

GENESIS 1-11 AND THE AFRICAN WORLDVIEW:  
CONFLICT OR CONFORMITY?

by

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## SUMMARY

### GENESIS 1-11 AND THE AFRICAN WORLDVIEW: CONFLICT OR CONFORMITY?

The purpose of this study was to present an analysis of the belief systems of the worldviews behind the religions of Christianity and African Traditional Religion with a view toward aiding the Christian church in Africa help its converts from African Traditional Religion to hold a biblical worldview in the areas where the biblical and traditional African worldviews conflict. The two worldviews were analyzed, and compared using the philosophical elements of a worldview and the religious dimensions of how a worldview is lived out in culture.

Genesis 1-11 of the Christian Bible was used as the basis for the biblical or Christian worldview. The Christian believes that the Bible is God's inspired word to mankind and that what is recorded in Genesis 1-11 gives God's answers to the basic philosophical questions that make up a worldview. Therefore, Christian philosophy and the Christian worldview are postulated on God's special revelation as recorded in the Bible. The African worldview is based upon the sayings and traditions of the elders as received from the ancestors. The traditional African believes in the trustworthiness of the ancestors as strongly as the Christian believes in the trustworthiness of the Bible. When an African converts from African Traditional Religion to Christianity he encounters a conflict of beliefs in certain philosophical elements of his worldview.

Upon the conviction that beliefs determine practice, unless the African convert to Christianity changes his beliefs he will not change his practice, and syncretism will be the result. After analyzing the two worldviews, the areas of conflict in beliefs were presented with recommendations for bringing the African Christian's worldview beliefs into conformity with the Christian worldview.

**KEY TERMS:** Africa; African traditional Religion; African worldview; Biblical worldview; Christianity; Christian worldview; Philosophical elements of worldview; Philosophy; Religious dimensions of worldview; Syncretism; Worldview

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## DECLARATION

Student number: **3439-620-9**

I declare that GENESIS1-11 AND THE AFRICAN WORLDVIEW: CONFLICT OR CONFORMITY? is my own work and that the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Jack Pryor Chalk

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Date

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## CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

Traditional religions are not primarily for the individual, but for his community of which he is a part. Chapters of African religion are written everywhere in the life of the community, and in traditional society there are no irreligious people. *To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivities of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundation, his context of security, his kinships, and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence [emphasis mine]. To be without one of these corporate elements of life, is to be out of the whole picture. Therefore, to be without religion amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society, and African peoples do not know how to exist without religion (Mbiti 1969:3).*

This thesis is concerned with the religions of Christianity and African Traditional Religion and the areas of conflict and conformity in the worldviews behind those religions. As reflected in the above quote, religion is an integral part of the lives of African peoples. Every book and article on African Traditional Religion witnesses to that truth. Those from the West will have trouble comprehending religion being such an integral part of one's life. For most Westerners, religion is a set of beliefs loosely held and practiced by going to a Christian church on Sunday morning. For the traditional African, 'church' happens when the events of the day call for it. Sickness and consultation with a herbalist or sorcerer, prayers and gifts to ancestors, the rituals performed during rites of passage, the harvest festivals, the avoidance of someone known to be a witch, are the ways they practice their religion or have 'church.'

Because their religion defines who they are, to change religions, for an African, means to give up their identity and the support and security that is embodied in it. That is why missionaries of other religions find it so difficult to make converts. To whole-heartedly accept a new religion means ceasing to be African, and in the words of Mbiti above, 'amounts to a self-excommunication from the entire life of society.'

Because of the social cost to the individual African for accepting a new religion, the new religions (primarily Islam and Christianity) entering the sub-continent have had to determine how much of the traditional religion's beliefs and practices have to be forsaken before they can be accepted into the new religion. Both Islam and Christianity have holy books that define their beliefs and practices. Historically, missionaries from these two religions have looked at their holy books and looked at the religion of the African and have defined conversion in terms of which elements of the old religion have to be abandoned and which elements of the new religion have to be adopted. The conclusions have ranged from total abandonment of the traditional religion and total adoption of the new religion, to keeping all of the traditional religion and adding certain elements of the new. The successes of Islam and Christianity in different parts of Africa can be linked to the approach their missionaries have taken in defining conversion.

Islam is seen to be much more inclusive than Christianity in the traditional practices and beliefs it allows its converts to hold on to. It defines its adherents in terms of what they must 'do' to be of their religion. For that reason Islam has had greater success in the rural areas of Africa where the traditional practices are a part of everyday life, than in the urban. When an African leaves his village community and goes to an urban area, he is uprooted from the sources of his identity and is forced to establish a new one. He is also removed from the daily events that require religious acts, he no longer has access to a herbalist or sorcerer, he is not present in the village for the ritual associated with rites of passage. In other words, the events that reinforce the traditional religious aspects of life are no longer there. This African is more receptive to renouncing what he no longer has and accepting a new religion which will give him a new identity. This is a main reason Christianity is having success

winning converts in urban areas of Africa. Christianity is more concerned with what a convert 'believes' than what he is required to do.

### 1.1 Research Thesis

This thesis will focus on the area of religious beliefs in Africa and will investigate the belief systems of African Traditional Religion and Christianity. These belief systems will be defined in terms of their respective worldviews. It will present an investigation into the similarities and differences between the biblical worldview as presented primarily in Genesis 1-11, and the African worldview. In this work 'God's worldview', 'the biblical worldview', and 'the Christian worldview' are used interchangeably as having the same conceptual meaning. The concept will be developed further in Chapter Three.

The religion of Christianity is rooted in the biblical worldview based primarily on Genesis 1-11 of Christianity's holy book, the Bible. By confession, the Bible is the Christian's source of belief and practice. My thesis is that where the African Christian's beliefs differ from the biblical worldview there is a failure in praxis and the Christian religion is rendered ineffectual in the lives of those who claim to be Christian. Does the typical African Christian worldview reflect the biblical worldview or the traditional African worldview? What are the areas of conformity? What are the areas of conflict?

### 1.2 Limits of Research

Africa is a diverse continent and is the second largest in land mass and population of the six continents defined by the United Nations. The history, tradition, culture and thus the worldview of the people of the mostly Arab North Africa are very different from those of sub-Saharan Africa. Even though the people of North Africa are very

much African and are rich in biblical history, for this work 'Africa' and 'African' will be limited to sub-Saharan Black Africa.

### 1.3 Relevance of Thesis

Most people are not conscious of having a worldview, but all people have one. The areas of investigation in this thesis will follow along the lines of the elemental study and analysis of the fundamental realities of human existence as reflected in a worldview. The African, or anyone else for that matter, does not think in terms of the philosophical elements of reality. He lives life daily based upon assumptions about reality that he has been taught verbally from birth and by experience. However, an independent study of one's worldview can be done along those lines making it possible to compare worldviews. This thesis will analyze the biblical worldview and the African worldview. Any paths of divergence and the resulting need for convergence will be presented.

If the Church in Africa is not preaching and teaching the biblical worldview, accepting it as their own, and living accordingly, its members will accept the new religion without discarding the old beliefs. That, in missiological terms, is called syncretism. Syncretism is 'the mixing of Christian assumptions with those worldview assumptions that are incompatible with Christianity so that the result is not biblical Christianity' (Kraft 1999:390). Is this happening in the African Church? Christianity is rooted in the biblical worldview based primarily on Genesis 1-11. Therefore, the biblical focus of this work will be those worldview assumptions that are fully developed in Genesis 1-11, as well as those found there only in germ form, but elucidated in other parts of the Bible.

### 1.4 Methodological Approach to Research

The methodological approach to my research will be centred on the concept of

‘worldview.’ This work will be structured upon the analysis of worldview because Africans have a worldview, and the religion of Christianity has a worldview. The African worldview is expressed in their parables, religious myths and rituals, social order, and life events. The Christian worldview is revealed in their Bible. The Worldview is seen to be important because worldview determines beliefs and beliefs determine behaviour (praxis).

In analyzing the biblical and African worldviews, philosophical elements involved in a worldview will be identified and compared in each. I believe that all worldviews are religious at their core. An analysis of the philosophical elements of a Christian’s worldview should reflect a biblical cosmology, epistemology, ontology, etc., while the analysis of an African’s worldview should reflect these same core philosophical beliefs based upon African Traditional Religion (ATR). This work will attempt to provide a framework for Christians in Africa to do a critical examination of their cultural worldview assumptions so they can see where they conform and conflict with the biblical worldview.

Research methods for this type of study should be those that best discover the philosophical elements of the African and biblical worldviews. To that end, the following methods have been used:

#### 1.4.1 Library Research

Library research takes advantage of the published empirical research of others that have been interested in the same areas of study. Many Christian theologians and philosophers have written books on the Christian worldview. The sundry elements of African religion and worldview have been documented and published by various African theologians and philosophers and by Western anthropologists and missionaries. Recent years have seen an increase in published works putting forth an

African philosophy, some by Western scholars and some by African scholars. In researching the African worldview, particular attention will be paid to works by African scholars. Lecturing at an African theological college and having access to its library containing hundreds of volumes on African studies, has been very helpful. Also, the fact that the college is accredited by the University of Sierra Leone has opened up the availability of all the libraries within the university system. The Bibliography lists the published books and journal articles that have been consulted in this research.

#### 1.4.2 Electronic Media

Electronic Media can be of two main types:

(1) Physical media such as DVDs, CD-ROMS, and diskettes. The data contained on this type of media is fixed and, like a printed book, to update the data requires the media to be reissued. The type of data available on physical media that is relevant to this research is limited. However, two have been particularly helpful. Global Mapping International has produced a CD containing over 10,000 African proverbs that are indexed by subject matter. Also, Scott Theological College in Kenya has produced a CD containing twenty years (1982–2002) of the African Journal of Evangelical Theology. Several articles from that journal have been useful to this research.

(2) Internet or on-line sources. Information posted on the internet can be changed often and can disappear altogether. The date of access of this type of electronic media is extremely important. Search engines are useful in finding the type of data desired and the results can be overwhelming. In searching the topics of African worldview, African philosophy, African Traditional Religion, Christian worldview, and biblical worldview, each yielded results in the millions with African philosophy yielding the most at about 42 million. To find credible information of relevance to your topic of



research can be time consuming, but also rewarding. Most major universities have websites for their African studies departments with links to articles published on the internet and there are several on-line journals for African studies and for Christian and African philosophy that have been useful in this research.

#### 1.4.3 Ethnographic

Ethnographic research involves observation whereby the researcher becomes immersed in the daily lives of the research subjects being observed. Being immersed for the past six years in an African community, on campus and in the surrounding village, where my wife and I are the only non-Africans for many miles, has not only shown the need for this research, but has also aided greatly in it. Observation of African Christians often reverting to traditional religious practices led to the assumption that their set of beliefs constituting their worldview had not changed. Therefore, an investigation is being made into where elements of the traditional African worldview conform or conflict with the Christian worldview.

#### 1.4.4 Qualitative

The subjective experiences and perceptions of the research objects are the focus of qualitative research methods. The methods I used include open ended, rather than structured interviews, and casual conversations with African Christians and with Western missionaries working in Africa. The purpose is to gain an understanding of the 'why' of phenomenological events observed and not just a description of what happened. Listening to the voices, published and unpublished, spoken within a society helps to analyze and understand the people's motivations and intentions behind the observed actions.

### 1.5 Review of Pertinent Literature

Some works are considered to be the most helpful in the areas of research

conducted and will be relied upon more extensively than others that are consulted. In the area of Worldview these books include:

*Worldview: The History of a Concept* by David K. Naugle, published in 2002 by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company in Cambridge, UK. David Naugle is a professor of Philosophy at Dallas Baptist University in the USA. In this work he does not deal directly with specific worldviews such as pantheism or polytheism. ‘Rather, this book is an historical examination of an intellectual concept’ (2002:xviii).

The concept of worldview received prominence in the English-speaking world through Protestant evangelicalism. It was developed by the Church Fathers and medieval theologian-philosophers but did not become identified by name until Scottish Presbyterian theologian, James Orr (1844-1913) and Dutch neo-Calvinist, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) conceived of Christianity as a worldview.

The real substance of the book begins in Chapter Three, A Philological History of “Worldview”. The first use of the term is credited to the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* where he used the German word *Weltanschauung*, which is translated into English as ‘our intuition of the world.’ The context in which Kant used the word suggests that for him *Weltanschauung* means one’s sense perception of the world. Kant apparently used the term only once, but it evolved quickly to refer to a human’s intellectual conception of the universe. Naugle traces the use of the term in German and other European languages and then into the English speaking world.

The role of worldview in the history of European philosophy is presented next. Naugle begins in the nineteenth century with the ideals of G.W.F.Hegel, Soren Kierkegaard, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Friedrich Neitzsche. From the idealism of Hegel

to the perspectivism of Nietzsche, the idea of worldview was used to express their philosophies.

From the foundations laid in the nineteenth century, Naugle selects five philosophers from the twentieth century and presents their contributions to the concept of worldview. The views of Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Donald Davidson are given. Naugle rounds out his philosophical history of worldview with a brief discussion of several philosophers of the postmodern period. Their basic position on worldview is a disbelief that any meta-interpretation of reality is true and ought to be believed or taught.

After a philological and philosophical history of worldview, Naugle turns to a disciplinary history, first in the natural sciences and then in the social sciences. Michael Polanyi, a Chemist, believed that a scientist must see the universe from a centre lying within himself. Therefore, a scientist's worldview will influence the outcome of his work. Thomas Kuhn developed the idea of worldview being paradigms that provide model problems and solutions to a community of scientific practitioners in a particular discipline. For Kuhn, scientific revolutions are in reality paradigm shifts. In the area of psychology, Naugle deals with Carl Jung who studied the relationship between psychotherapy and worldview, and Sigmund Freud who attempted to determine whether or not psychoanalysis constituted an independent worldview. In the field of sociology, Naugle puts forth the work of Karl Mannheim (worldview is not a theoretical but a pre-theoretical phenomenon: preceding and conditioning abstract thought), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (commonsense knowledge, which makes up one's pre-theoretical worldview, rather than ideas, must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge), and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (worldviews can solidify and quickly be used as a club). The cultural

anthropologists featured are Michael Kearney (the two most prominent ideological orientations driving worldview theory are cultural idealism and historical materialism), and Robert Redfield (there are ‘worldview universals’ since there is only one world to view).

This book is well researched and is relied upon for much of the presentation in this thesis on the history of the worldview concept. David Naugle has presented a thorough history of the worldview concept and true to his Christian beliefs, has presented the concept of a biblical worldview as being real, rational and preferable. He gives this warning in his concluding reflections: ‘...I suggest, it is also possible for Christian worldview advocates to cultivate an immoderate enthusiasm for their biblical systems with their cultural and apologetic potential and to become forgetful of the God who stands behind them’ (2002:328).

*Worldviews: Crosscultural Exploration of Human Beliefs* by Ninian Smart, published in 1983 by Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, USA. Professor Smart taught at several universities in England and retired as the Chair, Dept of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, USA. He was considered one of the world’s foremost scholars of religion, and had authored over 30 books before his death in 2001.

This book was written as a text in Religious Studies which the author says encompasses the ‘systems of beliefs which, through symbols and actions, mobilize the feelings and wills of human beings’ (1983:1). He contends that the modern study of religion must focus on the exploration of worldview which forms a background to the lives peoples lead or as he calls it, ‘worldview analysis.’ His worldview analysis is based upon the model of six dimensions of religion: doctrinal, mythic, ethical, ritual, experiential, and social.

The author states that the world can be divided up into six main blocs of belief: the modern West; the Marxist countries from Eastern Europe to East Asia; the Islamic crescent; Old Asia; the Latin south; and the smaller societies throughout black Africa and the Pacific. He then gives an examination of the major beliefs in each bloc structuring a basic worldview for each.

Smart then presents a chapter on each of his six dimensions of religion beginning with the experiential which he categorizes as 'numinous' (experiencing the Divine as Wholly Other) and mystical (experiencing the Divine as inner manifestation). From there he moves to the mythic dimension. Particularly helpful was a section on the power of history. Smart (1983:81) states: 'The tension between history as myth and history as the result of critical inquiry is something which has become explosive in the religious context, where earlier histories tend to get rewritten.' As will be presented in Chapter Four of this thesis, this is affecting the African Worldview today. The doctrinal dimension is dealt with next. From a worldview standpoint, today's experiences find part of their meaning in stories about the past and the future, and according to Smart (1983:96): 'because they are views about the world, and about the whole of life, they rapidly develop a strong doctrinal aspect.' He then presents several worldview functions of doctrine.

The author's chapters on the ethical and ritual dimensions deal mainly with religion and he relates them to the major religion of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. However, his chapter on the social dimension is quite helpful in understanding the interrelationship between society, religion and worldview. He deals with Emile Durkheim's functionalism and Claude Levi-Strauss' structuralism as social theories and the way changes in a society are a function of, or a cause of, change in worldview. He aptly points out the major religions differ from the religions

of small-scale societies, such as the tribal societies of Africa. Smart (1983:146) states: 'While in small-scale societies religion is part of the fabric of society, the great religions often started within societies as novel forces, challenging the assumptions of the rest of society.'

Smart closes the book with a section on the future of belief. His position is that with the recent explosion of information available to people around the world and the advent of what he calls 'the global city' the conflict between science and religion will magnify and the exchange of ideas across the globe will cause people to question what they believe in light of new alternatives. Worldviews are in a state of flux. The question is: will there be unity in a diversity of worldviews or will there be the unity of diverse worldviews into a global worldview?

This book is very helpful in its presentation of worldview as a concept. Of particular interest were the chapters on the mythic dimension dealing with the power of myth and the doctrinal dimension.

In the research of the biblical Worldview, these books are most helpful:

*Genesis in Space and Time* by Francis A. Schaeffer, published in 1972 by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, USA. Dr. Schaeffer was a Christian philosopher and author of over 20 books. This book is about the flow of biblical history as recorded in the first major section of the Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-11. The value of these eleven chapters according to Schaeffer, is that they put modern man in his cosmic setting and show him his uniqueness in relation to the rest of the cosmos. It is his view that the events recorded in these early chapters should be viewed as history. He points out that biblical history did not begin at Genesis 1:1, 'In the beginning....' The New Testament records that there was love and communication between God the Father and Jesus the Son and promises made before this world began (Jn 17:5,24; Tt

1:2; 2 Tm 1:9). Something existed before creation and that something was personal and active. That is important to the author as he presents the biblical view of the beginning of the world as opposed to the view of an impersonal beginning which is the consensus of the Western world and most of Eastern thinking.

Schaeffer uses the word 'scientism' to describe the modern scientific theory of an impersonal beginning to a universe that is the result of the uniformity of natural causes in a closed system. For him, this raises two overwhelming problems that are not solved by scientism. The first is that it gives 'no real explanation for the fact that the external world not only exists but has a specific form...it is obviously not just a handful of pebbles thrown out there. What is there has form' (1972:20). The second problem scientism poses for him is that if you begin with an impersonal universe, it gives no explanation for the existence of the personal. Man is a personal being that interacts with other personal beings. If you go back to an impersonal beginning man would have to disappear. He goes on to state that the Judeo-Christian tradition [biblical worldview] begins with the opposite position and it is the foundation upon which the Western culture has been built. Before 'in the beginning' the personal was already there including love and thought and communication. This position he supports from several passages in the Bible. He then presents the biblical position of the creation of the universe by fiat of an all-powerful God.

The subject of differentiation in what was created and the creation of man is covered next. This section begins with Schaeffer's differentiation between true communication and exhaustive communication. The events of 'in the beginning' took place in the far distant past. What can we really know about them? Schaeffer (1972:35) states, 'What we claim as Christians is that, when all the facts are taken into consideration, the Bible gives us true knowledge although not exhaustive knowledge.'

Man as a finite and fallen creature is incapable of handling exhaustive knowledge. What the Bible tells us about the beginning of things is propositionally true but certainly not exhaustive in what is revealed.

With that understanding, Schaeffer presents the biblical account of dividing or separating what was first there into its various parts. The first differentiation was between light and darkness, the second was between the waters and the firmament, and so on. The final distinction in the creative process was the creation of man. God made man apart from plant life and the conscious life of fish, birds, and animals. Man was made 'in the image of God' with the final differentiation being between male and female Man.

Next, the author deals with God and the universe He created. He points out that at each of the various levels of creation everything fulfils the purpose of its creation. The machine part of the universe acts like a machine. The animal part acts like animals. 'Man stands at his particular level of creation as being in the image of God and having a reference upward rather than downward...' (1972:55). He gives four different areas in which the world tells us something about God so that if we want to know what God is like we can look at creation as it was originally made.

The biblical account of the fall of man into sin and its results are presented next. The Fall resulted in a change in the nature of human beings and brought God's judgement on man and nature. Because of man's sin God spoke, and by Divine fiat, the universe became abnormal making it difficult for man to exist in it. In this abnormal universe there are separations caused by sin which has caused sociological upheavals in our world. However, in spite of the Fall, man still bears the image of God even though that image is marred. Schaeffer's worldview conclusion is: 'Modern



man does not see man as fallen, but he can find no significance for man. In the Bible's teaching man is fallen but significant' (1972:100).

Schaeffer next traces the biblical account of the division of humanity into a godly line and an ungodly line, the destruction of the ungodly by a great flood with a remnant of the godly line, Noah and his family, being saved. From this unified point in the family of Noah, the course of the history of mankind flows to another division at the Tower of Babel. Unified man had tried to be as God so God confused their languages so that they could not communicate as one. Schaeffer ends the book with a reminder that the flow of history as recorded in Genesis 1-11 in its beginning is still flowing today. In the midst of that flow man always was and always will be significant.

This book articulates the biblical worldview in an easy to understand but philosophically significant language. The material in this book is helpful in its presentation of God in relation to Man and the Universe, and Man in relation to God and the Universe.

*The Genesis Record* by Henry M. Morris, published in 1976 by Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. Dr. Morris was a professor of hydraulic engineering and the founder of the Institute for Creation Research. This book is subtitled *A Scientific and devotional commentary on the book of beginnings*, and in it the author shows that Genesis 1-11 tells us the beginnings of the universe, order and complexity, the atmosphere and hydrosphere, life, man, marriage, language, culture and religion. These are things that are included in one's worldview and they are dealt with from a biblical and scientific point of view.

The author gives various theories of who wrote the Book of Genesis with his opinion being that Moses served as a compiler and editor of records written in the past

and passed down from generation to generation. He gives his support for that opinion and states his belief that the events recorded in Genesis are a literal history of origins and from them we derive meaning, purpose and destiny.

Next, he deals with the different theories on the date of creation from a biblical standpoint based on genealogies and from a scientific standpoint with his conclusion that the Bible could not support a date for the creation of man earlier than about 10,000 BC. This is followed by a discussion of the 'gap theory' which holds that the primeval creation of Genesis 1:1 took place billions of years ago, with the various geological ages occurring in a long time gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. A great cataclysm terminated the geological ages and left the earth as described in Genesis 1:2. Morris's conclusion is that neither science nor the Bible supports this theory.

In his treatment of the biblical text the author presents an in depth analysis of the Hebrew words used to describe the various things created and processes used and relates them to his knowledge and training in the sciences. He gives a good explanation of why the earth is a planet uniquely suitable for human habitation. Genesis 1:28 is seen by the author as the primeval commission to man to use science and technology as man's basic work relative to the earth.

In dealing with the Genesis account of the fall of man into sin and the resultant curse on creation, Morris relates it to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. He says that it is the universal experience that all things, living and nonliving, eventually wear out and decay. This condition was formalized into a fundamental scientific law which states that all systems, if left to themselves, tend to become degraded and disordered. Because of deterioration in the environment some species have become distinct and, because the trend is downward rather than upward, no new species are coming into existence, only mutations of existing ones.

The book deals in depth with the biblical account of the Great Flood recorded in Genesis 7 and 8. The author's position is that the flood could have been caused by natural means and did not necessarily require a supernatural miracle on God's part. He explains how it could have happened and then reflects on the effect of a world-wide flood on the works of geologists and paleontologists in using the fossil record to support the theory of evolution.

The author notes that even higher critics have admitted that Genesis 10 is a remarkable accurate historical document. There is not a complete record of ancient nations available from any other source. Morris (1976:246) states: 'Thus this chapter provides the link between recorded history and the period of "prehistory" which is, except for the Bible, preserved only in ancient traditions.' He goes into a quite detailed tracing of the subsequent history of the nations named in this chapter. Although the book covers all of the Book of Genesis, only the part dealing with Chapters 1-11, the first 290 pages, is pertinent to this thesis and is very helpful in presenting a scientific basis for a biblical worldview.

*Christian View of God and the World as Centring in the Incarnation* by James Orr, published in 1948 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. Orr, a Scottish theologian and historian was given the opportunity to articulate the Christian religion as a total worldview when he was invited to give the first Kerr Lectures at United Presbyterian Theological College in Edinburgh in 1890-91. The lectures were first published in book form in 1893, and it has undergone many editions and reprints. This book is the progenitor of writings on the Christian worldview and no subsequent book has been able to match its breadth or depth.

The author was concerned that science was replacing Christian theology as the foundation of Western thinking. He believed that what was needed was a coherent

presentation of the Christian definition of reality as an ordered whole and he chose the German concept of *Weltanschauung* as the format for his presentation. Lecture I deals with the Christian view of the world in general. For the view to be Christian it must have its centre in the Divine and human Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Orr (1948:4) states: 'He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of redemption, to a view of the purpose of God in creation and history, to a view of human destiny, found only in Christianity.' This he claims forms a *Weltanschauung* or Christian view of the world that differs in important respects from all other worldviews. Orr traces the history of *Weltanschauung* from Kant to his time and deals with some of the oppositions to a Christian worldview found in philosophy and science.

Lecture II presents the alternatives to a truly Christian view of the world based on alternative views of Jesus Christ. Orr states that there have been two movements in history, one downward from a truly divine Christ to a Christ that was divine from his baptism to the cross, to a Jesus that was a good teacher but never divine. The other movement is upward, retracting the stages of the earlier descent and leading to a return to the Theism of the Bible. Lecture III presents Christianity as a theistic system and puts forth the cosmological, ontological, teleological, and moral arguments in favour of that system.

The remaining six lectures contain Orr's postulation of the Christian view of the world in regards to the various elements that make up one's worldview. He deals first with the doctrine of creation or nature. He (1948:122) states:

The vital thing in religion is the relation of dependence. To feel that we and our world, that our human life and all that we are and have, absolutely depend on God, - this is the primary attitude of religion. For if they do not thus depend, if there is anything in the universe which exists out of and independent of God,

then what guarantee have we for the unfailing execution of His purposes, what ground have we for the assured trust in His providence....

The Christian worldview rests upon this foundation [as recorded in Genesis]. Orr goes on to present how this view of creation is consonant with reason and consistent with all true knowledge. The crowning act of creation was man who bears the rational and moral image of the God who created him.

Orr proceeds on to present the biblical view of sin and the resultant disorder it caused in the created order. The final lectures cover God's provision for sin and plan for the redemption of all the created order as provided for in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. That Incarnation assures the final destiny of the wicked and the godly.

Throughout this book, James Orr displays a knowledgeable interaction with the thoughts of the philosophers of his day and before. His use of philosophical terms and concepts to present the Christian view of the world and to defend it against the prevailing philosophies of the day was very helpful in the research for this thesis which seeks to use the philosophical elements of worldview to compare the biblical and African worldviews.

In researching the philosophical elements of the African Worldview these volumes have been relied upon:

*African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life* by Laurenti Magesa, published in 1997 by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, USA. The Rev. Dr. Magesa is a priest of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Muscoma, Tanzania. The author's opinion is that African Traditional Religion should be considered one of the world's religions rather than an assemblage of localized belief systems. His goal in the book is to present the theological systems of morals and ethics of African Religion. He uses the terms interchangeably throughout the book but gives them slightly different definitions at the beginning. Morality he defines as a normative

ordering of the lives of people as they choose to relate to reality. Ethics is described as the scientific study of that normative ordering.

In his chapter on defining African Religion, Magesa asks the question: Is African Religion one or many? He quotes several authors on the subject and states his conclusion that African Religion, as practiced in its various forms, is a variety of expressions of basic belief that can be viewed as a generic whole. He states that, for Africans, religion is life itself and there is no separation between religion and other areas of existence. Religion and worldview are presented as being the same for an African.

Morality is presented in terms of what affects life. Anything that sustains life is considered good and moral. Anything that diminishes or destroys life is bad or immoral. For Africans, morality is imbedded in the mores that are the traditions passed down from God, the Great Ancestor, to the ancestors of the people, and then to the living, sometimes through the use of spirits. God, the ancestor and the spirits are powers that affect human life and are thus considered to be moral agents.

In African Religion, 'God possess certain moral qualities that human creations must emulate' (1997:40). After that statement, Magesa (1997:40) states: 'All of these qualities or attributes of God are derived from human experience of what is good and noble.' What is good and noble is what helps sustain life as Africans know it.

The author gives much discussion to powers or life forces. These powers or forces are endowed by God in every creature. Ancestors, spirits, humans and material things all possess a life force. Because of the common origin (God) of the power, all creatures are connected and have a causal effect on each other for good or bad. The idea of everything being in relation to everything else and that relationship needing to be kept in proper order is the basic underlying belief of African Religion. The keeping

of the proper order is both the definition and function of morality and the individual's participation in keeping the proper order forms the basis of the individual's moral character.

The role of the ancestors is dominant in the moral life of African Religion. They are the moral police of the individuals, families, clans and societies with which they are associated. Even though they are dead, their presence continues to influence life on earth. They are to be remembered, respected and revered because of their status as the intermediary between the living and God. Because of their close association with God, they will never be accused of moral wrongdoing even though they can control events on earth, both good and bad. Any event that diminishes life is seen as the ancestors pointing out and/or punishing some moral failure of the living and an indicator that something is not right in their relationship with the ancestors.

Magesa goes through the life process in Africa and explains certain rites of passage from birth to death that each African goes through. These are experiences that infuse life force into the individual as he lives this side of the ancestors. For the African, the sole purpose of life is to foster life and the way to do so is by procreation. The book contains a chapter on the various marriage arrangements permitted for the purpose of that procreation.

Attitudes and actions that oppose the life force and eventually destroy life itself are considered immoral. They are identified by the author as wrongdoing, illness and witchcraft. After a lengthy discussion describing each one of these, he turns to the ways and means available through African Religion to combat each one. He begins with prayers to God and the ancestors and various sacrifices and offerings are then described. The use of divination, sorcery and herbalism, is presented, all with the goal of restoring the force of life. 'Whatever strengthens the power of life is good medicine

and all power contrary to life (such as witchcraft) is bad medicine' (1997:211). What is sought is 'the power that enable one to achieve the purpose of being human: long life, good relations with other people, with the ancestral and other spirits, and with God' (1997:243).

The author gives a very comprehensive treatment of the moral traditions of African Religion. He drew from the works of many other authors and his extensive footnotes were very helpful.

*African Traditional Religion* by E.G. Parrinder, Third Edition, published in 1974 by Sheldon Press, London. This book, along with Mbiti's book reviewed next, were chosen because of their wide acceptance among African educators and authors, being frequently quoted in many of the contemporary books on African philosophy and religion researched for this thesis. Although the two books were published more than thirty years ago, their depth of research and pan-African coverage of beliefs and practices are still reflective of the belief system found on the continent today.

This book begins with a chapter on the significance of African religion. The author defends it against the characterizations of it by the early European traders and explorers giving reasons why the terms 'primitive', 'fetish', and 'juju' do not apply in describing the religion of Africa. In describing the spiritual world of the African, Parrinder shows how animism fits into the African belief system and how psychic power appears in different manifestations at different levels of a hierarchy of spirits. The level closest to the living humans and the most revered is the ancestors.

Next, the author delineates African beliefs about the Supreme Being. Almost all African societies believe in a Supreme God and a pantheon of lesser deities. The way the Supreme Being is worshipped and the names used to identify that Being vary widely across the continent, but the basic beliefs are the same. The lesser deities are



believed to reside in nature (rivers, trees, sun, moon, etc.) and in natural acts (rain, lightning, wind).

Five chapters are presented on the social order of African society. A basic tenet of African Traditional Religion is the belief that the lives of the living are profoundly influenced by their ancestors. They are believed to be the main mediators between the people and their God. They have passed from this life but are not dead and will not die until they are remembered no more. The prayers and libations offered to ancestors are ways of remembering them. Many African societies believe their chiefs (and in a few cases 'kings') are a type of deity and are honoured as such. Next, Parrinder deals with the religious rituals observed by most African societies. They include the rain-making rituals, the ceremonies held at times of planting and harvesting, purification rites and common meals shared by all. The personal rituals associated with birth, puberty, marriage, and death are explained. Finally in this section, the religious specialists active in African society are named and their functions are expounded. They include the priests, mediums, diviners, herbalists and witch doctors.

Those powers that constitute the spiritual forces in African religion are presented next. Different kinds of magic, how they are practiced and their purposes are explained. A whole chapter is devoted to witchcraft explaining what a witch is, what they do and how they can be detected. The final chapter deals with the African beliefs about the soul and its destiny. It is believed that when a person is sleeping his soul can wander about and is vulnerable to being captured by witches. At death, the soul leaves the body but may still stay near the grave to receive gifts and respond to consultations. It is believed that the soul joins the ancestors but may be reborn in subsequent generations, in the form of resemblance, protective influence and the

infusion of some of the vitality of the departed. Diviners are used to determine which ancestor has reappeared. The ancestral name is renewed and his clan influence is extended to another generation.

This book is well presented and appreciated by this writer because the author included many examples from Sierra Leone, the country of my residence for the past six years. E. G. Parrinder has earned his reputation as an authority on African religion having authored many books on the subject.

*African Religions and Philosophy* by John S. Mbiti, published in 1969 by Anchor Books in Garden City, New Jersey, USA. Dr. Mbiti, a Kenyan, has published over 400 articles, reviews and books on African theology and philosophy. In this book the author concentrates on those societies that were not deeply Christian or Muslim before the colonial period in Africa, and he emphasizes the unity of African religions and philosophy and draws examples from all of sub-Saharan Africa. He speaks of philosophy as being the understanding, attitudes and perceptions behind the way Africans think, act, and speak that work themselves out in traditional religions which permeate all departments of life.

Mbiti is critical of past European and American writers' attempts to categorize African religions with using of such terms as animism, ancestor worship, and fetishism. He says the use of such terms clearly shows how little the outside world has understood African religions. In this book he makes his own contribution, by an African, presenting religion as an ontological phenomenon, with the key to understanding African religion and philosophy being the concept of time. He states that the African is immersed in a religious existence which starts before birth and continues after his death.

For traditional Africans 'time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long *past*, a *present* and virtually no *future*' (1969:21). Events that lie in the future have not taken place so they cannot constitute time. The author uses two Swahili words to identify the two dimensions of time. 'Sasa' refers to the very near future (i.e. two weeks), the present of the recent past (i.e. two years). 'Zamani' is the period of the past into which the Sasa flows. The two share time before the Sasa disappears and the Zamani is what remains. It is 'the period of the myth, giving a sense of foundation or 'security' to the Sasa period, and binding together all created things, so that all things are embraced within the Macro-Time' (1969:29). The rhythm of human life begins at birth and flows backward to the Zamani which is entered at the point in time that no one is alive who knew the deceased personally. When that time comes, the deceased joins the company of the spirits and loses his personal identity. Between birth and joining the spirits the individual passes through puberty, initiation, marriage, procreation, old age, death and entry into the community of the departed, which Mbiti calls the *living-dead* (physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him). Much of the book deals with the religious aspects of passing through the various stages of life and death. Before he deals with that, Mbiti presents some basic concepts of African religious beliefs.

The first concept presented is the nature of God. He states that the notion of God as the Supreme Being is the minimal and fundamental idea about God that is found in all African societies. God is considered to be omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent and is believed to be transcendent and immanent. He is present in the Sasa and fills up and transcends the Zamani. God is recognized as one but can have other divinities and spiritual beings associated with Him. God is seen as good and just. The works of God include creation and providence over current events and nature. The

various ways and times that God is worshipped, and the cause of the separation between God and man, rounds out his discussion about God. The beliefs presented in this section permeate the material presented in the rest of the book as the author relates the various events of an African's life to their involvement of God. Every event is a religious event.

The final three chapters of the book deal with what were contemporary issues for Africa and traditional African religion at the time Mbiti wrote the book (1969). He deals with the changes in African society and culture which began around the second half of the nineteenth century and continues to this day. He puts the causes of the changes squarely on the shoulders of European colonization and the coming of Western Christianity. Colonization divided Africa across ethnic lines and introduced new forms of government. Christianity brought new religion, education and other elements of Western culture including urbanization. A wedge has been driven between religion and secular life creating ethical and moral problems. The new African is no longer finding his identity in his relationship to everyone else in the village.

This book presents a valuable treatment of the African worldview from the religious perspective supporting the idea of all worldviews being religious in their nature. The philosophical concept used most often in the book is ontology, but the way the material is presented makes it possible to identify the epistemological, metaphysical, cosmological, teleological and axiological elements of the African worldview. At the time he researched and wrote this book, Dr. Mbiti could see that the traditional African worldview is a worldview in transition. What has transpired in the past 35 years on that issue will be presented in Chapter Four of this thesis.

*African Philosophy: New and Traditional Perspectives*, edited by Lee M. Brown and published in 2004 by Oxford University Press, New York, USA. This book is a collection of nine essays written by faculty members of philosophy departments at several different universities in the USA. This is an interesting collection of current writings by Africans or Afro-Americans who were educated in the West in the field of Western philosophy and are now among the growing number of African philosophers who are constructing an African philosophy. The concerns of these essays are the epistemological and metaphysical perspectives that have shaped the conceptual languages of sub-Saharan Africa laying the foundations of African philosophical thought.

Four of the essays deal with the metaphysical concept of 'person'. The essay by K. Anthony Appiah contrasts the concepts of person in traditional Akan (Ghana) and Western traditions. The Akan concept of person is studied in the context of the social organizations of that culture. Segun Gbandegesin's essay deals with the idea in Yoruba philosophy that something becomes a 'person' only after it has chosen a destiny for its life. Leke Adeofe's essay titled, 'Personal Identity in African Metaphysics' explores the extent to which an African theory of reality (in this case the Yoruba metaphysical worldview) provides an adequate explanation of personal identity within that tradition. He states: 'A person is conceived to be the union of his or her *ara* (body), *emi* (mind/soul), and *ori* ('inner head')' (2004:69). This triadic view is contrasted with the Western (Cartesian) dualistic view 'that body and soul are the two ontologically irreducible constituents of a person, with the soul being the essence of the person' (2004:74). The final essay dealing with the concept of personhood is by D.A. Masolo and presents the Luo (Kenya) idea of *juok* which is

usually translated 'soul' or 'spirit'. *Juok* has a multitude of meanings and describes a person in social and metaphysical ideas of the Yoruba *ori*.

The essay by Kwasi Wiredu deals with concepts of 'truth' within the Akan and Western cultural traditions. The author discusses the roll of antecedents in truth claims and then presents the correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic theories of truth in Western philosophy. He points out his conceived errors in each theory and proposes 'the seeds of a possible unification in the contending theories of truth' (2004:45) as found in the Akan concept of truth that does not necessarily relate to fact.

In 'Witchcraft Science, and the Paranormal in Contemporary African Philosophy' Albert Mosley suggests that there is a correspondence between the traditional concepts of magic and witchcraft and the effects of psychic powers included in parapsychological research. He lists those powers as telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis and precognition. He defines them and explains how each could fit into African metaphysical and ontological concepts of magic and witchcraft. His hope is that those interested in African philosophy will take a greater interest in the Western science of parapsychology as they try to explain African phenomenon in Western linguistic concepts.

I.A. Menkiti wrote 'Physical and Metaphysical Understanding: Nature, Agency, and Causation in African Traditional Thought.' He (2004:108) states: 'It is my aim to argue in this essay that metaphysical understanding in traditional African thought so neatly dovetails with regular understanding of physical nature that the two understandings ought to be seen as forming one continuous order of understanding.' He believes that metaphysics is guaranteed by the existence of common sense that is grounded in the material circumstances of life. All of this is bolstered by the principle

of continuity that sees the rhythm of life repeated over and over again without disruption and without end.

The final essay is by the editor of the book, Lee M. Brown. He writes on 'Understanding and Ontology in Traditional African Thought.' Brown solidly presents a case for the existence of ancestral spirits, which he says is central to traditional African thought, arguing from the Western scientific and religious worldview. Western science says that only what is observable, testable and provable is real. Western religion says God is a Spirit, a person and cannot be seen, but yet, God is real. Why could not the same be true for ancestral spirits who Brown says can be viewed as contained energy clusters residual from the once-living individuals from which they emerged.

This group of essays, being current reflections on African philosophy, is very helpful in assessing the attempts being made to articulate an African system of thought using Western linguistic concepts (even the concept of philosophy is of Western origin). The writings of these and other African philosophers are important to the study of the African worldview because that worldview is in transition. And just as in the West, the worldview transition is being led by the philosophers.

*Foundation of African Thought: A Worldview Grounded in the African Heritage of Religion, Philosophy, Science and Art* by Chukwunyere Kamalu, published in 1990 by Karnah House, London. While the author's main concern is to trace a connection between ancient Egypt and traditional Africa in the areas of religion, philosophy, science, and art, his treatment of contemporary African philosophical concepts is well presented and is very helpful in comparing the African and biblical worldviews.

The author begins by attacking the Western anthropological and philosophical assertion that either Africans are incapable of abstract thought altogether or that African thought forms are more concrete than abstract. This, he says, would preclude Africans the possibility of having been philosophers or inventors. Much of the book presents various elements of the African worldview in very abstract terminology.

Kamalu's stated goal for the book is to interpret the concepts and themes of African religion and beliefs as being a coherent system of thought. The central idea of that system is 'that the world is ordered in accordance with a principle of how opposites co-exist and interact' (1990:24). He calls this the 'principle of opposites' and it is the paradigm he uses to present the material in the book. The book is divided into three parts. Part I deals with the African view of Being and Becoming. The world is seen as being two in one, a duality of opposites: void and matter, spiritual and physical. The spiritual is manifested in its opposite, the physical. This, the author says, is one of the most fundamental religious beliefs of African people. The duality of void and matter is described as the noumenal and the phenomenal, emphasizing that one you can know and experience and the other you cannot. All concepts of epistemology relate to what is knowable and what cannot be known. The phenomenal world of experience is constantly changing, never static but always *becoming* something else. The noumenal world is not subject to experience but exists of necessity because the existence of the physical rests upon the concept that it could not exist. Therefore, the noumenal is in the category of *being*. In the area of Being and Becoming the author presents the African concepts of God and explains how the use of myths helps the Africans explain and understand the interaction between the spiritual and the physical and the noumenal and the phenomenal.



Part II is titled, 'The Self and the External World.' It begins with a presentation of the Dogon (Mali) cosmology of the human being as a symbolic picture of the external universe. The water and chaos in the beginning of the world is related to the water and confusion in which the human embryo finds itself inside the womb. As the human baby becomes more conscious of himself and the separateness of the external world, it is as if that world is created as the creation myths relate. It is the African view that every object in the world possesses some level of consciousness and a Life Force of its own. There is nothing dead in the African universe and therefore, there is a unity and identity between people and objects. Next, the author presents the cosmological myth of the Dogon and the Bambara (Guinea). Both use figurative language symbolic of conception and birth of human beings. Kamalu then presents the African concepts of space and time and the physical-metaphysical duality of matter and void.

Part III deals with ethics and morals. The author states that notions of good and evil come from our experience and our morals are moulded by the society in which we are nurtured. He applies the African principle of opposites to morality by asserting that God, being the source of all good, is also indirectly the source of all evil, because the concept of good has no meaning if evil does not also exist. The African concept of morality presented agrees with Mbiti in that it is a morality of 'conduct' rather than 'being'. It defines what a person does rather than what he is, and what he does is judged good or bad based on the consequences to others. The key to the traditional African way of life is the dissolution of the individual into the collective consciousness.

The author ends the book by recognizing that because of external forces, Africa has changed and is still changing. The African personality has changed and

African worldview is changing. His desire is that Africa will hold onto its cultural heritage. He (1990:149) states: ‘...the African cultural heritage is the firm ground from which we should operate, the springboard for the advance of our acts, sciences and ethics in a manner consistent with the universal aspects of African culture.’

My research has produced ample material on Genesis 1-11, Christian philosophy, and the Christian worldview. It has also produces much material on African theology, philosophy and religion. No work has been found that compares Christian and African worldviews using the philosophical elements that make up one’s worldview.

#### 1.6 Why Use ‘Worldview’?

Analyzing a people’s worldview is a way of delineating the philosophical elements involved in the way people view their version of reality. Why is that important? It is important because worldview determines beliefs. Beliefs determine behaviour. Behaviour is chosen based on anticipated consequences. If belief is wrong, the consequences of behaviour cannot be accurately foreseen. People do not get expected results and are confounded.

This work is structured upon the analysis of worldview because Africans have a worldview, and the Bible puts forth a worldview primarily revealed in Genesis 1-11.

I agree with long-time missionary, Hans Weerstra (1997:1):

Questions of origin and purpose of the universe, questions concerning who we are as human beings and what is wrong with humanity, including the remedy for the malady, cannot be answered without fundamental beliefs usually associated with religious beliefs. But we want to link religion and worldview and make the point that the dichotomy many of us see between them is false because it rests on wrong assumptions, i.e. worldview, that is founded on naturalistic and humanistic thought systems. These systems radically divide the sacred and secular, the natural and the supernatural, as well as science and religion. ...that essential dichotomy of reality is wrong because it is anti-biblical, and also is intrinsically wrong – it contradicts and undermines reality as it objectively is.

For that reason we want to make the point that there is no essential or radical dichotomy. Worldview and religion need to be closely linked. In fact, when rightly understood on a deep belief level, they are one and the same.

As will be seen, Africans have a religious worldview. Even though their religion is not based on the Bible, do elements of their worldview conform to the biblical view of the world?

Analysis of worldview is the structure of this work. The foundation of the structure of analysis between the African worldview and the biblical worldview as revealed in Genesis 1-11 is the philosophical elements that make up a worldview.

Christian philosopher, Francis Schaeffer (1972b:3) writes:

...philosophy and religion deal with the same basic questions...though they give different answers and in different terms. The basic questions of both philosophy and religion...are the questions of being – that is, what exists; man and his dilemma – that is, morals; and of how man knows. Philosophy deals with these points, but so does religion...

Schaeffer goes on to give two meanings of the word ‘philosophy.’ The first is an academic discipline and he states, ‘In this sense, few people are philosophers.’ The second meaning he gives is, ‘a man’s *worldview*’, and he states, ‘In this sense, all men are philosophers, for all men have a worldview.’ Since Africans are included in ‘all men’, they have a philosophy of life called a worldview which will be analyzed.

Worldview is important for a number of reasons. It determines the prosperity and development of peoples and nations. It determines the contentment and level of satisfaction of individuals. It shapes politics of nations. It determines the space-time future of individuals and nations. And it determines an individual’s eternity.

As just mentioned, worldview determines the prosperity and development of peoples and nations. Let us take for example the Asian nation of Japan. According to Johnstone and Mandryk (2001:370) Japan has a population density of 335 people per sq. km. Only 13% of its land can be cultivated. It has no natural resources or oil. Yet, Japan has the world’s most powerful export-oriented economy and has an enormous trade surplus with the world. The average annual income per person is \$38,160.

Compare that with the sub-Saharan Africa nation of Cameroon. Johnstone and Mandryk (2001:140) state that Cameroon has a population density of only 32 people per sq. km.. It has an economy largely based on agriculture and oil exports and has great potential for development with ample rain and minerals. However, the average annual income per person is only \$620 compared to Japan's \$38,160. Why such a disparity between the prosperity and development in these two countries? It is not a lack of natural resources. It is not overpopulation. It is a difference in worldview. The Cameroonians view the cosmos as something they must adapt to. The Japanese view the cosmos as something that can be adapted to meet their needs.

It was also stated previously that worldview determines an individual's eternity. Every worldview contains ideas or beliefs about eternity. These beliefs can range between there being no such thing as eternity, to all humans spending eternity somewhere in some state of being. Worldview beliefs about eternity can cause anxiety within individuals and can cause wars between religions when religious worldviews clash on the national and international level. For example, the Muslim worldview says that a Muslim who voluntarily fights in a holy war and is killed, will spend eternity in paradise. On the other hand, some pacifist religions see participation in war as a sin and anyone who voluntarily fights in a war and is killed will spend eternity in hell. The Muslim believes he has nothing to lose and everything to gain by going to war for his faith.

The Bible places this clash of worldviews on the eternal states of human beings in the context of a spiritual struggle. Philosophy professor David Naugle states (2002:xvii):

From the perspective of Christian theism [the Christian worldview], a clash of worldview also assumes a crucial role in the hidden, spiritual battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, in which the very truth of things is at stake. Between these regimes, a conflict of epic proportions rages for the

minds and hearts, and thus the lives and destinies, of all men and women, all the time. Since nothing could be of greater final importance than the way human beings understand God, themselves, the cosmos, and their place in it, it is not surprising that a worldview warfare is at the heart of the conflict between the powers of good and evil.

Naugle goes on to state: ‘Consequently, an in-depth look at a concept that plays such a pivotal role in human affairs seems particularly worthwhile.’ This work will limit its in-depth look at the worldview concept to Africa and Genesis 1-11, looking for areas of conflict and conformity between the two worldviews.

### 1.7 Value of Genesis 1-11

The value of Genesis 1-11 is first and foremost derived from the fact that it is in the Bible. The whole Bible has been esteemed by Christians and non-Christians alike to be a book of great value. Halley’s Bible Handbook (Halley 1965:18,19) gives us some notable sayings about the Bible by famous people in world history:

Napoleon: ‘The Bible is no mere book, but a Living Creature, with a power that conquers all that oppose it.’

Queen Victoria: ‘That book accounts for the supremacy of England.’

Thomas Huxley: ‘The Bible has been the Magna Charta of the poor and the oppressed. The human race is not in a position to dispense with it.’

Horace Greeley: ‘It is impossible to enslave mentally or socially a Bible-reading people. The principles of the Bible are the groundwork of human freedom.’

Lord Tennyson: ‘Bible reading is an education in itself.’

Immanuel Kant: ‘The existence of the Bible, as a book for the people, is the greatest benefit which the human race has ever experienced. Every attempt to belittle it is a crime against humanity.’

The whole Bible is known by Christians to be the very words of God to humanity. The Bible describes itself as ‘given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness’ (2 Tm 3:16). The word ‘inspired’ as used here, is not to be confused with the common usage of the word, as when we say Shakespeare was ‘inspired’ to write plays; or Handel was

‘inspired’ to compose great music. Inspiration in the biblical sense is unique. The Greek word translated ‘inspired’ actually means ‘God-breathed’ as translated in some of the newer versions of the Bible. It refers, not to the writers, but to the words that were written. It is the Christian belief that the Bible does not contain mere human words and ideas, but God Himself has revealed in it His divine character and will, as well as His view of the world, human history and humanity itself, all by His own words that are recorded there. That is why Christians look to the Bible to get God’s view of the world.

