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# Worldview and Identity across Conversion

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## I Introduction

When travelling around the world today, we find Christians in just about all countries and almost all people groups. However, although they all call themselves Christians, they behave very differently in different places and cultures. The attention of anthropologists has been drawn to this fact in recent years. It is understood more and more that worldview is the underlying factor for these different behaviours. Worldview determines the behaviour of people, their personalities and their cultures. Therefore, if we want to understand people and their behaviour, we have to understand worldview. Building on this insight, two eminent evangelical anthropologists, Charles Kraft and Paul Hiebert, have written books on this topic.<sup>1</sup>

It follows then that if we want to understand people's behaviour during conversion, we have to understand their worldview before, during and after conversion. As an element of the deep layers of personality, culture and religion, worldview is closely related to identity. This is the reason we look at both elements when looking at the development of behaviours across conversion.

However, the problem is that worldview, culture and religion are very fuzzy concepts with many different definitions. For this reason, several anthropologists have abandoned these concepts. Taking the opposite stance, we propose to examine worldview through four simple models:<sup>2</sup> the stratigraphic model of creation, the model of the five basic soteriological concepts,

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*Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> In the social sciences, models simplify reality in order to help us understand its complexity, to shed light on certain aspects of it and to give us orientation for our action.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Kraft, *Worldview for Christian Witness* (Pasadena: WCL, 2008); Paul G. Hiebert,

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the model of the conscience orientation and the time concept.

## II Definition of Worldview

Worldview is at the core of personality, culture and religion. It is like the BIOS that formats the functioning of a computer. According to the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz, worldview is 'a way to see the world and ourselves. It is the image that the members of a culture share of the way how things really are, a conception of nature, of self, and society'.<sup>3</sup> We can say that worldviews are like 'glasses'. For Charles Kraft, the worldview comprises the basic assumptions, presuppositions and values, in short the conceptualizations of a culture.<sup>4</sup>

In a functionalist perspective, a worldview can be understood as a set of interpretations of the world, society and self in order to answer the questions and to solve the problems of everyday life.<sup>5</sup> Hiebert defines worldview as the 'fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things and which they use to order

their lives'.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, worldview has not only cognitive dimensions as mostly used by philosophers.<sup>7</sup> The evaluative and affective aspects touch deeper layers of personality, culture and religion than the cognitive aspects. The stratigraphic model of creation, the model of the five basic soteriological concepts and the time concept emphasize the cognitive aspects of worldview. The evaluative and affective aspects are mainly represented by the model of conscience orientation.

## III Models of Worldview

In the following section, we will present the four models through which we propose to examine worldview.

### 1. Stratigraphic model of creation

A simple way to look at worldview is through the stratigraphic model of creation. How does a worldview organize the different elements of creation like matter, plants, animals, human beings, spirits and gods? By simplifying we can structure the worldviews into four ideal-typical groups: holistic, Hebrew, dualistic and secular. Figure 1 shows how the different worldviews structure creation.<sup>8</sup>

3 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 303.

4 Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005 [1st ed. 1979]), 53-56.

5 Lothar Käser, *Foreign Cultures, a Cognitive Approach. An Introduction to Ethnology for Development Aid Workers and Church Workers Abroad*, translated from German by Geoffrey Sutton (Nurnberg, VTR, in print), 37.

6 Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 15, 25.

7 See e.g. Brian J. Walsh & J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984).

8 Cf. a similar model in Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 158.

Figure 1. Typology of Worldviews

Holistic Worldview	Hebrew Worldview	Dualistic Worldview	Secular Worldview
	God		Invisible aspect excluded
Supreme Being		Spirit	
Ancestors	Angels	“Excluded Middle”	Humans
Spirits	Spirits		
Humans	Humans	Humans	Animals
Animals	Animals	Animals	Plants
Plants	Plants	Plants	Matter
Matter	Matter	Matter	

In the holistic worldview, the universe forms one whole. Typical examples of cultural systems and world religions which fit into a holistic worldview are animism, Hinduism, Taoism, Shintoism, Mahayana and Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism, and all the folk religions. The Hebrew worldview has developed out of a holistic worldview (Genesis-Leviticus). The Hebrew God declares that he is the Creator separate from creation, that he is ‘holy’ (Gen 1-2; Lev 19:2). As a reform movement of Judaism, Islam has adopted the Hebrew worldview.<sup>9</sup>

The dualistic worldview separates the material, visible from the immaterial, invisible world. A typical example would be Plato’s dualistic philosophy. In medieval Roman Catholic Europe, influenced by Neo-Platonism, the middle realm of existence, which is influenced by the spiritual world and relates to all the basic daily problems in animistic and folk religionist cultures,

was excluded from the worldview.<sup>10</sup> Enlightenment philosophy has gone a step further to exclude the whole invisible aspect from the worldview. It takes only into consideration what is observable and measurable. Typical examples of this secular worldview are the Aristotelian philosophy, the European Enlightenment philosophy, the initial Confucian philosophy and the pure form of Theravada Buddhism, basically also a secular materialist philosophy.

