Changing Worldviews

WORLDVIEW AND CHURCH PLANTING

The concept of 'worldview' has emerged over the last two decades as an important concept in understanding human cultures. The term remains nebulous, and much is being written on it in disciplines as different as anthropology, psychology, history, philosophy of science, and Christian theology.

I. History of the Concept of Worldview

Early German cultural historians used the term **weltanshaun** with reference to the deep cultural patterns that persisted over long periods of time.

Later, anthropologists, in their study of the concept of 'culture,' became aware of the fact that there were deep underlying assumptions about the nature of reality on which more explicit elements of culture were built. These are now called 'worldview'. We will look at some of the streams of thought that have contributed to our current understanding of this concept.

1 **Ruth Benedict** analyzed the cultures of three American
   Indian tribes, and sought to show that the integration behind each of these was a deep emotional commitment at the core of the culture.
   - the Kwakiutle (Northwest Coast) were frenzied, competitive and disorderly.
   - the Hopi were stoical, restrained and highly ordered.

2 **Morris Opler** tried to show that the integrating factor
   behind cultures was logically related sets of cognitive beliefs which he called 'cultural themes.'
   - Cultural theme: "a postulate or position, declared or implied, ans usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society: (1945:198).
   - Dynamic opposition: Opler argued that carried to the extreme a cultural theme can be destructive, so most or all themes are balanced by subordinate counter-themes that stand in tension with dominant themes.

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Example: U. S. Worldview

Dominant Theme	Counter-theme
Individualism	Community
Freedom	Control, regulation

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3 **E. Adamson Hoebel** introduced the idea of basic evaluative assumptions. He spoke of 1) existential assumptions (similar to Opler's cognitive beliefs), and 2) normative assumptions which include a people's deepest values, concepts of righteousness and sin, and allegiances.

4 Robert Redfield proposed six cognitive universal themes to examine worldviews:
      1) time, 2) space, 3) self-others, 4)cosmic realities, 5) notions of causality, and
      6) universal human experiences such as birth, death, sex and adulthood.
      - Redfield's taxonomy has been used by Kearney and Kraft

5 Stephen Pepper introduced the idea of 'root metaphors'. He proposes five such metaphors. These, he proposes, shape the deepest attitudes of a culture to the world around it. Two, in particular, are of importance to us in later analysis of modernity: the organic metaphor in which people see the world as alive and relational, and the mechanical metaphor that sees the world as a big machine made up of impersonal parts driven by impersonal laws.

6 Clifford Geertz argues to culture provides meaning and that religion provides ultimate meaning. He uses the concept of 'ethos' to capture the underlying spirit or feeling of the religion and culture.

7 T. Parsons, E. Shills, C. Kluckhohn, et. al. proposed three dimensions of culture, society and personality. = worldview

    7.1 <u>Cognitive assumptions (BELIEFS)</u>: the fundamental conceptual categories, given, logic and beliefs of a society.

    7.2 <u>Affective assumptions (FEELINGS)</u>: the basic emotional orientation of the society.

    7.3 <u>Evaluative assumptions (VALUES)</u>: the foundational values and allegiances of a people.

II. A Model for Understanding Worldview

We will draw upon insights from the pioneers in the study of worldviews, and look at several of their key characteristics. We will examine first a <u>synchronic model of worldview</u>, and then a <u>diachronic model of worldview</u>. These are complementary in nature. When we focus on one the other is in our peripheral vision, but it is there.

1. <u>Towards a Definition of Worldview</u>.

We will begin with a simple definition of 'worldview' and elaborate on it throughout the course. *Worldview is the fundamental cognitive, affective and evaluative assumptions a group of people make about the nature of reality and which they use to order their lives.* It is the maps people have of their world which they use for living.

We need to explore the relationship between the concepts 'worldview,' 'world event,' 'ethos,' 'cosmology, 'cosmogony,' 'world order,' ' root metaphors,' and 'mazeways.'

