Understanding and Teaching Religious Belief Systems in the 21ˢᵗ Century Missions

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Introduction and Background

My purpose in writing this paper is to demonstrate the use of a systems model as a way to enable both graduate and undergraduate students who are training for cross-cultural ministry to use specific models to examine the structural properties of *religious belief systems*. In so doing I am trusting that some who read or hear this presentation will see this subject as a valuable area of preparation that should be taught more widely in undergraduate and graduate studies for prospective or current cross-cultural workers.

Through the application of logical models to case studies, students are trained to understand *how religious beliefs are structured* in the minds of people and how they express themselves in the daily lives and rituals of people in every part of the world. The ultimate purpose of the course is to train cross-cultural workers to be able to understand and to empathize more deeply with the people among whom they will serve.

As we teach this course at Toccoa Falls College (undergraduate), *Cultural Anthropology* is the minimum prerequisite. Students have been trained in this and prior courses (Applied Anthropology, Peoples of the World, Ethnography, World Religions, etc.) to recognize the worldviews of other people. In the course, *Religious Belief Systems [RBS]*, we work to deepen this approach so that students begin to see how to view the people of a second culture in such a way that they <u>see</u> the world through the eyes of those with whom they share the Good News, and they begin to <u>*understand*</u> the world as they do, i.e., to think as they think.

Many theologians are concerned that in any use of anthropological theory there is always the danger of adopting a purely relativistic approach to the study of the beliefs of a people. They are correct in being concerned…as they should be for their own discipline as well; however, from an evangelical Christian perspective, the overriding concern for the undergirding application of biblical absolutes to theoretical models should prevent this. In recent years there has been concern expressed that missiologists have gone too far in the application of anthropology to missiological issues. I *do not* join in that concern. In fact, I

am *more* concerned that many Christian workers, even cross-cultural workers, have little or no interest or training in anthropology.

Whatever our training may include, none of us can take our assumptions for granted without ongoing evaluation. *Christian* anthropologists, must always apply biblical absolutes in such a way that they will form the essential guidelines for any application of theory. In the *Religious Belief Systems* course, students know, from the first few days of class, the explicit biblical assumptions which will guide our study, and they are cautioned to question any movement away from those guidelines.

From another direction, contemporary discussions in anthropological literature have expressed continuing concern with the imposition of Western structures of understanding on non-Western cultural data. In this course I work to see that *emic*[1] structures are given a high priority, and I encourage the primarily monocultural students to examine non-Western beliefs and values without the inherent ethnocentrism so often seen in the history of their predecessors. In our discussions, I often ask questions to see if their perception is being modified to consider non-Western alternatives in solutions to problems in case studies. It is gratifying to see, as the semester progresses, that there is movement away from monocultural assumptions and reactions.

The history of anthropology is replete with numerous theories designed to help us understand the mosaic of peoples and their cultures around the world. They tend to come and go with time. As for my own approach in dealing with the complexities involved in communicating the Gospel in other cultures, exposure to various alternatives has led me to adopt a mixture of theoretical approaches. Although my perspective and my methodology may be seen as eclectic, I follow what is known as the *general systems theory*[2] approach to cultural analysis, modified by a *functionalist*[3] mentality, a bit of symbolic and cognitive theory, and a few other strange ideas…all further molded by my evangelical Christian worldview! So if my approach may be a little difficult to classify at times, this is the reason!

It may be worth mentioning here that in recent years, many anthropologists seem to be moving away from understanding the intricacies of culture through the study of structural systems. In fact, in our postmodern world, all theories, definitions, and methodologies seem to be open to new interpretations. In an article just published in the

monthly news publication of the *American Anthropological Association*, under the subtitle, *Postmodern Suspicion of Structure*, one professor writes:

> *"…in anthropology, we see a move away from the panoramic sweep of cultural systems, whether of a positivist stripe or hermeneutic grandeur.*
> *…the trend in anthropology is away from cross-cultural comparison and a search for statistical or other universals. How ironic that, as the forces (and structures) of globalization increase, anthropology turns more toward local knowledge and practice "*
> (Maynard 2003:8 &11).

So, as some behavioral scientists in this postmodern era move to change how they and we should understand the societies of the world, there is still a strong affinity among some of us for the use of the "systems" approach in the study of religion and related beliefs and practices. The data in this paper follow that approach.

