

Understanding Another Worldview

By Weston Leibee

As believers we belong to the society of the redeemed! Our society has the most worldwide, the most cross-cultural, and the most multi-ethnic, international agenda in the world! Jesus said to His disciples, "*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations...*" (Matt. 24:14).

Now that's quite an agenda! We have a HUGE cross-cultural agenda--to bring every *ethnos* (ethnic group) into the kingdom of God. Furthermore, we are the only society in the world where not one of us is allowed to dwell only in his own culture. God has created many diverse groups of people. Because God loves diversity, we ought to love it too.

As Christians do we need to study things like culture, worldview, etc? I think the answer is: absolutely! Based on the worldwide mission we have been given, we must. We, of all people, should be interested in the peoples of the earth, their ways, their languages, and their cultures. Why? Because we have been commanded to bring them all to Jesus.

Going As Learners

When my wife and I first moved to the Konkombas in Ghana, we went as learners. We decided we were going to be flexible and not get offended. We were going to eat everything offered to us! And I have to admit, it was a bit disappointing to find that the Konkombas could not reciprocate. How could they? We were new in their culture. Would they be interested in strange American ways? But even when we tried to do things the way they did it, they would often laugh at us. They just didn't have grace for crossing cultures.

Tizet (corn porridge) is what they make and eat every day, 365 days a year. My wife would watch the way they make it, and then she began to make

it. She would bring the pot, and they would just open the lid and look in and say, "Is that what white people eat?!"

Somehow the consistency wasn't quite the same as theirs. One's heart just falls, and you think, "Can't you see I'm trying everything as hard as I can to belong here?" But the answer is: they are not born again. They are not a part of this worldwide society of the redeemed, so they don't need to be cross-cultural. But you and I *do* need to have that kind of grace.

When I offer them a plate of food in my house that my wife cooked, they may say, "I can't eat this." But if I did that with the food they set before me in their village, it would be an insult. However, I am called to the cross. The Bible tells me I have to go and eat the foods set before me. Jesus gave a clear command to His disciples to go, stay in a person's house, eat with those people, and stay with those people if they'll accept you.

Once I was out weeding my garden, leaning over with one of those short-handled hoes, trying to do it just like they do. Here in America we have six-foot-long hoes because we want to save our backs. But they say you can't do anything that far away from the ground! When they watched me hoe, they would say, "Is that the way you hoe in America?"

"No, I'm doing it just like you."

"No, you're not. You have to turn that thing just a little bit like this."

And I think, "O Lord, how am I ever going to make it?" But then we realize that we are the ones with a mission, not them. We must make the effort because we want to get into their hearts. Brothers and sisters, are you willing to give up your personal rights? We don't have rights. You and I are called

to surrender. Amen?

Know Your Audience

Jesus understood His audience. He knew the worldview of the seeker in front of Him. In John 3, a seeker named Nicodemus came to Jesus. Jesus told him that to enter the kingdom, he must be born the second time. In the next chapter Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that to enter the kingdom she must drink the living water. In John 6 Jesus says that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood to enter the kingdom. And He told the rich young ruler that in order to inherit eternal life, he had to sell his possessions and follow Him. Was He preaching different gospels?

Jesus knew that He had to speak so that the person in front of Him could understand. Think of all the ways Jesus presented the gospel: as the new birth, a pearl, a grain of wheat, taking up the cross, a lost sheep--but it was all the same gospel!

Worldview Defined

What do we mean when we talk about someone's worldview? It is the way that we view the world around us; it is the core of our value system. It is in essence the springboard from which our beliefs originate, and it directs every behavior in our life. Our worldview is so much a part of our life and thought that it is very difficult to get away from it enough to study it objectively. It is who we really are.

Your worldview is different from your soul. Your soul is your spirit that God created and put in you. The human soul is in no way produced or fabricated by man. But your worldview is learned, produced and shaped by the society or culture in which you grow up.

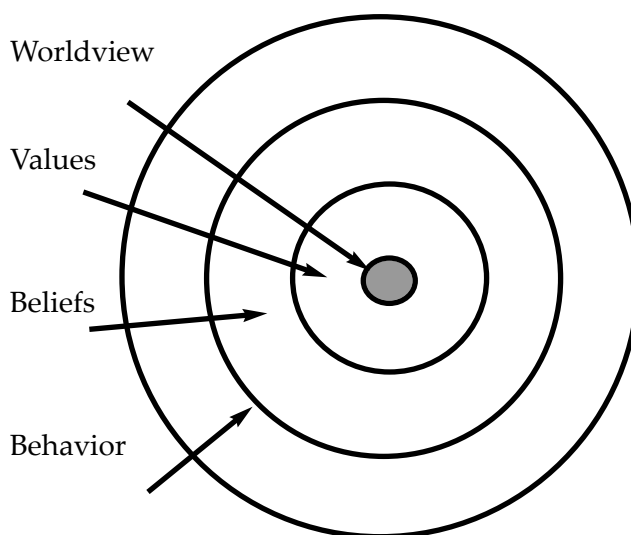
Differing Worldviews

At the Karaga Bible School a few months ago, I was teaching four points on the Creation of man: God created man in His image, God created man from the dust of the earth, etc. They were written from a Western mindset, but as they grappled with it, I mentioned that God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living soul. All at once they lit up! "Wow, tell us that again!"

