

## Chapter 6

### THE CHARACTERISTICS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RAMIFICATIONS OF A WORLDVIEW APPROACH TO MINISTRY

By George Walker

#### Introduction to the Chapter

You are training Christian workers to (a) demonstrate and proclaim the Good News about the love of God in a cross-cultural setting, (b) make disciples, and (c) develop local leaders to oversee the regional communities of Christ-followers. Your role in training is vital in the mission of God. Chapter 6 interjects the subject of worldview into the discussion of missionary training. What is a worldview? What part does the subject of worldview have in cross-cultural ministry? Is worldview essential for effective ministry? If it is true that worldview is essential for effective ministry, in what ways does that truth influence the content and context of missionary training?

This chapter will address these important questions. First we will define and describe a worldview. What are its characteristics? Next, we will explore the implications and ramifications of worldview in ministry. Then, at the end of the chapter, we will make applications to the training of Christian workers for cross-cultural ministry.

We will propose that since the subject of worldview is essential for the effectiveness of cross-cultural ministry, it is also necessary in the training of cross-cultural Christian workers. First, what is a worldview? The following true story from Papua New Guinea will help us introduce the subject of worldview.

#### What is a Worldview?

##### *A True Story – The Death of Bawame*

God in His love sent missionaries to a remote part of Asia to proclaim the gospel of Christ. He led them to a village of the Bisorio people deep in the jungles of Papua New Guinea. The missionaries lived among the Bisorios, building loving relationships with them and learning their culture and language. They did these things first in order to be able to clearly share the Good News!

During the days of culture and language learning, a Bisorio woman named Bawame was carried from a mountain location down to the village where the missionaries lived. She was thin and very weak. The hearts of the missionaries broke with sadness and concern. After consulting medical workers, they prayed and cared for her, treating her with anti-malarial medicine and providing food and fresh water. Bawame's family allowed her and two relatives to stay in the missionaries' home so they could provide her with the constant care she required. Praise God, she began to improve. The missionaries took hope in that she was going to recover. Then, unbeknownst to the missionaries, her uncle, Asebe, came and took Bawame away into the jungle to offer sacrifices to the ancestors to affect her healing. He took her in hopes that her illness was

not caused by the *yama*, the evil spirit of death, for which no offering could be made. The missionaries heard people in the village shouting, “They’re taking Bawame! They’re taking Bawame!” The missionaries ran down to the edge of the river only to see the dugout canoes pulling away with Bawame. Though she had clearly begun to improve, she was still frail and required more care and medicine. The missionaries called out, pleading, “Please, Asebe, please don’t take Bawame yet. Please, wait. Please, let us help.” Asebe did not look back. He just kept paddling upriver, deep into the jungle. Bawame died shortly thereafter in a lonely, remote place, without ever hearing the Gospel of Christ.

### *Underneath Observable Behaviors*

Let us reflect on what happened in this tragic story. Why did Asebe behave one way, while the missionaries behaved in another? The missionaries were very concerned about Bawame. They prayed to the Lord to heal her. They called the medical workers and gave her medicine. They gave her wholesome food and clean water. They even invited some of her family to stay in their home while Bawame healed. However, Asebe was also deeply concerned for Bawame. He removed Bawame from the missionaries’ home and took her upriver to a jungle hamlet. There he faithfully offered sacrifices to dead ancestor spirits in hopes of affecting her healing.

Both Asebe and the missionaries wanted to care for Bawame, but they took different actions to do so. Why were their behaviors in such contrast? Because at a fundamental level Asebe viewed life quite differently than the missionaries. What they each believed about the nature of reality greatly influenced how they viewed life and consequently acted. This is a crucial point. What people believe about the nature of reality, that is, their worldview, affects the way they interpret and relate to all aspects of life. In fact, it can be a matter of life and death! It influences their observable behaviors and emotions. Understanding worldview is therefore of enormous importance.

### *Defining Worldview*

A simple way to define the term *worldview* is this: The lens through which a person views and relates to all aspects of life.

All people, no matter where they live, what religion they practice or what language they speak, have a worldview. And that worldview profoundly influences how people live.

Let us contemplate what the Lord Jesus said regarding the tremendous importance of how a person views life. Many had gathered to listen to His teaching and Jesus challenged them to consider the real treasures of life. This was a vital issue. But how were people to discern the things that were of genuine value before God? To help them understand He used the eye as a metaphor. He declared to the crowds, “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:22-23; all Scripture references are from the New International Version)

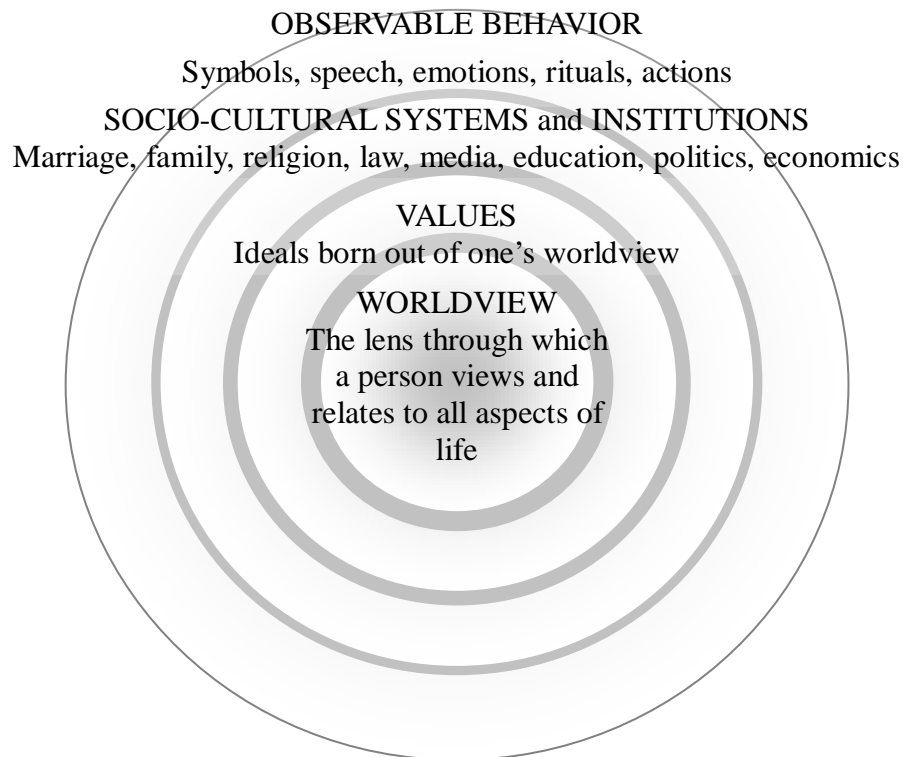
The health of one's "eye", the lens through which life is viewed, is absolutely critical. It is the condition of the eye that determines whether one is able to clearly see the light of God's truth or to not see it and be in deep spiritual darkness. Yes, a person's eye, the worldview lens through which they view life, greatly matters!

