Clash in Worldview and the Peoples of South Asia

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Introduction

Jesus said in Matthew 28:18–20, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

For nearly 2,000 years, the fulfillment of this Great Commission has been a centuries-distant dream for some, a seemingly impossible daydream for others. Today there is light at the end of the missiological tunnel. Insights from the study of anthropology for Christian witness have contributed to the advance of the gospel among all peoples.

The Lord commanded us to "go and make disciples of all nations." The word *nations* does not refer to countries, which are geographic and political entities, but rather to "people groups" that have their own separate languages and cultures—such as the Kurds, Tung, and Pathan. It is estimated that there are approximately 6,000 ethno-linguistic peoples worldwide.[1] The Word of God explicitly states that around the throne of God in heaven there will be representatives "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

Today we are closer than ever to seeing this become a reality. One of the reasons is the growing understanding of anthropology for effective Christian witness to all peoples. According to Charles H. Kraft in *Anthropology for Christian Witness*, understanding often comes from a clash in worldview. This paper presents how a clash in worldview led to new understanding in the AD2000 & Beyond Movement and a major initiative among the peoples of India. It shows

how some of the insights gained in chapters one to fourteen of the text relate to this practical situation and how these new insights can be applied to my own ministry?

The Setting for the Clash in Worldview

In this paper worldview is defined as "the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments/allegiances underlying a people's perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions." (Kraft 1996:52)

In November 1995 representatives from seventy-seven countries met to launch the five-year final thrust of the AD 2000 & Beyond Movement. The twofold strategy involved: 1) countrywide AD 2000 Initiatives—with a priority focus on establishing a church planting movement among the least evangelized ethno-linguistic peoples in the country and 2) Joshua Project 2000—a global focus on the least evangelized ethno-linguistic peoples in excess of 10,000 persons. The AD 2000 resource networks, also called strategic networks and tracks as well as the AD2000 task forces became the main enablers of the bi-focal countrywide and worldwide strategy. The expected result of these combined initiatives was a church for every people and the gospel for every person by December 31, 2000.

However, Dr. Raju Abraham, an articulate neurologist who had been working among the peoples of North India, brought a different basic set of assumptions to the table in representation of Christian leaders in India. This resulted in a major clash in pursuing a way forward together. Because the different worldview was addressed with a group of core international leaders prior to the event, the clash resulted in greater understanding on how to proceed in the Launch. Working through the clash on worldview fueled the church planting efforts in the country of India. In addition, it reinforced the importance and approach to the on-going development of the strategy of national initiatives.

Raju Abraham was born near Bombay and brought up in a non-Christian family. He obtained his medical training in England. Among several influential experiences in his life he studied three months at L'Abri in Switzerland and served with Mother Theresa in Calcutta for a few months. Following his time with Mother Theresa's ministry, Raju traveled around India, visiting Christian mission stations and Hindu holy places. He studied Islam and Judaism for eighteen months while working as a resident in a hospital in the Arab quarter of Israel. Through the process he concluded that the major strategy for South Asia involved prioritizing North India because of it's strategic importance. North India is important because it is the national political center. It is important in sheer population of 400 million people. Spiritually, North India is a major heartland of Hinduism and Islam. There is extreme poverty. North India experiences the lowest Christian presence in the country, with .1 percent Christian compared to more than three percent countrywide. Dr. Raju Abraham became the Secretary for Research, Development and Outreach, with Emmanuel Hospital Association (EHA). EHA associates 1,000 medical doctors in many mission hospitals scattered throughout India. Raju also serves as the coordinator of the Unreached Peoples Track of the AD2000 Movement for South Asia.

The Nature of the Clash in Worldview

The Editorial Committee of the selected Joshua Project 2000 list of 1739 ethno-linguistic peoples argued that the most effective way to accomplish the goal of a church for every people was by focusing on the ethno-linguistic peoples. The representatives from India presented an alternative worldview regarding the peoples of India and how to reach them. Dr. Raju Abraham noted that the growth of the church in India could only happen if we grasp the thorny and complex problem of reaching people groups. Raju noted: "We have to understand what a people group is--essentially that members of a people group have a sense of geographic location, a sense

of identity or 'we' feeling, and a partially shared social system. We have studied carefully the people group approach and have adopted the conclusions of the Anthropological Society of India as noted below."

