

# AFRICAN WORLDVIEW: AN INTRODUCTION

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## WHAT IS WORLDVIEW?

Everyone has a worldview. It is therefore critical, particularly as cross-cultural missionaries in African that we understand the African worldview if we are to be strategic and effective in communicating the Gospel.

But what is worldview? Worldview is the set of assumptions and presumptions that a person holds consciously or unconsciously about how they perceive reality (Kurka 2004; Sire 1988:17). It provides us with the much-needed foundation for behaviour, thought and assumptions which govern how we live. Worldview is the underlying set of ideas that enables people to cope with life in a given culture (Kraft 1999:385,387). Through it we have the basis of how we perceive our world, for example whether we consider the extended family a critical part of our lives or only the nuclear family, our belief in the spirit world or not, etc. Our worldview guides our understanding and interpretation of the nature of reality. Actually, it is what unravels the underlying complexity of life, like a Gordian knot, a plane's black box or the kingpin log (Osborne 1998).

Worldview depends on the community to which a person belongs and grows up in, and on what is learned from family and teachers (O'Donovan 1996:3). A person's worldview is reinforced through repetition of familiar actions and is generally taken for granted until one encounters a different worldview which forces them to analyse why they do or perceive things in a certain way.

There is a very close relationship between worldview and religion. Religion dictates and shapes the worldview of a person. In other words, religion is at the core of a person's worldview. One's worldview is therefore essentially a manifestation of the underlying religious beliefs. This close interplay between religion and worldview is very critical to mission as it implies that we should not simply seek to have converts without addressing the underlying worldviews.

Another important aspect that can easily be overlooked is the fact that worldviews are not stagnant; they constantly change. The Traditional/Primal worldview of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century is not what it is now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, even though there may be several continuities. Neither is biblical worldview stagnant. In fact this dynamic nature of biblical worldview has led scholars to question whether we can strictly talk of one biblical worldview or rather several biblical worldviews relating to different epochs. For now, it will suffice to point that this dynamism of worldviews demands that missionaries must therefore be keen to keep abreast with changes in their worldview and the worldview of the people they minister to. Otherwise they will easily find themselves out of touch with the people's experiences.

Since the subject of worldview is rather wide, it is helpful to reduce it into some basic themes for ease of reference and comparison. In this paper, I have used the following themes: Supreme Being, The Cosmos, Human Beings, Community, Knowing and Ethics (adopted from Burnett 1988 and Burnett 1995).

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## **AFRICAN WORLDVIEW**

African worldview is generally classified under Primal worldview, which is the set of underlying presuppositions about life in a Traditional/Primal society. These are the societies whose religion reveal have a number of the basic features of all religions (Burnett 1995:57). The term "Primal" is used to refer to religions which were there prior to the so-called "universal" religions such as Christianity, Islam, etc. (Turner 1994a:129). Though the term "Primal" connotes some element of primitiveness, I have nevertheless used it in this essay for lack of a better term. The following are the useful basic themes in exploring the African worldview:

### **Supreme Being**

In traditional African society, there is implied and widespread belief in a Supreme Being, God. African tribal societies are rich in the awareness of a Supreme Being to the extent that no native-born African is unaware of God's existence (O'Donovan 1996:41). However, the origin of God is generally a mystery; different myths exist in different African cultures trying to explain God's origin.

This Supreme Being, God, is believed to be the Creator of everything and Sustainer of life. This concept of God as Creator among Africans is briefly but well explored by Mbiti where God is described as Excavator, Cleaver, Moulder, Carpenter, Originator and Begetter to define his creative power (2004). I think this belief gives rise to the widespread worship of fertility gods.