To the Konkomba mind, the nose is the essence of life. Most of one's breathing is done through the nose. The nose signifies life. In their thinking, to cut one's nose is to kill a person. To our mind, the heart is the essence of life. We don't see our heart. But they have chosen an organ that one can see every day and that gives life every second. The nose in their worldview represents life.

God also created your soul within you. God awakened within us a spirit to respond to Him. We can choose good or evil, and we have an eternal destiny. But the soul is different.

The diagram will help us understand worldview and the parts that come out from it. At the core of the diagram is **worldview**. Your worldview is the way that you think, how your mind operates. This is shaped by the society in which you are raised. It develops automatically as you interact and learn from others and from your environment. From birth our culture and learning determine our **values**. Our values are what is important to us. Our values in turn form our **beliefs**. This also includes the spiritual dimension, what we cannot see. That which is important to us affects our beliefs. And our beliefs influence how we act, our **behavior**.



When we move to another country, the part that sticks out to us is the **behavior**, what we see: the food people eat, the things they wear, the way they greet each other, the places they sleep. These are not just little behavioral quirks; they stem from what those people believe in, what they value, and what they treasure.

When Charity and I first moved among the Konkombas, we noticed many different behavior patterns and wondered what was behind them all. What motivated these people? What did they value? And what was at the core of all this--their worldview? This is all very necessary before we bring Christ to them. How are they going to perceive the gospel? So for the last year and a half we did a lot of observing, asking questions, and studying.

We had to undo a lot of our Western thinking and patterns. I can't use Western idioms there. In America I may ask, "How is your spiritual life?" A Konkomba will say, "Wonderful." But he is referring to his worship of the spirits.

Keeping in mind the diagram, let's look at a physical example to begin with. Food is basic in every culture, since we all have to eat. When we began living among the Konkombas, we noticed some behaviors surrounding the use of food that seemed strange to us. We noticed that there are long, laborious methods of preparing food. It is



done in a very careful, meticulous way, almost reverently. What might have shaped these values and behavior?

The Konkombas have a history of famine, drought, a weak economy, and a highly inflated currency. All this has made food incredibly valuable. They also have a worldview that food is the essence of life. They often say, "If you skip one meal, you may die." We may see that as funny, but we have to realize that on their low-calorie, low-nutrition diet, that wouldn't take very long. Many of them hover on the border of existence.

All this places great value on the quantity of food, not necessarily the quality. Through the harshness of the dry season and the unpredictable rainfall, just having enough food and getting it on the

Konkomba Worldview on Food

Worldview - History of famine and drought, weak economy, inflated currency; laborious and backbreaking methods of farming

Values - quantity and availability of food

Beliefs - food is scarce, one should use caution and respect

Behavior - proper manners and words in giving/receiving food, enjoying the tedious methods of preparation

American Worldview on Food

Worldview - History of prosperity, strong economy, government-subsidized pricing; efficient, relatively easy methods of farming

Values - quality, efficiency, and variety of food

Beliefs - more than enough food and water, one should choose the food one enjoys and is easiest and quickest to make

Behavior - fast food, expensive and pre-made food, on-the-go eating without even sitting down, even throwing food to one another (bags of chips, cans of soda, candy)

table is a major feat. That forms a belief system that food is to be treated with reverence and carefulness, and it brings a corresponding behavior as we just discussed.

Look at the American worldview on food. Our behavior with food is very different. Our culture of food is based on a worldview that, historically, we are a prosperous nation. Who here has known hunger or famine in his lifetime? We also have very mechanized methods of farm production. Many of us don't even know how things grow. Where does milk come from? Many children will say, "The store!" We know nothing about the hardships of cultivating and producing food.

Our economy has been strong. We import a vast variety of food from all around the world. Our worldview focuses on foods that taste good and are efficient. We have absolutely no value system based on: "Is there going to be enough food?"

We can buy food from vending machines or convenience stores, or dine at a vast array of restaurants. And it produces a behavior incredibly dif-

ferent about food. Many Americans stand when they eat, or eat on the run. In Ghana that is totally forbidden and disrespectful. You have to stop and eat in quietness. To throw food across the room is unthinkable. If Konkombas came here and watched us, they would be appalled at our culture of food.

I hope you get the picture. If you are not sensitive about the other's worldview, you or he might get offended. That may bring about misunderstandings and strained relationships that could affect the reception of the gospel. We must do everything we can to understand and overcome the differences that result from worldview. Then the living gospel, Jesus incarnate in us, can more clearly be seen through you and me

This article was adapted from a message given at the 2005 Missions Conference. In part two we will look more at the implications of worldview for the gospel. How does a Konkomba's worldview affect his values and belief system? How does he approach God? And what is his understanding of sin?



Giving Gifts

Giving gifts of food is very common among the Konkombas. A girl from a neighboring compound might come to our compound with a gift of food. She will often bring it in a beautiful, painted tin. The girl will come and say, "I want to give you a gift." She will curtsy.

I would take it with two hands very slowly. And then there would be a respectful exchange of words: "God bless you. God add back to you two of what you have given. May God give us one mouth together [unity]." Even little children do this reverently and respectfully.