They discovered that the knowledge of a group's self-perception and its perception by others is relevant for developing outreach strategies and moving towards an understanding of the groups God had called them to reach. For example, some of the responsive people groups in the state of Uttar Pradesh they studied were the eighteen million Chamars, the one million Balmikis and the Rajputs, Thakurs and Yadavs (eleven million each). Focusing on people groups could result in fresh mass movements into the Kingdom.

The Worldview held by Christian Leaders in India

In 1992 The Anthropological Society of India under the leadership of its director Dr. K. N. Singh launched *The People of India Project* first volume. This is one of the most far-reaching ethnographical studies this century that would eventuate in a projected total of seventy-two volumes. Begun in 1985, as many as 500 scholars—mostly anthropologists, took part spending over 26,000 days in the field interviewing an equal number of people in 5,000 villages spread over most of the districts of India in ninety-one eco-cultural zones. There were over 100 workshops held to discuss the findings at its various stages in which a further 2,500 scholars participated. 120 volumes of typed information were put on 350 floppy discs to be used through the National Informatics Centre.

The results confirmed some assumptions and corrected others. There are 2,795 communities in India close to previous estimates. However only 325 languages are spoken compared to the 1,500 previously thought. Twenty-four different scripts are used to write them in. A community or caste is a dynamic category, continually redefining itself, its relationship

with other communities and its relationship with its social and physical environment. A surprising fact is that 80% of Indian communities are non-vegetarian. Another interesting fact is that the majority of people are immigrants. Almost all the communities had oral historical traditions of migrating to that part of the country from another part. Communities derived their names from traditional occupations they were expected to follow but more and more they have been moving out of their traditional occupation.

Christian researchers and leaders in India have embraced the conclusions of the Anthropological Society of India in defining people groups. A people group is a caste, a community or a tribe that has at least the following characteristics: 1) they only marry among themselves; 2) they see themselves as distinct from others; 3) others identify them as being distinctive; and 4) they share similar customs, food and dress. They may not all speak the same language. Many of them have similar occupations but this is becoming less common as modernization occurs. The first three are essential to be identified as a distinct people group in India.

The Worldview Held by Christian Leaders in the AD2000 & Beyond Movement

The resource networks were the building blocks of the AD2000 Movement to this point of its ten-year history. Their integrated vision embraced the perspective of ethno-linguistic peoples as being the primary target of the goal of a church for every people. Their basic assumption was that the most effective way to establish a church planting movement among every people was to focus on the linguistically distinct peoples in the world. On the basis of this presupposition, the purpose of the resource networks is to network church leaders for an intensified effort of world evangelization. They seek to intensify, galvanize and accelerate vision for world evangelization within that interest group. Their purpose is to stimulate the vision of a

particular Global Resource Network as it interfaces with the purpose of the AD 2000 & Beyond Movement. The strategic global networks are designed to encourage cooperative relationships with existing movements, networks and structures that result in coordinated efforts to evangelize unreached peoples and urban centers. In seeking to interface with our colleagues from India however, the clash occurred as they sought to implement their vision of Bible translation, radio, Jesus Film, Audio Recordings and so on based on language.

How the Insights Gained in Chapters One to Fourteen of the Text Relate to the Clash in Worldview

There are Different Ways to Look and Report on the Same Reality

For resource network leaders involved in the AD2000 & Beyond Movement the way to view the challenge of the unfinished task of establishing a church planting movement among the unreached peoples was to view an unreached people primarily in terms of their linguistically distinctiveness. However, the same reality of the unfinished task and the imperative of Christ's mandate to make disciples of the peoples was looked upon by Christian colleagues from India in a different way. They viewed the primary challenge as establishing a church planting movement and an effective Christian witness not as linguistically distinct peoples but rather as people groups narrowly defined in conformity with the view of the Anthropological Society of India.

Anthropology Deals with What People Do and Think

The resource networks are highly focused on their own functional calling. This is what they do and it is how they think. The Radio Task Force (World by 2000), for example, identifies and tracks the language groups of the world, setting up networking with the national church or

other mission agencies in each of these areas and producing broadcasts in each language. They do it language by language.

On the other hand the nationals seeking to effectively witness in the own communities on the ground in India did and thought on the basis of people group community rather than linguistically distinct peoples as their primary focus.