It becomes evident that when a person moves from Hinduism or a secular outlook to the Christian or Islamic faith, she cannot change her worldview at once. It will take a great and long effort of teaching until some of the presuppositions and assumptions acquired during early childhood will have been transformed. Obviously, these ideal-typical worldviews can be mixed in one person.

<sup>9</sup> However, in relation to the five basic soteriological concepts and the time concept we may find many differences between the Islamic and the Hebrew worldview.

<sup>10</sup> The concept of the ‘excluded middle’ has been coined by Paul G. Hiebert, ‘The Flaw of the Excluded Middle,’ *Missiology: An International Review* 10/1 (1982): 35-47; see also Paul G. Hiebert et al., ‘Split-Level Christianity,’ in *Understanding Folk Religion* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1999), 89-91.

As an evangelical Christian I have a Hebrew worldview. But through my socialization in Swiss society and schools, my worldview includes some dualistic elements along with secular elements acquired through my higher studies. These different worldviews are operational in my everyday life in different situations: when I am ill, I have the reflex to take a drug, a thought driven by the secular worldview. But then I am also urged to pray, a response driven by my Hebrew worldview. Driven by my dualistic worldview, I have no problem to continue to work when I am sick even though I should rest.

## 2. The model of soteriological concepts

The second model by which we understand worldview consists of the five basic soteriological concepts (God, man, evil, sin, salvation).

Evangelism has traditionally started with announcing the Good News of Jesus Christ, Saviour and Lord. But the coming of God's Kingdom and the forgiveness of sin are not good news when there are no sins to forgive, such as is the case, for example, with Islam where humanity is created good but weak and it is normal to sin (Surah 2:36; 4:28). The same is the case when Jesus Christ is not acknowledged as Lord and God as in Islam where Isa is venerated as a great prophet, in rank just after Muhammad. The concept of Son of God is abhorred as idolatry in Islam (Surah 5:72; 6:100-101; 9:30-31). Reasons may be the ancient Marianite sect's teaching in peninsular Arabia that the Trinity is composed of the Father, Mary and Jesus, or ideas about nocturnal visits of spiritual beings.

There is no use of announcing salvation from sin where sin is not a problem. Sin is closely related to the concept of evil. How did evil enter the world? Is evil linked to destiny which is sent by the Supreme God? (Surah 35:15). Or has evil entered a good creation by an entirely good God through the initiative of his Adversary, Satan? Further on, the concept of sin is also closely related to the concept of Man. Is Man created in the image and likeness of God or is this idea of being like God blasphemy (Surah 112)? Is man's sinfulness normal or does it separate him from the fellowship with God?

The concept of man leads us to the concept of God. We have seen that Islam has adopted the Hebrew worldview: God is separated from creation. He is 'holy'. On the other hand, Eastern concepts of deity are monistic and pantheistic: the Supreme Being is part of the universe and is in everything. Many Eastern religions have a holistic worldview.

The next question is: what is the moral quality of deity? The holiness of the Biblical God is of a moral quality that is hard to find in other religious systems where deities represent the whole spectrum of human character, for example in Greek mythology and in the Hindu pantheon.

In conclusion, we have to notice that teaching salvation makes sense only when the concepts of sin and evil are carefully studied, and these in turn are based on the concepts of mankind and God. The Bible teaches these concepts throughout, starting from its first three chapters (Gen 1-3). Based on these insights, missiologists have started to implement chronological Bible studies, and in oral cultures, Chronological Bi-

ble Storying (CBS).<sup>11</sup>

A very useful example of presenting the different soteriological concepts in narrative form and in Islamic contexts is Yehia Sa'a's book *All That the Prophets Have Spoken*.<sup>12</sup> Its concept is based on Luke 24:44-46 where Jesus explains the messianic prophecies from the OT to the two Emmaus disciples. *All That the Prophets Have Spoken* is a shortened adaptation of McIlwain's basic and pioneering *Building on Firm Foundations*.<sup>13</sup>

What is the relation to worldview? These five basic soteriological concepts build up a worldview, biblical or other. They have to be worked on during evangelism and after conversion in order to transform the convert's previously existing worldview into a biblical one. If these chronological, transformational Bible studies are not integrated into the discipleship process, worldviews will remain unchanged.

This fact sheds also light on the discussion as to whether the OT is replaceable by the cultural-religious systems in place as 'preparation of the Gospel' (*praeparatio evangelica*). Obviously, other religious systems will build up different worldviews and can therefore not replace the OT with its Hebrew worldview.

### 3. The model of conscience orientation

In Catholic moral theology, psychology and philosophy, the conscience has remained an important topic until the present time. In Protestant theology and in the social sciences it has disappeared from view. It is part of the 'black box' upon which social sciences do not reflect; instead, they concentrate on the incoming stimuli and the outcomes. Nevertheless, it is of fundamental importance to understand the underlying factors of human behaviour. In an old fashioned way, we call these 'the conscience'.

