

# How Do Cultures Really Change? A Challenge to the Conventional Culture Wisdom

by William Bjoraker

## Introduction

The mission of Jesus the Messiah, the gospel, is the most revolutionary force for change on planet Earth. It has changed not just billions of individual lives, but impacted whole cultures and radically transformed societies. Indeed, many of us trace our spiritual ancestry to one of the most famous of these transformations, the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation, which continues to carry deep theological resonances for evangelicals today. Yet, we often bypass any examination of the cultural processes which brought about these transformations. The consequence is that we still lack a clear understanding of the nature of culture and how it really changes.

With the re-emergence in recent years of a strong Kingdom of God vision in our theology of mission, the new vanguard of mission is to be all about changing the world—finding solutions, ways to fix things that are broken, helping to bring change. There is a new focus on social justice by the younger generations and in the emerging churches. Terms like “international development,” “holistic” and “transformation” appear across our mission vernacular as agencies and institutions aim to bring thorough and dramatic change to global conditions. According to the mission statement of the university where I serve as faculty, we are to be “working at the roots of human problems around the world.” The implication is that we want to change culture. Many other contemporary scholars and missiologists are writing about transformation and offering strategies for transformation.<sup>1</sup>

It's also apparent that we are moving beyond ideas of contextualization which affirm the validity of all cultures. We recognize that embedded in all cultures are false beliefs resulting in unjust, oppressive, and degrading practices. We affirm that Jesus' inaugural gospel-of-the-Kingdom message in Nazareth was “to preach the gospel to the poor; to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed...” (Luke 4:18-19). This holistic message addresses the spiritual, psychological,

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*William (Bill) Bjoraker is a theologian of mission specializing in Jewish Studies and Contemporary Western Culture. He and his wife served in pastoral and teaching roles as missionaries in Israel for eight years. His PhD dissertation, “Faith, Freedom and Radical Individualism in Late Modern America,” assessed individualistic social dynamics in late modern American culture. Bjoraker serves on the faculty of William Carey International University, and as a missionary to the Jewish people under the General Council of the Assemblies of God.*

physical, social, economic, and political needs of people in cultural systems vandalized by sin and evil. This is a call to work for the restoration of societies to *shalom* (wholeness and human flourishing).

These currents suggest that our mission is to follow Jesus in word and deed, and to be in the business of changing cultures. It presses us to ask how we best go about changing culture. So, the fundamental question is, “How do cultures really change?”

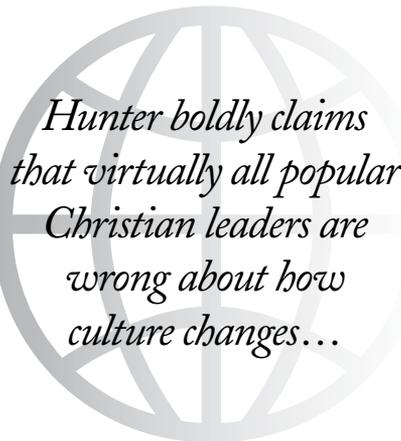
These are the questions taken up by James Davison Hunter (LaBrosse-Levinson Distinguished Professor of Religion, Culture and Social Theory at the University of Virginia and Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture). In his recent book, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford University Press, 2010), Hunter challenges much of our conventional wisdom on culture and culture change. This paper is my effort to glean from Hunter’s insights and suggest their implications for missiology.

Though his focus is North American culture and religion, for at least two reasons Hunter’s work is relevant to our mission in non-Western cultures. First, the United States still has massive influence worldwide. In an age of globalization, what happens in America and how things work in America have consequences throughout much of the world. Second, and more importantly, since we know from the Bible that there is a fixed human nature—all are created in the Image of God—there are culture-constants or universals; principles and patterns that hold true in every society. People differ *widely*, but not *wildly*.

My departure point, therefore, will be Hunter’s book, which consists of three parts: “Essay I: Christianity and World-Changing,” “Essay II: Rethinking Power,” and “Essay III: Toward a New City Commons: Reflections on a Theology of Faithful

Presence.” Since readers of *IJFM* are mostly interested in the cultural anthropology and the transmission of the gospel, this paper will primarily discuss Essay I.

Hunter boldly claims that virtually all popular Christian leaders are wrong about how culture changes, and counters with his own propositions. If he is right, we need to learn from him. If he is wrong, we need to refute him. What is at stake? Perhaps any success in facilitating cultural transformation toward Kingdom of God values in global mission efforts.



Here is how we will proceed:

1. We will use five examples to see the failure of what Hunter calls “the common view” about how Christianity can change culture.
2. We will consider conventional wisdom’s explanation of the failure.
3. We will consider Hunter’s explanation of “the real problem,” and twelve propositions about culture and how it changes.
4. We will reflect on evidence from history that verifies these propositions.
5. We will revisit the five examples to consider how the twelve propositions better explain the phenomena.
6. We will consider missiological implications.

