

World View Clash

A Handbook for Spiritual Warfare

Which is closer to reality, a traditional animistic world view or a Western naturalistic one? What is a biblical view of the world and how should it affect our spiritual warfare in world missions? This article is an excerpt from Murphy's exhaustive study from his book entitled: The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare.

By Edward F. Murphy

The World Vision organization planned to dig a well for a needy African village called Walamo.¹ They were warned not to go to the village because the most powerful *marabout*, or witch doctor, of the region had cursed it. They were told something bad would happen to them or their machinery if they tried to dig a well in the village under so strong a curse that people from other villages would not go there.

The team went anyway. In time they dug a well which filled with sweet, pure water. The people of Walamo were ecstatic. Nearby villages heard of it and, convinced the curse had been broken, resumed trade with Walamo. When asked why nothing evil befell the workers or their equipment, they responded, "Francois's god is more powerful than the *marabout's* god."

Francois, who led the drilling crew, was tempted to dismiss their views as pure superstition. The well had come in by understanding and working with the relevant scientific laws. The people, however, saw it as evidence of the superior power of Francois's god. Two world views had clashed.²

World View Clash

I am a missionary. A missionary leaves behind his own familiar culture and seeks to contextualize himself within a foreign culture.³ He does this for the sake of the gospel and out of love for God and for the people to whom he is sent. As fully as possible, he seeks to understand their world view. He faces a serious problem, however: He carries with him his own world view. James W. Sire

in *The Universe Next Door* defines world view as "a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or unconsciously) about the basic make up of our world."⁴ The working definition of world view I will use is even more basic: World view refers to "one's basic assumptions about reality."

Everyone holds world view assumptions whether or not they are reflective persons. All persons believe their own assumptions about reality are the correct ones, or at least the best ones, for the present. All persons' beliefs and behavior, in that order, are based upon their world view, whether or not they are conscious of that fact.

While world view is closely related to religion, the two are not identical. Paul Hiebert affirms that "a world view provides people with their basic assumptions about reality. Religion provides them with the specific content of this reality."⁵ If one holds to an atheistic world view, then atheism functions as a religion.

Aside from the agnostic position, only two conceivable world views exist. The *spiritualistic world view* affirms that ultimate reality is spiritual: immaterial, not physical or material. According to this view, whether ultimate reality is looked upon as personal or impersonal, it is spiritual. The vast majority of the world's more than five billion inhabitants hold to some form of a spiritualistic world view. Intellectually convinced atheists are very rare even in Western and in Marxist societies. Ours is not a world of philosophical materialists, but rather one of

convinced spiritualists.

This common spiritualistic world view gives the church a beginning point with most of humanity. Even the present occult explosion within the Western world is advantageous at this point. We can say to the occultist, "You are basically correct in your view of reality at one major point. Humans exist as spiritual beings, and not merely as material ones."

Second, the *materialistic or naturalistic world view* affirms that ultimate reality is material or physical, not spiritual. This view assumes that all life generated spontaneously from non-life and that by this process primitive single-celled life forms evolved over vast periods of time into the vast range of life as we know it today.⁶

Five important implications result from this view of reality:⁷

1. The universe is a cosmic accident that has no ultimate purpose.
2. Human life is a biological accident that has no ultimate significance.
3. Life ends forever at death for each individual life form.
4. Mind has no separate existence or survival apart from brain.
5. Humanity's intuitive, historic belief in an ultimate mind, spirit, or God behind, within, and outside of the physical universe is a form of self-deception. Thus, humanity's corresponding belief in human uniqueness, dignity, purpose, and survival beyond death is a non-real view of reality.

No wonder life is so empty to intellectually convinced but honest

World View Clash

atheists. The word *honest* is important here because most atheists do not want to honestly face the nihilistic implications of their naturalistic world view. When they do, death would be better than life because it leads to eternal non-existence.