Every human being is born with a disposition to develop a conscience. Norms are learned from significant others through reinforcement or withdrawal of love in the dialogical tension between self and other. Conscience is thus developed during early childhood in ways that depend on the cultural context, producing different conscience orientations. In relation to our models of worldview, the former two models emphasize the cognitive aspects of worldview, the model of conscience orientation represents deeper layers of personality, culture and religion, the evaluative and affective aspects. Conscience orientation is an interdisciplinary model (theological, psychological and anthropological).

Conscience is developed during early childhood in ways that depend on the cultural context. The American anthropologist Melford Spiro<sup>14</sup> observed that children raised by a few educa-

<sup>11</sup> See [www.oralcity.net](http://www.oralcity.net).

<sup>12</sup> (Gatineau: Goodseed, 2000). This book is an adaptation for a Muslim context of John Cross, *The Stranger on the Emmaus Road* (Gatineau: Goodseed, 1996) developed for Westerners. An adaptation for Eastern contexts is John Cross, *By This Name* (Gatineau: Goodseed, 2006). The integral text of all these books is available in English, French and Arabic, and other languages on [www.goodseed.com](http://www.goodseed.com).

<sup>13</sup> 9 vols., 5th pr. (Sanford: New Tribes Mission, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Melford E. Spiro, *Children of the Kibbutz* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), chap. 15, particularly 408f.

tors, for example father and mother in a nuclear family, integrate not only the norms presented but also the educators themselves into their conscience. Thus, they function with a fixed set of rules and develop rules-centred personalities. They organize their lives with an agenda; they tend to be punctual, pursuing clear objectives. Work is more important than relationships. Since their conscience functions autonomously, they tend to become individualists. When they violate the norms, they feel guilty. This is why Spiro calls this a guilt-oriented conscience.

However, when children are raised by many educators, for example in an extended family, they integrate the norms, but cannot integrate the educators into their conscience. They remain thus dependent on the presence of these significant others in order that their conscience functions properly. When the mother is present, the mother's norms are functional; if the grandmother is present, the grandmother's norms are functional. These children tend to develop a relational personality with a group identity. They prefer personal interactions to work, and during work they prefer team work. Their focus is status rather than achievement and objectives.

If nobody is present, then no norms are functional. This fact represents the basis of the phenomenon that Westerners call corruption. This type of conscience functions according to the slogan: 'As long as nobody sees it, you can do anything'. But if the violation of the norm becomes known and public, shame arises. This is why Spiro calls this a shame-oriented conscience.

With the number of educators influencing the outcome of worldview,

Spiro gives us an interesting model for worldview development. But, of course, Spiro's model does not show the entire reality. A Chinese baby growing up in a nuclear family in Beijing will still be relational, even though it is raised by few educators. There are other factors influencing the conscience development, especially the mode of education. If the educators present the norms by giving explanations and arguments (rules), the child's conscience will become predominantly rules-centred. If the educators emphasize the relational aspect of the norms like 'What will the neighbours say?' or 'When Daddy comes home, he will spank you,' then the child will develop a relational conscience.

If very few norms are presented, then the conscience either becomes relational or does not develop properly. This happened in the '68-generation' that rejected the traditional norms of Western society. Their children have either become predominantly shame-oriented or have underdeveloped mal-functioning consciences, neither shame nor guilt-oriented. A 10-year old boy with such an underdeveloped conscience can stab his colleague without remorse.

Adapting Lingenfelter and Mayers' model of basic values,<sup>15</sup> we can develop a personality typology based on the conscience orientation (see Figure 2).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Sherwood G. Lingenfelter & Marvin K. Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> See a more detailed discussion of this model and its personality typology in Hannes Wiher, *Shame and Guilt: A Key to Cross-Cultural Ministry* (Bonn: Culture and Science Publica-



**Figure 2. Personality Typology**

<b>Rules-centred Conscience</b>	<b>Relational Conscience</b>
Individualism Time Orientation Task Orientation Achievement Focus Analytic Thinking Courage to Lose Face	Collectivism Event Orientation Person Orientation Status Focus Holistic Thinking Fear of Losing Face

This typology represents ideal types, every person being a mixture of both conscience orientations. It is useful to know our profile in order to understand better how and why we behave as we do and to understand better our partners, friends, colleagues and disciples.

Shame and guilt being expressions of sin, the model of conscience orientation becomes a soteriological model. The conscience tends towards peace expressed through harmony or justice. The rules-centred conscience searches to repair the fault in order to regain innocence and justice. Martin Luther's main concern was to find innocence, through reparation (justification) of his personal, individual guilt, given freely by a gracious God.