In addition to the influences I have noted, my thinking has also been challenged and shaped by the writings of Christian anthropologists Alan Tippett, Paul Hiebert and Charles Kraft, along with missiologist, David Hesselgrave and others. In fact, some of their ideas are so mixed with mine,
I have difficulty in sorting them all out as I teach this course and write this paper! But I *will* attempt to give credit where I am aware of using source materials…at least they will all be mentioned in the attached bibliography!

In the specific application and integration of all these factors, I need to further state that my own study of *religious belief systems* began during the ten years I spent working among the Arabs of Jordan and Lebanon. One of the many things I learned as I lived among these gracious people was *how little* I knew about the way they thought and how little I understood the worldview that guided their lives.

Later, when I knew I was going to stay in the USA to teach, the Lord opened the way for me to study cultural anthropology at the University of Georgia. There, I was able to take a concentration in *Belief Systems*. Among many scholars introduced to me by Dr. Charles Hudson, my major professor in this concentration, was a writer by the name of Robin Horton, professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. My first exposure to his writings was through a book titled, *Rationality* (1970), edited by Bryan Wilson. In that volume, Horton examined the similarities underlying African thought and Western science, and then compared

differences. More recently, he has expanded his work in his own book, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion, and Science* (1993).
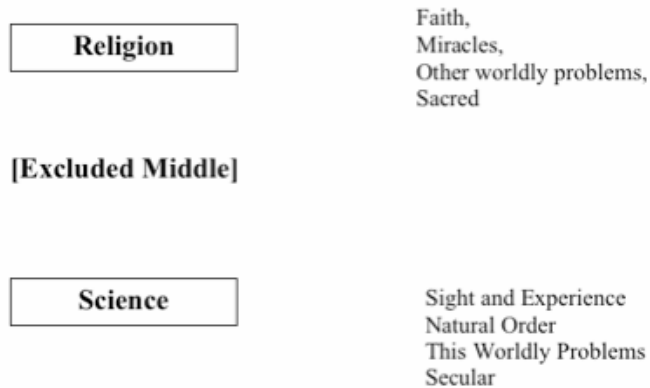
The Course

My design for this course: Religious Belief Systems ("RBS" to students), gives a background in theory and then uses a simple beginning model developed for the study of religious beliefs in any culture. I have kept this model simple because I want it to be useful to undergraduate students, most of whom have limited experience in dealing with other cultures. It is also easy to remember and apply in whatever cultural system they work with.

I should mention, also, that what I am writing does not give an overview of the *whole* course, but does give what I believe to be the *core* of what I am teaching in that area. Later I will list topics covered during the entire semester and this will indicate the broader scope of the subject.

I emphasize in class that when we deal with the subject of *Religious Belief Systems,* we are really dealing with *the way people think*. We are not just examining beliefs and values, even though that is an important part of our study. Our focus is on *how these are structured in the human mind*.[4] I have worked to simplify many of the intricacies related to the subject in order to focus on a way of communicating with undergraduate students which will interest and enlighten them, and to give them tools which may be developed further as they work with the complex beliefs of societies around the world. Some of them may question whether I have been successful in this goal, but most of them do seem to express a high level of interest.

Early in the course they read Paul Hiebert's classic article, *"The Flaw of the Excluded Middle."* (1982:35-47) and we discuss this in class. Students begin to see, many for the first time, that our Western two-tiered view of the universe typically leaves out an entire dimension in the worldview of people in non-Western cultures. The model given by Hiebert in the original article is titled "*A Western Two-Tiered View of Reality.*"

A WESTERN TWO-TIERED VIEW OF REALITY

| Religion | Faith,
Miracles,
Other worldly problems,
Sacred |

[Excluded Middle]

| Science | Sight and Experience
Natural Order
This Worldly Problems
Secular |

Source: Hiebert, Paul G., "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," MIS, vol. 10, Jan. 1982, p. 40.

