

WORLD VIEW

Selected Definitions from the Literature

Of all that is connoted by "culture," "world view" attends especially to the way a man, in a particular society, sees himself in relation to all else. It is the properties of existence as distinguished from and related to the self. It is, in short, a man's idea of the universe. It is that organization of ideas that answers to a man with the questions: "Where am I? Among what do I move? What are my relations to these things?" (anthropologist Robert Redfield, "The Primitive World View")

World view is defined as a belief system about the nature of the universe and its effect of the operation on our social environment. (communication specialist Carley Dodd, Dynamics, p. 75)

A world view represents the deepest questions one might ask about the world and life, and about the corresponding orientation that one should take toward them. More concretely, the world view provides answers to such basic questions as: Who or what am I? Why am I in the world? What is reality? How do humans differ from nonhumans (animals, objects, the invisible beings)? Who belongs to the invisible world and what are the invisible forces in the world? What is the proper orientation to time and space? What about life after death? What in life or the world is desirable or undesirable, and to what degree?

The dozens of items that occur in most world views can be reduced to three or four categories, namely Supernature, Nature, Human Beings, and Time. (Catholic anthropologist/missiologist Louis J. Luzbetak, The Church and Cultures, p. 252).

A world view (or vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it. . . . [T]his vision is a channel for the ultimate beliefs which give direction and meaning to life. It is the integrative framework by which order and disorder are judged, the standard by which reality is managed and pursued. It is the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns.

For each adherent, a world view gives reasons and impetus for deciding what is true and what really matters in our experience. In other words, a world view functions both *descriptively* and *normatively*. . . . A world view is both a sketch of and a blueprint for reality; it both describes what we see and stipulates what we should see. (theologian James H. Olthius, "On World Views", p. 155)

A world view is a way one views the whole world. . . . A world view is a way of viewing or interpreting all of reality. It is an interpretive framework through which or by which one makes sense out of the data of life and the world. (philosopher/theologian Norman Geisler, Worlds Apart, p. 11)

A world view may be likened to a window through which human beings look out on reality. . . . [T]he world view of our culture, like every other aspect of our culture, is taught to us from birth, and so convincingly that most of us never question that our view of reality is the only accurate one. Our deep-level world view perspectives provide us with our understandings of both the personal and the nonpersonal universes around us. (missiologist/anthropologist Charles H. Kraft, Communication Theory for Christian Witness, p. 222)

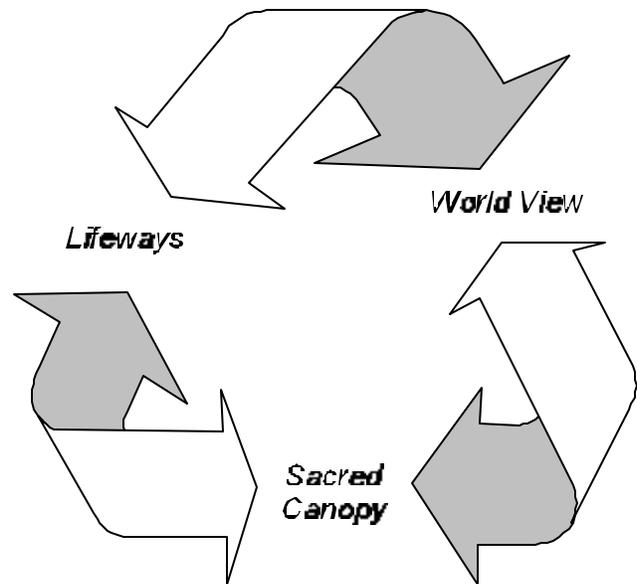
Taken together, the basic assumptions about reality which lie behind the beliefs and behavior of a culture are sometimes called a world view. (missiologist/anthropologist Paul Hiebert, Anthropological Insights, p. 45)

World view is the grid through which people see their world. Our world view is like an umpire at a ball game. He may seem unimportant and you are hardly aware of him, but in reality he decides the ball game. (African theologian Tokunboh Adeyemo, "Towards an Understanding of African Worldview and Values", p. 1)

1. Definition of world view: **World view is the ever changing set of core assumptions upon which we build the cultural map through which we understand the world around us.**