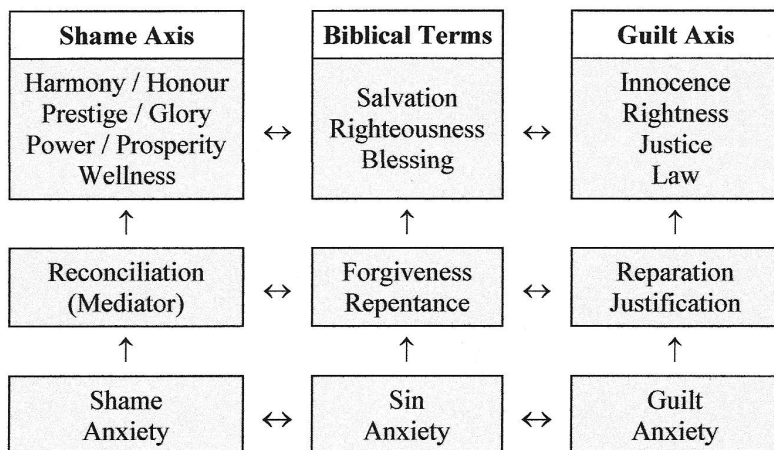
Relational consciences want to restore harmony and honour with the significant others through reconciliation. As they are caught in shame, they need a third person, a mediator, to help them in the restoration process. The main emphasis of rules-centred per-

sons is justice expressed in law and order while relational persons look for harmony, power, prosperity, prestige and wellness.

For rules-centred persons and societies, human rights are an important issue, while for relational persons and cultures the corporate honour and dignity is in the fore-front (cf. the Muhammad caricatures). Figure 3 shows the positive and negative basic values of the soteriological model of conscience orientation schematically.

At conversion, a deep personality structure like the conscience orientation will not change automatically. The only way to transform the different values is to work on them intentionally. The deep layers established during early childhood will allow little change, but the later elements of conscience orientation will be open to modelling. Relational elements can be added through a relational education or lifestyle, for example an intimate covenant relationship with the Biblical God. Rules-centred elements will be accessible to insertion of rules into people's lives, for example a tight agenda or the Ten Commandments.



**Figure 3. Soteriological Model of Conscience Orientation**

#### 4. The model of the concept of time

Because of its particular importance in everyday life and in theological discourse, with the fourth model we will deepen and nuance the understanding of one of the basic values of the personality typology in the perspective of conscience orientation: it is the concept of time. The rules-centred persons organize their lives with their agenda, have a prefixed program and will want to be punctual. Contrary to this, relational persons attribute little importance to time and are more person and event-oriented.<sup>17</sup> The well-known passage from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 represents an event orientation typical for relational cultures.

But there is an additional aspect to the concept of time: the past and future

time perspective.<sup>18</sup> Many people, like the Hebrews, take their orientation from the ancestral traditions. These people are like rowers looking backwards. They conceive of the future as in their back (Ps 143:5; Is 46:10; Jer 29:11).<sup>19</sup> John Mbiti shows a similar conception in Swahili. In his doctoral thesis, he insists that the Akamba people of Kenya have no future concept.<sup>20</sup> Several theologians and scientists have rightly criticized this extreme view.<sup>21</sup>

With Leonard Nyirongo and Benjie van der Walt we prefer to say that

<sup>18</sup> Wiher, *Shame and Guilt*, 286-287.

<sup>19</sup> A.E. Hill, *NIDOTTE* 1, 361-362; H.W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), § 10.

<sup>20</sup> John S. Mbiti, *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background* (London: SPCK, 1969), 24ff.

<sup>21</sup> Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Nairobi: Evangel, 1975); K. Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Lingenfelter & Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*.

there is no incapability to conceive of the future, but rather a difference in time perspective, which in this case is more oriented towards the past.<sup>22</sup> Lingenfelter and Mayers call the past time perspective 'absence of crisis orientation', and the future time perspective 'crisis orientation'.<sup>23</sup> For persons or cultures with a past time perspective it is extremely difficult to foresee the future with its potential opportunities and problems, for example a drug shortage in a pharmacy, or to plan by objectives.

How did this change from past to future time perspective come about in the OT? According to Gerhard von Rad, the Israelites started to turn to the future because of the prophets announcing the day of Yahweh with the consequence that the time concept has become linear and future oriented.<sup>24</sup> This future perspective became particularly prominent in the eschatological vision of the NT. The NT authors introduced the concept of the 'eschatological interim' and emphasized the eschatological future.<sup>25</sup>

This eschatological vision was very unique in the Ancient Near East. Because of the past time perspective, for certain persons it is difficult to conceive even today. This is probably the reason why two contemporary movements have largely neglected the eschatological interim. First of all, the ecumenical movement chose for its 1973 missionary conference in Bangkok the theme 'Salvation now!'<sup>26</sup> In the following years, the WCC started to support revolutionary movements in Southern Africa in order to hasten salvation for these peoples.

A second movement, which is called the 'Health and Wealth Gospel', neglects the concept of the eschatological interim in its theology.<sup>27</sup> On the basis of the cultural concept of salvation, which can be very close to the OT concept of *shalom*, a sincere Christian faith is automatically associated with health, prosperity and wealth. According to the formula *do ut des* (I give you in order that you give me back), God will return a hundredfold what is given to Him. In the logic of the 'prosperity gospel', a faithful Christian cannot be ill or poor.

<sup>22</sup> Leonard Nyirongo, *The Gods of Africa or The God of the Bible? The Snares of African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University, 1997), 89-98; Bennie J. van der Walt, *Afrocentric or Eurocentric?* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University, 1997), 64-66; Wiher, *Shame and Guilt*, 286-287.