Western theology has been influenced by the Western world view more than most of us are aware. By *Western theology* I mean the broad, generally accepted interpretations of Scripture embodied in mainstream works of systematic theology, covering the broad range of theological viewpoints and ecclesiastical groupings one finds among all believers who hold to a high view of Scripture and propagate a common historic Christian faith.

By *Western world view*⁸ I mean the view of reality that arose out of the historical movement of the eighteenth century called the Enlightenment. It is often summed up in one word, *naturalism*. Sire traces the historical swing from theism to naturalism, and by way of deism, to nihilism.⁹ One scholar defines methodological naturalism as “the name for that characteristic of scientific method which constructs its pattern of thought on the basis of natural causation as distinguished from a supernatural or occult explanation.”¹⁰

This Western world view arches over all of the scientific method. Such a method, when adopted as one’s *model* for reality, views the universe as a uniform system based strictly on the cause-and-effect relationships between its constituent parts, each in a determinate relationship one to the other, utterly closed to any dimensions of reality that transcend the natural. Sire observes that history thus becomes a “linear system of events linked by cause and effect but without an overarching purpose.”¹¹ Thus, naturalism explains everything on the basis of impersonal natural and therefore predictable causes that account for and explain all of reality.

Spiritual Warfare

How does all of this affect our study of spiritual warfare? Although we Christians have rightly rejected naturalism as an acceptable view of ultimate reality and hold faithfully to historic theism, naturalism nonetheless deeply influences our view of the daily events of our lives. This influence helps shape our view of the world of spirit beings, both benevolent

level of supernatural this-worldly beings and forces from my own world view. 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 zone 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.

In “The Excluded Middle,” an article published in the *MARC Newsletter*, Bryant Myers expands Hiebert’s concept of a two-tiered world. He points out that “the most important feature of this Enlightenment world view is that the spiritual and real worlds do not touch.... This is the major difference when we compare the Western world view to how traditional people understand their world.” Myers further

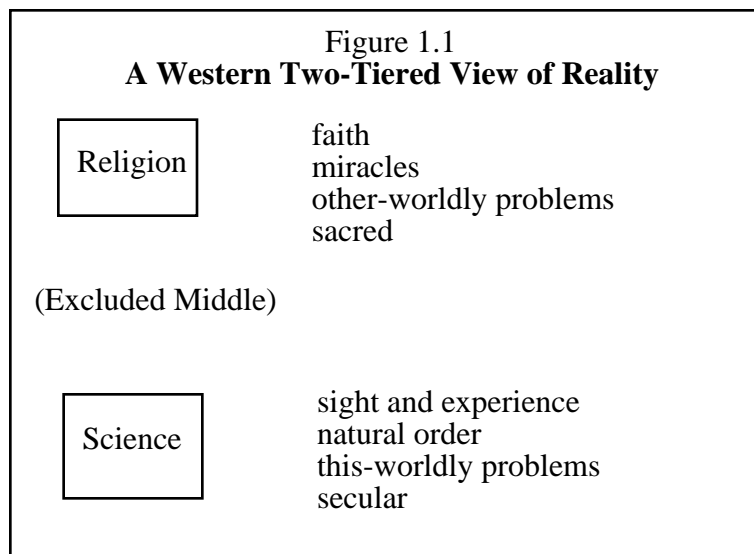
explains that most traditional religions

believe the world is a continuum between those elements of the world which are mostly spiritual in nature and those which are mostly material.... There is no gap between the two worlds. The spiritual and physical co-exist together as inseparable parts of each other.¹⁴

According to Myers, there is a “middle part” of the traditional world view, a level of reality comprising witch doctors, shamans, curses, idols, household gods, and the evil eye. This spiritual part of reality operates in the material world and is rejected, or excluded, by the Western world view.

