

# **INAUGURAL LECTURE**

**Re-discovering African Wholistic Approach to Life:  
Ways of Acquiring and Appropriating Knowledge**



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Ways of Acquiring and Appropriating Knowledge**

**Adam K. arap Chepkwony**

**MOI UNIVERSITY**  
**≡ PRESS** 

## *Dedication*

*To the late Kalenjin musician cum educator, Mr. Kipchamba arap Tabotuk who spend his entire adult life sensitizing people on the wholistic African approach to life through his more than 1000 songs; and to all scholars and sages who continue to disseminate the rich African heritage.*



**Adam K. arap Chepkowny**

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I am grateful to all the members of the Department of Philosophy, Religion and Theology who gave me the opportunity to discuss and develop my ideas. In particular I want to mention the Head of Department, Dr. Michael Ntabo Mabururu who has been a source of encouragement and support. Many thanks to Ms. Miriam Rono, my student, colleague and an upcoming scholar of African spirituality. Ms. Rono, Silas Chemwaina and David Mutai have assisted in the preparation and presentation of this lecture.



I also want to express my appreciation to all Moi University students who have taken the course REL: 101- African Traditional worldview, for the many ideas and experiences they have shared in class. Their contribution has not only enriched this work but has also inspired me to present this lecture.

I want most sincerely thank my entire family, my wife Betty and my children, Chelangat, Chemutai and Kipkirui for making me a proud father and for understanding when I am unable to share quality time with them due to academic commitments. I also want to thanks my relatives and Kongasis community for their continued support.

Finally, I give glory and honour to Asis, the creator, controller and the sustainer of the universe and the source of the rich wholistic African approach to life.

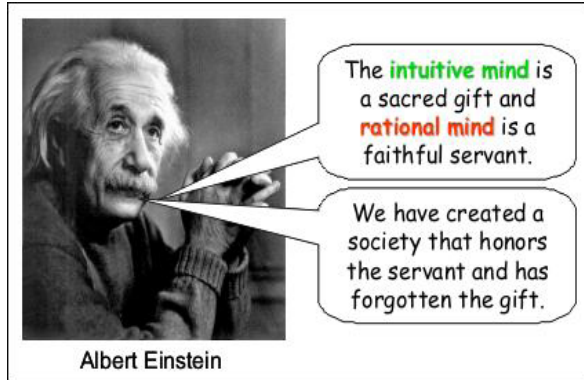
## **Abstract**

The introduction of western science and Christianity in Africa at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems to have revolutionized the African mind and indeed way of life. Western science and Christianity, a product of the western worldview, are today perceived as the source of hope for Africa by African governments, politicians, scholars and the general public. In recent times however, questions have been asked by scholars and scientists as to whether science is the only way to attain objective knowledge and Christianity the only path to spiritual truth.

This lecture is informed by the fact that every culture and civilization has and provides knowledge and way of life to its community. Religious worldviews teach many truths and values and play central role in the lives of their adherents. But more importantly, each religious worldview has its own unique way of approach to God, man, the universe and to life.

This lecture argues that, like other faiths, the African worldview has granted African people a wholistic approach of acquiring and appropriating knowledge from time immemorial. This however has been ignored and in its place, Africans have heavily relied on western knowledge. The perception of the western worldview as the ideal has enslaved and impoverished the African mind. This enslavement hinders the African mind from being creative, innovative and able to think outside a constricting box. For this reason, African contribution to knowledge has been ignored in the last century.

The lecture explores how the western worldview has created conflict in the African psyche, making them live painful and debilitating “double lives”. The characteristics of the future global community are discussed in this lecture and it is argued that such a community can only be forged by incorporating a wholistic African worldview with its hitherto denigrated cultures on board.



*Adopted in Donna Williams*

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*Most scientists are now willing to admit that they will never reach the end of learning, and some are even talking about other sources of truth – philosophy and especially theology - as crucial components in the search of reality. A new kind of humanity has begun to express itself as we recognize the vastness of God's creation and our very small place in the scheme of things.*

*John Mark Templeton*

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## **Citation**

Prof. Adam Kiplangat arap Chepkwony is a Kenyan and currently serves as Professor of Religion at Moi University. Prof. arap Chepkwony was born on May 25, 1953 near Kericho town in Kericho District. He is the tenth child of the late James Chumo and the late Tabitha Chumo and the step mother Sophia Chumo. He has four brothers and eight sisters.

Prof. arap Chepkwony started his primary education at Silibwet Primary School in Nyahururu and later moved to Kimugu Primary School in Kericho where he sat for KCPE in 1968. He attended Cheptenye High School between 1969 to 1971 when he sat for the East African Certificate of Education (EACE).

In 1972, Prof. arap Chepkwony went to USA to pursue his undergraduate studies at Houghton College, Houghton New York, USA. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Religion and a major in Psychology in 1976. For a Master of Arts degree, he attended Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, USA in 1976. He graduated in 1978 with a major in Religion and a minor in Philosophy. He returned to Kenya upon completing his education in June 1978.

Prof. arap Chepkwony began his teaching career in 1978 as a teacher at Kericho Tea Secondary School. In 1981 he completed his Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. Thereafter he taught at Kericho Teachers' Training College from 1981 to 1989.

His university teaching journey started in September 1989 with his appointment as a tutorial fellow in the Department of Religion and Philosophy Moi University. At Moi University, Prof. arap Chepkwony has risen steadily from the position of tutorial fellow to the current position of Professor by 2007. He has taught and supervised many master's and doctoral students in the Department of Religion and Philosophy.

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In 1997, Prof. arap Chepkwony graduated with Doctor of Philosophy degree in Religion from Moi University. His dissertation was entitled: “African Religion in the Study of Comparative Religion: A Case Study of Kipsigis Religious Practices”.

He also has a Higher Diploma certificate in Psychological Counseling obtained in 2003 from Kenya Institute of Professional Studies.

Prof. arap Chepkwony served as the Head of Department of Religion from 1997 to 2004. During his time in office the Department saw significant growth both in programmes and in manpower. In particular he oversaw the development and implementation of three new programmes, Diploma in Religious Studies, Postgraduate Diploma in Religion and Doctor of Philosophy in Religion.

His interest in religion and science developed when he was invited to The Center of Theology and Natural Sciences (CTNS) at Berkeley, California in 2000 to present a paper on Religion and Science in Africa. He and a colleague in the Department subsequently entered and won a Science and Religion award in the year 2002. The result of this award was the introduction of a course “African Traditional Healing and Science” currently taught to third year, BA in Religion programme. At that time, he started a Dialogue in Religion and Science group at Moi University to promote constructive engagements of science and religion. He is currently the chairperson of the group.

In the year 2004, Prof. arap Chepkwony won the Local Societies Initiative Award organized by Metanexus Institute of Science and Religion, Philadelphia, U.S.A. In the following year, Dialogue

in Religion and Science group won supplementary funds “for organizational excellence, creative programming and spirited commitment to fostering the constructive engagement of science and religion”.

The group introduced dialogue in issues at the intersection of Religion and Science to all schools of Moi University, a few selected secondary schools around Eldoret and several universities in Kenya and Uganda.


Prof. arap Chepkwony is currently the External Examiner of Makerere University in Uganda and Ilorin University in Nigeria. He is also external thesis examiner for the University of Cape Town and Uganda Martyr’s University in South Africa and Uganda respectively. He has edited three books and published over thirty articles in journals, chapters in books, book reviews and entries in encyclopedias. He serves on the editorial board of Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Moi University and Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies, Ilorin University, Nigeria.

Prof. arap Chepkwony served as the contact person for African Association of the Study of Religion (AASR) for ten years between 2005 to 2011. He was the Chair of Ecumenical Symposium of Eastern African Theologians (ESEAT) from 2002 to 2010 where he oversaw six of the ESEAT series of books published. The series captures the development of theological trends in Africa. He is currently a member of several professional bodies among them American Academy of Religions (AAR) and Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).

Prof. arap Chepkwony is also a good friend to Margaret Thatcher Library, Moi University. He has donated to the library many books he found of interest. In particular, through him, Life and Peace Institute at Uppsala in Sweden provided fifty seven titles of books on Peace studies between 2004 and 2007. More recently,

Prof. arap Chepkwony won a Library Book Project Award from the International Society for Science and Religion (ISSR), Edmund College, Cambridge in the United Kingdom. Moi University Library will benefit from this award by receiving 224 titles of the best science and religion books in the market today.

Prof. arap Chepkwony serves the community in various levels. He has been on the council of the former Kenya Highlands Bible College and currently on the Board of Governors of Chepseon Complex High School in Kipkelion District. He is the Director of Kongasis Christian Education Centre which houses, Kongasis Primary School, Kongasis Community Library, Kongasis Women Group, Kongasis Farmers Group and Kongasis Post Secondary Student Association (KAPSA). Prof. arap Chepkwony has also written several successful project proposals that have benefited the community. He is also the Director of a new school, Chepkinoiyo Academy at Kuresoi, Molo District. He is a member of an outreach group that travels throughout the country to educate and motivate students, parents and members of the community to appreciate the value of education and to consider Moi University as a university of choice.

  
**PROF. RICHARD K. MIBEY, FWIF, EBS**  
VICE CHANCELLOR  
MOI UNIVERSITY

September 22, 2011

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# **Chapter One**

## **Worldviews and acquisition of Knowledge**

### **Introduction**

The introduction of science in Africa at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the missionary and colonial education seems to have revolutionized the African mind and indeed the way of life. Science and western Christianity are today perceived as the hope of Africa by African governments, politicians, scholars and the general public alike. In recent times however, questions have been asked as to whether science is the only way of acquiring objective knowledge. Similarly, questions have been raised as to whether western Christianity as we know it, is the only path to acquire spiritual truth.

In this lecture, I would like to pursue the line of argument that there are many other ways of acquiring and appropriating knowledge than western science and western Christianity. One such way of knowing, in my view, can be discovered if we revisit the ancestral wisdom of the African peoples. I intend to do this by discussing three worldviews, that is, Western science, Western Christianity, and African Spirituality. The first two worldviews have claimed authority over knowledge in Africa in the last century, while African spirituality has fought for its survival during the same time.

To help us appreciate the African worldview and maybe to understand the Western worldview better, I shall turn the later upside down from our normal perception of seeing it as authoritative and the best approach to acquire Knowledge. Whether this will really help us comprehend better or create more

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confusion, I do not know. However, it is my intention that this approach will assist us to see the things we have always seen from one perspective or from another angle. It may therefore give us a clearer picture or maybe a totally different perspective of what we have always known. It may also help us to see the strength and/or the weakness that we have never known or imagined about western science and western Christianity. It may further help us to see and imagine things in a totally different and exciting way that we have never conceived in the past. If any of these or any other inspiration of whatever kind happens, then I will consider myself as having achieved my objective.

But first, kindly allow me to tell some stories. Stories in the discipline of comparative religion are also known as myths. A myth or a story in the discipline of religion does not carry the dictionary meaning of falsehood. Instead it is understood to be a story and does not imply falsity or truth. It is simply a story (Burke 2004:5). The purpose of a myth/story therefore is to provide lessons that can be learned in a particular situation. The three stories I shall tell are about my academic journey. It is these stories; insignificant as they may be, that has shaped my thoughts and academic development that have been an inspiration to me over the years.

I obtained first and second degrees in United States of America. This is where my academic foundation was laid in the years 1972 to 1978 at Houghton College, Houghton, New York. During the second year of my undergraduate studies, I took a compulsory course, "Composition and English Grammar". In one lesson, we read a story by Ernest Hemingway about an American tourist who went to Africa for a safari with his wife. During the safari, the man murdered his wife. To unravel what happened was a major task for lawyers who handled the case in America. My lecturer commented that this was such a complex case that no African lawyer could have handled.

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One student, a small white missionary girl, was not amused at all about the comments and engaged the lecturer and the entire class for more than thirty minutes in a hot debate. She argued that African lawyers were as good as or better than America lawyers and that she was sure that African lawyers would have unraveled the mystery surrounding the murder. The reaction of this missionary student became an inspiration for me during the rest of my studies in America. I learned to defend myself, my culture and my people whenever it was necessary. She helped me to internalize the fact that Africans are like other people and capable of doing what others can do. From a background that believes that everything from the west is good and everything from Africa is inferior, you can imagine the impact that this story had on my life. This experience marked the beginning of my academic journey by creating an interest in me of African culture and spirituality.

My second story took place in my fourth year class. I was taking a course called "Music appreciation". The course covered some western classical music including those of Mozart, Handle and Ludwing van Beethoven among others. Beethoven's music in particular did not register anything in my soul and very little in my mind. One day, our lecturer came to class with an old record player and played Beethoven's music. As the record was playing, the lecturer was carried away with excitement, seemingly enjoying that instrumental music.

My music teacher must have noticed that I was totally bored. When the record ended, he asked me what I thought about the music. Unfortunately I was not smart in the way I gave my answer, but I was very sincere. In my response, I said, "To me sir, the music is meaningless and monotonous". You should have seen the face of my professor of music, he was totally disappointed. I can imagine what went through his mind as he

thought to himself “stupid African.” He quickly turned and asked for opinion of other students. I was amazed at the responses given by white colleagues (I was the only African), clearly suggesting that the music had some meaning and that it was actually lively, purposeful and entertaining. I was surprised that my lecturer and some white students in that class would have died for that music, which was meaningless and monotonous to me.

I was therefore not surprised when my final mark was a C in spite of the fact that I scored above B in all my continuous assessment tests and the final examination. I believe my lecturer was right to give me that mark because the truth is that I did not appreciate that music, which was the main objective of the course. This, however does not mean that I do not enjoy any music. If that class was about Kipsigis traditional music, I would have excelled not only by appreciating it but also by singing and dancing.

The lesson I learned here was that all people are not the same; that people’s tastes and likes are never the same. And most importantly, I learned that although we shared a lot of common things with Americans, I was different in some ways and that difference made me who I am and shall always be. I learned to appreciate myself, my ideas and my culture even when it did not agree with that of others.

The third story happened during my Masters of Arts degree at Asbury Theological Seminary in 1977. I noted with great concern the absence of courses on African theology or any course on Africa at all in the programme. There were, on the other hand, courses on Black theology, Liberation theology, Feminist theology, Catholic theology, Wesleyan theology among many other types of theologies. When I insisted on being taught a course on African theology it was suggested that I take an independent study. I opted to study African Christian Theology on the understanding

that I am an African and a Christian. I wanted to understand, interpret and indeed perceive God from the perspective of my cultural background.

The independent course I took became an eye opener for me and created a lot of interest not only in African culture but also in other cultures that had produced the teachings of the world's religions. Indeed, a revised version of the paper I presented at the end of that course became my first published work, "Theological Trends in Africa" *African Ecclesial Review* (1992). Since then, all the writings I have done reflect African culture and African ways of thinking and doing things. This interest in African culture and of other religions has shaped my academic interest in the study of Comparative Religion, with particular emphasis on African spirituality.