### How Does a Worldview Work?

#### *A Worldview Model – Illustrated and Explained*

Below is a basic model to help us think about how a worldview works. The model shows how a worldview influences the actions a person takes, the emotions a person feels, and the opinions a person expresses. In using this model keep in mind that any graphic has limitations that cannot fully capture the subtle nuances or complexities of reality. Nevertheless, this tool can help us better understand how a worldview works and impacts any person's life. We will carefully consider the key components of this model by reflecting on the worldview and actions of Asebe.

Figure 1: *A Worldview Model*



Source: Adapted from G. Linwood Barney in Hesselgrave, 1994, p. 49

The Lord Jesus said that if the eye is bad that person will be left in great spiritual darkness, unable to see the light of God's perspective. Throughout the Scriptures, God testifies to this serious issue of being in spiritual darkness. One such example is from the testimony of the

prophet Isaiah. Around 700 B.C., during the turbulent years of Israel’s exile, God’s prophet declared the sad folly of idolaters, stating that such persons are those who “cannot see.”

In analyzing the worldview model, each component of the model will first be explained followed by a real-world illustration from Asebe’s life and a reflective application from Isaiah 44. Please note that while the context of Isaiah 44 refers to idols that were actually crafted, Asebe’s “idols” (e.g., dead ancestor spirits) though not of wood or stone were idols nonetheless. They were false gods whom Asebe feared and worshipped. Therefore the truths from Isaiah 44 apply to him as well.

### *The Components of the Worldview Model*

#### *Worldview*

A worldview contains core assumptions about the nature of reality, including the origin and structure of the universe. It provides a person with explanations of who God (gods) is, who he or she is, what spirits and forces exist, and how all of these entities relate to one another. These core assumptions are interconnected. They are primarily derived from stories and form the lens through which a person sees life.



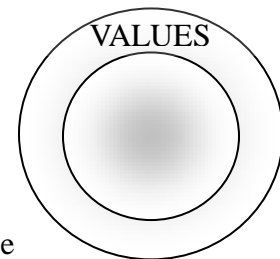
As a young Bisorio boy, Asebe heard many stories and witnessed numerous events that began to form his understanding of the nature of reality. His worldview lens thus began to form. He learned, for example, that the Sun was the creator of all things and that it surrounded humans with various spirits beings. These spirits controlled the events of life—including sickness. Therefore Asebe was confident that either a dead ancestor spirit or the evil spirit of death called *yama* was the cause of Bawame’s illness.

The prophet Isaiah declared that the person who worships idols is led astray by a deluded heart and cannot deliver himself (Isaiah 44:20). Isaiah’s declaration was sadly true of Asebe. He confidently assumed things about the nature of reality that were not true. He had a deluded heart. He was in a spiritual darkness from which he could not deliver himself. Without the light of God’s word he was held captive within false worldview assumptions.

#### *Values*

Values emerge out of worldview. They are expressions of ideals, that is, the way things ought to be in light of a person’s accepted view of reality.

Since Asebe assumed various spirit beings controlled the well-being of man, he valued maintaining harmony with these spirits to secure their favor. He emotionally held on to this important value in regard to his niece Bawame, too. A way to express the value of maintaining harmony was to offer sacrifices of appeasement to dead ancestor spirits.

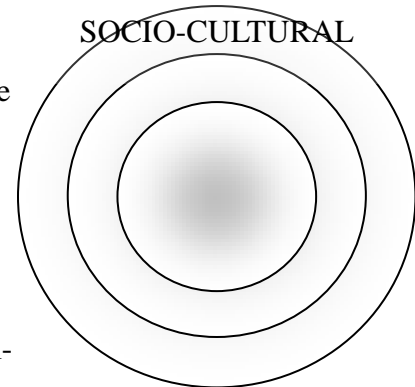


Though Asebe dearly held to his value, God’s prophet declared of idolaters, “The things they treasure are worthless” (Isaiah 44:9). Asebe sincerely hoped for success by maintaining harmony with dead ancestor spirits, but it did not profit him or Bawame at all. Sadly, his value of maintaining harmony with the spirits was a false value based on false worldview assumptions.

### *Socio-Cultural Systems*

Social and cultural systems and institutions develop from values and worldview. No orderly society can exist without them. These systems and institutions involve marriage, family, religion, law, media, education, politics, production, and economics.

Asebe’s worldview assumptions and the associated values strongly influenced his emotions and the choices he made. They affected how he related to his family and others, how he practiced his religion and how he labored to sustain general well-being.

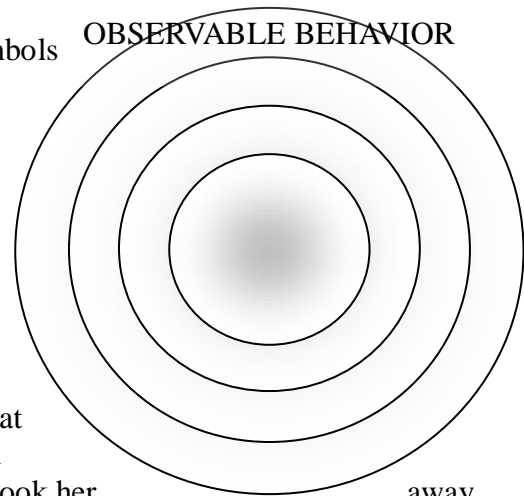


In the same way that Isaiah declared an idol profoundly impacts an idolater’s life (Isaiah 44:15), so Asebe’s idol of dead ancestor spirits affected how he interacted with his family, with his community and even with outsiders. It affected how he approached maintaining well-being. He would do all he could to please his idol.