In traditional African societies, God is revered as being everywhere; he is omnipresent. Thus, the Langi say 'He is like air', the Ngombe say he is 'The One who fills everything' and the Burundi say 'He who is met everywhere' (O'Donovan 1996:47). Though the above statements attest to God's omnipresence, it is noted that in everyday life among Primal peoples, there is a very strong belief that God is far removed from man and earth, away in the farthest heavens; he is "A terribly remote God" (Donovan 2003:36). This emanates from various myths about how God got angry and left the earth for the far heavens after man disappointed him (Burnett 1995:59). He is therefore distinctly removed from the daily affairs of this world and thus can only be approached through intermediaries such as priests (O'Donovan 1996:41). This ambivalence of God being both transcendent and immanent among the Nuer, one of the Primal societies, is pointed out by Evans-Pritchard (2004).

Another attribute of the traditional African God is that he is Omnipotent; the All-Powerful One. All majestic deeds, such as earthquakes, rain, etc are attributed to him. Small wonder according to the Zulu, He is the One "who roars so that the nations be struck with terror" (O'Donovan 1996:53). Furthermore, God is seen as the Provider; the one who provides rain to enable people to farm and animals or wild fruits for food. Indeed he is the provider of the ultimate gift - life (ibid., 54-55).

The traditional African God is also Omniscient, the All-Knowing One. Nothing happens without his knowledge. He therefore demands worship from man. However, it has been rightly observed that though sacrifices form an integral part of such worship, there is no direct sacrifice to God in a number of African tribal societies; sacrifice is more to or through the spirits (see Salala 1998:136). There is also the belief in many gods and spirits who are lower than and subservient to the Supreme Being. However, it is important to acknowledge that there is no uniform African traditional belief in the spirit world as Salala rightly points out (ibid., 134). For a more detailed treatment of this subject of God in Africa, see Mbiti 1982 and 1992.

### **The Cosmos**

Traditional Africans believe that the cosmos was created by a Supreme Being, God. However, the Supreme Being is generally distant and unconcerned with the creation having delegated that responsibility to spirits and lesser gods, such as rain, fertility, or forest gods (as has been

noted in the foregoing section). As God's representatives, these spirits and gods have direct influence on people and nature. Some spirits are good and are therefore worshipped while others are evil and are to be avoided. There is therefore an over-riding fear of the unknown, and sometimes fatalism due to such as complex world of spirits and human beings (Burnett 1995:58-60).

The cosmos is believed to be a total unity with no distinction between the visible and the invisible, the natural and the supernatural. Human beings are seen as part of nature and the two are constantly at war with each other (Turner 1994a).

### **Human Beings**

In African tribal societies, human beings were created by the Supreme Being. However, exactly how that came about varies a lot. Some communities, like the legend recorded by O'Donovan clearly points out that man was created by God (1996:80), while other like the *Kikuyu* of Kenya believe that their first ancestors walked down from Mount Kenya (considered to be heaven).

In most African traditional cultures, there seem to be no distinction between man and the rest of creation. There is no dichotomy in the human nature, between the material and the immaterial. Therefore, the soul is capable of leaving the body since it is not viewed as encased by the human body. This is what gives rise to the belief in sickness caused by soul-stealing by witches since the human soul is not an entity but "several inter-related souls" (Burnett 1995:60). It even makes it for Primal peoples to believe that sickness is caused by the intrusion of a spirit on a person.

There is also a strong belief in ancestors. A living person is part of the ancestral chain. Death is not an end to a person's life but simply a move to the world of ancestors, what Mbiti calls "the living dead" (1982: 61). Ancestors can transfer some aspects of their souls to living persons (Golka 1993:107). They continue to live on through children named after them; in fact, some ancestors appear in dreams to demand that a parent name a child after them. The proof of such complex continuity is claimed to be in the resemblance of character and appearance between the child and the ancestor (O'Donovan 1996:82). As such, ancestors are seen as superior to people who are still alive. They demand respect, allegiance and worship by their living progenitors to maintain the delicate balance in the physical and spiritual world. In return, the ancestors are expected to protect and mediate on behalf of the living.