Christians look specifically to the first eleven chapters of the Bible to get God’s account of the beginning of all things except Himself. Old Testament scholar Samuel Schultz (1990:11) wrote: ‘The Old Testament provides an answer to man’s inquiry into the past. Unfolded in the first eleven chapters of Genesis are the essential facts regarding the creation of this universe and of man.’ If God had not revealed the origin of the cosmos, humanity, and all that humanity concerns itself with, that information would forever be inaccessible to man. Without knowing origins, the knowledge of meanings would also be inaccessible to man. The search for meaning in answers to life’s basic questions is fruitless unless one searches Genesis 1-11. Again, Schaeffer (1972a:9) states it well:

...I wish to point out the tremendous value Genesis 1-11 has for modern man. In some ways these chapters are the most important ones in the Bible, for they put man in his cosmic setting and show him his peculiar uniqueness. They explain man’s wonder and yet his flaw. Without a proper understanding of these chapters, we have no answer to the problems of metaphysics, morals or epistemology, and furthermore, the work of Christ becomes one more upper-story ‘religious’ answer.

For Schaeffer, an upper story ‘religious’ answer is something that must be accepted as being true by faith only because it cannot be supported by fact or reason. The Church in Africa accepts the work of Christ as fact because of what history records and the

Bible explains. The Christian Church in Africa must also have a worldview that corresponds to the Christian worldview of the Bible as revealed primarily in Genesis 1-11.

#### 1.8 Value of Africans

From the Christian point of view the value of Africans is derived first and foremost from the fact that they are human beings created, according to Genesis 1:27, in the image of God. As human beings, like all human beings, they can trace their ancestry back to one of the three sons of Noah (Gn 10:1ff), and through Noah back to the first man, Adam. Africans are one in kind with and share familial relations with all other people on earth. Africans are part of the world (the people of the world) that God so loved (Jn 3:16).

We as human beings, created by God in His image, should value what He values. At this particular time in the history of the world, God has shown His value for the people of Africa by the supernatural building up of His Church and the bringing of many African souls to salvation. The African Church is growing faster than anywhere else in the world today and according to investigative journalist Kenneth Woodward (2001:44), 'South of the Sahara, Christianity is spreading faster than at anytime or place in the last 2000 years.' He goes on to say that 1,200 new churches are started every month across Africa. Many missiologists believe that the greatest impact on the Church during the 21<sup>st</sup> century will come from Africa and the Africans. If God allows the Africans to impact His Church to that extent, He must value them highly.

According to the World Christian Encyclopedia (Barrett 1982:3), in the year 1900 the total population of the world was 34.4% Christian, and in the year 2000 the world's Christian population had fallen to 32.3%. Yet, according to Johnstone and Mandyrk (2001:21), during that same century the percentage of Christians in all of

Africa increased from 10% to 48.4%, and by the year 2000 in sub-Saharan Africa, 60% of the people profess to be Christian. If 60% of sub-Saharan Africans are Christian, then 60% of sub-Saharan Africans should have a biblical worldview and sub-Saharan Africa should have a predominately Christian culture. Since this is not the case, is there is a dichotomy between profession and practice among professing Christians in Africa?

The focus of this thesis is in the area of worldview with the conviction that belief determines behaviour. Unless the African Christian's beliefs are structured by a biblical worldview instead of the traditional African worldview, their behaviour will be structured more by traditional beliefs and Africa's culture will not reflect predominately Christian values. If the percentages are right, 60% of the population being Christian should make a significant impact on African culture. The fact that that is not happening, should be of great concern to the Church in Africa.

#### 1.9 Design of Thesis

As stated earlier, this thesis investigates the philosophical elements involved in explaining the realities of human existence as reflected in one's worldview. These elements are examined in a biblical worldview as delineated in Genesis 1-11 and in the African traditional worldview. Areas of conformity and conflict between the two worldviews are highlighted and analyzed as to their effects on the Church in Africa.

Chapter Two deals with the concept of 'worldview.' Several definitions of the term are given from the fields of anthropology and philosophy and the definition for this thesis is given. An investigation is made into the history of the concept with the philological history and the history of its use in philosophy presented. The religious dimensions of worldview analysis are discussed with six dimensions being explained. The philosophical elements of worldview are delineated and explained. Finally, an



analysis is made of what it takes for a worldview to accurately reflect reality with criteria given to help analyze truth claims of worldviews.

Chapter Three presents the biblical worldview. The biblical worldview is analyzed along the lines of the philosophical elements laid out in Chapter Two with the text of Genesis 1-11 being the primary source for the analysis. The philosophy of the Christian religion is introduced followed by a discussion of the use of Genesis 1-11 in establishing the biblical worldview. The historical accuracy, or truthfulness, of the events recorded in Genesis 1-11 is dealt with and the position taken in the thesis is stated.

The Christian, or biblical, worldview is delineated and a basic outline referenced to Genesis 1-11 is presented. Next, the philosophical elements of the Christian worldview are discussed using a question/answer format. This is followed by an analysis of the religious dimensions of the Christian worldview. Finally, the idea of culture is introduced because worldview is lived out in culture and the beginning of human culture is recorded in Genesis 1-11.

The topic of Chapter Four is the African worldview. Africa is a huge continent and diverse in tongues, tribes and nations. Given the diversity, can there be what would be called an 'African worldview' that captures the consensus of the majority of Africans? This question is investigated and answered. Next, the idea of African Traditional Religion being a worldview philosophy is presented with a discussion of the concept that postulates the African worldview following. The African worldview is delineated much the same as the biblical worldview in Chapter Three, with a basic outline being given and the philosophical elements being presented using the same philosophical questions but giving answers from the African worldview.

The religious dimensions of the African worldview are discussed followed by a presentation of the idea of culture in the African worldview. The chapter ends with a presentation of the African worldview being a worldview in transition and the forces behind that transition.

Chapter Five presents a comparison of the biblical and traditional African worldviews in the philosophical and religious areas examined to see where the points of conflict and conformity lie. The two worldviews are compared as philosophy and the answers furnished by them to the philosophical questions asked in Chapters Three and Four are compared. The religious dimensions of each are examined. Finally, the relationship of Christianity to African Traditional Religion is discussed.

Chapter Six contains the conclusions and recommendations of this thesis. Particular attention is paid to the areas where investigation has shown that the biblical and traditional African worldviews diverge. The process of religious conversion is discussed followed by a presentation of the paths of divergence between the two worldviews. The reality of syncretism in the religious practices of Christians in Africa is presented showing the effects of Christians holding to both worldviews on the Christian church in Africa. The chapter concludes with recommendations to the Christian Church on ways to combat syncretism emphasizing the importance of the convergence of the biblical and African worldviews in the belief systems of its members.

The great need for Christians in Africa today, whether they be students, pastors, or denominational leaders, is to examine their cultural assumptions to see if they run counter to Christianity and conflict with the biblical worldview. They need to critically examine them in the light of Scripture. What will be the consequences if they do not? They are more than likely to fuse and confuse their religious tradition

with Christianity and maintain a culture-bound worldview. And since beliefs determine behaviour, their behaviour will be more African than Christian.

This work attempts to provide a framework for Christians in Africa to do a critical examination of their cultural assumptions so they can see if they conflict with the biblical or Christian worldview. If there are areas of conflict, they must be given special attention by teachers in theological colleges and seminaries, and by pastors in the local churches. If people do not think like Christians, they will not act like Christians.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WORLDVIEW

In the Western world, the shift from the modern to the postmodern era has moved the concept of worldview from the purview of philosophy departments to the warp and woof of mainstream cultural society. When a Westerner over fifty reads a magazine article or watches something on television and says, 'that does not make a bit of sense', he is experiencing a conflict of worldview. The past thirty years has seen a proliferation of publications by educators, philosophers, and theologians, either promoting the postmodern worldview or endeavouring to help society understand and cope with it. From a religious perspective, the shift to a postmodern cultural worldview may not be welcomed, but the mainstream cultural focus on the concept of worldview certainly is. As previously stated, I believe that all worldviews are based on core religious beliefs whether they be Islamic, Christian, African traditionalist, or atheistic belief systems. An analysis of worldviews should lead naturally to an analysis of the religious beliefs behind those worldviews. This chapter will present an analysis of the worldview concept. It will begin with some definitions of worldview and present a history of the concept. The various religious dimensions and philosophical elements that make up a worldview, and some tests to determine if a worldview reflects reality, will follow. The following two chapters will take the analysis of worldview to an analysis of the religious beliefs behind the biblical, or Christian worldview, and the traditional African worldview based on African Traditional Religion.

#### 2.1 Definitions

One's worldview is important because worldview determines beliefs and beliefs determine behaviour. A certain belief is chosen because it is believed that it

will produce a certain consequence. In no area of life is this more consequential than in the practice of one's religion, for religion deals with consequences that are ultimately eternal. Behind the behaviour and beliefs of human beings as lived out in their cultures, lie certain assumptions about the way the world is constructed. These assumptions include the categories and reasoning people use in constructing their beliefs about the nature of reality. Anthropologist Paul Heibert (1997:85) gives three sets of assumptions involved in this construction process:

*Essential assumptions.* These provide a culture with the fundamental cognitive structures people use to explain reality.

*Affective assumptions.* Affective assumptions underlie notions of beauty and style, and influence the people's taste in music, art, dress, food and architecture as well as the ways they feel about themselves and life in general.

*Evaluative assumptions.* These provide the standards people use to make judgements about right and wrong.

Taken together, the cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions provide people with a way of looking at the world that makes sense out of it, that gives them a feeling of being at home, and that reassures them that they are right.

Worldviews are implicit by their nature. People are usually not aware of the ways their categories, systems of logic and basic assumptions form the way they see the world. Heibert states it simply: 'Their worldview is what they think with, not what they think about....'

Almost every worldview writer has their own definition of the concept. Some are short and simple. Some are long and complex trying to be totally comprehensive in scope. Some of the shorter definitions include:

Dewitt (2004:2): In the shortest of descriptions, I will use "worldview" to refer to a system of beliefs that are interconnected in something like the way the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are interconnected. That is, a worldview is not merely a collection of separate, independent, unrelated beliefs, but is instead an intertwined, interrelated, interconnected *system* of beliefs.

Erickson (2001:220): A broad conceptual synthesis that forms one's perspectives on the whole of reality.

Geisler and Bocchino (2001:43,55): A *worldview* is a set of beliefs, a model that attempts to explain all of reality and not just some aspect of it.... Moreover, a *worldview* is a philosophical system that attempts to explain how the facts of reality relate and fit together.... In other words, a worldview shapes or colors the way we think and furnishes the interpretive condition for understanding and explaining the facts of our experience.

Heibert (1985:45): people perceive the world differently because they make different assumptions about reality.... Taken together, the basic assumptions about reality which lie behind the beliefs and behaviour of a culture are sometimes called a worldview.

Kraft (1999:385): Worldview, the deep level of culture, is the culturally structured set of assumptions (including values and commitments/allegiances) underlying how a people perceive and respond to reality. Worldview is *not separate* from culture. *It is included in culture* as the deepest level presuppositions upon which people base their lives.

Miller (2001:38): A worldview is a set of assumptions held consciously or unconsciously in faith about the basic makeup of the world and how the world works.

*New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn: World-view- a set of fundamental beliefs, attitudes, values, etc. determining or constituting a comprehensive outlook of life, the universe, etc.

Nielsen, et al (1988:7): They present a general picture of the world as a whole and of the individual within it, including a specification of the overall significance of life.

O'Donovan (1996:3): It is the view which a person has of his world. It is the way he understands and interprets the things which happen to him and to other people. It is a person's way of understanding life and the world in which he lives. It is a person's belief about what is real and what is not real.

Phillips and Brown (1991:29): A worldview is, first of all, *an explanation and interpretation of the world* and second, *an application of this view to life*.

Sire (1997:16): A worldview is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of the world.

Smart (1983:2): I shall use *worldviews* in a general sense to refer to both religion and ideologies.... 'Worldview analysis' – tries to depict the history and nature of the beliefs and symbols which form a deep part of the structure of human consciousness and society.

Van Rheeuan (1991:33): These distinctive patterns of reality are worldviews - models of reality that shape cultural allegiances and provide interpretations of the world.

Walsh and Middleton (1984:32): A worldview provides a model of *the world* which guides its adherents *in the world*.

Allan Johnson (1985) gives a more extensive definition of worldview as used in the social sciences in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology*:

Within a culture, a worldview is a general way of looking upon the universe and our relation to it, a general set of assumptions about the meaning of life, about what is important, and about how things work. In comparing traditional and modern communities, for example, sociologists identify different points of view, with traditionalists being less receptive to change and new ideas, more reliant on religious faith, and generally suspicious of technology, science, and detached rationality as a way of approaching human life. A worldview is typically associated with a group or society, which means that, as with all aspects of culture, there is usually variation among individuals in the *degree* to which they share in it. Radicals and revolutionaries would be by definition at odds with the prevailing worldview of their society.

Worldview is often used interchangeably with *weltanschauung*, a German concept that is most closely associated with philosopher and historian Wilhelm Dilthey and sociologist Karl Mannheim.

The worldview contributions of Dilthey and Mannheim to the social sciences will be discussed later in this chapter in a section on the history of the worldview concept.

Philosopher Diana Axelsen (1979:184), in her essay 'Philosophical Justifications for Contemporary African Social and Political Values and Strategies', argues that the political leaders in Africa not only need to, but have, grounded their strategies of social change in systematically developed worldviews. She gives her idea of what should be included in a worldview:

The argument in this essay will rely heavily on the concept of 'worldview', which is closely analogous to the western analytical notion of conceptual scheme. However, as a minimum, a worldview as I interpret it will include (a) a position concerning the nature of ultimate reality (ontology); (b) a statement concerning the nature of knowledge and what constitutes personhood (e.g., Are persons substances or processes? Are they individuals or manifestations of a single cosmic process or both? What is the relation between physical and psychological properties of persons, if both are

acknowledged to exist?); (d) a view about the nature of human history; (e) an identification of the fundamental values which individuals ought to pursue: and (f) an identification of cultural norms and a specification of their relationship to individual norms. [It is not evident from the text whether or not (c) was omitted or skipped in the lettering.]

David Noebel (1991:8), also a philosopher, proposes certain disciplines that should be included in every worldview:

The term *worldview* refers to any ideology, philosophy, theology, movement, or religion that provides an overarching approach to understanding God, the world, and man's relations to God and the world. Specifically, a worldview should contain a particular perspective regarding each of the following ten disciplines: theology, philosophy, ethics, biology, psychology, sociology, law, politics, economics, and history.

Noebel (1991:9) expanded the idea of worldview to include law, politics, and economics in order to accommodate his analysis of the Marxism/Leninism worldview. But he does recognize the primary importance of theology and philosophy: 'It is clear that theological and philosophical assumptions colour every aspect of one's worldview and that disciplines such as sociology and psychology are related; but other relations and distinctions are less recognizable.'

In looking at these definitions, certain words or phrases are used, all of which describe some aspect of the concept of worldview:

- fundamental cognitive structures
- systems of beliefs
- explains all of reality [cosmology, metaphysics]
- philosophical system
- assumptions about reality (conscious or unconscious, true or false)
- significance of life [teleology, ontology]
- culturally constructed
- religion
- ideologies
- associated with a group or society
- nature of knowledge [epistemology]
- personhood [ontology]
- nature of human history [philosophy of history]
- fundamental values [axiology]
- cultural norms [ethics]



All of these are applicable to a worldview, but the use of all of them would produce a rather lengthy and cumbersome definition. It seems that any definition of worldview should include the word ‘universal’ as one’s worldview encompasses *all aspects* of one’s world or universe. Therefore, my definition of worldview for this thesis will begin there:

WORLDVIEW: A person’s or group’s universal theories (philosophical in nature, based upon religion, and lived out in relationships) which explain the appearance of truth or reality (verisimilitude) in their lives.

The structure of this thesis will be along the lines of the philosophical elements of ATR and Christianity as the two religions are lived out in relationship to deities and nature and in human relationships.

## 2.2 History of the Worldview Concept

I am indebted to David K. Naugle and his book *Worldview: The History of a Concept* for most of the content of this section. Page number references are to that work. Naugle’s book traces the origin of the term and its rapid proliferation from Germany, to the rest of Europe and on to the English speaking world through its usage in philosophy, the natural sciences and the social sciences.

### 2.2.1 Philological History

Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant is almost universally credited with coining the term *Weltanschauung* (intuition of the world) in his *Critique of judgement* first published in 1790. Kant’s contribution to its widespread philosophical usage is recognized by Naugle (2002:59):

From its coinage in Kant, who apparently used the term only once and for whom it was of minor significance, it evolved rather quickly to refer to an intellectual conception of the universe from the perspective of a human knower. Kant’s Copernican revolution in philosophy, with its emphasis on the knowing and willing self as the cognitive and moral center of the universe, created the conceptual space in which the notion of worldview could flourish. The term was adopted by Kant’s successors and soon became well ensconced as a celebrated concept in German and European intellectual life.

Kant's disciple, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), began immediate use of the term with the basic meaning of the perception of the sensible world. By 1799 it had been adopted by Fichte's younger colleague, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854), who gave the term its commonplace meaning as 'a self-realized, productive, as well as conscious way of apprehending and interpreting the universe of beings' (Naugle 2002:61). In the ten years from Kant to von Schelling the term's primary meaning changed from being a sensory perception to an intellectual perception of the cosmos.

From this beginning, *Weltanschauung* spread to be used by a number of prominent intellectuals (Schleiermacher, Schlegel, Novalis, Hegel, von Goethe) and by German theologians, poets, historians, and by the musician Wagner. By the end of the nineteenth century *Weltanschauung* was considered to be a companion concept to 'philosophy' and was a part of the normal vocabulary of the educated German. Its usage spread from Germany to other parts of the Western world. Naugle (2002:62) writes:

*Weltanschauung* captured the imaginations not only of the German intelligentsia, but of thinkers throughout Europe and beyond. The term's linguistic success is seen by how readily it was adopted by writers in other European languages either as a loanword, especially in the Romance languages, or as a calque (or copy word) in the idiom of Slavic and German languages.

The Danish and Norwegian have *verdensanskuelse* as its equivalent, the Dutch use the compound *wereldaanschouwing* from which the Afrikaan's *wereldbeskouing* is derived. The term made its way as a loanword into the Romance languages, and as a loanword and a calque into the English language. Naugle traces the first appearance of *Weltanschauung* in English to a letter written by William James in 1868 and the first usage of the English equivalent 'world-view' to J. Martineau in his book *Studies of Christianity* published in 1858. It only took sixty-eight years from Kant to Martineau

for *Weltanschauung* to spread throughout Europe and into the English language, translated as ‘world-view.’ It was Protestant Christianity’s use of the term that gave it prominence in the English speaking world. The works of James Orr, and Abraham Kuyper, putting forth a Christian worldview, were widely read in North America and Europe. They both were Calvinist in doctrine as were the vast majority of Protestant Christians in their era, so their works were readily accepted as a Protestant answer to the secular worldview challenges of the modern era.

Naugle points out a surprising phenomenon in light of the widespread use of *Weltanschauung* and worldview in philosophy in the English speaking world. He states that little attention has been paid to the terms in English encyclopaedias and dictionaries of philosophy. My research has corroborated his findings that very few of them have an independent entry for either term, and the ones that do, have very brief definitions. There seems to be more in-depth treatment of the terms in anthropological and theological reference material. Given the widespread uses of the term across disciplines, the dearth of entries should be corrected in future editions of philosophical reference works.

Before leaving the area of philology, the correct English equivalent of *Weltanschauung* should be addressed. Some reference works translate it as a single word (worldview), some as a hyphenated word (world-view), and some as two separate words (world view). Following Naugle and most authors, the compound English word (worldview) will be used in this work, unless reference is made to another work which uses a different English equivalent.

### 2.2.2 Philosophical History

In the nineteenth century the role of worldview in the history of European philosophy was most prominent in the thoughts of German philosophers Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Wilhelm Dilthey and Friedrich Nietzsche and Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard.

Beginning with Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Christian philosopher, we see a connection made between one's view of the world and one's view of life. He preferred to use the term *Lebensanschauung* (lifeview) rather than *Weltanschauung*, which to him meant a deep and satisfying view of life that would enable him to become a total human self and that would embrace a truth that he could live and die for (Naugle 2002:25). For Kierkegaard, that deep and satisfying view of life came from Christianity. Naugle (2002:79) states: 'In his *Attack Upon "Christendom"*, Kierkegaard bemoans the fact that in nominally Christian homes children suffer from the failure of parents to impart to them a distinctively Christian education, including a lifeview.'

On the European continent, Dilthey (1833-1911) had recognized the importance of worldview as a concept. His thoughts on worldview were a part of his overall attempt to formulate an objective epistemology for the human sciences. He applied the typological method used in the natural sciences at the beginning of the nineteenth century and formulated three basic types or forms of worldview: Naturalism, established upon the premise that human beings are determined by nature; The Idealism of Freedom, postulating that the mind is free and unaffected by any forms of natural or physical causality; and, Objective Idealism, which views the mind and empirical reality as an integrated whole. 'In place of traditional metaphysical systems that claimed universal validity, Dilthey set forth his metaphilosophy of

worldview. In it he proposed an analysis and comparison of basic attitudes toward life as these underlie and are expressed in poetry, religion, and metaphysics' (Naugle 2002:83). Dilthey called this endeavour a 'doctrine' or 'science' of worldviews.

For Dilthey, the structure of worldviews reflects 'an inherent psychic order' in human beings. 'Since there are three structural aspects of the human mind (mind, emotion, will), there are therefore three structural aspects to a worldview' (Naugle 2002:87). These three structural aspects correspond to the three sets of assumptions put forth by Herbert previously in this chapter. First, Dilthey says the structure of a worldview begins with the mind's formation of a 'cosmic picture' (*Weltbild*) which is a product of cognition [Essential assumptions]. Second, based upon the cosmic picture there is a formation of the 'effectual value' of life [Affective assumptions]. Finally, in the upper level of consciousness 'made up of the highest ideals, greatest good, and supreme principles guiding the conduct of life [Evaluative assumptions] which give a *Weltanschauung* validity and power.'

The contributions of Nietzsche (1844-1900) to the philosophical thinking on the concept of worldview were more a precursor to postmodern deconstructionism than a reflection of the prevailing views of other European philosophers of the century. Nietzsche concluded that there is no God and that nature and the ongoing historical process were the only tools humanity had for understanding the world and human life. According to Naugle (2002:101):

Nietzsche believes worldviews are cultural entities which people in a given geographical location and historical context are dependent upon, subordinate to, and products of. He posits a general law that "every living thing can become healthy, strong and fruitful only within a horizon." A *Weltanschauung* provides this necessary, well-defined boundary that structures the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours of people. From the point of view of its adherents, a worldview is incontestable and provides the ultimate set of standards by which all things are measured. It supplies the criteria for all thinking and engenders a basic understanding of the true, the good, the

beautiful. Worldviews for Nietzsche tend to be incommensurable constructs that render cross-cultural communication difficult if not impossible.

Hence, worldviews are cultural entities and are specific to a geographical location and historical context and contain no ‘truth’ but only products of linguistic custom and habits. For Nietzsche, all worldviews are ultimately fiction (Naugle 2002:102). Naugle (2002:103) describes Nietzsche’s doctrine of *Weltanschauung* as a ‘journey into the landless sea.’ Nietzsche’s philosophy of worldview laid the groundwork for the secular humanist worldview against which the biblical worldview and the traditional African worldview are competing today.

No philosopher of the nineteenth century has incited the ire of current African philosophers like GWF Hegel. Hegel is loathed not for his philosophical contributions to the concept of worldview, but because of his own worldview. As for his contribution to the concept of worldview, Hegel is credited with the idea of the Absolute Spirit and the existence of alternative conceptual frameworks. Naugle (2002:70) describes Hegel’s view thus:

Hegel’s phenomenology entails the discrete recognition of a diversity of world models as the Absolute Spirit instantiated itself in human thought and culture on its dialectical journey through history toward eschatological self-understanding. Along the historical way, however, alternative theories of life are developed, contrasted, and synthesized. The notion of *Weltanschauung* as the cognitive offspring of the Absolute Spirit in the historical process was well-suited to convey this aspect of his philosophy.

Hegel saw one’s worldview developing over time through a dialectical process whereby one’s present conceptual framework encounters a new or slightly different conceptual framework: by the use of reason the superior elements of the old and new frameworks are retained to form a synthesis of the two (thesis > antithesis > synthesis) – a new and more accurate unfolding of the Absolute Spirit (or Mind). His use of Spirit may be indicative of his view that religion is intrinsic to human nature and that

the role of philosophy is to explain the nature of the relationship between one's religion and his general theory of the universe (*Weltanschauung*).

It is Hegel's *Philosophy of History* that is the source of anger from the African philosophers of today. In that work he presented a grandiose picture of the universe and of human history – past, present, and future. Writing from an eighteenth century ethnocentric German perspective, the soil that produced Adolph Hitler and the Holocaust, he divided the world geographically and intellectually into three regions with sub-Saharan Africa at the bottom, Asia in the middle, and Europe at the top. I will let the African writers speak for themselves:

Henry Olela, Professor of Philosophy, Clark College, Atlanta, Georgia:

Modern philosophical speculation, however, has generated a tendency toward the neglect of truth in regard to many aspects of the foundation of philosophy. This is particularly indicative of the Hegelian idealism, which tended to underestimate African civilization. Hegel's diction was basically that Africa was outside history because it had not achieved the 'German' consciousness. Hegel had consciously attempted to subscribe to the argument of the European or Asian origin of any cultural traits of merit found in Africa (Olela 1979:58).

Paulin J. Hountondji, Professor of Philosophy, National University of Benin:

This ideological significance of Europe's contemplation of a world in which it was master by reason of the quality of its collective mind emerges most clearly from Hegel's philosophy of history, which, when all is said and done, is nothing but a celebration of the European spirit. The way in which Africa features in Hegel's speculations serves further to underline this direction of his philosophy, for by excluding Africa totally from the historical process through which, according to him, the human spirit fulfils itself, Hegel places Africa at the opposite pole to Europe as its ideal and spiritual antithesis. The logic of Hegel's philosophy of history owes as much to his attachments to the dialectic as the naive symbolism suggested by the opposition of the white race to the black (Hountondji 1996:1).

Lee Brown, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Howard University:

Within Western cultures, those sentiments (African religions being grounded upon superstition and metaphysical fantasy) became an institutionalized lens through which African cultures and African s came to be viewed. Such sentiments were fostered by the racist perspectives of well-respected philosophers such as Georg Hegel... (Brown 2004:4).

A plethora of writers on African Philosophy have articles posted on various websites on the internet. Many of them are directed at Hegel's views on Africa and Africans. In an article titled 'Hegel's Idea of the Absolute and African Philosophy', John Inyang (2005) writes:

In his book *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel had derogatorily detached Africans from rationality. Succinctly stated, Hegel conceived the African as one who does everything except the ability to reason or reflect philosophically.... We shall establish that the notion of the 'Absolute' is not peculiar to Hegel's thought but is also inherent in African worldview and culture. It will also show that African culture or thought system is anchored fundamentally on rationality.

In a rather lengthy article, 'Exorcising Hegel's Ghost: Africa's Challenge to Philosophy', Olufemi Taiwo portrays the quintessential expression of animosity toward Hegel. Taiwo laments: 'In *all* areas of philosophy, basic and derivative, Africa is a peculiar, almost total, absence.' He goes on to state: 'I would like to argue that the roots of the peculiar absence may be traced to a signal event in the history of philosophy and that this event may actually be the inspiration for the absence... It is only insofar as Western Philosophy has passed itself off as Universal Philosophy that we may talk of the peculiar absence.' Taiwo (2005) claims this to be a false universal and states: 'I submit that one source for the birth of this false universal is to be found in Georg Friedrich Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*.'

A preponderance of African writers have stated their beliefs that Hegel's worldview as expressed in his *The Philosophy of History* and as inherited by his Western philosophical decedents provided the justification needed by the Western world for European colonization of Africa. This is a major reason the Western world is disliked by African intellectuals and the Africans they influence. It is also a major reason why Christianity, seen as being a Western religion, is rejected by some without a hearing. The increase in interest in and publications on African Philosophy in recent



years is seen as a backlash against Hegel's portrayal of Africa. African philosophers are now insisting that the African worldview has a legitimate philosophical foundation.

It is ironic that Hegel's dialectical process (thesis>antithesis>synthesis) appears to have a parallel in processes to be found in African culture. In interpersonal relationships, disagreements among individuals or groups are solved using that dialectic process. When Westerners disagree, they state their opinions, agree to disagree, shake hands, and go their separate ways. When Africans disagree (thesis>antithesis), they state their opinions, keep talking until they find common areas they agree on (synthesis or consensus), shake hands, and leave together. This reflects the African view of the harmony of the community being more important than the individual.

### 2.3 Religious Dimensions of Worldview Analysis

As stated in Chapter One, I believe that all worldviews are religious at their core. This thesis will focus on the philosophical elements involved in a worldview. Included in those philosophical elements are religious dimensions which motivate behaviour. I am indebted to the book *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs* by Ninian Smart, for much of the material in this section. Page number references are to that work unless identified otherwise. Professor Smart's field is the study of religion and he stresses the worldview/religion connection when he states: 'The heart of the modern study of religion is the analysis and comparison of worldviews' (1983:3). He bases that statement upon his analysis of what motivates people. Smart (1983:1) states:

The reason is simple: human beings do things for the most part because it pays them to do so, or because they fear to do otherwise, or because they believe in doing them. The modern study of religion is about the last of these motives: the systems of belief which, through symbols and actions, mobilize the

feelings and wills of human beings. In addition to examining traditional faiths, the modern study of religion also looks at secular symbols and ideologies... which often rival religion and yet in an important sense are themselves religious. Thus, the modern study of religion helps to illuminate worldviews, both traditional and secular, which are the engines of social and moral continuity and change; and therefore, it explores beliefs and feelings, and tries to understand what exists inside the heads of people. *What people believe is an important aspect of reality whether or not what they believe is true.* [emphasis mine].

Smart reminds us in the above quote that beliefs motivate behaviour and what people believe helps form their reality, even if what they believe is not true, truth being that which corresponds to or adequately expresses what is real (Evans 2002: 118). Hesselgrave (1984:156) echoes this view: ‘The universals [general terms that signify the nature or essence] may be true to reality or they may be ill-conceived and false, but so long as they are believed to be true, they will be of paramount importance.’ People form their worldviews based upon what they believe, and behave accordingly. People’s beliefs are structured upon religious dimensions. Since it is possible that what people believe may be false, it is also possible that their religion may be false. It may not put them into a proper relationship with actual reality and the religious consequences are eternal. Different criteria for determining which worldview(s) accurately reflects reality will be presented later in this chapter.

Smart (1983:5), a professor of religious studies, says ‘a main part of the modern study of religion may be called “worldview analysis” — the attempt to describe and understand human worldviews....’ From the religious studies standpoint, he goes on to state: ‘To see how they work, we must relate ideas to symbols and to practices, so that worldview analysis is not merely a matter of listing beliefs.’ His conclusion is ‘belief, consciousness, and practice are bound together’ (1983:6).

Professor Smart goes on to deal with six dimensions of religion that portray beliefs, consciousness, and practice in worldview analysis. The beliefs are formed by

the doctrinal, mythical, and ethical dimensions, but those beliefs are experienced and practiced in the ritual, experiential, and social dimensions. He begins his analysis with the experiential dimension because that is where people live.

### 2.3.1 Experiential Dimension

For many people, a religious experience, such as a dramatic encounter with the Divine, provokes a turning point in their personal history and their lives are forever changed. For others, religious experience is less dramatic, but still involves certain feelings. Most religions have rituals designed to reinforce, or to express, or to stimulate those feelings. The magnitude of the religious experience can be measured by the magnitude of the feelings it produces.

Smart presents two strands of religious experiences. One is called the 'numinous'. The term is attributed to Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) in his work, *The Idea of the Holy*. Otto derives the word from the Latin *numen*, a powerful spirit, sensed but not seen. Smart (1983:63): writes:

For Otto the numinous experience is at the heart of religion. He defined it as the experience of something which is a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* – a mystery which is fearful, awe-inspiring (*tremendum*, which literally means 'to be trembled at'), and fascinating, and which, for all its fearfulness, draws you toward it. You get something of this feeling looking over a cliff: doesn't the great drop inspire fear, and yet aren't you also drawn toward it, so much so that sometimes you have to make a conscious effort to draw back? But above all, the sense of presence which confronts a person in the numinous experience is majestic: marvelous in power and glory.

Otto also referred to the Holy as the Wholly Other – both because it was something completely other than the person encountering it, and because it was mysteriously other in quality from the things, and people of this world. It is thus *different* and other-worldly, a description that fits in with many accounts of God in living religious contexts (1983:64).

Otto was depicting what was for him the central experience of religion. The idea of the numinous is encountered in African Traditional Religion and in the religion of Christianity when those religions approach the Supreme Being or God.

Another type of religious experience which seems to be the opposite of the numinous is the mystical experience. The mystical experience is of something inside rather than outside the individual and is usually accomplished by attempting to purify the consciousness of the individual to such a degree that all thoughts and images are left behind and the distinction between subject and object disappears.

*The Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* says this about the mystical experience:

In general, mysticism can be understood as a spiritual and non-discursive approach to the union of the soul with God, or with whatever is taken to be the central reality of the universe. When this is thought to be a transcendent God, one typical path is inward, away from the world, toward union with the transcendent one. But introversive mysticism is not the only type. There is also an extraversive mysticism in which the subject senses his unity with the universe, with all there is. This is often accompanied, either as cause or as effect, with a pantheistic identification of God with all there is. Finally, there is the use of meditative techniques, mystical in tone, to achieve an enlightened state of being, apart from any concept of the divine (Reese 1980:374).

Some aspects of the mystical experience are found in African Traditional Religion and in some forms of Christianity. The numinous and the mystical types of religious experience are closely tied to the philosophical metaphysical views of dualism and monism. These will be addressed later in this work.

Smart (1983:77) ends the section on the experiential dimension of religion by dealing with the truth-value of religious experiences and how truth-value is worldview-dependent. In speaking of the depth psychologist's view of the human being trapped within a material universe he writes:

In so doing, they beg the question of whether religious experience tells us anything about the way things are – the question of whether religious visions and insights 'tell the truth'. If there is only this cosmos, then nothing, however dramatic in experience, will make us aware of something outside the cosmos. The experience of what transcends or goes beyond the cosmos will always be interpreted as having its origins inside us. So the question of whether religious experience tells us the truth at all is a question that depends in part on the worldview with which we start.

### 2.3.2 Mythic Dimension

All religions have sacred narratives, called myths, which help explain why things are the way they are perceived. The concept of 'myth' has undergone changes from positive to negative, back to positive in the history of its religious usage. Smart credits the early Christian Church with the idea that a myth is a false story as it attempted to discredit the Roman myths about their gods (1983:79). In recent years the meaning of 'myth' has been used in religious studies in a more positive light, casting it in the frame of neutrality.

Edward Scribner Ames (1910:150) writing about one hundred years ago expressed the earlier prevailing negative view of myth:

Myths are not like psalms or hymns, lyrical expressions of religious emotion: they are not like creeds or dogmas, statement of things which must be believed: they are narratives. They are not history, they are tales told about gods and heroes, and they all have two characteristics: on the one hand they are to us obviously or demonstrably untrue and often irrational: on the other hand they were to the first audience so reasonable as to appear truths which were self-evident.

Paul Bohannan, writing about fifty years after Ames expresses the same idea of myths being false. He begins his book *Africa and Africans* (1964:1) by stating:

Africa has, for generations now, been viewed through a web of myths so pervasive and so glib that understanding it becomes a twofold task: the task of clarifying the myth and the separate task of examining whatever reality has been hidden behind it. Only as it is stated and told can the myth be stripped away. Only if the myth is stripped away can the reality of Africa emerge.

Bohannan is speaking of myths about Africa being false, but still echoing the idea that all myths are false. My research has shown that some, but not necessarily all, African myths do express the reality of Africa, thus meeting the definition of 'myth' in current usage. Reese (1970:375) says that myth is 'a narrative account taken to be true, but not known to be true.' And Smart (1983:79) states: 'But as we have seen, modern students of religion commonly use the word "myth" in a neutral sense to

mean a story of divine or sacred significance, without implying that it is false or true.’ According to this definition both African Traditional Religion and the Christian Bible contain myths. They will be examined in the course of this work.

Smart points out that myths often make use of symbols or things, beings or actions, that have a meaning outside themselves. He goes on to state: ‘In order to understand the mythic dimension we have to know something of the language of symbols in religion and human life.’ Mbiti (1975a:22) agrees in stating: ‘Each people has its own symbols, whose meanings are generally known to almost everyone....Religious ideas have created many of the symbols; and in turn the symbols themselves help to communicate and strengthen religious idea.’

The importance of religious myth in communicating a worldview is understood by those who study religion and by those who propagate a particular religion. One textbook on world religions states:

Myths are essentially symbolic, metaphorical, or archetypal narratives that also contain supernatural or mysterious elements at their very core. Myths frequently imply an all-encompassing system of belief which explains the structure of reality and suggests how human experience should be understood. Myths need not necessarily be fictional or false. A true story may be so central to human experience that it is simultaneously mythical...Even when a myth is known to be false, it may be a powerful means of encapsulating a worldview (Nielsen et al 1988:7).

And one Christian missions professor writes: ‘Charles Taber rightly comments, “Understanding the mythology of a people is one of the most important keys available to open the door to their view of the nature of reality, the meaning of life, the foundations of value judgements which underlie their whole outlook” (Van Rheezen 1991:41).

Religion needs to make sense of human life, where we came from, what we do today, and where we are going. Myth is the tool religion uses to construct explanations that make sense.

### 2.3.3 Doctrinal Dimension

Doctrine can be defined as ‘a body of beliefs...considered authoritative and thus worthy of acceptance by all members of the community’ (Lockyer, Sr 1986:309). The religious worldview of any community is based on myths about the past and the future and stories that explain the present. Because these myths and stories change very little from generation to generation they take on a doctrinal aspect.

Smart gives five functions of the doctrinal dimension of a religious worldview. The first function is to bring order or make sense to the various myths, rituals and symbols supplied by tradition. The second function is ‘to safeguard the references myths have to that which lies beyond, to that which transcends the cosmos....These things are said through images and symbols in scripture, myth, and ritual; they are said more systematically in the form of doctrines’ (1983:97). Another function of doctrine is to relate myths and traditions to the present day and the new knowledge that is discovered almost daily. The fourth function of doctrine given by Smart is to stimulate a new vision of the world. Is it improving or degenerating? Is it permanent or transitory? He states: ‘So the doctrines have a practical meaning, not just a theoretical one. They provide a kind of vision or way of looking at things, which itself can inspire us to act, and guide our minds in a certain way’ (1983:98).

The fifth function of doctrine in a religious worldview given by smart is to define the community. This function of doctrine is very important to this work. Smart (1983:100) writes:

Those who belong to the community have to accept a set of doctrines, and anything outside these may turn out to be heresy and warrant the expulsion of those who propound those ideas....in each tradition there is some scheme of belief which is typically accepted by its members, and such a system gives shape to the world as perceived by the group....For what, after all, is the community but the people who affirm these things? Public affirmation is in itself an act in which a person reexpresses solidarity with the rest of the community.

The quote from John Mbiti on page one of this thesis expressed the idea that, for the African, traditional religions are for the community rather than for the individuals that make up the community. Mbiti states that to give up religion (i.e., to cease believing doctrines of that religion) results in a self-excommunication from the community. The religion of Christianity also has a set of doctrines that must be believed by those wanting to be a part of the Christian community. Historically, the Christian doctrines have been summed up in creeds which are recited as public affirmations of assent to the doctrines and of identification with the Christian community. The areas in which the doctrines of ATR and Christianity differ make up the defining choices as to which community the African belongs.

#### 2.3.4 Ethical Dimension

Smart believes that ethics cannot be studied independently of religion. He states: 'In modern times an attempt has been made to try in one way or another to set up ethics on an independent basis – that is, independent of traditional religious belief. But as we shall see, such an attempt cannot be completely successful because every ethical system seems to raise questions about the worldview behind it' (1983:115).

Ethics is 'an enquiry into how man ought to act in general' (Lacey 1986: 66).

Geisler and Bocchino (2001:309) state:

The words *ethics* and *morals* are commonly used interchangeably. When we use the term *ethics*, we are referring to a fixed set of (moral) laws by which one can measure human behavior. Defining ethics in this way gives us a basis for making *moral* judgements. Ethics can be thought of as the standards, laws, or prescription that individuals are obligated to obey. Said another way, we can understand ethics as a set of standards (what ought to be) by which one *evaluates* human behaviour and judges it morally right or wrong.

By what *basis* one evaluates human behaviour and judges it morally right or wrong is the concern of this work. According to Morris Inch, ethical inquiry can be divided into philosophical and theological. He states: 'Philosophic ethics approaches



man's responsibility from what can be known by natural reason and in respect to temporal existence. Theological ethics deals with what may be gained from the alleged insight of any given religious community as to this life or that to come' (Inch 1984). Ethical behaviour is reflective of the religious beliefs defining such behaviour. An investigation into the basis of evaluating ethical behaviour in ATR and Christianity will be undertaken in Chapter Five.

### 2.3.5 Ritual Dimension

Professor Smart puts the dimension of ritual on a par with the ethical dimension as being central to religion and to the living out of worldviews. Talking matter-of-factly about a Supreme Being as being the creator of the world and the judge of all things naturally leads to inner feelings that this Supreme Being ought to be recognized or worshipped in some outward, tangible way. As Smart (1983:131) states: 'So there is basically a strong outer aspect to ritual in general and to worship in particular. Typically, ritual has a bodily basis, so that worship is bodily reaction to something unseen.' Religious ritual is an act of communication of feelings that recognizes a relationship.

Sacrifice is one form of ritual. The victim being sacrificed, the believed transformation of the victim into something sacred, and the final destination of the victim all reflect elements of a religious worldview. Who the sacrifice is made to, and what is hoped to be gained are worldview determined. Prayer is the inner counterpart to outward sacrifice. Prayer is considered another sacrificial way of communicating with what lies beyond this world. In many cultures, including Africa, the knowledge of how to make acceptable sacrifices has given rise to religious specialists, or priests, that can be hired to perform the ritual.

Another important type of ritual is what is called rites of passage. ‘These are rites which accompany vital transition in life, as in puberty rites when young folks make the transition to adults; or as in baptism, when a person makes a transition from being outside to being inside the Christian community; or as in marriage, when two people move from one relationship to another. The rite is ceremony, or ritual, which marks a person’s passage from one category to another’ (1983:139). The difference between being a child and an adult or married and single makes a difference in the way people in a community treat a person and they are categories (performative categories) that define behaviour. Most societies mark the transition from one category to another through the performance of some ritual. Rituals are valued for the feelings they evoke and the visions they create, having their ultimate meaning in the experience of performing them. We shall see that both ATR and Christianity have their rituals that express their core religious beliefs and reflect their worldviews.

### 2.3.6 Social Dimension

Smart (1983:144) begins this chapter by contrasting the number of worldviews represented in small-scale societies and in larger societies:

In a small-scale society...there is typically a single over-arching worldview. Individuals may have variations in belief, and some may have their skeptical impulses, but on the whole such a society has a single system of religious beliefs. Most larger societies are different, for various reasons. For one thing, as we have seen, nation-states increasingly display great internal pluralism – that is, they include a variety of minorities, often from afar. Such a society has within it a mosaic of worldviews.

A society comprised of individuals or sub-groups holding several different worldviews is more open to the introduction of a new religion than a small-scale society where everyone holds a common worldview. The entrance of Islam and Christianity into Africa has made it easier for each to win converts in societies where

both religions are represented. Once an individual has a choice of religions, whether the choice is between two or three different religions is not that important.

The religion (singular) of a small-scale society is part and parcel of the fabric of society. People are born into and grow up in a community where a particular religion defines who they are and how they relate to the world. A religion like Islam or Christianity starts within societies as something new, from the outside. Being new implies being different from the norm, so a new religion challenges the religious assumptions of that society and provides a new, usually revolutionary way of viewing the world and of ordering society.

For Smart, the essential question regarding the social dimension of religion is this: ‘To what extent is religion a reflection of what goes on in the structures of society, and to what extent does it bring these structures about?’ (1983:147). As stated in Chapter One, 60% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa professes to be Christian. The question must be asked: To what extent is African Christianity a reflection of African culture, and to what extent has African culture reflected Christianity?

#### 2.4 Philosophical Elements of Worldview

The use of philosophy to analyze religious worldviews dates all the way back to the initial use of the term. It comes from a combination of the Greek words, *philos* (love of) and *sophia* (wisdom), thereby meaning ‘the love of wisdom’. According to Reese (1980:431): ‘The term was first used by Pythagoras (570-500 B.C.) who noted that men could be divided into three types: those who loved pleasure, those who loved activity, and those who loved wisdom. The end of wisdom in his view, however, concerned progress toward salvation in religious terms.’ Twenty-five hundred years later, philosophers are still dealing with religious issues such as the possibility of the

certainty of the existence of God. If a God exists, what is the nature of its Being, and what is its relationship to the phenomenal world? What is the origin and nature of the phenomenal world if no God exists? These are religious questions and they tie into the seven worldview questions put forth by James Sire (1997:17) in his popular book, *The Universe Next Door*:

What is prime reality – the really real?  
 What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?  
 What is a human being?  
 What happens to a person at death?  
 Why is it possible to know anything at all?  
 How do we know what is right and wrong?  
 What is the meaning of human history?

The answers to these types of questions are inclusive in everyone's worldview. (Moreland and Craig (2003:13) state: 'Philosophy can help someone form a rationally justified, true worldview, that is, an ordered set of propositions that one believes, especially propositions about life's most important questions.' Philosophy can serve both a critical and a constructive function in analyzing one's answers. Moreland and Craig (2003:14) continue: 'Philosophy is critical because it examines assumptions, asks questions of justification, seeks to clarify and analyze concepts and so on. Philosophy is constructive because it attempts to provide synoptic vision; that is, it seeks to organize all relevant facts into a rational system and speculate about the formation and justification of general worldviews.' This thought is echoed by Kwame Gyekye (1997:13), Professor of Philosophy at the University of Ghana: 'It is therefore, the task of philosophy to subject our lives – our ideas, beliefs, actions, values, and goals – to serious critical examination if we should be what we want to be and know what things are most worthwhile for our lives.'

In analyzing the philosophical elements of two religious worldviews, one might think that the rubric under which it should be done would be philosophy of

religion. However, like philosophy of science, philosophy of religion is a ‘second-order’ discipline (Hick 1973:2), studying the concept of religion as opposed to studying specific religions. Hick states: ‘Then we may reserve the name “philosophy of religion” for what (by analogy with philosophy of science, philosophy of art, etc.) is its proper meaning, namely, *philosophical thinking about religion*.’ This work is intended to be an analysis of various philosophical elements of the worldview of ATR and Christianity and thus will deal with standard areas of study considered to be ‘first-order parts of philosophy’ (Moreland and Craig 2003:14).

Each philosophical author has his own way of organizing the various first-order disciplines within philosophy. Young (1954:22) presents a philosophical tree with the traditional branches of Logic, Ethics, Aesthetics, Epistemology, Metaphysics, and Value Theory. Geisler and Feinburg (1980:24-34) include the first-order disciplines within philosophy as Ethics, Aesthetics, Logic, Epistemology, and Metaphysics. Audi (1995:xxvi) gives Epistemology, Ethics, Logic, and Metaphysics as basic fields of philosophy, but includes Aesthetics with the second-order disciplines of philosophy of religion and philosophy of science. This work will use the broader areas of Metaphysics, Axiology, and Epistemology with Logic being considered in the following section on worldviews that reflect reality.

#### 2.4.1 Metaphysics

Metaphysics is a broad area of philosophical investigation into the nature of what exists beyond matter and energy. Moreland and Craig (2003:173) give the generally accepted origin of the term:

The term *metaphysics* was first used as a title for a group of works by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). One set of his writings was about “the nature of things” and came to be called the *Physics*. Another set of works (which Aristotle himself never named) was called “the books after the *Physics*” (*tameta ta physica*) by some ancient editors that collected and edited his writings in the first century B.C. Thus *metaphysics* originally meant “after the *Physics*:” and, while

metaphysical reflection existed before Aristotle, the title was first used in the way just mentioned, and it has continued to refer to a certain branch of philosophy ever since.

The English word *physics* comes from the Greek word for nature, *physis*. So *metaphysics* is concerned with what is beyond nature or beyond the physical. Most definitions are short and state the object of concern to be ‘the nature of ultimate reality’. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, gives a more comprehensive definition of metaphysics: ‘The branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things, including such concepts as being, substance, essence, time, space, cause, and identity; theoretical philosophy as the ultimate science of being and knowing.’ The range of topics studied is very broad and philosophers have developed some widely accepted sub-branches of metaphysics. For this thesis, the metaphysical elements of worldviews analyzed will be categorized in the sub-branches of ontology, cosmology, teleology.

2.4.1.1        **Ontology** comes from the Greek words *ontos* (being) and *logos* (knowledge), and means the ‘knowledge of being’ and refers to the division of philosophy directed at the study of being. The study is generally understood to apply to all entities, including God, created or uncreated. Ontological questions addressed in this analysis of the worldviews of ATR and Christianity, include: Is there a Supreme Being? If so, what is it like? What is the origin and nature of man? Does man have a pre-existence? What is the nature of the external world? Does man’s existence terminate at death? What is reality? Are heaven and hell real places?

2.4.1.2        **Cosmology** is from the Greek *kosmos* (world) and *logos* (knowledge or reason concerning). Reese (1980:108) gives this definition:

Traditionally, cosmology is considered to be that branch of metaphysics which concerns questions of the origin and structure of the universe, its creation or everlastingness, vitalism, or mechanism, the nature of law, space, time, and causality. The task of cosmology can perhaps be distinguished from that of

ontology by a difference of level, the cosmological analysis seeking to discover what is true for this world, and the ontological analysis attempting to discover relations and distinctions which would be valid in any world.

Cosmological questions concerning this thesis include: What is the origin and nature of the universe? What is God's relationship with the universe? What is the meaning of time? Must every phenomenon have a cause?