### *Observable Behavior*

The observable behavior of a society is seen through symbols (words, art, dress, and colors), speech, stories, emotions, rituals (rites of passage, ceremonies, and festivals), actions, and events. These activities help form and reinforce a worldview.

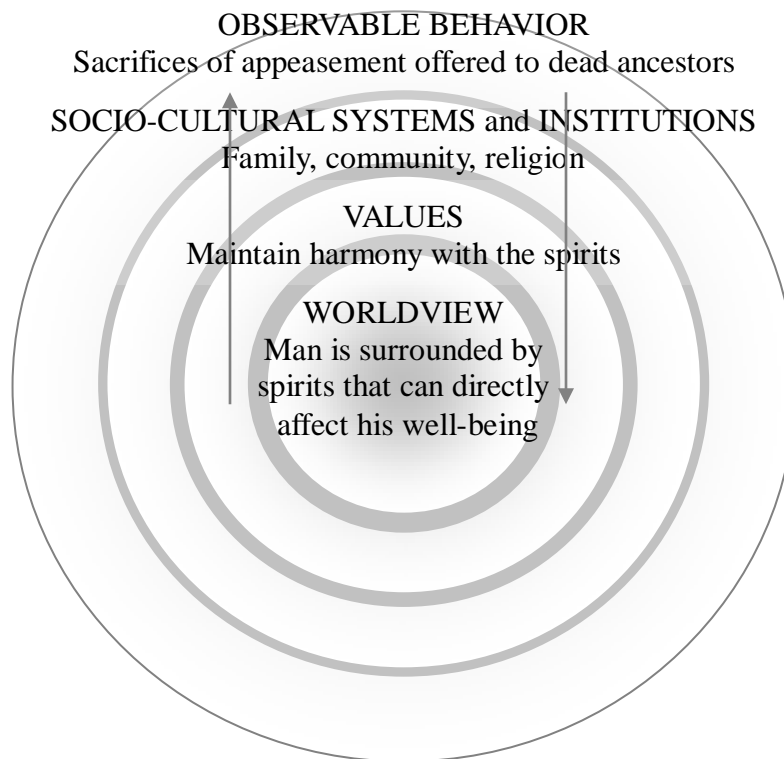
Asebe grew up listening to many stories and watching others do many things—including offering sacrifices to address sickness. His worldview lens was formed and reinforced by what he both heard and observed. Consequently, through his worldview lens he assumed that a dead ancestor spirit had caused Bawame’s sickness and needed to be appeased to restore harmony. He therefore took her away from the missionaries’ home and went to his jungle hamlet. Once he arrived there, one of the first things he did was offer an animal sacrifice to the dead ancestor spirits. However, Bawame eventually died. Because she did die, Asebe concluded that the *yama*, the evil spirit of death who cannot be appeased, was the real cause of both her sickness and death. Sadly, this conclusion was based on false worldview assumptions.



The prophet Isaiah vividly describes the devoted actions of an idol maker—carving the idol with great care, using symbols to beautify it, working diligently to the point where, “he drinks no water and grows faint” (Isaiah 44:12). But all these efforts of the idolater led to that which would “profit him nothing” (Isaiah 44:10). So, too, Asebe’s diligent efforts were profitable for nothing. And sorrowfully, without the light of God’s word to enable him to see the truth, Asebe’s continued practices, stories, and choices only served to keep him enslaved to a false worldview.

Asebe’s false worldview deeply impacted his values, the social and cultural aspects of family, community and religion, as well as his actual behavior and emotions. As he acted upon his false worldview assumptions it only kept him believing in the same, ever remaining in darkness. Asebe’s false worldview, in part, worked as represented in the following figure.

Figure 2: *Asebe’s False Worldview*



Asebe’s erroneous worldview was the source from which all else emerged. From this starting point his values, social and cultural systems and behaviors were shaped and greatly influenced. Without the light and life of God it is grievously true of Asebe as for all those without the Savior—they are “darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God.” (Ephesians 4:17-18).

The only hope for Asebe—for any one—is God and His word. True hope comes when God’s word is proclaimed and ministered by His Spirit deep within a person’s worldview. As has well been said, “True conversion first and foremost involves a change of worldview—adopting a

completely different understanding of God and His world; of self, sin and salvation” (Hesselgrave, 1994, p. 50).

Questions for reflection: (a) How would you describe the term worldview in your own words? (b) As you reflect on the heartbreaking story of Bawame and Asebe how has God been speaking to you in regard to worldview? (c) In what ways might this worldview model help you in training others for cross-cultural ministry?

## The Bible and Worldview

### *The Bible—Our Ultimate Frame of Reference*

Let us consider more closely what the Bible says about this crucial issue of worldview. Like Asebe, everyone has a worldview—a starting point which serves as their ultimate frame of reference by which they understand and relate to all of life. While there are many worldviews among the peoples of the world, the Bible is the only God-given frame of reference for mankind. The Bible is the ultimate frame of reference within which man can understand life correctly. Any other frame of reference will not lead to truth and life. This fact about worldviews must be held fast in training others.



### *God Himself—The Authoritative Source*

Another main fact about worldviews is that every worldview has an authoritative source upon which it is based. Who or what is the authoritative source for a person’s worldview? This is of central concern because it is in regard to ultimate authority that much of the spiritual battle is waged. For Asebe the ultimate authority for his worldview was his human ancestors. For Muslims it is the Koran and the prophet Mohammed. For secular humanists it is autonomous man and science. These, and untold other rival authorities, challenge the ultimate authority of God and His word. In the midst of this battle, God has set forth His word, the Bible, as the sole authoritative source for proper worldview assumptions. God’s word as a whole story from Genesis to Revelation is the ultimate authority for worldview assumptions, values, institutions, and human behavior. His word alone is the authoritative source that provides man’s frame of reference, the worldview lens, through which all aspects of life are to be properly interpreted and related to.