All references to Hunter’s book will be simply: (p.\_\_\_\_) or (pp.\_\_\_\_).

### *The Failure of Conventional North American Culture Wisdom*

Hunter contends that the dominant ways of thinking about culture and culture-change among influential evangelicals are flawed, for they are based on specious social science and problematic theology. He summarizes this conventional view succinctly: “The essence of culture is found in the *hearts and minds of individuals*” (p.6, italics his). The “common view” is that culture is found in the beliefs and values held by the majority of individuals and the choices made on the basis of those beliefs and values. If a culture is good, it is because people’s good values lead to good choices. If people’s hearts and minds are converted, they will have the right values, will make the right choices, and culture will change. Most recently this has been expressed as “worldview” thinking.<sup>2</sup> So the task of culture-change is one of changing the worldviews of individuals.

Hunter especially takes on Charles Colson, one who has popularized Christian worldview thinking.<sup>3</sup> Hunter quotes Colson,

History is little more than the recording of the rise and fall of the great ideas—the worldviews—that form our values and move us to act (1999:17).

The focus is on the intellectual battle of ideas. The strategy is to impart the Christian worldview (read: Christian truth claims as they bear on every academic discipline and cultural domain) to as many individuals as possible. As the number of individuals who hold the Christian worldview grows, this will change the culture. Quoting Colson again: “transformed people transform cultures” (1999:295). Colson summarizes the strategy thus:

If our culture is to be transformed, it will happen from the bottom up—from ordinary believers practicing apologetics over the backyard fence or around the barbecue grill (1999:32).

Note the phrase, “from the bottom up.” Hunter will critique this as he proceeds.

Hunter quotes many leaders and activists, both Protestant and Catholic, as holding this conventional view, including Bill Bright, Billy Graham, James Dobson's "The Truth Project,"<sup>4</sup> and Pope John Paul II (pp. 10-11). Hunter also notes that

a cottage industry has arisen in response to the desire for "worldview training": there are worldview summer camps, worldview institutes, home school curricula, and an endless number of books on the subject.<sup>5</sup>

Hunter grants,

all of these things are good and great good can come from them. But do they change the world? The answer is both yes and no; but mostly no. Cultures simply do not change in these ways, or at least not in the way people think they do (p.18).

He contends that this model not only does not work, but it cannot work. On this basis, Christians cannot "change the world."

Hunter gives historical evidence that this "common view" does not reflect how cultures really change. If culture-change were simply the cumulative effect of ideas and beliefs in the hearts and minds of the majority, then the influence of minorities would be relatively insignificant. But historically they are not. He then offers the following examples from the United States (pp. 19-22), not for evaluating their ideas, but to note that minority groups and views can and do have disproportionate influence:

### ***Five Examples that Belie Conventional Culture Wisdom***

1. *The Influence of Christian Faith in Culture.* Christianity has been a dominant presence in America throughout its history. Today, 86-88% of Americans adhere to some faith commitment. Yet American culture—business culture, law and government, the academic world, popular entertainment—is intensely materialistic and secular. Why have Christian

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- ideas and values not been more influential?
2. *The American Jewish Community.* Jews have never comprised more than about 3.5% of American society. By the common view, then, the Jewish contribution would be insignificant. Yet Jewish contributions to science, literature, art, music, film and architecture are unrivaled. Why is this so?
3. *The Gay Community and Gay Rights Movement.* This community comprises only 3% of the population, yet its influence has become enormous. The majority remain troubled about homosexuality, but it is a raging debate. How does such a small minority have such influence?
4. *Darwinism Still the Official Creed in Public Schools.* A recent Gallup poll showed an even split between those who believe Darwinian macro-evolution is supported by the evidence and those who do not. Only 13% said God had no part in evolution and 83% take some form of a providentialist view of origins. So if the worldview ("hearts and minds") of the majority is what shapes and changes culture, why do public school curriculums not reflect this view?
5. *Abortion on Demand.* The Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* was institutionalized into the U.S. legal system. Pew Forum surveys say only 15% hold that abortion should be always legal; 50% say only in some circumstances should it be legal. But laws do not reflect this majority opinion. Why is this the case?

What explains the failure of the majority's worldview to shape the culture? We will revisit this question at the end

of this two-part article to see what light the twelve propositions on culture and culture change give us (Hunter's eleven and my added twelfth).

### ***The Apparent Problem According to Conventional Wisdom***

Why do these minority groups have disproportionate influence? Hunter contends that, firstly, according to the common view, Christians aren't trying hard enough, are not determined and diligent enough, don't think with an adequate Christian worldview, or don't pray enough. Christians just aren't Christian enough. As Colson (as cited in Hunter, p. 22) says in one of his *Breakpoint* radio commentaries,

If we don't seize the moment... and act on the cultural commission, there will be no culture left to save. But when we do our duty, we can change the world.