4.2.1.3        **Teleology** is from the Greek *telos* (end) and *logos* (knowledge or doctrine) and is the doctrine that principles of explanation can be derived from ends, final causes, or purposes (Reese 1980:571). In other words, a thing's design and purpose can explain why the thing exists. In his *Dialogues*, Plato puts forth a doctrine of teleology: '...everything in the universe has a purpose or proper function within a harmonious hierarchy of purposes. The ultimate explanation of things is purposive rather than mechanical. The underlying question of all of Plato's investigations is the "why" of an event rather than the "how"' (Albert et al 1988:10). Teleological questions include: Does everything in the universe serve a purpose? Why does the universe exist? Why does man exist? Does the end justify the means?

#### 2.4.2 Axiology

Axiology is another broad category within philosophy. The name comes from the Greek *axios* (value) and *logos* (knowledge or theory) and can be defined as the study of, or theory of the nature of value and valuation in general. In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Lemos (1995) gives this definition:

**value theory**, also called, axiology, the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of value and with what kinds of things have value. Construed very broadly, value theory is concerned with all forms of value, such as the aesthetic values of beauty and ugliness, the ethical values of right, wrong, obligation, virtue, and vice, and the epistemic values of justification and lack of justification. Understood more narrowly, value theory is concerned with what is intrinsically valuable or ultimately worthwhile and desirable for its own sake and with the related concepts of instrumental, inherent, and contributive value. When construed very broadly, the study of ethics may be

taken as a branch of value theory, but understood more narrowly value theory may be taken as a branch of ethics.

This work will take the broad view and include ethics/morality as a branch of value theory along with aesthetics and, following Young (1954:23), the second-order discipline of philosophy of history.

2.4.2.1        **Ethics and morality** are often used as synonyms, but some philosophers see the relationship between the two to be like the relationship between theory and practice, with the former denoting the theory of right conduct and the latter referring to the actual practice of right conduct (Sahakian and Sahakian 1966:31). According to Moreland and Craig (2003:395): ‘Ethics can be understood as the philosophical study of morality, which is concerned with our beliefs and judgements regarding right and wrong motives, attitudes, character, and conduct. When an ethicist studies morality, certain **value concepts** are the centre of focus: “right,” “wrong,” “good,” “bad,” “ought,” “duty,” “virtuous,” “blameworthy” and so on.’ Ethics comes from the Greek word *ethikos* (custom) and in ordinary usage refers to a set of rules or principles by which certain acts are permitted or prohibited. For this work, ethics will be used in a theoretical sense as being descriptive and morality will be used in the practical sense as being more prescriptive or evaluative. Ethical/moral questions include: Who or what determines what is moral or immoral? Is right and wrong behaviour determinative by the situation? Is it wrong to lie? What justifies an action? Is infidelity ever justified?

2.4.2.2        **Aesthetics** is from the Greek *aisthesis* (sensation) and is usually limited to the part of the sensible world to which the term ‘beauty’ may apply. Aesthetics is described by Feagin (1995) as ‘the branch of philosophy that examines the nature of art and the character of our experience of art and the natural environment.’ Feagin credits Baumgarten with coining the term ‘aesthetics’ in his



*Reflections on Poetry* (1735). He derived it from the Greek word *aisthanomi* (to perceive) and says that it ‘has always been intimately connected with sensory experience and the kinds of feelings it arouses’ (Feagin 1995). Although philosophy of art dominates the study of aesthetics, this work is more concerned with man’s aesthetic relationship with the natural environment and with the aesthetic value of religious experience.

2.4.2.3 **Philosophy of history** is defined by Carr (1995) as ‘the philosophical study of human history and of attempts to record and interpret it.’ In everyday usage history is thought of as the progression of events that happened in the past and as the discipline of acquiring the knowledge of those events. Reese (1980:226) states: ‘We distinguish between the study of History and the study of Philosophy of History, on the grounds that the latter finds in history repeated patterns or laws of some kind.’ Reese credits Hegel with turning man’s attention to the importance of history stating as Hegel’s view: ‘And if the world is under the control of God then the entire process might be appropriately interpreted as the divine Reason realizing itself in history’ (1980:212). The concern of this thesis is with the analytical aspect of philosophy of history considering the views of ATR and Christianity on such things as the meaning of history, and whether or not history is cyclical or linear in progression.

#### 2.4.3 Epistemology

Epistemology comes from the Greek *episteme* (knowledge) and *logos* (explanation) and is defined in Lacey (1986:63) as: ‘Enquiry into the nature and ground of experience, belief and knowledge. “What can we know, and how do we know it?” are questions central to philosophy, and knowledge forms the main topic of epistemology, along with other cognitive notions like, belief, understanding, reason, judgement, sensation, imagination, supposing, guessing, learning, forgetting.’

Moreland and Craig (2003:71) define epistemology as ‘the branch of philosophy that tries to make sense out of knowledge, rationality and justified or unjustified beliefs.’

In analyzing the worldviews of ATR and Christianity, we are analyzing belief systems and will be investigating the rationality and justification of each.

## 2.5 Which Worldview(s) Reflect Reality?

In analyzing worldviews from a truth claim standpoint, one would expect that the worldview that contains the most truth would best reflect reality, since by definition, truth means ‘the quality of those propositions that accord with reality, specifying what is, in fact, the case’ (Horwich 1995). Philosophers use the fundamentals of logic to investigate truth-claims.

### 2.5.1 Logic

Much of the information in this section was taken from *Unshakable Foundations* by Geisler and Bocchino, and unless otherwise indicated, page number references are to that work. Aristotle wrote a series of essays titled, ‘Logic’ or ‘Organon’ in which he put forth principles of human reason, both valid and invalid. His goal was to establish the steps to be used in logically constructing a body of knowledge.

Aristotle showed how every science begins with certain obvious truths he referred to as *first principles*, explaining how these first principles form the foundations upon which all knowledge rests. First principles are the fundamental truths from which inferences are made and on which conclusions are based. They are self-evident, and they can be thought of as both the underlying and the governing principles of a worldview (2001:19).

If Aristotle was right, then one’s worldview is only as valid as the first assumptions on which it is based and the logical inferences drawn from them. Correct

reasoning should enable us to determine if one's worldview is credible, and correct reasoning is established by the principles of logic. We all use logic in the form of human reason to think about the reality of our existence. The use of reason and the reality of our existence are fundamental assumptions that all people share. They are unavoidable; in order to deny them one would have to use reason to think of a basis for the denial, and one would have to exist to engage in the reasoning process. Once we begin using reason to think about our existence we have begun to philosophically construct a worldview using the principles of logic.

The first principle of logic is the principle of contradiction, also called the principle of non-contradiction, and is 'the principle that a statement and its negation cannot both be true' (Purtill 1995). This principle is also called the law of noncontradiction (LNC) and asks, can opposite truth claims both be true? Can the Christian claim that evil is real and the Hindu claim that evil is an illusion both be right? According to the LNC if one claim is true, the other claim must be false. Geisler and Bocchino (2001:23) point out that the LNC 'is both self-evident and unavoidable; again, *it must be used in any attempt to deny it.*' They give this example (2001:24):

If someone were to say, "There is no such thing as truth, and the LNC is meaningless," he has done two things. First, he has assumed that his view is true as opposed to false, and thus he uses the LNC (which, of course, implies that the LNC has meaning, because his view is assumed to be meaningful). Second, he has violated the LNC by suggesting that *there is no such thing as truth* while at the same time and in the same sense insisting that *there is such a thing as truth* – the truth of his own view. By doing so, he automatically validates the LNC.

Two more first principles of logic are important in analyzing the truth claims of a worldview. To communicate properly, we must share a mutual understanding of the meaning of the words communicated.

When we assign words (symbols) to correspond to certain aspects of reality (referents), we are using another law of logic called the *law of identity* (LID). This law simply states that something is what we say it is: A is A. A correlative principle, the law of the excluded middle (LEM), asserts that it is either A or non-A (but not both). All valid thinking rests on these principles: they are absolute, and without them thinking would not be possible. Mere symbols, terms, or words can be relative to a particular language or culture, but as long as they refer to the same reality, meaning can be, and is, universal. Universal statements translate into all languages as universal statements (Geisler and Bocchino: 2001:24).

These three first principles or laws of logic (LNC, LID, LEM) are necessary in analyzing truth claims, but logic's function is to correct erroneous thinking and is therefore a negative test for truth. 'This is a very important characteristic: *Logic by itself will not help us find truth but will only help us detect error. What is true must be logical, but what is logical is not necessarily true*' (2001:28). Geisler and Bocchino give the example of the statement, 'two leprechauns plus two leprechauns equals four leprechauns' as being a logical statement, but it does not mean that leprechauns really exist. How can we discover truth in worldviews if logic, by itself, only detects errors?

The first presupposition that is required of anyone searching for truth is that truth can be found. To say that truth does not exist is to assume that view to be true which violates the LNC and is self-defeating. 'By definition, *truth is an expression, symbol, or statement that matches or corresponds to its object or referent* (i.e., that to which it refers, which it is an abstract idea or a concrete thing)' (2001:33). To say that true statements can be made about reality is rationally justifiable. In the area of religion there are many conflicting statements about reality. How can we discover the correct view?

In analyzing worldviews, it should be evident that some are epistemically superior to others. Many philosophers have put forth various criteria for examining the intellectual and practical validity of alternative worldview truth claims. Professor W.C. Young (1954:47-59) has given one of the more comprehensive sets of criteria

which will be summarized here. He divides them into four main types or groups of criteria that man has historically used to determine correspondence with reality: Immediate, Social, Philosophical, and Revelational, and then he describes the components of each. People that do not do a critical analysis of the sources of their beliefs are likely to use any or all of these criteria for accepting or rejecting a truth claim.

### 2.5.2 Immediate Criteria

1. *Instinct*. This is an inborn pattern of activity and response common to a specific biological group. While it may be possible to grasp certain truths instinctively, to make instinct a final judge of truth would make the lower biological nature superior to the higher reasoning capacity of man.

2. *Feeling*. Feelings can take the form of emotion as in ‘it just feels right’ or the form of a hunch as in ‘I have a feeling that he is coming today.’ As a judge of truth, feelings are usually wrong as often as they are right.

3. *Sense Experience*. A large part of what we learn comes through our senses. In fact, some philosophers claim that *all* knowledge is acquired that way. But Aristotle saw that sense data must be interpreted by the ‘common sense’ in the intellect before the data could be known.

4. *Intuition*. This is immediate knowledge, insight or understanding without any conscious reasoning process. Intuition has been credited for many important discoveries that seem to have been reached by ‘a sudden flash of genius.’ Man does seem to grasp certain things in a direct fashion, but very often the intuition of different people contradicts each other. In such cases, man’s rational nature must appeal to a higher criterion to make a choice.

### 2.5.3 Social Criteria

1. *Custom*. The way people in a society are accustomed to behaving tends to become authoritative. But customs cannot be a final standard for truth because customs change and they can clash with other societies and customs.

2. *Tradition*. Customs and traditions differ in degree only. Customs that have been held for a long time become deeply rooted and become tradition. However, even traditions held for generations can, and eventually do, change. Tradition may contain truth, but does not make truth.

3. *Universal Agreement (Consensus gentium)*. The fact that an idea has been universally believed is taken as evidence of its truth. One only needs to remember that at one time it was universally believed that the earth was flat to realize that universal belief does not make something true.

### 2.5.4 Philosophical Criteria

1. *Correspondence*. This is the empirical test. Truth must have a correspondence with reality. In worldview analysis the worldview should fit with reality and offer convincing explanations or interpretations of the totality of things. As Young (1954:52) points out: ‘The problem of distinguishing truth from error centers about this very matter of showing just how an idea *does* correspond with *that* reality. Correspondence does not solve the problem but only states what is involved in a truth situation.’

2. *Pragmatism*. This is the existential test and is concerned with the practicality or workability of truth claims in a worldview. Is it liveable? A belief system should not only be practical, but it should be personally satisfactory, meeting the internal needs for a sense of peace and well-being. The major problem with this criterion of truth is that the terms practical, workable, liveable, personally satisfactory,

peace and well-being are all relative. A career thief would have different meanings for these terms than would a parish priest.

3. *Coherence*. This is the rational test and implies that in order for a statement to be believed it must make sense, or be coherent, with what is already believed as part of the first truths of a worldview. It presupposes the existence of a body of truth. Coherence will not determine whether any particular worldview is based on true or false beliefs. Many supposedly coherent systems of the past, like Ptolemaic astronomy, have ceased to be. But Young (1954:57) concludes: ‘Without doubt, coherence has great value in reminding us that our world-views must hold together. It reminds us that all facts which have significance must be included in arriving at a philosophy of life. Man’s mind demands an ordered and reasonable outlook.’

The non-worldview-conscious person will use the immediate and social criteria to develop their belief systems. The worldview examiner will use the philosophical criteria to determine the strengths and weaknesses of various conceptual frameworks. No one criterion is an absolute proof of truth. Taken together they may indicate a probability of truth but exception can be found for each. Therefore, these criteria may be used to show that one worldview may be epistemically superior to another, but they cannot prove any worldview accurately reflects reality in its totality. In analyzing the biblical or Christian worldview another criterion of truth must be considered. The Christian worldview claims to be based upon special revelation that has been recorded in its Scriptures, the Bible.

#### 2.5.5 Revelation

Special revelation is the means relied upon to obtain the first truths in the Christian worldview. The Christian believes that God exists and that he has communicated some of his truth through the world of nature, but he has also revealed

himself and spoken to humanity through his written Word. God has revealed divine truth, but not exhaustive truth, about the origin, nature, purpose and destiny of man and the entire cosmos. It is upon God's special revelation that the Christian bases his worldview. It is built on a supernatural basis and in the words of Young (1954:58): 'He would be most incoherent if he did not take into account his supernatural experience for it is the most real and most essential element of his philosophy of life.'

In concluding this chapter, I turn to the concluding remarks of David Naugle (2002:345):

After all, what could be more important or influential than the way an individual, a family, a community, a nation or an entire culture conceptualizes reality? Is there anything more profound or powerful than the shape and content of human consciousness and its primary interpretation of the nature of things? When it comes to the deepest questions about human life and existence, does anything surpass the final implications of the answers supplied by one's essential *Weltanschauung*? Because of the divine design of human nature, each person in a native religious quest possesses an insatiable desire to understand the secret of life. A hunger and thirst, indeed, a burning fire rages to solve the riddle of the universe. There is a yearning in the very core of the heart to rest in some understanding of the alpha and omega of the human condition.... The mystery of a heart is the mystery of its *Weltanschauung*.

The next chapter will examine the biblical or Christian worldview and how it answers the questions of life. Chapter Four will do the same for the traditional African worldview based upon African Traditional Religion.



## CHAPTER THREE

### BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW

This chapter will delineate the biblical, or Christian, worldview in summary form. A worldview based on the content of the Bible, the Holy Scriptures of the Christian faith, is considered to be the Christian worldview. For the Christian, the Bible gives not only religious doctrine to be believed and religious ritual to be practiced, but it also gives a religious picture of the whole world, and all of time, that formulates into a *Weltanschauung*. This chapter is not concerned with the tenets, dogmas or doctrines of the Christian religion. It is concerned with how the Bible answers the worldview questions that we all ask, and how those answers are formulated into a Christian philosophy of life or worldview. The next chapter is concerned with how African Traditional Religion answers the same questions and how those answers are formulated into an African worldview.

#### 3.1 Christian Religion as Philosophy

The discipline of philosophy and its relationship to the religion of Christianity has a history that follows the thesis >antithesis> synthesis pathway. Christianity began in a culture greatly influenced by Greek philosophy and the question since its beginning has been: Christianity *vs* philosophy or Christianity *as* philosophy? Tertulian (155-222), one of the earliest church Fathers, taught that philosophy has no place in religion. He reportedly said that he believed Christianity because it is absurd. Two hundred years later, Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo, assimilated Platonism into his Christian theology. Anselm (1033-1109), Archbishop of Canterbury, formulated his now famous version of the ontological argument for the existence of God. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), a Roman Catholic philosopher, brought Aristotelian philosophy into the Christian faith believing that philosophy and

religion compliment each other, with reasoning pointing us toward faith. John Wesley (1703-1791) considered philosophy to be separate from Christianity but something that ministers needed to acquire knowledge of. In his “Address to the Clergy” delivered February 6, 1756, Wesley (1872:492) challenged the ministers to be a ‘tolerable master of the sciences’ by entering through the gate of logic. And he asked them to ask themselves: ‘Do I understand metaphysics; if not the depths of the Schoolmen, the subtleties of Scotus or Aquinas, yet the first rudiments, the general principles, of that useful science?’

By the late nineteenth century, the concept of worldview had firmly established itself within the discipline of philosophy. James Orr (1844-1913) delivered his famous Kerr Lectures, which were published in book form, to justify the rationality of the Christian view of the world. He noted the recurrent use of *Weltanschauung* in philosophy and German theology and saw the need to expound a Christian *Weltanschauung*. However, he does not equate *Weltanschauung* and philosophy. Orr (1948:8) writes:

Christianity, it is granted, is not a scientific system, though, if its views of the world be true, it must be reconcilable with all that is certain and established in the results of science. It is not a philosophy, though, if it be valid, its fundamental assumptions will be found to be in harmony with the conclusions at which sound reason, attaching its own problems, independently arrives. It is a religion, historical in its origin, and claiming to rest on divine Revelation. But though Christianity is neither a scientific system, nor a philosophy, it has yet a world-view of its own, to which it stands committed....It has, as every religion should and must have, its own peculiar interpretation to give of the facts of existence; its own way of looking at, and accounting for, the existing natural and moral order; its own idea of a world-aim, and of that “one far-off Divine event,” to which, through slow and painful travail, “the whole creation moves.” As thus binding the natural and moral worlds in their highest unity, through reference to their ultimate principle, God, it involves a “*Weltanschauung*”.

Although Orr did not believe that the Christian view of the world constituted a philosophy, he used the field of philosophy to structure his work. Throughout his

lectures he pits Christianity and the Christian worldview up against the philosophies and philosophers of his day and prior.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a synthesis of opinion among Christian theologians and educators that the religion of Christianity does contain its own worldview and it also constitutes a philosophy of life. Moreland and Craig (2003:3) state: ‘Since the late 1960s Christian philosophers have been coming out of the closet and defending the truth of the Christian worldview with philosophically sophisticated arguments in the finest scholarly journals and professional societies.’ The movement actually began a decade or so earlier. In the early 1950s two philosophy textbooks were published by professors at well-known evangelical seminaries which have been used by many Christian colleges and seminaries over the years. Edward John Carnell published *A Philosophy of the Christian Religion* and *A Christian Approach to Philosophy* was published by Warren C. Young. Carnell’s book limits itself to reason reaching its perfection in faith in the person of Jesus Christ. Carnell (1952:53) states: ‘Biblical Christianity outlines an epistemological and metaphysical framework which gives cosmic support to the virtue of love.’ His philosophy results in a religion of love but not in a total worldview. Young’s book on the other hand is an introduction to Christian philosophy for Christian colleges. It deals with the principles of philosophy and concludes with what he calls, ‘The Christian realistic world-view.’ Young (1954:200) writes:

The Christian realistic faith is founded, not on human speculation, but on divine disclosure. ...if “philosophy” be understood to mean a world-view or a way of life, as it has been used throughout this work, and as it is most generally understood today, then Christianity is a philosophy. If philosophy is...the attempt to see life steadily and to see it whole, or as others have suggested, to give a coherent account of all of one’s experience, then certainly there is a Christian philosophy. The basic question of human experience is not philosophy *verses* no philosophy, but *good* philosophy *versus* *bad* philosophy. Everyone has a philosophy of life, a world-view, no matter what form it may happen to take. Our problem is not to get rid of philosophy, but to find the

right philosophy, and having found it, to present it to others with a conviction that grows out of the assurance that one has found the truth.

After Young came Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) who wrote prolifically from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. In one of his early works Schaeffer (1982:178) writes: ‘The Christian system (what is taught in the whole Bible) is a unity of thought. Christianity is not just a lot of bits and pieces—there is a beginning and an end, a whole system of truth, and this system is the only system that will stand up to all the questions that are presented to us as we face the reality of existence.’ If we look at a definition of ‘philosophy’ as given in *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.: ‘A set or system of ideas, opinions, beliefs, or principles of behaviour based on an overall understanding of existence and the universe’, then Christianity would certainly be a philosophy. Most of Schaeffer’s writings use metaphysics, ethics/morality, and epistemology to present the Christian system and to defend it against other philosophies.

J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig represent a large contingent of present day Christian philosophers teaching in Christian colleges and universities. They are well educated in philosophy from prestigious universities in the U.S. and Europe and they teach Christianity as philosophy. Moreland and Craig co-wrote a mammoth textbook titled *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* in which they present Christianity as philosophy and show how philosophy is used in constructing systematic theologies and as tools in apologetics and polemics.

From its early years in which Christianity was seen as antithesis to philosophy (The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Colosse recorded in Col 2:8, ‘Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit...’), to Christianity and philosophy being seen as separate but friends, Christianity has now been recognized by Christian scholars as a philosophy that can compete with and conquer other

philosophies. Christian philosophy is lived out in a Christian or biblical worldview which has its foundation built upon the first eleven chapters of the first book (Genesis) of the Christian holy book, the Bible.

### 3.2 Use of Genesis 1-11 in Establishing the Biblical Worldview

The Bible, as Francis Schaeffer stated, contains a whole unified system of thought that constitutes a biblical worldview. Converts to Christianity must look to the Bible as their rule of faith and practice and therefore, must live by and with the biblical worldview. The value of using Genesis 1-11 in establishing the biblical worldview is given by Hans Weerstra (1997d:56):

Epistemology asks how do we know what we know, and how valid and true is what we know, and what is the source and limitations, if any of the knowledge we have. Genesis 1-11 gives true, reasonable and reliable answers to these ultimate questions. Without God's revelation given in the first chapters of Genesis no true reliable knowledge of ultimate reality, including the visible and invisible existence, (empirical and non-empirical reality) is possible. One cannot obtain the deep answers concerning life, its origin, meaning and purpose without this fundamental basic reality as God has given it in Genesis 1-11.

#### 3.2.1 Genesis as First Principles

The Book of Genesis was written in the Hebrew language and the first word of the book is *bereshith* which means 'in beginning.' The first word of a book customarily was used by the Hebrews as the title for the book (Wood 1975:9). The earliest translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek used the Greek word *genesis* (meaning origin, source, generation) as the title for the first book. First principles of the biblical worldview are expressed as origins. Henry Morris (1976:17) explains why:

The Book of Genesis gives vital information concerning the origin of all things—and therefore the meaning of all things—which would otherwise be forever inaccessible to man. The future is bound up in the past. One's belief concerning his origin will inevitably determine his belief concerning his purpose and his destiny. A naturalistic, animalistic concept of beginnings specifies a naturalistic, animalistic program for the future. An origin at the

hands of an omnipotent, holy, loving God, on the other hand, necessarily predicts a divine purpose in history and an assurance of the consummation of that purpose. A believing understanding of the Book of Genesis is therefore prerequisite to an understanding of God and His meaning to man.

John Philips (1980:38) has this to say about origins: ‘Genesis 1 is a statement of origins, and science knows nothing of origins. Science is concerned with how things go on and has nothing to say about how they began. Science can measure the laws that now govern in the material universe, but those laws do not explain how the whole process started....that kind of information is not to be obtained by *reason* but by *revelation*.’

Among the first principles of the biblical worldview as given by Morris (1976:18-21) are these:

1. *Origin of the universe* – The Book of Genesis stands alone in accounting for the actual creation of the space-mass-time continuum which constitutes our physical universe.
2. *Origin of order and complexity* – Man’s universal observation...is that orderly and complex things tend naturally to decay into disorder and simplicity. Order and complexity never arise spontaneously – they are always generated by a prior cause programmed to produce such order.
3. *Origin of the solar system* – The Book of Genesis tells that the earth, sun, moon, planets, and all the stars of heaven were brought into existence by the Creator. Modern scientific cosmogonists have been notably unsuccessful in attempting to devise naturalistic theories of the origin of the universe and the solar system.
4. *Origin of life* – How living systems could have come into being from non-living chemicals is...a total mystery to materialistic philosophers. If the laws of thermodynamics and probability mean anything at all, the almost-infinite complexity programmed into the genetic systems of plants and animals, are inexplicable except by special creation.
5. *Origin of man* – Man is the most highly organized and complex entity in the universe, so far as we know, possessing not only innumerable intricate physio-chemical structures, and the marvellous capacities of life and reproduction, but also a nature which contemplates the abstract entities of beauty and love and worship, and which is capable of philosophizing about its own meaning. Man’s imaginary evolutionary descent from animal ancestors is altogether illusory. The true record of his origin is given only in Genesis.

6. *Origin of marriage* – The remarkably universal and stable institution of marriage and the home, in a monogamous, patriarchal social culture, is described in Genesis as having been ordained by the Creator.
7. *Origin of evil* – The origin of physical and moral evil in the universe is explained in Genesis as a temporary intrusion into God’s perfect world, allowed by Him as a concession to the principle of human freedom and responsibility, and also to manifest Himself as Redeemer as well as Creator.
8. *Origin of languages and nations* – All scholars today accept the unity of the human race. Only the Book of Genesis adequately explains how distinct nations, races, and languages could develop if all men were originally of one race, one language, and in one location.
9. *Origin of culture* – The Book of Genesis describes the beginning of the main entities which we now associate with civilized cultures – such things as urbanization, metallurgy, music, agriculture, animal husbandry, education, navigation, textiles, and ceramics.
10. *Origin of religion* – Many religions take the form of an organized system of worship and conduct. The origin of this unique characteristic of man’s consciousness, as well as the origin of true worship of the true God, is given in Genesis.

This connection between origin and worldview is expressed by van Dyke (2001:156): ‘..., all these questions pertain directly to our worldview and ultimately to our concept of origins.’ Morris (1976:21) sums up the importance of The Book of Genesis to the first principles of the Christian worldview by stating: ‘The Book of Genesis thus is in reality the foundation of all true history, as well as true science and true philosophy.’

### 3.3 Genesis 1-11: Tales or Truth?

The book of Genesis divides naturally into two parts. The first section (Chapters 1-11) records the earliest history of the world, called primeval history. Primeval history focuses on the world as a whole and on mankind in general. The second section of Genesis (Chapters 12-50) records the history of a specific family line (Abraham) and is known as patriarchal history because it tells us about the forefathers or patriarchs of the nation of Israel.

The historical accuracy, or truthfulness, of what is recorded in Genesis 1-11 has been questioned by scholars for centuries. For years, scholars from the school of higher criticism questioned the factual historicity of Genesis 12-50 almost as strongly as they did of Genesis 1-11. However, because archaeological discoveries continue to prove the accuracy of what is recorded in Genesis 12-50 regarding people, places, and events, its factual historicity is questioned only by the most ardent sceptics (see Wood 1975:11)

The factual historicity of what is recorded in Genesis 1-11 is still questioned, doubted or denied by many scholars who regard what is recorded as legendary folklore, myths, tales or parables. The other end of the spectrum is expressed by Wood (1975:10):

This viewpoint is unacceptable to all who believe in the supernatural inspiration of the Scriptures. All the Bible was divinely inspired through human authors, and this includes these opening chapters. They are free from all inaccuracy and error. They reflect the history of earth's earliest days in a brief but literal manner, and they are to be studied and understood in the same way as any other portion of the Bible.

The Christian view of the Bible can be expressed in the words inerrancy and infallible. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. gives these definitions: inerrancy – ‘freedom from errors or untruths’; infallible – ‘Incapable of erring.’ In other words, the Bible contains no errors or untruths and (since it is the word of God) it is not capable of containing errors. The orthodox view of inerrancy is expressed by Feinberg (1984): ‘Inerrancy is the view that when all the facts become known, they will demonstrate that the Bible in its original autographs and correctly interpreted is entirely true and never false in all it affirms, whether that relates to doctrine or ethics or to the social, physical, or life sciences.’ The controversy among Bible scholars is whether or not the events recorded in Genesis 1-11 are myths or tales relating symbolic truths or are they truth relating actual space-time events. The controversy



over this section of Genesis is aptly summed up by Kidner (1967:9): ‘There can scarcely be another part of Scripture over which so many battles, theological, scientific historical and literary, have been fought, or so many strong opinions cherished.’ We now turn to some of those opinions as expressed by scholars in their commentaries on Genesis.

### 3.3.1 Tales

Those scholars that question the factual historicity of what is recorded in Genesis 1-11 usually also question who wrote it. The Scriptures themselves ascribe the authorship to Moses, but theories have arisen that say the stories recorded were collected by a number of compilers centuries after Moses lived.

Logan (1957:13): ‘Nevertheless, when one begins to study these tales...’

Richardson (1953:27, 30): ‘The chief interest of Genesis 1-11 is centered on what we have called the “parables”.... A parable is a story which may or may not be literally true; it conveys a meaning beyond itself.’... ‘The kind of “truth” which is contained in the Genesis parable is the truth of religious awareness.’

Davidson (1973:10) ‘“Story myths”...provide answers to questions people ask about life....’ Adam is not the first man who lived at a particular place and time in history; he is “Everyman”, the “Everyman” is us.’

Hargreaves (1998:1): ‘“Adam” stands for all us humans.’

van Dyke (2001:154-5) ‘We therefore argue that Genesis 1-11 should not be interpreted as symbolic literature, but rather as mythological... The positive aspect of this view is that it does not insist on the literal truth of the whole Bible and makes room for exploring other kinds of truth.’

Richardson (1953:13): ‘It is now no longer open to us to suppose that Moses wrote the Pentateuch [the first five books of the Bible].’

Anderson (1963:21, 22): ‘It is now widely recognized, however, that the traditions of Genesis were not written down until some centuries after Moses.’... ‘Even stories which once had a pagan meaning...took on a completely different meaning when associated with the Lord, the God of Israel.’

### 3.3.2 Truth

Those scholars who believe the factual historicity of what is recorded in Genesis 1-11 usually also accept the scripturally ascribed authorship of Moses rather than later compilers.

Hobbs (1975:10): ‘In simplest terms Genesis I records the factual events of God’s creative works.’

Wiersbe (1998:7) ‘Inspired by the Spirit of God, Moses wrote Genesis and told us where we came from, why we’re here, and what God expects us to do.’

Loveless (1973:7) ‘The Genesis account is not on trial in this book.’

Woodson (1974:9) ‘For anyone who reverences the Scriptures as the Word of God, there is every reason to believe that Moses was given direct revelation from God as to how the world began.’

Pink (1950:10) “‘In the beginning God.” *This is the foundation of truth of all real theology.*’

Schaeffer (1972a:15) ‘The mentality of the whole Scripture...is that creation is as historically real as the history of the Jews and our own present moment of time.’

### 3.3.3 Truce

According to Christian doctrine, the contents of the Bible in its present form, constitutes ‘an infallible rule of faith and practice’ (Bancroft 1976:35). If that is the case, should Christians question the factual historicity of what is recorded in its early chapters? Noted conservative Christian scholar, W H Griffith Thomas (1946:25) took a neutral position: ‘Is it myth?...if by myth is meant a form of picturesque teaching suited to the childhood of the world, it may be said that even if it be a myth in *form*, its underlying teaching and details must be true to *fact*.’ This thesis does not attempt to reconcile Genesis 1-11 with science. This thesis does attempt to compare the biblical worldview based on what *is* recorded in Genesis 1-11 with the traditional African worldview base on ATR. David Atkinson (1990:10) in his commentary *The*

*Message of Genesis 1-11* sums up the position taken in this thesis: ‘...the fact remains that it is this text in its canonical form which Christian people have from the beginning received as the opening chapters of their Bibles. It is this text as a whole which the writers of the New Testament had before them. It is this text through which the divine Word comes to us.’ And it is this text that Christians believe, whether they believe it as religious myth or as historical fact.

#### 3.4 Revelation as Postulating Christian Philosophy

Christians believe that the biblical worldview has its source in God and that God has made known to us the truths of that worldview through indirect and direct communication with mankind. The mode of that communication is in the form of revelation and it consists of two kinds. The indirect communication is called ‘general’ or ‘natural’ revelation. General revelation is not found in the Bible or in the life of Jesus Christ, but in God’s creation and in the conscience of man (Ps 8; Rm 1:20). ‘Nature does not give propositional truth. It gives data from which inferences are reasonably drawn’ (Buswell, Jr. 1967a). While not imparting salvific truths such as the Incarnation, or Atonement, general revelation does impart reasonable evidence that a powerful, rational divine Being exists. Special revelation, supernatural in nature, is God’s direct communication to mankind through spoken words recorded in the Bible (Gn 35:7; 1 Cor 2:10; 1 Pt 1:20) and through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who is believed to be part of a triune God-head of one God (Jn 1:1, 14; 10:30; Col 2:9; 1 Tm 3:16). Since Jesus Christ was God in the flesh, everything he said and did was a revelation of God’s mind and character.

The Christian faith is not founded on human speculation, but on divine disclosure. ‘To human confusion and sinfulness God responds with revelation: objective, concrete revelation in time’ (Wilkes 1981:29). This supernatural revelation

was given to man for his edification, so that he would know God, how to relate to God, and how to relate to his fellow man. This supernatural revelation was given to man so that, if believed and practiced, his life could be all that God intended it to be when he was created, that is, a life of godliness (2 Pt 1:3) and life to the full (Jn 10:10). This is the basic postulate of Christian philosophy and the biblical worldview. Young (1954:202) states: ‘...all philosophical systems begin with postulates of some kind, so there is no evident reason for rejecting the hypothesis that a world-view may be built on a supernatural postulate.’ Professor Young (1954:230) continues: ‘The assumption of revelation always means something beyond the validating domain of natural categories. To prove revelation would be to prove that there is no revelation. To experience revelation or the supernatural is quite another matter.’ The experiential dimension of revelation will be addressed later in this chapter.

### 3.5 Delineation of the Christian Worldview

Genesis 1-11 contains the basic propositions of the Christian worldview, either in a fully developed form (e.g., origins) or in germ or seed form (e.g., the Atonement). Professor Arthur Ferch (1985:17) states: ‘As a seed contains the fruit, so the first book of the Bible encompasses the origin of all the themes that follow in Scripture.’ Genesis 1-11 and the themes that follow put forth a religious view of God called ‘theism.’ *Nelson’s New Christian Dictionary* (Kurian 2001:747) defines theism: ‘Theological system which postulates a transcendent God who is the creator of the universe, an imminent God who sustains it, and a personal God who is able to communicate with and redeem his creation. Christian theism is also monistic or monotheistic.’ Religious worldviews begin with God and the Christian worldview begins with theism. In his book *The Christian View of God and the World As Centring in the Incarnation*, James Orr outlines what he calls a ‘Sketch of the Christian View’

from which I have borrowed as a starting point for delineating the Christian worldview. I have entered in brackets references to Genesis 1-11 which contain the source or seed for the view. NOTE: Genesis 12:1-3 is included with Genesis 1-11 because the event recorded there obviously took place chronologically prior to Genesis 11:31.

### 3.5.1 Outline of the Christian View (Orr 1948:32-34)

- I. The existence of a Personal, Ethical, Self-Revealing God; A system of Theism. [Gn 1:1, 27, 28]
- II. A. The creation of the world by God. [Gn 1:1-2:1]
  - B. God's imminent presence in the world. [Gn 2:8]
  - C. God's transcendence over the world. [Gn 6:5, 9:17]
  - D. God's holy and wise government of the world for moral ends. [Gn 11:1-8; 12:1-3]
- III. A. The spiritual nature and dignity of man. [Gn 1:27; 2:7]
  - B. Man's creation in the Divine image. [Gn 1:27]
  - C. Man's destination to bear the likeness of God in a perfected relation of sonship. [Gn 3:15]
- IV. A. The fact of sin and disorder in the world. [Gn 3:6,7; 4:8; 6:5,11; 9:20-27]
  - B. Sin and disorder does not belong to the Divine idea of the world inhering in the world by necessity. [Gn 1:31; 3:16-19]
  - C. Sin and disorder entered the world by the voluntary turning aside of man from his allegiance to his Creator, and from the path of his moral development. [Gn 3:6]
  - D. A Fall as the presupposition of its doctrine of Redemption. [Gn3:14, 15]
- V. The historical Self-Revelation of God to the patriarchs and in the line of Israel bringing to light a gracious purpose of God for the salvation of the world, centring in Jesus Christ, His Son, and the new Head of humanity. [Gn 3:15; 6:13; 12:1]
- VI. A. Jesus Christ was not mere man, but the eternal Son of God—a Divine Person. [Gn 3:15]

- B. Jesus Christ took upon Himself our humanity and in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. [Gn 3:15]
- C. Therefore, Jesus Christ is to be honoured, worshipped and trusted even as God is. [Gn 3:15]

D. The Incarnation sheds new light on:

1. The nature of God, with the work of the Spirit reveals Him as Triune—Father, Son, and Spirit—one God. [Gn 1:26; 3:15; 6:3]
2. The doctrine of creation—all things being created by Him and for Him. [Gn 1:1-26]
3. The nature of man and his capacity for union with the Divine; its possibility of perfections, and the high destinies awaiting it in the future. [Gn 1:26, 27; 2:7]
4. The purpose of God in the Creation and Redemption of man—to gather together in one all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10). [Gn 3:15]
5. The permission of sin by showing the possibility of Redemption from it, Divine mercy revealing a grander discovery of the Divine Character, and far greater prospects are opened up for humanity. [Gn 2:16,17; 3:15, 21]

VII. A. The redemption of the world through a great act of Atonement. [Gn 3:15]

B. The Atonement to be appropriated by faith. [Gn 3:15]

C. The Atonement availing for all who do not wilfully withstand and reject its grace. [Gn 3:15]

VIII. The historic aim of Christ's work was the founding of a kingdom of God on earth which includes the spiritual salvation of individuals and a new order of society. [Gn 3:15; 7:1]

IX. A. History has a goal. [Gn 3:15]

B. The present order of things will be terminated by the appearance of the Son of Man for judgement. [Gn 3:15; 6:3a, 13]

C. The resurrection of the dead. [Gn 3:15]

D. The final separation of righteous and wicked. [Gn 3:15]

### 3.5.2 Protevangelium

Further comment needs to be made on the full content of the meaning of

Genesis 3:15. The events described in Genesis 1-11 apply generally to all mankind.

They are the events of primeval history of the world. The events of Genesis 11:31 to 12:4 describe the origin of the Israelites, the Jews or Hebrews, which are the descendants of Abraham. Genesis 3:15 contains the prophetic announcement of an event that would take place thousands of years in the future and which would mark the beginning of the Christian religion. The prologue to the events of Genesis 3 is recorded in Revelation 12:7-9:

7. And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Genesis 3 records how the serpent (identified above as Satan) tempted the first man and woman to disobey God, thus bringing sin into the world. God pronounces a curse upon the serpent, stating in Genesis 3:15:

And I will put enmity  
Between you and the woman,  
And between your seed and her Seed;  
He shall bruise your head,  
And you shall bruise His heel. NKJV

This verse is pregnant with meaning for the Christian religion and the Christian worldview. What is partially revealed here (in germ or seed form) as words spoken by God, was further revealed as phenomenon in actual space-time history, and was consummately revealed in the visions and writing of John the Apostle in the Book of Revelation, the final book of the Christian Bible. As soon as man sinned, God let it be known that the enmity (hostility) is between man and Satan, not between man and God. Satan has a seed consisting of all humanity of all time that oppose God and good, and do evil (Jn 8:44; Ac 13:10; Eph 2:1, 2). The woman also has a seed consisting of ‘those in the human family who are brought into right relationship with God through faith, children of the Father’ (Morris 1976:121, see also Wood 1975:35).

The last part of Genesis 3:15 implies that in addition to the plural and corporate meaning of the two seeds, there is another meaning as well. There is one ultimate seed of the serpent and one ultimate seed of the woman, and those two ultimate seeds will be engaged in ultimate conflict with the seed of the woman ultimately triumphant (Rv 20).

This great promise of Genesis 3:15, is called the *protevangelium* meaning ‘first gospel.’ As Derek Kidner (1967:70) explains it: ‘There is good New Testament authority for seeing here the *protevangelium*, the first glimmer of the gospel. Remarkably, it makes its debut as a sentence passed on the enemy (*cf.* Col 2:15), not a direct promise to man, for redemption is about God’s rule as much as about man’s need (*cf.* Ezk. 36:22, “not ...for your sake...”).' The Christian belief is that God’s coming to earth in the form of His Son, Jesus Christ (the Incarnation) who was born of a virgin (Is 7:4; Mt 1:23) made him, not the seed of a man, but the seed of the woman (Gl 4:4). He came to establish God’s kingdom on earth (Mt 4:23; 12:28; Lk 17:20,21; Rm 14:17). That kingdom was not established without a conflict with the ‘prince of this world’ (Jn 12:31; 1 Jn 5:19). The final blow by the Seed of the woman to Satan was mentioned first (‘He shall bruise your head’) referring to his final defeat and eternal judgement (Rv 20:2,3,10). The first blow was delivered by Satan to the Seed of the woman when Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross to pay mankind’s sin debt to God (the Atonement) – ‘But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities,’ (Is 53:6). God had announced in Genesis 2:17 that disobedience would bring death (spiritual death, or separation from God, and physical death) (see also Rm 6:23) and death became an enemy of man. The bruising of Christ’s heel was not a fatal blow because Christ was resurrected from the dead and became the first fruit of all who die as seed of the woman (1 Cor 15:20-23), thus



destroying the enemy of death (1 Cor 15:26). The Christian gospel is that if man will acknowledge his sinfulness before God, accept by faith the death of Jesus Christ on the cross as payment of his own sin debt (substitutionary atonement) then he will only die physically and not spiritually, and that at an appointed time his body will be resurrected to newness of life. Those who die without faith in Christ's substituting atonement will be resurrected to everlasting punishment (Heb. 6:2; Jude 7; Rv 20:13-15). This is all impregnated into the *Protevangelium* in Genesis 3:15.

The Christian worldview implications of the *Protevangelium* are tremendous. The Christian sees all humanity as being of one or the other seeds. There are no other options. The Christian sees the enmity between the seeds as the source of conflicts and hostilities in the world. Moral and natural evil is explained, and the power to overcome evil and do good is revealed. The question of what happens after death is answered. The love of God for humanity is revealed (Jn 3:16). The meaning and purpose of history is explained and man's final destiny is exposed. The worldview of the Bible moves from being biblical to being specifically Christian because of the *Protevangelium* in Genesis 3:15.

### 3.6 Philosophical Elements of the Christian Worldview

Following the philosophical methodology of posing questions and then formulating answers to them, in delineating the philosophical elements of the Christian worldview a question/answer format will be used. Within each first-order discipline of philosophy discussed in Chapter Two some broad questions will be posed allowing for the expounding of an answer based upon the biblical or Christian view. Chapter Four will use this format asking the same questions to be answered by the traditional African view based upon ATR. At the end of each answer from the Christian worldview I have entered, in brackets, references to the outline of the

Christian view previously given in this chapter. From the outline, the Christian view can be traced to its basis in Genesis 1-11.

### 3.6.1 ONTOLOGY QUESTIONS

#### 3.6.1.1 Is there a Supreme Being, and, if so, what is it like?

This question deals with the existence and nature of God. As to the existence of God, the Christian Scriptures assume it. The Book of Genesis is the first book and it begins: ‘In the beginning God...’ Hobbs (1975:9) sums up the Christian view: ‘If you can believe the first four words of the Bible, all else becomes both clear and credible.’ God is, but what is God? Both philosophers and scientists seek to define their terms carefully but the biblical writers were not concerned at all with definitions. In speaking of the first verse of the Bible (‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth’) Carnell (1952:31,33,34) comments: ‘Neither here, nor in the context, is a formal, Aristotelian definition given of any of the difficult terms which are so casually employed: “Beginning,” “God,” “heavens,” “earth”. ...’ As for God, the Being cannot be defined connotatively (how can the highest genus be subsumed under anything?) or denotatively (since there is only one specimen to which the name may be applied). ...The biblical writers were not interested in doing the impossible, defining God, they were interested in leading people *to* God.’

God is not a term to be defined, but a person to be known. A person can be known if that person’s nature, character and attributes can be known by the intellect and confirmed to exist by experience. That is exactly how the Christian knows his God. From Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21 the Bible is revealing the nature, character and attributes of God through his words and actions, constantly inviting the reader to a personal, experiential relationship with Him.

The attributes of God are described by Professor Gordon Lewis (1984):

God is an invisible, personal, and living Spirit, distinguished from all other spirits by several kinds of attributes: metaphysically God is self-existent, eternal, and unchanging; intellectually God is omniscient, faithful, and wise; ethically God is just, merciful, and loving; emotionally God detests evil, is long-suffering, and is compassionate; existentially God is free, authentic, and omnipotent; relationally God is transcendent in being, immanent universally in providential activity, and immanent with his people in redemptive activity.

Lewis only mentions that God is loving and fails to mention that God is holy. These two attributes are prominent in God's self-revelation in the Bible. He is said to be 'majestic in holiness' (Ex 15:11). He states: 'I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy' (Lv 11:44). Heavenly creatures are described as worshipping God by saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty' (Is 6:3; Rv 4:8). As to his being loving, the Bible describes him as 'showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments' (Ex 20:6). It also says that 'the earth is full of his unfailing love' (Ps 33:5). God's love for the world is manifest in the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ, giving rise to the Christian faith (Jn 3:16), and God declares himself to be the personification of love in 1 John 4:16: 'God is love.'

In addition to the above attributes, God is revealed in the Bible and Christian philosophy as tri-personal. God's words and actions as recorded in the Bible are attributed to three different 'persons' (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) who are not three different gods or three modes of God. They are coequally and coeternally metaphysically one God. God is revealed as Father of all mankind even though they do not have a personal relationship with him, in that he is their creator. God is also revealed as a loving Father to all who are rightly related to him through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. God the Son speaks of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ who is declared in Scripture to be God in the flesh. It was the death of God the Son on a cross that paid the death penalty of sin and opened the way for all humanity to know God as

Father. God the Spirit is at work in the world convicting mankind of sin and indwelling those who repent of their sin and accept the atoning work of Christ by faith. The three 'persons' of God constitute a tri-unity, or Trinity, in Christian doctrine.

The Christian view of God answers man's basic question of why, besides energy, matter and form, is there personality in the universe. Man is personal, and since the personal cannot come from the impersonal, then that which is personal must have created man. Because God is personal and man is personal the possibility of feelings and communication between the two is a reality. The Christian view is of a personal-infinite God who created and sustains the universe which reflects his unity and diversity. As Francis Schaeffer (1972b:13) states: 'What we are talking about is the philosophic necessity, in the area of being and existence, of the fact that God is there. That is what it is all about: *He is there.*' God has always been there (Gn 1:1), he is the one prime existent. [I; II A, B, C, D; VI A, B, C]

### 3.6.1.2 What is the origin and nature of man?

The Christian view of man is that his nature is a direct result of his origin. Man's origin came about by a creative act of God and his nature came about because God created man in his own image (Gn 1:27). The mode used to put life in man was God's own breath: 'The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being' (Gn 2:7). Man is differentiated from the rest of creation, living and non-living, because only man was created in the image of God and only man has the breath or spirit of God in him. Like God, man is a tri-unity, a tri-unity of spirit, soul and body (1 Th 5:23). And, like God, man will exist in some form throughout eternity future (Dn 12:2, Rm 6:23).

Man is like God in image, but not in essence. God is infinite, man is finite. There are no limits to the attributes of God. There are limits to the attributes of man.

According to Udo Middelmann (1974:15): 'Man is a curious phenomenon. Man is the only being that is unable not to question his identity, the only being who cannot take his identity for granted.' Middelmann goes on to state that, apart from the Christian view, man has only two ways to answer the question of his identity. He can seek his identity in the order of things in the cosmos, being one particular among a mass of particulars, and thus insignificant. Or he can deny that a separate identity is desirable and seek solace in a unity with all things and thus become a zero. The Christian view of the identity of man comes from outside the present external order. Man's origin is God who is not confined to this immediate existence. In the words of Middelmann (1974:16): '...the primary relationship of man is beyond the immediate physical existence of particulars. His primary relationship is to God.'

Being made in the image of God, who created all things, means that man has the ability to create, but in a finite way. Creation requires imagination which is a mental synthesis of new ideas from elements experienced separately. Imagination is evidence of creativity. Unlike the animals, man is open to the creative restructuring of his environment. Man has the ability to act, rather than react as the animal does. Man can also enlarge his environment. Fairy tales and myths show man's creativity.

The Christian view of the nature of man is not just idealistic, it is realistic. Man as he is today does not accurately reflect the image of the God of the Bible who is absolute goodness and holiness. How can man, who was made in the image of God, be so inhuman to his fellowman? Francis Schaeffer (1972b:30) gives the Christian answer:

...at this point we must recognize...that man as he is now is not what he was; that man is discontinuous with what he has been, rather than continuous with

what he has been. Or, to put it another way, man is now abnormal—he has changed.

Man as he now is by his own choice is not what he intrinsically was. In this case we can understand that man is now cruel, but that God is not a bad God.

There was a space-time, historic change in man. There is a discontinuity and not a continuity in man. Man, made in the image of God and not programmed, turned by choice from his proper integration point at a certain time in history. When he did this, man became something that he previously was not, and the dilemma of man becomes a true moral problem rather than merely a metaphysical one.

The space-time historic change in man came about as the result of the Fall as recorded in Genesis 3. Man wilfully chose to disobey God, his infinite reference point, and physical and spiritual separation from God was the result. Being created in the image of God, man possessed ‘personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness and creativity’ (Sire 1997:27). Sire (1997:33) explains what happened in each of the areas as a result of the fall:

In *personality*, we lost our capacity to know ourselves accurately and to determine our own course of action freely in response to our intelligence

Our self-transcendence was impaired by the alienation we experienced in relation to God, for as Adam and Eve turned from God, God let them go. Human *intelligence* also became impaired. Now we can no longer gain a fully accurate knowledge of the world around us, nor are we able to reason without constantly falling into error. *Morally*, we became less able to discern good and evil. *Socially*, we began to exploit other people. *Creatively*, our imagination became separated from reality; imagination became illusion, and artists who created gods in their own image led humanity further and further from its origin.

This being the Christian view of the present nature of man, is it any wonder that special revelation is the means relied upon to obtain the first truths in the Christian worldview. Man has changed since creation, God has not. If God has told us the truth about creation, he has told us the truth about man’s present condition and what he (God) has done to provide a way of restoring his image in man (the Incarnation and Atonement). [II A; III A, B, C; IV C; VI D 3]

### 3.6.1.3 What is reality, and what is ultimate reality?

The philosophical concept of reality comes from the Latin *realitas*, deriving from *res* meaning ‘thing.’ According to Reese (1980:481) it was introduced into philosophy, apparently by Duns Scotus, who used the term as a synonym for ‘being.’ Graeme Forbes (1995) defines reality as: ‘in standard philosophical usage, how things actually are, in contrast with their mere appearance... Reality is sometimes said to be two-way-independent of appearance. This means that appearance does not determine reality.’