- a. It is essentially pre-theoretical in character; it is the foundation upon which theories and the methods of theorizing are built (Walsh, 1992, 16).
- b. As such, it is a belief system (Dodd, 1991, 75; Olthius, 1985, 155) of the basic assumptions we make about reality (Hiebert, 1985, 45).
- c. Because it is pre-theoretical, it is generally not found at the conscious level, and the assumptions which comprise it are not necessarily coherently linked to each other--they may even be contradictory. The assumptions world view is generally concerned with include the nature of the world we inhabit (time and space), the nature of us as people (existence and being), the nature of the One we image (powers), and how we know (knowledge and logic):
- d. World view defines the way we "lean into life"; it is both a map of life and a map for life (Walsh, 1992, 18).
 - i. As a map of life it is a lens or window through which to view and make sense of the events we see every day (Kraft, 1983, 222). As a map through which we make sense of life, world view is built on a faith system (Luzbetak, 1988, 252) and is religious in character, since it deals with "ultimate" concerns, "limit" questions (Toulmin, 1961), and "control" beliefs (Wolterstorff, 1976; noted by Walsh, 1992, 19).

ii. In addition to being a map of life, world view provides a map for life (Walsh, 1992, 18-19). World view informs us as to what ought to be and provides the foundation upon which we build a plan by which to live as well as giving us the grid to see every event in life (Hall, 1981, 16-17). It serves as a one component of a circular loop in which faith (the sacred canopy), world view, and lifeways interact (adapted from Walsh, 1992). Together they enable us to maintain the perception that we understand reality, help us make sense of all the events of life, and anchor meaning and purpose for the way we live.



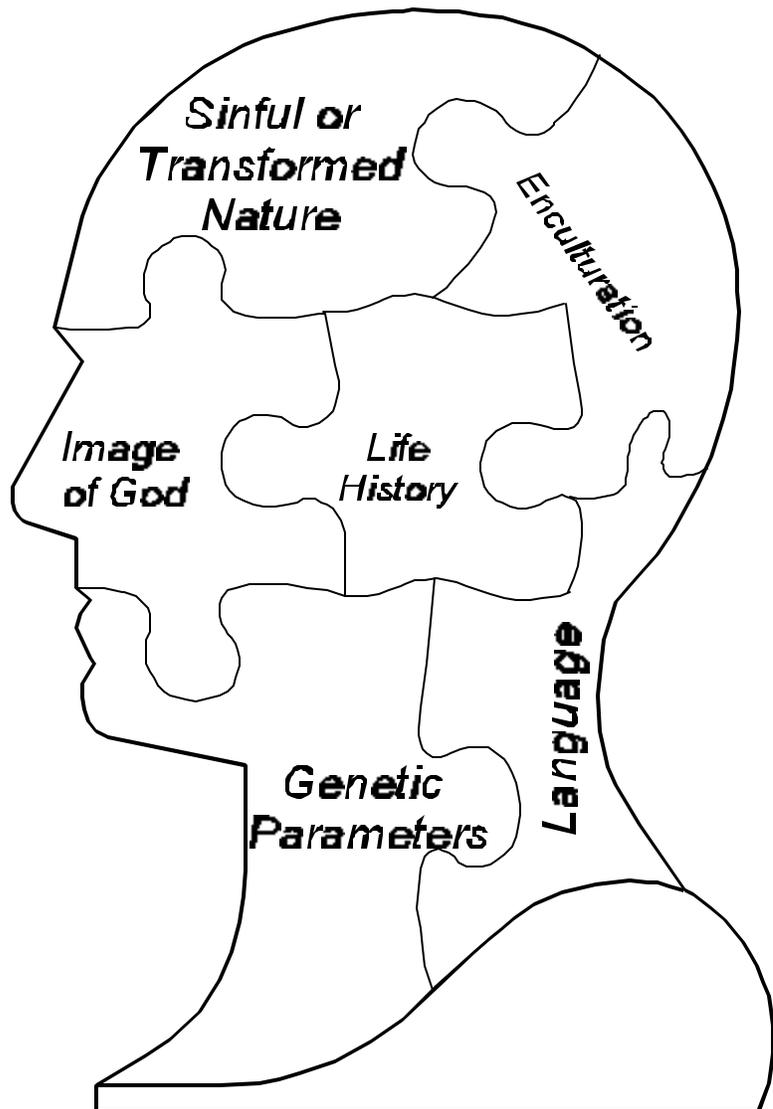
2. Several elements are involved in the construction of world views

a. **Genetic Parameters:** Most generally I use this to refer to our basic genetic parameters, including not only what we will look like, but predispositions and abilities encoded in our gene structure. None of us is purely a product of genes, but the genetic blueprint affects neurochemistry, which in turn has been increasingly seen to have an impact on our traits and personality. Our genetic parameters also serve as a reminder that we are physical creatures with needs of food and shelter.