Moi University has not only given me an opportunity to teach but has also provided an avenue for me to research in this area. When I first taught Comparative Religion at Moi University in 1989, African Religion was not considered one of the religions of the world. This prompted me to do my Doctor of Philosophy degree in this area with a precise objective of finding out if the Kipsigis Religion and by extension, African religion, is on a par with other religions of the world. In my Dissertation "*African Religion in the Study of Comparative Religion: a Case Study of Kipsigis Religious Practices*", (1997) the findings were clear that the Kipsigis religion and by extension African Religions, are on a par with all other religions of the world. Today, this idea has been accepted worldwide and the majority of the works that come out currently include Africa religion among the religions of the world.

The study of comparative religions is a fascinating subject that everybody should be exposed to. It is unfortunate that religious propaganda has made many people believe that it is only their faith that holds the truth and that the rest of the religions are

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false. This has hindered many people from understanding or appreciating other religions of the world. The comments made by Max Muller, the father of the study of Comparative Religion, that “[She] he who knows one religion knows none” captures one’s ignorance when they are not exposed to other religions other than their own ([www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/396833/max-muller/274129/ideas-on-religion](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/396833/max-muller/274129/ideas-on-religion)).

Here we need to acknowledge the fact that all the religions of the world, without exception, share many truths, values and play a central role in the lives of practicing communities. Yet, there are important and interesting differences and similarities that cut across all the faiths of the world. At the same time, and more importantly, each religion has its own uniqueness in the way it approaches issues, understands, knows and thinks about God, man, the world and how these three relate to each other. This explains the underlying uniqueness of each religion.

The commonalities and the differences found among religions reflect the similarities, differences, and the uniqueness among human beings. In this regard, Kluckhohn and Murray observed that:

Every man is in certain respects

1. Like all other men
2. Like some other men
3. Like no other man (quoted in Hesselgrave 1984:147)

To explain what Kluckhohn and Murray had in mind, I find Sundberg’s exposition most appropriate. He writes:

*One fact is that human beings around the world share many similarities, such as the ability to interbreed, the presence of physical environment, and the common experience of birth, early helplessness, growing up, and growing old. Another fact is that human beings*

*share many things with their groups of identification, though not with all mankind – knowledge of specific places, ways of socializing the young, language, and expectations about authority. Finally, each human being is unique, having one-of-a-kind finger prints, a special history, and a particular life style (quoted in Hesselgrave 1984:146).*

The main reason why people are not alike can be attributed to the influence of culture. The diverse cultures of the world arise from a group's perception of the world and the relationship of that world with humans and other living things. This perception is known as a worldview. It is worldviews of different religions that have given birth to different cultures and a variety of ways of acquiring and appropriating knowledge. Ninian Smart affirms this when he writes:

*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 teaching, 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 (Smart 1983:1).*

A worldview is thus the core of culture, the ultimate cultural coding (Shorter 1998:22028) and the source of cultural knowledge. In the following section I shall explain the meaning of a worldview.

### **What is a Worldview?**

A worldview, simply put, is the way a community perceives the world in its totality – that is, that which makes sense of all the phenomena around them. In other words, it is a cultural construction of what a particular group of people perceives to be real. A dictionary definition of the term worldview reads “a comprehensive conception or image of the universe and of humanity's relationship to it” (Random House Webster's College

Dictionary, 1997). The Oxford Dictionary defines a worldview as “A set of fundamental beliefs, attitudes and values determining or constituting a comprehensive outlook of life and the universe (The New Shoetree Oxford English Dictionary). The thrust of these definitions is what the community believes about the universe, about mankind and how human beings are expected to relate to the universe and to one another.

The way people perceive the world is not uniform. Indeed, all individuals, all human communities and all religions in the world have different conceptions of the universe and how human beings relate to it. This suggests that there are many worldviews. It is important however to remember that the term “worldview” is a western terminology and understood in a western framework. The word in fact is a German translation of “*Weltanschauung*” which suggests a systematically ordered picture of reality and that, which could be expressed philosophically (Ian Richie 1993:60) The term worldview is therefore defined within the Western perspective, that is, it is theoretical and academic in nature, and may not be understood exactly in the same way in other cultures.

It is therefore important to understand that an African might not conceive their worldviews in the same way as understood by Europeans. Some modern scholars have suggested that a better terminology that can be used in place of worldview is “life-world”. Life-world in this case, describes the daily live experience of self, others, work, worship, the world and how each relates to the other (Ritchie 1993:59). Hesselgrave prefers to enlarge the phrase worldview to “man and world view” or “life and world view” (Hesselgrave 1984: 155). In other words, writes Hesselgrave, a worldview is “the structure of things as man is aware of them. It is the way we see ourselves in relation to all else” (Hesselgrave 1984:155). This definition of a worldview seems

to encompass what all the religions of the world understand worldview to mean, that is, an experience of human beings with the Supreme Being, the environment and the entire universe (Ritchie 1993).

Ordinarily however, most people cannot articulate their worldviews. In an effort to understand the concept, worldview, scholars have suggested several fundamental questions which when answered, guide one to understand what a worldview means. To help construct the worldview of any religion, Heylighen (2000) has suggested the following six questions as guide:

1. Where do we come from? This is the question that every community, every religion in the world has attempted to answer through stories, myths and legends. The response to this question elicits answers that are most important about human existence. Most worldviews give spiritual answers on how they understand where and how they come into being.
2. Where are we? The answer to this question involves what we perceive this world to be. Is it real or is it an elusion. A response to this question provides answers to the functions and the structures of the world. The term “world” here is taken to mean everything that exists around us, that is, the physical universe, living and non-living things, life, society and culture.
3. Where are we going? This question seeks to explain the purpose and the future of life in this world. In other words, is there a future life or life after this world? If so, what kind of life? And how different from the present life is the life after death.



4. What is good and what is evil? This question determines the level of moral standard expected of human beings. It helps to give directions and purpose in guiding human actions. In real sense, it answers the question of the values cherished in each community.
5. How shall we act? The answer to this question explains how we should act upon knowing what is good and what is evil. The question seeks answers of the action needed to solve practical problems faced by human beings on a day-to-day basis. In answering this question, a plan of action is envisaged.
6. What is true and what is false? The answer to this question is connected with how we should act. A plan of action as suggested above must be based on knowledge and correct information. It is only when we acquire relevant knowledge that we can construct reliable models of life. The knowledge on which the action is based serves as a pillar on which the entire worldview is anchored (Heylighen, 2000 at <http://pespmcl.vub.ac.be/WORLDDVIEW.html>)

The answers to the six questions help one or a community to see the meaning and the purpose of their existence and the world around them. The answers also build values, beliefs, and knowledge that sustain and maintain the pillars of a worldview. Since this lecture is concerned about acquiring and appropriating knowledge, it is proper to discuss at this point the relationship between knowledge and worldview. Although there is no single agreed upon definition of knowledge the following dictionary definition will serve this purpose. Knowledge as thus been defined as:

1. The facts, felling or experiences known by a person or group of people.
2. The state of fact of knowing.

3. Awareness, consciousness or familiarity gained by experience or learning.
4. Specific information about a subject. (<http://nwlink.com/donclark/knowledge.html>).

Similarly, Prusak (1988) has defined knowledge as “a fluid mix of framed experience, contextual information, values and expert insight”. Prusak further explains that this includes, experience, belief, values, how we feel, motivation and information.

Using the above definitions of knowledge, it is quite clear that worldviews are a source of knowledge. As noted above, values, beliefs, and knowledge are derived from the different worldviews. It is such values, beliefs and experiences that prompt one to act. The experience I encountered for example at college narrated earlier, made me to think different and change my action. This goes along with what Drucker understand by knowledge when he writes: “Knowledge is information that changes something or somebody – either by becoming grounds for actions or by making an individual (or an institution) capable of different more effective actions” ([www.thefreedictionary.com/knowledge-26](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/knowledge-26)).

Indeed the knowledge we acquire from worldviews determine the way of life, the pattern of the economy and the future direction of a community. The economy of the west, for example, was propelled by the spirit of capitalism, individualism and science derived from the western worldview. The recent development, that has seen the Chinese and Indian economies prosper are said to have been inspired by the way they perceive the world.

One country whose worldview has influenced the way of life of its people in spite of modernity is Japan. The success of Japan in the modern world has been attributed to the way it has reconciled modern ideas with those of Shintoism, their traditional

spirituality. In deed, Japanese view the cosmos as something that can be adapted to meet their needs. It will suffice, to illustrate the power of a worldview by showing how the Japanese culture has embraced and effectively incorporated Shinto spirituality in the modern times.

### **The Japanese/ Shinto Example**

In the year 2005, I attended a conference organized by International Association of the History of Religions (IAHR). During that visit, I made the following observations that were published African Association of the Study of Religion (AASR) Bulletin.

It was interesting to see how Japanese have preserved their culture over the years. One aspect of their culture that is evident is the language. Japanese have maintained their language and very few Japanese can communicate in English or any other language. In spite of that, Japanese have managed to use their language to express themselves even in the midst of modern technology.

It was not difficult to see things that are uniquely associated with Japanese culture and religion beautifully blended with modern technology. The Japanese old family and public bath system for example, is still practiced. However, the practice is supported by high technology and sophistication of modernity. Similarly, the Japanese traditional foods, dress, architecture, healing system and festivals are among the practices that are still observed.

Interestingly, it was the season for traditional Cherry blossom Festival during the conference period and this was celebrated with pomp and glory in Tokyo. The Japanese attitude towards work cannot go unmentioned. It was evident that Japanese are hardworking people and this value which is associated with traditional Shinto religion clearly shows the fruits of their worldview (arap Chepkwony 2005: 28 -29).

I found the spirituality of Japanese people most interesting. For countries where there is constant antagonism and suspicion among religions and even among denominations of the same faith, the Japanese provide a model of how religions can co-exist in harmony with each other. The religions of Japan, that is, Shintoism, Buddhism and Confucianism do not only tolerate each other but in some way are perceived to be one religion or separate but practiced simultaneously. For example, Japanese worship both *kami* and *hotoke*, the Shinto and Buddhist equivalent of God respectively. According to Prince Mikasa's opening address to the XIXth IAHR World Congress at Tokyo in 1958:

The object of worship of the Japanese Buddhist is *hotoke*, and as far as Buddhism is an important religion, it would be logical to presume that *hotoke* and *kami* must be different. Nevertheless, it has become quite customary for Japanese to link the two, and the term *kamihotoke* is in common use ( Prince Mikasa, 1958).

The Prince further explains that although the two terms from different religions are contradictory, it is not so in Japan. Instead, he argues, "there are a number of Japanese who pray, without the slightest compunction, simultaneously to both *kami* and *hotoke*" (Ibid.). For many, this is amazing and a lesson for Africa and the West where frequent conflicts and hatred among different religions is openly witnessed.

From this example, it is clear that worldviews dictate the way of life of a people. The Shinto worldview in this case, is receptive to other religions, encourages hard work, believes in the power of the gods, values and Japanese language, cultural knowledge and way of life.

The Japanese worldview, therefore serves as a way of acquiring and appropriating knowledge for the Japanese people. Similarly, since each individual is "like no other man" each has the ability to provide unique knowledge supported by their

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specific worldview. In discussing human uniqueness, Rolston III elaborates on the functions of the human brain, mind and culture. He observes that the human brain is capable of forming thousand of possible thoughts. He writes:

*The human brain is of such complexity that descriptive numbers are astronomical and difficult to fathom. A typical estimate is  $10^{13}$  neurons, each with several thousand synapses (possibly tens of thousands). Each neuron talks to many others. The network, formed and re-formed, makes possible virtually endless mental activity. The result of such combinatorial explosion is that the human brain is capable of forming more possible thoughts than there are atoms in the universe (Rolston III 2006: xxv).*

Wilber on the other hand recognizes that human knowledge from all cultures and civilization “from the ancient shamans and sages to today’s breakthroughs in cognitive science” is now global and available. He then poses a question as to what would happen if all such knowledge, experiences, wisdom and reflections were put together. He asks:

*What if we took literally everything that all the various cultures have to tell us about human potential – about spiritual growth, psychological growth, social growth – and put it all on the table? What if we attempted to find the critically essential keys to human growth, based on the sum total of human knowledge now open to us? What if we attempted based on extensive cross-cultural study, to use all of the world’s great traditions to create composite map, a comprehensive map, an all inclusive or integral map that included the best elements from all of them?(Wilber 2007:1).*

The implication of Wilber’s questions is that every culture and civilization has and provides knowledge to its people. In Africa however, African ways of acquiring and appropriating knowledge have been ignored. Instead, for over a century now, Africa has heavily relied on knowledge from other cultures and

in particular, scientific and Christian knowledge from the West. Yet Francis Collins, one of the world's leading scientists suggests that "science is not the only way of knowing" (Collins 2006: 229). He continues to argue that;

*The spiritual worldview provides another way of finding truth. Scientists who deny this would be well advised to consider the limits of their own tools... (Ibid).*

In the same way, many have claimed that Christianity is the only way to truth and the solution to all human problems. Writing on the topic, "The Biblical and Christian Worldview of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", Bojider Marinov advises the European community thus, "Europeans must learn again that Christianity is not just a religion "of the heart", it is a comprehensive solution to all problems" ([http://www.biblicalworldview21.org/church\\_and\\_kingdom/missionary\\_worldview.asp](http://www.biblicalworldview21.org/church_and_kingdom/missionary_worldview.asp)).

It is this kind of perception that has literally enslaved the African mind to the point of almost worshiping science and Christianity as the only two ways of acquiring knowledge. This attitude has boxed the African mentality completely, denying it the opportunity to be creative and innovative and to think outside the box. For this reason, Africa has contributed little or no significant knowledge to the world in the last century.

This inaugural lecture is about African worldview and how Western science and Christianity has suffocated it over the years. Due to this, the knowledge derived from African spirituality has not been exploited for the benefit of Africa or the world. I am therefore suggesting that apart from western science and Christianity which have claimed authority over knowledge, there are other ways of acquiring and appropriating knowledge.

To accomplish this objective, I shall first outline the origin and development of western worldview which includes Biblical worldview that has borrowed heavily from the western worldview. I shall then discuss western education as a product of western worldview. I will argue that disciplinary studies are no longer able to solve human problems and that there is need to adopt other relevant and current approaches to learning. Second, I shall present the African worldview and show its unique ways of acquiring and appropriating knowledge. Third, I will then discuss how the two worldviews, Western and Christian, have impoverished the African way of life and ways of acquiring and appropriating African knowledge. Finally, I will suggest that African wholistic approach derived from an African worldview encompasses science, spirituality, disciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches. I will then explore some African stand out and provide new ways of thinking and knowing.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Development of Western Worldviews**

#### **Introduction**

The western worldview has patronize the type of education and ways of acquiring and appropriating knowledge in Africa from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This worldview is generally accepted and practiced by the majority without any questions. I will therefore examine the characteristics of the Western worldview in order to understand the practical implications of this worldview to the people of Africa.