Or as Jim Nelson Black put it,

The [culture war] is winnable through the witness of our faith and *through the witness of each individual to take up spiritual arms* against the darkness of this world (as cited in Hunter, p.23, Hunter's italics).

Secondly, apparently there just are not enough of us who hold the Christian worldview. We need larger numbers of Christian worldview holders.

### ***The Real Problem According to Hunter***

Hunter contends that the real problem is three wrong assumptions, which he subsumes under the term "idealism" (p. 24). These three commonly-held assumptions are: *ideas-as-primary-in-culture*, *individualism*, and *pietism*. He traces this idealism from its origins with Plato through the German Enlightenment and Hegel (p. 24). He notes the well-known maxim and

title of the classic book by Richard Weaver (1948), *Ideas have Consequences*. Hunter contends that the role of ideas in culture is exaggerated because idealism misconstrues human agency, “underplays the importance of history,” “ignores the way culture is generated, coordinated, and organized,” and imputes more logic, linearity and rationality to culture than is there (p. 26). He asserts that every strategy for changing the world that is based upon these assumptions will fail—“not most of these strategies, but all.” Hunter’s arguments against these assumptions are fundamental to his theory of cultural change.

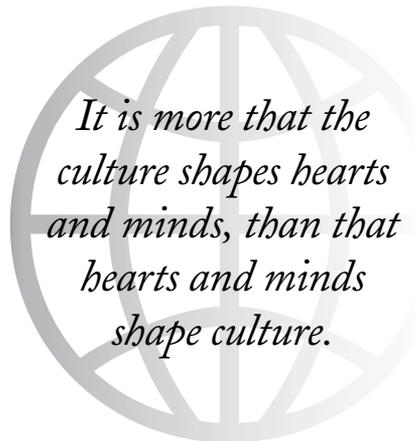
*Against Idealism (ideas-as-primary-in-culture):* Ideas do not drive history, except as they are grounded in social conditions. Hunter states,

Ideas do have consequences in history, yet not because those ideas are inherently truthful or obviously correct but rather because of the ways they are embedded in very powerful institutions, networks, interests, and symbols (p. 44).

*Against Individualism:* Hunter describes individualism as that “which influences us to view the autonomous and rational individual—even if a genius—as the key actor in social change...” (pp. 44). Individualistic societies and the notion of the autonomous self are largely a phenomenon of modernity and Western civilization.<sup>6</sup> Cultures are viewed as constituted and changed through the actions of aggregated individuals. Accompanying this is the notion that “cultural change can be willed into being.... And cultural change is democratic—it occurs through the actions of ordinary people, from the bottom up” (p.31). Hunter argues, rather, that it is networks of elites and the institutions they create that make a difference. He argues that it is more that the culture shapes hearts and minds, than that hearts and minds shape culture.

*Against Pietism:* At the risk of over-generalizing, the most important goal in life according to the Christian

pietistic tradition is having one’s being right before God, pursuing true spirituality and personal holiness as individuals and in the church. There is nothing exceptional or wrong with this view, but “as an element of a working theory of culture, that is something else altogether” (p. 26). This ethos often marginalizes concerns outside of the individual or the church. “In this light, pietism is sympathetic to idealism in the way that it extends idealism into the realm of the religious, spiritual and supernatural conceptions of reality” (p. 26). Pietism “is a natural link



to both idealism and individualism” (p. 26). It holds that the more godly individuals we have, the more culture will change and that hearts and minds are the primary source of culture.

### *Hunter’s Propositions on Culture and Culture-Change*

Hunter offers seven propositions on culture, then four on culture-change (pp. 32-44). I will quote (in italics) each of Hunter’s propositions, then summarize his views and add my own views. Finally, I will add a twelfth proposition of my own.

#### Seven Propositions on the Nature of Culture

##### *1. Culture is a system of truth claims and moral obligations.*

Culture is a complex of commanding truths and moral obligations that one adheres by virtue of one’s membership in a group (p.33). They do not exist as propositions, but are embedded within narratives and myths that bring mean-

ing to members of that society. These myths and narratives have overlapping worldviews and deep assumptions about reality that operate far below what most people can articulate, and by which people in a society navigate life.