### *The Testimonies of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul*

When the Lord was here on earth he was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. As Satan had tempted Adam in the Garden of Eden, so he came to tempt the Lord Jesus, the Last Adam.

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and

said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’ Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:1-4).

Satan, with deceitful scheming and evil motive, desired to cause Christ to sin. He subtly tempted the Lord to act independently of God. But the Lord Jesus was unyielding in His submission to the will of God the Father. Rather than independently display His power and satisfy His hunger, He remained steadfast in His obedience to God. But carefully notice the Lord’s basis for doing so. He specifically quoted a central life-truth from the Holy Scriptures. The Lord Jesus declared that mankind is to live, “by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” In one sentence the Lord captured that which is to comprise man’s worldview and be the ultimate authority for life—all of God’s word. In one of the greatest spiritual battles of history, our Lord himself gave clear testimony as to the enormous importance of one’s worldview and ultimate authority.

Listen again to the Lord speaking to us in the Scriptures through the apostle Paul. In Paul’s last epistle, 2 Timothy, the Spirit of God inspired him to write the following to his beloved disciple:

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Paul reminds Timothy that “from infancy” he had learned the Holy Scriptures. From the earliest days of childhood, what Timothy heard and observed based on God’s word was a primary factor in developing a biblical worldview within him. In fact, it was the Scriptures that formed the basis upon which Timothy understood his need for a Savior and came to salvation in Christ!

Paul goes on to remind Timothy that “all Scripture is God-breathed.” This is reminiscent of the words of the Lord Jesus, “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Paul also holds forth God and His word as the ultimate authority and frame of reference for all of life—“for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” Here again, God’s word gives clear testimony as to the great importance of a person’s worldview being derived from the Holy Scriptures. Therefore the subject of worldview directly affects the central concerns of salvation and spiritual formation. Training in worldview is therefore an essential part in helping missionaries effectively participate in God’s mission.

Questions for reflection: (a) How would you explain to someone the impact worldview has as a person’s starting point? (b) In what ways do you see rival authorities of other religions challenging God’s word regarding the matter of salvation? (c) How may the truth of worldview serving as a person’s frame of reference assist you in the design and implementation of training? (d) How might the truth of God and His word as ultimate authority for worldview impact your training objectives?

## More Regarding the Formation and Nature of Worldview

### *The Role of Stories in Worldview Formation*

What do stories have to do with worldviews? In actuality, stories are primarily how worldviews are formed. In fact, worldviews and stories are inextricably bound together. They are fundamental elements of the belief systems missionaries will encounter.

Regarding the question of how worldviews are formed in the first place, David Hesselgrave explains,

“Basically by the telling of a story (and stories within a story) and drawing inferences from it. That’s why all people have their story (myth, legend, history – in one sense it makes little difference) and draw upon it to sustain their values, institutions and behavior patterns. So the Japanese build upon the Shinto myth of Izanagi and Izanami and the Sun Goddess. Hindus build upon one or another version of the Golden Egg myth. In one way or another the Chinese build upon the story of Pan Ku. Post-Christian Westerners build upon the story of naturalistic evolution. Christians build upon the biblical story” (Hesselgrave, 1994, p. 50).

### *Worldviews are Metanarratives*

As Hesselgrave points out, all worldviews are formed primarily by stories. Many stories weave together to compose one overall story of reality or worldview, also called a *metanarrative*. A metanarrative is the overall story that sets in place a framework by which other stories are understood and interpreted. For example, from Genesis to Revelation the Bible consists of many stories, but together they form one complete story. Taken as a whole, God’s word is the biblical metanarrative or biblical worldview. Other worldviews are also metanarratives that are composed of many stories. Whether Islam, Hinduism, Animism or Scientism, all non-biblical worldviews are metanarratives. They set in place a certain understanding of reality for their adherents. This understanding in turn shapes and profoundly influences their values, their social and cultural systems and even their behaviors.

### *Worldviews are Informally Learned and Tacitly Assumed*

Consider for a moment the story involving the Bisorio man, Asebe. How did his worldview form and develop? Did he primarily learn his worldview through formal means as in a school classroom? No. As with all people, Asebe’s worldview was primarily formed informally through the everyday events of life. As he grew up hearing stories and telling stories, witnessing events and participating in events his worldview was shaped. This is another significant aspect regarding the nature of worldviews—they form and develop mostly through informal means.

This informal learning through observation of modeled behavior and through what is heard happens for the most part unconsciously (Hall, 1959, p. 96 and Hesselgrave, 1991, p. 396). For

example, when a child learns his mother tongue he learns informally, not being conscious of learning a language per se. Notice, too, that when a mother teaches her child, she is not only teaching sounds and words, but informally communicating such things as family relationships (“This is Grandmother, Mommy’s Mommy”), values (“Sit modestly like this when wearing a dress”), and even worldview beliefs (“See the little bird on the window sill, Mary? God made it!”). All people, whether Christian or non-Christian, begin learning their worldview from childhood through such informal, everyday means.

The informal process by which a person’s worldview forms and develops means that worldviews are tacitly assumed. People are not typically conscious of their worldview assumptions anymore than a man wearing eyeglasses thinks about the fact he’s wearing them! The authors of *Understanding Folk Religion* astutely discern, “Worldview assumptions are taken for granted and hardly ever examined; they are fundamental givens with which people think, not what they think about” (Hiebert, Shaw, & Tienou, 1999, p. 40). This too is a dynamic regarding the nature of worldviews that should not be overlooked.

Questions for reflection: (a) How might the interconnection between stories and worldview formation help you in the design of training objectives and delivery methods? (b) What informal processes of worldview formation and reinforcement do you observe in your society? (c) In what ways might you better employ informal methods in your training environment? (d) What are some ways to discover the tacitly held worldview assumptions of a person? (e) How might your ideas of worldview discovery apply to needs assessment in training design?