What then is a western worldview? By “Western” here we mean European and American worldview or Euro-American worldview. We need to note however that it is not necessarily true that Europe and America prescribe to the same exact worldview. In fact even some sections within Europe or America may not be sharing the same worldview. However, it should be understood that Europe and America share a common heritage of the enlightenment period that greatly influenced the present western worldview.

Since many Africans have been influenced by Christianity, I will explore the Biblical worldview as it developed alongside the western secular worldview. I will also present the Biblical worldview as presented by the missionaries at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Africa.



## **The origins of a Western Worldview**

Since I had earlier explained the meaning of a worldview in depth, I will not repeat the issues of definition and what constitute a worldview. Instead, I will discuss the content of the western worldview directly with the previous knowledge in mind. But first, allow me to begin with a brief history of how the West developed its worldview over the centuries to what it is today.

The enlightenment era in Europe and America is credited with the present western worldview (Encyclopedia of Phil.Vol. 1&2: 520). But it is the medieval period that contributed greatly to the development of the Euro-centric worldview as understood today. Although the early history of this period was characterized by multiple cultures, it acquired a Christian worldview that was held in common by the majority of the inhabitants of Europe. It was Christianity that turned the multicultural and multilingual groups of people in Europe into a single people with one language and one religion.

The Christian worldview of the medieval period was based on the belief that the centre of all truth and experience was in God. Believe and total trust in God was thus of paramount importance during this period. It was during this era that theology was described as "the queen of the sciences". It was called the "queen" because the study of God and his works was believed to be the highest solid foundation upon which any inquiry must stand. It was generally accepted that there was no more noble and sublime purpose to which one could commit oneself to than to know and understand God (Brown 1968: 230 – 231).

With this understanding, the medieval worldview therefore tended not to trust human perception per se. Human perceptions were seen as variable and untrustworthy. To make the situation even worse was the belief that the material world itself was

deceptive. Therefore, to be overly concerned with the material phenomena was interpreted as a neglect of one's soul and one's dependence on God. The purpose of the material world, it was believed, was to distract humans from living the honourable and Godly life.

It is this period and these ideas that developed the scholastic system of thought in Europe. The central idea of scholasticism was that the sources of knowledge lie in the scriptures and the writing of the Church fathers. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was one of the greatest scholastic thinkers. In his book, the *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas produced a synthesis of Aristotle's science and Christian theology (Encyclopedia of Phil. 1967, Vol. 7 & 8:106). Using Ptolemy's model of the universe, in which its centre was believed to be the Earth, a coherent and unified medieval cosmology was constructed. That worldview showed a complex picture of God surrounded by nine orders of angels in a hierarchy above the spheres of stars, planets, sun, and moon all centred on the Earth ([www.cuw.edu/academic/program/history](http://www.cuw.edu/academic/program/history)).

The medieval cosmology also imagined a hierarchy of all beings that was known as the great chain. The great chain of being was an hierarchy of all creatures from the most primitive life form, animal kingdom, human beings, the nine orders of angels and finally, God. The point here was that everything and every person had a place in God's kingdom. This conception of the structure of the universe was integrated with Ptolemaic idea that the earth was the centre of the universe and not the sun, as we know it today (Ibid.).

This worldview, however, began to collapse when astronomers began to argue that the sun rather than the earth was the centre of the universe. This view challenged the Ptolemaic cosmology, Aristotelian ideas and the entire Christian worldview of that

period. When Nicolas Copernicus in 1543 suggested that the universe was heliocentric (Sun centred), that marked the collapse of the medieval European worldview. It also marked the beginning of an enlightenment period and a new worldview that attempted to explain the place and role of human being in the universe. This then marked the beginning of the current European worldview (Encyclopedia of Philo. 1967, 1&2: 519).

### **The Development of the Modern Western Worldview**

Enlightenment was a European intellectual movement of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. The age of enlightenment was so named because of the attitude some scholars in London and Paris had towards their supposed informed culture as opposed to others' cultures. This group of scholars believed that they were more enlightened than their compatriots and were ready to go out and enlighten them.

The enlightenment period used ideas concerning god, reason, nature and man to synthesize a worldview that is currently the guiding principle in Europe and America. The present western world is heavily influenced by enlightenment thinking which is characterized by humanism rationalism, modernism and secularism. We shall briefly explain these "isms" for clarity.

Humanism: Humanism emerged in Italy and France in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries among a group of thinkers known as humanists. The original idea as conceived by the group was to celebrate humanity as the crown of creation. These thinkers felt that they were fulfilling divine purpose by exercising their intellectual powers for achievement in arts such as music, painting, architecture and scholarship. Over the years, however, people became more and more impressed with what humans could do and ended up virtually worshipping human accomplishment. Indeed, the scientific and technological achievement in the

sectors of medicine, physics, biology and engineering was so impressive that science became the “religion” and “scientist” the new “priest” of that time. It was such influences that the spiritual aspect of human began to fade away. Humans were instead perceived as body and soul or mind and emotion without any spiritual dimension associated to it.

**Rationalism:** The use of reason which was understood to be sense and observation, was central to the enlightenment thinkers. Reason was celebrated as the power by which man understood the universe. And with this power it was possible to improve human condition, which would culminate in human knowledge, freedom and happiness.

Rationalist scholars like Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650), G. W Leibniz and Isaac Newton, believed that the way to the truth is by the application of reason alone. Descartes, for example, developed a method to attain truth in which only those things that were recognized by intellect or reason were accepted as knowledge. The ideas promoted by Descartes greatly impacted on the way the modern world understood truth and by extension, the development of the European worldview. Descartes saw two realms of knowledge, that is objective knowledge, which incorporates physical matter, science, mathematics and rationale. On the other side, was the subjective knowledge, which consisted of spiritual, intuitive or that which is not open to empirical or mathematical verification. For him, there existed a dichotomy between psychical and spiritual spheres (Encyclopedia of Philo. Vol. 1&2: 345).

**Modernism:** The modernist thinkers emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when intellectuals in Europe debated as to whether those who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (modern) were superior to the Greeks and the Romans (ancient). This debate brought about a dichotomy

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that remained of great concern to the modernist thinkers and the enlightenment period as a whole. Like the rationalist, the modernist believed that reason was the liberator of truth and hence the argument that “the truth shall set you free” (Ibid.).

These 18<sup>th</sup> century thinkers believed that virtually everything could be subjected to reason, and that included traditions, customs, and history. Similarly, they believed that the truth, revealed by reason, could be applied in politics and social spheres to correct and improve the political and social conditions of the human being. Baron de Montesquieu (1689 -1755) believed that the principles of science could be applied to create better governments. He wrote on the spirit of laws, which favoured governments that are based on the separation and balance of powers to prevent tyranny (Encyclopedia of Philo. Vol 1&2:369).

John Locke on the other hand, introduced the idea that all humans possess certain natural rights such as right to life, liberty and property. He further suggested that it was the role of governments to protect these rights among its citizen. Jean-Jacques Rouseau in 1763 proposed a new society for the individuals. He declared the right of liberty and equality for men. Inspired by this spirit, the French attempted a revolution in 1789, which failed (ibid).

**Secularism:** The impact of humanism, modernism and rationalism was the separation of the physical and the spiritual, worldly and otherworldly, sacred and profane. This resulted in what came to be known as secularization. George Jacob Holyoake was the first person to use the term secularization in 1846 to denote “a form of opinion which concerns itself with questions, the issues which could be tested by the experience of this life” ([www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org)). All these ‘isms’ are the development of this era that marked the separation of secular and spiritual matters in public life.

The picture that the enlightenment had painted was that intellect, self-realization and freedom would create a new and better society. These tenets formed the bases of modernism whose alternate goal was to create a new world order. The major ideas of the enlightenment can thus be summarized as follows: First, that the enlightenment idea was associated with human progress. Second, that the enlightenment placed complete confidence and trust in the powers of human reason alone. Finally, the spirit of the enlightenment believed that scientific principles could be applied to politics for the improvement of a better society.

The enlightenment period with its strong belief in the scientific revolution challenged and questioned traditions. In particular, it questioned traditional religious beliefs and institutions, the traditional institutions and political models. It also questioned traditional notions of social order and social conventions.

*Enlightened denial of any kind of transcendence of external world, of personal immortality, of the whole fabric of Christian sacraments, and enlightened rejection of the dogma of original sin, as well as much more in the enlightenment, is quite incompatible with Orthodox Christianity, Catholic and Protestant alike (Encyclopedia of Philo. Vol. 1&2: 521).*

The enlightenment, therefore, reflects the modern western worldview, which is associated with development, technology, science and naturalistic explanations for most things. In this western view, anything that cannot stand the test of empirical verification does not pass as truth or reality.

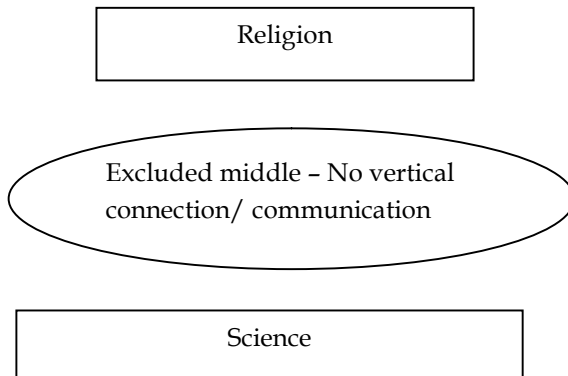
Due to the emphasis on empirical verification of truth, God and spiritual matters were closed out. For some, God was non-existent while for others God was seen as a remote and impersonal creator. This meant that the scriptures were regarded as having

no authority and their authenticity discredited. The Biblical accounts of miracles and the deity of Christ were rejected since they could not pass the test of scientific verification.

The result of this perception was that matters of God, spirits, faith, and religion were separated from the scientifically verifiable things; the physical world, natural order, humans and a secular world. This forms what Paul Hiebert has referred to as the two-tiered view of reality with science on one side and religion on the other (Hiebert 1994:196).

### **Illustration 1**

Two-tiered view of reality



*Adapted from Paul Hiebert, 1994*

According to Augsburgur:

*The two-tiered view of reality offers only two levels, the religious level, based on faith, manifest in miracles, and concerned with other worldly problems; and the scientific level, based on experience and manifest in the natural order dealing with the problems of this world (Augsburger 1986:33).*

The worldview that emerged clearly delineates the upper from the lower tier. The two tiers are perceived as distinct and nothing connects the two vertically, that is, the natural and the supernatural or the earthly and the spiritual realms. The implication of this was a dichotomy between science and religion and reason and faith. As Hiebert puts it:

*The result was the secularization of science and the mystification of religion. Science dealt with empirical world using mechanistic analogies, leaving religion to handle other-worldly matters, often in terms of organic analogies. Science was based on the certitude of sense experience, experimentation, and proof. Religion was left with faith in visions, dreams, and inner feelings. Science sought order in natural law. Religion was brought in to deal with miracles and exceptions to the natural order, but these decreased as scientific knowledge expanded (Hiebert 1994:197).*

This two tiered model represents the current western worldview. This means that the majority of people in the West see and understand the world around them as such; that is, most people would rely on science and self for answers on issues of their daily problems and that only a small number of people would resort to spiritual intervention. Pearse confirms this when he says that:

*Most, though not all, major cultures have been underpinned by adherence to a major religion. The West is unusual in having debunked its own and also rigorously excluding religious issues from public life. Even more remarkable is the cheerful confidence displayed by most Westerners in the falsity of any "hard" religious claims. What eighteenth and nineteenth-century rationalism began, the rise of functional rationality and technocracy has completed (Pearse 2005:40).*



Two worldviews emerged in the enlightenment era. One was the Deist worldview which believed that God created the world and set it to run by natural laws. God and the world are thus separate and that God has no direct involvement with the creation. The God of the Deist is a distant God who did not perform any miracles. The Deist believes in a linear history, that the world will come to an end one day and that there is no life after death.

The other worldview known as the Secular Atheistic worldview was propounded by the scientist. This worldview did not believe in a created world nor a creator God. Instead the scientist came up with a theory, the Big Bang theory to explain how the universe came to be. The theory simply suggested that the formation of the world was an accident. They believed that the world came into being through explosion over time and that basic elements combined, evolved and mutated to form the current world. This world will run down in time and be destroyed. Due to this fact, the world should be exploited to the maximum by humans. The end of human life is death and there is no life thereafter.

**Table 1: Western worldview**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Response</b>
1. Where do we come from?	Scientific explanation – the big bang theory – by accidental explosion over time. No personal source of existence of the world – No God
2. Where are we?	On earth which must be exploited – the world will finally run down – a linear history
3. Where are we going?	We are going nowhere – Death is the final destiny – the end of human life – no life after death

4. What is good and what is evil?	That which benefits the individual and the evil is that which hurts and destroys life – morals are relative –end justifies the means –survival for the fittest
5. How shall we act?	Follow the laws – human rights, moral values are relative, what is good for me is okay
6. What is true and what is false?	Science –what can be verified using scientific methods is true, what can't, is false

### **Biblical Worldview**

The enlightenment period posed a very difficult dilemma for Christianity and its adherents in Europe and America then. The enlightenment's new ideas and teachings were opposed to what Christian religion taught and cherished. The enlightenment thinkers attacked religion and in its place introduced reason. The "free thinkers" and the "philosophes" of the period, as they were called, emphasized the role of critical inquiry, logic and reason. In that way, anything that could not be proven by science, such as belief in God, the existence of spirits, angels, and miracles was not accepted. The end result was that Christianity lost its influence in society. Indeed, this marked the beginning of the decline of Christian faith in Europe and America.

The Christian worldview, given the many changes, had no option but to adapt to the new discoveries and new ways of thinking. It therefore changed its medieval worldview in which the sun was perceived to be the centre of the universe. It however maintained its fundamental teaching, that is, the world was created by God as suggested in the book of Genesis. That God's creation was purposeful and that He is the controller and sustainer of the

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entire universe. The Christian God was also perceived to be a personal God who acts accordingly and responds to human needs in this world.

The worldview further indicates that God interacts continuously with his creation and personally acts through his son Jesus Christ. Human beings are expected to live a life as modelled by Christ who came to save mankind. The Christian worldview taught that the problem of man is sin. Human beings are thus encouraged to live a righteous life according to the teachings of the church and the laws stipulated in the Holy Scriptures. Christians believe that there is life after death, that those who are obedient will live in heaven with God for ever and the sinners will go to hell to suffer forever. The world, it is believed, will eventually be destroyed but human life and that of the creator shall continue forever.