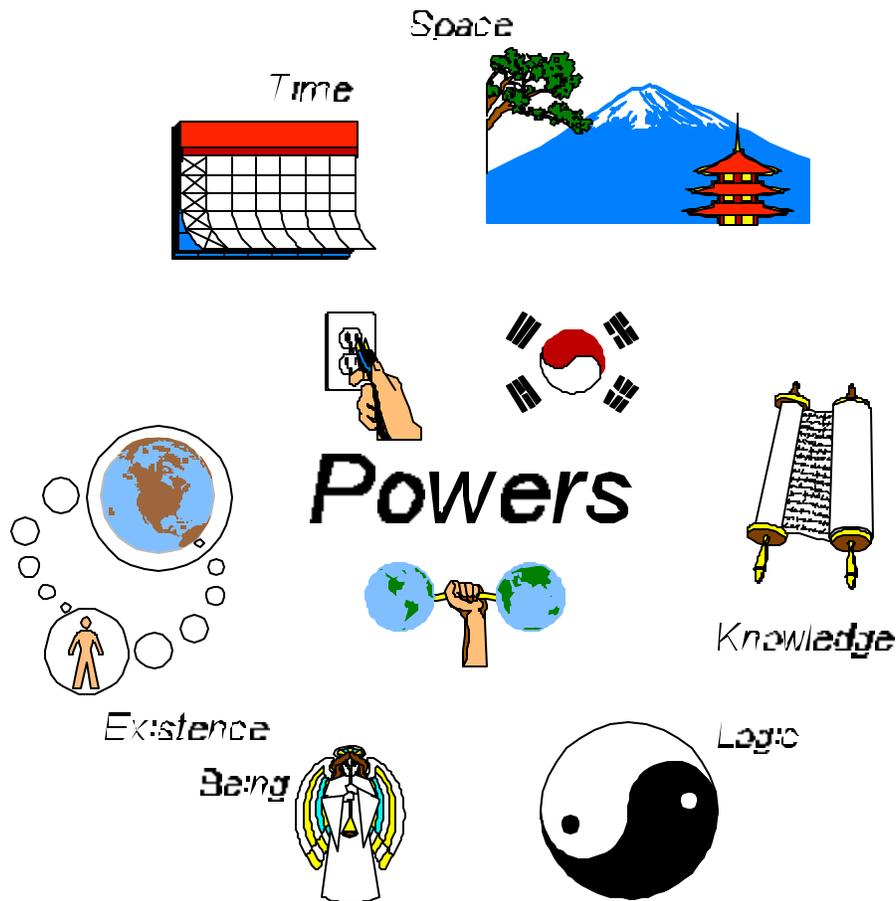
b. **Life History:** Each person has a unique life history, which includes his/her family background and the personal choices he/she has made in life. It is important to note that we are not simply passive recipients of our family's influence. Rather, we are all in some sense both actors and playwrights in the drama we live.

c. **Enculturation:** Enculturation is the process by which our family (and our larger culture) molds and shapes us in both patterns of living and mores upon which those patterns are built (Hesselgrave, 1978, 124; Schusky and Culbert, 1987, 4).

d. **Sinful or Transformed Nature:** Our relationship with Christ has an impact on our world view (Romans 5-6). Unbelievers are dead in their sins and caught up in the world system (Eph. 2:1-3), while believers have been transformed (2 Cor. 5:17) and are being



- renewed in the image of Christ (Col. 3:10).
- e. **Language:** The foundation for thought expression, and construction of our perceptions of reality. See further discussion in the "Encoding the Message" notes.
 - f. **Image of God:** No matter what the hardware, all humans are made in the image of God. This is the single most significant factor for consideration in this discussion.
 - i. This is the foundation of who we are as people, and permeates every aspect of our existence. It also drives us to find religious significance in life. If Wink is correct in stating that our images of God create us (Wink, 1992, 48), then this is at the very core of who we are and provides the driving direction for world view.
 - ii. Being in the image of Someone, we have a built in desire to link with the One whose image we bear. As a result of Adam and Eve's fall and their consequent expulsion from the Garden (Gen. 3:1-24), our direct link was sundered. However, we retained the image of God (Gen. 9:6), and our search for intimate re-connection with the Creator continues, though it is now distorted and is expressed as a deep concern with the powers that govern the world we inhabit (Jacobs, 1979, Conn, 1979; see also Wink, 1992, 3-10). Thus, our assumptions about the powers are at the core of our world view (see diagram).



