

## **Worldview Transformation and Mission: Narrative, Theology, and Ritual in John's Apocalypse**

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### **I. Worldview Warfare and the Gospel**

#### **Transforming Gospel**

The role of worldview in the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan and how transformation of worldview is integral to biblical conversion is at the heart of the mission challenges the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces. Because worldview warfare is central in the cosmic conflict, worldview transformation on the personal level must be central as well in Adventist mission in leading people to experience biblical conversion (which includes belief, being, behavior, worship, and worldview).

Experience demonstrates, that where the gospel is either articulated or interpreted in terms of non-biblical worldviews (either wittingly or unwittingly), some form of syncretistic Christo-paganism is inevitable both theologically and experientially. This syncretistic Christianity is evidenced most everywhere in the world even in developed countries where New Age and elements of Emergent Church phenomenon blend world religions in varied expressions of non-biblical spirituality. Such versions of spirituality exhibit common characteristics (either some or all). They depersonalize God. They promote minimal thought and consciousness over that of thought, reason, and content. They diminish the importance of physical body and concrete behavior. They draw from a plurality of authoritative spiritual materials while downplaying or negating the priority of Scripture.

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They enable a direct-connect with the divine without the need of Christ. They deny the reality of sin and the personal need for atonement. They individualize spirituality by asserting the superiority of being spiritual over being religious and or active in organized religion (the church or spiritual community). They devalue service as elemental to spirituality as well as apocalyptic/prophetic informed spirituality. And they espouse a non-temporal *telos*. In one form or another, each of these characteristics reflects a non-biblical worldview. In addition, syncretistic spirituality is out of sync with a host of distinctive Adventist worldview understandings of last things regarding the nature of man in death, the keeping of the commandments of God, the Sabbath-Sunday conflict, the resurrection, the second coming, etc.

These realities demand an understanding of how worldview factors in the proclamation of the gospel and its reception on the part of individuals to whom the Church is called to reach and serve. At bottom worldview transformation has to do with understanding the heart of the “eternal gospel” (Rev 14:6). Worldview transformation is at the heart of what it means to experience biblical conversion. The issue of worldview transformation on the personal level then is important in light of ongoing issues in mission: (1) the formation of a true people of God distinct from that of the world; (2) the retention of new members; (3) the continued syncretism on the part of old and new members alike (and many leaders); and (4) the effective witness of the church where the gospel maintains its disruptive qualities and brings radical change in both individual and community life from generation to generation.

Revelation’s worldview warfare in relation to the Church’s mission to the world provides an understanding of the true nature of and the motivation toward worldview transformation and the personal experience it engenders. In particular, “the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17)—which forms the Remnant’s self-identity, to which they tenaciously cling, and which they passionately proclaim to the whole world—is a prophetic apocalyptic worldview which brings into being truly transformed lives, i.e., conversion. Why so? Because at bottom this apocalyptic prophetic

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worldview entails owning Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior with all the existential moral and spiritual implications such owning of Christ entail.<sup>1</sup>

Naugle suggests that "conceiving of Christianity as a worldview has been one of the most significant developments in the recent history of the church."<sup>2</sup> I would assert that conceiving Seventh-day Adventism, as a unique expression of the biblically informed and biblically shaped Christian worldview, is one of the most significant developments we can nurture in our identity, mission, and message. Not only so, but to assert as well that The Three Angels Messages found in Revelation's chiasmic center (Rev 14:6-13) should both inform and critique the larger global Christian worldview.

Whether we understand it theologically or embrace it as an overall narrative, Revelation's worldview offers a fresh perspective on the holistic nature, cosmic dimensions, and universal applications of biblical faith and present truth. Revelation's worldview reminds us that the preaching of the gospel is not merely the transference of knowledge or the change of behavior, but bringing about personal conversion. In our contemporary world the most important distinctions and sources of conflict among human beings are no longer ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. At the heart of this current culture war is a clash of worldviews.<sup>3</sup>

### **Purpose of Study**

And so the purpose of this study:

- 1) to raise the question of worldview in relation to the Great Controversy theme in our preaching of the gospel;
- 2) to explore the elements and themes of worldview and how they play in human self-identity and action as well as in the Great Controversy;
- 3) to show how Revelation both contains these worldview elements and themes and through them presents a distinct counter worldview in contrast to the worldview of the false trinity's and those who dwell on the earth;

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<sup>1</sup> See Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, The "Testimony of Jesus" in the *Writings of Ellen G. White* (ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez; Silver Springs, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009), 234-235.