### **The Biblical Worldview as presented in Africa**

Western missionaries replicated Paul Hiebert's experience of Indian in Africa at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when the Gospel was first preached in the continent. Today, unfortunately, missionaries repeat the same mistakes since little has changed in their attempts to understand and approach different worldviews. The western worldview says Hiebert, "left western Christians with a spiritual schizophrenia... they lived in an ordinary world explained in naturalistic terms, in which there was little room for God" (Hiebert 1994:220). It is this reality of the world that African Christians and non-Christians alike have adopted in the midst of their own views of reality that point to the opposite direction.

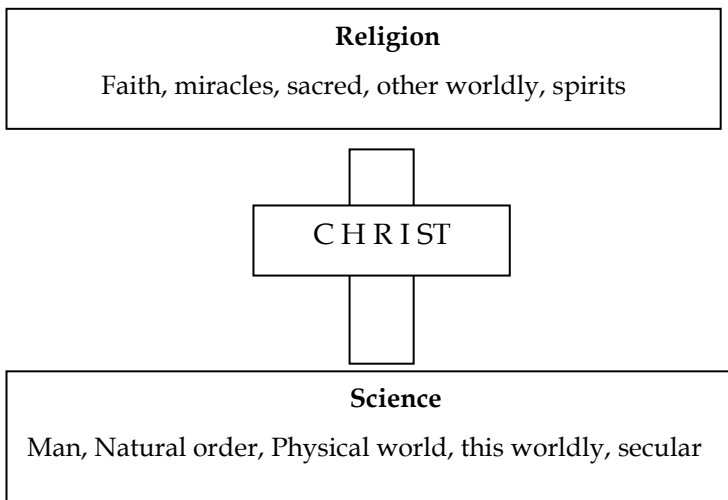
Interestingly, the Biblical worldview does not make sharp distinctions between the natural and the supernatural phenomenon. The bible unlike western realities does not deny spiritual realities. Indeed, Biblical stories portray vibrant encounters of human and spiritual forces. The missionaries in Africa however presented a biblical worldview that borrowed

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heavily from the secular West. The only difference from the secular western worldview was that the Biblical worldview introduced Christ as the link between God and his creation. Everything else including the role of science remained the same as the western worldview.

### **Illustration 2**

Two tiered view with Christ at the centre



*Modified model of Hiebert (1994)*

### **Western Education and Acquisition of Knowledge**

One of the major developments of western worldview was the introduction of western education as we know it today. When theology lost its position as the queen of the sciences, it gave way to the emergence of the different academic disciplines. The reason why the "Queen" was forced to abdicate its prestigious position by the sciences is that theology was not able to solve all the human problems encountered during that era.

The academic disciplines that emerged included; biology, physics, chemistry, mathematics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and religion. All these disciplines were dominated by western science and thus forced them to adapt the scientific methods and approaches of acquiring and appropriating knowledge. These disciplines have over the years generated large amounts of knowledge and each has created its own empire of academic giants and professionals. It is these discipline- based models of academic programmes that have become dominant in most universities. The popularity of these disciplines is based on the fact that the “ model capitalizes on the benefits of specialization – allowing specialists within a discipline to refine theories, methods and technologies and push outward the bounds of knowledge within that field” (Seipel in [www.mwndeley.com/interdisciplinarity-introduction-5](http://www.mwndeley.com/interdisciplinarity-introduction-5)).

The importance of these disciplines as taught in the majority of universities all over the world cannot be underestimated. In spite of these, we note that, like theology was not able to solve all human problems, these disciplines too, important as they are, have often failed to meet all the essential needs of humanity singly. Due to new realities that require diverse ideas, the academic disciplines have found it difficult to maintain the status quo any longer. Subsequently, the scholars of any one of these disciplines have been forced to rely on the expertise of other disciplines to solve certain human problems. One trend that is evident in academic circles is the emergence of a new discipline that cut across, borrows and share ideas with one or more disciplines known as interdisciplinary studies.

### **Interdisciplinarity**

In discussing the concept of interdisciplinarity, it is important for us to be aware that there are other terms that have been used interchangeably with interdisciplinary yet in real sense are not the

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same. These terms include, cross-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary. Marilyn Stember has provided excellent distinction of these confusing nomenclatures. She observes thus:

*Cross-disciplinary activity views one discipline from the perspective of another, such as physics .... in which principles of physics are used to understand acoustics of music.*

*Multi-disciplinary analysis draws on the knowledge of several disciplines, each of which provides a different perspective on a problem or issue...In multidisciplinary analysis each discipline makes a contribution to the overall understanding of the issue but in a primary additive fashion.*

*Trans-disciplinary analysis is concerned with the unity of intellectual framework beyond the disciplinary perspective. It may deal with philosophical questions about nature of reality and the nature of knowledge systems that transcend disciplines (Quoted in Seipel: 2- 4).*

Interdisciplinarity on the other hand has been understood to be a process of analyzing, evaluating and synthesizing information from various disciplines with a view of providing a solution to an issue. Julie Klein defines interdisciplinarity thus:

*"Interdisciplinary studies may be defined as a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession," (Klein, Julie 1998:1,quoted in Seipel: 3).*

Like the above approaches, interdisciplinarity builds on the traditional disciplines but goes much deeper. From the above definition, the major difference between interdisciplinarity and the other approaches is that interdisciplinarity goes beyond simply using ideas of one or more disciplines or even comparing and contrasting the knowledge in different

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disciplines. Interdisciplinarity approach involves accommodating knowledge, concepts and tools from other academic disciplines and integrating the ideas together to create new knowledge and deeper understanding. Interdisciplinarity therefore builds on the specialization of each discipline, Klein summarizes well what interdisciplinary entails when she writes:

*Disciplinary knowledge, concepts, tools and rules of investigations are considered, contrasted, and combined in such a way that the resulting understanding is greater than simply the sum of its disciplinary parts. (Quoted in Seipel: 3).*

The implication for an interdisciplinary scholar is that he/she needs to draw insights from his/her discipline and reconfigure them in such a way that it addresses the problem at hand. An interdisciplinary programme therefore is one that seeks “to synthesize broad perspectives, knowledge, skills, interconnections and epistemology in an educational setting” (Seipel: 4).

The point I would like to pass across here is that there are many ways of acquiring knowledge and that the use of interdisciplinary studies is among the current way of developing knowledge. The conclusion here is that the world we live in is not structured in such a way that one can operate with knowledge and information from one specific discipline. Indeed, the trend now points to other ways beyond interdisciplinarity. There is need to follow the habit of human mind that analyzes, evaluates and synthesizes all available information in order to provide solution to every day human problems. The African wholistic approach to acquisition of knowledge is another possible tool that will take our understanding of the universe to another level. In my opinion, this idea will be borne forth from the African worldview to which we now turn.

## **Chapter Three**

### **African Worldview**

#### **Introduction**

African spirituality provides a worldview that is understood and lived by African peoples. An African worldview is a system of beliefs that provides people with a mechanism to understand the world in which they live and to explain everyday events and occurrences. These constitute the beliefs, values and attitudes learned by each individual from the time they are born to the time they die. It is these culturally influenced values that provide the mechanisms that control how one understands what happens to them, their community and the world in which they live in general.

An African worldview is complex, deeply spiritual, social and medicinal in nature. It is therefore not possible to discuss an African worldview that is devoid of the spiritual beings in the human environment. It is a worldview that looks at the entire universe and how each aspect is related to each other. The universe that is under the control of the Supreme Being is inhabited by divinities, ancestral spirits, human beings, other spiritual beings, animate and inanimate things in that hierarchical.

#### **An African worldview**

An African worldview is a three tiered view of reality. In the upper level is the Supreme Being who created, sustains and controls the entire universe. The lower level is that of human beings and their communities, who are expected to be obedient to the Supreme Being and to maintain harmony with all other created things in the universe.



The middle level is the vibrant spirit world that connects the activities in the physical world with the spiritual world. The divinities and the ancestral spirits influence everyday life in their functions as mediators between the living and the Supreme Being. The Earth and the sky spirits assist all living things to control nature in favour of life in the universe. These spirits are sometimes used by the Supreme Being to reward, warn or punish humans when they break the accepted moral code.

The African worldview sees history as cyclic in nature. That is, people are born and die but are reborn again through the birth of children of their relative. They therefore do not perceive of a world that has an end. As long as human beings live in harmony with all the other created things, life shall continue forever. At the end of human life, one goes to the underworld to live with the ancestors forever in a land where there are no sorrows.

To have a grip of an African worldview, we must understand the place of spiritual beings. We shall therefore discuss the role of each of the components of the universe, that is: the Supreme Being, human beings and the spirit world.

## **The Supreme Being in African Spirituality**

African people believe in the existence of a Supreme Being. Without any exception, all African societies believe in one Supreme Being who created the world and all that is in it. The evidence that African people believe in one supreme God is found in African prayers, songs, and myths among others sources (See Sambu: 2007; Also, (<http://afrikaworld.net/Mbiti.htm>)).

Apart from creating the world, the Supreme Being sustains the creation, provides and protects the entire creation. The Supreme Being owns everything, rules over the universe and is the source of life and reality. The Supreme Being is understood to be eternal, all-powerful, *knows everything that happens in the world* and is

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present everywhere all the time. The Supreme Being is known to be kind, loving and cares for all the creation. The Supreme Being is holy, righteous and upholds justice. The Supreme Being is perceived as the pure spirit, unifier, immortal and beyond human comprehension.

From the perspective of African traditional worldview, the Supreme Being has no gender and that explains why Africans view their God as father or as mother. As the creator, each African community has their unique myths of how the Supreme Being created the world (Mbiti 1975:4). Since African people are made up of different ethnic communities, each with its own language, beliefs and living in different and unique environments, the Supreme Being is known to each of these societies by name in their own different languages. There are therefore many names to describe the same Supreme Being according to each community (Mbiti 1975: 42-43).

Therefore there is only one Supreme Being in the universe who serves the entire creation. There is no African community that believes that deity is different and unique from the Supreme Being of other communities. They see the same Supreme Being as the same one who created different people, gave them different languages, culture and environment.

### **The Role of Human Beings in an African Worldview**

The role of human beings in African religion is very important. According to African spirituality, humanity takes the center place in the universe. In this position, human beings define the entire universe and its creator from a human perspective. This conception is a logical conclusion given that all the Supreme Being's actions and those of other spiritual beings are generally directed towards the well-being of the human person. This does not imply dominance but rather suggests that human beings see

the rest of the creation as “the friend, the beneficiary, the users” (Allies 1993; Mbiti: 1975:60).

In this position, human beings look for ways to benefit from the universe to their advantage. To manage this appropriately without disturbing the cosmic harmony, there are a number of specialists who serve as links between human beings with their fellow human beings, the Supreme Being, the divinities, the ancestors and spirits (Mbiti, 1975: 150). These specialists are found in every society and in each locality and are both men and women. They are God-fearing individuals who are blessed with knowledge, talents and skills to decipher the mysteries surrounding mankind. In turn, they render their services to people for a modest gift, normally regulated by the community to avoid exploitation. These specialists are in various categories as outlined by arap Chepkwony (2006 : 643-645).

Herbalists: Herbalists are individuals who mainly use herbs to treat their patients. Herbalists are categorized according to the kind of knowledge, skills, and methods they use. They are basically of two levels, first, are those who concentrate on physical common diseases such as stomach upsets, malaria, migraine, asthma, arthritis, wounds and skin ulcers among others. The second level is specialists who treat more complicated diseases such as surgery (Thairu as quoted in Tessema 1980) bone fractures and mental illnesses.

The herbal formulations are generally derived from roots, barks, leaves and fruits from plants. Herbs are also formulated from bones, excreta, oils, skins, fur, feathers, fish oils, animal products and other ingredients suitable for yielding medicinal extracts. These are processed into powder, liquids or oils ready for use. The herbalist can thus be likened to the pharmacist since they prepare and dispense medicine in the community.

## AFRICAN WORLDVIEW (WORLD-LIFE)

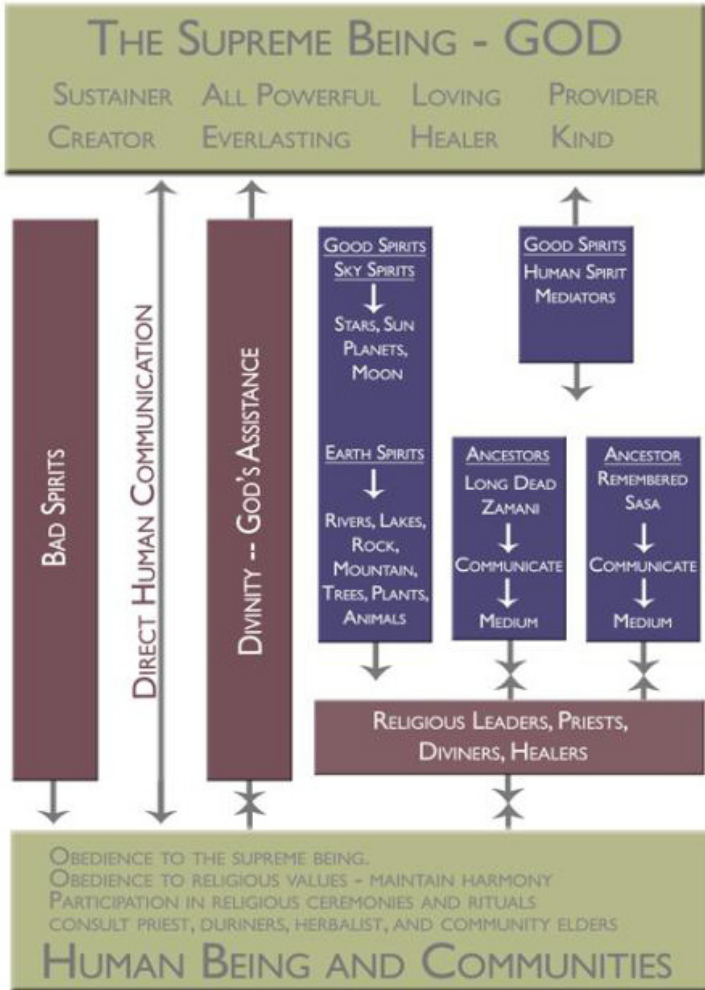


Illustration 3

***Diviners:*** The role of diviners is to reveal the difficult and unique causes of illness that the herbalists fail to discern. Sometimes some diviners double up their specialty as herbalists, but the majority work with the patients in discovering the hidden causes of suffering. They serve as consultants to the herbalists when initial treatment fails. As such, it is assumed that there are hidden causes of disease, which could only be revealed by a diviner.

