Anthropological Theory

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Both Sherwood Lingenfelter and Charles Kraft are prominent Christian anthropologists, broadly influencing the missiological community. Lingenfelter is an author and administrator, currently the Provost of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, CA. Two of his more popular books[1] are *Ministering Cross-Culturally* (1986) and *Transforming Culture* (1992). Kraft, a part-time professor at Fuller and the President of Deep Healing Ministries, is a prolific writer. For this question, two of his books are immediately applicable, *Christianity in Culture* (1979) and *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (1996). Although the underlying relationship between Lingenfelter and Kraft is not explicated in their writings, both make reference to the other in their books. Lingenfelter (1992) challenges Kraft's assumption that culture is neutral. Kraft (1996) responds in a somewhat conciliatory tone.

In *Transforming Culture*, Lingenfelter (1992) argues that culture is not neutral, but in actuality, it is a "prison of disobedience." Fallen man has created institutions of culture that are themselves structurally evil. Consequently, he makes the case that not only is man sinful in nature, but also his way of looking at and evaluating his world and the structures he has created are likewise sinful. Apart from Christ, Lingenfelter does not see a way for man to escape his own nature and his created structures. He challenges Kraft's (1979) presentation of culture – a somewhat neutral vehicle from and through which Christianity can dynamically emerge.

Kraft (1979), in *Christianity in Culture*, presents a widely influential argument that culture may well be analyzed by thinking of it in terms of form and meaning. For example, an expression of courteous greeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina looks different than the same expression in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. When I travel to Buenos Aires, my host and his family greet me with warm hugs and kisses on the cheek. In fact, everyone greets everyone else similarly. In Milwaukee, my friends will shake my hand, but may stand at a distance and will not offer a hug. Kraft's point is that the cultural form may vary, but the meaning is the same. The kisses and the handshake, different in form, are both expressions of greeting with very similar meanings. Therefore, he argues that a missionary should strongly consider using local cultural forms as dynamic equivalents of Scriptural truths. In so arguing, his underlying assumption is that the cultural form is not inherently evil. This differs from Lingenfelter's stated argument.

What anthropological theories underlie these two approaches to culture? What is nature of culture? What is the role of humanity in culture? What effect has sin had on

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[1] According to Amazon.com

man and culture? The following table charts the anthropological theories that inform these two prominent Christian anthropologists:

| Sherwood Lingenfelter | Charles Kraft |
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| <ul><li>Lingenfelter earned his Ph.D. in Anthropology from the University of Pittsburgh, studying under George Murdock, a cultural evolutionist whose focus was social structures.</li><li>Lingenfelter did fieldwork among the Yap people in the South Pacific.</li><li>Whereas *Ministering Cross-Culturally* focused on cultural values, *Transforming Cultures* predominantly concerns itself with various social structures and the "social games" played within each of them.</li><li>Lingenfelter (1992) is notably influenced by the British anthropologist Mary Douglas.[2] Douglas (1973), in *Natural Symbols*, introduced the Grid/Group model for describing social games. Lingenfelter adapts this model to multiple social relationships.[3]</li><li>In several unstructured interviews with Judith Lingenfelter, she told me that Sherwood came to his beliefs about culture as a "prison of disobedience" through a careful study of the Bible.</li><li>He has also been influenced by the work of Margaret Archer. Archer</li></ul> | <ul><li>Kraft's (1979) form/meaning correlation is attributed to Ralph Linton's (1935) book *The Study of Man*. Linton, along with Margaret Mead, were culture/personality anthropologists.</li><li>In his later work, Kraft (1996) praises the work of Michael Kearney (1984) and Robert Redfield (1953), who write extensively on the subject of worldviews. Whereas Lingenfelter is oriented toward a society, Kraft is oriented toward culture.</li><li>Kraft calls for dynamically equivalent churches, theology, translations, and more. He believes that God is able to use almost any cultural form in a host society.</li><li>Kraft (1996) argues that people are sinful, not culture. He believes that people sin, not cultural institutions. He argues that culture is in the minds of people. Culture is represented by symbols that have been clustered into schemes. These assumptions are similar to Claude Levi-Strauss' French structuralism. Also similar to Levi-</li></ul> |

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[2] Douglas, who studied under Edward Evans-Pritchard, follows in a long line of British anthropologists who were functionalists. British functionalism had two schools of thought. The first was psychological functionalism, led by Bronislaw Malinowski who studied how cultures functioned to meet the psychological, physical, and emotional needs of individuals. The second school of British functionalism was structural or social functionalism, represented by Alfred Radcliffe-Brown. This school studied how the structures of culture functioned to maintain the equilibrium of societies. Douglas was a structural or social functionalist.