#### *Bjoraker’s Comments:*

I believe Hunter is correct here, but does not go far enough. He describes truth claims and moral obligations, but does not adequately describe the *affective* level—the values, concerns, desires, loves, hopes and fears that characterize a culture. Missiologists tend to follow social theorists Morris Opler, Talcott Parsons, Edward Shils, and Clyde Kluckhohn, who introduced the theory that humans have three inherent dimensions: cognitive, evaluative and *affective* (Hiebert 2008:25). Beliefs (the cognitive), values (the evaluative), and *feelings* (the affective)—all of which are shaped by experience—comprise worldview, and from worldview comes speech and behavior (2008:49). Though Hunter does allude to the other dimensions and deeper levels by mentioning embedded myths and that “frameworks of meaning by which we navigate life exist ‘prereflectively,’ prior to conscious awareness” (p.33), he does not adequately describe the three dimensions of human existence.

One strong indicator of the worldview is captured in the question: Who are the heroes and villains in a society? As Jonathan Swift put it, “Who’er excels in what we prize, appears a hero in our eyes.” Myths—understood not as fiction but as paradigmatic stories in which the history of a people is embedded—are powerful, meaning-producing forces exemplified in the role models with whom people identify and whom they seek to mimic. Stories carry the cognitive, affective and evaluative dimensions of life in a single whole. Any worldview change must involve myth, and myth is personified in heroes. Modernity has emphasized the cognitive (the “left-brain,” the analytic, the linear, the rationalized, the technological). But as Plato is reputed to have said, “Let me

write the songs of a nation and I care not who writes its laws.” The postmodern shift in the West expresses a longing for a new holism.

One way of gaining perspective on the affective dimension of worldview is to ask: Do the dominant stories and myths of a culture resemble a mystery, a romance, a tragedy or a comedy? (Hiebert 2008:65). Myths transmit to each generation the reality and meaning of the community to which they belong. As Rollo May put it,

Our powerful hunger for myth is a hunger for community.... To be a member of one's community is to share in its myths, to feel the same pride that glows within us.... The outsider, the foreigner, the stranger is the one who does not share our myths (1991:45).

The Fall of Man (Genesis 3) resulted in three major consequences in the human psyche: *fear*, *shame* and *guilt*. Although all are present in every culture, each culture has tended to emphasize one of them more than the others, giving a culture or people group a basic orientation in one of the three. This orientation comprises one major theme in their broader worldview. In fact, cultures of the world may be classified based on which of these worldview themes is dominant (the affective dimension is common to all three):

1. *Fear/power* (affective dimension). Largely found in tribal cultures that embrace animism. People fear the spirit world and seek to defeat or placate spirits or gods.
2. *Honor/shame* (affective and evaluative dimensions). Found in group-oriented cultures, primarily in the East and Middle East. People need honor before the group, and the honor of the group comes before the individual. Shame must be avoided at all costs, and at all costs honor must be restored if lost.
3. *Guilt/innocence* (cognitive and affective dimensions). Largely found in Western cultures. There is a desire to restore

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innocence after wrong acts; to expunge guilt and obtain justification (Muller 2000).

We might say that humans generally “feel” their way through life, more than think their way through. As Pascal said, “The heart has its reasons, reason knows not of.” Paul said that those who will be deceived by Satan would perish because “they received not the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10). Truth must be loved not merely known cognitively, and must be loved to be truly known. The Greatest Commandment is to “love the Lord your God...” holistically, yes, but *to love* is the prior verb, not *to know* (Deut. 6:5). The human being as, at base, a loving, desiring creature is good anthropology.

Through a consideration of these three orientations one can begin to see why teaching the Christian worldview (when reduced to a set of cognitive ideas or propositions applied to cultural issues) will not be comprehensive enough to change a culture. Other forces are often more powerful and fundamental than the worldview held by the majority.

Robert Bellah and his associates, in their landmark sociological study of American culture, *Habits of the Heart: Individualisms and Commitment in American Life* (1996), use a rope metaphor to describe four strands of American national culture—the Biblical, the civic/republican, utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism. Referring back to the five examples defying conventional culture wisdom above, what is important to realize about contemporary American culture is that the Biblical strand, which has always been only one of four, has frayed since the 1960s postmodern shift. The republican/civic has frayed as well. The other two strands have become dominant. Put succinctly,

individualism has severely weakened the influence of the Christian worldview, no matter how many may profess Christian faith. Minority groups (like those in the five examples above) have disproportionate influence due to their networking of resources and influence in and through institutions.

I believe that Hunter is correct, then, to think naïve the notion that merely changing the “hearts and minds” (read “ideas”) of individuals will change the culture. Worldview is much more comprehensive than ideas and beliefs, though it includes them. To teach “the Christian worldview” the way it is most popularly done today—imparting the ideas of Christian belief—will not necessarily change worldviews at the deep level. Any teaching of culture-change that remains at the level of rational analysis will have limited effect. Facilitating deep-structure worldview change is a far more complex task.