The Christian view of reality can be said, in philosophical terms, to encompass a form of realism embracing a form of dualism. Geisler and Feinberg (1980:148) state: *Realism* postulates that we are in direct contact with an independent, material, external world.’ That world exists independent of and external to our minds where ideas and sense data are processed. The Christian view accepts a spiritual realm as well as a physical realm and in a modified moral dualism recognizes an ongoing conflict between the seed of Satan and the seed of the woman.

Prior to the eighteenth century the Christian realistic view of reality dominated philosophy and science. Since that time the concept of reality has become highly subjective. Man desires to be autonomous, to be free from all restrictions so that he will not be bound by the external moral codes of a Supreme Being from which all other beings derive their existence. The Christian view of reality has not changed with the times. It has remained, in the words of Middelmann (1974:61): ‘The notion that reality is a state of being independent of and does not derive itself from anything. It is effective existence, and thus not dependent on our imagination or ideas. It is perceived in the act of cognition as an “opposite” outside of (or *even against*) my consciousness.’

The Christian concept of reality is based on the belief that the Bible is God's propositional revelation of truth. Udo Middelmann (1974:63) states:

Furthermore, the framework of Genesis 1-3 gave the basis for the direct relationship of both man's prayers to God and God's revelation to man. God's knowledge of reality and man's knowledge of reality could have much in common since man himself bore the *imago dei*. The finite bore a distinct resemblance to the infinite (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; 2 Pet. 1:4). So there was room not only for love and obedience, but also for knowledge about God, about man and about God's creation. In other words, the Bible explained the basis not only for man's understanding of the existence and character of God, but also for his understanding of God's creation, including personal man. It explained how man could understand that there was an objective existence independent of man's perception of it.

God the Creator has made an objective reality, which he, being infinite knows objectively. This he communicated to man who, being finite, would otherwise have no way to be certain of perceiving anything outside of himself and his subjective consciousness.

The Christian view is that God made an objective universe and personal beings with the ability to truly perceive that universe. God has given these personal beings the freedom to live with their perceptions and to measure them by his revealed Word (the Bible) and by the reality in which they live.

Is reality one or many or both? This metaphysical question is answered by Monism with everything is one (there is no diversity) in its very being, and by Pluralism with there are many beings and any unity perceived in them is not essential to their being. The Christian view is that there is a real unity and a real diversity of being in the universe. This view is based on the belief of a Trinity in the God-head. There are three persons in one God consisting of a plurality of persons and a unity of essence. Since a three-in-one God created the universe and the universe displays his glory (Ps 19:1), it is reasonable to believe that the universe reflects that same unity in diversity. Geisler and Feinberg (1980:176) sum up the Christian view:

Christian theists do not view being as univocally identical wherever it is found. Beings are similar (analogous), but not identical to one another. Yet there is a unity of being, since God is one being from whom all other beings derive their very being. God *is* being; everything else *has* being because He



gives it being (John 1:2; Rev. 4:11). “In him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). God is an infinite being; and all creatures are finite beings.

To the question of what is ultimate reality, the Christian answer is God. He is seen as the Uncaused Cause of everything that is except himself. God is the one prime existent, the one prime reality and the one source of all other reality. As Geisler states: ‘He is the infinite cause of their [creatures] being; and they are the finite being that He causes. God is a necessary being, and creatures are contingent.’ [I; II A; III A]

#### 3.6.1.4 What is truth?

At his trial, Jesus told Pilate that he came into the world to testify to the truth. Pilate responded with the question: ‘What is truth?’ (Jn 18:38). Pilate did not wait for an answer.

I will deal with the nature of truth here under the discipline of Ontology because of its relationship with reality. *How* the truth can be known will be covered under the discipline of Epistemology. Truth is defined philosophically as ‘the quality of those propositions that accord with reality, specifying what is in fact the case’ (Horwich 1995). Geisler and Bocchino (2001:33) state: ‘By definition, *truth is an expression, symbol, or statement that matches or corresponds to its object or referent* (i.e., that to which it refers, whether it is an abstract idea or a concrete thing).’

Aristotle gave a clear and simple definition: ‘To say of what is, that it is not, or of what is not, that it is, is false; while to say of what is, that it is, and of what is not, that it is not, is true’ (Reese 1980:588).

The biblical usage of the word encompasses the philosophical meanings with an added dimension. Noted scholar and theologian James Oliver Buswell, Jr. (1967b) states: ‘The word “truth,” *aletheia* in the New Testament and a variety of words, chiefly *emeth* in the Old Testament, always connotes (1) the interrelated consistency

of statements and their correspondence with the facts of reality, and (2) the facts themselves. The former may be called propositional truth, and the latter, ontological truth.'

Connotation number one given above reflects the general philosophical meaning of truth. The philosophical definitions include the words 'propositions,' 'expression,' 'symbol,' 'statement,' and 'to say.' These words describe forms of communication and imply that truth is that which is communicated, *if* that which is communicated accurately reflects facts or reality. Philosopher Thomas Hobbs stated it this way: 'True and false are attributes of speech, not of things' (Reese 1980:588).

Connotation number two given by Buswell above adds the idea that truth exists independent of any communication which expresses truth. The fact or reality itself is an ontological being called 'truth.' Both communication and independent existence reflects the understanding of truth in Christian philosophy and religion. God is the God of truth (Ps 31:5; Is 65:16) and God's word *is* truth (Jn 17:17). God's Son, Jesus Christ, is identified as the Word (Logos) (Jn 1:1,14) and as the Word of God (Rv 19:13). God's Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth (Jn 15:26). In Christian belief, all members of the tri-personal Godhead not only communicate truth, but are truth. With the Incarnation of Jesus Christ the truth became a man, the implications of which are the basis of Christian theology.

'In the beginning was the Word (Logos) and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the Only Begotten (margin), who came from the Father, full of grace and truth' (Jn 1:1,14). The Word (*Logos*) is a *Person* whose personal existence is identified to be with God 'In the beginning,' (Gn 1:1) before anything was created. 'The Word was God' means that not only is the Word related eternally

with God but is actually identical in essence with God. It is a union, not a fusion. Christianity teaches that early in the first century A.D. this Word became a Person who not only communicated truth but ontologically was truth. That Person is Jesus Christ.

When Jesus Christ walked the earth he spoke the truth (over 70 times he is recorded in the Gospels as saying 'I tell you the truth'), he acted in truth, he lived in truth because he was the truth personified (Jn 14:6). As such he is the Christian's prime true source of special revelation about God and salvation. Jesus Christ showed the world what God is like (Jn 14:9), the God of truth. The Christian idea of truth is not only communication that accords with reality, but that reality itself is in the form of the Person of Jesus Christ. Pilate looked Truth in the face. [I; V; VI A, B]

### 3.6.2 COSMOLOGY QUESTIONS

#### 3.6.2.1 What is the origin and nature of the universe?

The Christian view of the origin of the universe is that it came about by creative acts of God (Gn 1:1) in the form of words spoken by God (Gn 1:2-26). God spoke the universe into existence, not using anything but the power of his word to bring the universe into being. Jean Paul Sartre's basic philosophical problem was that something is there rather than nothing. Philosophers and scientists through the ages have tried to come up with explanations as to how the universe came to be. The options are few. Either it all came from absolutely nothing, what Francis Schaeffer calls '*nothing* nothing' meaning no energy, mass, motion or personality existed prior to something existing. Or it came from an impersonal beginning which may have been energy, mass, or motion. It really doesn't matter. The third, and final, option is to assume that what is here came out of a personal beginning. Observation and experience relate the existence of diversity and unity in the universe as well as the

existence of personal and impersonal objects in the universe. That the universe came into existence from absolutely nothing defies all the laws of nature and science known to man and does not even enter into any widely held religious belief. Beginning with the impersonal does not explain the existence of numerous complex systems working in unity, seemingly coordinated, nor does it explain all the particulars in the universe. Some particulars have life; and one particular, man, has personality. An impersonal beginning plus time plus chance cannot adequately explain or give meaning to all that exists in the universe. Beginning with a personal being with the power and intelligence to create all that is in the universe is the only option that makes sense and is the Christian view of the origin of the universe.

The Christian view of the origin of the universe is that '*God created the cosmos ex nihilo [out of nothing] with a uniformity of cause and effect in an open system*' (Sire 1997:26). God did not make the universe out of himself or out of some chaos that existed before the universe. The universe came into being by God's spoken word. The universe is orderly and is open, it is not programmed. Certain natural laws were incorporated into the universe when God created it, but God can override the laws or operate above the laws (supernatural) as he wills. The Christian view is that God is continuously involved in the events taking place in an orderly but not determined universe.

According to the Bible, the universe reflects the power and glory of God (Ps 19:). The Christian God is trinitarian and what God created is trinitarian in nature. The universe is essentially made up of three elements, time, space and matter. Each of these reflects a trinitarian nature. Time is considered to be past, present, and future; space has the dimensions of length, breadth, and depth; matter only appears in the three forms solid, liquid, and gas (Meldau 1969:24). As stated earlier in this chapter,

man also reflects a tri-part nature of body, soul and spirit. The Christian view of the universe is that it reflects ‘God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made...’ (Rm 1:20).

The Christian view of the universe also includes the belief that the universe, as it presently is, is not the way God created it. God created every thing good (Gn 1:31) and perfect, but because of the Fall, when sin and death entered the universe, the universe now reflects the effects of sin and the curse of sin (Gn 3:17-19). Sin has marred the image of God in man and in the universe, unleashing forces of spiritual evil ruled by Satan (Eph 2:2). The Christian view of the universe sees it as the place of a spiritual battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan (Eph 6:12), with the kingdom of God ultimately prevailing (Gn 3:15). [I; II A, B, D; IV A, B, D; VI D 1; VIII]

### 3.6.2.2 What is God’s relationship with the universe?

The view of Christian theism is that God is both transcendent and immanent. By transcendent is meant that God is not the universe but is beyond it. The universe is finite, God is infinite. When we look at the universe, including man, we see God’s handiwork, but we do not see God. But God is not so beyond the universe that he does not relate to the universe. God is immanent or ‘in’ the universe as the sustaining cause of the universe. Geisler and Feinberg (1980:272) explain it this way:

In short, God’s relation to the world is analogous with a painter’s relation to his painting. The painter is *beyond* the painting, but he is also reflected *in* the painting and is the cause of it. However, the theist would protest that this analogy does not go far enough, for God is continually, personally, and intimately involved with sustaining the universe, whereas the painter can walk away from his painting once it is painted.

Because God is continually and personally involved in the affairs of the universe, and because he is God and not nature, he can act *supernaturally* in the

universe. Christians do not believe that natural laws are fixed, immutable and inviolable, but 'natural laws are descriptions of the regular way God works in His creation, not prescriptions of how He must work. God's special intervention in the world is called a *miracle*. In short, if there is a God who can act in the world, then it follows that there can be special acts of God (miracles) in the world' (Geisler and Feinberg 1980:273).

The regular and special actions of God in the universe are called *divine providence*, which is defined by Erickson (2001:162) as: 'God's care for the creation, involving his preserving it in existence and guiding it to its intended ends.' God's walking and talking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gn 3:8) dispels the view that God created the universe and left it to its own devices. When Jesus Christ was in the world he did not just teach about sin and righteousness. He taught much about his Father, God, who exercised providential care over all creatures to the extent that not even a sparrow could fall to the ground except it is God's will (Mt 10:29). Jesus further taught that God feeds the birds (Mt 6:26), directs the sunshine and the rain where he wants it (Mt 5:45), and knows the number of hairs on a person's head (Mt 10:30). All of this indicates God's close personal involvement in his creation. Moreland and Craig (2003:563) add this proviso: 'While God's providence, then, extends to everything that happens, it does not follow that God wills positively everything that happens. God wills positively every good creaturely decision, but evil decisions he does not will, but merely permits.' Donald Guthrie (1981:80) states: 'Although it is maintained that providence affects all men, some distinctions are made over God's special concern for those who believe in him, mainly in the realm of spiritual blessings. According to Romans 8:28 God exercises control over all aspects

of the lives of believers, which arise from his special concern as Father for his children.’ [I; II A, B, C, D; VI D. 2.]

### 3.6.2.3 What is the meaning of time?

The study of time started as a philosophical endeavour but, because of the advancement of theories of relativity, has been taken over by science. Time is a biblical concept denoting a beginning (Gn 1:1), a succession (Ec 3:1-8) and an end (Mt 28:20) to world history. However, the end of world history may not be the end of time. The bible uses the words ‘age’ and ‘eternity’ in characterizing the biblical concept of time, dividing it between temporal events before the second coming of Christ and the future events afterward. Eternity is defined as ‘A transcendence of time; without beginning or end, it is also qualitatively superior to the temporal’ (Erickson 2001:60). James Orr (1948:131) states: ‘Eternity we may rather take to be an expression for the timeless necessity of God’s existence; and time, properly speaking, begins its course only with the world.’ Traditionally, the term eternity has been used by philosophy and theology ‘to designate God’s infinity in relations to time—i.e., to designate the divine perfection whereby God transcends temporal limitations of duration and succession and possesses his existence in one indivisible present’ (Henry 1984).

A. R. Lacey (1986:228) in *A Dictionary of Philosophy* writes:

A famous attack on the reality of time was made by [British philosopher] McTaggart, who distinguished two series of temporal positions. The *A series* contains notions like *past, present, future*, which apply to different events at different times. The *B series* contains notions like *earlier than, simultaneous with, after*, which permanently link whatever events they do link. He then argues that the B series by itself, without the A series, cannot account for change, and so for time, while the A series involves either a contradiction or a vicious regress.

The Christian view of time is that it is linear (or horizontal) allowing for a succession of events in chronological order and from the temporal moment can be

referred to as past, present, or future. Moreland and Craig (2003:389) states: ‘In conclusion, we have good grounds for accepting an A theory of time in view of the proper basicity of our belief in the objective reality of tense and temporal becoming.’ According to Lacey (1986:229), the Christian view agrees with the view of science: ‘Time, unlike space, has only one dimension, and an apparently irreversible direction. This irreversibility is connected with the second law of thermodynamics, which says that entropy, or lack of organization, tends towards a maximum in isolated systems. For time to be reversed would be for this law to be broken.’ [I; VI D 3, 4, VIII; IX A, B]

#### 3.6.2.4 Do laws and causality govern the universe absolutely?

As previously stated, the Christian view is that natural laws are descriptions of the regular way God works in the universe but they do not prescribe how God must work. Events manifesting God’s actions contrary to natural laws (supernatural), are called *miracles* (Ps 77:14). Miracles are necessary for Christianity to be believable.

As to whether miracles are essential to Christianity, James Orr (1948:10) writes:

The question is not about isolated “miracles,” but about the whole conception of Christianity—what it is, and whether the supernatural does not enter into the very essence of it? It is the general question of a supernatural or non-supernatural conception of the universe. Is there a supernatural Being?—God? Is there a supernatural government of the world? Is there a supernatural relation of God and man, so that God and man may have a communion with one another? Is there a supernatural Person—Christ? Is there a supernatural work in the souls of men? Is there a supernatural Redemption? Is there a supernatural hereafter? It is these larger questions that have to be settled first, and then the question of particular miracles will fall into place.

Causality (or causation) questions whether or not every phenomenon must have a cause. Causation is, according to Lacey (1986:32): ‘the relation between two things when the first is necessary or sufficient or both for the occurrence of the second.’ For Geisler (1976:242) causality means ‘the actualization of potential. A “cause,” then, is that which affects a transition from potential to actuality.’ He goes on



to states that ‘no being whether contingent or necessary can be self-caused. A self-caused being would have to be ontologically prior to itself.’ The Christian theistic view is that God is not a self-caused Being. God is an uncaused Being. That being the case, the Christian view is that not every thing needs a cause. Only contingent or created things need a cause. As Geisler and Feinberg (1980:272) state: ‘The Creator is not a creature, and so does not need a cause either beyond or in Himself.’

The God of Christianity makes laws in nature but is not himself bound by them. The God of Christianity is the cause of all creation but is not himself caused by anything. The Christian view is that laws and causality do *not* govern the universe absolutely. [I; II A, D; VI D.2]

### 3.6.3 TELEOLOGY QUESTIONS

#### 3.6.3.1 Why do man and the universe exist and do they have a final end?

The Christian view is that God created the universe as a free act of his will.

James Orr (1948:131) states the answer to why God did it:

A few words before leaving this part of the subject on the motive and end of creation. If we reject the idea of metaphysical necessity, and think of creation as originating in a free, intelligent act, it must, like every similar act, be conceived of as proceeding from a motive, which includes in it at the same time a rational end. And if God is free, personal Spirit, who is at the same time ethical Will, what motive is possible but goodness or love, or what end can be thought of but an ethical one? In this way it may be held that, though the universe is not the product of a logical or metaphysical necessity, it arises from the nature of God by a *moral* necessity which is one with the highest freedom, and thus the conception of creation may be secured from arbitrariness.

Thus, the creation of the universe was not an arbitrary act on God’s part, but a moral necessity in order for his divine nature of love to be expressed (1Jn 4:8,16). All definitions of love include or imply the existence of an object. The Bible records the fact of love within the triune Godhead of God in that the Father loved the Son (Jn 17:24) and the Son loved the Father (Jn 14:31). But since this love is confine to

members of the Godhead of one God it is basically self-love. The Greek word used most often in the New Testament to refer to God's love is *agapao* indicating a self-sacrificial kind of love. Vine's (1981:21) *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* states: 'In respect of *agapao* as used of God, it expresses the deep and constant love and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential love in them towards the Giver, and a practical love towards those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others to seek the Giver.' Human beings are the unworthy objects and the universe is the place love is played out.

The universe was created by God to be the dwelling place of man. Everything created was good (Gn 1:31) and had a teleological end in God's creative purpose. Man was to enjoy his home and enjoy and glorify God forever. Man only had to obey one commandment to prove his love for God (Gn 2:17; 1 Jn 5:3). Man disobeyed the command of God and the destructive consequence of sin (the Fall) was felt by man (Gn 2:17; 3:16-20) and nature (Gn 3:17-18; Rm 8:22). Therefore, neither man nor nature exists today as they were perfectly created by God.

Because man was still the object of God's love after he sinned, the universe became the place for God to glorify his Son, Jesus Christ, by sending him into the world as a man, albeit a perfect man, to redeem the world by taking the punishment of sin upon himself at Calvary (the Atonement). The giving of his Son was an act of love on God's part (Jn 3:16) and his purpose was the regeneration (*palingenesia*) or re-creating of fallen human nature (Tt 3:5) and physical nature (Mt 19:28). The regeneration of man was made possible by Christ's death on the Cross, the regeneration of all creation will take place at Christ's second coming (Ac 3:21). The universe started with *genesis* and will end with *palingensia*.

However, not all of humanity will be regenerated. Man was created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) (Gn 1:7) and as such is endowed with the capacity to reason and to exercise a free will. God set obedience to his commands as proof of man's love for him (1 Jn 5:3). Since the first man, Adam, all men have willfully sinned (Rm 3:23) and shown that they do not love God. 'In the biblical perspective sin is not only an act of wrongdoing but a state of alienation from God' (Bloesch 1984). Bloesch continues: 'The solution to the problem lies in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. The penalty for sin is death, judgment, and hell, but the gospel is that God has chosen to pay this penalty himself in the sacrificial life and death of his Son, Jesus Christ (cf. John 3;16-17; Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-10; II Cor. 5:18,19; Col. 2:13-15).' At the judgment those who have wilfully repented of their sins against God and believed the gospel of God's Son will receive eternal life (Jn 3;16; Rm 2:7), while those who have wilfully rejected God's act of love (Jn 3:126) will be punished with everlasting destruction (1 Th1:9). The Christian view is that, metaphysically, the final end of man will be either eternal life with God or eternal punishment. [II A; III B; IV D 2, 4; VII A; VIII; IX A, B]

### 3.6.3.2 Does evil have a purpose?

Since God is absolute goodness, the existence of evil (both moral and natural) in the world has posed problems for theologians and philosophers for centuries. Leibniz, a German philosopher, introduced the term 'theodicy' to refer to the 'problem of evil' or attempts to explain God's reasons for allowing evil. Evil was always viewed by the authors of Scripture as a means by which God could bring some purpose to pass (Gn 50:20; Rm 8:28). In the words of Young (1954:219) 'their faith depended on it. If...one sees it [evil] as the inevitable result of human rebellion, and a necessary condition of human freedom, then there is room for faith, and one can live

in the firm assurance that in spite of human perversity, God is able, and will in His own time, bring to pass the perfection and glory that is to come.’

Porcella (1967) points out that, according to Scripture, moral evil is the cause of the existence of physical or natural evil in the world (Gn 3:16-19; Rm 8:19-22). The Christian view recognizes that God may and does use natural evil for his own ends, but it also recognizes that God did not deliberately will it for this purpose. In discussing this issue Moreland and Craig (2003:544) write:

First, *the chief purpose of life is not happiness, but the knowledge of God*. One reason that the problem of evil seems so intractable is that people tend naturally to assume that if God exists, then his purpose for human life is happiness in this world. God’s role is to provide a comfortable environment for his human pets. But on the Christian view, this is false. We are not God’s pets, and the goal of human life is not happiness per se, but the knowledge of God—which in the end will bring true and everlasting human fulfilment. Many evils occur in life that may be utterly pointless with respect to the goal of human happiness; but they may not be pointless with respect to producing a deeper knowledge of God. Innocent human suffering provides an occasion for deeper dependency and trust in God, either on the part of the sufferer or those around him. Of course, whether God’s purpose is achieved through our suffering will depend on our response. Do we respond in anger and bitterness toward God, or do we turn to him in faith for strength to endure?

Porcella (1967) gives two of God’s purposes for allowing evil in the world:

‘The Scriptures indicate that evil has been permitted by God in order that His justice might be manifested in its punishment, and His grace in its forgiveness (Rm 9:22,23).’

Besides God’s justice and grace, the Scriptures teach that God uses evil to discipline his children. That discipline can take the form of family trouble (2 Sm 12:10) or sickness (1 Cor 11:30) or natural disasters (Job 1:4) or whatever means God sees fit. God does discipline his children (Ps 39:11; Pr 22:15) and bad things are the rod he uses. However, the Christian view is that God’s discipline of his children is motivated by love (Heb 12:5-11; Rv 3:19). ‘My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in’ (Pr 3:11,12). [I, II D; IV A, B; VI D 5]

### 3.6.4 ETHICS/MORALITY QUESTIONS

#### 3.6.4.1 Who or what determines what is moral and immoral?

Ethics and morals are two words used in philosophy, general theology and Christianity sometimes to be the same and sometimes to be different in meaning. Geisler and Bocchino (2001:309) state: ‘The words *ethics* and *morals* are commonly used interchangeably. When we use the term *ethics*, we are referring to a fixed set of (moral) laws by which one can measure human behaviour. Defining ethics in this way gives us a basis for making *moral* judgements. Ethics can be thought of as the standards, laws, or prescriptions that individuals are obligated to obey. Said another way, we can understand ethics as a set of standards (what ought to be) by which one evaluates human behaviour and judges it morally right or wrong.’ Dr. Morris Inch (1984) adds: ‘Ethics shares with certain other human enterprises the quest for truth, but is distinct in its concern for what man ought to do in the light of the truth uncovered. It is not simply descriptive, but prescriptive in character.’ That which ethics prescribes is morals. This thesis will follow Evans (2002:41,77) who defines ethics as ‘Branch of philosophy that concerns itself with questions of right and wrong, good and evil, virtues and vices,’ and morality as ‘The system of rules that ideally should govern human behaviour with respect to right and wrong, good and evil.’

The Christian view is that there are moral values or standards that are objective. Some things are right or wrong whether or not anyone believes them to be right or wrong. The source of these objective moral values is God, whose nature is perfectly holy and good. ‘God’s moral nature is what Plato called the “Good”.’ (Moreland and Craig 2003:491). Moreland and Craig go on to state: ‘Moreover, God’s moral nature is expressed in relation to us in the form of divine

commands, which constitute our moral duties or obligations. Far from being arbitrary, the commands flow necessarily from his moral nature.’

Every person being accountable to God for the moral choices he makes is also prominent in the Christian view of morality. Those who do good (by the Scriptural standard) will be eternally rewarded, while those who do evil will be troubled and distressed because they are under God’s wrath (Rm 2:6-11). The moral choices made in this life have eternal significance and the sacrificing of self-interest for the sake of God and others brings not loss, but gain. Because God is holy, his moral standards are good. Because God is just, rewards and punishment for obeying his standards will be exactly as each person deserves.

Christian ethics state that when there is a conflict between God’s commands and the laws of a human authority, the Christian must obey the commands of God and bear the consequences of not obeying the human authority. There is what Morris Inch (1984) calls ‘the higher order.’ The Christian must obey God rather than man (Ac 4:18,19; 5:29).

God has given the Christian everything that is needed to obey his moral commands. The ‘new birth’ of the Christian gives him a new nature including a new volition to obey the commands of God. The indwelling Holy Spirit of God gives the Christian the power to obey. Finally, God has manifested himself in human flesh, in the Person of his Son Jesus Christ, who gives us a manifestation of perfect morality. God, himself, came to be one of us, to live among us and to show us how to live lives that please God. The Bible says that Jesus was tempted in every way a human can be, yet he was without sin (Heb 4:15). ‘Because of all this, we have a human referent – a perfect one – for our morality. Christ is our complete moral example. In view of Him,

morality is not a mere legalistic assent to a written code; it is a dynamic relation to a living Person' (Geisler and Feinberg 1980:369). [I; IV B, C; VI A, B, C]

#### 3.6.4.2 How do we know what is right?

Geisler and Feinberg (1980:373-7) give several theories proposed by philosophers and theologians that attempt to define the right. William James suggested that something was right if it worked. Immanuel Kant put forth the idea of a 'categorical imperative' that is binding on all men: one should not do anything that he cannot will as a universal law for all men. G.E. Moore's position is that good is not definable in terms of anything other than itself, therefore it must be known only by intuition. Thomas Aquinas believed there are self-evident *first principles* for all knowledge, including the law of benevolence in ethics. Thomas Hobbes said the right can be known by appeal to some sovereign authority, such as a government or some leader. All of these theories have problems because the terms used to describe them can have different meanings to different people or they lack content altogether.

The Christian view states that God has revealed to mankind what is right using two different methods. One method is God's 'special' revelation recorded in the Christian Holy Book, the Bible. The intellectual discipline of Christian Apologetics deals with the Christian's justification for believing that the Bible is God's Word and the final authority for what is right and wrong. God's commandments are recorded in the bible and they reflect his nature of absolute righteousness. The Christian accepts the Bible as his rule of conduct and faith.

The other method God has used to reveal what is right is available, not just to Christians, but to all men and is called 'general' revelation. Man was made in the image of God (Gn 1:27) and even though fallen and unregenerated, man has enough of God's nature in him to know right and wrong even though he does not have the

will to do it. The Bible records in Romans 2:14,15: '(Indeed when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)' This natural revelation has been available since the creation of the world so that no man can be excused for not knowing the right thing to do (Rm 1:20). [I, II D; III B; IV B, C]

### 3.6.5 AESTHETICS QUESTIONS

#### 3.6.5.1 What is man's relationship with the natural environment?

This question is answered under the discipline of aesthetics because by definition aesthetics includes the branch of philosophy that examines the nature and character of our experience of not only art, but of the natural environment (Feagin 1995). The Book of Genesis records that man was created in a different mode (Gn 1:26; 2:7) and with a different function (Gn 1:26) than the natural environment into which he came into being. Man was created in the image of God and was given the task of ruling over the other living creatures (theologically, the vice-regent of God). Regarding the differentiation between man and other living creatures Udo Middelman (1974:16) writes:

For one thing, man finds himself different from the animal. Animals only react to their environment. They do not store information that has no relationship to the present or the possibility of immediate reaction. An animal filters mental impressions that correspond to its organs and reacts to them. Furthermore, an animal has no creativity in the sense of fantasy or imagination. Man, however, is, as we say in German, *weltoffen*, open to creative restructuring of his present environment. He seeks his identity from beyond the immediate. Man acts rather than reacts, and he can be creative and act beyond the immediate reality.

In the second chapter of Genesis we read that God brought the other living creatures to man so that he could categorize his environment by the assigning of



names. As Middelmann (1974:17) states: ‘Man is the one who groups his environment into classes rather than being grouped by his environment into a class—man.’ Genesis goes on to record that man shaped the elements of his natural environment for his own useful purposes in making musical instruments and tools (Gn 4:21,22), making bricks and building cities and monuments to himself (Gn 4:17; 11:3,4). Man is differentiated from the animal in that he has the possibility of being creative beyond his immediate environment and of enlarging his environment. The animal cannot do that (Middelmann 1974:18). From man’s creativity has come the industrial revolution, and great advancements in science and technology.

Man is given the ability to control his natural environment rather than being controlled by it. The Christian view is that the natural environment should not be abused or spoiled needlessly, but the natural environment was put here by God as man’s dwelling place and for his benefit. Therefore, he has the right to control or change it. Termites in one’s house must be dealt with or the house will be destroyed, thus causing more trees to be destroyed in order to replace the house. There must be a balance.

The Christian view is that spirits exist with, but not in, the natural environment. Rocks exist, trees exist, spirits exist, but spirits do not reside *in* the rocks or trees. Therefore, man has no need to fear the inanimate part of the natural environment or to pay any religious homage to any part of it (Ps 115:4-8). [II A; III A, B; VI D 3]

#### 3.6.5.2 Is there aesthetic value to religious experience?

The Book of Genesis records that an aesthetic experience led to the need for religious experiences. The first woman saw the fruit that God had commanded her husband not to eat and it was ‘pleasing to the eye, ...she took some and ate it. She also

gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it' (Gn 3:6). That act was the first sin (The Fall). Prior to that act God was pleased with man. Man had God's approval and direct communication with him (Gn 1:31; 2:16; 3:8, 9). There was no need for religion. Because of man's sin, he lost God's approval, but God, in his mercy gave man a religious system of offerings and sacrifices whereby man could express his worship and regain God's approval (Gn 4:3-5). The Fall, beginning with an aesthetic experience, is the reason for religious systems.

Geisler and Feinberg (1980:338) describe religious experience as 'an awareness of the Transcendent, or what in the Western world is commonly called *God*.' That Transcendent is believed to go beyond and be more than one's empirical world and in a sense to be the ultimate there is. Nothing transcends the Transcendent. Geisler and Feinberg add another characteristic to the Transcendent as an object of religious experience—'it has ultimate *value*. One gives it final devotion because it has intrinsic worth. Since it is intrinsically and ultimately worthy, it is the object of worship.' Geisler and Feinberg (1980:342) contend that religious experience of the Transcendent is different from an aesthetic experience. They state: 'Perhaps the simplest way to explain the difference between the aesthetic and the religious is that the former deals with our sense of the sublime and the latter with our sense of the sacred or holy. One deals with beauty and the other with ultimate worth. The aesthetic brings pleasure, but the religious occasions worship. The former involves a sense of amazement, but the latter a sense of adoration.'

Contrary to Geisler and Feinberg, the Christian Scriptures and the experience of Christians themselves indicate that religious experience can be, and often is, at one and the same time, an aesthetic experience. S L Feagin (1995) writing in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* states: "The aesthetic" has always been

intimately connected with sensory experience and the kinds of feelings it arouses.’ Reese (1980:5) has this to say about aesthetics: ‘This term has come to designate not the whole domain of the sensible, but only that portion to which the term “beauty” may apply.’ The Christian’s aesthetic experience of the Divine includes, but is not limited to, beauty. The writers of the Bible were human beings and they expressed their human feelings involved in religious experience of the Divine. Verses like Exodus 15:11 are replete with aesthetic terms: ‘Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?’ ‘Majestic,’ ‘awesome,’ and ‘wonders’ are terms critics use to describe works of art or music. Besides these words, the writers of Scripture expressed their feelings of the Divine using other aesthetic wording: ‘to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord’ (Ps 27:4); ‘Perfect in beauty, God shines forth’ (Ps 50:2); ‘O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness’ (Ps 96:9 KJV); ‘I stand in awe...’ (Hab 3:2); ‘...glad with the joy of your presence.’ (Ps 21:6). Even the word ‘fear’ (Ps 22:23, Is 59:19) as it is used in the Bible to describe a feeling toward God has aesthetic value. Rather than ‘being afraid of’ the word signifies a ‘reverential awe’ toward God. Ralph Earle (1984) states: ‘It should be obvious that “the fear of the Lord” does not mean being afraid of God. Rather, it is a reverential trust in God that makes us want to please and obey him.’ Christians worship God because they love and appreciate him and what he has done for them, and not because they are afraid not to. The Christian seeks religious experience because he wants to, not because he has to. Because God provides the experience, and God is good, the experience has aesthetic value.

In addition to writings, as in the Scriptures, music is used by Christians to express their aesthetic experiences. Great hymns of the faith like ‘All That Thrills My Soul is Jesus,’ ‘It is Well With My Soul,’ ‘For the Beauty of the Earth,’ and ‘How

Great Thou Art' express aesthetic feelings toward God. More recent choruses like 'I Stand, I Stand in Awe of You' and 'Lord, You Are Beautiful' indicate that the religious experience of encountering and worshipping God does have aesthetic value to it. Whether sensing God's handiwork in a sunset or his Spirit in a sanctuary, sensing the presence of God is an aesthetic experience. But, as James Orr (1948:19) reminds us: 'For religion is more than a mere aesthetic gratification. It implies belief in the existence of a real object other than self, and includes a desire to get into some relation with this object.' The Christian's experience of the 'numinous' is an aesthetic experience. [I, V, VI C, D 3]

### 3.6.6 PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY QUESTIONS

#### 3.6.6.1 What is the meaning of history?

The philosopher Hegel regarded history as 'the locus in which the activity of the divine reason is to be observed' (Reese 1980:226). Francis Schaeffer (1972a:165) gives a specific historic meaning to Genesis 1-11: 'These chapters give the history which comes before anything secular historians have been able to ascertain, and it is that pre-secular history which gives meaning to man's present history....It sets in perspective all the history we now have in our secular study.' Lockyer, Sr. (1986:483) gives a simple definition of 'history': 'A narrative or chronological record of significant events.' The Book of Genesis and all of Scripture claims to be such a record: 'This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created' (Gn 2:14); 'Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you...' (Lk 1:3). The Biblical authors were writing about events that constitute history. John D. Davis (1924:314) writes:

Biblical history is the record of that series of events which form the basis of the religion of the Bible (cp. Mark X.2-9; Rom XV.4: 1 Cor. X.11). It may be

divided into four periods: 1. An account of the creation of the universe, showing God's relation to the world; and introducing human history. 2. A sketch of human history, showing God's relation to the human race, and introducing the history of the chosen people. 3. The history of the chosen people, showing God's dealing with them and the preparation for the advent of Christ. 4. The history of the establishment of the Christian church, which is to reach all nations.

The Christian view of history is that the Bible records the history of God's dealings with humanity in general, first directly, then through his chosen people (Jews), then through his Son, Jesus Christ, then through the Christian Church. Christians believe that God has an ultimate goal for humanity—to come to a knowledge of himself and his Son, Jesus Christ (Pr 2:15; Is 11:9; 2 Pt 1:2) and an ultimate goal for all of history—the establishment of the Kingdom of God (Lk 17:21; Rv 11:15). Both goals will be accomplished at the Second Advent, when Jesus Christ returns to earth to rule and reign (Rv 20:22). All events in all parts of the world must be seen and interpreted in light of those goals. Moreland and Craig (2003:544) state: 'History cannot be seen in its true perspective apart from consideration pertinent to the Kingdom of God.' Then they quote the British divine Martyn Lloyd-Jones: 'Let us not therefore be stumbled when we see surprising things happening in the world. Rather, let us ask, "What is the relevance of this event to the kingdom of God?"...we should...judge every event in the light of God's great, eternal and glorious purpose.'

[V; VI D 4; VIII, IX A, B]

### 3.6.6.2 Is history cyclical or linear in progression?

Reese (1980:227) states: 'The Judeo-Christian tradition changed the periodization of time from cycle to progression or from circle to the concept of time's arrow. In St. Augustine, the ages of the world represent a fall and return characterized by paradise, expulsion, period of the law, and the Second Coming.' The bible is written using words indicative of chronological order or linear progression such as:

‘then’ (Gn 3:8); ‘when’ (Gn 6:1); and, ‘Two years after the flood...’ (Gn 11:10).

Secular historians have dated events recorded in the Bible from Abraham forward in chronological order based on archaeological evidence. The Christian view is that history is linear in progression; it had a definite beginning (Gn 1:1); and history as we know it will be consummated with the events recorded in the last book of the Bible, Revelation. Theologically, the great chronological events of human history are summed up by Sire (1997:32): ‘Human “history” can be subsumed under four words—*creation, Fall, redemption, glorification.*’ [II A; V; VI D 4; VIII; IX A, B, C]

### 3.6.7 EPISTEMOLOGY QUESTIONS

#### 3.6.7.1 What can we know and how can we know it?

Man knows many things. He knows there are rivers and oceans and mountains and trees. He knows that two plus two equals four and that four times four equals sixteen. He knows that there are other people besides himself and that people and things come in different shapes, sizes and colours. Man also knows that he does not know everything. Humanistic man believes that he can eventually know all that he *wants* to know. Christian man believes that he already knows all that he *needs* to know for life and godliness (2 Pt 1:3).

Moreland and Craig (2003:72) write about three types of knowledge:

The following three sentences reveal three different types of knowledge:

1. I know the ball in front of me.
2. I know how to play golf.
3. I know that Reagan was a Republican president.

Sentence (1) expresses what is known as **knowledge by acquaintance**. Here one knows something in that the object of knowledge is directly present to one’s consciousness.

Sentence (2) involves what is called **know-how**. Know-how is the ability or skill to behave in a certain way and perform some task or set of behaviours.

Sentence (3) expresses...what is more typically called by philosophers, **propositional knowledge**. Here someone knows that P where P is propositional. For present purposes, a proposition may be defined as the content of a sentence or statement. Epistemology involves all three kinds of knowledge.

Francis Schaeffer (1972b:38) credits Plato with being the Greek philosopher with the greatest sensitivity to the problem of knowledge. He states:

He understood the basic problem, and that is that in the area of knowledge, as in the area of morals, there must be more than particulars if there is to be meaning. In the area of knowledge you have *particulars*, by which we mean the individual “things” which we see in the world. At any given moment, I am faced with thousands, indeed literally millions of particulars, just in what I see with a glance of my eyes. What are the universals which give these particulars meaning? This is the heart of the problem of epistemology and the problem of knowing.

Science looks at the particulars and poses universal laws to try to explain them. Christians look at the particulars and know that God has already explained them in his written word. Schaeffer (1972b:62) confirms: ‘In the Reformation and the Judaeo-Christian position in general, we find that there is someone there to speak, and that he has told us about two areas. He has spoken first about himself, not exhaustively but truly; and second, he has spoken about history and about the cosmos, not exhaustively but truly.’ God has spoken on the basis of propositional revelation concerning the particulars and what he spoke has been recorded in the Bible. God is a verbalizer (Gn 1:3) and since man was created in the image of God, man is a verbalizer in his communication to other men. There is universal agreement on that (even post-modern deconstructionists cannot deny it). Schaeffer (1972b:65) asks:

In the Christian structure, would it be unlikely that this personal God who is there and made man in his own image as a verbalizer, in such a way that he can communicate horizontally to other men on the basis of propositions and language—is it unthinkable or even surprising that this personal God could or would communicate to man on the basis of propositions? The answer is, no.... If God has made us to be communicators on the basis of verbalization, and

given the possibility of propositional, factual communication with each other, why should we think he would not communicate to us on the basis of verbalization and propositions?

...God has made us to be language communicators...why then should it be surprising to think of him speaking to Paul in Hebrew on the Damascus Road?... Do we think God does not know Hebrew? Equally, if the personal God is a good God, why should it be surprising in communicating to man in a verbalized, propositional, factual way, that he should tell us the true truth in all areas concerning which he communicates?

Since the same reasonable God made the knower and the thing that is known (the subject and the object) it should not be surprising that there is a correlation between them. God made the subject and he made the object, and he gave the Bible to explain, epistemologically, the correlation that exists between them. We cannot know the object exhaustively, but we can know it truly.

According to Schaeffer (1972b:85), another benefit of Christian epistemology based on God's revelation is that the distinction between reality and fantasy is clear. Because man is made in the image of God man has a mind that can think creatively using imagination. Man can change the form of the universe (as an artist or an engineer) and expose the results of his imagination on the external world. Schaeffer states:

Being Christian and knowing that God has made the external world, there is no confusion for me between that which is imaginary and that which is real. The Christian is free; free to fly, because he is not confused between his fantasy and the reality which God has made....as a Christian I have the epistemology that enables me not to get confused between what I think and what is objectively real.

Autonomous man is alienated from God, from others, and from himself in the area of knowing. Without the universals of the Bible he cannot explain all the particulars in the world and in his own life. There are no categories that differentiate between his internal fantasies and the objective external world. He has nothing to tell him who he is. That is not the case for the Christian.



The Christian view of what we can know and how we can know it is answered in the special revelation of God as recorded in the Bible, especially the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Hans Weerstra (1997d: 56) stated it clearly: ‘Also, any meaningful and reasonable “epistemology” is impossible without Genesis 1-11,... Epistemology asks how do we know what we know, and how valid and true is what we know, and what is the source and limitations if any of the knowledge we have. Genesis 1-11 gives true, reasonable and reliable answers to these ultimate questions.’ God’s special revelation in Genesis 1-11 being true to reality is vitally important to the Christian view of the world. As Francis Schaeffer (1972a:162) notes: ‘Unless our epistemology is right, everything is going to be wrong.’ [I; II A; III B; VI D]

### 3.6.7.2 What justifies a belief?

Propositional knowledge is defined by philosophers, following Plato, as justified true belief. Moreland and Craig (2003:73) elaborate on this definition:

If someone knows something then what he knows must be true. It would make no sense to say that Jones knows that milk is in the refrigerator but that, nevertheless, it is false that milk is there....But truth is not sufficient for knowledge. There are many truths that no one has ever thought of, much less known.

Besides truth, a second part of knowledge is belief. If Jones knows something in the propositional sense, he must at least believe it. It would make no sense to say that Jones knows that milk is in the refrigerator but that, nevertheless, he does not believe that milk is in the refrigerator.... But mere belief is not sufficient for knowledge. People believe many things that they do not know to be true.

True belief is a necessary condition for knowledge. But is true belief sufficient for knowledge? No, it is not. The reason is that someone can believe things that are true but have no justification or warrant at all for those beliefs. It may be that one’s belief is true by simple accident.

...justification (or warrant) for a belief amounts to something like this: one has sufficient evidence for the belief, one formed and maintained the belief in a reliable way (e.g., on the basis of his senses or expert testimony and not by palm reading), or one’s intellectual and sensory faculties were functioning properly in a good intellectual environment when he formed the belief in question.

Epistemic justification involves evidence or support for holding a belief which is referred to as the logic or structure of epistemic justification. Philosophers have put forth two alternative logics or structures, foundationalism and coherentism.

‘Foundationalism is the view that there is a structure of knowledge whose foundations, though they support all the rest, are themselves in need of no support’

(Geisler and Feinberg 1980:152). Geisler and Feinberg (1980:161) give this

description of coherentism:

Coherentism is the belief that there are no epistemologically prior or basic beliefs, and that “justification just meanders in and out through our network of beliefs, stopping nowhere.” There is, if you will, no bedrock in justification. Whereas foundationalism is often conceived as pyramidal in structure, coherentism is pictured as a “web of belief.” There is mutual relationship between various beliefs, so that one supports a second, while the second and a third support the first.

Christian philosophers and theologians are divided in their support of these alternative structures for epistemic justification. Aspects of both are involved in Christian belief. The core issue for Christians is proof—is there proof or evidence that confirms the beliefs that make up their worldview. The Christian worldview is based on God’s special revelation in the Bible, the focal point of that revelation being Jesus Christ. If the Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ are not justified, there is no justification for the Christian worldview. For the Christian, the proof that justifies belief in Jesus Christ and what he said is his resurrection from the dead. As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:14, 17: ‘And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith.’ ‘And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins.’ Paul goes on to state in verse 20: ‘But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead....’ The Scriptures go on to state that Christians in the first century had sense and expert testimony as evidence for belief in Christ’s resurrection: ‘After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many

convincing proofs that he was alive' (Ac 1:3); 'For he [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man [Christ Jesus] he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead'(Ac 17:31). The Bible is God's written expert testimony to succeeding generations. J I Packer (1984a) writes: 'Beliefs, as such, are convictions held on grounds, not of self-evidence, but of testimony. Whether particular beliefs should be treated as known certainties or doubtful opinions will depend on the worth of the testimony on which they are based. The Bible views faith's convictions as certainties and equates them with knowledge (1 John 3:2; 5:18-20),...because they rest on the testimony of a God who "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2) and is therefore utterly trustworthy.'

The Christian view is that God's testimony of the virgin birth, sinless life, sacrificial death, and resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ justifies belief in all that God has said. The Christian believes that he can clearly understand what God has said and can formulate a true worldview based upon the word of God. 'We also know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And so we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life' (1 Jn 5:20). [I; II D; V; VI; VIII]

### 3.7 Religious Dimensions of the Christian Worldview

Religious beliefs are at the core of all worldviews. What one believes about God determines the direction of beliefs about absolutes and ultimates in everything else. Beliefs determine and motivate behaviour. The Christian religion, as foundational to the Christian, or biblical worldview, motivates Christians to experience an ongoing relationship to the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and it determines how that experience is obtained. The Christian Holy Scriptures, the

Bible, is their source of faith and practice and it guides them as they live out the various religious dimensions of their worldview.

### 3.7.1 Experiential Dimension

According to the Bible, a person must have an initial experience in order to become a Christian. This experience becomes a turning point in their personal history and their lives are indeed forever changed. The experience is referred to by different terms: ‘being saved’ (Ac 2:47), ‘become a believer’ (Heb 10:39), ‘being born of God’ (1 Jn 3:9), ‘being redeemed’ (1 Pt 1:18), ‘renewal’ (‘regeneration’ KJV) (Tt 3:5). Probably the term most definitive was used by Jesus when he said: ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again’ (Jn 3:3). ‘Born again,’ ‘new birth,’ and ‘regeneration’ are used interchangeably to describe this initial experience. J I Packer (1984b) describes it this way:

Regeneration, or new birth, is an inner re-creating of fallen human nature by the gracious sovereign action of the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-8). The Bible conceives salvation as the redemptive renewal of man on the basis of a restored relationship with God in Christ, and presents it as involving “a radical and complete transformation wrought in the soul (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23) by God the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Eph. 4:24), by virtue of which we become ‘new men’ (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), no longer conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9), but, in knowledge and holiness of the truth created after the image of God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; Rom. 12:2).” (B. B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, 351).

Packer goes on to talk about the *decisiveness* of the new birth experience: ‘The regenerate man has forever ceased to be the man he was; his old life is over and a new life has begun; he is a new creature in Christ....’ The Apostle Paul described the experience to the Christians at Corinth: ‘Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come’ (2 Cor 5:17). In biblical theology this experience is absolutely necessary for one to become a Christian. The Bible recognizes that some will become mere adherents of the Christian faith and not true Christians and refers to them as goats (mixed in with the sheep) (Mt 25:31-33) and

weeds or tares (mixed in with the wheat) (Mt 13:30). In the judgement, they will find themselves under the wrath of God (Mt 7:21-23; 25:41). The Bible does not leave the individual to wonder if they are a true Christian: 'The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God' (Rm 8:16 KJV).

After this initial experience, the Christian enters into other kinds of religious experiences incorporating aspects of dualism and monism. Dualism is 'any view of reality based upon two fundamental principles, such as matter and spirit, nature and supernature, or good and evil' (Erickson 2001:53). Monism is 'the metaphysical view that reality is fundamentally one' (Evans 2002:77). The Christian's experience of the 'numinous' is basically dualistic, where God is experienced as the awe-inspiring Wholly Other which involves the experience of worship (Ex 34:8; Jn 9:38). The Christian also experiences a 'oneness' with all of God's creation, sharing the same maker (Ps 8), a oneness with fellow Christians and with God himself (Jn 17:21-23; Ac 14:15; 1 Cor 6:17; 1 Jn 4:4).

The experience most precious to the Christian is the experience of God's presence in a mystical way (Ps 16:11; 51:11; 89:15; Ac 21:28; 1 Th 2:19; 2 Tm 4:1; 1 Jn 3:19; Jude 24). Because God is spirit and his Holy Spirit resides in the Christian (Ac 2:14; 1 Cor 6:19; 2 Tm 1:14) the presence of God is felt in the spirit of the Christian (1 Cor 2:14). In Christian theology Satan is also a spirit (1 Jn 4:3), a deceiving spirit (2 Cor 11:3; Rv 20:10). Therefore, the Holy Spirit has gifted the Christian to discern or distinguish between spirits (1 Cor 12:10).

### 3.7.2 Mythic Dimension

When the bible uses the word 'myth' (Gr *Mythos*) (1 Tm 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tm 4:4; 1 Pt 1:16) it signifies the fiction of a fable as distinct from the genuineness of the truth' (Hughes 1984). This work will adopt the more modern usage of the term to

describe a story of divine or sacred significance used to explain the way things are and not question the truthfulness or historicity of it. However, in stating the Christian worldview, and the mythic dimension of it, notice is taken that Christians accept the epic stories of the Bible and build their worldview upon them.

Perhaps the best way to treat the mythic dimension of the Christian religion is to highlight Rudolph Bultmann's attempt at the 'demythologization' of the New Testament and his 'rejection of the biblical view of the world as belonging to "the cosmology of a pre-scientific age" and as therefore quite unacceptable to modern man' (Hughes 1984). Bultmann viewed the world as a closed system, governed by fixed natural laws, without the possibility of supernatural events. Hughes (1984) continues:

He accordingly finds it necessary to discard such obvious (on his premises) mythical elements as Christ's preexistence and virgin birth, his deity and sinlessness, the substitutionary nature of his death as meeting the demands of a righteous God, his resurrection and ascension, and his future return in glory; also the final judgement of the world, the existence of spirit beings, the personality and power of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Trinity, of original sin, and of death as a consequence of sin, and every explanation of events as miraculous.

All of the supernatural events and descriptions Bultmann rejected are included in, and a necessary part of, the stories that define the Christian religion. Christian ontology and cosmology are based upon the epic myths of Genesis 1-11. Christian teleology and epistemology are based upon belief in the supernatural communication of the biblical stories to man. Christian ethics is based upon the sinless life of Christ. These biblical stories are passed verbally from one generation to another in the form of 'children's stories' and in the modern era in the form of movies. In this manner, children of Christians are taught the rudiments of the faith and the story content of the Bible in hopes that they, too, will want to become Christians.