FIG. 1

For those of you who may not be familiar with this concept, the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* describes it this way:

> Hiebert built his analysis on a two-dimensional matrix. The first dimension is that of three worlds or domains: 1) a *seen world* (that which is of this world and seen), 2) the *unseen of this world* (that which is of this world but not seen), and 3) an *unseen transempirical world* (that which pertains to heavens, hells, and other worlds). The second dimension is that of two types of analogies people use to explain the powers around them: 1) an organic analogy (powers are personal, e.g., gods and spirits) and 2) a mechanical analogy (powers are impersonal, e.g., gravity and electricity). Combining the seen/unseen/transempirical worlds and organic/mechanical analogies into a matrix, Hiebert's model highlighted the difference between Westerners, who tend to see only two worlds (the seen world and the transempirical world) and many non-Westerners who recognize the middle world, comprised of unseen powers (magical forces, evil eye, mana) and spirits which are very much a part of everyday human life (e.g., a person is ill because of a curse or a spirit attack). The blind spot in the Western worldview Hiebert labeled the flaw of the excluded middle (2000:363).

With conceptual models like this, the students begin to realize that it is important to understand that people in different societies actually do see the world around them very differently. They also begin to comment that the work God has called them to do is a bit more demanding than they had thought previously.

From this point, I introduce a very simple model based on a three-level triangle which looks at the process of human thought as it moves from sensory perception at the base through levels of abstraction. The model is simple because I want to reiterate to

students that no matter how complex the religious belief system they study may be, there will nearly always be two consistent themes. The model looks like this:
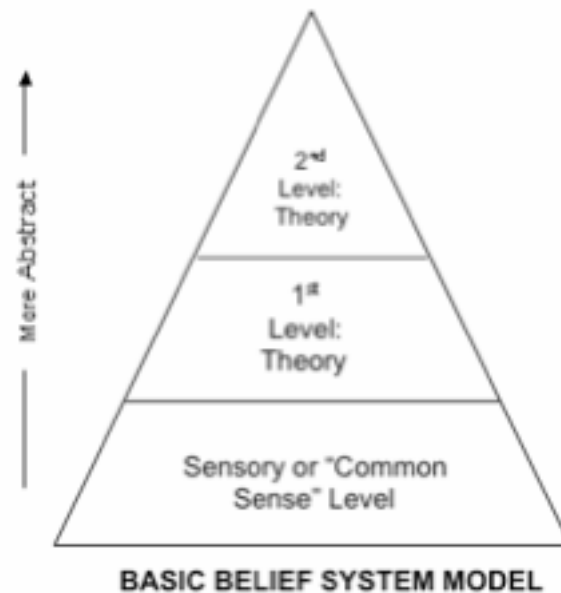

**BASIC BELIEF SYSTEM MODEL**

FIG. 2

This model shows the students that

1. *human thought processes* tend to move from the level of "sensory perception" at the base to a more "abstract" category and then on to higher levels of abstraction (more than two, but this keeps the model simple).

2. *more and more is explained by less and less* as one moves toward the more abstract upper point of the triangle.

As I re-introduce these very fundamental concepts periodically, the students are able to use this model as a basic building block throughout the course.

Quite often in cultural anthropology, we stress *differences* between people in different cultures because monocultural people are prone *to assume that other people are just like they are, with a few variations*. This is one of the major reasons for using *"The Flaw of the Excluded Middle"*(Hiebert 1982:35-47) early in the course. This often profoundly modifies student thinking about worldviews. In addition, as different belief systems are studied, students are presented with a number of case studies illustrating an unlimited number of *different* ways people devise to organize their religious beliefs. However, at a certain point in the course, similarities between *Traditional* (or *Folk,* or