<sup>23</sup> Lingenfelter & Mayers, *Ministering Cross-Culturally*.

<sup>24</sup> Gerhard von Rad, 'Israel's Concepts of Time and History: The Eschatology of the Prophets', in *Old Testament Theology. Volume 2, The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (New York: Harper, 1965).

<sup>25</sup> Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and His-*

*tory* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); idem, *Salvation in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. e.g. Arthur P. Johnston, 'Bangkok 1973: A Different Gospel with a Different Mission', in *The Battle for World Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. e.g. Bruce Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel: What's Going on Today in a Movement That Has Shaped the Faith of Millions?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1987); Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *The Word-Faith Controversy: Understanding the Health and Wealth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

From the theological point of view, this movement does not take into account the nuanced NT concept of salvation: through his substitutionary sacrifice Jesus Christ has made possible salvation; it is a free gift from God that cannot be manipulated. Through the first coming of Jesus Christ, the reign of God has come near (Mk 1:15), but we have not yet arrived at consummation, the New Jerusalem, exempt of sickness and pain (Rev 21-22). The reign of God will be completely realized only after Jesus' second coming and the New Creation.

From the anthropological point of view, the prosperity gospel has an anthropocentric and holistic worldview. From the point of view of the five soteriological concepts, the movement identifies its cultural concept of salvation with the OT concept without considering the NT differentiation, especially the eschatological dimension of salvation. Concerning the conscience orientation, the prosperity gospel is supported by a relational worldview which pursues harmony, honour and power before men, and health, wellness and prosperity for oneself. Thus, a large part of the world population tends to adopt the prosperity gospel by its worldview and fills the churches of pastors who preach this theology.

This is one factor that contributes to the success of churches like the 'Universal Church of the Reign of God' and 'Salt of the Earth' in Brazil, 'El Shaddai' in the Philippines, the 'Church of God (Aladura)', the 'Celestial Church' and the 'Redeemed Christian Church of God' in Nigeria, and the 'Kimbanguist Church' in the Democratic Republic

of Congo.<sup>28</sup> Referring to this, the African section of the Lausanne Theology Working Group writes: 'We therefore wonder if much popular Christianity is a syncretised super-structure on an underlying worldview that has not been radically transformed by the biblical gospel'.<sup>29</sup>

#### IV Identity in Theological and Psychological Perspective

After having presented the four models to understand worldview, we will now try to see how identity is linked to worldview. For this we look at theological and psychological approaches to identity.

The theological basis of our identity is God: in the perspective of creation, we are God's creatures, created in his image (Gen 1:26-27). In a soteriological perspective, all who have accepted Christ are God's children (Jn 1:12). And all 'those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God ... And by him we cry, Abba, Father' (Rom 8:14-15). In missiological perspective, we are sent by Jesus just as Jesus has been sent by the Father (Jn 20:21, cf. 17:18). The Greek term 'apostle', meaning 'sent one', testifies to this missionary identity of the disciples. The apostle Paul introduces most of his letters by 'Paul,

<sup>28</sup> [www.igrejauniversal.org.br](http://www.igrejauniversal.org.br); [www.saldaterra.org.br](http://www.saldaterra.org.br); [www.chanrobles.com/elshaddai.htm](http://www.chanrobles.com/elshaddai.htm); [www.aladura.de](http://www.aladura.de); [www.celestialchurch.com](http://www.celestialchurch.com); [www.rccg.org](http://www.rccg.org); [www.kimbanguisme.com/e-option2.htm](http://www.kimbanguisme.com/e-option2.htm).

<sup>29</sup> 'Lausanne Theology Working Group Statement on the Prosperity Gospel', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 34, 2 (2010): 99-102, citation 101.

apostle of Christ Jesus'.<sup>30</sup> It is an important goal in the discipleship process to build up an identity 'in Christ'.

In psychological perspective, identity develops in the dialogical tension between self and other. In this process, identity development is closely related to the emergence of shame and guilt which evolve in the same dialogical tension. The link between worldview and identity is established through the priority of certain values in conscience orientation. Identity is then constructed in a process during which past experiences, values and thought systems are integrated into a unified, organized and coherent personality structure.

During conversion, two or more non-integrated cultural systems co-exist. If integration of these does not take place, 'multiple personalities' are the consequence. These are the basis for syncretistic behaviour. That is why integration is of special importance during conversion. This integration is rendered possible by 'critical contextualization'<sup>31</sup> of the following sectors:

- Comparison between the Bible and values, thought systems, and behaviour styles transmitted by the parents
- Comparison between the Bible and the 'Christian' culture
- Comparison between the Bible and society.

This integration implies a critical

contextualization of what Hans Bürki calls the 'cultural skins'.<sup>32</sup>

## V Worldview and Identity in Religions

After having studied the models of worldview and identity, we ask how they correlate to cultures and religions. As the stratigraphic model of creation shows (Fig. 1), most religions are built on an holistic worldview. This applies to animism, Hinduism, Taoism, Mahayana-Buddhism, Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism and Shintoism. In terms of conscience orientation, holistic worldviews are relational and harmony-centred. Our approach to animists and adherents of South and East Asian religions will therefore be relational, holistic and harmony-centred.