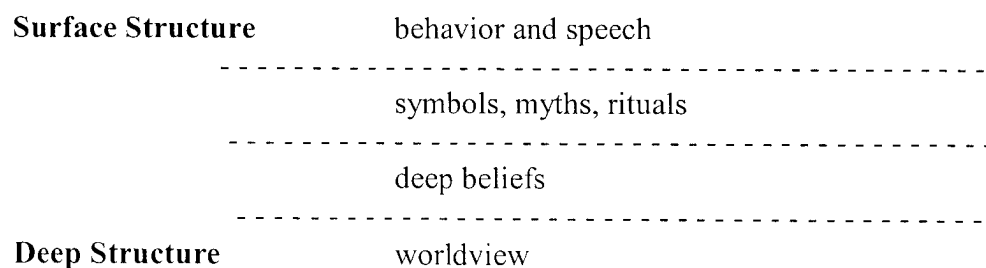2. <u>A Synchronic Model of Worldviews</u>

  2.1 **Depth**

In recent years there has been a growing awareness that there are deep structures that

underlie the surface behaviors of human beings. Sigmund Freud examines the deep unconscious structures of human personality. Clyde Kluckhohn pointed to 'implicit culture' that underlies 'explicit culture.' Ralph Linton differentiated between overt and covert culture, and Edward Hall speaks of technical, informal and formal levels of culture.

Sol Tax noted, "'World View' I now use to refer to the superficial empirical phenomena, and 'structure' to refer to the layer below. I suggest that there exists a still deeper layer, as yet unexplored, that needs to be identified. . . . the deeper 'X-factor' beneath the cultural structure of beliefs." 1990:281. Commentary: Can World Views Mix? Human Organization :280-286.

James Spradley noted (1975:457) the need for a sense of depth below ordinary cognitive analyses, says: "We think that one of the most useful concepts to clarify and further our understanding of the underlying ideology of a culture is the notion of values . . . . a value is any concept referring to a desirable or undesirable state of affairs." (Worldview and values. In Anthropology - A Cultural Perspective. N.Y.: Wiley. 1975).

This leads to a model of culture:

Surface Structure	behavior and speech
	symbols, myths, rituals
	deep beliefs
Deep Structure	worldview

In philosophy of science, T. Kuhn introduces the worldview as lying behind the explicit theories of science. Larry Laudin develops a model of scientific knowledge rooted in the concept of worldview [see insert].

Are there levels of depth in worldviews? Below themes and counter themes, and the categories and logic with which they are constructed lie different ways of creating categories [different types of sets], root metaphors that organize themes into larger patterns, and epistemological issues [ranging from various forms of idealism to various forms of realism].

The concept of depth has profound implications for Christian churches and missions. Too often we have discipled believers at the surface level of behavior and speech, or of symbols, myths and rituals. As evangelicals we stress conversion of deep beliefs, but often are unaware that if we fail to convert the worldview, the surface cognitive structures of the people will become 'hijacked' or subverted by an unconverted worldview.

2.2. Configurational nature of worldview.

Worldviews are configurational. They are not simply the sum of themes and assumptions . There is an inherent relating of these into larger patterns or gestalts-- overall configurations that make sense of the whole.

2.3 Generative nature of worldview.

Worldviews are generative. They are algorithms that enable the human mind to create a great many patterns [an example is the Spirograph which enables a child to create a great many patterns using colored pencils and cogged wheels]. Worldviews are not the visible outputs of culture, but the underlying structures that generate surface behavior. In this they are like the deep structures of language. A few simple sets of rules and a vocabulary enable a person to create any number of sentences which can be understood, even though the speaker and the hearer have never heard that sentence before. Similarly, mathematic equations can be graphed.

2.4. Dimensions

We will follow the lead of Parsons, Shils, etc. al. In speaking of three dimensions of cultures, societies and persons, and apply this to worldviews.