Anthropology is a Matter of Perspective, which Approaches a People Holistically

In India some startling facts impressed Christian workers on the importance of people groups as defined by the Anthropological Society of India in relation to a holistic approach to Christian witness. A few years ago Raju Abraham was involved with some social anthropologists investigating the impact of community health programs on a cluster of twenty villages where there was work for five years or more. They chose two scheduled caste groups to study--the Sharya Rout and the Kacchi. They lived in primitive conditions. They still had a poor immunization record, very little antenatal care take-up, and poor follow up for infectious diseases like tuberculosis. In short, they hardly seemed impacted by the enthusiastic community health programs going on in their villages. The story was different for the upper strata of communities. They were very happy for the programs and cooperated to make things happen in their community.

They realized that focusing attention on the poorer people groups is very important for real impact to those most in need of health facilities. As I traveled with Raju to several of these villages in 1996 the importance of approaching communities holistically became very clear to me.

The second observation was that a geographical approach was not enough to affect change. Change in the Shariya Rout happened more as a result of what was happening to their

community in other villages than among their own neighbors in that village.   Many of the villages that they were active in through the EHC had some of the Shariya Rout but other villages did not. How then could they influence the whole community, which was said to be a large number?

Thirdly, information on the customs of the Shariya Rout was not easily available. Who were they? What was their tradition? How could they contextualize holistic values that would result in the improvement of their whole community?

How these New Insights Can be Applied to My Own Life and Ministry

Do Not Condemn People who Have a Different Position

Raju Abraham appeared intent on disrupting the entire go-forward launch of the last five years of the AD2000 & Beyond Movement. As I spoke with him by phone and other Indian colleagues I was distraught by the impact that this could have on the prayerfully and carefully crafted five-year plan that clearly had the support of the resource network leaders and many national leaders with the AD2000 Movement. In my own spirit I wrestled over several weeks prior to the meeting with the issue and found myself inclined to consider that this was a problem of Raju and the other leaders from India. As we met face to face prior to the Launch alone and with others to address the issue I found that rather than disruption, this view would increase understanding, perspective and even enhancement on how to approach the task before us.

There is a Need to Develop Both an Insider (emic) Perspective as Well as an Outsider (etic) Perspective

The entire episode in relation to clash on worldview led to a major initiative among the peoples of India and greater impetus to the efforts to establish a church among every people. This underscores the value of developing both an emic as well as an etic perspective. The greater understanding of the worldview and approach to fulfilling Christ's mandate in India resulting in being able to communicate the view to those in a position to support the efforts of those serving in India through prayer and financially. On the other hand, the etic perspective reinforced in the mind of those serving in India both the importance of targeting peoples linguistically as well as compiling the information of different peoples by language to enable global functional networks to focus their efforts more precisely. The anthropological study revealed that many peoples thought to have different languages were in fact the same people identified differently reducing the number of languages reported to be spoken in India from 1500 to 325.

How the Understanding Gained by the Clash of Worldviews Resulted in a Major Advance in Christian Witness

As Raju and the other national Christian leaders developed their strategy the importance of looking at the target from various perspectives resulted in the acronym they use called PLUG. PLUG refers to the different targets they are trying to reach through their networks, which are similar to the global resource networks of the AD2000 Movement. Their goal is to establish an effective witness resulting in a church planting movement in every people, in every language, in every urban center, and in every geographic division of North India. Researchers totaled 500 target groups or units in North India, which included 200 people groups, fifty languages, fifty urban areas, and 200 geographical districts. Much like a net, each target group serves as a thread

drawn from a different direction to ensure that every person has a chance to hear, regardless of the language they speak, their cultural grouping, of the city of geographical district in which they reside. These target groups have become the focus of the network's prayer and mobilization efforts.

The intense interchange with Raju resulted in better understanding for many of God's servants. It also contributed to increased commitment to support the vision of the Christian leaders in India. Since the Launch I have been involved in India twelve weeks. Out of the dialogue emerged a twelve-page booklet titled *The Challenge of North India*. Through the distribution of some 25,000 copies of the booklet significant mobilization of prayer, financial and human resources have taken place to support the advancement of the gospel in that land. As my wife Doris and I participated in statewide consultations in each of ten states of North India for five weeks several months ago we were awestruck by all that God is doing in that land.

The clash of worldview that took place at the Launch in November 1995 reinforced an important principle in the countywide initiatives. National leaders were encouraged to develop strategies for their own countries according to their own worldview.

Conclusion

I am convinced that a clash in worldview can often lead to greater understanding among God's people resulting in advance in effective Christian witness among all peoples. Insights from anthropology for Christian witness applied to practical situations can reap wonderful results for the Kingdom of God.

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[1] Kraft, Charles H. *Anthropology for Christian Witness*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996. p. 216.