To traditional peoples there is no natural-versus-supernatural dichotomy. The supernatural directly relates to the natural. Traditional peoples live in the middle zone. That is why much of our preaching and teaching seem to have little relevance to their daily life. For instance, we explain sickness on the basis of germs, nutrition, and related factors. They on the other hand explain sickness on the basis of curses, the evil eye, witchcraft, or

Figure 1.1
A Western Two-Tiered View of Reality



and evil. Anthropologist Paul G. Hiebert of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School writes of his own struggles in this area in an article entitled “The Flaw of the Excluded Middle.”¹²

John’s disciples asked, “Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” (Luke 7:20). Jesus answered not with logical proofs, but by a demonstration of power in the curing of the sick and casting out of evil spirits. So much is clear. Yet when I read the passage as a missionary in India, and sought to apply it to missions in our day, I had a sense of uneasiness. As a Westerner, I was used to presenting Christ on a basis of rational arguments, not by evidences of His power in the lives of people who were sick, possessed and destitute. In particular, the confrontation with spirits that appeared so natural a part of Christ’s ministry belonged in my mind to a separate world of the miraculous – far from ordinary everyday experience.

Hiebert then presents a diagram which clearly reflects the Western Christian view of reality, a by-product of our Western theology: (see figure 1.1) He comments:¹³

The reasons for my uneasiness with the biblical and Indian world views should now be clear. I had excluded the middle

karma, all of which are set against them.

Myers then applies this difference in world views to evangelism and missions. He writes¹⁵

Christians in the west believe that God and Jesus Christ are part of the world of high religion, and that others are wrong to believe in Allah or some other high god. This means we believe that the critical question for evangelism is “Whose god is the true god?”...

For people who still hold a largely traditional view of the world, the critical question is not “What is true?” but rather “Who is the most powerful?” After all, it is the stuff in the excluded middle that affects their lives for good or ill. This means that news about a god whose Spirit is more powerful than curses, witch doctors and demons is very attractive. This is one of the reasons the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements are growing as fast as they are today.

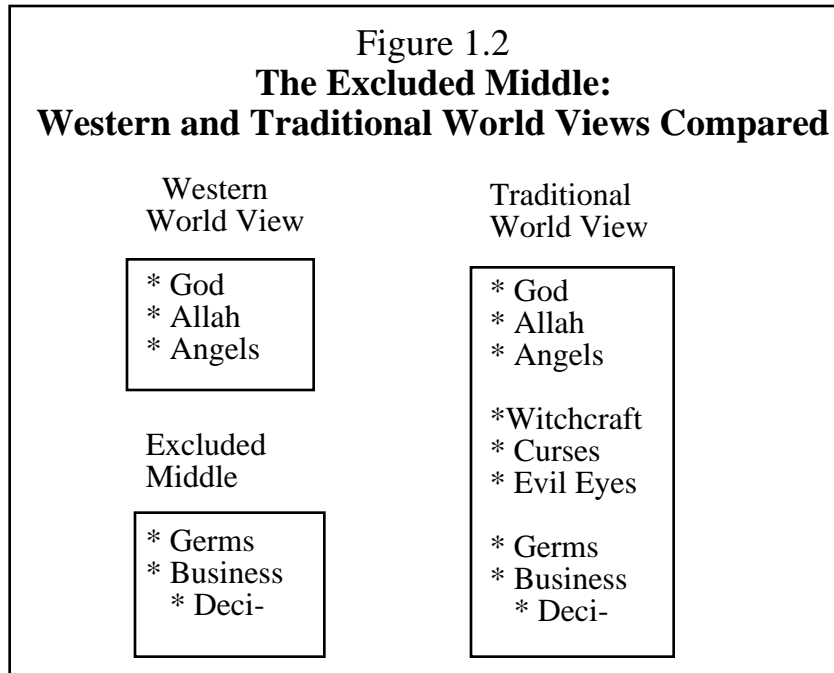
Francois, whom we met at the opening of this article, found himself in the excluded middle in the well-drilling incident. He could have reverted to the two-tiered view of reality in explaining the well of pure water to the people of Walamo. He could have told them that God was not involved because the well was part of the natural world of science, natural laws and technology. He could have dismissed their view as pure superstition. He could have tired to impose his secular Western world view upon the traditional world view held by the villagers. He could have, but he didn’t.