Primal) beliefs and those of people who have been taught in a *Western scientific context* need to be stressed as well. So I move on to a variation of this model to make comparisons:
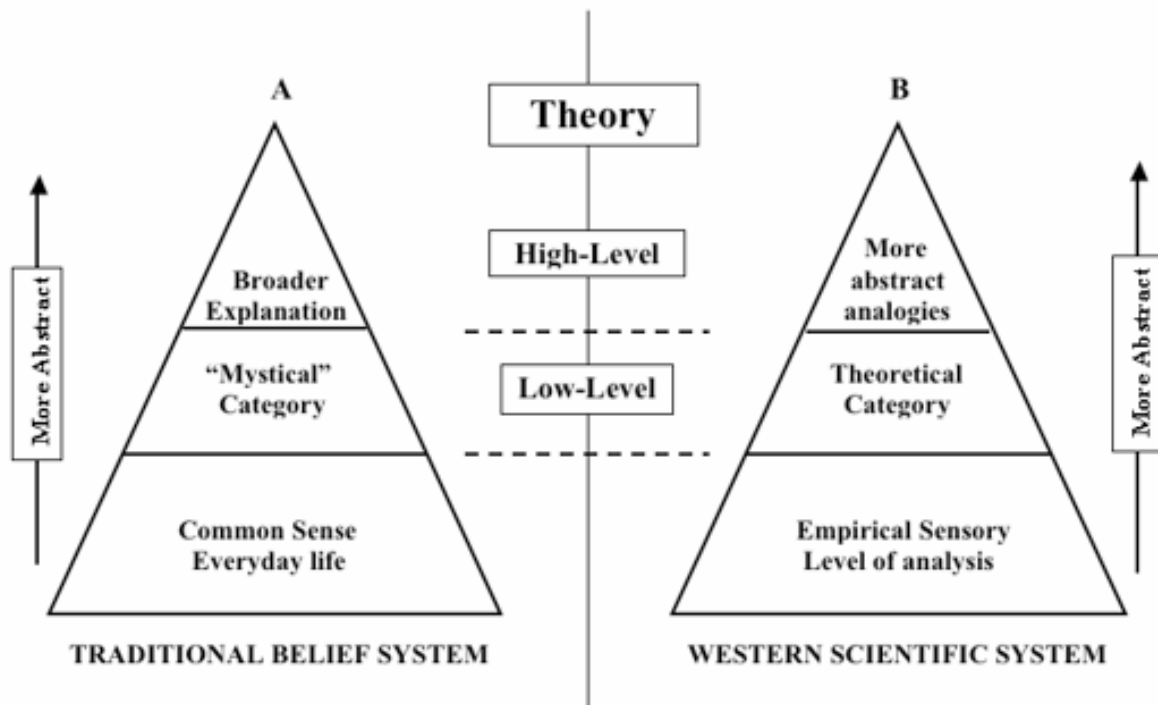
TRADITIONAL BELIEF AND WESTERN SCIENCE; A systems Analysis
FIG.3

Then, as I help students think through the implications of this model, I refer to the following premises[5]:

   1. The theoretical character of thought in traditional belief systems is essentially the same as that in Western scientific thinking. In other words, *"Common sense"* in both systems of thought (traditional and Western) is the simplest tool for dealing with circumstances in everyday life. However, when problems are *not* solved with common sense solutions, both systems allow for thinking to move into a "higher," more abstract level.

   Model A, the Traditional Belief System: Let me illustrate this with an example from Robin Horton's work among the Kalabari people of Africa. He describes how these people have a variety of herbal treatments for diseases.   Several of these may be tried in order to bring about recovery.   If no result is produced, they begin to say, "*there is something else in this sickness.*"   In other words, when the level of *common sense is too limited*, the *diviner* is called and the search moves into the "*mystical category"* to find the cause. This

category is familiar to the Kalabari…they do have a "middle" level…so they think and interact with the spirit world on a daily basis. The diviner often looks for a possible causal relationship between the social lives of the individuals [anger, envy, etc.]. His worldview is very holistic and it is his responsibility to determine the cause of an illness or misfortune and usually to prescribe the cure, so his solution is a move into the middle level.

So what has been described here is a "jump," in the minds of the diviner and the people involved, from common sense to "*mystical thinking*" in the *traditional or folk belief system.* For this type of belief system, most answers are found in the "*common sense everyday thought modes,*" but if solutions to problems are not found there, it is not uncommon to make this *jump.* Since the "*mystical category*" is so holistically entwined with the "*common sense*" level in traditional systems, the transition to this level is normally not a difficult one to make.

Model B, the Western scientific system: Using Horton's illustration to show similarity between the two modes of thought, a physicist is pictured looking intently through his microscope. He is observing small, fast-moving particles going through a sheet of metal foil in his laboratory experiment. These particles are too small to analyze, so he needs to compare them with some known quantity. As he observes, he sees that these puzzling observations have a similarity to the movements of planets in a solar system. In his thinking, he has shifted from the observable but unknown, to an analogy made with a known quantity. He has, in fact, moved into the first level of abstract theory to find an answer to his problem. There are differences between the two systems, but the similarities in arriving at solutions are basically the same.

