binary. First, as a positivist I saw them as Form=Reality. Later under the influence of postmodern anthropology and Saussurian linguist theory I saw them as Sign=Meaning [in the head].

New: My current view is that signs are triadic [Peircian] that combine an objective reality with a subjective perception of it mediated through the sign. This means human cultures are first and foremost symbols systems.

12. Outside and Inside Views of Reality:

Old: My old view saw science and theology as acultural, ahistorical ‘outside’ views of reality. This positivist view of science and theology set them apart from ordinary knowledge.

New: My new view is that we as humans can only see the world from in our cultural and historical contexts. This ‘inside’ view means that human knowledge is always contextual and historically shaped. But Scripture is divine revelation that shows how God sees things as they really are. This revelation is given in human context but this does not mean that the message is lost in the communication.

13. Spiritual Warfare:

Old: My old view was an Indo-European view that the battle is in heaven between God and Satan, and that the question was who had more power and could defeat the enemy and set up an empire.

New: My new view is that the battle is not one of power but of authority, and over the hearts and minds of humans. God continues to fight with redemptive love. Satan uses hate, deceit and blinding of the mind. The supreme victory is the Cross in which God bore the evils of his enemies and opened the door for redemption and reconciliation.

14. Law and Broken Relationships

Old: My old view was that sin is primarily a breaking of the law, and that salvation requires that we pay the penalty of sin. There is little room in this for mercy, or restoration of relationships.

New: My new view is that sin is ultimately a break in relationships, first with God and then with one another. Here salvation is rooted in reconciliation and restored relationships leading to love, peace, justice and shalom. I see the law as the commands of God, not as a code of action independent of God. They were given to Moses as a ‘school teacher’ to help Israel know God’s will. We, as Christians, know that will because we are in fellowship with God, therefore we are no longer ruled by law, but by our desire to relate to and please God, and because it is now in our nature to want to be like him.

15. Material and Spiritual:

Old: I used to see these as separate domains, with the spiritual taking priority over the material. Salvation was a deliverance from the material realities and life fully in the spirit.

New: In view of God's eternal incarnation in Christ, I believe that the material and spiritual are inseparable for us as humans, and that care for the material world is essentially a religious task in that is caring for the material world that is God's creation. We are to be caretakers, not exploiters of nature.

16. Mechanistic vs. Organic Root Metaphors:

Old: As a scientist I used to see the world through the mechanistic metaphor, with a materialistic foundationalism built on subatomic particles.

New; I now see ultimate reality in terms of an organic metaphor, and the mechanistic metaphor as subdominant.

17. Evangelism, Church, Kingdom an King:

Old: I used to see the central task of missions to be evangelism [which we do for God]. Discipling, church planting, and kingdom work were secondary.

New; I now start mission with the King [we are called to participate in what God is already doing on earth]. From this springs the proclamation of the kingdom, the planting of churches and the calling of people to enter Christ's kingdom through faith.

18. Meta This and That:

Old: I originally focused on the content of knowledge such as theology, cultural beliefs, narratives and science.

New: I now see the importance of examining how we know, not only what we know. This raises the questions of metaphysics, metatheology, metacultural grids and meta-narratives.

This makes us aware of the presuppositions we bring to our knowledge, and makes it possible to dialogue between different cultures, theologies and other paradigms of knowledge. It also lays the foundations for a critical realist approach to missions that takes cultures and cultural differences seriously, but also avoids cultural relativism and subjectivism.