2.4.1 *Cognitive assumptions:*

We will use Opler's concept of themes and counter-themes. This is easy to use, and enables us to find a few basic beliefs that seem to give 'meaning to whole areas of behavior and practice in a society. It also allows us a great deal of flexibility to generate emic themes [to understand the distinctiveness of a culture in its own terms] and yet to draw on etic themes as heuristic devises. It also helps us understand worldview changes as themes and counter themes change in their relationship to each other. For example, while the U.S. is strong on individualism, there is a counter-theme of community building. Sometimes this counter theme is strong enough to overcome the theme and so lead to change--as was true in the hippy movement in the 1960s. This approach does not lend itself to easy comparison between cultures, but, as we will see later, there are ways it can be adapted for cross-cultural comparisons. 'The term "theme" is used here in a technical sense to denote a postulate or position declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society (1945:200)." These as dynamic forces in culture. American Journal of Sociology 3:198-206. 1945.

Robert Redfield tried to provide a universal grid by which we can examine all worldviews and compare them. Redfield defined worldview as "that outlook upon the universe that is characteristic of a people. . . It is the picture the members of a society have of the properties and characters upon their stage of action . . . the way the world looks to that people looking out . . . the way a man, in a particular society sees himself in relation to all else. . . It is, in short, a human's idea of the universe (1952:30)." Redfield proposed six areas of life with which all humans must deal. These cognitive universals are:

1) **TIME**.
- All people have a sense of time (uniform linear, cyclical, pendular, event, dream, etc).
- Time is put into larger frames: degeneration, progression, renewal and messianic)

- Myths: people have different view of the cosmic story - e.g. Marxist, Capitalist)
2) **SPACE**. All people have maps of the universe and the world around them.
  - Example of Toba space.
  - Example of change in U.S. survey methods
  - Example of Indian village architecture
3) **SELF/OTHER HUMAN**. All people have a sense of what it means to be a human, though they may define this differently.
  - Maxakali view of self
  - Indian view of self
  - American view of self
4) **CATEGORIES OF BEING**
  - Example: 'the excluded middle'.
5) **CAUSALITY**. All societies have theories of what causes diseases, death, drought, rains, origins of things, and so on.
  - Example: Indian medicine
6) **UNIVERSAL HUMAN EXPERIENCES**. All humans must give meaning to experiences such as birth, death, disease, marriage and the like.
  - Example: Rites of passage.
7) **ORDERING THE WORLD**. To Redfield's categories I want to add another - namely the way we create categories: Fuzzy, Bounded and Centered sets.
  - Redfield sees humans as <u>those who seek meaning</u>.

We will use Redfield's categories as heuristic devises to begin investigations of worldview themes. They are helpful themes, but we must remember that they are etic categories we impose on a culture, and so hold them lightly.

2.4.2 *Affective assumptions*. Benedict and Geertz remind us that all cultures place value on the expression of certain feelings, and down play others. All have their 'likes' and 'dislikes'.

EXAMPLE: The current 'battle' in North American Protestant worship services
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AFFECTIVE MOOD:	MYSTERY, AWE, HOLY	PEACE, ORDER HOPE	ECSTASY, POWER ACTION
EXTREME MODE:	Asceticism & monasticism	Piety and mysticism	Thrill, frenzy and dance
FORMS OF EXPRESSION	Ritual, chants liturgy, candles, high order	Preaching, hymns, testimonies, peace, calm, silence, meditation	Prophecy, choruses, healing dance, clapping
POSTURE	Kneel, prostration	Bow heads, seated	Hands raised
FOCUS ON	God the Father	God the Son	God the Spirit
CENTRAL MESSAGE	Creation, order and providence of God	Sin, redemption and presence of God	Helplessness, illness and power of God
STORY	Cosmic history	Human history	Personal history
CHURCH TYPE	High church	Evangelical	Pentecostal

BUILDING	Cathedral	Church	Meeting hall
SOCIAL FOCUS	World and cosmic history	Denomination and group	Individual and self-expression

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2.4.3 *Evaluative Assumptions*. All cultures have their own values priorities and allegiances. All have a concept of what a 'good man' and a 'good woman' are. All have some sense of right and wrong.