Apart from revealing the cause of problems, diviners also provide curative medicine as well as preventive medicine. It is therefore not uncommon for patients to see a diviner for protection from misfortune. Similarly a person undertaking a long journey or a leader during election period may want medicine that will provide protection while on a trip and provide wisdom and clarity in making important decisions, respectively.

The diviners pray to the ancestors or the Supreme Being to reveal to them the reason why one continues to be unwell, the required medication, or the healer who could ably assist the patient. Diviners seek the cause of illness of their patients through mediums who communicate directly with the spiritual world. According to Mbiti, the medium can reveal:

*Where to find lost things, who may have bewitched the sick, what type of ritual and medicine are necessary for the cure of people's troubles, whether an intended journey will be a success or not, which of the living dead may have a request to make and what kind, and many other things (Mbiti 1975: 159).*

If an illness is caused by inappropriate behavior on the part of the patient, a remedy or cure for the illness can only come through spiritual intervention. While a herbal healer use herbs from plants to treat diseases, a diviner seeks input from the spiritual world to understand the cause of the illness and prescribe a cure. Diviners use diverse tools to diagnose their patient's problems. Some use items such as shoes, stones, bones, seeds, beads, pebbles while

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others use gourds, drums, rattles, boards and more recently books to cast lots and divine for their clients.

***Ritual Elders:*** Ritual elders are those men and women who perform healing rituals for individuals or for the entire community. Among them are priests, rain-callers and circumcisers. These are men and women who are well versed in all matters pertaining to their communities. These encompass knowledge in oral history, myths, beliefs, customs, taboos and religious practices in general. Since ritual practices are an indispensable aspect of African healing every village has its ritual healers.

Ritual practices themselves serve as remedies for certain illnesses and in certain cases; medicines are accompanied by rituals for the herbs to be potent. Rituals are also effective in treating certain diseases that are brought about by unsettled matters in one's life – the unfinished business. Ritual practices include prayers, sacrifices, offerings, or a combination of some or all of these. Rituals are therefore necessary because there are certain ailments that cannot be resolved by herbs alone. Some has summarized the importance of rituals thus:

*As much as our body requires food for nourishment, our souls and spirits require rituals to stay whole. It is as if without the spirit being nourished in us, the body pays for the consequences. The food of psyche is the symbol, and it is through ritual that our spirit is fed (Some 1997:160).*

This African wisdom of healing through rituals enables one to find new balance between the Supreme Being, community, environment and the self. It is this balance and harmony with the rest of creation that restores, retains and replenishes good health.

## **Spirit World in Africa**

The African worldview is populated with spirits. The world of spirits is central in all African communities including those in the diasporas. Spirits influence the lives of human beings as individuals and as communities in different ways. There are basically three functions of spirits, those known to assist human beings; those that create disturbances and those that are neutral, causing neither harm nor good to humans. There are four important kinds of spirits in an African worldview.

***Divinities:*** Divinities are spiritual beings that are close to the Supreme Being. Not all communities in Africa believe in the existence of divinities. The communities that believe in divinities have explanations of how they originated and their purpose in this world. However, the general understanding is that divinities were created or brought into being to hold certain functions in the theocratic government of the universe. The divinities serve human beings under different ministries each with a portfolio in the Supreme Being's monarchical government.

These divinities are venerated for a variety of purposes such as fertility, agriculture, and war among many other human needs. Communities that believe in divinities include the Yoruba of Nigeria (Ade Dopamu: 1999), the Adigo of Kenya (Chembea: 2011), the Bunyoro of Uganda (Byaruchanga Akiki, 1982) and several communities in Central Africa.

***Human Spirits:*** African communities believe that after death, one enters into the underworld and joins the community of ancestral spirits. These are the spirits of those who have died. The spirits are closely interested in what happens in families and communities they were associated with before death. As ancestral spirits, they are close to the Supreme Being and can affect the lives of the living.

There are two types of ancestral spirits. The remembered ancestors or the “living –dead” according to Mbiti, are the spirits of people who died recently and are still remembered. Mbiti refers to these spirits as the ancestors in the *Sasa* (present/ now) period ( Mbiti 1975: 83). These are the spirits that have come back to the family and the clan through the birth of babies named after them. They are believed to be the owners of land and protectors of the living. These spirits remain actively interested and engaged in the life of the members of their family and community. The new status in the ancestral land allows them to have special relationship with the Supreme Being, divinities and other ancestral spirits.

The ancestral spirits are mostly concerned about the prosperity and security of their families and communities. They intercede with the Supreme Being on behalf of individuals and their communities to protect them from harm. It is believed that these spirits have power over bad spirits that bring about evil. However, if individual members, families or communities engage in inappropriate behaviour, the ancestors withdraw their protection and their willingness to intercede for their descendants before the Supreme Being as a sign of displeasure.

*The “No longer remembered Ancestors”* are the spirits of ancestors who died long ago and are no longer remembered in the community. Mbiti refers to these spirits as the spirits of the *Zamani* (distant past) period (Mbiti: 1969: 28-34). Since the ancestors died so long ago and have no living relatives directly related to them, the spirits withdraw from involvement in the daily activities of human lives. It is believed that these spirits live in the land of ancestors near the Supreme Being.

***Nature Spirits:*** Nature spirits are spirits that inhabit or live in nature. There are two types of nature spirits, those that live in the outer space and those that live on earth. The spirits of the outer space live among the planets, sun, stars and the moon.



These spirits are important since they control the seasons which determine when to prepare the ground for planting and when to plant, to harvest, to prepare for communal ceremonies and when to rest. The seasons that are controlled by this celestial bodies also alert the community as to when to pray, sacrifice, worship and when to undertake traditional festivals and ceremonies.

The nature spirits on the other hand live on earth. These types of spirits live either in water or on land. The water spirits control springs, rivers, lakes and oceans. The spirits that inhabit *water* are very important since they are believed to control fish and animals that live in the waters. The nature spirits of land inhabit rocks, mountains, trees, valleys, forests and all sacred places. One of the reasons why the spirits inhabit these places is to protect the particular environments that serve as the Supreme Being's pharmacy. For it is here that all kinds of herbs for all kinds of ailments for both human beings and animals are grown and harvested. It is also here that both human beings and other creatures dwell and find their survival needs.

The nature spirits are, therefore, very important to human beings. They are good spirits who protect people and provide them with essential items in life like water, air, food, and medicine by preserving the environment. The nature spirits are directly under the control of the Supreme Being who often uses these spirits to reward or punish human beings when they go astray. For example, thunder and lightning is used to settle disputes and even to punish wrong doers.

***Bad Spirits:*** African people believe in the existence of bad spirits. The bad spirits are spirits of divinities that fell out of favour with the Supreme Beings. Others were human beings who were mistreated when they were alive or died bad deaths, like drowning, suicide or those who did not make it to the land of the ancestors for some reason. Bad spirits are also the spirits of

witches and wizards who, although still alive, are able to leave their bodies and inhabit animals. Disguised in the form of an animal, these spirits harm and bring about misfortune to people. These turn out to be revengeful spirits and are viewed as evil.

The bad spirits are responsible for all kinds of human disturbances such as illness, premature death, suffering and misfortunes. African religious traditions hold that just as there is good in the world, there is also evil. Goodness is the result of the blessings from the Supreme Being in response to good behaviour on the part of the individuals and communities. Suffering and misfortune of individuals and communities are the result of either inappropriate behaviour on the part of individuals or communities, or the intervention of bad or disruptive spirits. Bad spirits are therefore responsible for causing much of the misfortune that individuals and communities suffer (Kirwen, 2008:177-178).

**Table 2: African Worldview**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Responses</b>
1. Where do we come from?	Humans were created by the Supreme Being who created all the visible and the invisible things.
2. Where are we?	Humans are on earth with other created things - it is a real place and has no end - cyclic history
3. Where are we going?	There is life after death in the ancestral land - life similar to the present life except without the problems of this world - disease, pain, anger, grief etc

4. What is good and what is evil?	To live in harmony with other created things and to adhere to the moral values of the society. To break the cosmic harmony is evil - brings pain to the entire community.
5. How shall we act?	Obey the rules of the cosmic harmony as dictated by the ethical values and individual conscience.
6. What is true and what is false?	The foundation is based on the revelations of the Supreme Being, the divinities, the ancestors and human experience over the years.

## Chapter Four

### Wholistic Approach to life

#### Cosmic Harmony in an African Spirituality

I shall use the term “ wholistic” here to describe the way Africans perceive and deal with reality as a whole functioning system. Africans perceive the Earth as a garden where human beings, spirits and all the living creatures dwell. In this garden the Supreme Being expects human being and the rest of the creation to co-exist in harmony. A peaceful co-existence of all creatures is necessary for the survival of life in the universe. In his part, the Supreme Being continues to nurture his creation in a benevolent manner. The Supreme Being thus expects human beings to live in the world in harmony with the rest of the creation. Ikenga-Metuh has explained the importance of this relationship thus:

The goal of interaction of beings in African world-view is the maintenance of the integration and balance of the beings in it (the world). Harmonious interaction of beings leads to the mutual strengthening of the beings involved, and enhances the growth of life. A pernicious influence from one being weakens other beings and threatens the harmony and integration of the whole (quoted Onah in <http://africaworld.net/afreb/goddopnah/htm>)

To maintain a healthy relationship with creation, human beings are supposed to seek harmony on a cosmic scale. This can be achieved when human beings act righteously by following the acceptable moral values that ensure harmony between the Supreme Being and His creation. In the words of Rweyemanu,

*...the African soul has perceived the moral obligation to collaborate with the ordered harmony in creation so as to preserve that equilibrium which visible and invisible forces must maintain. It is*

*from the Supreme Being, the divine creator and author of order and harmony. It is therefore a sinful serious transgression to attempt to break or interrupt the free, harmonious and orderly functioning of the god-given peace which guarantees life, growth, survival in creation (Rweyemanu 1989, quoted in Onah).*

Africans therefore believe that any disorder in the universe causes disunity with the Supreme Being. Among the Kipsigis of Kenya, for example, this belief is based on the concept of *ngogisto*. *Ngogisto* is the belief that the Supreme Being (*Asis*) is the ultimate upholder of tribal sanctity and the final arbiter of justice. *Asis* therefore sees all evildoers and punishes them regardless of whether there was any litigation against them or not. The idea of *ngogis* suggests that the universe is a rigidly structured and ordered system such that any disruption of its normal function is followed by a counter reaction (Arap Chepkwony 1997). Whoever abuses the harmonious relationship that exists between the Supreme Being and his creation is due for punishment for creating an imbalance in the cosmic order. As Taylor rightly puts it:

*A man's well being consists... in keeping in harmony with cosmic totality. When things go well with him he knows he is at peace and of a piece with the scheme of things and there can be no greater good than that. If things go wrong then somewhere he has fallen out of step... The whole system of divination exists to help him discover the point at which the harmony has been broken and how it may be (Taylor 1963: 67).*

This idea of cosmic harmony is a widely acknowledged concept in African communities. Among the Bambuti of Congo, harmony within the community is of capital importance and it is actually the basis of their ethics. If a man beats his wife among the Bambuti, for example, this causes disharmony not only between the wife and the husband, but his family, community and the cosmos in

general. Cosmic harmony is therefore enhanced through proper relationships. Ethical relationships concern the behaviour of the individual or community towards Supreme Being, ancestors, fellow human beings, other creatures, the environment and the spirits. Each of these relationships has a direct effect towards the Supreme Being. Bad relationships bring disharmony or ill health, while good ones bring harmony and prosperity. In other words, the African code of ethics that governs these relationships controls not only the individual and the community, but also the cosmos and its creator. Onah has rightly observed that:

*If a person breaks either the spiritual or the cosmic harmony, the lack of peace that ensues reverts on the entire community. Sometimes individual reparations in terms of sacrifices are not enough to restore sense of the social dimension of immoral conduct (Onah in <http://afrikaworld.net/afrel/goddionah.htm>, 5).*

The key idea behind environmental sustainability is to maintain harmony with Supreme Being and the rest of the creation. It is only when harmony exists between the Supreme Being and creation that good health is enjoyed by the individual and the community at large. Onah summarizes this idea thus:

*The goal of all moral conduct is therefore the fullness of life. Human life is considered full in Africa when it is marked by spiritual, material, and social blessings; when the network of relations with the spiritual, human and material beings is as it should be (Ibid.).*

In summary, the alliance between the Supreme Being and humans depends on whether humans maintain good relationship with his fellow humans, flora, fauna and the spirits.

## **Communal life in Africa**

The one important aspect of an African worldview that comes out very strongly is the integration, interconnectedness and mutual dependence of all things in the universe on each other. In this way, the elements of the universe are expected to co-exist in harmony. In describing the fifteen cultural themes that constitute an African worldview, Kirwen demonstrates the oneness and the wholeness of an African cultural knowledge and the living reality in contemporary African life. He observes:

*These fifteen cultural themes are on-line in one's brain in a subconscious manner, just like the grammar of a spoken language - one accesses them on demand giving meaning to one's daily activities. Furthermore, they are all inter-related, like the instruments in a fifteen piece band, each one contributes to the whole and only predominates when needed... (Kirwen 2008: 178).*

This stability and the well being of the creation is guaranteed only when harmony exists between the Supreme Being and the rest of creation. In this scenario, human beings are at the centre, maintaining unbroken relationships with the Supreme Being who is the source of harmony, an intimate relationship with fellow human beings, spiritual beings and the environment.

A strong sense of communal living has thus developed around the African worldview. Community is thus the centre of gravity in Africa. In these communal societies, the highest value of life lies in the interpersonal relations between human beings as depicted in rather popular quotation by Mbiti:

*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, I am' (Mbiti 1969: 108: Also Mbiti 1975: 108-109).*

This reality is true throughout the Africa continent albeit with minor differences. This spirit of community is guided by various but similar philosophies that bind people together from all parts of Africa. These philosophies provide unique ways of understanding, acquiring and appropriating knowledge. The three philosophies we shall consider are *Ubuntu* from South Africa, the *Undugu* from East Africa and the *Ntu* from Central Africa.

### **Philosophy of Ubuntu**

The *Ubuntu* concept comes from the Zulu people of South Africa. The term *Ubuntu* means “humanity”, “humanness” or “humaneness”. The idea of *Ubuntu* is derived from the Zulu aphorism, *umuntu, ngumuntu ngabantu* which is translated as “a person is a person through other persons” (Louw 2001: 1). This Zulu traditional maxim has deep religious meanings imbued with ethical implications. According to Louw, “it not only describes human being as ‘being with others’, but also prescribes how we should relate to others, i.e. what ‘being- with others’ should be all about” (Louw 2001:1).