2. The level of abstract theory (high/low) used varies with the context.

An interesting aspect of this premise is that a person's choices, as he moves into the abstract levels of theory, will depend on how wide of a context he wants to consider. If he believes it necessary to use only a limited area of experience (beyond that of "common sense"), he may use what is generally called a "*low-level theory.*" Of course, this is not the only factor (limitations based on intelligence, range of experience, etc. are important), but this is how solutions are normally arrived at. If he has deeper concerns, he may use a higher-level of theory.

Since our class is concerned primarily with understanding non-Western belief systems, this understanding is further illustrated through readings from *Nuer Religion*, by E. E. Evans-

Pritchard. In one of the interesting references to his work, we discuss his premise that, *"A theistic religion need be neither monotheistic nor polytheistic. It may be both. It is the question of the level…of thought, rather than of exclusive types of thought"* (1956:316). If you understand monotheism to be exclusive in a system of belief, this may sound like a contradiction in terms. However, in a number of belief systems, like that of the Nuer, one "high" god and many spirits can and do play complementary roles. The "level of thought" referred to by Evans-Pritchard would equate in our model to a "monotheistic god" at the "high" level, and a "polytheistic" realm of spirits at the "low level" of theory (which compares to the middle range of Hiebert's model which is excluded by Westerners).

In traditional belief systems, *spirits* provide explanations in broad but clearly defined contexts. This vital worldview belief relates primarily to one's immediate community and environment, and to daily concerns. A supreme being, however, while related to a higher-level of theory, tends to provide a means of explanation which relates to theories of the origin of life, the reason for existence, etc.

An interesting validation of the triangle-shaped model is that more and more is explained by less and less as one moves up toward the peak of the triangle. The *"mystical"* or *"1st level of theory"* explains a broad range of issues which confront people on the daily sensory level. The *"2nd level of theory"* provides an even broader explanation as thought is generalized into fewer abstract categories.

Another illustration of the use of *"high/low levels of theory"* varying with context is when, in non-Western systems, a sickness does not respond to herbal treatments of various kinds. The practitioner may re-diagnose and try another alternative, but if there is still no result, the conclusion is that there is something else in this sickness. In other words, the context provided by common sense is too limited and there is a shift to *"mystical thinking"* to resolve the problem. The Western analogy might be the use of prescription medications to cure an illness, but if this has no benefit, one may shift to prayer to resolve the problem.

Later in the course, another topic, closely related to the understanding that has just been developed, deals with the comparison of *"high"* and *"low religion,"* to *"Great"* and *"Little Tradition."* I generally use this model to explain the relationships:
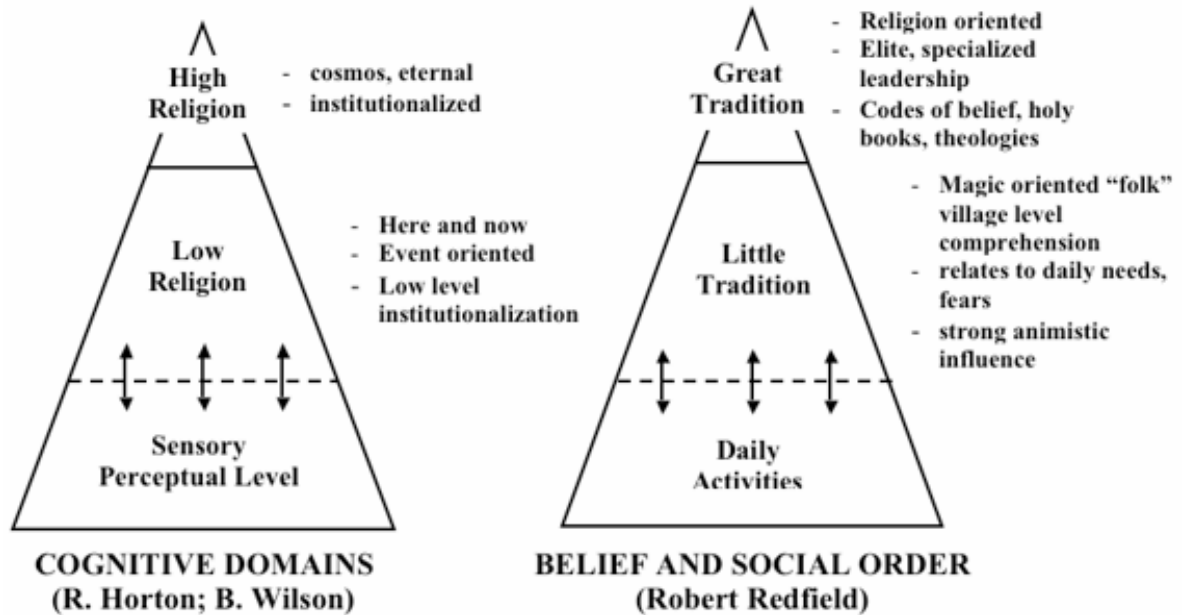
High/Low Religious Systems Compared To Great/Little Tradition