[3] In my view, Douglas' model has several significant problems. These are noted carefully by her follows in two books, *Essays in the Sociology of Perception*, edited by Douglas herself, and *Culture Theory*, written by Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky. Douglas' model was first presented as a hypothesis; it was not grounded in research data. Field tests of grid/group often resulted in central tendency error, i.e., rather than neatly dividing into one of Douglas' four quadrants on her Grid/Group $X$ and $Y$ axes, respondents tended to plot toward the center. The model does not provide an explanation for culture change. Douglas' followers have suggested the addition of a third dimension, a $Z$ axis, which would represent power. Aaron Wildavsky (1984) uses the model to describe Moses' leadership of the Israelites. Lingenfelter has adapted it to describe the social game in various relationships.

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| argues that there are no patterns of culture, but that culture is constantly changing. Culture does not have norms. What is normative is change. | Strauss' structuralism is Kraft's argument that culture has surface and deep levels. Victor Turner's anthropological work focused on the role of symbols. Kraft's descriptions are similar to Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology and "thick descriptions." |
| ■ Lingenfelter has also been influenced by the writings of Richard Adam (1975). Adams argues that power is the control of resources, whether material or human. | ■ Kraft (1996) in his later writings takes a more conciliatory tone regarding culture. He acknowledges that he and Lingenfelter actually agree on almost every aspect of culture except the notion that people sin versus structures sin. Kraft acknowledges that there are sinful aspects of culture.[4] |
| ■ Rather than accommodating culture, Lingenfelter argues that sinful cultural institutions must be confronted at their power source. Underlying this methodology are the assumptions that change occurs because of conflict rather than because of ideology. His orientation is societal, not cultural. Note the emphasis of Eric Wolf, an Austrian born, anthropologist, who similarly argues in relationship to human poverty, its causes and cures. | |

What are the implications of these two approaches upon missiological strategies and ministries? For the sake of clarity, it may be helpful to be more specific about each approach. For example, Lingenfelter uses Douglas' model to describe social relationships and function. He describes culture as a "prison of disobedience." He says that culture is sinful. He believes that cultures do not have normative patterns, but are in a constant state of change. He feels that culture change takes place when the power sources are confronted.

Douglas' model is useful in that it provides a mechanism for describing social relationships and function. It is similar to the work of Geert Hofstede. If cultures indeed are prisons of disobedience, then is Lingenfelter arguing for cultural determinism? Of the statements in the preceding paragraph, which summarize Lingenfelter's anthropology, the most significant is the belief about how culture change occurs. If culture change takes place predominately through making change at the societal and structural levels, then this has a direct implication upon missiology. If, however Kraft is right, that one's orientation should be toward culture and ideology, then an entirely different missiological strategy emerges.

Following Lingenfelter, I would want to direct missiological endeavors toward changing society at the structural level. I would work to bring down sinful institutions of

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[4] In reading Lingenfelter and Kraft (and also talking extensively with Judith Lingenfelter), I believe too much in made over the differences between Sherwood Lingenfelter and Charles Kraft with respect to the "prison of disobedience" expression. In *Transforming Culture*, Lingenfelter's ultimate methodologies are strikingly similar to Kraft's (1979). Also, in *Christianity in Culture*, I think Kraft actually acknowledges in several places that he understands how culture is used in sinful ways by fallen man. The more significant difference between these two Christian anthropologists lies in the emphasis on society versus culture. The implications are described in my conclusion.

culture whether they are corporations that are amassing wealth at the expense of impoverishing local societies or unbiblical stratifications of society like the five-tier India caste system. I would assume that a change in structure would result ultimately in a change in culture. Today, this approach fits very nicely into the strategy of working toward an implementation of Kingdom values throughout all of society.

Following Kraft (1979), I would want to direct missiological endeavors toward changing cultural assumptions or worldviews. The most important tasks would be related to ideology. David Hesselgrave (1994) would concur, arguing that stories create worldviews. Jim Slack and J.O. Terry (1997) argue that the last stronghold in seeing cultures change is the worldview.

In conclusion, I would argue for a both/and approach to missions. Rather than discarding the notion of sinful structures, I would agree with Lingenfelter that some structures are unbiblical. They need to be addressed. In emergency situations, they need to be confronted aggressively. For example, if we know of specific girls who are being held captive for prostitution trade, every effort should be made to free them. This effort is important. At the same time, I do not believe that such power confrontations bring about actual cultural change. A concurrent strategy is warranted where, through meaningful relationships, people are taught the Gospel with the goal of salvation. This involves a change in worldview or deep cultural assumptions. One only needs to travel to Klaipeda, Lithuania to see the failure of conflict theory as a means for culture change.