The concept of "the living dead" referred to above, points to a belief in life after death. However, it is not very clear how this transition takes place after death. Some maintain that the spirits of the dead are in an unknown state until they are "brought home" or "settled" through a series of rituals. This gives credence to the extremely elaborate funeral rites among several Primal societies (see Fish and Fish 1995 for a detailed analysis of funeral rites among the Kalenjin of Kenya, as one such example).

It is perhaps important to point out at this juncture that the lack of the concept of equality in creation of man means that in the Primal worldview, status is a major issue. The kings, witchdoctors and elders are considered special and above the rest. And generally men occupied a higher status than women and children in several Primal societies. This hierarchical structure demands detailed knowledge of how one ought to relate with the various categories; a complex art that children must learn.

### **Community**

African traditional societies place very high premium on communities. Obligations to family and wider community (clan or tribe) supersede personal needs. Major decisions are made communally. Individualism is despised. The value of an individual is in the community, which

echoes the philosophy “I am, because we are” (Burnett 1995:63). This is what O’Donovan rightly refers to:

Africans tend to find their identity and meaning in life through being part of their extended family, clan and tribe. There is a strong feeling of common participation in life, a common history, and a common destiny. The reality in Africa may be described with the statement: ‘I am because the community is’. (1996:4)

Socializing is therefore considered very important as it helps maintain and extend one’s scope of community. Events which bring people together such as communal farming, funerals, initiation rites, etc. are cherished. African traditional people freely visit each other without the need for appointments, like in the West. During such visits, the focus is not on the measured outcome; rather it is on the need for socializing. When people meet, they exchange elaborate greetings paying special attention to enquire about the family news. It is considered extremely rude for one to pass another person or a group without proper, elaborate greetings.

Among African traditional peoples several initiation practices such as circumcision, initiations, etc. exist not simply as rites of passage but maybe more importantly to promote communal bonding and identity. In most African societies there is widespread practice of circumcision of girls not just boys. Such rites are used to educate the young people on many important matters such as marriage, etc. as they are accepted in adulthood. However, the shedding of blood during such rites as circumcision is to solemnize the event and provide a covenant unity between boys/girls and the whole clan, both living and dead (O’Donovan 1996:235).

Given such strong emphasis on community, old people play a significant role in maintaining unity; they are respected and their experience highly valued. **Childlessness or bareness is considered a major taboo since children are considered a must in ensuring continuation of the family line and the ancestral status after a person dies (ibid., 295). This is so because the dead can continue to live through a child being named after him/her, hence the concept of the “living dead” already referred to above. In such a context therefore, to be without child is considered one of the worst curses. A barren woman is thus considered useless and cursed while the husband of such a woman is forced to marry other wives until he gets children, especially boys, who can perpetuate the family name and lineage.**

### **Knowing/Knowledge**

Arising from the belief in a world full of hostile spiritual powers, every physical event is believed to have an underlying spiritual cause. This cause-effect belief is so strong that it overrides all events or happenings. African traditional societies therefore put emphasis on the need to know how not to disturb these forces.

Such knowledge is passed down the generations through stories, myths and rituals. Older people in such societies play a very important role in this process of learning as O’Donovan points out: “In many traditional African societies the idea of truth is related to the stories and myths about life and human experience which are passed down from one generation to another by the elders or grandparents of the clan.” (1996:10). Burnett rightly points out that such myths in tribal societies are not simply fairy-tale stories but concrete means used to symbolically convey truth and wisdom (1995:61). Dreams and visions are also considered important means through which the spirits convey messages to the living.

Taboos and appropriate sacrifices are part of this complex system which must be carefully followed to keep away the bad spirits. This leads to prevalent use of magic and divination. Magic refers to the use of mystical powers to protect oneself from “misfortune, danger, evil spirits, sickness, and to get control over other people and situations” (O’Donovan 1996:238). Divination is “used to discover the person who supposedly caused someone’s sickness,

difficulties, or death...to get advice or make decisions...to learn how the ancestors have been offended and **which ritual or sacrifice will solve a particular problem**...to get revenge on an enemy...(ibid., 242). Magic and divination are therefore key in African traditional societies.