### *Worldviews are Emotionally Embraced*

It is important to observe that most informal learning takes place in the context of trusted relationships—parents, siblings, extended family members, friends, and leaders. Since most informal learning takes place in these relational contexts, most of that which is learned is embraced with deep emotion and is not easily changed. Therefore a worldview has a powerful grip on its adherents.

People hold to their worldview with deep emotion not only because of those cherished relationships from which they have learned it, but also because it provides their understanding of reality and their purpose within that reality. It goes to the heart of their identities and meaningfulness as people!

It is in relationship to this powerful dynamic that the late Paul Hiebert alerted others,

“Challenges to these assumptions threaten the very foundations of their world. People resist such challenges with deep emotion, for such questions threaten to destroy their understanding of reality. People are even willing to die for beliefs that make their lives and deaths meaningful” (Hiebert, 1994, p. 38).

Think of all the unbiblical worldviews that are held among the peoples of the world—false worldviews held with deep emotion, ever resistant to change. In fact, missionaries continually find that the deeper one penetrates toward a person’s worldview, the greater the resistance!

This is a mighty conflict. When others opposed Paul’s God-appointed apostleship and message, he informed the church at Corinth that the battle being fought was against “strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). And what were those strongholds? They were opposing “arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God” (2 Corinthians 10:5). The battle of such opposing arguments emerges out of opposing worldviews that are set “against the knowledge of God.” Training must prepare missionaries for such a great battle. There are no neutral worldviews. Cross-cultural workers must be well equipped to minister at a worldview level in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is He alone who can give the wisdom, love and “power to demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Questions for reflection: (a) How may the truth that worldviews are mostly learned within trusted relationships enhance your training strategies? (b) Since worldviews are held with deep emotion and strongly resist change, in what ways should we train others to prepare for such a battle? (c) In what ways do these factors challenge you as a trainer?

### What are the Implications of Ministering at a Worldview Level?

We have briefly considered a few main aspects of worldviews—what they are, how they form, how they work, and the profound influence they have on peoples’ lives. Now we will consider some of the implications of doing ministry at a worldview level. What does it cost cross-cultural workers in terms of commitment, time and effort? What are the implications for training?

#### *Acquiring Culture and Language*

Ministering at the deep level of worldview necessitates that missionaries learn the culture and language of the host society. Both culture and language are expressions of the underlying worldview assumptions and must be learned well to discover a people’s worldview. This is imperative for proclaiming the Gospel of Christ with clarity. As stewards of God’s word, it is wise to first comprehend a people’s worldview, and then proclaim His truth. Doing so heeds an important exhortation from God’s word, “He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame” (Proverbs 18:13). For further exploration of this vital issue of culture, language and mission, please refer to chapter 5, “Culture Anthropology: Integrating Science and Mission” by Andres Casanueva.

#### *Living Incarnationally*

A cross-cultural worker cannot learn culture, language and worldview without living among the host society and developing loving relationships. Therefore ministering at a worldview level assumes missionaries live among those they serve. By God’s grace missionaries should become

genuine friends of the host society, gaining the respect and confidence of individuals, families, and leaders. This should not be done with insincere motives, simply to gain a foothold or to become influential, but to humbly follow kingdom principles.

As active members of a community, missionaries need to connect with people in settings where worldview assumptions and values are informally passed on—in homes, marketplaces, gardens, fields, places of casual visiting, at weddings, birthday parties, funerals, religious celebrations, and so forth. By living in such a relational way, the informal means of communicating and learning worldview assumptions and values will be experienced and understood. This, of course, includes “how” the people tell stories—a primary means of expressing their worldview.

### *Taking Time*

Ministering at a worldview level is not done quickly. It takes time to learn a culture and language different from one’s own. It takes time to develop genuine friendships with those among whom one begins as a stranger. It takes time to gain understanding of an unfamiliar worldview that has been years in the making. These comprehensive ministry efforts are an intimate part of loving people.

Training others to minister at a worldview level should be in keeping with the breadth and depth of the required knowledge, skill, and character. In such an undertaking time is a major factor.

Questions for reflection: (a) If a cross-cultural worker bypasses culture and language acquisition and the development of relationships, in what ways might the results be affected? (b) Since ministering at a worldview level necessitates culture and language acquisition, how does this impact training? (c) How does the need for an incarnational approach to ministry influence your training strategies, both as to format and content? (d) How does the factor of time affect an overall strategy for training? (e) What are some factors that hinder training others in a worldview approach to ministry? (f) How can the identified hindrances possibly be overcome?

### What are the Consequences of Not Ministering at a Worldview Level?

#### *Syncretism – What It Is and What It Does*

A serious consequence of failing to address a people’s worldview is syncretism. Syncretism is one of the greatest hindrances to evangelism and church multiplication. It encumbers the advance of God’s Kingdom. Training must help minimize and even prevent the continuation of this malignant phenomenon. This is “a phenomenon that impacts every corner of the world today”, and “has sapped the vitality of churches and limited Christianity to a segment of people’s lives” (Hiebert, Shaw & Tiénou, 1999, pp. 392, 15).

Syncretism may be described as the process of combining biblical beliefs and practices with unbiblical beliefs and practices. The sad and tragic result of such a process is the formation of a new, erroneous worldview that distorts God’s truth and the Gospel of Christ.

When the issue of worldview is ignored and God’s word is preached to the lost, the former worldview is not displaced. All or much of the old worldview lens remains intact. People do not clearly comprehend God’s word. The syncretistic result is that people have a serious mixed view of reality and the issues of life—as reflected in the following true accounts.

After hearing the Gospel, a people group in the highlands of Papua New Guinea began to attend church services held by the missionary. They did so to pay back God for sending Christ. Once they felt they had attended a sufficient number of church services to compensate God, they completely ceased any such activity. They believed God had been paid back—even though they did not really understand why He had sent Christ in the first place! They had no clear idea of salvation. They treated the Gospel message as though they were appeasing spirits within their traditional worldview. These dear people had not understood that they were lost sinners who could only be saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. Sadly, their worldview was not addressed. The resulting syncretism left them in a confused and hopeless state.