Even when understood in this more comprehensive sense, worldview is still but one aspect of culture, perhaps less than half of its totality. To “change the world” we must be about more than worldview change. Institutions, networks, interests, economic forces, symbols, forms of power and how they are embedded in structures are at least as decisive in what constitutes a culture (See propositions 3, 4, 5 and 6 below).

**2. Culture is a product of history.** Culture takes form in the slow accretions of meaning over long periods of time. Pierre Bourdieu uses the term “habitus,” defined as the categories, classifications, evaluations and sensibilities of mind which are the individual’s internalization of the social structure and how it is objectified through habits in his or her life. It is the transmission of a tradition at the pre-reflective level.

He calls it “the past which survives in the present,” or “history turned into nature,” *second* nature if you will. Thus, the inertia built into a culture can make it highly resilient over time.

*Bjoraker's Comments:*

I think Hunter is certainly correct here. Most societies listen to the voices of tradition. And even if they do not, or even if they rebel against them, they are nonetheless shaped by their traditions.<sup>7</sup> The past is always prologue. Culture is never a snapshot; it is always a video. What culture is now has been formed by what it was yesterday.

The Exodus is a prime example of such a “myth” for the Jewish people. It is the formative experience of the nation of Israel, to which they look back every year at Passover. It really happened in history. Had you been there with a video camera, you could have filmed it. But it also is myth because the Jewish people use it to interpret their history and cultural identity. For the Greeks, Homer’s *Odyssey* and *Iliad* function this way. For the Romans, it is Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Milton hoped that *Paradise Lost* would so function for the English people.

An implication of this is that anthropological theories that are only *synchronic* (how culture operates in a given point in time) are helpful but inadequate. Deeper understanding of culture requires *diachronic* study (through time).

**3. Culture is intrinsically dialectical.**

There are two ways in which culture is *dialectical* (has a two-way interaction). The first has to do with the relationship between *ideas* and *institutions*. Culture is as much an infrastructure as it is ideas. It takes shape in concrete institutional form. Culture exists at the interface between ideas and institutions, between the symbolic and the social and physical environment—in other words, it is intrinsically dialectical. If the focus is only on worldview, one only

understands half of what is going on in culture. The other half of culture is the nature, workings and power of the institutions in which those worldview themes are generated, embodied, transmitted and managed—institutions such as marriage and the family, the market (business, employers and corporations), the state, constitutions, political parties, law and judicial systems, education, journalism, religion, science, sports, and professions (with their entrance certifications and guilds). These institutions provide patterns and channels for action that



have their own history and logic, and that interact with the ideas and ideals for which they are carriers.

The second way culture is dialectical has to do with the relationship between *individuals* and *institutions*. While individuals have their own worldview, institutions and the larger social order provide the framework and meaning for social relations, and also “act back” on individuals to form the structures of their consciousness. This is the fundamental point of Berger and Luckmann’s *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), now an axiom of social theory.

Individuals are not powerless, but institutions have much greater power. Culture is far more likely to change individuals than individuals are to change culture.

*Bjoraker's Comments:*

Again, I think Hunter is correct. There is a saying in Jewish culture, “It is not that the Jews kept the Sabbath,

but that the Sabbath kept the Jews.” The belief (command) to keep the Sabbath produced the practice. The understanding makes the practice possible, but it is also true that the practice carries and transmits the understanding. There is a dialectical relationship between them. The institution of the Sabbath has had a powerful preserving effect on Jewish identity over millennia.

Hunter does not address two other cultural partners in dialectical relationship—*idealism*, championed by Weber (where ideas generate culture and culture generates institutions), and *materialism*, championed by Marx (where material realities generate culture). The material dimension (including modes of production, market forces, and economic incentives) is constantly in a dialectic with ideas. One can think of economic philosophies, financial institutions, market forces of supply and demand, and the power of money. These all have a life of their own and are generally as strong or stronger than ideas, and they shape people’s worldviews. Think of how the Industrial Revolution created institutions and the unintended consequences that acted back on society in countless ways.

**4. Culture is a resource, and as such a form of power.**

“Cultural production,” understood as the output of ideas, information, and knowledge of all kinds—expressed in speeches, pronouncements, edicts, tracts, essays, books, film, art, law, etc., as well as in materials and rituals—also carries degrees of *symbolic capital*, which is the meaning and prestige imputed to cultural symbols. A war hero, for example, may have symbolic capital in running for political office; so Ulysses S. Grant and Dwight D. Eisenhower were more easily elected president because of their symbolic capital. Like money, symbolic capital can be accumulated. Unlike money, it cannot as readily be transferred from one generation to another, or from one individual to another.