### **Ethics**

The understanding of what is good and bad is based on the traditions passed down from the ancestors, as already described in the preceding section. **Thus, it is the family or clan which determines what constitutes good or bad, right or wrong (Burnett 1995:65). In such a context, to go against the family or clan is a considered a serious betrayal which merits various categories of punishment. Banishment is the ultimate punishment, in which case the person loses all value and ceases to exist in the terms of the clan (ibid., 65).** Anyone who does not belong to the clan or tribe is considered an outsider and can be stolen from or fought provided the spirits approve.

Tradition forms the rubric of the value system in a African traditional society. In other words, everyone is expected to follow without questions what has been done before, tested and proven effective. In such a context, right and wrong depends on what the society has decided depending on its traditions. Thus, "Sin is usually socially defined" (Loewen 2000:138).

Rulers and the elderly people in the clan or family are the custodians and enforcers of law and order, though the community at large can enforce law on any of its members. This enables a society to have order and direction. However, the fact that African traditional societies tend to be largely oral means that over time laws or interpretations change their meanings. This means that the very oldest persons in a society are the custodians of law and rituals since they are the ones who can remember most. However, there is tension in this approach to issues since it is also equally true that the older a person gets the less accurate their memory becomes. So how can they be trusted to convey the truth?

### **CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS**

In light of the above aspects of African worldview, I wish to make a couple of observations which I think are critical for cross-cultural mission work in Africa:

#### **African Understanding of God**

In most cases the traditional names of God have been used in the Bible as God's name. However, we have to ask: Is the Ngai of Kikuyu the same as the God of the Bible? A look at the brief overview above reveals that indeed there are several points in which the two worldviews agree in their understanding of God i.e. he is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, etc. Therefore it is important to highlight these common areas.

**However, there are also several aspects where the God of the Bible differs from the traditional God. Some of these are that the God of the Bible is personal and relational; we can relate with him personally and even call him Father. This is unlike the impersonal tribal God. He is not removed away from everyday life like the tribal God. He is interested in our daily affairs. This means that he is not like some "angry headmaster out there in the sky with a cane in his hands" just waiting for us to mess up then we be disciplined!**

**The Christian God is loving. This sharply contrasts with the almost total lack of the concept of love in the African tribal God. The God of the Bible loves us just as we are – with all our sins. In fact he does not treat us as our sins deserve but is merciful and forgives our sins through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. There is no longer the need for continuous sacrifices to appease God; Jesus Christ made the ultimate sacrifice and thereafter human beings can receive forgiveness from God.**

God is in full control of other lesser spirits unlike the possibility in tribal religion where some lesser gods are fully in control of their areas of influence. All spirits including the Devil are subject to our Almighty God. And ultimately at the end of the earth all evil shall be defeated.

### **God and Nature in Africa**

How should African Christians respond to the interrelatedness of God and nature in Africa? For example, such occurrences as animals talking like human beings, witchcraft i.e. use of spirits (“*jiini*”) to influence human affairs, worship of ancestors, astral projection, etc.? Or how should Christians interpret fertility issues such as barrenness, droughts, floods, etc.? In light of the above, the following would be broad categories of issues to address:

#### *Natural Phenomena (i.e. Fertility Issues)*

There is need to highlight the fact that God is totally in control of the cosmos and therefore we do not have to live in fear of nature, even in the face of natural disasters. Furthermore, when faced with natural disasters such as floods, droughts, etc. we need to point out that sometimes there are natural causes. For example drought could be due to deforestation. As a result, we as African Christians need to play our role (i.e. in reforestation) even as we can pray to God.