For another people group in Asia, the horrible impact of syncretism was different, though just as deadly. After these people heard the Gospel they continued former practices, but now with a Christian form. For example, prior to the missionaries’ arrival they used to offer pig sacrifices at the grave sites of their dead relatives to appease them and gain their favor. However, once they heard of Christ things changed—at least from their point of view. Not at all understanding the Gospel, they continued to make sacrifices at the grave sites. Putting wooden crosses on the graves, they offered pig sacrifices believing the Holy Spirit would be pleased. They believed the Holy Spirit would “come down off the wooden crosses”, receive the pig sacrifices and grant them blessings! Tragically, without their worldview being displaced by truth, the syncretistic result left these fellow human beings in a horrible lost state.

These two true accounts of syncretism serve as heartbreaking examples of the deadly global phenomenon of syncretism. Other examples abound: A new believer seeks out a shaman on her way home from church in order to divine the whereabouts of her husband; other believers keep Psalm 91 open on a table to protect their household from evil; a pastor believes a fox seen outside his house is his reincarnated grandfather; after drinking coffee, Christians read the coffee grounds in the bottom of the cup to predict the future; horseshoes are hung outside homes in order to ward off the power of the evil eye; others live in daily fear of bad omens or astrological concerns. Sadly, such examples seem endless.

### *High and Low Religion*

Another chief factor contributing to the heartbreak of syncretism lies in missionaries failing to make a distinction between high and low religions. The table below highlights key differences between a high religion (e.g., Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism) and a low religion (e.g., tribal animism, folk-Islam, and folk-Buddhism). These different religions emerge out of different worldview assumptions. They underscore the fact that a worldview provides the framework that shapes the kinds of questions people ask and the answers they

seek. Carefully review the table. These distinctions are critical because they help guide worldview discovery and direct church planting strategies. These factors should also help guide training strategies.

Table 1: *Differences between High and Low Religion*

High Religion	Low Religion
Seeks to offer answers to questions about origins, the purpose of life, the ultimate destiny of the universe, of a people, of an individual; is concerned with ultimate reality, truth and what is logically consistent	Seeks to answer questions people face in their everyday lives—how do they make sure they have good crops, how to explain the sudden death of a child, who stole money hidden in the house, why did my business fail, etc.; is less concerned about “ultimate realities”
Has written texts (e.g., Bible and Koran)	Is passed on mainly by oral tradition, duplicated rituals, reenacted dramas, and songs.
Is highly institutionalized with prescribed rites, rules and regulations	Is more informally organized
Gives ethical and moral directives	Is relative or amoral (pragmatic)

Source: Adapted from Gailyn Van Rheenen, 1991, pp. 57-59

Regarding this matter of high and low religion, Gailyn Van Rheenen makes a profound observation concerning two great errors among cross-cultural workers: 1) They assume that their own cultural categories are universal, and 2) they communicate on the level of high religion rather than on the popular level of low religion. While the people are asking low religious questions, the missionary is preaching on the level of high religion (1991, pp. 51, 61). This insight is invaluable. Most unreached people groups of the world are of low religion orientation. They are looking for an access to power due to their primary focus on finding answers to everyday life issues. As Van Rheenen keenly observes, “Frequently people become Christians as an access to power rather than as a response, in faith, to the living God.” Therefore if God’s word is not communicated clearly, the low religionist may “exchange one system of power for another and establish his own Christo-pagan system” (1991, p. 88).

The consequences of not ministering at a worldview level are devastating. A syncretistic church is enslaved by old beliefs. Such a church lives in fear instead of joyous freedom. It is weak and unhealthy. And saddest of all, it is unable to effectively spread the Good News. If anything does spread, it seems to be only more syncretism.

It is imperative that training equip cross-cultural workers to minister at a worldview level. Such equipping will go a long way in stemming the tide of syncretism, and help restore the Lord’s people to a proper biblical worldview. May God grant us the needed wisdom unto His glory!

Questions for reflection: (a) What examples of syncretism have you observed among Christians? (b) What do you see as the source of the syncretism you have observed? (c) Because syncretism (both its causes and effects) is a great hindrance to the advancement of God's Kingdom, what adjustments should be made in training cross-cultural workers?

## Ministering for Worldview Change

### *A Cross-Cultural Illustration—The Bisorio People*

We have reflected on the implications of ministering at a worldview level and the consequences for failing to do so. Now let's consider how these matters might be addressed. If cross-cultural workers invest the time and effort to live among a people, learn their culture and language, establish healthy relationships, and gain a good understanding of their worldview, how might they use these accomplishments to minister effectively? What impact do these matters have on training?

As an illustration of a worldview approach to ministry, consider missionaries who used this strategy working among the Bisorio people of Papua New Guinea.

### *Ministry Background*

The missionaries found the Bisorio people living deep in the jungle, virtually cut off from the outside world. They were a semi-nomadic people who lived in constant fear of the various spirits and forces that were central to their worldview. They sought to manipulate and appease these entities to control the affairs of everyday life. Nevertheless, hunger was prominent. Disease threatened their health at every turn. They often warred with neighboring tribes. Quarrels and offenses were daily occurrences among themselves. Their way of life was truly miserable and without hope—both spiritually and physically.

The Bisorios allowed the missionaries to live among them, though they had no true idea why they had come. The missionaries began to learn their unwritten culture and language and to build friendships. They lovingly drew alongside them in their everyday lives. They helped in their gardens, joined them on hunting trips, and ventured together on fishing expeditions. They ministered to physical ailments, helped in the delivery of babies and celebrated at weddings. They visited in their homes, on the trails, and down by the riverside as their children played together. They listened to their many stories and observed their various cultural customs. By intimately sharing life with the Bisorios, the missionaries learned their culture, language and worldview. Because of this investment, when the time came for the missionaries to share the Gospel they were able to communicate clearly in the Bisorio language, speaking directly to their worldview.