Worldviews in folk religions are predominantly animistic.<sup>33</sup> As most believers around the world are folk religionists,<sup>34</sup> most inhabitants of our

<sup>32</sup> Hans Bürki mentions the following cultural skins surrounding the self, which should be worked on during and after conversion: affective skin (imitation, intuition, initiative), skin of the defence mechanism (mask, persona), intellectual skin, physical skin (face, body, sense, clothes), linguistic skin (hides or reveals), family and friendship skin (privileged relationships), socio-cultural skin, cosmic skin (space, time), transcendental skin (light, darkness). Hans Bürki, 'Évangile et culture', in *Évangile, culture et idéologies*, eds. René Padilla, Hans Bürki, Samuel Escobar (Lausanne: Presses Bibliques Universitaires, 1977), 13-50.

<sup>33</sup> This is because in the animistic worldview sickness and bad luck are caused by spiritual beings. Thus, the spiritual realm is dominating everyday life.

<sup>34</sup> Hiebert et al., *Understanding Folk Religion*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Tit. 1:1.

<sup>31</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, 'Critical Contextualization', *Missiology* 12 (1984): 287-296; reprint: *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11 (1987): 104-112.

globe have a holistic worldview. Besides being holistic, in terms of the five basic soteriological concepts, the animistic worldview is pantheistic, anthropocentric, with a social definition of sin and a prosperity concept of salvation. In terms of conscience orientation, the holistic worldview is relational with person orientation, status focus and holistic thinking and thus an and-and-logic.<sup>35</sup> Our approach to folk religionists will therefore be relational and holistic.

Identity is closely linked with religion through worldview. This becomes apparent in the stratigraphic model of creation and in the model of the five soteriological concepts which are defined by the cognitive aspects of religions and philosophies. It is less apparent in the model of conscience orientation which represents the values that are given priority by a religion.

## VI Conversion in Theological and Anthropological Perspective

From an evangelical point of view, conversion is a central feature in the Bible. Here we will look at it from a theological and an anthropological viewpoint.

In theological perspective, conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit who 'convicts' or 'persuades' the conscience of a person (Jn 14:6; 16:8; Rom 3:23; 6:23; 10:9-10). The Greek term for 'convict' is *elengcho*. The study of the human conscience is a basic element of the studies of evangelism and

conversion. On the basis of the Greek term, this field of study is called 'elenc-tics'.

The Hebrew (and Greek) terms for sin mean literally 'missing the mark' (*hata* and *hamartia* respectively) or 'deviating from the way' (*'awon* and *paraptoma*). The 'turning around' of conversion (*shub* and *epistrepho*) is correcting this wrong direction in order to march towards the real goal which is God. The wrong goals are either other gods or the self.

In the NT, the apostle Paul uses OT concepts like justification, redemption and sanctification (Rom 3:21-26; 5:1-5; 1 Cor 1:30), and introduces new imaged terms like regeneration, new creation, reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17-20) and adoption (Rom 8:14-17). These different terms illuminate different aspects of conversion.

While conversion in theological perspective is a one-point event (regeneration),<sup>36</sup> in anthropological perspective it is a process which can last a long period. The different disciplines of the natural and social sciences illuminate different aspects of this process. In the psychological perspective, conversion is part of the general process of maturation of a person: a person feels a void, something is lacking in her life. In this view, conversion is a solution for the Oedipus complex through which a strong image of Father is created. Thus, religion strengthens the personality.

In the sociological perspective, conversion is seen as a normal part of the process of socialization: to adopt

<sup>35</sup> This is the reason why animists and folk religionists have no problems with syncretistic behaviour.

<sup>36</sup> In the Engel scale, it is represented by the 'new creation' point 0.

**Figure 4. Model of the Conversion Process (modified Engel Scale)**

God's Role	Missionary's Role	Scale	Reaction of the Person
General Revelation	Information	-9	Ignore the idea of God
General Revelation	Information	-8	Accept the idea of God
Conviction	Information	-7 - -5	Know the Bible
Conviction	Call	-4 - -3	Consider decision
Conviction	Call	-2	Decision
Conviction	Follow up	-1	Evaluate decision
Regeneration	Follow up	0	New creation
Sanctification	Edification	+1	Growth
Sanctification	Edification	+2	Become a Disciple
Sanctification	Edification	+3	Make Disciples

a certain conviction can be the consequence of social pressure or it can make integration into a social group easier. Along these lines of thought, for Geertz, religion is the 'socially available system of meaning'.<sup>37</sup> In the physiological perspective, a decision can be facilitated during this process by an over stimulation of the nervous system through music, repetitious rhythms, mystic meditation and other techniques. Finally, in the perspective of communication theory, conversion is a process of communication.