Symbols are used in the Christian religion to represent truths contained in the biblical stories. The Orthodox branch of Christianity has holy images called icons. According to Shelley (1995:142): ‘An orthodox believer does not consider these images of Jesus and the saints the works of men, but as manifestations of the heavenly ideal. They are a kind of window between earthly and celestial worlds. Through the icons the heavenly beings manifest themselves to the worshipping congregation and unite with it.’ Western Christianity does not accept a mystic nature of icons or symbols, but does make use of symbols such as a cross, as a remembrance of the act or doctrine represented by the symbol.

### 3.7.3 Doctrinal Dimension

The doctrinal dimension represents the cognitive element of religion. In his lectures of over one hundred years ago, James Orr (1948:20) made comments that are still relevant today:

If there is a religion in the world which exalts the office of teaching, it is safe to say that it is the religion of Jesus Christ. It has been frequently remarked that in pagan religions the doctrinal element is at a minimum—the chief thing there is the performance of a ritual. But this is precisely where Christianity distinguishes itself from other religions—it does contain doctrine. It comes to men with definite, positive teaching; it claims to be the truth; it bases religion on knowledge, though a knowledge which is only attainable under moral conditions.... A strong, stable, religious life can be built in no other ground than that of intelligent conviction. Christianity, therefore, addresses itself to the intelligence as well as the heart.

Doctrine and teaching are fundamental to the preservation and propagation of

Christianity. The Bible records in the Apostle Paul’s first letter to Timothy:

‘Command and teach these things.... Watch your life and your doctrine closely.

Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers’

(1 Tm 4:11,16), and in his letter to Titus: ‘You must teach what is in accord with

sound doctrine’ (Tt 2;1). For the Christian, what is recorded in the Bible represents the standard for sound doctrine.

Ninian Smart (1983:90) states: 'Once myths are taken out of the lips and hands of the storyteller and organized into scriptures, they have a new and different life.... they are preserved in a form which invites interpretation and commentary... commentaries often enable us to understand the doctrinal underpinning of myth.' Commentaries are an important part of the body of Christian doctrine. The original Christian Scriptures were written in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic which are first-languages to only a handful of Christians today. Therefore, the Scriptures have to be translated into the language of the reader and oftentimes a literal word-for-word translation loses the meaning of what was said in its original language and context. A discipline within theology called 'hermeneutics' has arisen to study and solve the problems of translating in order to reveal and express the original meaning. The need for hermeneutics has produced a large number of commentaries on the Bible, with some directed to readers at all levels of Christian knowledge.

The teaching of doctrine has been an important part of Christianity since Jesus Christ was walking the earth (Mk 6:6). He was referred to as 'Teacher' by his disciples and by the Jews (Mt 8:19; Mk 4:38). Schools were started early in Christian history and to this day are a very important part of teaching doctrine with thousands of Bible colleges and seminaries in existence worldwide. In addition to the availability of formal doctrinal education, most individual Christian churches hold classes for teaching the Bible and Christian doctrine at least once a week.

In addition to formal teachings, doctrines of Christianity have been formulated into creeds and confessions of faith, mostly because of the rise of heresies. The three most widely used creeds have been The Apostles' Creed, The Nicene Creed, and The Athanasian Creed. The use of confessions of faith arose as formal statements of Christian faith written by Protestants during the Reformation. The most widely used



statements of confession have been the Augsburg Confession and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Mark Noll (1984) writes: ‘Although Protestants do not regard confessions as absolute authorities in matters of faith and practice, many of them have found confessions to be valuable introductions to Christian belief, helpful summaries of Scripture, and dependable guides to Christian life.’

#### 3.7.4 Ethical Dimension

Christian ethics are based upon the commands of God and the teachings and examples of Jesus as they are recorded in the Bible. God gave rules of behaviour to follow (ex. the Law or Ten Commandments) and Jesus explained the spirit of the law, giving the only acceptable motive for obedience to them, and he set a new standard for his followers.

In explaining the spirit of the laws God gave, Jesus pointed out that sin came from the heart (Mt 5:19) and that a desire to disobey God makes one guilty as if the deed is actually done (Mt 5:28). When asked what the greatest commandment was Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’ (Mt 22:37). He went on to give the second greatest commandment: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Mt 22:39). Both of these commands had been in the Jewish law since Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai. The second commandment set the standard for ethical behaviour among God’s people and Jesus reformulated it early in his ministry when he said: ‘Do to others as you would have them do to you’ (Lk 6:31). So the ethical standard set by God was to treat others as you want to be treated and do it because you love them as much as you love yourself. The commandment is to love and the motive for treating people right is love equal to self-love.

At the end of his ministry on earth, Jesus drew his disciples around him and gave them a new ethical standard for their behaviour toward fellow believers. After washing his disciples' feet Jesus told them that he had set an example for them to follow (Jn 13:15) and then he said: 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.' The old standard for ethical behaviour was self-love. The new standard for Christians is the self-sacrificial love that Jesus showed for his disciples. Christ loved enough to die for them. If the Christian loves that much he will have no trouble treating people as Jesus did because his heart will be filled with love leaving no room for desire to sin. Christians believe that they are empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit of God to help them love other people and to walk in ways that please God. The Spirit indwells them as a result of the new birth experience that gave them a new nature and a right standing before God. The Christian idea of ethics is 'Be right and you will do right.'

The Christian also believes in a righteous judgement of God as an incentive for good ethical and moral behaviour. For the Christian, the judgement is not to decide eternal life or eternal punishment. On that basis the Christian is accounted righteous because of Christ (Rm 4:22, 23). The judgement Christians will face will determine gain or loss of rewards and will be based on how they lived after becoming Christians (Rm 2:6-11; 14:12), and will include a judgement of words (Mt 12:36) and deeds (2 Cor 5:10). Christian ethics is more a matter of motive in the heart and mind than deeds done. The Bible tells the Christian that God will search his heart and mind and will repay accordingly (Rv 2:23).

### 3.7.5 Ritual Dimension

Like all major religions, Christianity has certain rituals involved in the physical practice of the faith. These rituals are designed to communicate feelings and

beliefs reflective of what God has done through the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of the rituals in Christianity have carried over from its Jewish roots with some changing slightly in form or meaning.

Sacrifice is one form of ritual common to many religions and prominent in the practice of the Jewish religion. The sacrifice was to satisfy God for the sins committed against him. He had set the penalty for sin as death with the first man (Gn 2:17) and had instituted a system of delayed judgement on the sinner if the sinner offered an animal sacrifice to die in his place (Lv 1:4). The blood of the sacrifice covered the sin of the offerer for a time, but did not take the sin away (Heb 10:1-4). Jesus, God Incarnate, was born into the Jewish culture, lived a sinless life, and was offered up to God as a perfect sacrifice (amoral animal for sinful man was not equal in value; perfect man for sinful man was greater in value—a true sacrifice), and a once-for-all sacrifice (Heb 10:18) for the propitiation of man's sin. God is justified in forgiving a Christian's sins because he has accepted the death of Jesus Christ in payment of the penalty sin deserves.

For the Christian, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ has two ritual implications for worship. First, Christians are to immolate Christ and offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God (Rm 12:1). The difference between the sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Christian is that Christ's sacrifice involved his dying, while for the Christian the sacrifice involves his living. Being a living sacrifice means not living life for oneself but for God. That sacrifice is accepted by God as a spiritual act of worship. The ritual involves a daily sacrifice as the Christian says with Christ '...not as I will, but as you will' (Mt 26:30). The second ritual implication of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ is the institution of an ordinance of worship called the Lord's Supper or Communion. Jesus instituted this ritual ordinance before he was

crucified as he was having his last supper with his disciples. He took bread and said: 'This is my body given for you' (Lk 22:19). Then he took a cup of wine and said: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you' (Lk 22:20). He instructed them to '...do this in remembrance of me' (Lk 22:19).

The ordinance of the Lord's Supper is practiced by all branches, denominations and sects of Christianity. It is a reminder to Christians that redemption is complete and it symbolically feeds the soul. There are several different beliefs about whether the elements of bread and wine (or juice) are merely symbols of the body and blood of Christ or if they actually contain any of the reality of his body and blood. In the eleventh century, the Roman Catholic Church adopted the view of 'transubstantiation' which holds that in the Lord's Supper the substance in the elements of bread and wine physically change into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. In the Reformation, Martin Luther put forth a view called "consubstantiation" which holds that during the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are present with the elements but the substance of the elements is not changed. Christ is really present during the Supper. John Calvin put forth the view that during the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are present in a spiritual and mystical way that is very real even though not physical. 'Calvin's position has received widest acceptance within the universal church' (Osterhaven 1984).

Prayer is another sacrificial way for the Christian to communicate with God. It is a sacrifice of time and an inward acknowledgement of dependence upon God. Christians have prayer times during their worship services (Eph 6:18; 1 Th 5:17), special prayer meetings (Ac 16:13), and prayer for the sick (Ja 5:14). The Christian does not have to go to a church to pray, or to be with other Christians. Since it is an

inward communication with God who is omnipresent, the Christian can pray anywhere and at any time. The Christian is commanded to pray continually (1 Th 5:17).

Christians celebrate certain rites of passage as rituals accompanying significant life events. The most significant rite for the Christian is the ordinance of baptism (Rm 6:3; 1 Cor 12:13) which symbolizes the death and burial of the old nature and the rising of the new nature to eternal life in the rebirth experience. Baptism is an outward sign of the transition from outside to inside the Christian community. Christians also have baby dedications (1 Sm 1:22, 28; Lk 2:22) and promotions in Sunday School classes to mark the birth and attaining of certain age levels of children. Two rites of passage invite the community of Christian friends to participate. The wedding (Jn 2:1,2) marks the transition of two people from one relationship to another in which the two become one (Gn 2:24; Eph 5:31). Funerals mark the final transition of an individual from this life to the next. For the Christian, a funeral is the opportunity to remind the family and friends that since the deceased was a Christian he has already passed from death to life (Rm 6:13) and to bring the bereaved words of hope (1 Th 4:13) and comfort (Ps 116:15).

#### 3.7.6 Social Dimension

The ramifications of the social dimension seem to cause the most problems for converts to Christianity. The Bible teaches that when people become a Christian they are born again into a new family, the family of God (1 Pt 4:17), and other Christians become their brothers and sisters (Mk 3:35; 1 Tm 5:1,2; Ja 2:15). Jesus also told the crowds: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple' (Lk 14:26). Michael Wilcock (1979:147) points out that 'hate' is a biblical way for

expressing preference. A Christian's love for Christ should be so great that love for his family would seem like hate in comparison. For the Christian, the spiritual bond with other Christians is stronger than the blood bond of one's earthly family. Spiritual relations will go on for eternity, while blood relations end at death. Therefore, the Christian is to give preference in his relations 'to those who belong to the family of believers' (Eph 6:10). In cultures where one's identity is bound to one's family or tribe, to convert to Christianity causes problems with the family. Jesus warned his followers that this would be the case in saying that he 'did not come to bring peace but a sword' and he came 'to turn a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother...' (Mt 10:34-37). Therefore, Jesus warned the people to count the cost of becoming his disciple (Lk 14:28-33).

While becoming a Christian may (but not necessarily) cause problems with one's blood family, the Christian is brought into a new social community called 'the Church' (1 Cor 1:2; 11:18; Phlm 1:2), or the 'fellowship' (1 Cor 5:2), or the 'body of Christ' (Eph 4:12) referring to the body or totality of all believers in Christ. The Bible uses the analogy of the human body of believers (1 Cor 12:12-27). The Bible also explains that each Christian has been given a spiritual gift that is needed in the Church (1 Cor 12:1-11; Rm 12:4-8). Each individual Christian is valued because of their gift and purpose in the family of believers.

The community of Christians is given specific instructions in the Bible as to how they are to conduct themselves in the social dimension. The New Testament contains many verses called 'one another' verses that define how Christians ought to relate to one another. Christians are to 'honour' (Rm 12:10), 'serve' (Gl 5:13), 'be patient' (Eph 4:2), 'be kind and compassionate' (Eph 4:32), 'admonish' (Col. 3:16), 'encourage' (1 Th 5:11), 'not slander' (Ja 4:11), 'love' (Rm 13:8), and 'forgive' (Eph

4:32) one another. The Christian community should be made up of people who ‘Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves’ (Php 2:3) and who ‘do everything in love’ (1 Cor 16:14). This should be the goal of every Christian community.

### 3.8 Culture in Genesis 1-11

The Book of Genesis records that when man was created, God put him in the Garden of Eden where all of his needs were supplied and his only responsibility was to take care of the Garden (Gn 2:15). Man picked the seed-bearing plants and fruit for his food and his primary relationship was with God. When man sinned, the ground was cursed and he had to work hard for his food (Gn 3:17-19,23) and his relationship with God was based on a system of offerings representing worship (Gn 4:3). Genesis 4 records that the first man and woman had two sons who brought offerings to the Lord, the offering of Abel being acceptable and the offering of Cain being unacceptable (Gn 4:4,5). Cain killed his brother and was driven by God from the land, which would no longer produce food for him (Gn 4:11, 12). Cain was an ungodly man, separated from God and from his parents.

According to the Bible, Cain, being separated from God, set out in the world to develop a system in which he could have his needs met apart from God. Cain married and produced children who produced children (Gn 4:17, 18). The primary relationship of Cain and his descendants was not with God but with his fellowman, so they began to build cities to have close fellowship with each other (Gn 4:17; 11:4). Cain’s family developed tools and musical instruments, raised food, developing what anthropologists call culture (Gn 4:21, 22). The Book of Genesis records that human culture came about as the ungodly line of Cain devised systems and means to get their needs met apart from God.

The cultural system started by Cain and his descendents is called the ‘world’ (1 Jn 2:15) in the Bible and is depicted as being under the control of the evil one, Satan (1 Jn 5:19). The Bible uses many different terms to describe the Christian’s relationship with the world cultural system. They are ‘in’ the world, but not ‘of’ it (Jn 17:14-19); they are ‘aliens and strangers in the world’ (1 Pt 2:11); their ‘citizenship is in heaven’ (Phlp 3:20); they are instructed to ‘not live by the standard of the world’ (1 Cor 10:2) or to ‘conform to the pattern of the world’ (Rm 12:2). John R. W. Stott’s (1978) commentary on The Sermon on the Mount is called *Christian’s Counter-Culture* and portrays the Christian living in the world system as just that. Christians are instructed to ‘not love the world’ and are told that if they do love the world they ‘do not love God’ (1 Jn 2:15). Christians are warned to not be surprised if the world hates them (1 Jn 3:13). Jesus warned his disciples that the world would hate them because it hated him (Jn 15:18). He also told them to ‘take heart! I have overcome the world’ (Jn 16:33).

The Christian is to live in this world system as a missionary lives in a foreign land. The primary relationship is to be with God and, as in the Garden of Eden, God will meet all the Christian’s needs (Phlp 4:19) as he serves God in this world. The Christian still has to work (1 Th 3:10), but God supplies the work, opening doors of opportunity (Rv 3:7). The Christian view of the world is as a temporary dwelling place, not to be loved but to be pitied, and as a place for the light of the gospel and good works to shine bringing glory to God (Mt 5:16).

### 3.9

### Conclusion

This chapter has brought together the concepts of worldview, philosophy, and religion. In critiquing philosopher Martin Heidegger’s ideas, David Naugle (2002:134) writes: ‘First of all, Heidegger suggests that, historically speaking,



philosophy and worldview are virtually one and the same, that “all great philosophy culminates in a worldview.” The time honored task for philosophy has been the development of a final interpretation of reality and an ideal for living.’ The Christian believes that his religion accomplishes that task for him.

The Christian worldview is based on the Bible. The Christian’s view of the Bible is that it is the word of God and it tells man the truth—the truth about God, the truth about the world and what is wrong with it, the truth about man and what is wrong with him, the truth about what can be done about man’s condition, the truth about the past, and the truth about the future. The Bible does not cover over the faults of its heroes, nor does it present an optimistic picture of humanity in its fallen condition. The Bible does present man with a way of salvation and redemption through Jesus Christ. The Christian worldview is built around this religious end and those who have obtained that end must have the Christian worldview. As stated by James Orr (1948:4):

He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of the purpose of God in creation and history, to a view of human destiny, found only in Christianity. This forms a “Weltanschauung,” or “Christian view of the world,” which stands in marked contrast with theories wrought out from a purely philosophical or scientific standpoint.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AFRICAN WORLDVIEW

This chapter will present a delineation of the African worldview which is based upon African Traditional Religion. In writing about the African worldview, I have the distinct disadvantage of not being African, meaning that I will have to rely on research and observations for what gets written. The danger in writing from that perspective is that one may miss the heart and intentionality behind what is read and seen. Fortunately, people born and raised in Africa have written about their experiences, views, and religion and they have provided the missing ingredients for the non-African reader. Also, many non-Africans who lived in Africa longer than my six years here have researched and observed and have written their findings. I am indebted to both types of authors.

#### 4.1 Is There an 'African' Worldview?

Given the number of diverse tribes and languages and the geographical diversity throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the issue of any unity in that diversity must be raised. Is there *an* African religion and *an* African worldview? Fortunately, this question has been addressed by many of the works researched for this thesis. In *Africa's Three Religions* Geoffrey Parrinder (1969:17) deals honestly with the issue:

The study of ancient traditional religious beliefs of Africa is doubly difficult. First, there is the great variety and multiplicity of peoples, the lack of a central tradition, especially in Africa south of the Sahara. This can be overcome, to some extent, by selecting beliefs of outstanding importance shared by different African peoples, while noting regional difference; but it must be recognized that this is only, partial and many exceptions may remain unobserved. However, the effort must be made, because the only alternative is to abandon the study altogether.

Parrinder's scepticism is overshadowed by the plethora of authors that believe this type of study need not be abandoned because there is enough unity in the

diversity to speak of *an* African traditional religion and *an* African worldview. Some of them have this to say on the issue:

Mbiti (1969:xii): ‘In this study I have emphasized the unity of African religions and philosophy in order to give an overall picture of the situation.’

Magesa (1997:16): ‘In recent times, most African scholars, including Mbiti, studying African Religion from the “inside” agree. They now see African Religion as one in essence. Although its varieties cannot be denied, there is a “basic world-view,” as John V. Taylor asserts in a work published before Mbiti’s, “which fundamentally is everywhere the same.”’

Imasogie (1983:53): ‘However, in spite of the differences, there is a core of Africanness that runs through their cultures and religions. In view of this, one may speak legitimately of an African world view, the local peculiarities notwithstanding.’

Sow et al (1979:10): ‘...they stressed the necessity of identifying the African culture’s common points, which constitute a basis for Africanism.’

King (1970:83): ‘It is hoped that our study has shown that traditional African man has a way of life which is essentially based on his vision of the world of spirit. It is harmonious, whole, and integrated; it lacks unresolved conflicts; it expresses a life which has balance, meaning, and roundness. As a system it is tough, all-permeating, and resilient; it has survived the most tremendous hammer blows and is very much alive today.’

Richmond and Gestrin (1998:xiii): ‘Their differences notwithstanding, all Africans share many traits and traditions which visitors will encounter almost everywhere across the continent.’

Lamb (1987:xii): ‘But sub-Saharan Africa—or black Africa, as it is commonly called—contains cohesive elements enabling it to be considered as an entity.’

Gehman (2005:24): ‘Yet, with all the diversity there is unity. All African peoples are united on the big picture.... The individual expressions may be different, but a general similarity prevails throughout the continent, so that we may speak of African Traditional Religion in the singular.’

Kamalu (1990:3): ‘...we know it makes sense to speak of African religion and philosophy universally as a single body of knowledge.’

In speaking of *an* African worldview and *an* African traditional religion

(ATR) we are speaking of two concepts that are so intertwined that they are

inseparable. The African worldview is a religious worldview based upon ATR.

Ambrose Moyo is quoted in Richmond and Gestrin (1998:30): ‘Religion permeates all aspects of African traditional societies. It is a way of life in which the whole community is involved, and as such, it is identical with life itself. Even antireligious persons still have to be involved in the lives of their religious communities....’

Richmond and Gestrin go on to state the relationship between religion and worldview:

‘Africans are very spiritual people. Life is short and difficult, and Africans, like people everywhere, need beliefs to explain and give meaning to the world they live in.’ And University of South Africa professor, S A Thorpe (1991:6) writes: ‘ATR is the context from which African philosophy, anthropology, soteriology and ethics have sprung. In fact, the entire African world view, which is often expressed in forms of art and dance, is rooted and grounded in an African religious approach to life.’

#### 4.2

#### ATR as Philosophy

The African worldview based on ATR is equated with philosophy by Geoffrey Parrinder (1969:233): ‘The African world view is life-affirming; a philosophy of vitalism or dynamism lies behind many attitudes and actions.’ In writing about the Akan people of Ghana, John Pobee (1979:44) states: ‘The first thing that strikes one about Akan society’s world view is the fact that *homo Akanus* has a religious ontology.’

Unlike the Christian religion, ATR has no written scriptures. In this work the Christian worldview is based primarily on the first eleven chapters of the first book (Genesis) of the Christian holy book, the Bible. There are no such written historical expositions of African traditional beliefs and practices which form the basis of ATR and African philosophy. In a chapter titled ‘Philosophy and Cosmology’, Parrinder (1969:25) minimizes the importance of the lack of historical literature:

To speak of the philosophy of cultures that had no literature may seem inappropriate, but there are parallels for this. The ancient Hindus compiled the hymns of the Vedas and the dialogues of the Upanishads, which are imbued with philosophy and are often claimed as the oldest 'scriptures' but these were not written down for many centuries, until well into the Christian era. The ancient teachings were passed down by the priests of the Brahmin caste, in feats of memorization which were unique. Ancient African ideas were not transmitted so rigidly but there are myths which go back to time immemorial, proverbs which enshrine ancient wisdom, songs and rituals, and modern attitudes that reflect traditions of the past as well as thought about the present.

To say that African peoples have no systems of thought, explicit or assumed, would be to deny their humanity. The great philosophical phrase, 'I think, therefore I am', applies to all men. Some students of African life watch rituals, photograph masquerades, or dissect social organization, and then declare that Africans have no doctrines and that their religion is 'not thought out but danced out'. That fatuous statement came in fact from an armchair theorist, but it suggests that human beings dance for no reason and with their minds literally blank. But why are dances performed and repeated? There are many reasons, and powerful ones are that they express the life force, continuity with the past, and unity in the present community, and these are reasonable ideas.

Probably the most widely read and often quoted author writing on African religion is the Kenyan, John Mbiti. In the Introduction to his book *African Religions and Philosophy* Mbiti (1969:1) writes: 'Religion is the strongest element in traditional background, and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned.' He (1969:2) goes on to state:

'Philosophy of one kind or another is behind the thinking and acting of every people, and a study of traditional religions brings us into those areas of African life where, through word and action, we may be able to discern the philosophy behind.... Philosophical systems of different African peoples have not yet been formulated, but some of the areas where they may be found are in the religion, proverbs, oral traditions, ethics and morals of the society concerned.

As Mbiti points out, philosophical systems of African peoples have not, as yet, been formulated but, as will be pointed out later, efforts are under way to do so. In this work I will not try to formulate an African philosophy as a whole, but will answer the philosophical questions asked based upon the African worldview as influenced by ATR. Mbiti (1969:2) explains: "'African philosophy" here refers to the

understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations of life.’ He goes on to state: ‘Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life.’ It is clear that any attempt to speak of African philosophy must incorporate African traditional religious beliefs. Writing about Mbiti’s views, Magesa (1997:15) states: ‘The philosophy underlying the religious expression of the African people, Mbiti argues, is a philosophy in the singular.’ That is the approach taken in this work.

In reviewing the literature on African philosophy that has been published in the last three or four decades, and especially the most recent publications, it is surprising that the religious dimension of African life, which permeates all other dimensions, is all but completely ignored. Only one (Kamalu 1990) of the works on African philosophy consulted for this research (see Bibliography) gives any positive reflection on religion as it affects one’s philosophy or worldview. Following Kwame Nkrumah, modern philosophers take the position that modern Africa and modern philosophy must be secular (Axelsen 1979). Karp and Masolo (2000:9) in their introduction to *African Philosophy and Cultural Inquiry* support the position of Robert Horton and many others:

In his widely discussed essay (1967), he argues that religion does for traditional thought what abstract reasoning does for scientific knowledge. Trapped within the sociological immediacy of closed systems, he argues, religion—traditional religion—“explains” reality by appeal to personal spiritual concepts. In this it differs from scientific explanation, which makes use of the abstract (non-human) concepts of “particles” or forces. Myths, then, are to religious thought what philosophy is to science. And such pairs represent opposed and mutually exclusive models of knowledge. For Horton, the advent of philosophy in Africa must be predicated on a qualitative leap, that is, on an act of cultural transformation which begins with intellectual secularization and modernization.

Kwame Gyekye (1997:245) subtitles his book, 'Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience' and in it has this to say: 'A culture may be a religious culture, even an intensely religious culture at that: but, in view of the tremendous importance of science for the progress of many other aspects of the culture, it should be able to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's ("Caesar" here referring to the pursuit of the knowledge of the natural world).' The observed trend is that philosophy is following science in trying to be prescriptive instead of descriptive. It is the opinion of this writer that African philosophy wedded to science is an adulterous relationship and will produce illegitimate offspring because African philosophy is already inextricably wedded to African Traditional Religion.

#### 4.3 Vital Force as Postulating the African Worldview

Africans are very aware of an unseen world of spirits, powers, and forces. In anthropology, philosophy and theology this view is commonly referred to as 'animism' even though the definitions vary from discipline to discipline. Philosophy sees it as: 'A perspective on the world that sees spiritual powers or forces as residing in and controlling all of the natural world' (Evans 2002:10). Theology sees it as: 'The worship of physical objects in the belief that spiritual forces are present within them' (Erickson 2001). Most African theologians and philosophers today would reject the idea of Africans worshipping physical objects even though they might see them as possessing a power or force and therefore, treating them with reverence.

Parrinder (1974:20) attributes the first use of the term 'animism' to Edward Tylor who in 1871 put forward the suggestion of 'animism' or 'the theory of souls', as 'the fundamental concept of religion.' Parrinder goes on to state: 'Deriving animism from the Latin word *anima* for the soul, Tylor maintained that "belief in spiritual beings" or souls was the root of all religious faith.' The term 'animatism' was used in

1899 by R R Marett as a refinement of Tylor's term. For Marett 'animatism would represent the belief in impersonal spiritual power or a life-force pervading all things' (Parrinder 1974:21). The term 'animatism' did not gain as wide spread a use as 'animism' and has all but disappeared from use.

#### 4.3.1 The Contribution of Tempels

One of the first attempts to delineate an African philosophy was done by Belgian Catholic missionary/priest, Placide Tempels, whose work *Bantu Philosophy* about the Baluba people (a sub-group of the Bantu) in the Belgian Congo, was published in French in 1945. Commenting on the work of Tempels, Parrinder (1974:21) writes:

In recent years increasing stress has been laid upon the widespread African belief in psychic power. Father Tempels calls this "vital force", and Edwin Smith prefers the name "dynamism". The latter describes it as "The belief in, and the practices associated with the belief in hidden, mysterious, supersensible,, pervading energy, powers, potencies, forces". The supreme value of the Bantu, says Tempels, is "*force, forceful living, or vital force, to live forcibly, to reinforce life, or to assure its continuity in their descendants*".

Tempels' main contention is that the ontology of the Bantu Africans is different from the ontology he held as one having a Western worldview. Tempels (1959:50) states: 'We can conceive the transcended notion of "being" by separating it from its attribute, "force," but the Bantu cannot. "Force" in his thought is a necessary element in "being," and the concept "force" is inseparable from the definition of "being." There is no idea of "being" divorced from the idea of "force."' The theory put forth by Tempels in *Bantu Philosophy* has been defended and attacked by subsequent African theologians and philosophers. I turn now to an African philosopher for an overview of Tempels' contention. In *The Invention of Africa* V. Y. Mudimbe (1988:138-9) gives this summary of Tempels' theory:

Tempels' conception of Bantu philosophy may be summarized in five propositions.



(1) Since Bantu are human beings, they have organized systems of principles and references. These systems constitute a philosophy even if Bantu are not “capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary’ (Tempels, 1959:36).

(2) This philosophy is an ontology. In the West... philosophy has been conceived with defining and indicating the real in terms of being.... Bantu philosophy seems to offer a dynamic understanding by giving a great deal of attention to the being’s vitality and by relating being to its force (Tempels, 1959:50-51).

(3) Bantu ontology in its specificity implies that being, as understood in the Western tradition, signifies force in Bantu tradition, and therefore, one can state that being = force. It is this force in its mysterious presence that provides a possibility of classifying beings in a hierarchy comprising all the existing realms: mineral, vegetable, animal, human, ancestral, and divine. On the other hand, in all of them vital force appears to be the essential sign of ordering identities, differences, and relationships.

Within these uninterrupted exchanges, beings are not bound in upon themselves but constitute what Tempels calls a “principle of activity” (1959:51) and by their interactions account for the “general laws of vital causality,” namely,

(a) “Man (living or deceased) can directly reinforce or diminish the being of another man”.

(b) “The vital human force can directly influence inferior force-beings (animal, vegetable, or mineral) in their being”.

(c) “A rational being (spirit, manes, or the living), can act indirectly upon another rational being by communicating his vital force to an inferior force (animal, vegetable, or mineral) through the intermediary of which it influences the rational being” (1959:67-68).

(4) Bantu ontology can be thought of and made explicit only because of the conceptual frame of Western philosophy (1959:36).

(5) Bantu ontology could be a guide to the ontologies of all “primitive peoples” in general.

Items (4) and (5) have been the targets of most of the attacks upon Tempels’ work. Those African theologians and philosophers that cannot see past the colonial period reject anything Western and most all Africans reject the negative connotations of words like primitives, natives and savages used by Tempels throughout his book. One notable detractor of Tempels is John Mbiti (1969:14) who writes: ‘The book is primarily Tempels’ personal interpretation of the Baluba, and it is ambitious to call it “Bantu philosophy” since it deals only with one people among whom he had worked

for many years as a missionary.... It is open to a great deal of criticism, and the theory of “vital force” cannot be applied to other African peoples with whose life and ideas I am familiar.’ However, in the same book, *African Religions and Philosophy*, Mbiti (1969:113) writes about ‘spirits that animate trees, rivers, animals, charms, and the like; and below these are family spirits thought to be ever present, and to act as guardians.’ Would it not take a vital force to animate non-living objects just as Tempels wrote about?

Another detractor to Tempels’ work is K A Opoku of the University of Ghana. In his book *West African Traditional Religion* Opoku (1978:7) writes: ‘Tempels studied Baluba religion and philosophy and came to the conclusion that what he called “vital force” was the key to an understanding of Baluba thought. This theory of “vital force” may be applicable to the Baluba, but its application to other African peoples is bound to be erroneous.’ Contrary to this opinion is Parrinder (1974:21) who writes:

In many parts of West Africa there is a word *nyama*, which European writers have sought to translate as energy, power, *force vitale*, *triebkraft*. From the western Sudan down to the Guinea coast one finds variants of this word, sometimes used as a title for God, sometimes of human or animal strength, or again as the mysterious force in medicines. *Nyama* is often conceived of as impersonal, unconscious energy, found in men, animals, gods, nature and things. *Nyama* is not the outward appearance, but the inner essence.

Tempels’ writings on African philosophy left a model that some see as superimposed and others see as extracted. African Philosopher, Professor Paulin Hountondji (1996:17) states: ‘The importance of Tempels’ work in the intellectual history of Africa is difficult to overestimate.’ He concludes: ‘But quite apart from this ideological significance which it assumed in the colonial context, *Bantu Philosophy* provided a conceptual framework and reference for all future attempts to formulate the constitutive elements of a distinctive African mode of thought, to construct an

original African philosophical system.’ Tempels was a Catholic missionary and his ultimate purpose for living with and studying the Baluba was religious. Hountondji (1996:16) says of Tempels: ‘His conceptual approach to this evangelical mission was to establish a relation of identity between Bantu philosophy and Christian theology....’ Tempels’ concept of vital force is important for understanding African Traditional Religion as well as for understanding African ontology and the African worldview.

#### 4.3.2 Proponents of the Vital Force Concept

The concept of vital force as the prime presupposition for the African traditional religion, ontology, and thus worldview, is accepted as valid by many who study religion and worldview. A sample of published words include:

Nyamiti (2006): In his survey of African traditional worldview he states as a main heading, ‘Dynamism and vitalism, comprising an existential, concrete and affective way of approach. Reality is seen and judged especially from its dynamic aspects closely related to life. The farther a being is from these elements, the more unreal and valueless it is conceived to be. Hence, the emphasis on fecundity and life, and the identification between being and power or vital force. Indeed, the ideal of the African culture is coexistence with and the strengthening of vital force or vital relationship in the world and universe.’

Van Rheenen (1991:20): ‘However, the animist begins with different presuppositions. He assumes that spirits and forces shape reality and interprets daily events to fit this model of reality.’

Thorpe (1991:88): ‘The goal of Yoruba life is to achieve holistic unity in the midst of the multiplicity of forces that shape people’s circumstances.... It is a person’s lot to accept the myriad forces that influence human lives and destinies. In themselves these forces are neither good nor bad. They simply exist. One should not try to overcome them but should simply accommodate oneself to them.... Thus unity and spiritual harmony or composure... are the main goals of life.... Their concept of the Supreme Being, for example, seems to be that of a pulsating life force, present in all people and permeating the entire universe. This vital force is evident in the Yoruba’s ways of self-expression.’

Gehman (2005:57): ‘when a [African] person is alive the physical body is filled with energy, a life force, a vital-principle.’

Kamalu (1990:87): ‘We start from the African premise that everything has its own level of consciousness or vital force and thus its own level of response to external action from other objects. There is a hierarchy of forces descending from human beings through to the animals, the plants and finally reaching stones and rocks at the lower end. But nothing is dead.’

Sanneh (1983:240): ‘This *force vital* has been portrayed as the great principle which infuses a unitary purpose into all aspects of life, so that the different areas of life are comprehended into an integrated, meaningful whole. It acquires its greatest expression in religious symbolism and language, scholars say, thus giving religion both a practical orientation and a theological significance in its interpretive and explanatory function.’

Even such an unrelated organization as The International Observatory on End of Life Care acknowledges vital force as being prominent in African thinking. In an article posted on their website titled ‘Ethical Issues in Uganda’, they write: ‘We may note that what has been named *The Vital Force Principle* within African thinking has a profound religious meaning in that “this vital force is hierarchical, descending from God through ancestors and elders to the individual,” and that “whatever increases life or vital force is good; whatever decreases it is bad”’ (The International Observatory on End of Life Care 2006).

Perhaps the most ardent proponent of Tempels’ concept of vital force is Laurenti Magesa. His book on African religion is centred on that concept. Magesa (1997:51) writes: ‘In African Religion, the centrality of the human person in the universal order is indicated by the religious practice it fosters.... This is why all life forces, that is, all creation, are intended to serve and enhance the life force of the human person and society.... Universal order can be maintained only if this plan of the interaction of vital forces for the sake of the enhancement of the vital force of humanity is adhered to and observed.’

#### 4.4 Delineation of the African Worldview

The delineation of the African worldview based upon ATR becomes a subjective endeavour because of the lack of objective writings in the form of scriptures or any other accumulated body of knowledge. Raymond Ogunade (2003) writing for the Metanexus Institute states:

African Religion is therefore, the indigenous Religion of the Africans.... This is a religion that has no written scripture, yet it is 'written everywhere for those who care to see and read. Its scripture is what I call the 'Book of Universe.' It is largely written in the people's myths and folktales, in their songs and dances, in their environment, in Nature, in their liturgies and shrines, in their proverbs and pithy sayings.... It is religion whose historical founder is neither known nor glorified.

Magesa (1997:6) quoting Mbiti writes: 'They come as people whose worldview is shaped according to African religion.' On the unification of life and religion in Africa, Magesa (1997:25) states: 'For Africans, religion is far more than a "believing way of life" or "an approach to life" directed by a book. It is a "way of life" or life itself, where a distinction or separation is not made between religion and other areas of human existence.... For Africans, religion is quite literally life and life is religion.'

Mbiti (2006) asserts: For all its [African religion] riches, it has no written sources on which its authority may be based. It is lived (not read), it is experienced (not mediated), it is integrated into the life of people; wherever they are, their religiosity, their religion is with them.' And Addo (2002) adds: 'There are no creeds written down because through the traditions of the elders all creeds and functions are carved on the individual's heart. Each individual by his very nature and life style is a living creed from the time one rises until one returns at night.' Ogunade (2003) concludes: 'It is not a fossil religion but a religion that millions of Africans today have made theirs by living it and practicing it.' For the African, religion is a matter of doing and practice rather than doctrine and principles.

Because African religion is lived rather than written, the delineation of the African worldview based on African traditional religion must be initially based on observation rather than research. Beginning early in the last century anthropologists and Christian missionaries began living among the African people so that they could observe their lives and write about what they observed. In the past few decades many African scholars have read what was written earlier, critiqued it and added their own observations from either being African or living in Africa, and have produced quite a few works on ATR. Only a few have tried to quantify an African traditional religion worldview either in the form of cultural presuppositions or common elements of all African cultures. Some of these works and my own observations have contributed to my delineation of the African worldview. I am grateful to Gehman (2005), Magesa (1997), Mbiti (1969, 2006), Nyamiti (2006), O'Donovan (1996) and Van Rheen (1996), for their efforts in formulating a view of ATR. Their works have been my guide in writing this brief outline of the African worldview. Proper credit will be cited in the chapter where original ideas or words have been used.

#### 4.4.1 Outline of the African Worldview

- I. The existence of one Supreme Being or God, that is higher than all other divinities.
- II. A. The creation of an ordered cosmos by God.
  - B. Creation included the physical and spiritual worlds.
  - C. The cosmos is imbued with a vital force flowing from God through everything He created.
  - D. The vital force is there to sustain life in all of its dimensions.
- III. A. The nature and dignity of man.
  - B. Man is god's highest created being.
  - C. The cosmos was created for man.
  - D. Man finds his personal identity in his community.

- IV. A. Community is defined in terms of common participation in life, history and destiny.
- B. Community includes the living and the dead.
- V. A. A Holistic view of life
- B. Life is made up of events rather than time.
- C. Fatalistic view of life.
- D. Total cosmic harmony motivates actions.
- VI. A. The past holds the future
- B. One's destiny is to join those who make up the history of the community.

#### 4.5 Philosophical Elements of the African Worldview

Following the scheme used for the biblical or Christian worldview in Chapter Three, a question/answer format will be used to answer the same worldview questions asked in Chapter Three. At the end of each answer from the African worldview I have entered, in brackets, references to the outline above.

##### 4.5.1 ONTOLOGY QUESTIONS

###### 4.5.1.1 Is there a Supreme Being, and, if so, what is it like?

In his book *Introduction to African Religion* John Mbiti (1975a:40) writes: 'All African people believe in God. They take this belief for granted. It is at the centre of African Religion and dominates all its other beliefs. But exactly how this belief in God originated, we do not know. We only know that it is a very ancient belief in African religious life.' In a recent work Mbiti (2006) states: 'In an ongoing research since 1960, I have not found a single African people without a word or name for God.' ATR is often thought to be polytheistic, that is believing in and having many gods. Parrinder (1974:24) says this is particularly true of West African religion. But Opoku (1978:5) takes exception to that stating:

In classical polytheism, the gods in the pantheon were all independent of one another. One of the gods might be regarded as the chief, but he was never regarded as the creator of the other Gods.

In African traditional religion, however, the picture is quite different. God, or the Supreme Being, is outside the pantheon of gods. He is the eternal creator of all the gods, and of men and the universe. This makes him absolutely unique, and He is differentiated from the other gods in having a special name. This name is always in the singular, and is not a generic name, like *Obosom* (Akan) or *Orisha* (Yoruba). All the other divinities have a generic name in addition to their specific names.

This is the African's way of showing the uniqueness of God. Peter E.A. Addo (2002) echoes this when he writes: 'Traditional African religion is centred on the existence of one Supreme High God.... The traditional African belief is that the Great One brought the divinities into being.' In the African view, things that appear to have divine powers are only exhibiting the vital force emanating from the Supreme Being, God.

Parrinder (1969:39) rightly states: 'The nature of God in African belief can be gathered from the qualities attributed to him.' These attributes of God are not self-revealed as in some religions. The major source of the African beliefs regarding the attributes of God is their ancient myths. Parrinder continues: 'It has been seen that African myths express many beliefs about God in graphic form. It is not necessary to accept the myths as true in detail; but they express a conviction in the spiritual direction of the universe.' Then he names other sources: 'Myths speak about God in picture language, and other sources for an understanding of his character in African traditional religion are found in prayers, songs, proverbs, riddles, and some rituals.'

Researching ATR has revealed the existence of contradictory views in many areas among the various authors. Besides polytheism mentioned above, as another example Nyamiti (2006) writes: 'Society and religion are centred on man... Interest in God seems to be chiefly based on His readiness and capacity to help man in his terrestrial interest.' And Parrinder (1969:42) writes: '...yet man is not the centre of the



universe in African thought....’ No area has produced more writings or more contradictory opinions than African beliefs about the Supreme Being. A book that should have been most helpful is Mbiti’s *Concepts of God in Africa*. However, he is writing as a Christian with an ecumenical presupposition and used Christian theological and biblical terms as chapter titles and sub-headings throughout the book. A reader might think that ATR and Christianity were almost the same religion. Those writing from an anthropological or philosophical view (including some non-African Christian missionaries) present ATR as a distinct religion unique to Africa. In this work I have endeavoured to rely on the writings of those authors in which was detected the least bias and whose writings closely harmonize with my own observations and interviews. One such work is *God: Ancestor or Creator?* by Harry Sawyerr. Sawyerr was born in Sierra Leone, my country of residence, and was a Professor of Theology at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. This book is the result of his study of the concept of God among three West African peoples – the Akan of Ghana, the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Mende of Sierra Leone.

Among the attributes of God in ATR the one that is foundational is that God is real. Gehman (2005:316) writes: ‘No African community lacks a name for the Supreme Being.’ The one glue that seems to hold all the other ATR beliefs together is the belief that God is there, above all things, the source of all things and the reason for all things, giving everything a reason for being. In his book *The Prayers of African Religion* Mbiti (1975b:4) declares: ‘At least 90 per cent of the prayers are addressed to God. Therefore, he emerges as the dearest and most concrete spiritual reality.’

Sawyerr (1970:10) states:

So all man’s hopes and aspirations are anchored in God. He is not just a philosophical concept but a reality, even though he may not be manifest. It is therefore believed that he pervades the whole universe and in the ultimate analysis His majesty is said to be in full control of the various experiences of

man, good and bad. The cultic and nature spirits are therefore understood to be concrete manifestations of the power of God.

God is considered to be all-powerful. 'In other words, God is a God of Power and is the ultimate source of all power' (Sawyerr 1970:5). The power of lightening, thunder and wind come from God. The power of witchcraft and sorcery come from God. However, the evil use of power is not God's will.

God is spirit. He has no physical body; but is invisible. 'God is likened to wind which cannot be seen, but can be known by its effects. The Akan say: "If you want to speak to God tell it to the wind"' (Gehman 2005:316). McFall (1970:62) writes: 'The God of the Nuer does not have a proper name. He is simply called "Spirit." He is omnipresent, being compared to wind or air which is everywhere. He is not wind or air but is like wind or air. Even though He is omnipresent, yet He dwells in the sky.' Nyamiti (2006) states: 'Among the spirits, God is the highest. He is the ultimate controller of natural forces and human dealing. he dwells far away in the sky, or in some important places such as mountains.'

Besides being all-powerful, God is all-knowing. The Yoruba say he is 'The One who sees both the inside and outside of men' (O'Donovan 1996:41). God can be all-knowing because he is present everywhere (Opoku 1978:27). He is spirit and his spirit fills the cosmos. There is no other being like God. He is unique. (Gehman (2005:317) writes: 'there is no one that can compare to the Supreme Being in ATR; he is unique. No one can draw an image of God for God is incomprehensible. He is unlike anything or anyone we may know. Unlike the creatures, God has no limitations. Unlike creation, God had no beginning. Thus, God is beyond our ability to comprehend.' In his power, knowledge and uniqueness, God is seen as good and merciful. Sun and rain producing crops, one's health and the birth of children are seen as proofs of God's mercy.

The question arises as to whether or not the God of ATR is personal or impersonal. No doubt he is often referred to using personal pronouns, but is he someone the traditional African has a personal relationship with or is he a concept that the traditional African has a knowledge of? Gehman (2005:318) points out: 'There has been much controversy over the nature of the Supreme Being, whether Deity or personal or impersonal.... The mysterious nature of God combined with other factors may suggest an impersonal, transcendent power rather than a personal being. Because of ambiguity, scholars have taken different interpretations on the subject.' Jomo Kenyatta (1965:224) after describing the God of his people (the Gikuyu) writes: 'The Being thus cannot be seen by ordinary mortal eyes. He is a distant Being and takes but little interest in individuals in their daily walk of life. Yet at the crises of their lives he is invariably called upon.' Gittins (1987:46) makes these comments:

A somewhat dismissive statement by a Christian Mende man, provides a useful focus for our enquiry. He said:

The Mende has an idea and some knowledge of a Supreme Being. But who is he? Where is he? They don't know this. Natural objects and the spirits of the dead – that is their firm belief.

Who then is the Supreme Being?

Gittins (1987:47) goes on to give what he believes to be the traditional Mende belief that the Supreme Being is 'up' looking after them. He states: 'The vagueness of this statement seems to me to capture well the attitude of the majority of Mende people uninfluenced by one of the world religions.' And he concludes with the comment that the Supreme Being he has been describing seems a remote figure, hardly a personality' (Gittins (1987:48). And Sawyerr (1970:5) states: 'God creates the world and rules it with His power.... But He is also believed to be remotely situated from the everyday events of human life.' Although many Christian writers say the Supreme Being of ATR is a personal Being, the majority of writers portray the Supreme Being as distant and approachable only through intermediaries. [I; II A, B]

#### 4.5.1.2 What is the origin and nature of man?

Without having a common scripture or a single founder to put forth what Africans should believe concerning the origin of man, they have relied on myths to explain what is not obvious. John Mbiti (1975a:77) writes:

Exactly when man came into being is unknown. Science has its own ideas, and religion has its own ideas. According to traditional African views, man was created by God. There are many myths and stories all over Africa which tell about the creation of man. Practically every African people has its own myths about it. Some of these myths differ considerably from people to people while others are remarkably similar across the continent. We can, however, put the ideas together and construct a general picture which emerges from a consideration of these myths and beliefs about the origin of man.

As the above quote mentions, the general belief in ATR is that man was created by God, or a Supreme Being. This explanation affords man the highest dignity and satisfactorily fits in with the other African ontological and cosmological beliefs. The mythical explanations about the origin of human beings vary as to where they were created (on earth or in the sky or heaven) and how they were created (moulded from clay, they fell like fruit from a tree, etc.). Regardless of the details, some general beliefs are the same in ATR. Mbiti (1975a:79) concludes:

Whatever the story may be, the ideas are that: (i) man was created by God; (ii) in almost every case it was either husband and wife, or two pairs; (iii) the creation of man took place generally at the end of the creation of other things. This last point may indicate that people believe that man was the completion or perfection of God's work of creation, since nothing else better than man was created afterwards. In some myths God is pictured as creating man without any assistance from what he had already created; but in others it is said that God used the help of some of the other creatures, either spirits or animals, but these acted under God's direction.

As to the nature of man, ATR asserts that the human being is a bipartite or in some tribes a tripartite being. Kofi Opoku (1978:11) writes:

The general African belief concerning man is that he is made up of material and immaterial substances, and although there may be variations of this idea from one African society to another, the fundamental assumption among them is the unity of the personality of man. Man is a biological (material) being as well as a spiritual (immaterial) being. It is the material part of man that dies

while the spiritual (the soul) continues to live. Death, therefore, does not end life; it is an extension of life.

Janheinz Jahn (1989:107) in following on with Temples' work with the Bantu people describes their belief: 'The origin of a human being, however, is represented as a double process. On the one hand it is the purely biological union of shadow and body.... But at the same time something spiritual... unites with the body, for the production of a human being is a process of body and spirit.' Noel King (1970:33) states: 'Presumably "Bantu" means "men" human beings *par excellence* as opposed to all others.'

The spiritual part of man is identified by various terms: soul, life, breath, shadow or double (Mbiti 1975a:118) and the spirit and soul are considered to be different parts by some. 'The Nuer regard man as tripartite beings. The life or breath comes from God and returns to Him at death. The flesh is buried in the earth. The soul becomes a ghost and goes to be with God' (McFall 1970:68). Parrinder (1974:134) states: 'African ideas of the soul and spirit are very complex.' He goes on to explain:

That there is a spiritual nature in man no African peoples doubt. In one aspect it is akin to what we call the personality of a man. It is identified with the ego, and is responsible for the peculiar characteristics of individuality. It helps explain why people are different in face, why voices differ, why each has his own oddities.

This soul is a power, and some writers would approximate it to the vital forces in the universe, rather than to a personal spirit. As a kind of soul-stuff it animates the body, pervading it with life. When it is separated from the body, by witchcraft or death, the body dies.

The soul is closely connected with the breath, for this is a clear accompaniment of vitality. It may be thought of as residing in the mouth and nose, and as going away at death. The heart too, is a source of blood and life, and ceases beating at death; some people use the same word for heart as for soul. Then there is the shadow, which is akin to the breath and disappears at death. The conventional belief is that corpses cast no shadow and that is how one knows a ghost. Yet while breath and shadow vanish at death, and are not generally thought to live on elsewhere, the personality may hover around the grave for some time or be reborn into the family in a new-born child.

John Mbiti (1969:119) believes that ATR and African philosophy is basically

anthropocentric. The African sees humanity as the centre of the universe and the reason for creation. ‘There is a clear distinction between man and animals... To call someone an animal is the greatest of insults, for this removes him from the category of persons’ (Gehman 2005:57).

The moral nature of man is believed to be more or less neutral. Mbiti (1969:278) states: ‘A person is not inherently “good” or “evil”, but he acts in ways which are “good” when they conform to the customs and regulations of his community, or “bad” (evil) when they do not.’ In a recent work in speaking of the event that separated God and humanity (Mbiti 2006) writes: ‘It did not turn persons into “fallen” creatures, nor did it defile persons ethically so as to make them evil (sinful) before God. The story serves to explain the ontological separation between God and persons and the regrettable consequences for persons.’ Man may commit evil acts but that does not make him evil by nature. [II; III A, B, C]

#### 4.5.1.3 What is reality and what is ultimate reality?

In his book *Foundations of African Thought* Chukwunyere Kamalu (1990:24) uses as one of his themes ‘Being and Becoming – in which the world is seen as being two in one, a duality of the void and matter, the spiritual and the physical. The spiritual is not manifest in itself, but through its opposite, the physical.’ He then quotes Mbiti: ‘Traditional African societies have been neither deaf nor blind to the spiritual dimension of existence, which is so deep, so rich, and so beautiful. The physical and the spiritual are but two dimensions of one and the same universe.’