### *The Bisorio Metanarrative*

Before teaching God’s word the missionaries learned the Bisorio metanarrative—their worldview. They discovered the Bisorios believed that the Sun had created them and everything else, including the many capricious spirits surrounding them and governing their lives. This led the Bisorios to live in constant fear of dead ancestor spirits, spirits of death, spirits that could cause sickness or hinder crop growth. Witchcraft, too, was a power they greatly feared. This is only a brief sketch of their metanarrative, but this was the “stronghold”—the formidable fortress overseen by Satan that confronted the missionaries as they prepared to proclaim God’s word.

### *Chronological Bible Teaching*

How should evangelistic efforts begin? How do you initiate the battle against a worldview fortress, displacing the existing false worldview while building a new biblical worldview? What stories are best used to engage the conflict? How do you choose? These are important questions.

Recall that in ministering at a worldview level we are confronting an opposing metanarrative—a complete overall story about reality—and not simply an opposing point here or there. This is a critical distinction from some methods. Our goal is to displace an erroneous metanarrative and build a new metanarrative, God’s Story—the biblical worldview!

When it finally came time for the missionaries to teach God’s word they used a method of teaching known as Chronological Bible Teaching (CBT). CBT is a comprehensive, narrative, chronological methodology and strategy of teaching the Bible for worldview change. It is adaptable to any ministry context and is easily reproducible. CBT encourages cross-cultural workers to begin where God began: at creation. It matters how the “starting point” starts! Beginning at the beginning lays a solid foundation for God’s Story. It is in the beginning of God’s word that a new worldview will begin to first take shape for people: a new view of God, of themselves and of the world as a whole. This is an indispensable first step in building God’s Story before sharing the Gospel. So the missionaries initiated building an entire new Story for the Bisorios with, “In the beginning God.” They went on to use the creation narrative to glorify God by contrasting Him with the rival gods of the Bisorio worldview. Using what they had learned from their shared life with the Bisorios, they specifically targeted contrasting worldview aspects. The Spirit of God mightily used this to begin to woo the Bisorios to truth!

The third day of creation will help illustrate targeted points of intentional teaching at a worldview level. The table below highlights biblical truths the missionaries strategically taught in contrast to the Bisorio worldview.

Table 2: *Intentional Teaching to Contrast Worldviews*

The Bisorio Worldview (the ancestors' word)		The Biblical Worldview (God's word)
The Sun, the creator, understood to be distant, far removed from earthly affairs, and not interested in man	contrasted with	The wonder of Creator God's intimate love, care and concern for man as demonstrated, for example, by the variety of delicious fruits and vegetables He made for them
The wearisome fickle and hostile nature of the many spirit beings	contrasted with	The refreshing, good and hope-giving character of God as demonstrated in His wise and orderly creative acts—"everything after its kind"—for mankind's benefit and enjoyment
The limited capacities and spheres of rule of the various spirit beings	contrasted with	God's absolute infinite power and sovereign rule over all things as demonstrated by creating everything by the authoritative power of His spoken word

As the narrative unfolded, the Bisorios were overwhelmed by the God of Scripture! The spirits of their worldview began to dwarf by comparison. They began to see creation, including themselves, from a new perspective as they put on a new lens and viewed the world. They were filled with hope. They began to call for others to come hear "God's Talk." And many others came—from two and three days walk away! As the missionaries continued to unfold the Old Testament narrative (e.g., Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, Tower of Babel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Israel and their history, etc.) they used the same intentional and targeted worldview teaching. God powerfully used such teaching to displace the old lens with a new biblical lens in preparation for the Good News. Through such intentional worldview teaching of Scripture, the Bisorios came to clearly understand their lost condition before God. Though they were filled with a biblical conviction of sin, they also knew that their only hope for salvation was from God alone—through the promised Redeemer! As God's Story continued with the New Testament, the Bisorios rejoiced at the coming of Christ. The life of the Lord Jesus swept them off their feet. They were captured by His many acts of love and grace toward sinful men. He was their hope. What a refreshing contrast to their traditional worldview! After finally hearing of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Savior, the Bisorios were overwhelmed by the love, mercy and grace of God toward them. How they rejoiced with great joy as they trusted Christ for salvation! They were never the same.

The missionaries used this methodology of teaching at a worldview level not only in evangelism, but also throughout their entire church planting ministry. They continued to develop God's Story through to the book of Revelation. And as the Bisoiros were taught, so they gladly taught others! Over the years the church has grown and multiplied, reaching out to neighboring peoples too—all according to a new biblical worldview lens. All praise and glory to God alone!

## Applications to Training

In this chapter we have introduced the subject of worldview. We have reflected on the profound influence worldviews have in life and in ministry. Let us conclude by considering more specifically some of the applications worldview may have to training. What impact does this vital subject of worldview have in regard to training missionaries for effective cross-cultural ministry? We will make application to the following areas of training: (a) content, (b) delivery methods, (c) trainers, (d) context, and (e) time.

### *Training and Content*

A worldview approach is a holistic methodology of ministry. Therefore to prepare workers for this kind of ministry, the approach to training should be holistic. A worldview approach will guide the content of training. To equip others to minister at a worldview level assumes that missionaries will be trained in topics such as: (a) worldview, (b) comprehensive ministry strategies, (c) culture anthropology, (d) language acquisition, (e) transformational development, (f) animism and folk religions, (g) Chronological Bible Teaching (a style of narrative), and (h) leadership development.

Not only will a holistic approach to training determine the specific learning objectives (knowing, being, and doing), but it will also guide the sequence and integration of the content. This kind of training calls for more than a random selection of subject matter. It necessitates a strategic and intentional integration of the selected content. This matter of order and integration is addressed in detail in chapter 7, “A Foundation to Guide the Design of Integral Training” by Robert Strauss.

### *Training and Delivery Methods*

Equipping others to minister at a worldview level should utilize dynamics that influence worldview development and change. Consequently an outcome of such training includes not only missionaries being equipped to impact others for worldview change, but also undergoing worldview change within themselves. Therefore training should strategically employ such delivery methods as storytelling and experiential learning. Though storytelling and experiential learning are common aspects of andragogy, the strategic use of the same is necessary in training others for a worldview approach to ministry.