FIG. 4

"High Religion" has been defined as "*a cognitive domain that is expressed in a highly institutionalized social organization"*(Wilson 1970).   We see this in Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, etc. The characteristics of this domain of "high religion" are:

1. It deals primarily with *cosmic questions* such as the origin and destiny of things, and the ultimate meaning of life.

2. It has *written texts* that solidify or "fix" an authoritative body of beliefs.   Since these texts are then unchangeable, as time passes, commentaries must be written to make these meaningful and applicable to new times and changing cultures.

3. It is *institutionalized.* This means a High Religion is characterized by specialization with different leadership and religious roles; it has formally defined orthodox positions; it has central institutions such as temples or churches and schools for training leaders, and it has bureaucratic organizations of many forms.

4. For the most part, *"high religion"* provides for *moral systems* in which the gods (usually male dominant) are good and in conflict with demons or "devils" who are evil.

By contrast, the category of *"low religion"* is a cognitive domain in religion that is less institutionalized, and centered more in *immediate people-oriented needs and practices.* Low religion tends to have the following characteristics:

1. It deals with the *immediate problems of everyday life*… not ultimate matters.   It is concerned with crisis, disease, death, drought, etc.

2. It is often *"informally" organized*.   The leaders may not even be specialists but only perform their religious services incidentally to their everyday work.

3. It has *no written texts*.   Beliefs are found in myths, dramas and religious performances, and since these are not "frozen" by being put into an unchanging form, *they can change over time* without the people being aware of it.   So this means they can be reinterpreted for each new problem or occasion.

4. A Low Religion is often *amoral*.   Emically, the spirits and beings in this world are understood as being good or bad (more analogous to people). They help those who serve them and harm those who forget them.

Somewhat parallel to the model from R. Horton and B. Wilson is that of Robert Redfield. Redfield was a professor at the University of Chicago and did his field work in Mexico. He studied concepts of folk society and folk culture, and attempted a closer integration of the social sciences and the humanities. He classified a framework for categories or domains of religion as *"Great"* and *"Little Tradition"* (1973).   Redfield has taken a little different direction in *relating belief to social order*, but it works itself out in essentially the same way. If we focus with Redfield on the cognitive domain of *High Religion*, especially in the context of their *social institutionalization*, several levels of organization can be discerned.

The *Great Tradition* refers to great centers of organized religion, its central cathedrals, mosques, etc., training centers, formal bureaucracies, holy writings, and organizational structures. It is here that we find the highest arenas for religious activity. Here you have the clergy, the theologians, the leaders, and the scriptures of the religion.

It is also important to know that *most of the books written about the world's major religions* deal with the *Great Tradition*, giving extensive information about how it is rationalized, delineating its systematic codes of beliefs, its commentaries, its organization, etc. Most students who plan to work in second cultures are directed to these kinds of sources. They are, of course, important to give the *ideal* perspective of the religion in question, but they give only a partial picture of the true nature of actual belief.

The *Little Tradition* refers to the actual expressions of the *Great Tradition* worked out in the daily lives of people at the *"folk"* level*.* This is the religion of the average

believer…often in the lives of people at the rural, peasant, or small village. A significant high level of the population of most societies around the world function at this level. Here there is a great deal of variance in the content, and even in the structure of belief systems of the people, although the primary contrast is between the *Great* and *Little Tradition*. *Little Tradition* beliefs correlate poorly with what is defined as orthodox by the *Great Tradition*. The *Great Tradition* tries to control the lower levels, and determine for them what is orthodox and correct, but in most areas of the non-Western world this is difficult. The "fit" is better if channels of communication between the top and the bottom are good, but this is most often not the case.