- Kluckhohn and Parsons see humans as <u>those who have gods and a sense of morality.</u>
  They and Shils outlined several value continuums:

1) HIGH EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION ---- VS ------- EMOTIONAL CONTROL
   Some societies value emotional expression, others emphasize
   stoicism and nonemotionalism.

2) GROUP -------------- VS ----------------------- INDIVIDUAL
   Some societies such as the U.S. stress the autonomous
   individual as ideal. Self-reliance, independence, and freedom are important. Other
   societies stress the dependence of the person on the group and value relationships, patron-client (dependency) roles, and the group over the person.

3) TRANSCENDENCE ---------VS--------------IMMANENCE
   Some cultures have a 'this-worldly' emphasis. Others have an 'other-worldly' emphasis.
   For example, Europe in the Middle Ages was focused on heavenly matters. Modernity is
   focused on well being in this world.

4) ASCRIBED ---------------- VS ------------------ ACHIEVEMENT
   Ascribed is where emphasis is given on what a person gets through birth - e.g.. a king,
   titles, position in society based on birth, etc. Achievement is where emphasis is placed on
   what a person achieves by her/himself. U.S. is strongly achievement oriented,
   particularly in cities.

5) DIFFUSENESS -------------VS---------------SPECIFICITY
   Some societies take the broad context into account. Other take only the narrow
   immediate context into account. This relates to 'high and low context cultures' and is
   tied, in part, to scale and shared information.

To these we can add:

6) HIERARCHY --------------------VS-----------------EQUALITY

7) UNIVERSALIST ------------ VS --------------- PARTICULARIST
   Universalist is when the same laws, rules and order is thought to apply equally to all.
   Particularist is when each person is treated differently on the basis of her/his rank and
   place in society. U.S. and Christianity are universalistic, so we try to convert people to
   our faith.

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EXAMPLE OF VALUE DIMENSION: "Limited Good"

George Foster introduced the idea of "limited good" as a dominant value in most peasant societies. According to this, there is only so much good in the world, so if one person works hard and gets more, someone else gets less. Consequently, no one tries to get ahead for fear of being blamed of robbing from the others.

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3. Diachronic Model of Worldview

Worldviews also have cosmic stories or myths that explain what is going on. These diachronic explanations give meaning to the story of human and corporate lives.

Eliade speaks of three basic stories--cosmic story, group story, personal story--and shows how the relationship between them shapes the meaning the world has for the people.

There are several basic plot lines:
- the world is degenerating
- the world is progressing
- the world is cyclical in its story
- these can be combined in complex ways: see the Indian view of time.

4. Worldview or World Event: Ong on the difference between oral and literate society wvs.
   - Kanthapura.

5. Worldviews or Mazeways?

Can we speak of 'worldviews' in modern, pluralistic societies, or should we, as A. F. C. Wallace suggests, speak of 'mazeways': personal worldviews not corporate worldviews?

6. Worldview in Ethnography vs in Ethnology

Ethnography is the in-depth study of a particular culture. Ethnology is the comparison of different worldviews in order to provide mutual understanding and to develop general pan-human theories.

III. Methods for Studying Worldviews

Several methods of emerged for examining worldviews. None of them is sufficient by itself to help us discover the worldview behind a particular culture. Together they can help us gain some preliminary understandings.

1. Ethnosemantic analysis:

Ethnosemantic analysis is the examination of words and clusters of words to see the underlying nature and relationships between them. The result is a set of semantic domains that show hope people categorize and understand their world. This method is particularly helpful in gaining emic understandings of the people themselves rather than imposing our categories on them. This method has been developed by James Spradley, and Warner and Schopfeldt.