<sup>2</sup> David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

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4) to underscore how our call to engage every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, calls for conscious stepping into their culture and worldview with the intent to understand where they are and lead them to the biblical view;

5) to assert how such engagement with the cultures of the world and their respective worldviews is in effect working to transform worldview;

6) to remind us that in keeping with the Gospel, the call to mission understands, engages, and challenges both culture and the worldview a given culture reflects;

7) to explore how the “testimony of Jesus” which the Remnant cling to and proclaim is a prophetic apocalyptic worldview that will effect truly transformed lives (conversion) as that worldview transforms the worldview of its hearers. Change of belief and behavior is not enough—one’s worldview itself must change as well;

8) to explore the role of worldview in the great controversy and how transformation of worldview is integral to biblical conversion and at the heart of mission challenges we face.

In accomplishing the above, this study will explore how a worldview is articulated. Hopefully we will learn better how worldview is formed within the individual or a given community. Most important, we will hope to catch a glimpse of how one’s functioning worldview can be shifted and transformed.

## **II. Worldview Warfare and Mission in Revelation**

At its chiasmic center Revelation envisions global mission where the Church engages the people of the entire world with the urgent end-time truths of the eternal gospel: “And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Rev 14:6). While the passage affirms the universal scope of God’s redemptive call in lieu of the beast’s destructive influence over the same worldwide audience (13:7; cf. 17:15), it at the same time assumes and envisions distinctive nations (ἔθνος). There are distinguishable people groups within the nations (λαόν) as well as unique tribes and languages within given people groups and nations (φυλῆν καὶ γλώσσαν).

Revelation consistently summarizes humanity in this fourfold pattern—nation, tribe, tongue, and people (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15). Seven times altogether, though none of the ordering within the

respective lists agrees precisely with the other.<sup>4</sup> These words describe the distribution, characteristics, and relationships of human beings in the world.<sup>5</sup> Worldwide human life is thus organized into societies. Furthermore, Revelation envisions social status and roles within human social order: the “rich and poor,” “slave and free,” “small and great,” kings, nobleman, commanders, the strong (6:15; 11:18; 13:16; 19:5, 18; cf. Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). Thus the global, the regional, the local, the varied roles and standings within society, as well as the individual person are alike in view. All spheres and all peoples are to hear the eternal gospel. All are to be called to experience its hope, warning, and transforming power.

The imagery of nations, people groups, languages, tribes/clans, social status and roles implies the existence of integrating cultures, which mirrors, expresses, and fosters the unique characteristics of a given society. It assumes too, worldview(s), which a given culture similarly mirrors, expresses, and fosters within that particular society. The delineation of roles and societal standing (“small and great,” “poor and rich,” “free and slave,” kings, commanders, noblemen, etc.) further suggest the presence of disparate worldviews on both the structural level and existential perception/experience of individuals within society.

### **Those Who Dwell on the Earth**

Throughout Revelation, the functioning worldview of those envisioned in Revelation 14:6 is expressed more clearly elsewhere in the Greek phrase οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς –“those who dwell on the earth.” The phrase occurs often in the book of Revelation but nowhere else in the New Testament (3:10; 6:10; 8:13, 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:2, 8).<sup>6</sup> The phrase is not

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<sup>4</sup> See chart Kendell H. Easley, *Revelation* (ed. Max Anders; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 101.

<sup>5</sup> Mal Couch, ed. *A Bible Handbook to Revelation* (ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 134.

<sup>6</sup> Of the 13 times κατοικέω appears in Revelation, nine are in the present active participial form followed by the phrase ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς –“upon the earth” (3:10; 6:10; 8:13, 11:10, 13:8; 13:14; 17:8). Two refer to those who dwell in the earth but either don’t include the preposition ἐπὶ or separate those on the earth from those dwelling in it (13:12; 17:2). In the message to Smyrna the people of God dwell where Satan dwells (2:13). The issues of worldview and worldview influence are evident in each context. Revelation 14:6 uses the terminology τοὺς καθημένους ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς where the verb κάθημαι is used rather than κατοικέω.