Redfield also notes that ideas most often spread horizontally through the "*folk*" channels of communication across the *Little Tradition*. They may also move up from the *Little Tradition* and find acceptance in the *Great Tradition*, or they may be passed down from the *Great* to the *Little Tradition*. Change is introduced in a number of ways, but it is usually very slow compared to changes in the Western world. In addition, Redfield adds that the leaders at the level of *Great Tradition* may be unaware of variations at *Little Tradition* level.

In teaching the course, I draw these and other concepts together, and consistently refer back to *The Excluded Middle* in Western cognitive orientation. This middle realm of belief, as we have seen, is important and even vital to the belief systems of non-Western peoples, structurally and practically. If we neglect it or disregard it, we will have potentially serious problems in communicating the Gospel to people in other cultures. Having been trained in Western education modes of thought, our automatic reaction is to exclude this middle level and look for answers in other categories of thought.

Historically, and even today, when many cross-cultural workers enter a new society, many are not aware of the kinds of differences that people make in categorizing religious beliefs. The workers focus on learning the language and proclaiming the Gospel and generally assume God will take care of the rest. An understanding of *Religious Belief Systems* is a tool in the process of contextualizing the Gospel in a new society; but, it is a <u>crucial</u> tool. For example, there are some typical mistakes to be seen as *inferences* are drawn from these various models:

1. Most Western-trained missionaries and preachers, both having a Western cognitive orientation centered in the *"High Religion"* realm, tend to concentrate almost

entirely on issues of *"High Religion"* which they believe are essential to bring about changes in the lives of people to whom they take the Gospel. This is especially true if they have no training in cultural anthropology. Because *"high religion"* is the central area of concern in *their* lives, and because they are *specialists* in areas dealing with a high content of theory, they unconsciously expect that to be the focal point to be dealt with in the lives of others. Often, their communication is framed in "high religion" sorts of concepts…primarily in theological language, a major component of their own education. Even thought this may be "simplified" by those working in a second culture, at least by *their* standards, it often seems irrelevant *to the daily lives and needs of average people.*

       2. Western-oriented people often do not notice the *Low Religion* of a particular area, or if they do, they usually discount its importance. In the scientifically-trained worldview of the Western missionary, hearing that sickness is caused by witchcraft or evil spirits seems like superstitious nonsense. He knows that germs cause sickness.   Even though he knows the Bible teaches the interrelationship of the seen and unseen world of spirits, and though intellectually he believes the Bible, he is *conditioned* in his automatic responses to such phenomena by his own *scientific* training. He mentally takes the *supernatural* of *low religion* and puts it into the *natural* category of his own Western belief system, or excludes it entirely as "superstition." Of course this is mainly due to the "excluded middle" in the Western worldview and the failure to understand the importance of that entire area in the lives of non-Westerners which is so important to them.

       Obviously the form of Christianity that comes to non-Western peoples often fails to answer the questions raised in their daily lives. These questions <u>were</u> answered by their old low religion. For this reason, new converts usually turn back to the old religion to meet these needs.   Or they may take some religious symbol from the new religion, like the cross, and treat it like the old low religion symbols are used (e.g., as magical).

       There are some uncomplicated solutions to these problems; however, they have profound implications. It must be emphasized that:

       1. Cross-cultural workers must communicate *in the forms* of Christianity that speak to these *immediate, daily real needs*.   It is usually much more appealing to people in *"traditional"* or *"folk"* cultures to relate the Gospel to points of need they feel now, than to begin with the cosmological issues of belief found in the "*High Religion*" domain of

Christianity. The Bible <u>does</u> speak to those felt (and deeper *true*) needs, and those biblical solutions must be studied, learned in an *emic* context, and applied in new cultures.

2. Cross-cultural workers must discover the cognitive domains of explanation in particular societies and speak to all of those domains.   If they only work with one area, viz., the *"High Religion,"* people will be only *"partially converted."*   Many, if not most, "Christians" in the non-Western world seem to be *"High Religion"* converts, but functioning *"folk religionists."* Lack of understanding on the part of Western cross-cultural communicators of the intricacies of other belief systems may be at least partially responsible for this very large and continuing problem among people who claim to be Christians in every society around the world.