Some individuals, institutions and objects accumulate more symbolic capital than others. For example, a PhD holder typically has more symbolic capital than an auto mechanic. The winner of a Nobel Prize in literature has more symbolic capital than a romance novelist. *The New York Times* has more symbolic capital than *The Dallas Morning News*. Yale and Harvard have more symbolic capital than Bob Jones University. An Oscar has more cachet than a Christian Film and Television Excellence Award. A Rhodes Scholarship carries more than does a Rotary Club scholarship. A BMW carries more than a Honda. This influence carries credibility, prestige, and often an authority that puts one in a position to be listened to.

*Bjoraker's Comments:*

Hunter is stating something obvious to us all, though the notion of *symbolic capital* helps us define it. One can think of families who have great symbolic capital: the Kennedys in the United States; the Ghandis in India, and, of course, the Royal Family in the United Kingdom. So, the question should be asked: where is symbolic capital invested in the people group to which you are called as a missionary, or which you are studying as a missiologist?

*5. Cultural production and symbolic capital are stratified in a fairly rigid structure of "center" and "periphery."*

This is an extension of Proposition 4. With economic capital, *quantity* is paramount. But with symbolic capital, perceived *quality* matters most. The status of symbolic capital ranges from the "center" to the "periphery." Individuals, institutions and networks most critically involved in the production of a culture operate in the center, where prestige is highest, rather than on the periphery, where status is low. *USA Today* may sell more newspapers than *The New York Times*, but *The NYT* is the newspaper of record in America because it is at the center of cultural production,

**T***he key actor or force in history is not individual genius but rather the networks and the new institutions that are created out of those networks.*

not the periphery. Influence follows, for high symbolic capital has greater power to shape culture.

*Bjoraker's Comments:*

Again I concur with Hunter and I might add that shifts in social capital can change who is at the center and who is at the periphery. An example is the shift from the center to periphery of evangelical Protestant Christianity in the United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In early America Christians held the center. They founded Harvard, Princeton and Yale to train Christian ministers. Professing Christians held high political office, and basically ran the country and its institutions. They were the educated elites. They had symbolic capital. As Ralph Winter noted,

They enforced honesty in both public life and business (inventing Dunn and Bradstreet). They created coeducation, banned liquor and slavery, urged use of whole foods and a hundred other things. They even sang of "alabaster cities gleaming...undimmed by human tears" (2007:4).

He suggests that there were at least two factors in the shift. First, between 1876-1930 an inundation of immigrants, mostly from southern Europe and Ireland, tripled the U.S. population. These did not carry the educational and financial resources of the elite and established Northern European evangelicals. They were socially powerless.

Second, when Darwinian thought hit America, many of the educated elites bought into the new science. After the Civil War, evangelist Dwight L. Moody drew huge crowds of blue-collar folk who were appalled by Darwinism and modernism. Polarization ensued—the

fundamentalists labeled the socially conscious Christians "liberals" and focused on evangelism and building Bible Institutes that were outside of the centers of cultural capital. The elite institutions at the center were lost to the "modernists." After the polarizing Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925, the fundamentalists found themselves on the periphery, and those with higher education, the "modernists," held the center. The fundamentalists were not prominent in fighting corruption, disease and poverty, and their more pietistic emphasis lost the culture.<sup>8</sup>

*6. Culture is generated within networks.*

Most of us are influenced by the "great man" view of history. This idea was popularized by nineteenth century Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881). Carlyle states that the history of the world is but the biography of great men:

For, as I take it, Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these great ones; the modellers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain; all things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the practical realization and embodiment, of Thoughts that dwelt in the Great Men sent into the world: the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, were the history of these (Carlyle: accessed 2011).

I resonate with Hunter as he sees this as mostly wrong, and as representative of individualistic culture. The key actor or force in history is not individual genius but rather the net-

works and the new institutions that are created out of those networks. The more active and interactive the network, the more influential it will be.

Hunter does offer a caveat. He admits that leaders are important. In any network, there is usually one who provides leadership, a greater degree of articulation, who puts more at risk, financially, socially and in terms of reputation. He is one who provides the connective tissue for the network itself. This is where we find the greatness of a Martin Luther, John Calvin, William Wilberforce, or a Martin Luther King, Jr. But these great leaders do not exist outside of networks, and without the networks they could not have accomplished anything. Each leader was shaped within a network of mentors and/or conditions.

*Bjoraker's Comments:*

In Carlyle's essay referenced above, great men are pictured as "the switchmen on the train tracks of history." Surely Hunter is correct to criticize this view and emphasize networks. As Shakespeare said, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." Two well-known leaders, Martin Luther and Winston Churchill, had "greatness thrust upon them", but neither would have been great had not the conditions been ripe. Western individualistic culture is often blind to the power of community, corporate solidarity and context.