This process of conversion, which the author considers as the discipleship process, has different stages. In every stage, different issues are at the forefront. On the basis of these findings, James Engel has conceived a scale which we have adapted for our purposes (see Figure 4).<sup>38</sup>

How can we take advantage of the findings of the social sciences and of the Engel scale for our topic, the transformation of worldview? Social sciences have confirmed that we are what we believe and what we are convinced of. Our convictions determine our behaviour. If we want to change our behaviour, we have to change our convictions. In order to change our convictions, we have to change our knowledge by giving new or supplementary information.<sup>39</sup>

Here we can profit from the Engel scale and introduce the stratigraphic model of creation and the five basic soteriological concepts into the discipleship process. The social influence operates essentially on the level of convictions, attitudes and intentions. Here

<sup>37</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>38</sup> James F. Engel, *Contemporary Christian*

*Communication: Its Theory and Practice* (Nashville: Nelson, 1979).

<sup>39</sup> See Martin Fishbein & Icek Ajzen, *Belief, Attitude, Intention, and Behavior* (Reading, MS: Addison-Wesley, 1975).



we can introduce our new insights on how conscience orientation can be transformed. The other influences operate on the level of behaviour itself.

Having laid the foundations for a deeper understanding of the three concepts (worldview, identity and conversion), in the following sections, we will study their relationship to each other. We will ask how worldview and identity develop across conversion.

## VII Worldview and Identity before Conversion

Evangelism is geared to the worldview of the receptor community. This means that the communicator follows the rules of cross-cultural communication: starting with a message in continuity (with known, understandable and acceptable elements) and continuing later with elements in discontinuity (more difficult and less understandable and acceptable material).

A good example from the Bible is when God starts to present Himself to the animist Abram as the Supreme Being of the Semitic (animistic) universe ('*el* or '*elohim*': Gen 17:1). But God specifies without delay how he is different from other animistic gods: He is not a local but a universal, omnipotent God ('*el shadday*': Gen 17:1; 28:13-14) and he does not tolerate any other divinities beside him (Gen 35:1-2; cf. Ex. 20:3). To Moses he presents himself then as Yahweh (Ex 3:14). Later on, 'the Redeemer' is added to God's presentation (*go'el* 'the closest parent': Ruth; Is. 63:16), and finally 'the Father' (Is 63:16; Mt 6:9).

If the audience has an animistic worldview (which is relational and holistic), then aspects of the Bible which

are relational and holistic should be first presented in the communication of the Gospel (e.g. life stories, parables, riddles, aspects of the covenant relationship). If the audience pursues harmony and prosperity, primarily elements of the Gospel which stress these elements are selected (e.g. life in abundance: Jn 10:10). After conversion, the message should be balanced and elements in continuity and discontinuity should be presented in order to transform the worldview.

## VIII Worldview and Identity across Conversion

Across conversion worldview and identity can change or remain unchanged.

### 1. Worldview and identity change across conversion

In theological perspective, transformation across conversion is God's work: 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!' (2 Cor 5:17). It is evident that this verse talks about the core of a person which the Bible calls often the 'name'. A misinterpretation of this verse has led many believers to understand that cultural features have no value during and after conversion. Another verse seems to confirm this misinterpretation: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). However, it is evident that cultural just as racial and gender differences remain entirely or partially after conversion. But based on the misinterpretation of the former verses, the 'cultural skins' are ignored.



In anthropological perspective, the worldview changes across conversion when the convert changes the environment in relation to his model of creation: if the convert comes, for example, from an animistic worldview, a dualistic worldview can be introduced through preaching and teaching. The worldview can change in relation to the conscience orientation, if the convert comes from a relational into a rules-centred community or vice versa. For example, if the society is relational and the believers' community rules-centred due to a certain type of preaching and teaching, the convert's conscience orientation will gradually become more rules-centred.

The worldview is also transformed, if the five basic soteriological concepts are worked on systematically. For example, if the Supreme God is seen as the origin of destiny and thus perceived as potentially good or evil, the teaching of the biblical concepts of God and of evil will show that God is good and all that he has created and provides in life is good. Evil comes from His counterpart: Satan. Or, if prosperity is understood as God's gift regardless of our merits but based on our trust in him, the convert will not anymore try to influence his chance in life on the basis of the general rule 'I give you so that you give me (many fold)'.

One example of systematic teaching is what happened under Calvin's influence in Geneva in the 16th century: within a few years, Calvin preached 2500 sermons covering the whole Bible and transformed the consciences of the people of Geneva—one could almost say—despite their will. Through these systematic Bible studies the process of critical contextualization can build

up a new identity which is based on an integrated personality system.

## 2. Worldview and identity remain unchanged across Conversion

In theological perspective, there is no transformation when regeneration does not take place. This happens for example when the convert makes his decision due to social pressure or if his motivation is based on economic factors (cf. the 'rice Christians') or sexual pressure (to find favour with his prospective wife).

In anthropological perspective, the worldview can remain unchanged if it is the same in society and the believing community. For example, in an Islamic society, believers may all have maintained an Islamic worldview which is similar to the Hebrew worldview in some creational aspects, although it is different in most soteriological aspects. In relation to conscience orientation, the convert may come from a relational society into a relational believing community.