What I have described thus far deals with issues that are at the core of this course, but, as I noted at the beginning of this paper, there is much more. The topics we cover in class, and through assigned readings are:

(1)   History of the Anthropological Study of Religious Belief Systems
(2)   Animism-The Starting Point
(3)   The Flaw of the Excluded Middle
(4)   Western Beliefs vs. Traditional
(5)   Witchcraft, Sorcery and Magic
(6)   Religious/Magical Practitioners
(7)   Nuer Religion
(8)   Worldviews & Kinship-Based Cultures
(9)   Sins: Cultural or Theological
(10) Symbolism and Ritual
(11) Power Concepts
(12) Spirit Possession
(13) Power Encounter
(14) Kalabari Worldview
(15) High and Low Religion
(16) Cognitive Categories & Conversion

I also use several videos to give a visual representation of what is primarily theoretical to these students who have a limited cross-cultural experience.

The course papers done by students in this class have given some surprising results of what they have learned and applied in the course, many of them in ways that take the application of this knowledge beyond what they are expected to grasp in this undergraduate class. As the course progresses, students are given more complex case studies and demonstrate models of those belief systems, adding more content to the simple model with which we begin. They are encouraged to think through the intricacies of the specific system

they are studying and to diagram and analyze the belief system as carefully as they can. Their final course paper must include the model they construct and explain the rationale for the way elements are placed in the model.

My objective today is to give you a *taste* of what we teach at Toccoa Falls College in the School of World Missions, specifically in the analysis of *religious belief systems*. As I noted earlier, one of the major reasons I teach this course is to emphasize how and why students should do more in-depth study as to how people of other cultures *think.*

Listening to a former student of mine, now a missionary, speaking of his work among the Fulani in Guinea, I was interested to hear how he had applied some of the principles learned in class. He and his wife have worked there fifteen years. He emphasized that two factors were important in reaching the Fulani. First, relationships had to be established. *"People,"* he said, *"must know you before they will believe what you have to say. And you have to demonstrate that you believe what you say."* Then he added, *"Western people tend to start with the roof…but with the Fulani, we have to build a foundation first."*[6] I took this as a confirmation that he had applied lessons he had learned in the School of World Missions at Toccoa Falls College.

I believe that as students of *Religious Belief Systems* communicate the Gospel in other cultural frames of reference, they will be able to better understand systems of thought and belief as they work within the worldviews of the people they have gone to serve. I trust that you will consider the benefits of such training for all students in ministry, especially those planning to be cross-cultural workers.

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[1]Any analysis should be done on the basis of and understanding of culture from the inside. This insider's viewpoint is known as an *emic* perspective. The perspective of the informed outsider is called an *etic* perspective. The terms were developed by linguist, Kenneth Pike, for many years associated with the Wycliffe Bible Translators, and are now widely used by anthropologists.
[2]General systems theory grew out of the work of Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972). It encouraged anthropologists to examine cultures as systems composed of both human and non-human elements. It presumed that the normal state of a system was equilibrium and described the various methods by which systems deviated from states of balance and were returned to them. Roy A. Rappaport (1926-1997) was a major proponent (cf. "Ritual Regulation of Environmental Relations Among a New Guinea People"). Other

background is given in *Understanding Folk Religion*, P. Hiebert, R.D. Shaw, and T. Tienou, chapter 2.

[3]Here I am referring to what is known as the "psychological functionalism" of Bronislaw Malinowski. Briefly stated, the theory is that cultural institutions function to meet the basic physical and psychological needs of people in a society.

[4]A sub-category of cultural anthropology known as "Cognitive Anthropology" has helped to formulate some of my thinking, however a weakness of this model, which I believe to be very important, is its lack of emphasis on the use of historical contexts in this type of analysis.

[5]The following statements are drawn largely from *African Traditional Thought and Western Science*, by Robin Horton, in *Rationality,* Bryan R. Wilson, ed. and from *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West*, by Robin Horton (See bibliography for full references).

[6]From Kenneth Blackwell, speaking at the First Alliance Church, Toccoa , Georgia, February, 2003.

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