Francois understood the excluded middle. He realized that the people probably now saw him as a shaman more powerful than the sorcerer. He had to bridge the two world views and help the people understand, in Myers’ words, the “difference between the idea of ‘Francois’s god’

and ‘the God of Francois.’ Their world view, needed to be challenged by a biblical or kingdom framework, not a secularizing Enlightenment one.” Francois explained that he did not own a god or have any power of his own. He was not a shaman; he had no magic. He was only a servant of the one true God, who was more powerful than the shamans and Western science. This God created a world that was rational and understandable,

and his followers engage evil supernaturalism intensely and triumph decisively. Nor did awareness of such dimensions of the spirit world and of conflict with evil spirits die with the apostolic church. The post-apostolic fathers took the realm of the demonic so seriously that they automatically took new converts from paganism through rites of deliverance from evil supernaturalism, a practice we have lost to our own detriment.¹⁸

Effective ministry in our day demands that we must recover the knowledge and experience of the spirit world that the early church possessed. We must relearn the forgotten art of spiritual warfare. Probably not since the days of the apostolic and patristic churches has there occurred the present revival of evil supernaturalism that we are experiencing today. The Western world is being shaken by what Michael Green has called an “occult



and created human minds with the ability to figure out where the water was likely to be.”¹⁶

In his explanation, Francois challenged both the Western world view and the traditional world view of the Walamos. Neither is completely harmonious with the biblical world view. The traditional world view, while closer to the biblical view, is like the Western world view, also filled with error.¹⁷ It is polytheistic, pantheistic, magical, and animistic, and in these ways completely contrary to biblical revelation. In spite of these errors, the traditional view stands closer to the biblical world view because it fully acknowledge the reality of the spirit world.

In the Bible the spirit world is real, alive, and everywhere invading daily life. It is portrayed in both the Old and New Testaments but more vividly in the New, where Christ

explosion.”¹⁹

In missions the story is the same. Western missionaries gave birth to most of the mother churches of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania. These missionaries by and large believed that demons were automatically kept in check by Christ’s defeat of Satan on the Cross and by His resurrection. Evil supernaturalism, while recognized, was seldom openly challenged and defeated through power encounter.²⁰ In missionary work among animists or spirit worshipers, the first generation of converts was and is often won through power demonstrations on the part of God through His servants. Following conversion, however, no biblically nor culturally relevant theology of the demonic world or power encounter is usually developed for the new converts. Most of the intuitive recognition of and fear of the world of

World View Clash

evil spirits, ghosts, and the spirits of the ancestors or of animals held by the host cultures is regarded as “superstition.” It is thus relegated to the unreal and becomes something to be ignored in Christian living and evangelism. National Christians often feel timid in speaking of “the old ways.” Usually they did not receive from their spiritual fathers, the missionaries, an adequate biblical and functional theology of the spirit world, power encounter, and spiritual warfare. Essentially they were left unprepared for the spiritual warfare into which they were being thrust as Christians.

But today national Christians everywhere are asking questions for which adequate answers are not forthcoming: “Can true believers be demonized? If so, what can be done to set them free? What can Satan through his demons (Eph. 6:10-20) do against true believers? Can believers be hurt by demons? Can Satan severely injure believers physically, emotionally, and even spiritually? Can he kill believers? What about our churches?” they ask. “Can evil spirits work their way into positions of power and quench the flow of the Spirit and His gifts? Can they counterfeited the gifts of the Holy Spirit? How can such demonic strongholds be recognized and broken? What about the place of evil supernaturalism in evangelism? Do high level spirit princes of evil rule territorially? Can they so oppress and control individuals, communities, peoples, and even nations that the Word of God does not take root, but rather is rejected or expelled?”²¹

These questions spring out of a host of concrete experiences of our Christian brothers and sisters in other cultures. The answers, however, can not only help non-Western Christians but also awaken us in the West to the cross-cultural reality of evil supernaturalism, whose manifestation in the current occult explosion has surprised many of us. Our surprise only reveals our world view blindness.