*Ubuntu* is thus the acceptance of the need for mutual recognition or reciprocal regard of others. The importance of this concept is seen from the fact that the government of South Africa has recognized it officially. In the South African government white paper on social welfare of 1997, *Ubuntu* was defined as:

*The principle of caring for each other's well-being.... and a spirit of mutual support. ...Each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through recognition of the individual's humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well being (Ibid.)*



## Cosmic Harmony in An African Worldview



Illustration 4

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Louw has further shown how this concept carries deeper meaning embedded in an African worldview. He explains how a person becomes a person through others is connected with the spiritual worldview in which human beings are expected to live in harmony with the supreme Being, the ancestors and the environment in general. He observes:

*The person one is to become “through other persons” is ultimately, an ancestor. And, by the same token, these “other persons” include ancestors. Ancestors are extended family. Dying is an ultimate homecoming. Not only the living must therefore share with and care for each other, but the living and the dead depend on each other (Louw 2001:3).*

The importance of this practice is so crucial that to be regarded as a “person”, one must go through a process. In Louw's own words, “becoming a “person through other persons” involves going through various community prescribed stages and being involved in certain ceremonies and initiation rituals” (Louw 2001:3). The idea of *Ubuntu* is therefore central among the South African communities. In deed the term *Ubuntu* has its equivalent as *botho* among the Sotho, *(h)unhu* among the Shona, *bunhu* among the Tsonga and *vhutu* among the Venda (Louw 2001:1). This idea is replicable in all communities in Africa.

### **The Philosophy of Undugu**

In East Africa, the Swahili word *Undugu* portrays the oneness of all human beings. The word *ndugu* means blood sister or brother whereas *Undugu* describes an African richness of sisterhood and brotherhood that form a community of solidarity. Underlining the word *undugu* is another term, *utu* which means humanity. What propels one to be in solidarity with his/her fellow human being (*undugu*) is *utu* (humanity). The recognition that human beings are creatures of one creator compels Africans to respect

and treat others as equals in a brotherly and sisterly manner. Another way of understanding this concept is the commonly used Mbiti's maxim "I am because we are and since we are therefore I am". The Kiswahili saying " Mtu ni Watu" which means "a person is people," express the same idea. The one example of how *undugu* has been put into practice is the Late Mwalimu Nyerere's philosophy of *Ujamaa*. Laurenti Magesa explains this, thus:

*Nyerere in Tanzania promoted the unity of the 140 ethnic groups of Tanzania by preaching Ujamaa, that is, relate to all as if they were a member of your lineal family (Magesa 2008: 177).*

Like *Ubuntu*, the message here is much deeper than simply saying that people need one another or that people are like the birds of the same feather. The oneness insinuated here goes beyond human being and instead describes the kind of harmony that is expected in an African worldview in its entirety. Scientific studies have shown that humans are hard-wired to connect to each other. In his recent bestselling book, *The Great Turning*, David C. Korten notes:

*The commission's report, based on scientific studies of human brain, concludes that we humans are physiologically "wired" to form "close attachments to other people, beginning with our mothers, fathers, and extended family, and then moving out to the broader community" (Korten 2006:282).*

Similarly, Diarmuid O'Murchu laments how the contemporary society has lost its ability to relate wholistically. He observes that this trend has denied the western world a sense of human, planetary and global community. He writes:

*The search for community is not merely a pursuit of security and intimacy to obviate our loneliness in an anonymous and impersonal world. It is much more than that. It is the expression – however haphazardly and imperfectly made – of a yearning from deep within*

*the created order itself, a groaning arising from the heart of creation, ... Seeking reciprocity and mutuality. The very fabric of creation and the very nature of God sing in unison a song of love (O'Murchu 2004: 96).*

This is the essence of *Undugu*, to acknowledge the strength and the weakness of the other, to forgive, to show compassion, to help and to sacrifice for others. The *Undugu* as well as the *Ubuntu* concepts go beyond human boundaries and embraces the entire creation. African communities extend this relationship to animals, the environment and the earth, commonly referred to and admired as 'mother earth'.

### **Philosophy of Ntu**

*Ntu* is a root word in the Bantu languages. To comprehend the concept behind *ntu*, we turn to the Kinyaruanda language from which *ntu* is derived. Alexis Kagame's studies of the Kinyaruanda language is indispensable here and the only road map to understanding, not only the concept of *ntu*, but the Bantu (African) worldview (Jahn 1961:99).

In his studies of the philosophy of Abantu people of Rwanda, Kagame noted that in Kinyaruanda, like all Bantu languages, there are four main linguistic classifications that differentiate human beings, things, place and time and modality. In other words, according to Bantu languages, all beings, all essence, in whatever form is conceived under one of these four categories.

*Muntu* = human beings = man, women, ancestors

*Kintu* = things = dogs, stones, rivers

*Hantu* = Place and time = East and yesterday,

*Kuntu* = Modality = beauty and laughter (Jahn 1961: 100).

A close look at the four categories, *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu* indicate that *Ntu* is common to all categories. Kagame referred to *Ntu* here as “determinative”. The significance of the “determinative” here is that without it, the stem of the word loses its meaning completely. In other words, Mu, Ki, Ha and Ku do not mean anything at all. On the other hand, when the stems are removed, what remains is “*ntu*” for all the categories (Ibid. 100).

The immediate conclusion and implication here is that all the four categories, which encompass everything conceivable, must belong together. Alternatively we can also say that there must be something that connects human beings; plants, animals, objects, stars; time, space; and beauty and laughter together. This thing, *ntu*, which holds everything together, has been understood as a force. In other words, “man is a force, all things are forces, place and time are forces and the ‘modalities are forces” (Ibid.100).

Accordingly, *Ntu* is the universal force.

*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 manifestation. NTU is that force in which Being and beings coalesce.... NTU is the point from which creation flows’ that Klee was speaking : ‘I am seeking a far off point from which creation flows, where I suspect there is a formula for man, beast, plants, earth, fire, water, air and circling forces at once....Ntu is what Muntu, Kintu,Hantu, and Kuntu all equally are. Force and matter are not being united in this conception; on the contrary, they have never been apart (Jahn 1961:101).*

It is not difficult to see how the concept of *Ntu* is related to the concept of *Undugu*. At the same time, it is easy to see the idea of *Ubuntu* coming out clearly here, which is “a person is a person through other persons”. For if the force that is in *Muntu* is also

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present in *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu*, then we can indeed say that a person is a person through other persons and all other living and non-living things. This explains why same African communities use animals, birds, insects and objects as their totems and often refer to them as my relative.

The fact that humans have close affinity with animals and other living things has been seen as a primitive idea. However, recent scientific studies show the contrary. In his book, *The language of God* (2006), Francis S. Collins, one of the leading scientists in America and the former Director of Genome project has provided scientific evidence that human beings, animals, insects and plants have the same gene counts. He writes;

*After a decade of expecting to find at least 100,000 genes, many of us were stunned to discover that God writes such short stories about humankind. That was especially shocking in the context of the fact that gene counts for other simpler organisms such as worms, flies, and even simple plants seem to be in about the same range, namely around 20,000 (Collins 2006:124-125).*

The concepts of *Ubuntu*, *Undugu*, and *Ntu* clearly demonstrate how human beings are expected to relate to one another, to the spiritual beings and to the surrounding. It is expected that if individuals and communities follow these rules and expectations, and thus live in perfect harmony, life would be better and all would live in harmony. If this African knowledge of understanding community was embraced, it would revolutionize the global relationships, economies and the use of the available resources in this world. Indeed it would encourage peaceful co-existence of all creatures in the universe.

The life of community that is taken very casually today in Africa and currently being shunned by others in favour of individualism has been described as the hope of the global community life. In discussing the problems caused by individualism in the west,

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O'Murchu describes how the western world is searching for community life. He observes:

*Even people who enjoy the love and the support of a family, a residential household, the satisfaction, achievements, and camaraderie of a closely knit workgroup, or even a very intimate couple partnership still yearn for communion within a wider and larger ambience. The circle of human compassion, the propensity for relatedness, is a deep-seated archetypal yearning, a divinely bestowed aspiration that forever seeks the paradoxical paradise of something very intimate and, simultaneously, something that will open us up to the realms of total possibility (O'Murchu:2004:94).*

### **Altruism as a way of life**

The wholistic nature of an African worldview is naturally translated into strong cohesive and altruistic society. Kindness, tolerance, cooperation and hospitality are the strongest aspect of African culture. These virtues are highly esteemed by all communities in Africa. Today, Africans are known for their kindness and hospitality.

These virtues are extended not only to human beings but also to other creatures. The basis of this understanding is that the Supreme Being created all creatures and it is by his kindness that He maintains and keeps everything alive. For that reason, those who abide by these virtues receive both spiritual and material blessings. This explains why, in spite of poverty, Africans are always ready to share everything they have. This is motivated by the spiritual believe that the Supreme Being blesses those who are hospitable and especially to strangers, children, disabled and the weak. Mbiti summarizes this African value thus:

It is held to be a moral evil to deny hospitality, even to a stranger. Therefore, when people travel they may stop anywhere for the night and receive hospitality in that homestead. They should not

be molested unless, of course, they abuse the hospitality they have received (Mbiti 1975: 177).

This African characteristic has often been criticized by scholars who suggest that this behaviour disadvantages African economic and social evolutions. Recent scientific studies have however revealed the contrary. Research has shown that altruism is beneficial to human beings in a way that no one ever thought. In his book, *Why Good things Happen to Good People* 2007, Stephen Post and Jill Neimark have clearly demonstrated that love and caring expressed in doing good for others leads people to healthier, happier and even longer lives.

Dr. Stephen Post, a Professor of Bioethics at the Medical School of Case Western Reserve University at Cleveland, was also the President of the Institute for Research on Unlimited Love - Altruism, Compassion and Service. For more than five years, the institute he headed sponsored more than 50 studies on altruism by scientists from more than 54 prominent universities from all kinds of disciplines. The findings of these researches are amazing. A summary of these finding shows that:

1. Generous behaviour reduces depression and risk of suicide
2. Actively helping others during the teenage years promote good physical and mental health all the way into adulthood
3. Volunteerism on the part of adults significantly reduces mortality
4. Giving to others enables people to forgive themselves for mistakes
5. Praying for others reduces health difficulties among older adults (<http://www.discoveringtherealme.org/resources/book-review>).



More recently, Stephen Post has written another book which has hit the American and European market and is rated among the best sellers. The title of this new book is *The Hidden Gifts of Helping* (2011). In this book, Post discusses his own personal struggles in life and how the gifts of compassion, giving and hope got him through bad times. He concludes by suggesting that the power of the same gifts can get us through hard times.

It is abundantly clear from these studies that people who live generous lives also live happier and longer lives. Science is showing us that the transformation towards greater love that is believed, taught and practiced by Africans from time immemorial has an empirical credibility – it has a scientific base.

### **The Healing Wisdom of Africa**

The major purpose of any worldview is to provide a system of healing for its people and other living things. Indeed, the object of the religions of the world is to provide a redemption plan for its followers. The great wisdom of traditions among them, shamanic, Tibetan, Japanese and Indian have provided comprehensive and effective healing systems that have stood the test proof of time.

The western worldview that is currently used in Africa too has its medical model based on scientific investigation and intervention. The western conventional medicine believes in physical causes of illness. It therefore provides physical interventions as its remedies to illness such as surgery, drugs medication and behavioural modification (Wilber 2007: 27). The Kenya advert on the eradication of malaria can serve here as a good illustration. The advert which encourages the use of mosquito nets suggests that one is safe when inside the net while the mosquito is outside “mbu nje, mimi ndani” (Mosquito out, me inside). This illustrates the general attitude toward disease in western medical practice. The idea is that, as long as you can keep the disease away, the

underlying causes or any other problem is not significant. The basic idea is, if one feels pain, the primary concern is to remove or reduce that pain, if one has a tumor, remove it by surgery, if one has bad eye sight, provide glasses. This philosophy also may apply in the use of condoms as a prevention of HIV/Aids that is, “virus nje, mimi ndani” (Virus out, me inside). Again the idea here is that the environment or miasma that brings about the disease is not important as long as you can protect yourself.

The African approach to healing recognizes that illness is much more than physical. Disease is perceived to have emotional, psychological, mental and spiritual components that must be dealt with at the same time. The African healing wisdom further recognizes the crucial role and need to understand the cause, cure and preventions of diseases. But most importantly, the healing wisdom of Africa acknowledges the fact that the entire universe functions as a unified and whole system. This system, it is believed, has its own way of replenishing, renewing and healing itself. The importance of proper relationships with the entire universe is that it contributes directly to the well being of human beings and all living things.

Human beings are thus expected to get the remedies to their illness from nature and that includes the healing power of fauna, flora and the environment in general. For that reason, human beings are expected to respect nature and not doing so brings about ill-health to the community. Human beings are also medicinal to other human being. The absence of human companion as part of the environment can thus cause sickness and even death. Some (1999) has suggested that the reason why a person needs other human beings is because humans crave for full realization of their innate gifts and to have these gifts approved, acknowledged and confirmed. He observes that:

*...our inner authority needs the fuel of external recognition to inspire us to fulfill our life's purpose, and until this happens, we wait in paralysis for the redemptive social response that rescues us from the dungeon of anonymity (Some 1999:27).*

African approach to healing is therefore wholistic in nature. Some (1999) refers to nature as a “textbook” for those who want to study the remedies of healing. He writes:

*In other words, every tree, plant, hill, mountain, rock, and each thing that was here before us emanates or vibrates at a subtle energy that has healing power whether we know it or not. So if something in us must change, spending time in nature provides a good beginning. This means that within nature, within the natural world, are all of the materials and tenets needed for healing human beings (Some 1999:38).*

The healing wisdom of Africa does not require medicinal substance alone. Instead it is a combination of medicine, spirituality, rituals and the right attitude of mind as well as the support from the entire environment. African healing therefore, even for physical problems, requires the emotional, the mental and the spiritual components. This explains why, for example, herbs are said to treat many diseases unlike western medicine that are designed to treat one disease. A good example is the Loliondo wonder medicine in Tanzania that has amazed many scientists and the world in general by providing herbal medicine that is said to heal all chronic diseases. The retired preacher, Ambilikile Mwasapile says that God revealed the drug to him and therefore must be administered by him alone to be effective (Weekly Citizen, June 13: 19).