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as neutral as might first appear. It does not refer merely to the entire mass of humanity or simply those who live on planet earth.<sup>7</sup> It is a technical term, which always refers to unbelievers, the enemies of God.<sup>8</sup> It designates the worldview of the dominant portion of humanity. It is a this-world-only perspective.

More specifically, “those who dwell on the earth” appear in association with idolatry (13:8, 12, 14; 14:6-13; 17:2, 8, cf. 8:13 with 9:20, 21),<sup>9</sup> suggesting that they cannot look beyond this earth for their security. Rather, they trust in some part of the creation instead of the Creator for their ultimate meaning and welfare. The object of their trust and perhaps their very being, in that they have become part of the earthly system in which they find security, suggests that they have become like it—morally and spiritually.

The constitutive nature of worldview is reflected in the sixth trumpet where Revelation draws from Psalm 115:1-8 which enunciates the principle that we become what we worship (cf. 9:20, 21; Psalm 135:15-18; Jer 2:5).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 49. I suggest that the phrase “the whole world” (3:10; cf. 12:9; 16:14) means something different from the phrase “those who dwell on the earth.” The former refers to the entire mass of humanity, while the latter refers to those who have only an earthly perspective and thus ally themselves with the beast in rebellion against God. Revelation’s summary of “language of nations, tribes, tongues, and people” (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15) gives further example of language referring to humanity as a whole in contrast to “those who dwell on the earth.”

<sup>8</sup> Easley, *Revelation*, 65; Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (ed. Moisés Silva; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 193. “Those who dwell on the earth” are the ones who murder the martyrs (6:10), who reject the two witnesses’ call to repentance (11:10), who worship the beast (13:8, 12), who are deceived into making an image to the beast (13:14), and who get drunk on the harlot’s wine (17:2). They do not have their names written in the book of life (17:8), rather they are subject to the coming hour of trial (3:10; 8:13).

<sup>9</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (ed. I. Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 595, 596; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 283.

<sup>10</sup> So powerful are the worldview forces of natural religion that people will not abandon its immoral values and dehumanizing practices even in the face of God’s terrible judgments. Idol worshippers shape their gods after their own view of reality, i.e., they are “the works of their hands” (9:20; cf. Isa 40:18-20; 44:9-20; 66:3; Jer 10:3-8; Hab 2:18, 19). Those who make idols and put their trust in them become like them—they can neither see or hear nor walk, morally. It’s a moral principle. We resemble our ideals. We become like what we

When human beings commit themselves to some aspect of the earth, they become earthly<sup>11</sup> and thus come to be known as “those who dwell on the earth.” “Those who dwell on the earth” are self-defining in terms of their totally earthly perspective and how they relate to God, treat His people, and weigh eternal matters. They cannot trust in anything except what their eyes see and their physical senses perceive. They are permanently earthbound in their perspective. Their ultimate identity and perspective is in the world that they adore. That is why they are resistive of the Two Witnesses who threaten what they regard as ultimate value, meaning, and security (11:10).<sup>12</sup>

### **Those Who Hold the Testimony of Jesus**

In contrast to the worldview of “those who dwell on the earth” Revelation asserts the worldview of God’s covenant people who are depicted in Revelation’s chiastic center in the imagery of the woman and her seed (12:1-17). Here also (the chiastic center) and elsewhere throughout the book, God’s covenant people are referred to as the saints (13: 7, 10; 14:12; 5:8; 8:3, 4; 11:18; 13:7; 13:10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9). They are a tiny and powerless minority within a hostile world’s culture. They are persecuted and marginalized elements in society.<sup>13</sup> They are an alternative community and worldview pitted in conflict with the powers that be and the dominating worldview such powers assert and compel.

More specifically, God’s covenant people are characterized as those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus” (12:17, cf. 14:12). Much has been and can be said about the meaning of

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worship. Worldview as expressed in worship shapes character and action. See G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008); F. B. Meyer, *Gems from the Psalms* (Westchester, IL: Good News Publishers, 1976), 188.

<sup>11</sup> Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, 255.

<sup>12</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 596.

<sup>13</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 173, 181.