Mbiti (1969:20) gives this exposition of the African understanding of reality as consisting of the physical and spiritual:

Africans have their own ontology, but it is a religious ontology, and to understand their religions we must penetrate that ontology. I propose to divide it up into five categories, but it is an extremely anthropocentric ontology in the

sense that everything is seen in terms of its relation to man. These categories are:

1. *God* as the ultimate explanation of the genesis and sustenance of both man and all things
2. *Spirits* being made up of superhuman beings and the spirits of men who died a long time ago
3. *Man* including human beings who are alive and those about to be born
4. *Animals and plants*, or the remainder of biological life
5. *Phenomena and objects without biological life*

Expressed anthropocentrically, God is the Originator and Sustainer of man; the Spirits explain the destiny of man; Man is the centre of this ontology; the Animals, Plants and natural phenomena and objects constitute the environment in which man lives, provide a means of existence and, if need be, man establishes a mystical relationship with them.

This anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity or solidarity which nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy or remove one of these categories is to destroy the whole existence including the destruction of the Creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far part from one another nor get too close to one another. In addition to the five categories, there seems to be a force, power or energy permeating the whole universe. God is the Source and ultimate controller of this force; but the spirits have access to some of it. A few human beings have the knowledge and ability to tap, manipulate and use it, such as the medicine-men, witches, priests and rainmakers, some for the good and others for the ill of their communities.

Parrinder (1974:23) writes: 'The Africans are more capable of abstract thought than is generally recognized, and they believe in a latent energy in things, which is not visible in the outward appearance but can be seen in the effects produced by use.'

This latent energy is understood as power. Parrinder continues:

The psychic power appears in the world in different manifestations, which are explained as being in grades or a hierarchy. Thus there is not wild confusion of forces, but explanations are given as to why some powers are more effective than others. Animals and plants have spiritual forces akin to those of men, but generally they are of lower grade than man's....

The spirits are, in the main, the ancestors and the forces of nature: the powers behind, storm, rain, rivers, seas, lakes, wells, hills, rocks. They are not just the water or the rock, for they are spiritual powers capable of manifesting themselves in many places.

Taking a more philosophical approach to the African ontological understanding of reality than Mbiti, Jahn, in building on the works of Tempels and Kagame, proposes four categories of reality. Jahn (1989:100) identifies them as:

I Muntu = 'human being'

II Kintu = 'thing'

III Hantu = 'place and time'

IV Kuntu = 'modality'

Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu are the four basic categories of African philosophy. All being, all essence, in whatever form it is conceived, can be subsumed under one of these categories. Nothing can be conceived outside them....

Everything there is must necessarily belong to one of these four categories and must be conceived of not as substance but as force.... Man and woman (category Muntu), dog and stone (category Kintu), east and yesterday (category Hantu), beauty and laughter (category Kuntu) are forces and as such are all related to one another. The relationship of these forces is expressed in their very names, for if we remove the determinative, the stem NTU is the same for all the categories.

NTU is the universal force as such, which, however, never occurs apart from its manifestations: Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu. NTU is being itself, the cosmic universal force, which only modern, rationalizing thought can abstract from its manifestations. NTU is that force in which Being and beings coalesce.... NTU is that 'point from which creation flows' that Klee was seeking: 'I am seeking a far off point from which creation flows, where I suspect there is a formula for man, beast, plant, earth, fire, water, air and all circling forces at once.'

Jahn adds: 'NTU expresses, not the effect of these forces, but their being' and '*Muntu* and *human beings* are not coterminous, since the Muntu includes the living and the dead.' These categories are drawn from the Bantu language and are couched with a philosophical bent but are descriptive of the basic traditional understanding of reality throughout Africa. Nyamiti (2006) states: 'The different manners of being are distinguished by their mode and degree of participation in the Supreme Force (God) and in superior forces of other "spiritual" beings.' Akrong (2005) writes: '...for the African, life is a continuum of power points that are transformed into being, and life is



constantly under threat from evil forces. This logic of the rationality of being and cosmic life gives rise to the view that all reality is inter-related like a family.'

For the traditional African, reality is being and being is force. Therefore, ultimate reality is the Supreme Being or Divine force. 'Mbiti gives an ontological hierarchy of God/spirits/humans/animals and plants/phenomena and objects without biological life. So the "life" or "force" that resides in a stone is ontologically lower than that of a plant, and plants' than animals', and animals' than humans' (Ritchie 2006). Magesa (1997:39) states: 'At the top of the hierarchy of the universe is the Divine Force, which is both the primary and the ultimate life giving Power, God the Creator and Sustainer, the Holy.'

Jahn's NTU, Magesa's Divine Force, and Mbiti's God are references to the same ultimate reality in ATR. As Ogunade (2003) concludes: 'Basic to the African worldview that seems to penetrate all religious traditions in Africa...is the belief that God is the creator of the universe. He is the first cause and the Prime Mover and that He is the Ultimate Cause of the unending, explorable natural phenomena, which manifest variously and in various forms.' [I; II A, B ,C]

#### 4.5.1.4 What is truth?

In researching the concept of truth in ATR it has been most surprising that for the most part, it is not addressed. Books on ATR, even by Christian authors, lack entries for truth in the subject index. Where truth is mentioned in the text (see Gittins 1987:122 and Opoku 1978:159 as examples) it is never defined. Books on African philosophy do deal with the concept of truth, but only from a philosophical and not a religious standpoint. Religion puts presuppositions on philosophy that philosophy does not want. A few articles posted on the internet have been helpful in delineating the traditional African view of truth.

Of the three philosophical theories of truth (correspondence theory – a truth equals fact; coherence theory – a truth coheres with our system of beliefs; and, pragmatism – a truth works or has practical value), Wiredu (2004:37) sees ‘an interesting affinity between the coherence and pragmatic theories.... In both theories, truth is a matter, not of the reference of a sentence, but of its logical and cognitive affiliations.’ From a philosophical perspective a combination of the correspondence and pragmatic theories of truth would best describe the traditional African view of truth.

H.K.Dzobo (2006) did a study of the concept of truth among the Ewe and Akan of West Africa. He states, ‘The normative truth – statement [*Nyadzodzoe*] is therefore what is generally known by the society, represented by the elders, to be true in speech as well as in deed. The truth of a statement is therefore in its identity with what has been known to be the case in such matters.’ That would be the correspondence theory of truth. The most interesting of his findings is what he calls ‘the creativity or *Nyano* theory of Truth.’ Dzobo (2006) states; ‘This can be said to be unique to the indigenous concept of truth. It is different from the pragmatic theory of truth in that it is not only the workability of an idea that makes it true, but its power to bring about a better human situation and continuously to improve the conditions of life. The defining characteristic of the creative theory is its emphases on the ameliorative nature of truth.’ He concludes: ‘Finally, truth, like knowledge and wisdom, is the statement that has the power to create new and better situations in life.’

It has been the observation of myself and others that what is considered to be creating better situations in the traditional African view includes avoiding negative consequences by telling a lie. Masolo (1994:135) writes: ‘According to Odesa Oruka, much of knowledge that informs everyday cultural practice is the result of theoretical

deliberations and negotiations between the producers of traditional knowledge whom he calls sages and sage philosophers.’ The sages are considered to be the keepers of traditional beliefs. In an entry he wrote for *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Masolo (2006) quotes a sage’s answer to the question, ‘Why would people tell lies?’ His answer was ‘So that they may eat....’ The positive benefit of telling a lie created a better circumstance and therefore met the criteria for truth.

In Western cultures truth and lies are opposites with the former being good and the latter evil. In writing about the Lovedu of the Transvaal, Krige and Krige (1954:78) state: ‘Truth is not good in itself nor is lie always evil. Lies are objected to when they are socially inconvenient. Yet not only is it expected that a man will lie to get out of difficulties but there are cases in which lying is prescribed....’ Richmond and Gestrin (1998:86) confirm this: ‘To avoid giving offence, Africans will often nod and say yes when they really mean no....’ The avoidance of offence is considered the true thing to do and therefore, the false statement is considered to be the truth.

Richmond and Gestrin (1998:172) conclude: ‘Truth is not absolute, as in the West, nor are right and wrong or yes and no. In traditional African cultures there can be many versions of verities and many varieties of extenuating circumstances.’ Truth in the traditional African view does not have an ontological correspondent but it has great utility value. [V D]

#### 4.5.2 COSMOLOGY QUESTIONS

##### 4.5.2.1 What is the origin and nature of the universe?

It was stated earlier that the African ontology is a religious ontology. Likewise, the African cosmology is a religious cosmology so that African ontology and cosmology are closely aligned.

As to the origin of the universe Mbiti (1975a:32) states:

It is generally believed all over Africa that the universe was created. The creator of the universe is God. There is no agreement, however, on how the creation of the universe took place. But it seems impossible that the universe could simply have come into existence on its own. God is, therefore, the explanation of the origin of the universe, which consists of both visible and invisible realities.

When people explain the universe as having been created by God, they are automatically looking at the universe in a religious way. We can say, therefore, that the African view of the universe is profoundly religious.

While there are many different accounts of the creation of the universe, it is commonly agreed that man has been put at its centre.... It is also a widespread view among African peoples that God continues to create. Then, the creation of the universe did not stop in the distant past: it is an ongoing process which will probably never end.

Many Africans hold the view that nothing existed before God. That means that God created *ex nihilo* in the original act of creation but subsequently he can be using existing material to continue his creative acts (Mbiti 1969:51; Parrinder 1969:24). It is also believed that in addition to creating the material universe, God also endowed it with natural laws and is also the source of some human customs.

As previously stated, Africans believe the nature of the universe to be made up of visible and invisible, or material and spiritual realities. 'African peoples do not think of these divisions as separate, but see them as linked together' (Mbiti 1975a:32). Some African peoples believe the physical universe to be of two spheres (the heavens and the earth) and others believe it to be a three-tier creation made up of the heavens, the earth and the underworld, which is below the earth (Mbiti 1975a:32). Regardless of the number of levels believed to be in the universe, man is considered to be the centre of the universe.

'Finally, focusing on Akan cosmology, Wiredu describes its main characteristics: it is an empirical ensemble based on the belief that there is an inherent order in the creation' (Mudimbe 1994:207). Mudimbe and Wiredu, both African philosophers, recognize the existence in African beliefs of an order to the universe. The philosophical explanation of this order is much less convincing than the religious

ones. Most Africans cannot understand the philosophical explanation, but the religious explanations are a reality to them. John Mbiti (1975a:36) gives the religious view:

It is considered that the universe is orderly. As long as this order is not upset there is harmony. Order in the universe is seen as operating at several levels.

First, there is order in the laws of nature. These function everywhere and give a sense of security and certainty to the universe.

Secondly, there is moral order at work among people. It is believed by African peoples that God gave moral order to people so that they might live happily and in harmony with one another.

Thirdly, there is religious order in the universe.... Because of their belief that the universe is created and sustained by God, they interpret their life's experiences from that starting point... There are, therefore, taboos which strengthen the keeping of the moral and religious order.

Fourthly, there is a mystical order governing the universe. The belief in this order is shown clearly in the practice of traditional medicine, magic, witchcraft and sorcery. It is held in all African societies that there is a power in the universe, and that it comes from God. It is a mystical power, in the sense that it is hidden and mysterious. This power is available to spirits and to certain human beings.

Magesa (1997:51) agrees with Mbiti: 'Life implies the existence and interaction of mystical powers in the universe. Conversely, the continuous blending of mystical powers in the universe makes life possible.' Parrinder (1969:4) also confirms the African idea of mystical power: 'The many powers that are important in life can be described in different ways. Gods and ancestors may be spoken of as such, or described more generally as Divinity or Spiritual activity. But all such terms carry a suggestion of separateness from man, or an opposition of spiritual and material, of sacred and secular, which is commonplace in the West but foreign to Africans and most other conceptions of the universe.' The concept of power in the universe is identified by many authors in terms of force, a life force in the universe that is the basic understanding of the nature of the universe in Africa.

Magesa (1997:46) states: 'Every creature has been endowed by God with its own force of life, its own power to sustain life. Because of the common divine origins

of this power, however, all creatures are connected with each other in the sense that each one influences the other for good or for bad.' He goes on to state: 'The force of the older and animate creatures is always perceived to be the stronger, and is understood to claim allegiance of the younger and inanimate.... It follows that by right of their primogeniture and proximity to God by death, God has granted the ancestors a quantitatively more powerful life force over their descendants.' African's relationship to their ancestors will be dealt with in Chapter Six. [I, II A, B, C, D; III A, B, D; IV B; V D]

#### 4.5.2.2 What is God's relationship with the universe?

In ATR God is believed to be not only the creator of the universe, but also the continuing sustainer of the universe. Richard Gehman (2005:321) notes:

A great mistake was made in past studies of ATR. Scholars concluded that Africa's concept of God was similar to the 'God' among the Deists in European history. The Deist acknowledged God as the Creator; but the Deist believed that the world was created in such a way that it would be self-sufficient, containing all the laws needed for operation on its own. Thereafter, God removed himself from active participation in the sustaining and guidance of things on the earth.

The Deist's view of providence is quite different from that of Africans, for ATR recognised God's continued involvement in the affairs of the world. God is the One who provides food, sunshine, rain, children, health and protection. These are gifts from him. As Supreme Ruler over the earth, God is known as 'King', 'Lord' and Judge'. His will is absolute and he rules with power.

This view of God's relationship with the universe is confirmed by most all writers on ATR. Parrinder (1969:41) writes: 'Not only did he make the world, but he established the laws of society and the existence of justice depends upon obedience to him. Creation is not only in the past; the divine work is continued in sustaining the universe.' Opoku (1978:9) attributes these duties to God: 'He rewards men and also punishes them when they do wrong. He may be likened to the Overload of society for He is the Final Authority in all matters.'

God's divine involvement in the ongoing activities of the universe is attributed to God's personality and will by Mbiti (1969:48): 'God has a personality, and in this personality there is a will which governs the universe and the life of mankind. It is an immutable will, and man generally has to invoke it or accept it in situations that seem beyond human power.' Parrinder (1969:41) states: 'God is the giver of destinies....'

In his *Introduction to African Religion* John Mbiti (1975a:44-46) describes what God does in the universe. He cares for it and keeps it so that it does not come apart. God provides for what he has created. He provides life and everything needed to sustain life including food and the sunshine and rain needed to grow it. God is also actively involved in ruling the universe as King and Judge. In the African view, God's relationship with the universe is very much pro-active and beneficent. [II A, D; III C]

#### 4.5.2.3 What is the meaning of time?

Kenyan John Mbiti is credited with expounding an African view of time that is widely accepted (though there are some detractors) and often quoted. He first expressed the findings of his research in his doctoral dissertation at Cambridge University dealing with New Testament eschatology in the African perspective. In *African Religions and Philosophy* Mbiti (1969:21) restates his findings:

The question of time is of little or no academic concern to African peoples in their traditional life. For them time is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur. What has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of "No-time." What is certain to occur, or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena, is in the category of inevitable or *potential* time.

The most significant consequence of this is that, according to traditional concepts, time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long *past*, a *present* and virtually *no future*. The linear concept of time in western thought, with an indefinite past, present and infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking. The future is virtually absent because events which lie in it have not taken place, they have not been realized and cannot, therefore, constitute time. If, however, future events are certain to occur, or if they fall within the inevitable rhythm of nature, they at best constitute only *potential time*, not *actual time*. What is taking place now no doubt unfolds the

future, but once an event has taken place, it is no longer in the future but in the present and the past. *Actual time* is therefore what is present and what is past. It moves “backward” rather than “forward”; and people set their minds not on future things, but chiefly on what has taken place.

This time orientation, governed as it is by the two main dimensions of the present and the past, dominates African understanding of the individual, the community and the universe which constitutes the five ontological categories mentioned above [see question on reality]. Time has to be experienced in order to make sense or to become real. A person experiences time partly in his own individual life, and partly through the society which goes back many generations before his own birth. Since what is in the future has not been experienced, it does not make sense; it cannot, therefore, constitute part of time, and people do not know how to think about it—unless, of course, it is something which falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena.

The rhythm of natural phenomena is measured in rains or new moons, not in months or years. As Mbiti (1969:24) states: ‘When Africans reckon time, it is for a concrete and specific purpose, in connection with events but not just for the sake of mathematics.’ In writing about change in African society, Eboussi-Boulaga (2000:209) equates time with force: ‘Time is a force—a power of configuration—and not a rigid, inert identification which simply furnishes a coordinate for an event.’

Mbiti divides the African concept of time into two dimensions and uses Swahili words based upon an analysis of the verb tenses available to identify them. The *Sasa* covers the ‘now-period’ and is ‘the immediate concern for Africans because that is “where” or “when” they exist’ (Mbiti 1969:28). Events in the *Sasa* must either be about to occur, occurring or just occurred. Mbiti goes on to state: ‘What would be “future” is extremely brief. This has to be so because any meaningful event in the future must be so immediate and certain that people have almost experienced it.’

*Zamani* covers all past time and overlaps with *Sasa* to include the events occurring or just occurred. Mbiti (1969:29) states:

*Sasa* feeds or disappears into *Zamani*. But before events become incorporated into the *Zamani*, they have to become realized or actualized within the *Sasa* dimension. When this has taken place, then events “move” backward from *Sasa* into *Zamani*.... It is the final storehouse for all phenomena and events, the



ocean of time in which everything becomes absorbed into a reality that is neither after nor before.

In explaining the functions of these dimensions of time, Mbiti declares: ‘Sasa generally binds individuals and their immediate environment together. It is the period of conscious living. On the other hand, Zamani is the period of myth, giving a sense of foundation or “security” to the Sasa period; and binding together all created things....’

Mbiti’s position that there is virtually no future in the African concept of time has probably brought the most criticism. Scott Moreau (1986:42) points out that Byang Kato in his work *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* analyzed Mbiti’s position and took the opposite position that the African does live a life which demonstrates an awareness of the future. Moreau gives the example of every traditional African male anticipating his initiation to manhood as having a ‘definite future outlook.’ He also writes about the financial planning necessary for the payment of a bride-price before marriage. However, it has been my observation in six years of living among Africans that virtually nothing is done to prepare for the costs of initiations or weddings until the event is eminent, and then they scurry to raise the necessary funds. It is also evident in my students’ not beginning term assignments until a few days before they were due or not studying for exams until the night before. David Maranz (2001:93) shares that observation: ‘People have learned from experience to be present oriented, preferring to focus on the present and deal with the uncertain future as it comes along.’

Richard Gehman (2005:60) points out: ‘...but for traditional Africans, time moves in the cycle of known and repeated events, such as planting season, rains and harvest followed by the dry season.’ He goes on to state that there is a ‘rhythmic succession of events’ for the individual made up of ‘birth, initiation, marriage, bearing

of children, eldership and death.’ These events are measured by time moving in a circle as it moves backward. [IV B; V B; VI A, B]

#### 4.5.2.4 Do laws and causality govern the universe absolutely?

The existence of natural laws and the search for causation when those laws are violated are important elements in the traditional African worldview. As stated previously, Mbiti (1975a:36) writes that order in the universe is seen as operating on several levels: ‘First, there is order in the laws of nature. These function everywhere, and give a sense of security and certainty to the universe.’ However, Africans do not believe that the natural laws govern absolutely. When the natural laws are violated the principle of causality does govern absolutely and the cause must be found. Nyamiti (2006) states: ‘The connection between cause (supernatural) and effect is immediate; secondary causes are either not admitted or considered negligible.’

*The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Blackburn 1994) gives this definition of causation: ‘Causation is the relation between two events that holds when, given that one occurs, it produces, or brings forth, or determines, or necessitates the second.’ An event that brings good fortune is considered to be ultimately caused by God and an event that brings bad fortune is considered to be caused by a spiritual force and ultimately allowed by God (Minkus: 1979:93). Seeking the causes of bad events is the reason for much of the religious activity of the Africans (Mbiti 1969:221).

Mudimbe (1988:139) in writing about how the life forces of different beings on earth can directly reinforce or diminish the life forces of other beings calls it the ‘general laws of vital causality.’ Magesa (1997:46) confirms: ‘This relationship between and among created vital forces—just as that existing between God and creation—is therefore essential as well. It is also causal. Causation flows all directions to maintain life in the universe....’ Thus every event is seen to have a cause. Jahn

(1989:126) writes: ‘Thus for everything that happens in the world, for fertility and drought, for sickness and its cure, for happiness and unhappiness, some muntu [being] or other is responsible, whether living man, departed or orisha [spirit].’ Minkus (1979:93) in writing about the Akan says: ‘Fundamental to Akan causal theory is the conception of an orderly universe in which all events are caused and potentially explicable.’

The laws of nature are general and considered to be beneficent since they were put there by God. But, as stated previously, these laws do not rule absolutely and can be controlled by spiritual forces. The Lovedu see physical objects that once belonged to an ancestor (dithugula) as having power to control nature and thus giving the ancestors control over the physical world (Krige and Krige 1954:63). The cause of events bringing bad or evil results are sought after with the most diligence. According to Minkus (1979:103): ‘The true cause of an event may only be determined upon consultation with one who is qualified to look into such matters by virtue of his powers of possession or divination’. She goes on to state: ‘The causes most frequently cited to explain serious cases of misfortune and illness and to account for death are the following: punishment by the ancestral spirits, deities and personalized talismans; the operation of witchcraft and sorcery; and the unfolding of a person’s destiny.’

Natural causes of misfortune are rarely recognized. The root cause is usually moral or spiritual. According to Magesa (1997:182): ‘In the African mentality, everything wrong or bad in society and in the world, and most particularly, various afflictions, originates in witchcraft.... When natural or religious explanations fail to satisfy, the social explanation—witchcraft—is invariably involved.’ [II A, C]

#### 4.5.3 TELEOLOGY QUESTIONS

##### 4.5.3.1 Why do man and the universe exist and do they have a final end?

In the African view the universe exists for man and man exists to provide continuation and harmony in the life forces in the universe. Mbiti (1975a:37) states:

As the Creator of the universe, God is outside and beyond it. At the same time he is also its sustainer and upholder, he is very close to the universe. But in African myths of creation, man puts himself at the centre of the universe....

Because man thinks of himself as being at the centre, he consequently sees the universe from that perspective. It is as if the whole world exists for man's sake. Therefore African peoples look for the usefulness (or otherwise) of the universe to man. This means both what the world can do for man, and how man can use the world for his own good.

Man's function as the centre of the universe is in the words of Mbiti

(1975a:33) a priestly function: 'He is also like the priest of the universe, linking the universe with God its creator. Man awakens the universe, he speaks to it, he listens to it, he tries to create a harmony with the universe.' As indications that man considers it to be a religious universe, he turns some parts of it into sacred objects and uses other parts of it for sacrifices and offerings (Mbiti 1975a:33). Magesa (1997:51) confirms the position of man in the universe and religion:

In African religion, the centrality of the human person in the universal order is indicated by the religious practice it fosters. Charles Nyamiti explains how "African religious behaviour is centred mainly on man's life in this world, with the consequence that religion is chiefly *functional*, or a means to serve people to acquire earthly goods...and to maintain social cohesion and order." This is why all life forces, that is, all creation, are intended to serve and enhance the life force of the human person and society. The belief of African religion is that this is part of the Divine plan. Universal order can be maintained only if this plan of the interaction of vital forces for the sake of the enhancement of the vital force of humanity is adhered to and observed.

In the African worldview based upon ATR both man and the universe will never cease to be. Mbiti (1975a:34) writes: 'In terms of time, it makes sense for people to believe that there was a beginning for the universe, even though they do not know when it was. But nobody thinks there will ever be an end to it.... Events come and go in the form of major and minor rhythms.... All these rhythms of time suggest that the universe will never come to a halt, whatever changes there may be.'

Man has a final destiny but his spirit never ceases to exist according to ATR. The human race will continue to exist as individual humans sustain the vital life force through procreation. Each individual human is moving to a final end in the world of spirits. John Mbiti (1969:31-33) explains the human progression toward its final state. It is a gradual progression from the Sasa period to the Zamani. After physical death, a person continues to exist in the Sasa period as long as friends and relatives remember him *by name*. This could last several generations. When the last person who knew the deceased by name dies, then the deceased passes from the Sasa into the Zamani period. The changing of periods is quite significant for the living and the deceased. As long as the deceased is in the Sasa period he has all the rights and powers of an ancestor (what Mbiti calls the *living-dead*) and is in a state of *personal immortality*. When the deceased passes from the Sasa period it completes the dying process but he does not cease to exist. According to Mbiti (1969:33): ‘...they now enter into the state of *collective immortality*. This is the state of the spirits who are no longer formal members of the human families.... This then is the destiny of man as far as African ontology is concerned.’ [II A, C, D; III C; VI A, B]

#### 4.5.3.2 Does evil have a purpose?

In the African view evil does not have an ontological existence (Kamalu 1990:133). It is seen in terms of negative or harmful effects or consequences of an act. Acts are considered bad or evil if they bring bad or evil consequences. A person is not good or evil but he acts in ways which are considered good or evil (Mbiti 1969:278). The acts that act against the life force or harmony of a person or the community is considered to be an evil act. Magesa (1997:161) states: ‘What is elsewhere conceptualized as “sin” or “evil”, for example, is better expressed in African Religion by the concept of “wrongdoing,” “badness,” or “destruction of life.”... The concept

“sin/evil” seems to give less emphasis to wrong or bad *actions*, which emanate from *bad people....*’ Megesa (1997:162) concludes: ‘The sense here, then, is that sin and evil do not and cannot exist in human experience except as perceived in people. It is people who are evil or sinful, whether or not they are aided by invisible forces.’

Here we have two conflicting opinions from prominent African scholars. Does evil reside in the act or in the person that commits the act? Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of writing on the nature of evil in ATR. Most Africans would agree with Gunter Wagner that evil resides in forces or spirits that influence people to do evil acts. Wagner (1954:44) in writing about the perceived dichotomy of good and evil forces states: ‘Everything which deviates from the normal order of things, both in the natural and in the social world, is regarded as a manifestation of these evil forces, and hence, as dangerous.’

Africans see evil as a punishment for some act that disrupts the harmony of the life forces in the universe. My research revealed no stated purpose that evil serves in the world. If Mbiti’s position that evil is in the act is accepted, then the punishment that attends the act should serve as a deterrent to commit such acts. If Magesa’s position that the person that commits the act is evil, then the punishment that attends the act should serve to reveal who the evil people are. When bad things happen to an African, the first assumption is that he did something to deserve it (Minkus 1979:125). [II D; III A, B; V D]

#### 4.5.4 ETHICS/MORALITY QUESTIONS

##### 4.5.4.1 Who or what determines what is moral and immoral?

‘What is the purpose of human existence, and what implications does this have for the practical order of things? In African religion the answers to these questions delineate the conception of morality in the universe: the understanding of the good

that sustains life and the bad that destroys it. They establish both the context and the content of African morality and ethics' (Magesa (1997:35). Magesa's book *African Religion: The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life* is centred around this concept of moral acts sustaining life and immoral acts destroying life, indicating both the physical and social life of the individual and the community.

In addressing the meaning and value of morals in African religion John Mbiti says it deals with the question of what is right and wrong in human conduct. Mbiti (1975a:175) writes:

African peoples have a deep sense of right and wrong. In the course of the years, this moral sense has produced customs, rules, laws, traditions and tabos which can be observed in each society. Their morals are embedded in these systems of behaviour and conduct.

It is believed in many African societies that their morals were given to them by God from the very beginning. This provides an unchallenged authority for the morals. It is also believed or thought that some of the departed and the spirits keep watch over people to make sure that they observe the moral laws and are punished when they break them. This additional belief strengthens the authority of the morals.

Morals deal with human conduct. This conduct has two dimensions. There is personal conduct, which has to do specifically with the life of the individual.... But the greater number of morals has to do with social conduct, that is, the life of society at large.... African morals lay a great emphasis on social conduct, since a basic African view is that the individual exists only because others exist.

Because of the great emphasis on one's relationship with other people, morals have been evolved in order to keep society not only alive but in harmony. Without morals there would be chaos and confusion.

Agreeing with Mbiti that God is the source of moral values or laws, Magesa (1997:35) states that the ancestors are the depository and policemen of morals:

African Religion's conception of morality is steeped in tradition; it comes from and flows from God into the ancestors of the people. God is seen as the Great Ancestor, the first Founder and Progenitor, the Giver of Life, the Power behind everything that is. God is the first Initiator of a people's way of life, its tradition. However, the ancestors, the revered dead human progenitors of the clan or tribe, both remote and recent, are the custodians of this tradition.... The ancestors, who are in constant contact with both God and humanity, often "intrude" into the life of humanity with specific intentions. They do so on their own or through the agency of the spirits. The spirits are active beings who are either disincarnate human persons or powers residing in

natural phenomena such as trees, rocks, rivers, or lakes. Like God and the ancestors, but of lesser power, the spirits also play a part in the moral behaviour of human beings. God, the ancestors, and the spirits are all powers or forces that impinge on human life, in one way or another. In that sense they are all moral agents. The way they act has been determined by the ancestors and is “stored” in the traditions of the people. Tradition, therefore, supplies the moral code and indicates what the people must do to live ethically.

From the above quoted material can be seen the reason that Africans hold fast to their traditional religion. It is seen as a religious act to honour traditions because the moral laws of their society are embedded in the traditions and to violate them would bring the wrath of the ancestors. The wrath of the ancestors is the manifestation of the wrath of God (Parrinder 1969:89) who is the source of moral values in their traditions.

[II C, D; III A, D; IV B; V A, D]

#### 4.5.4.2 How do we know what is right?

Magesa (1997:64) states: ‘The realization of sociability or relationships in daily living by the individual and the community is the central moral and ethical imperative of African Religion.’ The African individual sees his existence within the framework of the African community. Mbiti (1969:141) concurs: ‘Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.”’

Since the maintenance of peace and harmony in the community is the moral imperative, anything that does not do that is considered to be immoral or not right. Again quoting Magesa (1997:166): ‘To threaten in any way to break any of the community codes of behaviour, which are in fact moral codes, endangers life; it is bad, wrong, or “sinful”.’ Krige and Krige (1954:78) state it best: ‘Right conduct is related always to the human situation and morality is oriented not from any absolute



standards of honesty or truth but from the social good in each situation.’ [III D, IV A; V D]

#### 4.5.5 AESTHETICS QUESTIONS

##### 4.5.5.1 What is man’s relationship with the natural environment?

As stated previously, man thinks of himself as being the centre of his universe and believes that the universe exists for him. That being the case he seeks to use the part of the universe he occupies (his natural environment) to his best interest. It has also been previously stated that man has a priestly function in his natural environment linking it with God its creator. Since Africans believe that spirits reside in natural phenomena such as trees, rocks, rivers, and lakes’ (Magesa 1997:35) the natural environment is seen as animate rather than inanimate. This guides man’s relationship to his natural environment. Mbiti (1975a:38) states:

This attitude towards the universe is deeply engrained in African peoples. For that reason many people, for example, have divided animals into those which man can eat and those which he cannot eat. Others look at plants in terms of what can be eaten by people, what can be used for curative or medical purposes, what can be used for building, fire, and so on. Certain things have physical uses; some have religious uses (for ceremonies, rituals, and symbols); and other things are used for medicinal and magical purposes.

African peoples regard natural objects and phenomena as being inhabited by living beings, or having a mystical life. In religious language we speak of these beings as divinities and spirits.

According to Mbiti this gives people the opportunity to religiously manipulate the objects. If a lake contains spirits, a sacrifice to those spirits should help catch fish in that lake. It makes them feel like they are in harmony with the lake and the spirits and still get what they want. Mbiti continues:

He sees the universe in terms of himself, and endeavours to live in harmony with it. Even when there is no biological life in an object, African peoples attribute (mystical) life to it, in order to establish a more direct relationship with the world around them. In this way the visible and invisible parts of the universe are at man’s disposal through physical, mystical and religious means. Man is not the master of the universe; he is only the centre, the friend, the beneficiary, the user. For that reason he has to live in harmony with the

universe, obeying the laws of natural, moral and mystical order. If these are unduly disturbed, it is man who suffers.

It has been my observation that Africans take a passive attitude toward their natural environment, not changing anything in it unless absolutely necessary. In the traditional village setting they will not move a rock out of the road or hush a barking dog or crying baby. They know that there is something there that they do not see and they respect it. [II A, B, C, D; III D; V D]

#### 4.5.5.2 Is there aesthetic value to religious experience?

As stated previously, Feagin (1995), in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, writes: “‘The aesthetic’ has always been intimately connected with sensory experience and the kinds of feelings it arouses.’ From that standpoint, the African’s religious experience does have aesthetic value. Since religion is an integral part of African life, any aesthetic experience is seen as a religious experience. Most religions offer their religious experiences during worship services or at sacred buildings, temples or shrines. But, in Africa, as Parrinder (1969:45) states: ‘...it is surprising to find that there is little ordered worship of God and few places where rituals are performed for him. The worship is done and experiences obtained from events of the African’s normal life.’

Mbiti (1975a:19) asserts that religious experience is found in the rituals, ceremonies and festivals of the people. He writes: ‘Africans like to celebrate life. They celebrate events in the life of the individual and the community.... They have a lot of religious meaning, and through their observation religious ideas are perpetuated and passed on to the next generations.’ Mbiti (1975a:24) goes on to say: ‘A lot of African music and songs deal with religious ideas and practices. The religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals are always accompanied by music, singing and sometimes

dancing. Music gives outlet to the emotional expression of the religious life....' In expounding on the role of singing and dancing, Mbiti (1975a:61) writes:

Africans enjoy celebrating life. Therefore when people meet together for public worship they like to sing, dance, clap their hands and express their rejoicing.

Some ceremonies of worship involve moving from place to place. As they do this, people beat their drums, play musical instruments, dance and rejoice. Religious singing is often accompanied by clapping and dancing, which express people's feelings of joy, sorrow or thanksgiving.

Through music, singing and dancing, people are able to participate emotionally and physically in the act of worship. The music and dancing penetrate into the very being of the worshipping individuals.

Parrinder (1969:77) explains: 'The importance of music in African religious life is that it gives expression to the deepest feelings, but it is not only feeling, for it points to belief in the life force that underlies religious thought.' These acts of 'worship' are carried out in the rituals and rites celebrated at the birth of a child, initiation to adulthood, weddings, harvest, etc.

Sacred objects and symbols have religious meaning and also evoke religious feelings. Magesa (1997:3) states: 'It is this relationship of symbols to meaning, and particularly human meaning, that makes them such a fundamental aspect of religion.' Then quoting Dundes, Magesa continues: "'Sacred symbols thus relate an ontology and cosmology to an aesthetic and a morality...".'

In the words of Mbiti (1975a:57): 'Prayers help to remove personal and communal anxieties, fears, frustrations, and worries.' With that result, praying would certainly be an aesthetic experience for the African or anyone else.

With Africans living close to nature and seeing all nature as possessing spirits or forces, observing nature can be an aesthetic experience. Geoffrey Parrinder (1969:53) concludes: 'Heaven and earth provide the stage where the human drama is played out. Men lift up their eyes to the sky and naturally regard its spirit as transcendent and mighty.' [I; II A, D; V A]

#### 4.5.6 PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY QUESTIONS

##### 4.5.6.1 What is the meaning of history?

Africa has a long history, most of which is unknown. Mbiti (1975a:4) writes: 'The history of man in Africa is very, very long. It goes back to the very first human beings. But most of that history is unknown to us today since the art of writing came only much later.' The fact that much of African history is unknown is a concern only to current scholars who are trying to construct such a history. The traditional African does not have a sense of history beyond a few generations of ancestors. My research revealed very little written about history in books on ATR. John Mbiti was the most helpful author and his books spoke of God working in current events as his working in history. For example, in *Concepts of God in Africa* Mbiti (1970:247) wrote: 'It is to be remembered that, for many African peoples, God's active part in human history is seen in terms of his supplying them with rain, good harvest, health, children, and cattle; his healing them when sick or barren; his helping them in times of difficulties; and making his presence felt through natural phenomena....'

The African's answer to the meaning history is closely aligned with the previous question of the meaning of time. It was pointed out there that time is viewed as moving from the Sasa to a much longer Zamani period. But the latter period only lasts for a few generations. In the words of Mbiti (1969:61): '...human history is cosmic history seen anthropocentrically or micro-cosmically.' For the African, life is like a play acted out on a stage. The actors perform for a while and then are replaced by new actors who may have a slightly different script. The former actors are remembered for a while and then are forgotten. But the play continues on *ad infinitum*. [IV A; V B; VI A, B]

#### 4.5.6.2 Is history cyclical or linear in progression?

In an essay titled 'Time in Yoruba Thought' John Ayoade (1979:84) writes: 'By showing an awareness of the past, present, and the future, the Yorubas accept time as a locus of history. This knowledge is exhibited in different dimensions. The first is that of time in antiquity.... Closely related...is the notion of precedence.... In addition to their notion of time as a locus of history, we find the notion of the irreversible and uninterrupted flow of time.' It would seem to be that Ayoade's conclusion is that, for the Yoruba, history would be linear in progression. However, earlier in his essay Ayoade (1979:78) states: 'Thus, in non-industrial societies the repetitive patterns of the world of nature, in addition to those of the human life, provide the basic measures of time reckoning. But the environmental measures of time are of two main types, (a) The celestial-cosmic cycle and (b) the terrestrial-ecological cycle.' Can time reckoned in cycles be linear in progression?

Mbiti (1969:29) states: 'Each African people has its own history. This history moves "backward" from the Sasa period to the Zamani, from the moment of intense experience to the period beyond which nothing can go. In traditional African thought, there is no concept of history moving "forward" towards future climax, or towards an end of the world.' The idea of being linear in progression connotes moving forward in a straight line toward a stated goal or destination. Mbiti concludes: 'Since the future does not exist beyond a few months, the future cannot be expected to usher in a golden age, or a radically different state of affairs from what is in the Sasa and the Zamani.' According to Mbiti the African looks forward to being part of the past.

Richard Gehman (2005:60) concurs with Mbiti: 'But for the traditional African, time moves in the cycle of known and repeated events, such as planting season, rains and harvest followed by dry season. There is a rhythmic succession of

events, which is measured by time moving in a circle. In the life of the individual the future is thought of in terms of birth, initiation, marriage, bearing of children, eldership and death.’ Death moves the African backward in history so that some of his human features or characteristics can be ‘reborn’ in future generations (see Mbiti 1969:215 and Parrinder 1969:84). [IV A; V B; VI A, B]

#### 4.5.7 EPISTEMOLOGY QUESTIONS

##### 4.5.7.1 What can we know and how can we know it?

Of all the works consulted on African culture and ATR, none written from an anthropological or theological perspective dealt with the area of knowledge. Only those writing from the philosophic perspective attempted to extract an African epistemology. N.K. Dzobo did a study of the epistemic conceptions found in the everyday language and oral literature of the Ewe and Akan of Ghana. He gives four main categories of knowledge in Ewe; traditional, deductive, formal education, and knowledge resulting from gaining an understanding of things in terms of their fundamental principles. Dzobo did a strictly philosophical study based on what has come to be known in the Western tradition as ordinary language philosophy. Of the categories of knowledge he expounded, only the category of traditional knowledge is apropos to this study. Dzobo (2006) describes traditional knowledge as ‘that which is passed down (by word of mouth) from one person or from one generation to another.’ He goes on to state: ‘The lessons of wisdom are stored by the elders in the proverbs and other wise sayings of the indigenous culture.’

Hallen (2003:83) calls traditional knowledge propositional knowledge which is associated ‘with information in written or oral propositional (sentential) form that is supposed to be knowledge and therefore true, but which the individual recipient is in no position to test or verify.’ He goes on to state: ‘Propositional knowledge is

therefore generally characterized as *secondhand*, as information that cannot be tested or proved in a decisive manner by most people who have it and therefore has to be *accepted as true* because it “agrees” with common-sense or because it “corresponds” to or “coheres” with the very limited amount of information that people are able to test and confirm in a firsthand or direct manner.’ And he laments ‘the weak evidential basis of so much of the information that people in that culture are conditioned to regard as knowledge, as true.’ However, this is not a problem for the traditional African holding the traditional African worldview based upon African Traditional Religion. He trusts his source of knowledge.

Knowledge in the traditional African culture is embedded in the ethics and morals, values, customs, traditional laws and taboos which are passed on through songs, myths, proverbs and sayings. As stated previously in this chapter, God is considered to be the source of all traditions and morality which he passed on to their ancestors. Again quoting Magesa (1997:35): ‘God is seen as the Great Ancestor, the first Founder and Progenitor.... God is the first Initiator of a people’s way of life, its traditions. However, the ancestors,...are the custodians of this tradition....’ The African can know all things about the traditional way of life and about his traditional religion by consulting the depositories of that knowledge. These include the ancestors, the chiefs and elders, the medicine men and sorcerers. The knowledge residing in each of these is a received knowledge passed to them from a previous depository.

In John Mbiti’s *The Prayers of African Religion* he lists the things that Africans pray for. He names things like children, healing, health, rain, harvest, success in hunting, security, happiness and peace. It is interesting that there are no prayers to receive knowledge. It is as if they expect (or want) God to act but not to speak. It shows the reliance Africans have on the knowledge gained through the

traditional human sources. Africans can know how to live life in harmony with the life forces in the universe and they can know how to correct it when there is disharmony because they can consult the traditional sources of their knowledge and believe what they say. [I; II A; III C; IV B; VI A]

#### 4.5.7.2 What justifies a belief?

In the last chapter, it was stated that propositional knowledge is defined by philosophers as justified true belief. It was also stated that two logics or structures have been put forth to justify holding a belief: foundationalism and coherentism (see 3.6.7.2). For the African, their traditional beliefs are foundational and coherent. The foundation of their traditional beliefs is the tradition of the ancestors and every belief is justified because it is shared with all others in the people group. [III D; IV A, B; IV A]

### 4.6 Religious Dimensions of the African Worldview

Religious beliefs are at the core of the African worldview. The African's beliefs about God and his delegation of knowledge and duties motivates them to revere and obey the elders of the community, both living and dead. They have no scriptures, so they rely on the teachings of the elders as their source of faith and practice. Those teachings guide them as they live out the religious dimensions of their traditional worldview.

#### 4.6.1 Experiential Dimension

For the traditional African all of life is religion and as life is experienced religion is experienced. Richard Gehman (2005:56) writes: 'ATR is not primarily belief, but the practice of people based on a traditional worldview.... ATR is best understood in the concrete practices of people.'



There is no conversion experience in ATR as in some other religions. You have to be born into it. Mbiti (1969:5) states:

Therefore, there is no conversion from one traditional religion to another...a person has to be born in a particular society in order to assimilate the religious system of the society to which he belongs. An outsider cannot enter or appreciate fully the religion of another society. Those few Europeans who claim to have been “converted” to African religions—and I know some who make such fantastic claims!—do not know what they are saying. To pour out libation or observe a few rituals like Africans does not constitute conversion to traditional religions.

Religious experience begins a few days after birth at the naming ceremony. During the festivities prayers of thanksgiving are offered and the announcing of the name given to the child links it to at least one of its ancestors. From that point on the individual has his own ceremonies commemorating the various rites of passage he passes through and also sharing in the ceremonies of others in the community. Every event is a community event and every event has religious connotations. ATR is a lived religion and Mbiti (1969:6) speaks of ‘the concentration of African religiosity on earthly matters, with man at the centre of this religiosity.’

Like Christianity, ATR contains religious experiences incorporating aspects of dualism and monism. God’s transcendence is recognized and he is believed to be separate and distinct from creation (Gehman 2005:317). Nyamiti (2006) writes: ‘Among the spirits, God is the highest.... He dwells far away in the sky, or in some important places such as mountains.’ Even though God is seen as ‘completely other’ (Mbiti 2006), transcendent and separate, he is also believed to be imminent and near (Gehman 2005:316). Again quoting Mbiti (1969:42):

Yet, in spite of all this transcendence of God, He is immanent so that men can, and do in fact, establish contact with Him.... It is, however, in the many acts of worship that men acknowledge God to be near and approachable. Such acts include sacrifice, offerings, prayers and invocations. Men also associate God with many natural objects and phenomena, indicating their belief that God is involved in His creation; there is no space where or time when, He cannot be found since He is contemporaneous with all things. This is not pantheism, and

there is no evidence that people consider God to be everything and everything to be God.

The transcendence of God and the immanence of God in ATR make God the Supreme Being because no other being can be both. His distinctness makes him worthy of worship and his nearness, watching over his people everyday, inspires acknowledgement of him. As life is lived, God is honoured.

#### 4.6.2 Mythic Dimension

In traditional Africa, myth is the road ATR rides on and the car it drives. Myths are the foundation of traditional beliefs and the vehicle by which they are transported from one generation to the next. 'For Africans, myth, together with ritual, constitutes what students of language...have called "primary language." It is a form of symbolic language that expresses the truths of human existence in a way that rational language cannot' (Magesa 1997:36). In writing about the value of myths in the African worldview Mbiti (1975a:77) states:

A myth is a means of explaining some actual or imaginary reality which is not adequately understood and so cannot be explained through normal description. Myths do not have to be taken literally, since they are not synonymous with facts. They are intended to communicate and form the basis for a working explanation about something. In societies without written records of ideas and events, myths are often the most effective means of keeping ideas circulating from one place to another and from one generation to another. Therefore, African peoples have thousands of myths covering many themes and ideas.

Some myths are more meaningful than others and some have longer histories. The nature of African myths allows them to evolve over time to accommodate societal changes.

The origin and nature of the universe is the theme of more African myths than any other. Magesa (1997:37) writes: 'A category of myth of great importance among many African societies relates to cosmology. More than all other myths, cosmogonic myths contain the primordial and pristine moral traditions.' Kamalu (1990:6) states:

‘Though there is really only one basic cosmology in ancient African religion, it occurs in many varied mythical forms.’ Mbiti (1975a:32-39, 78-81) gives descriptions of African myths about the creation and nature of the universe, the creation of man (man from the sky and man from the ground), the separation of God from man, the loss of original paradise, and how life came to be as it is now.

Life has meaning because there is a myth to explain each part of it. K.A. Opoku (1978:13) concurs writing in his book *West African Traditional Religion*: ‘In the pages that follow, detailed accounts of particular aspects of African traditional religion are given. This is only for purpose of emphasis and is not intended to present a compartmentalized picture, for African traditional religion must be seen as a whole system with a coherence of its own. It represents our forefather’s effort to explain the universe and the place of man in it in their own way, and they did this through myths or supernatural stories.’

Symbols are used in ATR to represent the beliefs incorporated into the myths. Mbiti (1969:44) states: ‘As far as it is known, there are no images or physical representations of God by African peoples: this being one clear indication that they consider Him to be a Spiritual Being.’ But they do make religious images. In a later work Mbiti (1975a:77) expounds: ‘These myths are not only oral. Some are carved on wood, clay, ivory and stone; some are represented in arts and crafts; and others are retained in dances, rituals and ceremonies.’ The mythic dimension of African religious experience is all-pervasive.

#### 4.6.3 Doctrinal Dimension

In explaining the difficulty in studying ancient traditional religious beliefs of Africa, Geoffrey Parrinder (1969:17) names the great variety and multiplicity of peoples and then he states: ‘The second difficulty is the complete lack of written

documents from within the religion. Not only are there no summaries of doctrines in ancient African religion, but no written exposition of spiritual experience, and nothing to tell what it was like to be a believer in the old religion.’ Magesa (1997:57) asks the question: ‘How does African religion understand itself? or rather, what do Africans consider their religion to be?’ He says these are big questions ‘because African Religion, including the worldview it gives rise to and incorporates, is entirely a lived religion, not a doctrinal one.’

Not only is there a lack of specific doctrines of teachings in ATR, there is also a lack of any formal creeds. Mbiti (1969:4) states: ‘In traditional religions there are no creeds to be recited; instead, the creeds are written in the heart of the individual, and each one is himself a living creed of his own religion.’

As previously stated, ATR is a lived religion. To study it one must study the religious journey of the African from birth to death (Mbiti 1969:5). Magesa (1997:58) adds: ‘Since it involves the whole of life, whatever one thinks, says, or does is religious or, at least, can have religious implication.’ A study of ATR and the African worldview cannot be limited to research. The lives of Africans must be observed. That is why nothing has been included in this chapter on the African worldview that does not concur with my observations from living in an African village for six years.

#### 4.6.4 Ethical Dimension

Ethical requirements in ATR are not based on written commands but on an established principle. ‘For any religious orientation, but here specifically for African Religion, the most important principles that determine the system of ethics revolve around the purpose or goal of human life.... For African Religion, all principles of morality and ethics are sought within the context of preserving human life and its “power” or “force”’ (Magesa (1997:31). Doing the good that sustains life and

avoiding the bad that destroys it is the foundation of the ethical dimension of ATR. It does not mean just physical life, but all of life. Thus, anything that breaks the peace and harmony in society is unethical. Individual acts are considered ethical or unethical based on the consequences of the act.

According to Magesa (1997:62) the most grievous violation of the ethical dimension are acts motivated by greed. He says ‘In the African moral outlook, greed is the antonym of hospitality and sociability or, in a word, good company.... Indeed if there is one word that describes the demands of the ethics of African Religion, sociability in the sense of hospitality, openhearted sharing, is that word.’ It is the African view that the earth and its resources belong to all human beings equally. It does not matter whose farm it is on, or whose house it is in, or what use it is put aside for, failure to share it is an inhospitable act, an act of greed and is unethical. Failure to share would bring a breach in relations and disharmony to the forces of life. ‘The ethical consequences is that we must repair every breach of harmony, every wound and lesion’ (Magesa 1997:65).

#### 4.6.5 Ritual Dimension

The ritual dimension of religious experience for the African is the most public and the most prescribed of the acts of worship. The purpose of these acts of worship is described by Magesa (1997:69):

Reverencing God, honouring the ancestors, and fearing the spirits are directly relevant to human life. They occur within the context of human needs and wants or, on the other hand, human anxieties and dislikes. If living men and women of the community or the group are the axis or the centre around which these activities revolve, *the primary purpose of acts of worship and reverence is neither God nor the ancestors, but the well-being of the person or community concerned.* [emphasis mine].

Since ATR is anthropocentric (Mbiti 1969:22) the rituals practiced in ATR centre on the individual, the family and the community. Rituals are performed as each of these

progress through the cycles of life.

From a psychological perspective, rituals provide many personal benefits to the African psyche. Mbiti (1975a:126) writes: 'Rituals generate a sense of certainty and familiarity. They provide continuity and unity among those who perform or attend them. In turn, people find a degree of identity through this common observance and experience. For example, the young people who go through the same rite of circumcision are bound together into a unity, and each finds his own identity within the unity of that group.'