Many people have confessed that they have been healed by the Loliondo wonder medicine which in my view incorporates herbs, spirituality, attitude and belief. The scientists, Christians and the elite continue to cast doubt as to the efficacy of the herbs and yet

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on the other hand people continue to flock at Loliondo and many continue to confess and witness the benefit from this wonder plant that scientists describe as poisonous. Sometimes, something may not be about science or about Christianity, but about what works. Wholistic approach in this case may not be accepted for its logic but for its success. Here we agree with Wilber who suggests that healing has a lot to do with the worldview of the concerned individual. He notes:

*...individual consciousness does not exist in a vacuum; it exists inextricably embedded in shared cultural values, beliefs, and worldview. How a culture views a parti*

*cular illness – with care and compassion or derision and scorn – can have profound impact on how an individual copes with that illness (Wilber 2007:27).*

An African wholistic approach to life is not simplistic dividing lines of dualism. We are currently in a world that cannot afford to see things in scientific terms only. The reality is that the human being inner world is full of experiences and mysteries that cannot be denied in spite of the fact it may not be scientific. The African wholistic life understands the world to be unified, connected rather than divided. It is the connection that forge unity rather than the differences which fragment and divide that is paramount. This approach is even supported by scientific finding as suggested by O'Murchu:

The quarks demonstrate in a compelling and exquisite way that life in our universe thrives not on isolationism but on the capacity to relate .... Across the sciences, there is mounting evidence for the fact that everything is created out of relatedness, sustained through relationships, and thrives on interdependence! (O'Murchu 2004:87).

In East Africa, more than any other African region, traditional spirituality was almost wiped out completely. This has left the African Christians rather lame in that they are totally inadequate in solving certain spiritual matters. In particular, issues of human well being and healing that the new Christian worldview is unable to address. Given that the African worldview is spiritual, social and medicinal in nature, the reality is that many Christians are forced to return to the African tradition in times of crisis to resolve their issues.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Impact of Western Worldviews on Africa**

#### **Living Double lives in Africa**

The fact that African religion is a way of life is accepted by many scholars of religion (arap Chepkwony 2003, Tasié 2003). Religion is part and parcel of African culture such that compartmentalization between secular and religious life, as evident in modern life is inconceivable. This idea is however not unique to African religion alone – other traditional religions of the world hold similar views. The separation of religion and science is thus a modern development that emerged in the west during the enlightenment period. Before then, there was no rivalry or disparity between religion and science as perceived today. Eric Waterhouse has thus observed that:

It has already been said that history shows that in the earliest days of their development, religion and the beginning of science were one within the culture of the tribe or nation concerned, and as for many centuries education was virtually the monopoly of the priestly castes...Even in the greatest days of Greece, science and philosophical religious speculation went together as in the brotherhood or colony founded by Pythagoras at Crotana (Wambutda 2002: 40).

The above sentiments reflect the situation in regard to African understanding of life today. African spirituality and science emerge from the same worldview which as we have explained is wholistic. Like all other cultures, African culture is both spiritual and scientific in nature. The development of African culture

involves keen observation, experimentation and verification which are the key concepts in science. The technology developed in African culture reflects the operations of specific scientific principles comparable to some degree to modern science. The book, *African System of Science, Technology and Art* (1993) edited by Gloria Thomas-Emeagwali has details of such scientific and technological efforts in Africa.

Having said that, the current perception of religion and science in Africa is not the same. The introduction of education and with it specific disciplines, approaches and specific knowledge has created compartmentalization. This idea of separation was brought about through education by the missionaries and the colonial governments at the turn of the century. It was the missionaries who introduced Christianity and with it western education that emphasized science and technical education. And although the missionaries used science to promote and advance the Christian faith, it was not long before the Africans realized that the missionaries and the settlers perceived religion and science as two distinct entities.

The pioneer African elite soon realized that Christian faith only served as a vehicle to education, and in particular, scientific knowledge. It was this scientific knowledge and not the faith that was believed to improve the livelihood of the individual and the community at large. On the other hand, the indigenous religions served the immediate needs of Africans in a more practical manner than did Christianity and other foreign faiths.

It was these experiences and observations that introduced Africans to what I have described as 'double" lives. In other words, for Africans to get the education that would improve their livelihood, they had to be Christians first. On the other hand, to be an African, the culture required one to observe the traditional life style that was not necessarily accepted by the church. At the

same time, the African admired and wanted to live a lifestyle that was close to that which was lived by the missionaries and the settler. To achieve this, one had to receive the western education through mission schools who first required one to be a Christian. For many, this meant accepting Christianity even if by pretense in order to achieve western education. This marked the beginning of "living double lives," for those who wanted western form of education but did not necessarily appreciate the new faith.

The African also observed and noted that the missionaries live 'double' lives in that the majority did not adhere to the teaching of the gospel as is taught in the church. In particular the Africans were concerned on how the missionaries segregated them in the church, in education, their attitude towards their lifestyle and in the way they degraded their culture in general. In this regard, E. Owen observed that Africans were not amused in the way they were treated by missionaries. He notes:

*...Western family life was depicted and such things as missionary attitudes to their wives, the education of their own children and their standards of hospitality were noted carefully by observant Africans, who ' because of the very teaching of our Master are keenly aware of inconsistencies between our profession and practice (Anderson1970:27)*

It was no wonder then that the Africans adopted this style of looking at issues for their own survival. Carey Francis, a prominent mathematician who taught for many years in Kenya captured this double living among his students at Alliance High School. He observed that:

*I think that they (the schoolboys) are like chameleons. When at school they fit into the surroundings, the idea of the school. Then they go out into the world... and they slide part way at any rate into their world (Anderson, 1970:24).*



The above scenario is not very different in Africa today in as far as the attitude towards science (western worldview) and religion (African worldview) is concerned. The majority of African elites continue to live 'double' lives, that of a scientist on the one hand and that of a Christian or African traditionalist on the other. It is generally assumed that a true scientist is not religious. On the other hand, religious people are often opposed to scientific developments. It is thus not unusual to find an Evangelist preaching against scientists on the ground that scientists play God or that they attempt to compete with God. In retaliation, the scientists very often ignore everything religious on account that it has no verifiable evidence and that religious claims cannot be repeated in an experiments.

This scenario was necessitated by the need for survival. J. N Mugambi has described the scenario of living 'double' lives thus:

*Double living is the name of the game of survival for people who are under the control of the principalities and powers of this world. Without the game survival is impossible (Mugambi, e-mail message to Downing)*

It is such hidden voices of Africa that force people to live double lives, lives that are painful, fearful and constantly uncertain; lives that are untruthful, non-progressive, deceitful and in general poor lives. It is a life of living someone else's life and denying one's own life for the sake of survival. It is an undesirable life for anyone in this time and age.

### **Conflicts caused by Science**

Science on the other hand has controlled and dominated the African mind and their way of life for a century. The perception of Bacon who saw science as power and salvation has clearly been the guarding principle of an African mind today. In this regard, Keller notes:

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*In viewing science as power, he (Bacon) thought he saw salvation. Indeed the salvation of mankind was to be found in the very power of science. It thereby became the moral responsibility of men to assume and exercise that power. To his contemporaries, his vision of science as power and as salvation must have seemed fantastic on both counts. To us, he seems to have been prescient in the former and naive on the latter (Keller 1995:33).*

It is true that science is a powerful tool that has served and will continue to serve mankind for many years to come. What is increasingly in doubt, however, is whether science is the only and the best way to acquire knowledge. One of the greatest weakness of science as a discipline is its limitation and narrowness in its approach. Science restricts itself to verifiable facts, that is, facts that can be empirically tested and repeated in an experiment. "This empirical concern of science" writes Ntabo and Abwire, "shows its limitation as well because its areas of discourse will be limited to the physical universe" (arap Chepkwony and Ntabo 2009:25). Human concerns and interests, and indeed, human knowledge, transcends the physical universe and enters into the realms of transcendental reality which cannot pass scientific test.

The spiritual knowledge that is not taken care of by science constitute essential component in human life. These spiritual, mysterious, magical and transcendental spheres are part of human knowledge that should not be ignored but instead studied seriously. In reference to magic, Paracelsus writes:

*Magic has power to experience and fathom things which are inaccessible to human reason. For magic is a great secret wisdom, just as reason is a great public folly. Therefore it would be desirable and good for the doctors of theology to know something about it and to understand what it actually is/ and cease unjustly and unfoundedly to call it witchcraft (Paracelsus as quoted in Keller 1995: 43).*

Another limitation of science that impoverishes human beings is its dualistic approach that tends to “divide life into right and wrong, earth and heaven, God and humankind” (O’Murchu 2007:7). This dualism has further been used to divide human beings in as far as their ability to comprehend science is concerned. The power of science has been used to suggest that only men can handle science while the women cannot. The identification of scientific thoughts with male is a phenomenon that is now embedded in all cultures. Simmel puts it more succinctly when he notes that:

*The requirement of ...correctness in practical judgments and objectivity in theoretical knowledge ... belong as it were in their form and their claims to humanity in general, but in their actual historical configuration they are masculine throughout. Supposing that we describe these things, viewed as absolute ideas, by the single word “objective”, we then find that in the history of our race the equation objective = masculine is a valid one (Simmel as quoted in Keller 1995: 75).*

The use of science as power to discriminate and divide is no different in Africa’s education system today. The masculinization of science goes even further to dichotomize men who are gifted in the science with those men who are not. The ideas of those who have scientific mind are seen to be objective or male, while the ideas of those who are not, male or female are regarded as subjective or female. Keller puts it thus:

*It used to be commonplace to hear scientists, teachers, and parents assert quite boldly that women cannot, should not, be scientists, that they lack the strength, rigor, and clarity of mind for an occupation that properly belongs to men (Keller 1995:77).*

In Kenya and indeed Africa in general, these sentiments and belief that women cannot think objectively and with them, men who pursue nonscientific disciplines or even arguments, is alive.

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Prof. Gudu for example, remembers how in high school, students were grouped in streams on the basis of how one performed in examinations. Those who performed very highly were in group A and were made to specialize in the sciences. Those whose performance was average were in group B and poor performers in group C. Those in group C were made to specialize in Arts, while those in B did not have any specialization. It is on this account that Prof. Gudu and many of us today are misled to think that science and arts or science and religion are in two exclusive spheres (DRS 5:3).

Today, the thinking of people of Kenya in general, the government and even the highest institutions of learning, the universities, are no different. In their article Ntabo and Musi have clearly articulated how this attitude is retrogressive, divisive and purely irrational. They write:

*...science teachers were remunerated better than their counterparts in Arts subjects ...science has also been reflected in terms of the allocation of bursaries and scholarships. They are given more readily and in wholesome to those pursuing science subjects than those doing the Arts. This is more evident in institutions of higher learning where, most scholarships, especially foreign scholarships, target science oriented students (arap Chepwony and Ntabo 2009:51).*

What this has done to many individuals in Africa is difficult to fathom. The entire life of an individual has been decided on the bases of an exam done in a moment of time. Individuals have been labelled as one who can do science, humanities and arts and assumed that they cannot do anything else better. Opportunities have likewise been denied to deserving individuals and others favoured undeservingly. This, I believe, has brought about untold suffering, conflicts, frustration and unfulfilled lives to many. Ntabo and Musi further argue that:

*This impacted negatively on the students who were falsely made to believe that unless one took science subjects, he/she cannot succeed in life and that they cannot contribute positively to nation building. In the student's mind, science was and still is, associated with success, while religion and other Arts subjects were associated with backwardness and failure (Ibid).*

## **Conflicts caused by Christianity**

Africans have similarly shown their uneasiness with the Biblical worldview that is greatly influenced by western worldview. This is especially evident when dealing with the crisis such as death and illness that cannot be explained scientifically. The christian missionaries to Africa taught that the only mediator between man and God is Jesus Christ. For this reason, the missionaries and the colonial government discouraged, degraded and demonized the belief in spiritual beings such as ancestors, spirits and divinities.

Further, the christian missionaries castigated African societal moral agents such as the priest, priestess, herbalist, diviners and healers in general. In fact, many African healers were arrested, fined or jailed for practicing their traditions. African religion was similarly labelled polytheistic, primitive, ancestor worship, fetish and sun -worship among other names to discourage and to lure converts into the new faith.

The difficulties that face African Christians in trying to balance their worldview with the Biblical worldview are immense. This dilemma is similar to that of westerners while in foreign countries with a different worldview. Paul Hiebert, for example, who was a trained scientist, theologian and missionary in India, found himself confronted by his own western worldview and the worldview of the Indian people he was serving. He confesses that as a missionary, he felt a sense of uneasiness when he was faced with questions that dealt with the India worldview. The Indian

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worldview has a lively middle tier that connects the physical world with the spiritual world. According to Hiebert, his Biblical worldview that was heavily influenced by the western worldview could not answer the questions raised by the Indian Christians he served. He observes that:

*The reason for my uneasiness with the biblical and Indian worldviews should be clear: I had excluded the middle level of supernatural this worldly beings and forces from my own worldview. As a scientist I had been trained to deal with the empirical world in naturalistic terms. As a theologian I was taught to answer ultimate questions in theistic terms. For me the middle level did not really exist. Unlike Indian villagers, I had given little thought to spirits of this world, to local ancestors and ghosts, or to the souls of animals. For me these belonged to the realm of fairies, trolls, and other mythical beings. Consequently I had no answers to the questions they raised (Hiebert, 1994: 196).*

Like Hiebert in India, the missionaries who served in African in the past and those who are currently in the field, have and indeed experience similar difficulties in relating to Africans whose worldview share a lot of similarities with that of the Indians. Fortunately, the new development in African Christianity is the introduction of Christ as the mediator, the healer and the messiah (Diane Stinston 2004). This is readily accepted as the source of power and there is no internal dissonance in seeking the healing power wherever it can be found. Africans often travel far for healing believing that medicine from distant lands is better and more powerful. However, Christ does not answer all the questions and solve all the problems presented by an African worldview.

Today there are many African Christians who are still struggling with these issues. Although many are faithful to the biblical worldview as presented by the missionaries over a century ago, they were brought up and socialized as an African from

childhood and thus assimilate the ingredients of the basic African personality. Therefore, in spite of the fact that African Christians faithful to the Church teachings, they nevertheless find the two worldviews clashing and thereby causing confusion and conflict.

Over the years, African christians have sought ways to accommodate the christian faith in their own worldview albeit with some adjustment. The very first reaction was the development of the African Independent Churches throughout Africa. These churches generally accept the Christian teaching and doctrines but also accept the vibrant spiritual African worldview.

The African Independent Churches therefore accept the biblical worldview with Jesus Christ as the only mediator between human being and God. However these churches acknowledge the existence of spiritual forces such as the ancestral spirits, the power of witchcraft and other spirits present in an African worldview. They are however in agreement with the Christian teachings in condemning the societal agents among them, healers, priests, priestesses, diviners and any other persons who ascribe to indigenous religion and support the cause of their propagation. The implication here is that the independent churches regard with contempt African indigenous institutions and practices. The resultant worldview is a new African biblical worldview that incorporates the mystical forces in the middle level but regards them as evil forces. This is unlike the African traditional worldview that recognizes that the majority of the spiritual forces are good and helpful to humans.