For example, narrative is powerful by God’s design. As the Lord intended, stories capture imaginations, influence ideas, shape perceptions, communicate values, and stir emotions. All of these elements are necessary to worldview formation as well as powerful aspects of effective training. Furthermore, experiential learning helps equip others beyond just the cognitive. As a concrete-relational methodology experiential learning promotes learning at a worldview level where concepts are experienced, values are deepened, and skills are developed for effectual engagement in the real-world.

### *Training and Trainers*

Training at a worldview level is absolutely critical for effective ministry. Cross-cultural workers are preparing for battle among spiritual strongholds that are worldviews raised up against the knowledge of God (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Therefore the dynamics of a worldview approach to ministry must be integrated into every aspect of training. Consequently trainers must understand the subject of worldview and its profound implications for effective ministry. They must embrace the imperative of training at a worldview level. In so doing they will equip others to more effectively “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

### *Training and Context*

Training for a worldview approach to ministry should be carefully designed around the important dynamic of relationships. Most learning that has deep and lasting worldview impact takes place in the context of trusted relationships. Therefore equipping others to minister at a worldview level should be in a context that facilitates learning among healthy relationships of trainers and trainees. Learning takes place not only through what is heard, but also through what is observed. The trainer’s manner of life is crucial in equipping others. Evangelical leader, Ravi Zacharias, once said in a public lecture, “Take great care in how you minister to others because what you win them with is what you win them to.” Those you train will tend to go and disciple others in the same manner in which they have been discipled. This is a reality of training.

The training context should be one that also provides a platform for trainees to sharpen one another as “iron sharpens iron” (Proverbs 27:17). Trainees should have regular interaction with one another. The Lord has designed His Body to be interdependent. A training context that aims at genuine worldview impact should be one that promotes this God-given life principle. Such a healthy context is indeed a part of the “curriculum.”

The training context should include opportunities for the trainees to put into practice what they are learning about worldviews. For example, having been in a classroom setting they should then have occasion to be further exercised through opportunities in their local neighborhood or village some distance away. This kind of real-world training environment will sharpen their abilities to minister at a worldview level while being a blessing to others.

### *Training and Time*

As we have noted, the implications of ministering at a worldview level call for various commitments, one of which is the investment of time. It takes time to develop relationships and to learn the culture, language and worldview of others before effectively sharing the Gospel. Though time must be invested, the rewards are bountiful and eternal!

It is the same in training for such effective ministry. It takes time to learn the many important subjects. It takes time to develop the necessary skills. It takes time to grow in depth of character. Significant duration and continuity is warranted. To fragment or abbreviate the necessary training

will only do a disservice to the missionaries—and of greater concern, an eventual disservice to those who are yet to clearly hear the Good News of God.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored the subject of worldview and its importance to cross-cultural ministry and training. We looked at what a worldview is, how it works and how it powerfully influences any person's life. We considered the implications and ramifications of worldview in regard to cross-cultural ministry and noted key applications to training. The subject of worldview is indeed essential for both effective ministry and training.

The renowned missiologist and servant of God, Paul Hiebert (1932-2007), in his final book, *Transforming Worldviews*, gives a clarion call to cross-cultural workers to employ a worldview approach to ministry. He alerts us to the development of mission movements. He brings to our attention that in the nineteenth century the focus of the mission movement was on changing behaviors (e.g., putting on clothing, avoiding alcohol and tobacco, and attending church regularly). While changes in behavior may indicate true conversion, such a focus did not necessarily mean that underlying beliefs had changed and, in fact, often produced syncretism.

He then points out that in the twentieth century the mission movement stressed right beliefs (e.g., the deity of Christ and salvation through faith alone). While these were of genuine concern, the focus on correct doctrine alone did not help plant churches that were faithful to the Gospel of Christ. The reason is “people often say the same words but mean different things. Underlying explicit beliefs is a deeper level of culture that shapes the categories and logic with which people think and the way they view reality” (Hiebert, 2008, p.11).

As to the twenty-first century, Hiebert asserts,

“Conversion may include a change in beliefs and behavior, but if the worldview is not transformed, in the long run the gospel is subverted and the result is a syncretistic Christo-paganism, which has the form of Christianity but not its essence. If behavioral change was the focus of the mission movement in the nineteenth century, and changed beliefs its focus in the twentieth century, then transforming worldviews must be its central task in the twenty-first century” (2008, p. 11-12).

This wise counsel from a missionary statesman is truly in keeping with the Holy Scriptures. In light of this sound advice, the call for the Latin mission movement is to embrace a new paradigm in training cross-cultural workers—equipping them for a worldview approach to ministry.

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<http://www.christianworldview.net/publishers.html> (Israel Wayne)

<http://www.prpbooks.com/RIW/> (A link associated with the book, *Revolutions in Worldview*)

<http://www.summit.org/resources/> (Summit Ministries)

<http://www.gotquestions.org/Espanol/index.html> (Spanish available for some articles)

<http://www.probe.org/content/view/932/77/> (Spanish available for some articles)

<http://www.wilberforce.org/contentindex.asp?ID=1030>(A link from Chuck Colson's *Break Point* site)

<http://www.theapologeticsgroup.com> (A guild of artisans, business people and theologians who have devoted their lives and giftings to the service of the Lord and His Great Commission)

<http://www.worldvieweyes.org/strauss-docs.html#Apologetics> (James D. Strauss)

## **Narrative**

### Books

Narrative Reader produced by Recursos Estratégicos Globales

Ryken, Leland

1992 Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Steffen, Tom A.

1996 Reconnecting God's Story to Ministry. La Habra, CA: Center for Organizational & Ministry Development.

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<http://www.oralbible.com/resources.php> (Many resources for storytelling)

<http://echothestory.com/downloads/StoryResources.pdf> (Many resources for storytelling)

## **Culture and Language Acquisition**

<http://www.claware.com> (New Tribes Mission's web site that provides help for culture and language acquisition. This site includes software for recording cultural findings and analyzing them. A tutorial helps guide you. You do not need a user name or password at this site. Once at the site, simply click on the download button and gain access to helpful downloads)

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