There are many rituals and ceremonies involved in ATR. Mbiti (1975a:127-37) describes different types of rituals that are observed in the African society. There are personal rituals drawing attention to the uniqueness of the individual which are performed at various times in the life of that individual. They begin at birth and include naming, initiation to adulthood, engagement, marriage, childbearing, eldership, old age, and death. After a period beyond death a ritual is performed by the living commemorating the passing to living dead status. Each step along life's way brings the individual new status and new responsibilities. There are agricultural rituals which include rain-making, dedicating new fields, planting, first fruits, and harvest. Health rituals are used to find the cause of sickness, the cure of sickness and protection from harm to health. Homestead rituals are performed at times of building a new house or barn, moving to a different house and welcoming guests.

Occasionally, festivals enhance the experience of both personal and communal rituals. Festivals provide entertainment and a release of tension in the community bringing people together as a group strengthening their unity. As Mbiti (1975a:137) states: 'Religious and social values are repeated and renewed through communal festivals.'

Sacrifice and offerings are other elements that are sometimes included in a ritual. According to Magesa (1997:201) these are done when the restoring or maintaining of the power of life is an issue. Mbiti (1975a:57) explains the difference between them: ‘The distinction between sacrifices and offerings is this: sacrifices involve the shedding of the blood of human beings, animals or birds; offerings do not involve blood but concern the giving of all other things, such as foodstuffs, water, milk, honey or money.’ Mbiti (1975a:59) goes on to explain the meaning of blood sacrifice:

In African societies, life is closely associated with blood. When blood is shed in making a sacrifice, it means that human or animal life is being given back to God who is in fact the ultimate source of all life. Therefore the purpose of such a sacrifice must be a very serious one. Such sacrifices may be made when the lives of many people are in danger. The life of one person or animal, or of a few of either, is destroyed in the belief that this will save the life of many people. Thus, the destruction of one becomes the protection of many.

The kind of situation that calls for a sacrifice may include drought, epidemics, war, raids, calamity, insect pests, and destructive floods. Since these affect the community, it is the community which then sacrifices an animal or, in past years, a human being.

Some tribes, such as the Massai, sacrifice only to God (Priest, Jr 1990:178). Others sacrifice to other spirits or deities as well as to the Supreme Being.

Offerings are generally not destroyed as a sacrifice is, but are ‘separated by dedication’ to God or spirits. The offering is symbolic and the item offered may remain in the household of the one making the offering (Magesa 1997:201).

‘Prayers always accompany offerings and sacrifices, so that the purpose of the sacrifice or offering may be declared’ (Mbiti 1975a:59). See Mbiti’s (1975b) *The Prayers of African Religion*, Chapter 10, for further explanation and examples of prayers used during offerings and sacrifices.

#### 4.6.6 Social Dimension

As stated throughout this chapter, life for the African is lived in community.

‘He knows that apart from community he would no longer have the means of existence’ (Magesa 1997:65) and Mbiti (1969:3) states: ‘Traditional religions are not primarily for the individual but for his community of which he is part.’ As far as his religion is concerned, he believes what the others in his community believe or as Mbiti (1969:87) says: ‘...it is a corporate “faith.” And this faith is utilitarian, not purely spiritual, it is practical and not mystical.’ That practical faith is lived out as the individual abstains from doing anything to harm relationship with others and with the natural order of things.

In ATR there are no private prayers, no private rituals, no desire to draw away from other people in order to commune with God. For the traditional African, his religion is fused with life, and life is fused with his community.

#### 4.7 African Worldview and Culture

The traditional African does not see himself as living in a particular culture, as opposed to a different culture. Sociologists define culture this way (Macdonald 1989:62):

**Culture** may be defined as *the beliefs, values, behaviour, and material objects shared by a particular people*. Sociologists distinguish between **nonmaterial culture**; *the intangible creations of human society* (such as ideas and beliefs), and **material culture**: *the tangible products of human society* (ranging from armaments to zippers). The terms *culture* and *society* are used much the same way, but their precise meanings are slightly different. Culture is a way of life a number of people have in common. A society is a group of people who interact with one another within a geographical or political boundary and who share a culture. Obviously neither society nor culture can exist without the other.

Allan Johnson (1995:68) adds this thought: ‘It is important to note that culture does not refer to what people actually do, but to the ideas they share about what they do and the material objects they use.’ For the African, culture and society are the same, and beliefs, values, behaviour and possessions define who they are in African. When an African looks at his culture he sees himself.



Richard Gehman (2005:55) states: ‘The best way to describe the African traditional worldview is “holistic” because ATR affects the whole of life from birth to death.... The notion of two compartments in life, the secular and the sacred, is a foreign concept in traditional Africa.’ In speaking of African religion and culture Dr. Abraham Akrong (2005), at the University of Ghana says: ‘They can now be understood as self-contained systems that are internally coherent without reference to any grand theories.’ Chukwunyere Kamalu (1990:24) says of his book: *‘Foundations of African Thought* seeks to interpret the concepts and themes of ancient and traditional religions with a view to outlining what is a coherent system of thought.’

For the traditional African, his culture, his worldview, and his religion are all logically consistent and coherent. They define life, explain life and provide the script for life. Culture is the stage on which religion, and therefore life, is acted out. Akrong (2005) concludes: ‘One can describe African religion as a this-worldly religion of salvation that promises well-being and wholeness here and now. It is a religion that affirms life and celebrates life in its fullness; this accounts for the lively and celebrative mood that characterizes worship in all its manifestations.’ The African culture is where Africans live. They love their culture because it fits them like a glove.

#### 4.8

#### A Worldview in Transition

A chapter on the traditional African worldview cannot end without saying something, even lamenting, about the current changes taking place in that worldview and the forces behind those changes. The changes are a result of colonialism and globalization which have opened the gateways to Africans and their culture. Over a half a century ago, African writers recognized that profound changes were taking place. In 1954 Daryll Forde (1954: xvii) wrote: ‘It has not been possible in this book

to attempt the complex task of describing and analysing the multifarious social changes and the transformation of beliefs and morals that are so marked a feature of Africa today.' Eight years later Colin Turnbull published *The Lonely African* in which he studied the dilemma of Africans trapped in the lonely void created by the transition from traditional to modern ways of living. The transition brought dissatisfaction. Turnbull (1962:58) writes: 'The traditionalist also points to a lack of any effective system of values, and the consequent moral instability. It can hardly be called immorality, they say, because there no longer are morals, there is only law.... In all these aspects of life they find that the traditional way was sounder because there was an overall unity achieved by a respect for a far greater power than that of the modern police force...'

Probably the most graphic exposition of the pain caused by the changes being experienced by traditional Africans was incorporated into a novel titled *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, published in 1958. In the section from which the novel gets its title, Achebe (1958:124) pens:

Does the white man understand our customs about land? How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.

In a chapter titled 'Changing Man and His Problems' Mbiti (1969:282-98) points to Christianity as the cause of the rapid changes in Africa, stating that it came carrying Western culture (politics, science, technology, medicine, schools) as well as the Gospel. He says it is a total change affecting all spheres of life. The biggest aspects of change he sees were the importation of the awareness of a future dimension of time and a dichotomy between religious and secular life. The problems caused by

the changes taking place are delineated by Mbiti with much of the same feeling we saw in Achebe.

To Christianity must be added the religions of Islam and Secularism as causes for the rapid changes in African society. Islam has been less of a force in change from traditional ways than has Secularism (called by Comte the 'religion of humanity' [Evans 2002:56]). The construction by African intellectuals of a modern African worldview is being done on the basis of secular humanism, totally ignoring the religious basis of the traditional African worldview. The past thirty years has seen many intelligent Africans go to some part of the Western world to earn post-graduate degrees and then turn their attention to constructing African history and African philosophy. Unfortunately, most have had to stay in the West in order to earn a living from their trade, which, according to Moses Makinde (2005), can be blamed on 'the anti-intellectualism of many military governments which lead to 'a general neglect of the university system.' The efforts to construct African history and philosophy have produced a concept called 'Afrocentrism.'

Afrocentrism is a backlash to colonialism according to culture writer Gene Veith (1994:57): 'Those who celebrate the achievements of Western civilization are accused of a narrow-minded "Euro-centrism"; this view is challenged by "Afro-centrism," which exalts Africa as the pinnacle of civilization.' That view is confirmed by African philosopher, D.A. Masolo (1994:23), who states the operative projection of Afrocentrism as 'one which openly declares its anti-Eurocentric war through its theory of Western conspiracy to replace Africa as the genesis of modern civilizations. This projection is built on a variety of historical premises which include a loose sense of Pan Africanism and on the claims to reconstitute the genesis of modern civilizations to its rightful claimants by writing the "correct" histories.' What postulates this

movement? In *The Invention of Africa* Mudimbe (1988:18) writes: ‘One is the postulation that history reflects or should translate the dynamics of human needs through time.’

Africa has no written history prior to the colonial period and it does need one. The history that is being developed does not account for the way things were in Africa at the beginning of the colonial period or the way things are in African today beyond ‘blame it on the colonial powers’ (see Hountondji 1996:135; Gyekye 1997:26; or any issue of *New Africa* magazine). Diop (1974), Kamalu (1990), Hountoudji (1996) and many others are propounding an illustrious pre-history for sub-Saharan Africa claiming it to be the source of the people and technology of the ancient Egyptian empire, that ancient black Africans sailed to the Americas about 100,000 BC (Barton 2004:38), and even that England’s Queen Elizabeth has black African blood ‘coursing through her veins’ (Zamani 2004:35). The traditional African living in a mud hut trying to cross a rain-swollen river in his dugout canoe must wonder how could they have fallen so far if what they are being taught is true.

This kind of historical construction does have its detractors. E.G. Parrinder (1974:131) writes: ‘Further, there is observable today a tendency for some Africans to glorify their largely uncharted past, and to speculate about some respectable ancestry for it in Egypt or even Mesopotamia. Here again, correct knowledge is more important than history.’ For the current African historians, meeting the need for a history overshadows correct knowledge. In reading the cited works no sources for their claims are quoted as there are no written records from the pre-colonial period in Africa. Therefore, supposition is stated as fact.

Another element in the African history being constructed has to do with the origin of Africans and of the whole human race. The discovery by Richard Leakey in

East Africa of some fossilized bone fragments from a creature believed to be the first pre-human, has crowned Africa as the cradle of humanity. Basil Davidson (1991:11) states: 'Even if *Proconsul*, as Leakey named this creature, was not a man, it was quite probably an ancestor of man.' The 'probability' aspect has been erased in the minds of most African historians. Diop (1974: xv) makes this claim: 'The triumph of the monogenetic thesis of humanity (Leakey) even at the stage of "Homo sapiens-sapiens," compels one to admit that all races descended from the Black race, according to a filiation process that science will one day explain.' The works of Diop and others has greatly influenced the African philosophers and historians who in turn influence public opinion. In a magazine read throughout Africa, Nick Hordern (2004:57) writes:

It is Africa which has given the world's greatest gift to humanity—life itself. And it is Africa where a common ancestor sired not only the line that resulted in today's chimpanzee but human beings – 7.5 million years ago in East Africa, one group of apes, in a desperate bid for survival, began walking on two legs to reach food in a steadily shrinking forest. This group's descendants eventually evolved into humans, who today proliferate the planet to such an extent that they threaten its destruction. Meanwhile, our four-legged closest cousins, who stayed behind, cling on to life as an embattled species.

Even leading African Christian theologian, John Mbiti, is now of this historical evolutionary persuasion and has questioned whether or not it includes the evolution of religion. In a recent article Mbiti (2006) states: 'If according to palaeontologists, the history and evolution of human beings began in eastern Africa and made its way to the rest of the world, what did persons take with them from this place of their origin?... One of these commonalities is the religious constituent that is found everywhere, with particular variation.... Can it be established, that Africa has contributed not only physical but also spiritual genes to modern persons?'

From a religious studies standpoint, what are the effects of these cultural changes brought about by foreign religions on the African worldview which is based

upon African Traditional Religion? What does the individual African think when he is told that Africans used to be the most technically advanced and prosperous people in the world and all he sees is poverty. What does he think when his religion tells him he was created by God and his village school teacher says he descended from primates which to him is 'sweet meat' to eat? When he looks at the developed world and then looks at his world does he feel like his 'four-legged cousin' that got left behind? Not only is his origin in question but so are his loyalties. Smart (1983:48) states: 'The state has, to a great extent, replaced tribe, clan, and in some ways even family, as the group with ultimate power over people's affections and loyalties.' Tradition tells him loyalty to his family, clan, and tribe defines who he is. Confusion as to identity and desire to enter the global technological age but lacking the resources to do so, brings great frustration.

The result of all this is that the African and his worldview are in a state of schizophrenia (the presence of mutually contradictory qualities or parts). He is looking at the modern scientific world and its desire for things with a future orientation. At the same time he is looking at the traditional world he came from with its security being in human relationships and with eyes looking 'toward' joining his ancestors. In uncertain times such as these, he turns to his religion.

Mbiti (1975a:192) writes: 'It is impossible for this rich African heritage to be wiped out even by modern changes. As long as there is a trace of African culture, it will also have some of African Religion in it.' With all the cultural changes taking place since Mbiti wrote those words, Richard Gehman (2005:9) can write this:

The cultures of Africa today are no more what they used to be. In so many areas the traditional customs are changing – technologically, educationally, economically, politically, culturally and to some extent religiously; yet we find that during times of crisis, especially death, even professing 'Christians' revert to tradition. The fact is that superficial customs

change easily with the passage of time; but the deep core worldview beliefs of a people are very persistent.

That has been my experience in six years of teaching in an African Christian college.

It is not unusual to find fetishes in the dorms and it is almost impossible to convince students of the Christian belief that there is a heaven and a hell. In Africa the advent of Christianity, Islam and Humanism has moved the bedrock of ATR but very little.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## TWO WORLDVIEWS: CONFLICT OR CONFORMITY?

The biblical worldview (BWV) of Christianity and the traditional African worldview (AWV) based on African Traditional Religion have been delineated in the last two chapters. In this chapter these two worldviews will be compared in the areas examined to see where the points of conflict and conformity lie.

### 5.1 The Two Worldviews as Philosophy

Both the BWV and the AWV are lived out on a philosophical level that remains subconscious for most adherents to each. Life is understood and events are interpreted based upon the paradigms learned, consciously and subconsciously, as one grows and experiences new things on a daily basis. The teachers of paradigm are usually hidden within cultures and therefore go unnoticed. The African is born into and raised in the African philosophical worldview making it the normal and correct worldview for him. Likewise, a Christian that was born into a Christian family was raised with a Christian philosophical worldview making it the normal and correct worldview for him. However, someone born into a secular culture or into a family that embraces another religion, who converts to Christianity finds that their original philosophical worldview now conflicts with how they are to understand and relate to the world they live in. The conversion is brought about by a change in beliefs which will result in a change of behaviour.

The change of beliefs required for religious conversion requires a change in philosophical views because philosophical worldviews are religious at their core (the view about God affects the views about absolutes and ultimates in all areas). On an academic level world religions are defined by their philosophical worldview beliefs so that conversion from one religion to another requires a change in philosophical



worldviews. By analyzing the philosophical elements of the Christian and traditional African worldviews, the areas of conflict and conformity can be noted and the areas where change in worldview beliefs required for conversion can be identified.

## 5.2 Basic Postulates of the Two Worldviews

Chapters Three and Four put forth the idea of God's general (in nature) and special (the Bible) revelation to mankind as postulating the biblical worldview, and the concept of vital force as postulating the African worldview. The postulates of both worldviews reflect a supernatural character. The BWV is supernatural in historical origin and ontology and the AWV is supernatural in ontology with its historical origin being unknown. Christians believe God's special revelation was communicated to mankind supernaturally in written form. A study of Christian apologetics would reveal the evidences Christian's have for believing the Bible to be a supernatural communication from God. African's have no written sources for their beliefs in vital force, but have just as much faith in the trustworthiness of the myths passed down from the ancestors as Christians do in the myths recorded in the Bible. The Christian would ask the African: 'Where are the facts supporting your beliefs?' The African would answer: 'If by facts you mean that which is actual or real I show you the river. Can you deny there is a vital force there?'

The postulates of both worldviews would share the same judgement when put before the science of today. The world has elevated science to be the final authority of what is true. Since science denies the supernatural, science pronounces the postulates of the Christian and African worldviews to be false, thus giving them a commonality in public opinion they did not share two centuries ago.

## 5.3 Philosophical Elements Compared

The answers presented to the various philosophical questions based on each

worldview will be compared in this section. Some of the questions are two-part questions with the worldview answers conforming on one part and conflicting on the other. Some questions are broad requiring broad answers incorporating several aspects of belief. A comparison of the two worldview answers will show conformity in some aspects of belief and conflict in other aspects of belief in answering the same question. A compendium of those worldview beliefs deemed important in converting from ATR to Christianity will be presented in Chapter Six.

### 5.3.1 ONTOLOGY QUESTIONS

#### 5.3.1.1 Is there a Supreme Being, and, if so, what is it like?

Both the biblical worldview and the African worldview assume the eternal existence of a Supreme Being. This Being is called God and by various Hebrew names in Christianity, and God and by various tribal names in ATR. There is a conformity of belief in a Supreme Being.

As to the nature of this God there are some areas of conflict. In his book *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective* Wilbur O'Donovan (1996:42) states:

The physical creation does indeed reveal the existence of God and African traditional religions confirm this. However, based on what we can see or hear or touch, we can know very little about what God is like. We know that he exists because we can see the evidence of his great power and wisdom in the world around us. We also see the evidence of his care for the things he has made, so we have an idea of his character. It is like finding the tracks of an animal in the bush. We may never see the animal, but from its tracks we know it had passed that way. From the size and shape of the tracks we may even get an idea about the size of the animal.

Who is this invisible God and what is he like? We can get a limited idea of what God is like by looking at nature. ...From the care he shows for his creation, such as providing rain, crops, and food, and by providing each kind of animal with a mate, we can see that God has a will, and emotions, and that he cares for the creatures he has made.

What can be known of God from looking at nature is called natural revelation and forms the limit of what Africans know about God. In the AWV many attributes are attributed to God by default. He cannot be seen so he must be spirit. He created

and sustains the earth so he must be all-powerful. He punishes when an evil act is performed so he must be all-knowing. In the BWV the attributes of God are self-revealed, being communicated verbally to the writers of the Bible and being confirmed by what is observed in nature.

Two attributes of God are central to the BWV and almost totally absent in the AWV. They are the attributes of love and holiness. About God's love Mbiti (1969:49) writes:

As for the love of God, there are practically no direct sayings that God loves. This is something reflected also in the daily lives of African peoples, in which it is rare to hear people talking about love. A person shows his love for another more through actions than through words. So, in the same way, people experience the love of God in concrete acts and blessings; and they assume that He loves them otherwise He would not have created them.

O'Donovan (1996:60) states: 'Although Africans do not traditionally speak about the love of God, they are aware of his goodness in providing rain, crops, children and their physical needs.' In describing the characteristics of the Supreme Being in ATR Gehman (2005:320) does not list love as one of them. The closest he comes is God being kind, merciful, and good because he provides for them. God's love is an abstract quality at best in the AWV. However, in the BWV God's love is something that can be experienced (2 Cor 13:14) and is revealed to be the motivation of his self-sacrificial and salvific dealing with mankind (Jn 3:16). The BWV holds God to be the personification of love (1 John 4:16).

As to the holiness of God in the AWV Mbiti (1970:41) writes: 'I have not come across direct references to the holiness of God. The concept is present among many African peoples, but one arrives at it by inference.' Gehman (2005:320) agrees: 'Little is said directly in ATR about the holiness of God. By inference we conclude that God is holy, both in the sense that he is separate from his creatures and he is separate from wrong doing.' O'Donovan (1996:65) clarifies the African view: 'In

traditional African beliefs, there is usually an unspoken awareness of the sinless perfection of God.... However, even though God is understood to be pure and without fault, sin is not generally understood among African peoples to be an offense against God's holiness. Instead, sin is thought to be behaviour which brings shame or defilement to the community.' But in the BWV God declares himself to be holy (Lv 11:44) and is declared by his worshippers to be holy (Is 6:3, Rv 4:8). The biblical view of God's holiness is given by (O'Donovan 1996:65):

Referring to God, holiness has to do with his character. He is perfect, faultless, pure, and free from all defilement by sin. The prophet Habakkuk said about God, 'Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong' (Hab. 1:13)....

In one sense God's holiness is his most basic attribute. Most, if not all, of his other moral attributes are related to his holiness. Because God is holy, he is good. Because he is holy, he is compassionate. Because he is holy, he is kind and loving. Because he is holy, he is just. Because he is holy, he has great wrath against sin. Because he is holy, he is faithful to his people.

The AWW assumes God to be holy because he is set apart and he commits no sin. The idea that he cannot even look upon sin is absent. In the African view an evil act is not sin until it is made public in the community. The fact that God saw the act and still sees the perpetrator is not an issue in the concept of God's holiness nor is it seen as an offence against God himself. In the BWV an evil act is an abomination in God's eyes and causes spiritual separation between God and the perpetrator, regardless of who knows about it.

Another problem area between the two worldviews comes to light in the ontological nature of God's being. The BWV presents God as a tri-personal being revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in his dealings with mankind, but coequally and coeternally metaphysically one God. Because God is personal he is directly approachable on the personal level through verbal communication. The basic AWW

presents God as a transcendent spirit who is distant and approachable only through intermediaries.

#### 5.3.1.2 What is the origin and nature of man?

The BWV and the AWV see humanity coming into existence by a creative act of God. Both agree that man's body was created out of materials already existing and that God gave life to the material body by adding spirit or breath. There is conformity in the area of the origin of man.

Just as there is conflict in certain areas regarding the nature of the God who created man there is also conflict in certain areas regarding the nature of man as a creature. The BWV gives man a history of transition in nature while the AWV sees man today being as he was when first created. The BWV is that man was created in the image of God as perfect, but finite, in his attributes as opposed to God's being infinite. In the BWV the first man chose to disobey God and caused sin to enter into the nature of mankind and the universe resulting in every man that has been born the natural way being born with a nature bent toward sinning. The AWV sees man's nature as being morally neutral, not being bent toward doing good or evil. In the AWV man may commit acts that are deemed to be sinful, but that does not make him sinful by nature.

In the BWV man has a personality that continues to exist apart from the body for all eternity. In the AWV man has a personality that continues to exist only as long as there is someone alive that remembers him personally. After that he ceases to be a personality and joins the world of nameless spirits.

#### 5.3.1.3 What is reality and what is ultimate reality?

The BWV holds that God created an objective universe that can be perceived by personal beings. That objective universe consists of physical and spiritual realms

displaying a unity of purpose and diversity in existence. Man's perception of the universe can be measured by what is revealed by God in the Bible and by what is experienced. In the BWV reality exists whether or not man is there to perceive it. The BWV sees physical objects as being animate and inanimate with spirits being able to inhabit only animate objects.

The AWW is that while there is an objective part to the universe consisting of physical and spiritual realms, there is also a part consisting of forces that permeate the universe. The existence of this vital force animates all objects in the AWW and all objects are beings and all beings are interrelated because the same force permeates all. In the AWW spirits can act benevolently or harmfully depending on the circumstances and spirits can inhabit both animate and inanimate objects. There are areas of conflict between the two worldview's view of reality in that the BWV does not hold to a vital force permeating and interrelating all the universe. It also does not hold the view that spirits can inhabit inanimate objects.

In the BWV God is the Uncaused Cause. He is being and everything else in the universe has being. In the AWW reality is being and being is force. Therefore, ultimate reality is the Supreme Being or Divine Force. The two worldviews are in conformity regarding their views of ultimate reality.

#### 5.3.1.4 What is truth?

This question reveals an area of conflict between the two worldviews. In the BWV truth has an ontological correspondent in reality. It holds to propositional truth based on the interrelated consistency of statements and their correspondence with the facts of reality. It also holds that truth is the facts of reality themselves – ontological truth. Stated simply, truth is the communication of facts and it is also the facts

communicated. This view of truth gives rise to the belief in Jesus Christ being the communication of truth (Logos) and also the personification of truth (Jn 14:6).

The AWV does not hold to a propositional or ontological view of truth. Its view of truth is stated as what is already known or believed or what brings about a better human situation. Truth is relative to the situation. In the AWV truth is not absolute which conflicts with the BWV of truth being absolute.

### 5.3.2 COSMOLOGY QUESTIONS

#### 5.3.2.1 What is the origin and nature of the universe?

As to the origin of the universe there is complete conformity between the BWV and AWV with both holding the view that God created the universe out of nothing. The BWV adds the detail that God spoke everything into existence in its final form while the AWV holds that God first created matter and then formed the matter into the various forms found in the universe.

Beliefs regarding the nature of the universe show areas of conformity and conflict between the two worldviews. Both worldviews hold that there is order built into the universe in the form of natural laws with the AWV adding the belief that some human customs were also built into the universe by God. Both worldviews hold that the universe consists of three levels or areas where beings can exist. The BWV calls them heaven, earth and hell. The AWV calls them heaven (or sky), earth and the underworld. There is conformity in these areas.

The BWV says that the present state of the universe, with earthquakes, typhoons, floods, drought, disease and famine, is not the way the universe was created. Everything was created perfect and the natural evils that exist today came about only when the first man sinned. The curse of sin affected man and his environment, the universe. The AWV holds that the present state of the universe is the

way it was created. The natural evils that happen are caused by God as punishment or by some malevolent spirit. The AWV does not recognize the effects of sin in the universe. There is conflict between the two worldviews in this area.

Another area of conflict between the two worldviews involves beliefs about the spiritual realm of the universe. The BWV holds that the universe is the place of a spiritual battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The kingdom of God consists of the good angels and the born again people on earth (Jn 3:3). The kingdom of Satan consists of the fallen angels and the rest of the people on earth. The two kingdoms have a conflict of values and destiny and are at war with each other. The AWV recognizes no such kingdoms and no such war. In the AWV every creature, whether spiritual, human, animal, plant or mineral has a life force and because of the common divine origin of that force shared by all, all are connected in a metaphysical way. In the AWV there is not war in the universe but harmony when everything is as it should be.

#### 5.3.2.2 What is God's relationship with the universe?

Both the BWV and AWV hold the view that God is transcendent and immanent in the universe. God is continuously and personally involved in the affairs of the universe as its Sustainer. Natural laws are descriptions of the regular way God works in his creation, but God can work contrary to natural laws if he so chooses. God is never the cause of evil in the universe but he does allow it to happen. God rules the universe as King and Judge. These views are shared by both worldviews and are in conformity.

The BWV holds that God exercises special providential care over these human beings that believe in him and are called his children. The AWV recognizes God's providential care as being equally provided to all human beings. There is also conflict



in the views of God's role as Judge. The BWV is that there will be a final judgement of all humanity at the end of time while the African view is that God rewards and punishes people temporally as life is lived.

#### 5.3.2.3 What is the meaning of time?

The meaning of time is an area of conflict between the two worldviews. The BWV sees time as a chronological succession of events. Time had a point of beginning in the past when the first part of the universe was created and in the BWV is omni-directional, flowing irreversible to a future of indeterminable length and to events that have not yet happened in time. The AWV sees time as a composition of events that have occurred or are about to occur in a very near future. Everything moves backward toward the past. The hope of the traditional African is that, in time, he will join the ancestors who live in the past. In the BWV time moves like an arrow shot forward. In the AWV time moves in a circle that is rolling backward.

#### 5.3.2.4 Do laws and causality govern the universe absolutely?

In the BWV natural laws reflect a cause/effect relationship and are descriptive of the regular way God works in the universe. God is not bound by natural laws. When God sets aside natural laws to accomplish something it is described as a miracle. Only God can set aside natural laws. In the BWV there are natural causes to bad events (recently in Freetown a strong wind blew over a big cotton tree with rotten roots and killed 27 people).

In the AWV natural laws can be set aside by God and by forces and powers in the universe. When natural laws are violated the principle of causality does govern absolutely and the cause must be found (in the above Freetown incident the survivors said: 'Sure the tree had rotten roots but why did the tree fall at this particular time and fall on these particular people. The cause must be found.' For some time after the

incident that tree was the scene of much religious activity as the real cause of the tragedy was sought).

Both worldviews agree that natural laws do not govern absolutely. Both also agree that God is the Uncaused Cause and everything else is governed by the principle of causality. There is conformity in these areas. The two worldviews conflict in their views on natural causes.

### 5.3.3 TELEOLOGY QUESTIONS

#### 5.3.3.1 Why do man and the universe exist and do they have a final end?

This is really a four-part question – Why does man exist? Why does the universe exist? What is man’s final end? What is the universe’s final end? It is only on the second question that the two worldviews are in conformity. Both the BWV and the AWW see the universe as existing to give man a place to exist. That was the purpose for which God created it.

The two worldviews are in conflict in their beliefs about why man exists. In the BWV man was created to be the object of God’s love and a source of love for God. Human life is to be centred on God. In the AWW man exists to provide continuation of and harmony between the life forces in the universe. Human life is centred on the physical and spiritual world he lives in.

The final end of man is another area of conflict between these two worldviews. In the BWV the final end of man is not fixed. The relationship of each individual to God is determinative. As stated in the previous paragraph, man was created to be the object of God’s love and a source of love for God. The BWV holds that man’s response to God’s love (as shown by the Gospel) will determine his final end. Those who choose to love God and show that love by obeying his commands will retain their personalities and spend eternity with God. Those who choose to reject

God's love and disregard him in their lives will retain their personalities and spend eternity in a place of eternal torment. This view of man's final end is held to be universal in that it applies to all humans that have ever lived. In the AWV man's final end is fixed from the beginning. Man dies and his spirit retains his personality as it joins the ancestors, the living-dead. Man's personality survives as long as there is someone alive that remembers him personally. After several generations, when there is no one alive that remembers the deceased, he becomes a spirit without personal identity living in the spirit world. In the AWV this view does not have universal applications but applies only to those born into ATR.

There is also conflict in how the two worldviews understand the final end of the universe. The BWV holds that at some point in the future Jesus Christ will return to earth and all creation will be regenerated, or restored to the condition of original creation. This regenerated earth will be the dwelling place of man for a time certain. In contrast to that view, the AWV holds that there will be no divine intervention to regenerate the earth and that the universe will remain the same as it is now throughout all eternity.

#### 5.3.3.2 Does evil have a purpose?

In the BWV man's sin nature is the reason he commits evil acts and the curse of sin brought disruption to the perfect order of the universe resulting in natural disaster (earthquakes, floods, etc) or what is called natural evil. Evil is a given in a fallen world. Because it is a fallen world innocent people suffer. The BWV holds that God can use natural evil as a means by which he can bring some purpose to pass, but God does not will evil to happen for that purpose. The AWV does not see evil as a given in a fallen world. It does not recognize a sin nature in individuals or the curse of

sin on the world. In the AWV natural evil is seen as punishment for some act or acts, by individuals or groups, that disrupt the harmony of the life forces in the universe.

Moral evil is that which is committed intentionally by man. Again, in the BWV God can use moral evil to serve a purpose even though he did not will it or want it to happen. God is a God of justice and his justice is manifested when evil acts are punished. God is also a God of mercy and his mercy is made manifest when evil acts are forgiven. Moral evil in the BWV is disobedience to God's commandments regardless of the immediate consequences. Moral evil in the AWV is understood in terms of harmful or negative effects or consequences resulting from an otherwise neutral act. Acts are considered evil only if they bring bad consequences. Those acts will be punished by God or some other being. Therefore, when bad things happen to some person or group it is assumed that it was deserved. In the AWV evil does not fall on innocent people. These two worldviews conflict in the area of natural and moral evil.

#### 5.3.4 ETHICS/MORALITY QUESTIONS

##### 5.3.4.1 Who or what determines what is moral and immoral?

The BWV holds that there are objective moral values and standards which apply to all men everywhere. God's word, the Bible, is the source of those objective moral values. Every person is accountable to God for the moral choices he makes. Because God is just, rewards and punishment for obeying or disobeying his standards will be exactly as each person deserves. When there is a conflict between the laws of human authority and God's commands as recorded in the Bible, God's commands are to be obeyed.

In the AWV God is considered to be the source of moral values on the assumption that he has communicated them to the ancestors. Moral values are

embedded in the traditions received from the ancestors. Moral values have a personal and a social dimension. When an individual commits an act that is harmful to society he has committed an immoral act. What is good for society determines what is moral. Ancestors are the moral policemen meting out reward and punishment for acts committed. Tradition supplies the moral code and determines what the people must do to live ethically.

This question about morals reveals several areas of conflict between the two worldviews. As to the source of moral values the BWV looks to the Bible while the AWV looks to the tradition of the elders. As the standard of what is moral the BWV looks to the Bible while the AWV looks to what is good for society. Where there is conflict between civil laws and the worldview's source of moral values the BWV calls for obedience to the Bible while the AWV calls for obeying the dictates of tradition.

#### 5.3.4.2 How do we know what is right?

The BWV holds that man can know what is right because God has revealed it to him by two different methods. The first is by his special revelation recorded in the Bible. For those who do not read or believe the Bible God has put a general revelation of what is right into man's nature. As a result of being made in the image of God, man, even though fallen and unregenerate, has enough of God's nature in him to know right and wrong even though he does not have the will to do what is right. Man has a conscience to inform him when he has done wrong.

In the AWV anything that disrupts the peace and harmony in the community is considered not right. Anything that does not disrupt the peace and harmony in the community is considered right. Right is determined by consequences. An act is right until it produces anti-social consequences. In the words of Mbiti (1969:278): 'To

sleep with someone else's wife is not considered "evil" if these two are not found out by the society which forbids it.' That is in direct conflict with the BWV that believes in an absolute objective standard of right and wrong based on God's commands recorded in the Bible. The BWV holds that to sleep with someone else's wife is not right regardless of who knows about it. What is right is not determined by consequences in the BWV. This question reveals an area of conflict between the two worldviews.

### 5.3.5 AESTHETICS QUESTIONS

#### 5.3.5.1 What is man's relationship with the natural environment?

Man's relationship with the natural environment reveals another area of conflict between the two worldviews. The BWV holds that God gave man the task of ruling over the other living creatures and the ability to creatively reconstruct his environment for his own useful purposes. Man was created in a different mode from the rest of creation, and being created in the image of God, is the highest in the order of creation. Man can control his natural environment rather than be controlled by it. In the BWV spirits exist as part of man's environment but they do not reside in inanimate natural objects.

In the AWW spirits or vital force resides in all natural phenomena from humans to rocks. Therefore, everything is considered of equal status. Not only are deities the objects of rituals and sacrifices, but so are rivers and forests and mountains. Whereas one holding the BWV would think he could outsmart fish with bait and hook, one holding the AWW would sacrifice to the lake trying to entice the lake to give up fish in exchange for the sacrifice received. One holding the AWW sees the natural environment in terms of himself and seeks to live in harmony with it.

### 5.3.5.2 Is there aesthetic value to religious experience?

Experiencing God is considered to be a beautiful experience in the BWV. God is expressed as having beauty and as creating beautiful things. The terms man uses to express his experience of God (majestic, awesome, wonder, beautiful) are terms used to describe other objects of aesthetic value. One holding the BWV seeks religious experience because he wants to, not because he has to. He wants to because of its aesthetic value. Music is used to express the aesthetic value of God. God's handiwork can be seen in the beauty of nature and the awesomeness of a high mountain, a deep valley or a colourful sunset and invokes aesthetic feelings. There is aesthetic value to religious experience for those holding the BWV.

Likewise, religious experience and aesthetic experience are joined together for those holding the AWV. Since religion is an integral part of African life any aesthetic experience is seen as a religious experience. Rituals, ceremonies and festivals have religious meaning and are accompanied by the aesthetically pleasing experience of music, singing and dancing. There is definitely aesthetic value to religious experience for those holding the AWV making this an area of conformity with the BWV.

## 5.3.6 PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY QUESTIONS

### 5.3.6.1 What is the meaning of history?

In the BWV the Bible is a history book recording the history of God's dealing with humanity. It begins with the record of God dealing with humanity in general, then through his chosen people, the Jews, and finally through the Church. History is a record of cosmic and human events happening within God's eternal plan. In the BWV history has an ultimate goal - the establishment of the Kingdom of God. This was spiritually accomplished as an historic space-time event with the first coming of Jesus Christ, and will be physically accomplished in history with his second coming.

In the AWW history involves the compilation of people and events of the present and a past consisting of a few generations. God's working in history does not involve any sort of long-term plan but is seen only as God's working in the present to send rain, harvest, health, children, etc. In the AWW history is the stage on which life is acted out with no real meaning or goal. The meaning of history is an area of conflict between the BWV and the AWW.

#### 5.3.6.2 Is history cyclical or linear in progression?

The BWV holds that history is linear in progression moving forward and not backward. History had a definite beginning at an unknown time in the past. In the BWV history, as humans know it today, will be consummated with the events recorded in the last book of the Bible, Revelation. The progression of human history follows the path of creation>fall>redemption>glorification.

In the AWW there is no concept of history moving forward toward a future climax. History moves backward from the moment of intense experience (the present) to the period beyond which nothing can go. Since the future does not exist beyond a few months, things cannot be radically different in the future than they are now. History is made up of a cycle of known and repeated events in people's lives consisting of birth, initiation, marriage, bearing children, eldership, death, and ancestorship. These two worldviews conflict in how they understand history.

### 5.3.7 EPISTEMOLOGY QUESTIONS

#### 5.3.7.1 What can we know and how can we know it?

According to the BWV man cannot know everything because of his finite mind, but he can know all that he needs to know to live a life of godliness. We see particulars, and universals are formulated by man to give the particulars meaning. Science poses universal laws trying to explain the particulars. In the BWV God has



already explained the particulars in the Bible. God has informed man about himself and about history and the cosmos—not exhaustively, but truly—on the basis of propositional revelation. The BWV holds that the special revelation given in the Bible answers what we can know and how we can know it.

In the AWV traditional knowledge is passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth using myths, proverbs and wise sayings. Knowledge itself is embedded in the ethics and morals, values, customs, traditional laws and taboos which make up tribal tradition. Knowledge is deposited with the ancestors, chiefs, elders, medicine men and sorcerers. What can be known is what they know and it can be known by listening to them. What can be known and how it can be known is an area of conflict between the BWV and the AWV.

#### 5.3.7.2 What justifies a belief?

God's special revelation in the Bible justifies the beliefs making up the BWV for those who hold it. Jesus Christ is the focal point of God's special revelation and there is sufficient evidence to prove that what the Bible says about Jesus Christ is true. In the BWV God's testimony of the supernatural events concerning Jesus Christ justifies belief in all that God has said.

In the AWV the foundation of belief is the traditions of the ancestors. A belief is justified if it is shared by all others in the same traditional group. This again is another area of conflict between the two worldviews.

### 5.4 Religious Dimensions Compared

The religious dimensions of the biblical and African worldviews are vital to each as each is a worldview based upon religion. The biblical worldview is based on Christianity and the African worldview is based on African Traditional Religion. The

religious dimensions of the two worldviews, using the religions behind the worldviews, will be compared in this section.

#### 5.4.1 Experiential Dimension

Becoming a Christian requires an initial experience of transformation that represents a turning point in one's personal history. As part of that initial experience God's Holy Spirit comes to reside inside the Christian. One function of the indwelling Holy Spirit is to guide the Christian into an understanding of the truth of Scripture (Jn 16:13; 1 Cor 2:14) so that he can appropriate the beliefs necessary for a biblical worldview. Without this experience one cannot be a Christian or comprehend the full extent of the biblical worldview. The Christian experiences God as the awe-inspiring Wholly Other spiritually and physically through the senses. The common beliefs and the common initial experience allow the Christian to experience a oneness with fellow Christians that is not possible with non-Christians.

There is no conversion experience in ATR. The African is born into it and assimilates it as he grows. ATR is more practice than belief and since religion permeates African life, religion is experienced as life is lived. Africans associate God with many natural objects and phenomena but not with themselves. The experience of God is external and everywhere. In the AWW as life is lived, God is honoured.

The experiential dimensions of the religions behind the two worldviews are in conformity in their experience of God everywhere, but conflict in the areas of initial experience required and the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit in the individual.

#### 5.4.2 Mythic Dimension

Christians accept the mythic stories in the Bible and build their worldview upon them. Christian ontology and cosmology are based upon the epic myths of Genesis 1-11. Christian teleology and epistemology are based upon the belief in the

supernatural communication of the biblical stories to man. Christian ethics are based upon the biblical account of the sinless life of Christ. The biblical or Christian worldview is based on the stories in the Bible making the mythic dimension foundational.

Likewise, myths are the foundation of African traditional beliefs incorporated into ATR and the African worldview. Myths are used to transmit traditional beliefs from one generation to the next. In the AWV myths do not have to be taken literally as their purpose is to provide a working explanation for something. For the African, life has meaning because there is a myth to explain each part of it.

Although the myths are different, there is conformity in the use of myths in both worldviews. There is also conformity in the use of symbols to represent beliefs incorporated into their myths.

#### 5.4.3 Doctrinal Dimension

Doctrine and teaching are fundamental to the preservation and propagation of the BWV. What is recorded in the Bible represents the standard for sound doctrine. The recording of myths in written form has given rise to interpretation and commentary on what is recorded in the Bible. The teaching of doctrine has been an important part of Christianity with a great many Christian schools teaching the biblical worldview around the globe. Christian doctrine has been formulated into creeds and confessions expounding the BWV.

There is conflict in the use of doctrine by the religions behind the two worldviews. In ATR there are no summaries of doctrines or written expositions of spiritual experience. There are no formal creeds or confessions. ATR is a lived religion, not a doctrinal one.

#### 5.4.4 Ethical Dimension

Christian ethics is based upon the commands of God and the teachings and example of Jesus as they are recorded in the Bible. The Bible teaches that ethics is a matter of the heart intent so that just the desire to commit an unethical act makes one guilty as if the act was actually committed. Every act of the Christian is to be motivated by love. In the BWV a coming righteous judgement of God provides incentive for good, ethical and moral behaviour. Every unethical act is viewed as a sin against God.

In ATR ethics is based upon outcome. All principles of morality and ethics are sought within the context of preserving human life and its power or force. Doing the acts that sustain life and avoiding the acts that destroy or diminish life are the foundations of the ethical dimension of ATR. Anything that breaks the peace and harmony in society is unethical.

The religions behind these two worldviews are in conflict in their ethical dimensions. In Christianity unethical behaviour toward your neighbour is a sin against God. In ATR unethical behaviour toward your neighbour is a sin against society.

#### 5.4.5 Ritual Dimension

In Christianity rituals are designed to communicate feelings and beliefs reflective of what God has done for humanity through Jesus Christ. Sacrifice is recognized as a ritual in most religions and the sacrifice of Christ has two ritual dimensions for the Christian. Christians are to emulate Christ by offering their lives to God as living sacrifices, and Christians are to partake of Communion or the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. Prayer is another ritual act acknowledging dependence upon God. Rites of passage are celebrated in Christianity as ritual acts.

The most public and most prescribed of the acts of worship in ATR are the rituals. Since man is the centre of the universe, the rituals occur within the context of human needs, wants, anxieties, etc. Therefore, the primary purpose of ritual acts of worship is not God but the well-being of the person or community. Religious rituals are performed as individuals, families and communities pass through the cycles of life. Rituals provide familiarity, continuity and unity among those who perform or attend them. Sacrifice, offerings and prayers are a usual part of ritual observance in ATR.

Though the religions behind both of these worldviews have a ritual dimension, they are in conflict in the area of the purpose behind the rituals. In Christianity the purpose is remembrance of God, dedication to God and submission to God. In ATR the purpose is to foster the well-being of the individual or community.

#### 5.4.6 Social Dimension

Converts to Christianity encounter more problems in the social dimension than any other areas of their lives. Christianity redefines family. Love for Christ should be so strong that love for earthly family would seem like hate. The spiritual bond with other Christians is stronger than the blood bond of earthly families. The Christian is to give preference to those of the family of God over one's blood family or tribe. Accepting Christianity puts one in a new family whose members all have the same Heavenly Father, God.

ATR is defined by its social group. It is not primarily for the individual but for the community which demands absolute loyalty. ATR is lived out as the individual abstains from doing anything to harm social relationship or relationships with the natural order of things. To change religions is to lose your identity. To cease practicing ATR is to cease being an African.

The two religions have a conflict of beliefs regarding the social dimension. Christianity binds the individual to Christ, redefines the social group and gives a new identity in a new family. ATR binds the individual to the social group of family and clan with blood relations being of the highest order.

#### 5.5 Relationship of Christianity to ATR

The fundamental beliefs of the biblical worldview and the African worldview have been compared in this chapter along with the religious elements involved with those worldviews. The focus of this thesis is those who have moved from ATR to Christianity with a concern that many have accepted a new religion without discarding old beliefs resulting in less than true conversion. The worldviews of the two religions conform in sufficient areas to make the transition from ATR to Christianity relatively easy if some basic beliefs of ATR can be merged with Christianity. The extent that this can be done without resulting in syncretism will be addressed in the next chapter. The remainder of this chapter will offer three categories of relationship historically taken by Christianity toward ATR.

I am indebted to Dr. Richard Gehman and the Epilogue to his book *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective, Revised Edition* for much of the content of this section. The three categories or approaches taken by Christianity in relating to ATR are given by Dr. Gehman (2005:396-399) as continuity, discontinuity, and continuity/discontinuity.

##### 5.5.1 Continuity

‘By *continuity* we mean the belief that all religions contain divine revelation and are a means of salvation, though Christianity may be recognized as “final” and “superior”. The relationship between ATR and Christianity is that of imperfect-perfect, ordinary-extraordinary, preparation-fulfilment’ (Gehman 2005:396). The idea here is that seeds

of salvific beliefs can begin in ATR and can continue to develop into the full fruit of Biblical salvation in Christianity. This approach to other religions did not come into prominence until the Age of Reason (circa 18<sup>th</sup> century) which corresponded to the approximate time Christian missionaries came in force to Africa. Philosophers began teaching an evolutionary development of religion beginning with animism, to polytheism and then to monotheism (Smart 1983:14). Liberal theologians gave up the biblical teaching of the uniqueness of Christ and began teaching that all religions contained a measure of truth giving all religions an underlying unity. This attitude has been adopted by a number of prominent African theologians. Gehman (2005:37) quotes Emmanuel Twesigye, Karl Rahner, Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, and J.N.K. Mugambi. Of Mugambi, Gehman (2005:398) writes:

J.N.K. Mugambi, professor in the University of Nairobi, laments the ‘superiority’ of Christian missionaries who preach that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ. The solution to conflict between ATR and Christianity is “the abandoning of this attitude of superiority. People of all cultures and all religions ought to be willing to accept that they do not have a monopoly of truth.”

Gehman points out that the problem with these viewpoints, from the Christian perspective, is that they are not faithful to the Scripture. These African theologians are letting the cultural situation dictate the reading of Scripture and their assessment of it instead of letting Scripture judge culture.

### 5.5.2 Discontinuity

‘By *discontinuity* we refer to the belief that a near total disconnect prevails between ATR and Christianity; that salvation cannot be found in ATR, but only through Jesus Christ’ (Gehman 2005:398). Karl Barth was a modern exponent of discontinuity. In *Christianity and Other Religions*, edited by John Hicks and Brian Hebbelthwaite, Barth contributed an essay titled ‘The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion’ in which he denounced all religions as worthless. He saw religion as man seeking God

which was unnecessary because God, in his grace, has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. This was the approach taken by many early Western trained missionaries. Referring to Kwame Bediako, Gehman (2005:399) writes: ‘Bediako echoes the consensus of many scholars today: “Western missionaries failed to see ‘much continuity in relationship’ between Africa’s pre-Christian traditional religious heritage and Christianity. They did not see it as ‘preparation of the Gospel’, but instead, emphasized *discontinuity*.”’ A better approach to ATR is needed.

### 5.5.3 Continuity/Discontinuity

It is Gehman’s opinion that discontinuity does not represent the viewpoint of Christianity. He posits a dialectical approach to ATR recognizing that in certain respects there is a radical *discontinuity* with ATR and in other respects there is remarkable *continuity* with ATR’ (Gehman 2005:399). Neither is total as shown by the areas of conflict and conformity previously presented in this chapter.

### 5.5.4 Points of Continuity

Gehman (2005:399) gives three points of continuity between ATR and Christianity.

(1) *Christian faith is a fulfilment of the African’s desires.* He writes: ‘Because of human nature, man has an inner hunger and thirst that cannot be met apart from a personal faith and trust in God through Christ.’ Quoting Kato, Gehman writes: ‘Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament and of the deep spiritual needs of the human hearts, not the fulfilment of African traditional religion or any other non-Christian religion.’

(2) *African culture manifests a continuity with many elements of Hebrew culture.* The similarities in cultural practices and religious beliefs should appeal to Africans. The Hebrew religion and culture included rituals, taboos, sacrifices, spirit



possession, polygamy, bride price and many other elements that Africans can identify with.

(3) *ATR provides valuable points of contact.* All of the areas of conformity between the BWV and the AWW provide points of contact between the two religions behind the worldviews. Belief in a Supreme Being and life after death is bridge enough between them to form a meaningful dialogue.

#### 5.5.5 Points of Discontinuity

Four points of discontinuity are suggested by Gehman (2005:400):

(1) *ATR does not lead people to Jesus Christ.* In Christianity, the purpose of the incarnation of Jesus Christ was to save people from their sins. ATR does not recognize the need for salvation from sin.

(2) *ATR represents degeneration from true faith, not a development that leads to true faith.* The Biblical support for this is found in Romans 1:18-32. Byang Kato (1985:32) illustrates this point:

The various ethnic African groups have their traditional religions as an answer to the reality of their existence. The primary question being raised today is that of the nature of these religions in relation to Christianity. The Apostle Paul categorically points out that the worship of pagan gods is a distortion of God's revelation in nature (Romans 1:18-23). Whatever rationalization we may try to make, the worship of gods in Africa is idolatry.

(3) *ATR differs radically from the Christian gospel in its teachings.* Gehman (2005:401) points out: 'The former is a man-centred religion, while the later is God-centred. Sin in ATR is against traditions of society and the ancestors, while sin in the Bible is rebellion against God and transgression of his law.' With the concept of sin being different, the view of salvation is different, thus differentiating the reason and manner God deals with humanity.

(4) *Converts from ATR stress discontinuity, not continuity.* It was Dr. Gehman's experience and my own experience that those who truly made the transition

from ATR to Christianity felt like they had made a transition from darkness to light. Their home lives changed radically as relationships changed from being based on a hierarchical social order to being based on love.