With regard to fertility issues such as barrenness, African Christian couples need to hold firmly the biblical teaching that in marriage the husband and wife are complete in Christ and children are a blessing from God (lack of children does not mean the end of life)! Also be open to medical help. The Church also ought to offer more support to couples facing childlessness due to immense family pressure that they daily have to face (i.e. for the man to divorce their wife for a “fertile” wife).

#### *Unnatural Phenomena (i.e. Animals talking like Human Beings)*

In traditional Africa there are numerous reports of bizarre unnatural occurrences all over Africa. Some examples include: pumpkins talking to people, people transforming into animals, mermaids, etc. In most cases whenever such occurrences take place there is strong inclination to interpret them in the light of African traditional beliefs – that the gods and/or ancestors want to communicate.

As Christians, it is imperative to note that though there are few cases of such unnatural acts in the Bible (i.e. when the donkey talked to Baalam), they were exceptions rather than the norm. They always pointed the people to God instead of worshipping the animals or trees.

#### *Witchcraft and Spiritual Warfare*

We need to acknowledge that some unnatural manifestations are demonic and therefore demand spiritual warfare instead of fear. Christians have been given authority over demonic forces.

There is also need to re-assess the currently popular form of spiritual mapping which seems to borrow a lot from African tradition. Where is the sufficiency of Christ’s death on the cross?

### **Human Beings**

The traditional African worldview undervalues women and girls. We have to confront this distorted understanding of the value of human life with the biblical worldview which appreciates all human beings as created in God’s image.

The sacred position and worship of ancestors in African societies needs very serious re-evaluation for Christians. This calls for a biblical understanding of Afterlife. The Bible expressly condemns worship of idols and any communication with the dead (necromancy). This would seem to affect various traditional practices i.e. naming children based on ancestors “asking” to be named through dreams or other means.

## Community

The extended family is of critical importance in Africa. Western missionaries do well to pay special attention to the implications of this worldview in the socio-spiritual aspects of Christian life for Africans. It is also critical that the Church in the West be helped to extend welcome to the increasing African Diaspora in the West.

Hospitality is a major hallmark of African community. This is an area the Church in Africa could enrich the rest of Christendom. Unfortunately the effects of globalization are seriously eroding this significant aspect of the African culture.

Another major issue that needs candid reflection is the perennial problem of tribalism across Africa. How come that African Christians are seemingly powerless in the face of this vice? What kind of discipleship is required if we are to address it?

Also the issue of community needs closer evaluation. Though Africans are more communal than westerners, this is often superficial. It seems to be simply a veneer which quickly fades off in the face of conflicts. For example, how do we reconcile the blatant individual greed which often does not take community good into consideration? Or why do African communities viciously fight each other in inter-tribal conflicts if we truly value community?

## Knowledge

There is need to have Christian replacements for the various African traditional rituals and rites which acted as teaching avenues. In this regard, the Church in Africa needs to have alternative Rites of Passages for all categories – at birth, during puberty/teenage, at marriage, mid-life, old age, etc. Special attention needs to be given to the issue of parenting. How can African Christian parents be better equipped to bring up their children in a fast-changing world?

## Ethics

The average African Christian tends to display inherent ethical contradictions. For example, how does a committed African Christian embrace corruption with such moral ease? Or why do we tend to revert to the support of our ethnic communities when caught doing something wrong? Or does the fact that my community accepts something as good make it okay even if it goes against the word of God?

## MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Having explored in detail the African worldview, let me explore what it means for effective cross-cultural mission. I think the following are critical implications which demand attention:

### Worldview and Conversion

Given that everyone has a basic underlying framework for life, conversion inevitably implies a major change in worldview. Kurka therefore rightly observes that “conversion to Jesus is a world view decision, a deliberate rejection of a previous understanding of reality, a previous set of assumptions about what is real and true, and a commitment to a whole new set of assumptions” (1998). I believe this is what Apostle Paul refers to in 2 Cor. 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.” Thus, a person with a Primal worldview who becomes a Christian must undergo a huge transformation in their set of underlying beliefs about God, life after death, ethics, etc.