This search for our image-maker permeates every aspect of our existence, and drives us to find religious significance in life and to attribute to the powers which govern our world a type of image-significance. This concern has resulted in an almost infinite variety of postulated cosmic powers which serve as image replacements in every culture of the world. The different "geographies" of these powers in various cultural settings may be called powerscapes (e.g., landscapes of the powers)

- (1) The outlines of every culturally-derived powerscape will be founded on the culture's identification of the power(s) which dominate that culture's existence.
- (2) People of every culture postulate a rich variety of power sources which impact their world (Jacobs, 1979; Hiebert, 1982; Burnett, 1990). Their

understanding of these powers forms the religious landscape they inhabit, and their assumptions about these powers gives them the range of answers to the questions of life and faith that they ask.

- (3) The types of powers accepted as real by the culture are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric, and inform life not just in the religious arena, but in every aspect of daily living. Each power within the world view will have defined lines of authority, responsibility, and accessibility which can be thought of as spheres of operation. In the case of personal powers, the culture may not perceive these powers as being cooperative with each other. Just like people, at times they work together and at times they conflict. This results in a type of religious equation of power interaction, which is reasonably stable in a culture, though it is open to change. It enables a people to know which power to call on for each of the problems or needs in life, and helps them make sense out of the chaos life brings to them.
- (4) The ascriptions to the powers are not limited to names and spheres of influence. Corresponding to the vocabulary and sphere of influence will be emotional responses and attachments to each power. This in turn will define the types of scripting developed in the culture by which a person knows what power(s) to call and how to call on them (Jacobs, 1979; Nuckolls, 1991). Three classes of powers may be identified: impersonal, psychological/social, and personal (disembodied) powers. These powers are discussed in greater detail in the Folk Religions course.

3. Issues in the assumptive areas of world views

Some thoughts about the assumptive areas of world view

1. Our assumptions are conditioned and established through the concepts and training we received from our culture as we were growing up.
2. The assumptions at every level are in some way distorted because of our sin nature.
3. Each set of assumptions is intertwined with the others and cannot be viewed in isolation from the total framework.
4. Our world view is dynamically changing all the time, as new events and circumstances unfold around us. For the Christian, our core assumptions should be more and more conforming to the image of Christ.
5. These assumptions are not limited to the cognitive. They also include the affective (how we feel) and the evaluative (how we judge).

- a. **Powers and the Religious Direction of the Heart:** (borrowing from Conn and Jacobs; similar issues are raised in Heibert's transcendent/immanent axis)

- i. The nature of God (whether He exists, what He is like, whether we can know Him, whether He reveals Himself, etc.)
 - ii. Our understanding of any other beings and/or events beyond the realm of our normal sensory perception
 - iii. It results in our assumptions of the powers, including their nature, how they are distributed, and their significance to our daily lives.
 - iv. What we are allowed to feel about or towards God (love, fear, distance, nearness, etc.)
 - v. How we are to "judge" (or evaluate) God's actions in the universe.
- b. **Knowledge and Logic:**
- i. The nature of "knowledge" (are there "brute" facts; experience and knowledge, etc.) and logic (how we reason from one thing to another)
 - ii. The way we know and what we assume the rules of "logic" to be
 - iii. What it is possible to know
 - iv. The methodology used to apply logical rules.
 - v. The range or types of feelings allowed concerning knowledge and logic and our use of the "logicscape"
 - vi. The means of evaluating knowledge and logic.
- c. **Space and Time:**
- i. The nature of space (continuity, reality, dimensionality, God's, relation to space, etc.) and time (linear or cyclical progression, direction of its flow, continuity in time, eternity, God's relation to time, etc.)
 - ii. Notions of measurement, distance, and time
 - iii. Types of time and space (sacred, secular, business, rest, etc.)
 - iv. The range of acceptable/unacceptable feelings about the various types of space-time.
 - v. The means of evaluating the types of space-time and how we judge violations of our understanding.
- d. **Existence and Being:**
- i. The nature of existence (what is "real") and life (what is "living"), including the meaning and purpose for each of them.
 - ii. The relation of physical and non-physical (e.g., mind and brain; people to spirits, etc.)
 - iii. The nature of human-kind, including the broad areas of
 - (1) Physical (e.g., male/female differences),
 - (2) Social (e.g., our identity as individuals or members of collectives; what institutions or patterns of society we prefer, how we distinguish juniors from seniors, etc.),
 - (3) Psychological and/or spiritual (e.g., our relation to the universe or to the spirits, our ultimate purpose and destiny; tied intimately to the religious direction of our hearts).
 - iv. The range of acceptable/unacceptable feelings about the existence and being