The change from one religion to another is a life-changing event. Changing from ATR to Christianity brings changes in this life and the next. Identifying the areas of conflict and conformity in the worldviews of each religion and understanding the concepts of continuity and discontinuity will help one make the transition more definitive. The next chapter will address certain areas of belief and practice deemed necessary for one to hold in order to make the transition complete.

## CHAPTER SIX

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of the research in this work has been on the belief systems of Christianity and African Traditional Religion as defined in terms of their respective worldviews. Areas of conformity and conflict in beliefs have been identified pointing toward the thesis that where the African Christian's beliefs differ from the biblical worldview there is a failure in praxis rendering the Christian religion to be ineffectual in the lives of those Africans who claim to have converted to Christianity. While the conversion process is not the subject area of this work, some thoughts on the process of religious conversion may be beneficial.

#### 6.1 Religious Conversion

Psychologists have done intensive but inconclusive studies on the psychology of religious conversion. Most recognize its disruptive nature. Professor of Psychology Lewis Rambo (1998) writes: '...the issue of conversion is a very controversial topic, because quite often it does in fact disrupt people's lives. It does disrupt families....it is a disorientation, a disruption, and something that has caused a lot of complications in many people's lives.' The disorientation Rambo referred to makes people uncomfortable and for that reason many people will not consider religious conversion. Rambo goes on to state: 'When we step back a bit from the issue of what is a proper way of understanding conversion, we see that most people do not convert. At least the studies I've seen of sociologists in the United States and Europe show that most people remain in the religion into which they were born.' There is no reason to believe that what is true in the United States and Europe is not also true in Africa for all humans share the religious nature. The concern of this thesis is that even though 60% of sub-Saharan Africa has professed a conversion from ATR to Christianity,

many or even most of them are still orientated toward the traditional religion into which they were born. Christopher Ejizu (2006) writes: 'Religious conversion is such a complex and fluid matter. Particularly in Africa, with the tremendous resilience and adaptability of the indigenous religions, the persistence of vital beliefs among many converts to Christianity or Islam, it is extremely difficult to be categorical about the state of religious conversion of the majority of people.'

There is not agreement among psychologists and sociologists as to whether one's beliefs or behaviour is the first to change in religious conversion. Rambo (1998) writes:

Many social scientists are saying that, in many cases, it is belief that follows practice, and not practice that follows belief. There is always a debate about the sequence, but I think one could argue that, in many groups, learning to behave in certain ways, and to affiliate in certain ways, often takes priority over some sort of belief system. The belief system is often something that people acquire much later, at least in its more sophisticated terms.

Psychology Professor Henry Newton Malony (1998) takes the view of sociologists: 'Initially, let it be admitted that while we are primarily considering the issue of religious conversion, conversion is a more general term that applies to all changes that involve a transformation of opinions from one belief to another.'

Malony puts forth the Lofton and Stark problem-solving model and states: 'However, I am firmly convinced that the psychological sequence proposed in this model is foundational for religious conversion wherever it occurs.' He explains the model: 'Their two-fold sequence begins with the experience of disequilibrium, a personal strain and stress, and continues with contextualizing that experience within a group situation.'

Rambo (1998) brings up the issue of expectations: 'I begin with the assumption that conversion is what a group says it is....What does a particular group say conversion is? What are the expectations of people's experiences? What

behaviours or rituals must they enact?’ He continues: ‘One of the rather striking things we find is that expectations vary from group to group. Some groups expect the conversion process be largely cognitive and intellectual. In some groups, they expect it to be largely emotional and passionate. In others, it involves much more doing particular things, and acting the rituals.’

In this work Christianity is the target religion, so the expectations Christianity has on the sequence of belief and practice will be examined. Professor Donald Bloesch (2006) states: ‘Conversion is both an event and a process.... Again conversion is both personal and social. While it basically connotes a change in our relationship with God, it indicates at the same time an alternation in our attitudes toward our fellow human beings. Conversion is a spiritual event with far reaching social implications.’ The event Bloesch talked about begins with a change of belief and the process and social implications is how the change of beliefs shows in changes of behaviour and praxis. Dr. Brian Allison speaks of Christian conversion as a radical change of belief and behaviour. Allison (2000) cites a verse from the Christian Scriptures to illustrate his point: ‘...They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God’ (I Th 1:9b). He concludes: ‘And so, the actual demonstration and proof of the acceptance of, and belief in, the Gospel is a radical change of lifestyle, this, conversion- -a turning from idols to God.’

John Mbiti (1969:5) states the African view: ‘What people do is motivated by what they believe, and what they believe springs from what they do and experience. So then, belief and action in African traditional society cannot be separated: they belong to a single whole.’ It is also the position taken in this thesis that belief and action cannot be separated. Until belief and practice conform to Christian doctrine and praxis the conversion process from ATR to Christianity is not final and the potential

converts cannot yet be called Christians. The idea here is not perfection in Christian praxis, but the revelatory nature of behaviour in times of crisis signifying the ultimate and final controlling beliefs. As stated previously in this work, in times of crisis many converts to Christianity revert to ATR for relief signifying they do not believe in the promises and power of Christianity for greater relief. Belief ultimately determines practice.

## 6.2 Paths of Divergence in Worldview Beliefs

Beginning with conformity of belief in a Supreme Being, God, and in this God being the origin of man and the universe by his creative acts, the worldviews of Christianity and ATR diverge with conflicting beliefs in many areas. The paths of divergence are seen as follows.

### 6.2.1 GOD IN RELATION TO MAN AND THE UNIVERSE

#### 6.2.1.1 Attributes of God

Both worldviews hold to the existence of God as a common starting point and both worldviews see many of God's attributes as being the same. The BWV sees God as a personal being which communicates to man and who can be known on a personal level by man. What man can sense the most about God is his love and his holiness. When man is in right relationship with God, his love is the dominant perception. When, because of sin, man is not in right relationship with God, his holiness is the dominant perception making man feel unworthy or ashamed. In the AWV God is remote and cannot be known as a personal being. He is perceived as being good because he has provided life and everything needed to live it, but he is not perceived as being loving. God is perceived as being holy in the technical sense of 'set apart for divine service' but not in the sense of being unable to tolerate anything morally impure. The Christian convert should see God as loving and holy in the biblical sense.

### 6.2.1.2 God as Father

John Mbiti (1969:62) writes: ‘We have already mentioned that African ontology is firmly anthropocentric; and thus makes man look at God and nature from the point of his relationship with them. We find, therefore, many expressions which attribute human nature to God.’ Mbiti is saying that since the source of ATR is African, the God of ATR reflects the image of African man. This is most evident in the way ATR views God as a father to Africans. Mbiti (1969:63) states: ‘Many visualize God as Father, both in terms of His position as the universal Creator and provider and in the sense of His personal availability to them in time of need.’ This reflects the African child’s view of his father. His father created him and provides for him and if the child needs help he can go to his father. Otherwise the mother and siblings do the interacting with the child. As long as the child’s needs are met and he does not have any major problems, he has no interaction with his father. In Mbiti’s book *Concepts of God in Africa* he does not even mention the fatherhood of God. Magesa (1997:45) mentions other relations attributed to God besides Father, as Mother, Grandparent, Elder and Great Ancestor. These reflect the African view of the hierarchy of authority and power with the elders or ancestors having more authority over a child than the father does (Mbiti 1969:268). The BWV sets God in authority over the father with the father having authority over the child. The result being the child’s relationship to his father is the most important in his life and it sets the model for the Christian relationship with God. He is pictured in the Bible as the Christian’s Heavenly Father. In addressing his followers, Jesus stated that if earthly fathers, ‘though being evil, give good gifts to their children, how much more will your father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him’ (Mt 7:11). God is described as a father to the fatherless (Ps 68:5). That Christians are called the children of God is a

sign of God's great love (I Jn 3:1). In the BWV man that is rightly related to God is able to know him not only as his creator but also as his kind, loving Father. Christian converts should hold that view.

#### 6.2.1.3 Evil

The existence of evil in a universe created by a good God gives rise to what the philosophy of religion calls 'theodicy' or the problem of evil. Clark et al (2004:93) states; 'The so-called "problem of evil" is stated as follows: If God is perfectly good and omnipotent, how can it be that evil exists? If God is good he should *want* to prevent evil. If God is omnipotent, he would be *able* to do so. If God is both of these things then why is there evil?' In the AWW evil comes about as God's punishment for some act by an individual or the community (Mbiti 1969:270). There is no belief in natural evil. Events such as floods, epidemics or wars are generally seen as the activity of God or other spirit beings (Mbiti 1969:57). In the BWV evil is a result of man's disobedience to God (sin) resulting in a degeneration in the nature of man and the created universe (Gn 3:14-19). Natural evil happens because created things atrophy and malfunction or collapse. Moral evil happens because unregenerate man is evil by nature and is incapable of not doing evil. However, in the BWV God can cause all evil acts to work for good to his children (Rm 8:28). The Christian convert should hold the view that evil may not have a supernatural cause and that even though it is bad, evil can serve a good purpose.

#### 6.2.1.4 God's relationship to the universe

God's continuing relationship to the universe is called divine providence. One of the most fundamental African beliefs about God is that he supplies the needs of his creatures (Mbiti 1969:53). Mbiti goes on to state: 'His providence functions entirely independently of man....' In the AWW God's providential care of his creatures is



shown through the provision of sunshine, rain, fertility, health and plenty for humans, animals and fields (Mbiti 1970:57-59). This is what Reese (1980:465) calls general providence which occurs through the fixed laws of nature. Reese adds: 'Christianity added to general providence the idea of special providence specifically related to each individual being.' The BWV adds to the AWW the idea of God's providence governing the personal events of one's life as well as the things that happen in nature. Moreland and Craig (2003:56) state: 'The biblical worldview involves a very strong conception of divine sovereignty over the world and human affairs, even as it presupposes human freedom and responsibility.' Providence comes from the Latin *providere* (to foresee) and the corresponding Greek word is *pronoia* (forethought). Forethought indicates an end result desired and foresight indicates a plan for attaining that end. The BWV holds that everything that happens to an individual is God's providence in governing the affairs of one's life to accomplish God's purpose and plan for that life. That should be the view of the Christian convert.

## 6.2.2 MAN IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD AND THE UNIVERSE

### 6.2.2.1 Nature of man

(1) Ontological nature. Both the BWV and the AWW hold that man has a material and immaterial part to his being. The material part is his physical body. The immaterial part is made up of his spirit and/or soul. In the AWW the spirit (also called soul) of man represents the vital or life force animating the physical body. Man has no control over it. In the BWV the immaterial part of man is comprised of spirit, understood as the breath of life, and soul, understood as the mind, will and emotions or what gives man his personality. Mind, will and emotions are things that man can control, giving rise to his moral nature.

(2) Moral nature. In the BWV man can control his mind, will, and emotions meaning that he can know what is right and moral and will to do it. Man is morally responsible. Because of the sin of the first man, the BWV holds that all of his progeny have a nature bent toward immorality. In the AWV the moral nature of man is neutral. He can commit an immoral act but that does not make him immoral by nature.

The Christian convert needs to believe in the tri-partite nature of man and that he has responsibility for his own soul. He also needs to understand that man is born with a sin nature which separates him from God until that nature is changed.

#### 6.2.2.2 Man's relationship to God

(1) God as Father of man.

It was stated previously that God relates to man as a father. In the BWV that relationship is reciprocal as man relates to God as his Father. God is seen as a personal source of provision, security and love. Man can know God as Father because of the intimate spiritual relationship (Rm 8:15-16) and because of the sense of self-worth man receives from the relationship. In the BWV man's worth was shown in God's sacrifice to save him from eternal separation from him. The BWV has the lowest and highest view of man, seeing him as a reprobate sinner separated from God but even in that condition worth more than God's own Son who was sacrificed for man's sins. The AWV holds 'that God is the Father of all people, and that all people are his children because God is the creator of mankind' (O'Donovan 1996:152). The traditional African relates to God more as Creator than as Father, putting the relationship on a more impersonal level.

(2) Approaching God.

A. Worship. Both the BWV and the AWV hold that God is to be worshipped. In the BWV God is to be worshipped because of who he is and for what he has

already done in saving man from eternal damnation. The biblical view of worship is bowing before a holy God asking nothing in return. In ATR worship is usually mixed with prayers of petition and sacrifices offered to ancestral spirits (Gehman 2005:321).

B. Sacrifice. In the BWV the sacrifices of animals required by God before the Atonement of Christ are no longer needed. Christians are to present themselves to God as living sacrifices (Rm 12:1), living to please God rather than themselves. In the AWV sacrifices to God are still needed in order 'to restore the balance in nature that has been upset through the displeasure of the spirit beings' (Gehman (2005:322). In the BWV God is to be approached with nothing but a humble heart submitted to him. In the AWV God is to be approached with a material offering with the hopes of getting something in return.

C. Intermediaries. In the BWV Jesus Christ, who himself is God, is the only mediator between God and man (I Tm 2:5). The Bible depicts him as sitting at the right hand of God making intercession for Christians (Rm 8:34). The BWV holds that God has given Christians the authority to approach him directly (Heb 4:16) because of their relationship to Jesus Christ. According to Sawyerr (1970:6), in the AWV, approaching God is modelled after the African communal system. Sawyerr (1970:7) explains:

In relation to this, we have to bear in mind that, in African community, there is a clear practice of rule by kings or chiefs, and that these chiefs are not easily approachable and are therefore only reached through intermediaries. For all practical purposes, the chief is distant from ordinary men. He is addressed only through the intermediary and, in turn, he addresses his petitioners only through the intermediaries. Even when the chief is present, a petitioner would request the intermediary to pass his plea to the chief... The chief is however, the one person to whom any of his subjects may run in times of danger and under whose protection they may find a safe sanctuary.

John Mbiti (1969:88) supports this view:

It is a widespread feeling among many African peoples that man should not, or cannot, approach God alone or directly, but that he must do so through the

mediation of special persons or other beings. The reason for this feeling and practice seems to derive mainly from the social and political life of the peoples concerned. For example, it is the custom among some societies for the children to speak to their fathers through their mothers or older brothers and sisters.

In the AWV, God is the chief and the ancestors perform the function of intermediary between God and man. Intermediaries are needed because of God's position in the universe and because of his remoteness from the people.

### 6.2.2.3 Man's relationship to the universe

Darrow Miller (2001:185) writes: 'Man is made in the image and likeness of God and is told to fill the earth and rule over it.' The biblical view and African views of man's relationship to the universe is expressed by Daniel Fountain (1996:324):

Two Hebrew words in Genesis 1:28, *radah* and *kabash*, are translated as "have dominion over" and "subdue" or "rule over." In other words, God told man to take charge of nature and control it....

But Genesis does not exist in tribal African tradition. Studying nature, taking charge of it, improving it, and preventing disasters are concepts absent in African culture. Taking charge of our environment is hard work, much too hard without a thorough conviction that it is important and possible. This conviction comes only from a transformation at the very centre of beliefs, values, and worldview, a paradigm shift from the African view of nature to the biblical one.

In the BWV man is to take dominion over nature. In the AWV man is to live in harmony with nature, not upsetting the way things are in nature if at all possible.

An African convert to Christianity needs to believe that God really is a loving Father directly approachable, requiring no sacrifice or the use of any intermediary. This God reached down to man through Jesus Christ and because of what Christ did, man can know God who loves him and wants to communicate to him on a personal level. The African convert also needs to see the created world as being here for the benefit of man; for man to use, but not abuse, as he lives on the earth.

## 6.2.3 THE UNIVERSE AND REALITY

### 6.2.3.1 Nature of the external world

Magesa (1997:39) states: ‘In the conception of African Religion, the universe is a composite of divine, spirit, human, animate and inanimate elements, hierarchically perceived, but directly related, and always interacting with each other.’ In the AWV all of these elements are infused with a vital force that must be acknowledged (Magesa 1997:7). The BWV does not hold to the existence of vital force in the external world.

The AWV holds to an interconnectedness of man with nature on a metaphysical level. Shorter (2002) explains:

African ethnic religions are typically “religions of nature”. That does not mean that they are “nature religions”, in which natural phenomena are objects of worship. It means that created nature offers both an explanation of the divine and at the same time the means of contact with divine reality. In African religion, the physical environment is not only sacred, but it is also an organic universe. In other words, nature is biologically continuous with humanity, and it connects human beings with the world of spirit.

The BWV does not hold to this organic connection in which nature is biologically continuous with humanity.

#### 6.2.3.2 Reality

The BWV sees reality as being objective though divided between the material and the immaterial. In creation there is a hierarchy of order beginning with God flowing downward to angels, man, and the rest of creation. In biblical ontology the spirit world consists of God’s Holy Spirit, good angels who obey God in ministering to humans, and fallen angels who rebelled against God and now obey Satan in attacking humans. In the BWV spirits can be around but not in inanimate objects. The AWV holds that the world is awash with spirits with all things having their own spirit dimension (Gehman 2005:214). These are spirits, as well as spirit beings such as the living-dead, the ancestor spirits. As far as rank, the ancestor spirits are the highest being able to make contact with God. The African convert to Christianity needs to

view the reality of the spirit world with the biblical worldview which holds that God created and controls all spirits so that man does not need to be afraid of them.

#### 6.2.3.3 How reality can be known

The BWV holds that reality can be known because God has revealed knowledge about it through his general or natural revelation and his special revelation as recorded in the Bible. One can perceive reality through the senses and then measure that perception against what God has revealed about it. In the AWW reality can be known by what is perceived and by what the tradition of the elders and ancestors says about it (Magesa 1997:273). In analyzing the ontology, epistemology, and ethics inherent in African proverbs, Gerald Wanjohi (1996) writes: 'By far the majority of Gikuyu proverbs on the origin of knowledge belong to empiricism. They emphasize experience as a condition for knowledge. Obviously, this is possible only through the senses....' The Christian convert needs to believe that man's senses are not perfect and man's ability to interpret what is perceived by the senses is imperfect and therefore, he needs to look to God as the only true source of knowledge about reality.

#### 6.2.3.4 Concept of time

The BWV holds that time is the chronological succession of events one experiences in life. The direction of time is one-dimensional, moving forward to other events that have not yet happened. The AWW holds that time is a rhythmic cycle of events moving backward carrying the individual toward the ultimate state of impersonal spirit. The Christian convert should view time as moving forward toward a glorious future as an eternal being.

#### 6.2.3.5 Meaning of history

In the BWV history tells of origins (Genesis 1-11) and origins reveal purpose.

Biblical history reveals the origin of man and the universe and answers the 'why' of man's existence. Beyond Genesis 11 biblical history records God's dealing with mankind in the process of generation>degeneration>regeneration, and the ultimate establishment of the kingdom of God. History has a beginning and an end. In the AWW history is the accumulation of remembered people and events. When no one is alive that remembers a person or event it disappears from history. History had a beginning but will not end. The Christian convert should view history as God's story of his dealing with mankind and recognize his own part in that story.

#### 6.2.4 REALITY AND MORALITY

##### 6.2.4.1 Basis of morality

In the BWV a proper view of morality flows from a proper view of reality. Biblical reality recognizes the existence of a holy, moral, and righteous God who created man and gave him moral rules to live by. These rules are recorded in the Bible and are regarded as absolute standards of morality. The reality of man's moral nature makes him accountable to God. Violating God's moral standard causes separation in man's relationship with God. In the AWW man's relationship with his community sets the moral standards. Peace and harmony in the community is the moral imperative. Anything that disrupts that is considered by the African to be immoral. Moral standards are not absolute but are determined by resultant consequences. African converts to Christianity need to see the reality of moral standards coming from God and not man or tradition, and the reality of his ultimate accountability to God based on those standards.

##### 6.2.4.2 Policing of morality

In the area of morals the BWV holds that God is not only the law giver (making acts of immorality to be against him), but he is also the law enforcer and

judge. All people will eventually appear before him to give an account (Rm 14:12).

The AWW holds that any immoral act is against the community or society and therefore ‘must be punished by the corporate community of both the living and the departed....’ (Mbiti 1969:268). The punishment deserved is determined by the ancestors and is either inflicted directly or communicated to the community leaders to be carried out. Converts to Christianity must see their accountability to God who can punish body and soul and obey him rather than seeing their accountability as being to their community which can only punish the body.

## 6.2.5 MORALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

### 6.2.5.1 Moral basis of relationships

In the AWW the moral basis of relationships is defined by peace and harmony in the community. To report a thief to the police would be wrong if the thief was someone important and his arrest would cause a problem in the community. Even the theft act itself is not immoral until it is made public and brings shame on the community. Someone can steal and lie about it and still remain moral until it is found out. For the African, relationships are the most important thing, but they are not based upon truth or trust. They are based upon culturally defined expectations of maintaining relationships. If telling the truth would mean a breach in relationships, whatever the truth is doesn’t matter, the sin would be in the telling of it. In the BWV man’s primary relationship is with God and man’s relationship with God is morally determined. Because God’s moral laws include how man is to relate to his fellowman, to violate one of his laws against another man is the same as violating it against God. To lie to your neighbour is just as immoral as lying to God. As Miller (2001:92) puts it: ‘All of man’s secondary relationships are defined in the context of this primary relationship with his creator.’ The African convert to Christianity needs to see his



moral responsibility to God as the basis of his relationships with other people, rather than looking to cultural expectations.

#### 6.2.5.2 Love in relationships

The concept of love in relationships is almost totally absent in Africa. Finding a book on ATR that even mentions love is a rare find. My observation from living in Africa is confirmed by Mbiti (1970:30):

In their daily lives, Africans do not talk much about love, and this is something perhaps too deep to be discussed in words. A person shows his love for another more through action than words. In the same way, it is rare to hear or find people talking about the love of God. They, however, assume that God loves them and shows his love through concrete acts and blessings. We do not have many examples in which people talk about the love of God.

Love in relation to God and to other people is assumed or imputed, but not acknowledged verbally by Africans, probably because it would be perceived as making one vulnerable to another. If love is not acknowledged why would it even be assumed in African relationships? The answer is found in the BWV concerning the nature of man. Wilbur O'Donovan (1996:56) states the biblical view: 'God provides for people in many different ways. Because he knows people's deepest emotional needs, he has made a general provision to meet those needs through marriage and family. Every human being in the world wants to be loved and appreciated by someone else.' If love is not professed, love will be assumed because love is needed. In the AWV love in relationships is not professed but assumed. In the BWV love is professed and celebrated as the basis of relationships. Love is God's nature (I Jn 4:8) and since man is made in the image of God the need to give and receive love is in man's nature. An African convert to Christianity needs to acknowledge the basis of love in relationships to God and man.

#### 6.2.5.3 Husband-Wife relationship

In the BWV no human relationship is as important as the marriage relationship

between husband and wife. O'Donovan mentioned above that God made provision to meet man's deepest needs through marriage and family. For the child those needs are to be met by the parents. For the adult those needs are to be met in the spouse.

O'Donovan (1996:56) writes: 'God is love (1 John 4:8) and he has given people the gift of love, communication, and emotional security in marriage.' Marriage is important because it meets deep human needs. God knew that, and established marriage as the first human institution. Soon after the first man was created a wife was created for him (Gn 2:18).

There is another reason the BWV holds that marriage is the most important human relationship. The BWV is the worldview of Christianity and in Christianity the marriage relationship between husband and wife is a human picture of the spiritual relationship between Jesus Christ and his Church. Ephesians 5:22-33 in the Christian Bible explains how and why the human relationship depicts that spiritual relationship. The wife represents the Church and the husband represents Christ. The duty of the wife is to submit to the husband (Eph. 5:22). The duty of the husband is to love his wife (Eph. 5:25): 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.' The Biblical view of marriage begins with the husband leaving his father and mother and cleaving to his wife (Gn 2:24) and that relationship being lived out as the wife submits to the husband and the husband gives himself sacrificially to the wife.

In the AWV marriage does not exist to meet the deepest human needs or to serve any religious purpose other than the religious implication of fertility. For the African, marriage is a function of utility and an obligation. The Theological Advisory Group (1994:11) writes: 'Without exception, marriage in Africa was considered normal, natural and fully expected.... Everyone was expected to marry after initiation

as his sacred duty to his family and clan in order to raise children and carry on his name and family.’ John Mbiti (1975a:98) describes the African view of marriage:

It is believed in many African societies that from the very beginning of human life, God commanded or taught people to get married and bear children. Therefore, marriage is looked upon as a sacred duty which every normal person must perform. Failure to do so means, in effect, stopping the flow of life through the individual, and hence, the diminishing of mankind upon the earth. Anything that deliberately goes towards the destruction or obstruction of human life is regarded as wicked and evil. Therefore, anybody who, under normal conditions, refuses to get married is committing a major offence in the eyes of society and people will be against him.

The way marriage partners are chosen reflects duty, as opposed to love, as being the motivation for marriage. Customs vary with some parents choosing a marriage partner for their child before it is born, other parents make the choice when the child is ready for marriage and some societies let the young people themselves decide who to marry (Mbiti 1975a:100). Whatever the custom, a choice must be made so that the marriage duty can be met. After they have married and produced children the marriage obligations are met and the obligation as parents takes prominence. The African convert to Christianity must view marriage as a sacred union with natural and supernatural manifestations. In the Christian marriage one’s spouse is the most important person and worthy of highest honour whether or not children are produced.

In examining the differing views of the BWV and AWV regarding morality and relationships another issue pertaining to the husband-wife relationship needs to be addressed. In the BWV the husband has a moral obligation (because God commanded it) to feed and care for his wife (Eph 4:28-29). The man is the one God commanded to work for his and his wife’s food. When man sinned, part of the curse pronounced by God was addressed directly to him: ‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the fields. By the sweat of your brow

you will eat your food until you return to the ground...' (Gn 3:17-19a). Because of his sin, the man was commanded to produce his own food from start to finish (before he sinned, he only had to pluck what he wanted to eat as it was already produced) and the production would be made very difficult for him. His sin brought corruption upon himself and creation as the ground would henceforth produce corrupt things.

According to the customs and traditions of the AWW the woman carries the responsibility to not only cook the food for her husband, but also to produce it. The woman has to deal with the thorns and thistles and produce food by the sweat of her brow. African men have, in effect, reversed the curse of Genesis 3 and have put it upon the woman. The African man that converts to Christianity needs to understand what has happened and assume his rightful place of provider for his wife and family.

#### 6.2.6 RELATIONSHIPS AND ETERNITY

The two worldviews under consideration continue to diverge along a path of morality in relationships to the connection between relationships and eternity. Both worldviews hold that how one meets his moral obligations in relationships while living determines one's state in eternity. They diverge in their beliefs about who one's moral obligation is to and what one's state in eternity will be.

##### 6.2.6.1 Relating to God

In the BWV one's relationship with God while living determines where he will spend eternity. One that is rightly related to God, or 'saved' at death, will spend eternity with God in heaven. One who is not rightly related to God at the time of death will spend eternity in hell, or eternal torment. Being rightly related to God is defined as believing the Christian Gospel. In the AWW one's relationship to God while living affects only his contemporary existence and has no eternal consequences. Worship,

sacrifice and offerings are given to God as petitions for things desired while living.

One's destiny is already fixed so that all the African needs God for is this life.

#### 6.2.6.2 Relating to man

The BWV holds that one's relationship with others is a reflection of one's relationship to God. If a person is rightly related to God, obeying his commands, he will treat others as he wants to be treated and he will love others as he loves himself (Mt 22:39). Beyond that, he will follow Christ's example and love others with a self-sacrificial love (Jn 13:34). He relates to people in this way because he is grateful for what God has done for him and not for some future benefit in this life or the next. In the AWW one's relationship with others has a bearing on how he will be remembered after his death and how he is remembered will determine how long he will exist in the Sasa period. The Sasa period is the duration of time after death that one lives in the memory of his progenies and exists as a living-dead, or ancestor. The African knows that how he treats others in this life will determine how he is remembered. If he is remembered well he will be spoken of well from one generation to the next and as long as he is remembered and spoken of his personality will continue to exist. The African convert to Christianity needs to see his relationship with God as being determinative for eternity and his relationship with God needs to be reflected in his relationships with others, which is not determinative for eternity.

#### 6.2.7 ETERNITY – WHERE?

Genesis 1-11 contains the genesis of the biblical worldview concerning life, death, and life after death for all humanity. Man's life is depicted as being a result of God's creative act (Gn 1:27) with man being created (male and female) in such a way that he can procreate after his own kind (Gn 1:28). Man being made in the image and likeness of God was created to live eternally with God. Death, always being a

possibility, became a reality when man sinned by disobeying God (Gn 2:17). Death is depicted as being spiritual (man's spirit separated from, or dead to, God's Spirit (Gn 3:8) and physical (Gn 3:19). Life after death is depicted in God's approaching man and providing a covering for his sin affecting reconciliation (Gn 3:9,21) and setting aside spiritual death, but not physical death (Gn 3:22). The seed for the Christian view of life after death is contained in the *Protevangelium* in Genesis 3:15. The customs and traditions passed down from the ancestors and elders are embedded in ATR and form the basis for the African view of life, death, and life after death.

#### 6.2.7.1 Death

In the BWV death is both spiritual and physical. Spiritual death means that man's spirit is not in communion with God's Spirit because of man's sin nature. The BWV holds that to be the state of everyone at birth. Physical death occurs when man's soul separates from the physical body because the mechanical part of the physical body has quit functioning. The BWV holds that as long as man's physical body is living, spiritual death is not a permanent condition. Man can choose to be reconciled to God spiritually by believing the Christian Gospel.

In the AWV death is a process that begins when the physical body stops functioning. Gehman (1999:4) writes: 'People in all African communities also believe that a human being is more than a physical body. There is a spiritual part of a person which continues to live on after the physical body dies.' While a person is living he has a vital force that animates him to fulfil his purpose of transmitting and maintaining life. Gehman goes on to state: 'A person dies when the vital force leaves the body.' In the African view, when one can no longer maintain or transmit life he is dead. Mbiti (1969:203) points out several paradoxes in the African view of death. The dead person is perceived as being cut off from humanity, and yet, 'there must be

continuing ties between the living and the departed.’ The grave is symbolic of the separation between the dead and the living but by turning it into a shrine it converts it into a place of contact between the two. Finally, Mbiti states: ‘Man has since accepted death as part of the natural rhythm of life; and yet, paradoxically, every human death is thought to have external causes, making it both natural and unnatural.’ Magesa (1997:156) states that death is perceived as a change of status (from lower to higher), marking entrance into a new and deeper relationship with living human beings and with the whole universe. Magesa (1997:157) concludes: ‘That is why “To join the ancestors at death, especially to become one of them, is the goal of...African peoples.”’ However, Gehman (2005:68) states: ‘More rituals are performed at death than during any other rite of passage. This is because death is a portent of extreme danger. All other transactions are within life; but death ushers a human being into the unseen world of the departed ancestors.’ The danger is present because death is perceived to always be caused by external forces. The danger gives rise to a fear of death. The African converting from ATR to Christianity should believe that the African’s ambivalent feelings toward death are not biblical. Death should be viewed in terms of a change in location of the spiritual personality from a physical body on earth to the spiritual presence of God (2 Cor 5:8) and not something to be feared (1 Cor 15:55).

#### 6.2.7.2 State of being in eternity

The BWV holds that after death the person remains in a conscious state of spiritual being, retaining their own personal identity throughout all eternity. Death may be felt in the form of physical pain in the body, but will not mark a metaphysical change in the personality of the person. The person will continue to exist forever. In the AWW ‘Death is recognized as the point when the spirit separates from the body....

The spirit is still distinguishable by more or less the same features as it had when the person lived' (Mbiti 1975a:118). However, in the African view this state where the spirit is distinguishable is not permanent for all eternity, but is only for the duration of time the person is part of the ancestors, or the living dead, after which time the spirit loses its personal distinction and joins the world of impersonal spirits. The African convert to Christianity should believe that after death his personal consciousness will exist for all eternity.

### 6.2.7.3 The living-dead

The BWV does not hold to a concept of the living-dead or ancestors, as believed in ATR and forbids consulting the dead (Dt 18:10-13). The beliefs held by the AWW are in opposition to the BWV. The term was coined by John Mbiti (1969:211) and it is best to let him describe what is meant:

For the majority of African peoples, the hereafter is only a continuation of life more or less as it is in its human form. This means that personalities are retained, social and political statuses are maintained, sex distinction is continued, human activities are reproduced in the hereafter, the wealth or poverty of the individual remains unchanged, and in many ways the hereafter is a carbon copy of the present life. Although the soul is separated from the body it is believed to retain most, if not all, of the physical-social characteristics of its human life. Once again we see that although death is a dissolution and separation, man does not accommodate this radical change; and African peoples both acknowledge and deny the disruption of death. A person dies and yet continues to live: he is a living-dead, and no other term can describe him better than that.

The belief in the living-dead, or ancestors, is dealt with by every writer on ATR. John Parratt (1996:52) writes: 'Probably the central feature of all African religion is the role of the ancestors. Ancestor veneration is a very important part of the total complex of African culture and may be regarded as the cement which holds African societies together.' While most African theologians would disagree with the use of the word 'veneration', all acknowledge the role of ancestors in African society. Jack Partain (1986) describes the role of ancestors: 'Deceased ancestors remain close



by, as part of the family, sharing meals and maintaining an interest in family affairs – just as before death. Yet they are thought to have advanced mystical power, which enables them to communicate easily with both the family and God. Thus they are considered indispensable intermediaries.’ Partain goes on to describe the authority attributed to the ancestors: ‘Moreover, the ancestors sanction society’s customs, norms and ethics. Without them, Africans are left without moral guidelines or motivation, and society is powerless to enforce ethics.’ When the last person who knew him dies, the living dead loses his personal identity and immortality and is now considered dead, as far as humans are concerned. This completes the dying process in the AWW (Mbiti 1969:213). The convert from ATR to Christianity must recognize the belief in the living-dead to be contrary to the BWV regarding life after death and renounce it.

#### 6.2.7.4 Reality of heaven and hell

In the BWV heaven and hell are real places of final destiny for the souls of human beings. In a physical sense heaven is described in the Bible as being upward from the earth (Gn 1:8, 11:4) and is designated as the dwelling place of God (Gn 28:17; Rv 12:7-8). In Christianity, the term heaven is used to represent the final abode of the saved, or the righteous, signifying those who died in right relationship with God. They will dwell with him forever. The biblical view of hell is of a place of eternal punishment for the unrighteous, or those who died not in right relationship with God (Mt 23:33). In the AWW heaven is considered to be the dwelling place of God and is believed to be above the earth, or in the sky (Mbiti 1969:67). There is no belief that humans could ever go there. The AWW holds no belief in hell or any such place like it. African converts to Christianity should embrace the concept of a final destiny in their worldview.

#### 6.2.7.5 Final judgement

The BWV holds to the concept of a final judgement which is understood to be the ultimate and lasting separation of good and evil at the terminus of human history. The exact time of the judgement has been set by God (Ac 17:31) but has not been revealed to mankind (Mt 24:36). The AWV does not include the concept of a final judgement. Mbiti (1969:210) writes: ‘The majority of African peoples do not expect any form of judgement or reward in the hereafter.’ African Christians must believe in and live this life with a view toward a final judgement.

#### 6.2.7.6 Eternity – where?

This question deals with whether or not one can now know for sure where they will spend eternity. In the BWV there is assurance of salvation from spending eternity in hell as punishment for sin and rebellion against God. Salvation from that destiny comes by believing, in faith, the Christian Gospel (Heb 10:22). One can know for sure that their final destiny is heaven rather than hell because God will give that assurance (Rm 8:16; 1 Jn 5:10). Since there is no belief in a heaven or a hell, the AWV holds that one’s eternity will be spent in the spirit world which is here on earth. ‘For the majority of peoples, however, the next world is in fact geographically “here,” being separated from this only by virtue of being invisible to human beings’ (Mbiti 1969:208). Death is seen as an ontological change from physical/spiritual to only spiritual but not a removal from the earth. Mbiti (1975a:116) gives a psychological basis for that belief: ‘As a whole these ideas paint the hereafter in features, colours and descriptions which are very much like those of the present life. This is to be expected since, if the hereafter was terribly different from the present life, people would find it disturbing to their imagination and would feel that they would become strangers in that world when they die. This would make them resent death more.’

Converts from ATR to Christianity need to know that they will spend eternity in a place far better than this life and that is assured because of their relationship to God through Christ.

### 6.3 Effects of Holding Both Worldviews on the Christian Church in Africa

Richard Gehman (2005:6) writes: ‘...a careful look at the African landscape reveals that the deep seated traditional worldview is held simultaneously by those who embrace either Christian or western thought.’ In writing about the ways African traditional religions and Christianity interact Lamin Sanneh (1983:242) states: ‘One underlying assumption in all these questions, is the continuing vitality of African religions both as influences in the ordinary perception of Christians and as a force in the organizational aspects of Christianity.’ Both Christianity and Islam seeking to win converts from ATR face this issue. Quoting Idowu, Gehman (2005:12) writes:

While, as we have said, every African may wish to be regarded as connected with one or the other of the two “fashionable” religions, most are at heart still attached to their own indigenous beliefs. It is now becoming clear to the most optimistic of Christian evangelists that the main problem of the church in Africa today is the divided loyalties of most of her members between Christianity with its Western categories and practices on the one hand, and the traditional religion on the other. It is well known that in strictly personal matters relating to the passage of life and the crises of life, African Traditional Religion is regarded as the final succour by most Africans.

Magesa (1997:7) calls this divided loyalty ‘the “duality” of African Christians’ way of life’ meaning they often seek their comfort in their traditional religious systems. This is echoed by Imasogie (1983:14): ‘The superficiality of the African Christian’s commitment is evidenced by the fact that when he is faced with problems and uncertainties he often reverts to traditional religious practices.’

As stated in Chapter One, the accepting of a new religion without discarding the beliefs of the old religious system is called syncretism. Kraft (1999:390) gave the affect of syncretism on Christianity: ‘the mixing of Christian assumptions with those

worldview assumptions that are incompatible with Christianity so that the result is not biblical Christianity.’ Syncretism is seen to be a driving force in African religion and culture as Africa embraces globalization. Byang Kato (1985:25) expounds the incentives for syncretism in culture and Christianity:

Incentives for syncretism in Africa are not hard to find. The incentives for universalism (the idea that all will be saved in the end) are the same for syncretism, since only a thin line separates the two ideologies. The reasons for growing syncretistic tendencies in Africa may be summed up briefly.

(i) The prevailing wind of religious relativism in the older churches of the West is being carried abroad by the liberal missionaries in person and through literature.

(ii) The crying need for universal solidarity in the world fosters religious respect one for the other.

(iii) Political awareness in Africa carries with it a search for ideological identity. Some theologians seek to find this identity in African traditional religions.

(iv) Emotional concerns for the ancestors who died before the advent of Christianity force some theologians to call for recognition of the religious practices of pre-Christian idol worshippers.

(v) Cultural revolution promotes a return to the traditional socio-religio-cultural way of life in Africa. Since it is hard to separate culture from religion, the tendency is to make them identical and cling to idolatrous practices as being an authentic African way of life.

(vi) Inadequate biblical teaching has left the average Christian with an inability in ‘rightly handling the Word of truth.’ Syncretistic or neo-orthodox teachers bring their views, and even Christian leaders fail to discern what is right according to the teaching of God’s Word.

(vii) The African loves to get along with everybody. He is, therefore, not inclined to offend his neighbour by letting him know what the Bible says about non-Christian religions. That is why liberal ecumenism is thriving in Africa.

(viii) Liberal Christianity has done a thorough job in picking up key brains from the Third World and grooming them in liberal schools in the Western world.

(ix) The study of comparative religions, without affirmation of the uniqueness of Christianity, has helped produce theologians of syncretistic persuasion.

(x) The legitimate desire to make Christianity truly African has not been matched with the discernment not to tamper with the inspired, inerrant content of the revealed Word of God.

With the incentives for syncretism being so prevalent in Africa today, making converts from ATR to Christianity, who are totally converted in belief and practice, is hard to accomplish and hard to measure. It is hard to measure because the

foundational core beliefs are not manifested until times of crisis and some individual Christian's crises are handled in secret, out of the view of the Christian community. As stated in Chapter One, 60% of sub-Saharanans profess to be Christians. If that were truly the case, African culture would have a definite Christian reflection as psychologists tell us that people cannot live in conflict with their core beliefs very long without some kind of breakdown. African culture is slowly shedding its colonial influences and reverting back to its traditional ways. The Christian in Africa is following the same trend as culture and is therefore rendering itself culturally irrelevant. For Christianity to change Africans and thereby impact Africa, a new approach is needed.

#### 6.4 Recommendations to the Church in Africa

The traditional approach to the problem of syncretism in African Christianity is to teach correct or orthodox doctrine. The belief is that lack of knowledge of Christian doctrine and beliefs is the reason African Christians hold on to some conflicting traditional religious beliefs and behaviour. Many books have been written by African and Christian missionary theologians about the doctrines that need to be taught in African churches. See Gehman (1999, 2005), Imasogie (1983), Kato (1985), Mbiti (1986), O'Donovan (1996), Olsen (1972), and Pobee (1979) as examples. The approach taken by these and other authors is stated by Gehman (2005:xi): 'Thus the viewpoint contained in this book is more than a generally Christian viewpoint [worldview], as noble as that may be. Rather, it is intended to expound relevant biblical teaching and apply it to the issues in our study.' Those authors who incorporate worldview into their books do so from the perspective of theology and its affect on one's worldview. Imasogi (1983:12) writes: 'The observed lack of total commitment of the average African Christian to Christ is due to the lack of "fit" between Christian

theology and African life.' It is my view that Christian theology will never 'fit' into African life because Christian theology is strange doctrine to the African worldview.

My recommended approach to the problem of syncretism in the African Church is through philosophy rather than theology. It is based upon teaching worldview rather than doctrine. Worldview is the universal, and doctrine makes up the particulars. Teaching doctrine that does not assimilate into one's worldview will ultimately be rejected and will not bring about change in praxis. In this case, a new doctrine is like a pebble in the shoe. It will make a person walk differently for a while, but because it is not comfortable, eventually the pebble will be removed and things will return to the comfortable normal. What is needed in an African convert to Christianity is a change in worldview to one that can assimilate Christian doctrines as they are learned. The current approach is to teach the particulars expecting the universal to change. In my opinion, the equation needs to be reversed. My recommended approach is to teach the universal—the biblical worldview—and the Christian particulars will fall into place.

The teaching of the biblical worldview in African churches should be from a pragmatic approach teaching the practical rather than the ideological aspects of it. It has been my observation that ATR and the worldview it demands will not get Africans what they really want in this life or the next. With the advent of modern technologies Africans desire the convenience and status of owning automobiles, mobile phones and computers, but the traditional beliefs making up their worldview prevent them from accumulating the funds needed to buy them. Magesa (1997:73) states: 'Sustaining the universe by maintaining harmony or balance...among beings is the most important ethical responsibility for humanity, and it forms the basis of any individual's moral character.' On the individual level that balance is maintained by

sharing what you have. To save money is considered hoarding which constitutes greed and in the words of Magesa (1997:62): ‘Greed constitutes the most grievous wrongs’ with greed being the antonym of hospitality and sociability. For those holding the African worldview based upon traditional beliefs, improving one’s life is virtually impossible and they are frustrated. Likewise, ATR and the worldview it demands will not get Africans what they desire for the next life. Their desire is that at death they join the ancestors and remain one as long as possible. But if they really analyzed the African view of ancestors they would see that the living fear them, honour them out of obligation and blame them when calamities befall them (Magesa 1997:79). Humanly speaking, other than the power ancestors are perceived to have, that does not seem to be a very rewarding state of being. In speaking of the deficiency of the African worldview Mbiti (1969:127) writes: ‘So long as their concept of time is two dimensional, with a Sasa and a Zamani, African peoples cannot entertain a glorious “hope” to which mankind may be destined.’ Mbiti (1969:128) goes on to state: ‘Yet behind these fleeting glimpses of the original state and bliss of man, whether they are rich or shadowy, there lie the tantalizing and unattained gift of the resurrection, the loss of human immortality and the monster of death. Here African religions and philosophy must admit defeat: they have supplied no solution.’ For the Christian convert the biblical worldview does offer solutions to man’s deepest needs and fears, offering peace, prosperity of soul and security for this life and the next.

The Church in Africa consists of those who already profess to be Christians. What the Church needs is a strategy, not to evangelize or proselytize, but a strategy to de-syncretize the beliefs and practices of its members. The strategy I propose follows.

#### 6.4.1 Teach Genesis 1-11

Genesis 1-11 contains the foundational teachings of the biblical worldview. It

presents God and his dealings with mankind which makes up the theme of human history. Every event that happens on earth fits in with that theme somehow. It explains the way the universe was originally and why things are the way they are now. It tells why there is sin in the world and why mankind is separated from the physical presence of God. It also introduces God's plan to restore that separation. Emphasis needs to be placed on the last event recorded in Genesis 11 where Abram was called by God to leave his family and his culture to trust God for his future. Abram's call is the African's call and he set the example they should follow. For all the reasons stated throughout this thesis, I recommend teaching the Church in Africa the contents of Genesis 1-11. A suggested outline for incorporating the Christian view into the teaching on Genesis 1-11 would be the one presented at 3.5.1 in Chapter Three.

#### 6.4.2 Teach the Philosophical Elements of the Biblical Worldview

Philosophy helps people form rationally justified beliefs about all aspects of life and reality including origins, or beginnings, and an end. My recommended approach would be to teach the biblical answers to the philosophical questions as delineated in Chapter Three. The questions are repeated here.

- Is there a Supreme Being, and if so, what is it like?
- What is the origin and nature of man?
- What is reality and what is ultimate reality?
- What is truth?
- What is the origin and nature of the universe?
- What is God's relationship with the universe?
- What is the meaning of time?
- Do laws and causality govern the universe absolutely?
- Why do man and the universe exist and do they have a final end?
- Does evil have a purpose?
- Who or what determines what is moral and immoral?
- How do we know what is right?
- What is man's relationship to the natural environment?
- Is there aesthetic value to religious experience?
- What is the meaning of history?
- Is history cyclical or linear in progression?



What can we know and how can we know it?  
 What justifies a belief?

In order for the claim of superiority over the African worldview to be justified, the biblical worldview must answer the above questions in a way that does not violate the laws of logic or the criteria for accepting or rejecting truth claims as given in 2.5 of Chapter Two. The answers given to the above philosophical questions in Chapter Three can be used and when compared to the answers based on the African worldview given in Chapter Four, the path of divergence in worldviews can clearly be shown.

#### 6.4.3 Teach a Clear Presentation of the Gospel

The Gospel is simply defined by Erickson (2001:81) as: ‘The message of salvation offered by God to all who believe.’ The whole story explaining man’s need for salvation is included in Genesis 1-11. The *protevangelium*, encapsulated in Genesis 3:15 as a seed containing the whole Gospel story of God’s plan of salvation for mankind through the Seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, needs to be taught in language, signs and symbols that Africans can understand. A clear presentation of the Gospel should also include the costs one should be prepared to pay both socially and personally in self-sacrifice. If believed, a clear presentation of the Gospel should put one in a state of disequilibrium talked about by Malony as necessary to the conversion process, and cause disorientation and disruption as put forth by Rambo. At this point one believes something that conflicts with one or more basic core beliefs they hold as part of their worldview and it causes them personal stress.

#### 6.4.4 Teach Expectations

Rambo’s assertion that conversion is what a group says it is applies here. A convert to Christianity needs to be taught what he can expect to happen to him and what the Christian community expects from him. Initially, the convert should expect his becoming a Christian to resolve the sense of disequilibrium and disorientation he

felt when hearing the Gospel as he comprehends more of what being a Christian means. The convert should expect to understand things differently and expect to do things differently than before his conversion. As Van Rheenen (1991:88) explains it: 'Christian conversion is the enthroning of Christ at the centre of a person's life and allowing him to control every aspect of it.' The Christian expectation is that believing the Gospel demotes man from being ruler to being subject and behaviour should change accordingly. Christianity expects belief to precede and determine praxis. How Christian beliefs are worked out in praxis may be culturally determined as long as it remains biblical.

#### 6.4.5 Teach the Need for the Conversion Experience

Many people converting from ATR to Christianity see it only as a matter of change in behaviour and maybe some beliefs. Following the Islamic model, they believe that if they say and do certain things they have adopted a new religion. Even the concept of conversion is absent from the African worldview. As Mbiti (1986:101) states: 'There is no conversion in traditional religion, so to speak, since nobody is born, or can exist, outside of the religious framework.' However, conversion is required as understood in Christianity. The Christian understanding of conversion is a change in attitude or belief about God, sin, and Christ that will bring a person into right relationship with God. Jesus Christ explains the concept in Acts 26:18: 'to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' In the Christian view a convert's understanding of the Gospel should show the need for conversion and the actuality of the conversion experience should bring peace to his soul.

#### 6.4.6 Teach Praxis

A convert needs to understand how his new worldview should be put into practice. My recommended approach is to teach Christian living following the path of divergence between the biblical worldview and the African worldview as presented earlier in this chapter. Areas where the worldview beliefs conflict reflect areas of behaviour that need to be changed. Beginning with conformity of views in a Supreme Being or God, the two worldviews diverge along the path of God's relationship to man, man's relationship to God, the nature of man, man's relationship to nature, reality, morality, relationships and preparation for eternity. The need to converge the African Christian's personal beliefs in these areas to the biblical worldview is vital to the success of the Christian Church in Africa. The African Christian must believe and behave like a biblical Christian.

#### 6.4.7 Teach the Religious Dimensions of Worldview

The religious dimensions of worldview should be incorporated into teaching the biblical worldview of Christianity. The writings of Ninian Smart and others as presented in section 2.3 of Chapter Two could be most helpful in formulating the teaching of content and practice of religious dimensions. Smart gives six dimensions of religion in worldview specifying that beliefs are formed by the doctrinal, mythical and ethical dimensions, with those beliefs experienced and practiced in the ritual, experiential and social dimensions. The comparison of the religious dimensions of Christianity and ATR as given in Chapter Five could serve as a useful starting point for producing teaching material in this area. Religion becomes reality in these six dimensions and teachings should be culture-specific to render belief and practice biblical and relevant.

This thesis has addressed the religions of ATR and Christianity in Africa from the standpoint of worldview beliefs. It is hoped that this work can be useful to the Christian Church in Africa in teaching the biblical worldview to its members in order to address the problem of syncretism. According to Van Rheenen (1991:95): ‘When people come to Christ, they interpret the Scriptures through the filter of their own worldview.’ That results in their Christian praxis being more traditional African than Christian. As Van Rheenen (1991:89) points out: ‘**Christian conversion without worldview change in reality is syncretism.**’ From the Christian religion standpoint the worldview one holds has eternal consequences. The African man’s eternity will depend upon, not how he sees himself as an African, but how God sees him in relation to the realities of sin and salvation as first presented in Genesis 1-11 and elucidated in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. The biblical worldview holds that the Church is God’s instrument on earth to teach the African man the realities of life and death according to Genesis 1-11. The two worldviews will not converge unless the Church is true to its mission.

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