One of the missiological implications of this is that if the demands for such a change are not fully understood and appreciated, then there is the ever-present danger of having Christians who are syncretistic; Christians who mix their former worldviews with the Christian worldview.

Every missionary must therefore work towards avoiding syncretism. However, for a missionary to avoid syncretism, they need to diligently work towards understanding the local culture and

prevailing worldview so as to be able to fully appreciate the demands of conversion on the locals. This demands time and patience, not the “hit-and-run” or “show-us-the-results-immediately” approach to mission. We do well to heed Mbiti: “We need to sensitize African theology to explore the meaning and process of conversion in the African setting” (1986:192).

### **The Challenge of Syncretism**

Syncretism is indeed a major challenge for Christians from Primal societies as they tend to want to mix their former religion and Christianity. A study of the Old Testament reveals that Israelites were syncretistic time and again. They continued to serve the gods of Egypt and those of the surrounding Canaanite nations (2 Ki. 17:29-40). It is due to this that God allowed them to go into Exile (2 Ki. 17:7-9; Jer. 25:5-11) despite earlier warnings to avoid such practices (Ex. 34:15-17; Lev. 18:3). The sad story of Israel’s syncretism and subsequent punishment is a stark reminder of God’s standards human proneness to sin.

The challenge of syncretism among African Christians has been and continues to be major. Why? Some possible causes are: cultural renewal in Africa, development of African theology which justifies traditional religions, emergence of liberal theology, and lack of adequate Bible knowledge among new Christians such that in times of trial the converts turn to Primal religious belief (O’Donovan 1996:255).

In the light of such a huge challenge, we must, even if at the cost of being considered too conservative, boldly speak against the false teachings of some African theologians who are justifying syncretistic ideas.

### **Worldview and Communicating the Gospel**

Given that becoming a Christian demands huge personal transformation, we must make every effort to communicate these demands as clearly as possible. However, any attempt to communicate this without first grasping the underlying worldviews will result in costly mistakes especially where the one sharing the Gospel is from a different culture. For example, **the concept of personal salvation espoused by a Western missionary** who is largely influenced by Modernity’s high premium on individualism is bound to create confusion for the African Christian convert who is heavily influenced by the Primal worldview on community. (I think the Primal concept of community is closer to the Biblical teaching than Modernity’s concept.)

**For effective communication to happen, the communicator must see that not everything in Primal worldview is wrong. There are aspects that are consistent with biblical views which should be strengthened and used as points of contact for confronting the divergent themes. For example the concept of community needs to be reinforced with proper biblical views of individual responsibility.**

Then there is the process of discipling new converts. To make the conversion process authentic, I think it would be better if the convert is allowed (under guidance) to explore the biblical demands and then formulate convictions based on their journey of discovery. Such an approach would lead us to critically review the idea and practice of the so-called “Follow-up” or “Discipleship” classes for new converts where the missionary or a mature local Christian is doing all the teaching (lecturing) to the convert. **Effective discipleship is not a one-way process.**

Another issue is Don Richardson’s proposal to use Redemption Analogies to bridge the gap between the missionary and the people (1999:397-403). It involves finding out from the culture any stories or practices which resonate with the Biblical story. For example, the scapegoat of Leviticus 16 is similar to the cleansing animals in African funerals and therefore could be used when preaching in funeral ceremonies as redemptive analogy – Christ the Redeemer as the perfect *Scapegoat*, who at the cross took away the pollution of sin and death forever.

Admittedly, effective use of this method demand good grasp of the worldview and the cultural beliefs and practices.

### **The Kingdom of God Motif**

The strong emphasis on community in the African worldview points to its unique significance for effective mission - the centrality of the Kingdom of God motif.