- v. The means of evaluating our epistemological landscape of existence and being and how we judge alternate landscapes.
4. Functions of world view
- a. Provides the "benchmarks" against which any new religious ideas are tested.
 - b. Provides emotional and cognitive security against an uncertain and often hostile environment.
 - c. Deals not only with the answers to ultimate questions, but also to the pragmatic issues that arise in daily life.
 - d. Is the primary area that must be addressed if we desire to see significant life-changing impact.
 - e. Is primarily pragmatic in orientation, and is amenable to change as a result of pragmatic considerations. It may be described as a "build a better mousetrap" orientation.
5. Uncovering a world view: How do we unravel the world view of another person or group of people? It will help us to recognize that the dynamic nature of world views makes it such that an analytic "paper report" of a world view will never be completely accurate, because of the nature of change in the world view. As we indicated in the first diagram, world views also interact with faith views and lifeways. As either of these change, there will be a corresponding change in world view.
- a. *Comparative research and reflection*: It may be helpful to compare your research using ethnic categories.
 - b. *Ritual analysis*: This must include more than just the phenomena of the ritual and more than just the social aspects; it must also delve into the religious significance.
 - c. *Deep structure or theme analysis*: Usually done through linguistic analysis, identifying domains or themes that reappear in the culture as common threads underlying varied behavior. It can also be developed through analyzing the myth structure of a culture.
 - d. *Semiotic analysis*: Analyzing the symbols and signs of a culture.
 - e. *Script analysis*: Focuses not on the unconscious scripts followed to meet needs in everyday life (e.g., our "Tylenol script" for dealing with aches and pains)

N.B. We assume that the student has been introduced to the methodologies of ethnographic research, including participant observation, ethnographic interviewing, etc.

6. Is there such a thing as a "Christian World View"?

If we confine world view to the set of core assumptions, and not to the resulting behavior patterns, it seems that there should be a set of parameters within which any world view chosen will be in conformity to biblical revelation.

Core Area	Proposed Assumptions for a Christian World View	
Powers and Religious Orientation	Religious Orientation	
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God exists and is infinite though personal. He is the Creator of all that exists and loves all that He has created. 2. God has chosen to reveal Himself to us through the created order (general revelation) and the Bible (special revelation) 3. The universe consists of more than just the physical world around us. It includes also spiritual realm(s) inhabited by spirit creatures (e.g., angels and demons). These spirit t are involved in our world. Demons seek to keep those apart from Christ trapped in Satan's deceptions about God and His creation. They also harass believers to the extent the allowed. Angels minister to those who belong to Christ as directed by God. 4. God not only loves His creation; He also desires a love response in return. 	
Knowledge And Logic	Knowledge	Logic
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge is propositional as well as existential. 2. Man's nature and ability to know things is now tainted by sin. 3. Religious knowledge comes through two sources: general and special revelation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Logic is created by God, and follows the rules He has set out.
Space And Time	Space	Time
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Space is created by God, and is real. 2. Spaces can be religious in orientation, but are so because God declares them so, not because of any intrinsic quality. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time is created by God and is moving towards a conclusion (in linear fashion). There are times which carry religious significance because God declares them (not because of an intrinsic quality)
Existence And Being	Existence	Being
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Actual physical existence is real and not illusion. 2. Each moment of existence of the universe is a gift from God and is to be celebrated as such. 3. Existence is tied to purpose--everything within God's created order is to give recognition to the Creator by living (or existing) within God's divinely ordained plan. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All life is created by God. People are created in God's image, and partake of God's nature, though that is in some way tainted by sin. People are the highest order of God's creation, and have been given dominion over the rest of the created order. 4. God's ultimate purpose for people is that they be restored to His image through the work of Christ on the cross (Col. 2:15). In Jesus we see what it means to be fully human.