To see people who are immersed in demonized cultures be set free by the gospel; to truly and completely deliver men, women, and children from the kingdom of Satan and bring them into the kingdom of God and to

minister to believers who are still subject to abuse by the spirits, we Christian leaders must relearn the spirit world. We must remove our Western-world view biases, which blind us to the biblical view of the spirit world, and be willing to become incarnate into the same world into which our Lord entered – a world of spiritual warfare, often deadly spiritual warfare.

References

1. See Bryant Myers. “The Excluded Middle.” MARC Newsletter, June, 1991
2. World view has to do with one’s personal or a group’s collective view of reality. There are really only two basic realities. There is reality as God has made it and sees it. Then there is reality as we finite and imperfect human beings perceive it. My friend Charles Kraft writes that “we see the world (both physical and all aspects of it) as we have been taught to see it. It is part of our world view to assume that our way of seeing the world is right.... We from Western nations bordering the North Atlantic have been taught or allowed to assume that our perception of reality is the same as the absolute REALITY itself.... This is the problem of world view.” *Christianity With Power: Your World View and Your Experience With the Supernatural*, Ann Arbor, Mich.: Vine Books, 1989, 23-24.
3. *Contextualization* is the process of adapting to a lifestyle or point of view different from our own to such a degree that our behavior becomes normal for the new context in which we find ourselves. It is an essential part of cross-cultural living and ministry.
4. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, Downers Grove, Ill. InterVarsity, 1976, 371.
5. Paul Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1976, 17.
6. For an excellent and scholarly presentation and critique of this process by a reputable Christian scientist, see A.E. Wilder Smith. *Man’s Origin Man’s Destiny*, Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1975.
7. For a critique of this view see Arthur C. Custance, *The Mysterious Matters of Mind*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1980.
8. For an excellent discussion of the inescapable tension between one’s limited personal or group world view, Western world views and key elements of a biblical world view, see Charles Kraft, *Christianity With Power*.
9. Sire, 66.
10. Vergilius Ferm, ed., *An Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York: The Philosophical Library.
11. Sire, 66.
12. Paul Hiebert, *The Flaw of the Excluded Middle*, *Missiology* 10, January, 1982, 35-47.
13. Myers, 3.
14. Myers, 3.
15. Myers, 4.
16. Myers, 4.
17. Traditional world view is often described as not believing in germs or science of any form but only in spirit forces operating directly, every moment of the day, in “nature” until nature has become almost totally unpredictable. Bronislaw Malinowski in his classic *Science and Religion*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1951, 17-36, denies that the traditionalist holds to a totally mystical world view. On the contrary, he says, traditional people understand the difference between religion, magic, and science. By observation they have created a true science by which they also live their lives. While admitting malevolent spirits can interfere in the course of nature, they do not attribute all negative experience as necessarily coming directly from evil spirits or angry ancestral ghosts.
18. J. Warwick Montgomery, “Exorcism: Is It For Real?” *Christianity Today*, July 26, 1974. Jeffrey Burton Russell of the University of California in Santa Barbara, California, traces the development of satanology and demonology up through the 5th century A.D. In his book *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987, he begins with the apostolic fathers – Clement of Rome, Igna-

tius, Polycarp, Papias, and others –and post-first century Church of the Order of Exorcists.

19. Michael Green, *I Believe in Satan's Downfall*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981, 112.

20. Power encounter is a crisis point of encounter in the on-going spiritual warfare between supernatural person-ages in which Christians are directly involved. Its goal is the glory of God, the defeat of the “no-gods” (Gal. 4:8-9), and the obedience of men to the one true God and His only

begotten Son, the lord Jesus Christ (John 1:14,16; 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10). Much is being written today about power encounter.

21. The question of territorial spirits seems to be causing considerable controversy and opposition among Christians today. Some of it is justified by the careless, unscriptural, and shallow way these spirits are dealt with by some Christian leaders. However, the Bible does speak of spirits who exercise control over peoples and geographical areas.

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