Evangelism should preach individual and community conversion  the broad sense of the term, as well as preaching the Kingdom of God in all its ramifications. Foreign missions in Africa have often left out the Kingdom of God. But the gospel is all about the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14 f.). The work and teachings of our Lord Jesus are directed towards the realization of the Kingdom of God...We have seen or heard too much conversion motif, and too little Kingdom of God motif. The New Testament emphasis is clearly the reverse, and this is what waits to be rediscovered in our understanding of mission in the African context. (Mbiti, 1986:192)

This echoes the *kingdom paradigm of missions*, proposed by Engel and Dyrness, which envisages the building of dynamic Christian communities which have four key characteristics: sensitivity to God's initiative, having the vision of the reign of Christ as the key motivation, allowing mutual sharing from multiple centers of influence, and a deep commitment to partnership and collaboration (2000:82-108). Though addressing postmodern generation, I believe this new paradigm, with its emphasis on journey metaphor, the key place for community and the respect it accords to not-yet Christians, offers a lot to Primal worldview.

It is insightful to note that this idea of community is echoed by Donovan who contends that missionary work is for interrelated workers from the community of faith (2003:144), and by O'Donovan who compares the local church to the African extended family and calls for the **local church community which should be the place where "We belong to each other because we belong to Christ" (1996:154-157).**

As I desperately watch the erosion of community life in a number of African Primal societies due to Western influence, I cannot help but pray that the African Church can preach and model the Kingdom of God motif. Otherwise, we will continue to witness a "foreign" Christianity which does not resonate with the Primal man's yearnings for community. Churches, pastors and Christians in general must be ready to understand and build this cultural bridge of community based on the Kingdom of God if they are to meaningfully create a biblical model of what church ought to be.

### **Sound Biblical Theology**

One of the major areas of divergence between African traditional worldview and biblical worldview is in the understanding of issues such as God, human beings, death, after death, etc. It has been shown in the foregoing sections that though Africans had general revelation, their understanding fell short of what the Bible teaches. This means that even though there appears to be many common beliefs between the two worldviews, there is all likelihood of distortion of biblical teachings by African Christians. The smaller such divergences appear to be, the greater the danger of error and the propensity towards such error.

As such, there is dire need for sound theology - explaining the basic doctrines and teachings of the Bible. Some of the key areas would include teaching on God, human beings, sin, creation, ethics, death, afterlife, ancestors, spirits and gods. I think this is the one area where the African Church is at its weakest. Perhaps it is compounded by our adopting teaching methods which do not resonate with the African traditional societies. We seriously need to explore and discover means of conveying biblical teachings in a way that can be effectively learnt by Africans. Maybe the current stress on Storytelling (Oral Learning) will be able to meet this dire need.

## Mission and Ethics

The outworking of God's relationship with his people was supposed to be manifested in their manner of life. The biblical worldview demanded that God's people, the Israelites, make a radical break from the prevailing Primal worldview around them. They were called apart to be holy and distinct from the neighboring pagan societies, the Gentiles. In this way Israel was to be "a light to the Gentiles" (Isa. 49:6). The Law, given by God through Moses at Mount Sinai, was thus the new standard of living, the new Moral Code, for God's people.

Given this understanding, it is therefore critical that any converts from African traditional worldview must choose radically new lifestyle. This means that mission to Africans must clearly elucidate the demands of the Gospel particularly regarding ethics. **Instead of a clan-based ethics, the Bible ought to be the standard yardstick in all matters of life and godliness.** 

## CONCLUSION

This paper has pointed out the crucial place of understanding the African worldview in the broader scope of world mission. It seems to me that one major problem in the African scene is the fact that this knowledge about worldviews and mission is lacking. My contention is that the inherent dangers and mistakes that any missionary is bound to meet and make are not simply limited to missionaries (whether local or not); they equally affect any and every African Christian (young or old, church member or leader) who does not pay serious attention to the same. It would therefore be true that training for both western missionaries and African Christians on worldviews is necessary for a healthy African Church. I strongly believe that such training would greatly minimize the misunderstandings and mistakes.

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