*7. Culture is neither autonomous nor fully coherent.*

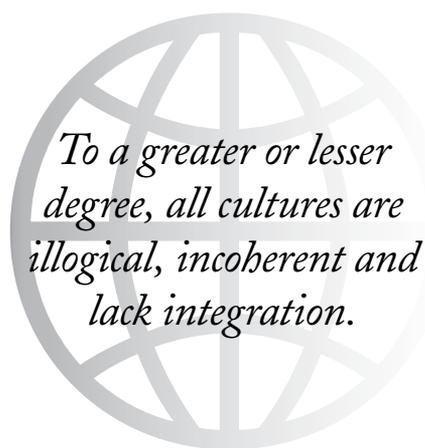
To a greater or lesser degree, all cultures are illogical, incoherent and lack integration. In most societies, there are discrepancies between the *ideal* and the *actual*, between beliefs and practices. This is because culture is never autonomous, but pervades all aspects of human life. Culture is a composite of competing networks, between which there is conflict, and often violence. Institutions such as the state and education "have their own logic, dynamics

and direction" and are inseparable from one another. The interplay of ideas and interests results in contradictions as well as complementarities.

*Bjoraker's Comments:*

Anthropologists have approached culture from at least three perspectives:

1. *Culture as mental or symbol systems* (ideas). Culture defined as in Hunter's Proposition 1; Hunter calls this the "idealist" tradition.
2. *Culture as material systems* (economic forces), in the Marxian tradition.



3. *Culture as social structural systems* (also known as structural-functionalist theories, where interests are rooted in physical/biological needs and wants, and involve power relationships between people who have differing access to power and resources).<sup>9</sup>

A view of culture as conflicted and in tension with itself is more realistic and consonant with the Biblical understanding of the fallen world, under the domination of sin and of principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12), than are the structural-functionalist theories of culture. The reality of culture is more complex than these *synchronic*, static, "snapshot" views can yield. Synchronic study is necessary but not sufficient. Culture as it is today is a product of history, so *diachronic* study is necessary. All cultures have changed and continue to change. Synchronic study cannot adequately deal with change.

*Cross-Cultural Application*

Any full assessment of Hunter's argument requires further application across cultures and to societies in the non-Western world. In closing this first section, I would like to leave you with a few questions that may be useful in extending Hunter's propositions into any cross-cultural context.<sup>10</sup> These will place us in a better position to evaluate Hunter's propositions about how culture really changes in Part 2:

1. What are the epic stories, heroes and villains that carry emotional valence in your cross-cultural setting?
2. How is the past prologue to the present realities in your culture setting?
3. What institutions hold power in such a way that they generate, carry and transmit worldview themes to individuals among this people?
4. What material and economic factors within your cultural setting may have more power to change individuals than individuals have to change the culture?
5. What are the cultural products (news media, arts, entertainment, legal rulings, educational degrees recognized, prized material possessions), organizations, and social positions that carry the most social capital and symbolic capital in the culture you are studying?
6. What networks, institutions and leadership operate at the center of prestige and how does their influence flow? Which are at the periphery? What are the implications for culture change?
7. How are cultural sub-systems (ethnic enclaves, tribes, job-sectors, professional guilds, education and legal institutions) in tension and conflict, and what inconsistencies or contradictions exist between what each of

these profess and what actually happens?

8. How does all this power, influence, social capital and conflict frame the way any Kingdom transformation might come about?

### Anticipating “Culture Change”

Having considered Hunter’s seven propositions on the *nature of culture*, Part 2 in the next issue will consider his four propositions on *culture change*, an additional twelfth proposition I have added, and a missiological assessment. Here is a sneak preview, without comment, of those propositions:

8. *Culture changes from the top-down, rarely if ever from the bottom-up.*
9. *Change is typically initiated by elites who are outside the centermost positions of prestige.*
10. *World-changing is most concentrated when the networks of elites and the institutions they lead overlap.*
11. *Cultures change, but rarely if ever without a fight.*
12. *Social crises, catastrophes and the consequent trauma provide optimal conditions for maximal culture change.* **UFM**

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> David Bosch’s magnum opus on the theology of mission is entitled *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (1991). Sherwood Lingenfelter’s important work developing and applying anthropologist Mary Douglas’s grid-group culture theory is entitled *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission* (1998). Anthropologist Paul Hiebert’s capstone work is entitled *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (2008).

<sup>2</sup> The concept of “worldview” has become popular over the last few decades. The term has become ambiguous and over-used. Anthropologists have used it to mean underlying assumptions, the deep-level themes by which a society explains reality. An early use of it in modern Christian thought was by Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), the great Dutch Calvinist statesman and theologian. In his famous “Stone Lectures” at Princeton Theological Seminary

in 1898, Kuyper outlined Calvinism as “an all-embracing life-system rather than a narrowly defined set of doctrines” (Heslam 1998:88). Kuyper sought to apply Biblical truth to all of life and culture. Christian liberals arts colleges in the twentieth century (like Wheaton College, Gordon College, Westmont College) have advanced the ideal of the “integration of faith and learning,” and “thinking Christianly across the disciplines.” But as James K.A. Smith says, something has been lost as the concept of worldview has been popularized in the last few decades. Now, often, “teaching from a Christian perspective” or, “teaching the Christian worldview,” means teaching a set of ideas. “Worldview-talk” is more of a heady project providing *information* rather than the task of holistic *formation* of persons. This emphasis on the cognitive owes more to modernity and the Enlightenment than to the holistic, Biblical vision of human persons-in-community (2009:31–32).