The worldview does not need to change either when the five basic soteriological concepts are the same in the society and the believing community. This is the case in a syncretistic believing community. If there are different conceptions between society and believing community, the concepts remain unchanged, if they are not taught systematically. This is the case in most believing communities around the world as systematic teaching is rarely seen as basic in the discipleship process and as Bible studies are not very popular.

Let us remember the fact that the

worldview influences largely our everyday behaviour. Believers will thus behave in the same way as society and not make any difference.

## IX Worldview and Identity after Conversion

When after conversion a 'Christian' worldview and an identity 'in Christ' develop, these can replace the pre-Christian worldview and identity or co-exist with them.

### 1. Formation of a 'Christian' worldview and identity after conversion

There are many publications which stress the importance of the formation of a 'Christian' worldview after conversion.<sup>40</sup> But what is a 'Christian' worldview? There are several ways to define it.

First, a 'Christian' worldview can be defined as the 'worldview of Christians'. However, a convert who has grown up with a Hindu worldview will still keep his Hindu worldview while being a Christian and he will function in his everyday life according to the Hindu worldview. A convert from an animistic background will function in his everyday life according to his ani-

mistic worldview. A convert from an Islamic background will still function with his Islamic worldview while being a Christian.

Others define a 'Christian' worldview with familiar, cognitive, philosophical concepts coined in the west.<sup>41</sup> Christians from the Global South who have grown up in relational and non-Christian societies bring other worldview backgrounds into their Christian life. On these grounds, they interpret the Bible differently and cannot adhere to western definitions of a 'Christian' worldview.

Still others define a 'Christian' worldview as a *biblical* worldview. The problem with this definition is that there are different worldviews in the Bible: in the OT different expressions of the Hebrew worldview during more than a thousand years, and in the NT different Greek elements mixed into the Hebrew worldview. Authors who are aware of this speak of a Hebrew-Christian worldview implying that it is based on the worldviews presented in the OT and that it does not have to be Western.

The author prefers to simply speak of a Hebrew worldview but defining it through the stratigraphic model of creation and the five basic soteriological concepts presented in the OT. Understanding this OT foundation of a 'Christian' worldview, it becomes clear that a Hindu or an animistic worldview cannot prepare people for the Gospel in the sense that they do not need the worldview presented in the OT anymore. Only biblical stories will be able

<sup>40</sup> E.g.: Walsh & Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*; B.J. van der Walt, *The Liberating Message: A Christian Worldview for Africa* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University, 1994); Darrow L. Miller & Stan Guthrie, *Disciplining Nations: Guide to a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Honolulu: YWAM, 2000); Philip Graham Ryken, *What is the Christian Worldview?* Reformed Faith Series (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> E.g. Walsh & Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*.

to model a worldview which will be able to transform personalities and cultures in a way that God has intended.

What should we then aim for after conversion? Through intensive Bible teaching, our objective is to transform the pre-existing worldview and identity gradually and progressively into a Hebrew worldview and an identity 'in Christ'. This will be a lifelong process.

## 2. Coexistence of a pre-Christian and a 'Christian' worldview and identity after conversion

In quite a few Christians and faith communities around the world, the pre-Christian worldview remains despite the development of a 'Christian' worldview. This is the case when the two worldviews pertain to different areas of life: while the 'Christian' worldview manages life on Sunday in the faith community and family, the pre-conversion worldview manages public life, work and the week days.

This condition is favoured by the fact that a relational personality or culture with a holistic type of thinking has an and-and-logic. Thus, contradicting worldviews can co-exist for different areas of life. This fact approaches the phenomenon of 'multiple personalities'. People with an analytic type of thinking have an either-or-logic and have problems with this way of conceiving of a Christian life. They tend to call this phenomenon 'syncretism' or 'Christo-paganism'.

When two cultural systems coexist in a person, then we encounter what Hiebert calls 'split-level Christianity'.<sup>42</sup>

The two systems compete for dominance in relation to identity which can be illustrated by the following question: 'Am I a Christian Kurd or a Kurdish Christian?' In other words: does my identity 'in Christ' prevail over my ethnic identity or vice versa? As shown above, the worldview tells which identification will be stronger, the Kurdish identity or the identity 'in Christ'.

In most cases the ethnic identity prevails because the work on the worldview is not accomplished after conversion. This fact is sufficiently illustrated, among many others, by the conflict in Ruanda which led to a tragic fratricide among Christians. Again, we come across the pre-eminent importance of chronological Bible studies to transform the worldview and integrate the cultural systems in order to build up a new identity 'in Christ'.

## X Conclusion

We realize that worldview and identity are important concepts to take into account through the process of conversion. The four models presented make the fuzzy concepts of worldview and identity understandable and transformable. Across conversion the transformation of worldview and identity are pre-eminent as the apostle Paul states: 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom 12:2).

<sup>42</sup> Hiebert et al., *Understanding Folk Religion*, 15-30, 73-92.