Interestingly, when I was on my sabbatical leave in 2007 at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena in California, USA, I sat in a class which was dealing with the topic "Power Encounters". The class covered issues on spiritual powers in other cultures and

how missionaries can encounter them in a cross-cultural setting. The lecturer admitted that western Christians could no longer continue to ignore the existence of spiritual powers present in other cultures. He observed that:

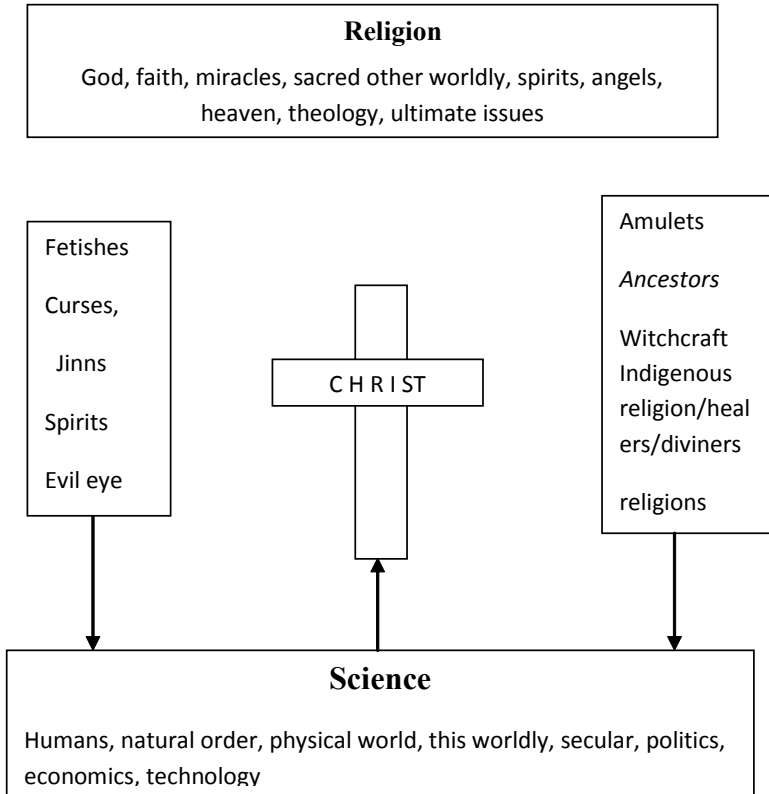
*Western worldview cross-cultural workers need a paradigm shift not only to be relevant but also to be Biblical. Westerners need to realize that our "r" [reality] is not God's "R" [Reality] (nor is the traditional view entirely corrects either – we all see through a glass dimly! (Class notes at Fuller 2007).*

In strong words, the lecturer indicated that the West must change their view other cultures and worldviews in order to be relevant to the present realities. He said, "If we fail to heed the reality of the excluded middle we will be considered naive and uninformed at best or stupid, unspiritual, irrelevant and/or arrogant at worst" (Class notes at Fuller 2007).

This increasingly accepted stand by evangelical Christians is supported by great writers and scholars among them Walter Wink, Clinton Arnold, Paul Hiebert, David Augsburger and Charles Kraft among others. Like the African Independent Churches they acknowledge the existence of the mystical forces in the middle level of a three-tiered worldview. These spiritual forces are, however, regarded as demonic powers that cause ill-health, ungodly life and rebellion against God. This phenomenon is now common in Africa, especially among the new Christian movements in the Pentecostal churches and emerging christian crusade meetings under the auspices of "ministries." To encounter these spiritual forces, those gifted with the power of casting out evil spirits are required.



### Illustration 5 – African Independent/Evangelical Churches View



When African christians join the church, they often ignore the fact that they were brought up in an African worldview. This worldview provides a picture that translated into beliefs and values which ultimately prompts them to act in a certain way. On conversion, Africans became christians with a well-established or even hard-wired worldview. In their new faith, christians are handily taught the biblical worldview well enough to understand what it means to them. Further, they are not shown how the

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Christian beliefs translated to values and actions. In other words, they are not assisted to see the meaning of the new life in Christ and the world around them.

The African Christian therefore joins the faith and by so doing is expected to disown their worldview. On the other hand, the new faith does not provide them with a workable worldview, at least not like their own African worldview. African reality provided them not only with answers to their problems but a community to support them and where to turn in times of need. As a result, A christian is confronted by two broken worldviews. This results in conflicts and confusion as one decides on how to handle new and old beliefs, values and how to behave.

Due to the multiplicity of worldviews, and the lack of complete satisfaction of any, African people have adopted several ways of dealing with conflicts brought about by diverse realities. First, there are those christians who strongly believe in the christian worldview and like the early missionaries believe that once a christian, the christian worldview replaces the indigenous one. Such christians ignore the hard-wired African worldview and puts on the new lenses of the Biblical worldview oblivious of the the consequences.

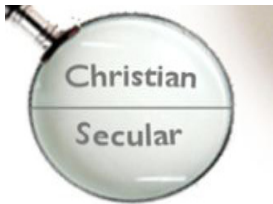


**Illustration 5: Accept Christian worldview only**

The christians in this category more often than not find themselves in difficulties. They fail to relate well with others and are often isolated since they find fault with indigenous worldviews and think it unacceptable. The irony is that although they believe

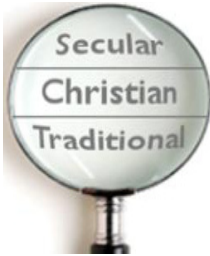
they have deleted the African reality, but in reality the rejected worldview disappears into the hide mode. From here, it appears once in a while to be applied when issues that cannot be catered for by the christian teaching and which have solution in an African culture arise.

Second, there are also those who recognize the importance of their African culture and spirituality but at the same time value the christian faith. Such individuals know when to lean and tap from the strength of each worldview for their benefit at the appropriate time and place. Although they are often seen as hypocrites or syncretists by the christians described above, this category relate well with both christians and non-christians. Many of them tend also to move to churches that are more sympathetic to their perspectives, normally the Catholic church or independent churches.



**Illustration 6: Accept christian and secular worldview**

Third, there is also another category of Africans who find it necessary not only to accept the African worldview but also Christian as well as the secular/scientific worldview. The majority in this category are professionals and more so those in scientific and technological disciplines. This category of people tends to accept all the worldviews separately, apply each when necessary but never merge the views together. These people tend to live double lives or even triple, as a traditional African, secular scientist and a christian. (arap Chepkwony, 2005).



**Illustration 7: Accept christian, secular and Traditional worldview Separately**

This unfortunate situation has been instigated by a group of christians, mainly evangelicals, who although they enjoy the benefits of scientific inventions, see science as an attempt to compete with God. The preaching against science and elitism has either driven the people away from the Churches or forced them to accept all the views but separately for survival purposes. This attitude has created a rift between science and religion and also christianity with indigenous cultures. Those who find themselves in this situation live as if they are using tri-vocal lenses, using each for separate goals as need arises.

The fourth category of people is those who insist on traditional worldview but see no objection to the other views. This group relies on traditions and adopts what can fit the traditional view from other worldviews and practices. For them, culture is dynamic and as long as the core values of their traditions are intact, they see not problem in adopting and exploring new ideas. This is actually the stand of the majority of the ordinary people many of whom profess christianity but are the beneficiaries of modern scientific achievements, traditional and christian services.

It is clear from the above that western and biblical worldview has created division among the African people. This has in a way prompted the idea of individualism as perceived in the West. Individualism is a product of both secular and Biblical

worldviews, while African traditional worldview cherishes communal living. Individualism however runs contrary to African realities and thus shunned and discouraged. Indeed Africans agree with O'Murchu who sees individualism as a moral transgression. He writes:

*In a world designed for relatedness, in which we depend on human relationships for our survival, individualism (exalting the individual above all other considerations – sometimes described as “ego-inflation”) becomes a serious moral transgression (O’Murcchu 2004:91).*

This is the state in which most christians find themselves. Many turn to simplistic answers or, use the Bible as scapegoat, and very often memorize certain biblical verses to shoot down any non-Christian or traditional arguments. It is clear therefore that the church has failed to train and to equip its faithful adequately to face life fully without isolating themselves from the supporting community. Instead, the church normally exposes new christians to scattered bits of biblical knowledge provided during church services.

The new faithful find it difficult to accommodate the new insight because they do not possess the context or the method to analyze, categorize and utilize the new found knowledge. This is because the new christian information has no foundation in their life system. The christians are not provided with a Biblical worldview that can confront the new challenges they face. This is made worse when christians are taught that the christian worldview is the only acceptable way of life. Again, the result is conflict, confusion and frequent change of churches in an effort to find a church that they can feel at home. The fortunate outcome of this misunderstanding is a divided, confused and ignorant christian community in Africa. The many schisms and the rise of independent churches is a witness to this confusion in Africa.

## Chapter Six

### Return and Pick It



In this lecture, I have presented the African worldview as a way of life in which Africans perceive and deal with the entire universe as one complete system. I have described this system as Africa wholistic approach. Since the African wholistic approach perceive the universe as one, interconnected and dependent on each other, the world is seen as a global community. This wholistic consciousness creates a community living system that O' Murchu describes as:

*Living systems are by their very nature neither subject alone nor objects isolated, but both subjects and objects in a mutually communicating (and defining) universe of meaning. At a deep level, each living being is implicated in every other. Each suffering, each extinction affects us and impoverishes us. Similarly, we partake of the joy and creativity of each individual organism (O'Murchu 2004:36).*

In an African wholistic community, the parts, unlike the way it is understood in science, does not equal the whole. Instead, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. O'Murch (2004)

illustrates this point by using the human body which is a complex interaction of forces and energies that cannot be observed in everyday life. He writes:

*There is no scientific, sociological, or psychological means of measuring the intimacy and exhilaration of courtship, the eroticism of sexual embrace, the ecstasy of contemplative prayer, the gripping excitement of sport or achievement, the placid serenity of a beautiful sunset, or, alternatively, the rending terror of pain and suffering or the mental and physical exhaustion of agony and torture. In all these situations, and in many others, what is happening in the whole person can be neither analyzed nor understood in terms of some or all of the parts of the human personality (O'Murchu 2004: 38 – 39).*

The African wholistic approach thus dictates the need for cosmic harmony for peaceful and fulfilled life in the universe. The major players in controlling the cosmic harmony are humans. Human beings are thus expected to follow the moral standards as stipulated by the Supreme Being, the ancestral spirits and the society at large. In this regard, human beings are expected to be altruistic, tolerant, hospitable, co-operative, and kind and possess a spirit of forgiveness at all times.

In response to human co-operation with the universe, nature, which is an integral part of African community, provides the required remedies for healing. Nature thus provides medicine extracted from the flora, fauna, minerals, soils and even human beings serve as medicinal to other human beings. The healing wisdom of Africa is therefore a combination of medicine, spirituality, rituals and the right attitude of mind.

I find no better way to suggest the way forward for this lecture than to use the concept of *Sankofa*, term is derived from the King Adinkera of the Akan speaking people of West Africa. In the Akan language, Sankofa is expressed as “*se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenki.*” This literally translated means “it is not taboo to

go back and fetch what you forgot” (<http://www.duboisle/sankofa.meaning.html>).

*Sankofa* concept resonates well with the culture of most African people especially with respect to the way African people perceived their world, the way they acquired and appropriated knowledge and the way they understood the meaning of life and the way to live it. This affects the way African people understand acquisition of knowledge, faith, development and how they perceive life in totality today.

*Sankofa* teaches that African people must go back to their roots; that they must reach out and gather the best of the African past. It is only then that they are able to move forward in order to achieve their full potentials. Indeed, Sankofa strongly suggests that whatever has been lost, forgotten or has been stripped of, should be claimed, revered, preserved and perpetuated (Ibid). The emphasis and lessons to be learned is that Africans must “return and get it”. Sankofa Education institute Website puts it thus:

*We must go back and reclaim our past so that we can move forward; so we understand why and how we came to be who we are today. We must return to our past in order to move forward. No matter how far away we travel we must always return home (<http://www.sankofa.org.uk>. 1)*

*Sankofa* is symbolically expressed as a mythic bird that flies forward while looking backward with an egg in its mouth or just about to pick it up. The lesson to learn from this is that Africa’s past is as significant as its future. That being the case, African people must explore their past in order to discover the pathways to excellence in the future. *Sankofa*, like *Ubuntu* is reminding African communities that the African worldview and its values have sustained human life for ages. These values are embedded in the African languages, worship, myths, stories, proverbs, rituals and in general, African belief system.

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If Africans can only search their past diligently, their traditional values, and beliefs, only then can the people of the African continent face the present challenges and thus move forward. It is this past that is pregnant with ethical values that enable African posterity to live in harmony not only with each other, but also with the creator and the other creatures. It is this past that carries the healing wisdom as embodied in the offices of the herbalists, diviners, priests and elders. And without any exceptions, their wisdom is derived from the African past, from the African tradition that is governed by an African worldview that is build around wholistic approach to life.

If Africa will ever have its renaissance as anticipated, it must begin from here. It must understand, accept and own the African worldview. It is only then that Africa will see the need and appreciate the African past by building from the knowledge of their ancestors to the current prevailing knowledge. For knowledge is acquired and systematically build from the experiences, ideas and previous knowledge. Even Einstein, Argues Rolston III (2006), had to stand on the shoulders of others to come up with his theory of relativity, He observes:

*Einstein constructed his theory with mental genius, achieved as he stood on the shoulders of thinkers standing on the shoulders of other thinkers for five thousand years - with ideas passing from mind to mind, critically evaluated in each new generation (Rolston III 2006: xxiv).*

This has nothing to do with glorifying the past as some scholars will be quick to argue. It has everything to do with the reality as it is. That is not to suggest that everything about Africa past is right, indeed there are many things that need to been examined, revisited and/or discarded. But how can one do so without first accepting and understanding where such ideas come from, how it has served the people in the past, why it is not relevant

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anymore and should you decide to discard, with what shall this be replaced. In fact, this is all about the problems African people are facing now. There is need therefore for Africa to retrace its steps for its people to know where exactly they went wrong.

To take these bold steps, there is need to shed fears and inhibitions of science and christianity or any other narrow disciplines or faiths. African people must outgrow the limited horizons of conventional understanding and approaches to life. It is true they have served African people relatively well in the past and will continue to serve in the future; however, they are rapidly outgrowing their usefulness. It is time that African people invoke their intuition and imagination and explore other ways of knowing and appropriating knowledge. The African wholistic approach to knowledge as suggested in this lecture is a store house of knowledge, the new direction for the global community and the hope that will improve human life and indeed that of the entire universe.



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