<sup>3</sup> Colson’s major work, co-authored with Nancy Pearcey, is *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999). The chapters follow the scheme of “Why Worldview Matters” (Part 1); “Creation: Where Did We Come From and Who are We?” (Part 2); “The Fall: What Has Gone Wrong With the World?” (Part 3); “Redemption: What Can We Do to Fix It?” (Part 4); and “Restoration: How Now Shall We Live?” (Part 5). The book is an apologetics strategy that asserts that this scheme and the three questions it asks “form a grid that we can use to break down the inner logic of every belief system or philosophy we encounter” (p.14). Chapter 2 is “Christianity is a Worldview.” This expresses the focus of the book—worldview as ideas and beliefs, in conflict with other belief systems. The heavy emphasis is on the intellectual battle of ideas, and that if this battle can be won, the culture wars can be won.

<sup>4</sup> The Truth Project’s web site—[www.thetruthproject.org](http://www.thetruthproject.org)—states, “The Truth Project is a DVD-based small group curriculum comprised of 13 one-hour lessons taught by Dr. Del Tackett. This home study is the starting point for looking at life from a biblical perspective. Each lesson discusses in great detail the relevance and importance of living the Christian worldview in daily life. We believe this one project represents the possibility for exponential change within the body of Christ, as we expect that thousands will be transformed by this

curriculum. As it has been throughout history, God continues to call ordinary people to make an eternal difference in our world. We invite you to be a part of this cultural change by participating in or leading a small group of your own." <http://www.thetruthproject.org/whatistruthproject/>

<sup>5</sup> He cites the website of "The Worldview Academy" to demonstrate the trend (<http://www.worldview.org/>) (p. 9).

<sup>6</sup> In my doctoral dissertation I define "the autonomous self" as: "an autonomous, atomistic, self-regulating and radically free moral agent endowed with rights." Relations between selves are seen in terms of an exchange based on the mutual interests of the contracting parties, which follows the Cartesian, Kantian and classical liberal tradition. In contrast to the traditional premodern self—that was constituted by transcendent moral authority—the autonomous self is a self that maximizes utility. In this view individuals are thought to pursue their own perceived goods based on calculation, contract and consent. Moderns and postmoderns generally assume the autonomous self-concept represents freedom and is therefore a goal to be sought. This freedom of the individual is seen to trump institutions like traditional marriage. This championing of the freedom of the individual and individual

rights explains why many heterosexuals embrace the Gay Rights movement. The autonomous self-concept presumes a radical freedom that is far above the level of free agency it has in reality. See *Faith, Freedom and Radical Individualism in Late Modern America: A Missiological Evaluation* by William Dale Bjoraker, Doctoral Dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Intercultural Studies (416 pages), 2007.

<sup>7</sup> G. K. Chesterton said in defense of tradition: "Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to that arrogant oligarchy who merely happen to be walking around." Western societies, guided by the metanarrative of progress, have often been more concerned about the present and the future, and the past is just past. As Henry Ford said, speaking for many, "History is bunk."

<sup>8</sup> See Winter's article for an excellent analysis of how American evangelicals originally had social capital, symbolic capital and held the center, but then lost it. Winter does not use the terms Hunter does, but definitely describes the cultural changes that bear out Hunter's propositions. Winter describes how the "First Inheritance Evangelicals" (George Whitefield to D.L. Moody) were committed to both social and personal transforma-

tion. The "Second Inheritance Evangelicals" (Moody to Billy Graham) dropped social transformation. Winter sees a recovery of First Inheritance evangelicalism from the year 2000 (2007:6-15).

<sup>9</sup> The *structural functionalist* model of culture, which held sway in British social anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century, led by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, and who were influenced by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), had a natural science orientation, and held that culture, or a society:

- Is to be understood using an *organic analogy* (as if it were a biological organism)
- Has a *functional unity* (that all institutions and structures of a society are neatly meshed, and each has an indispensable function without which the society would fall apart)
- Is in a *state of equilibrium*, characterized by harmony, a central value system, and internal consistency (Barrett 1996:59-66).

<sup>10</sup> For a most helpful tool for further research and application, I recommend Hiebert's "A Model for Worldview Analysis" in his *Appendix 1* (2008:335).

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