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the phrase “the testimony of Jesus” (τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ),<sup>14</sup> but at bottom it has to do with worldview.<sup>15</sup> Its content is the witness of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> It unfolds the theodicy of God’s handling of the reality of evil in the person and work of Jesus within the cosmic conflict.<sup>17</sup> It is the eternal gospel.<sup>18</sup> More precisely as a product of the “spirit of prophecy” (19:10) “the testimony of Jesus” is the “eternal gospel” (14:7) set in an apocalyptic prophetic context.<sup>19</sup> This apocalyptic prophetic setting of the gospel brings

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<sup>14</sup> The phrase occurs in 1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10 (twice). In 20:4 there is reference to the believer’s “testimony of Jesus” i.e., “their testimony of Jesus.” Larry L. Lichtenwalter, *Revelation’s Great Love Story: More Than I Ever Imagined* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald Publishing Association, 2008), 119-124.

<sup>15</sup> See discussion Rodríguez, *The “Testimony of Jesus” in the Writings of Ellen G. White*, 228, 229, 232-235, 242.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 119.

<sup>17</sup> Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2006), xv, xvi, 159-193.

<sup>18</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*.

<sup>19</sup> Revelation 19:10 asserts an organic link between “the testimony of Jesus” and “the spirit of prophecy” with the expression: “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” While the nominative case construction on both sides of the verb “to be” suggests equivalence/interchangeability (ἡ γὰρ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ ἐστὶν τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας), each side of the equation nevertheless nuances the same reality in distinct yet complimentary directions. There may be equivalence, but there is also differentiation. I suggest that this intended differentiation reveals the essential core of “the testimony of Jesus” to which the end-time people of God cling. In other words, the terminology “the spirit of prophecy” points to the essential prophetic apocalyptic nature or characteristic of the worldview, which “the testimony of Jesus” articulates. As a recurring motif in Revelation (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10x2; cf. 20:4) “the testimony of Jesus” as a worldview is broader than “the spirit of prophecy” but nevertheless ever encompasses and comprises it and all that it suggests. The larger context linking these two concepts suggests that “the testimony of Jesus” is the product of the “spirit of prophecy” in that it originates in the activity of holy prophets moved by God’s spirit (19:10; 22:6-9; cf. 1 Pet 2:20, 21.) As such it is both a witness from Jesus and about Jesus. The phrase “the God of the spirits of the prophets” together with “the words of the prophecy of this book” (i.e., Revelation) clearly links the activity of the Holy Spirit in the creation of Revelation itself as “the testimony of Jesus” (22:6-9). This suggests that “the testimony of Jesus” has an essential prophetic apocalyptic core and characteristic. Revelation refers to itself as a book of prophecy (1:3). It is a book of prophecy (22:10, 19). It is filled with words of prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10; 18) and as such it unfolds the prophetic apocalyptic testimony of Jesus—an example of what “the testimony of Jesus” is. This is Revelation’s worldview. This is the worldview which “the Spirit of Prophecy” engenders.



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understanding, shapes moral life, outlines the future, as well as invites and compels decision in the context of its hope and warning. By its very nature biblical apocalyptic prophecy casts a moral vision—a worldview, which generates an ethic and life to go with it.

Thus, “the testimony of Jesus” re-imagines the present world in keeping with God’s sovereign purpose, action, and invitation through Revelation’s victorious Lamb (5:1-10). In doing so it constructs a world of vision—a worldview. It presents the vision of a new world. It is an apocalyptic vision, a prophetic vision. Its form and content underscore the fundamental prophetic apocalyptic nature of the biblically informed worldview. As the product of “the spirit of prophecy” (19:10; 22:9, 10) it unfolds genuine prophetic witness in contrast to the “spirits of demons” who go out to deceive the whole world with another worldview (16:14). This “testimony of Jesus” communicates values and conduct that run counter to the values and conduct of the old world and provide a structure of meaning which grounds lives in both God and the hope of God’s new world.<sup>20</sup>

Revelation’s alternative community of faith is said to have this “testimony of Jesus” (12:17). Within the book’s narrative imagery the simple Greek word *to have* (ἔχω) frequently refers to essential identity and being because of what one is possessing more than merely possessing something external to them. The biblical notion of *having* thus points to something one *is* because of what they have—i.e., identity, and nature, and character.<sup>21</sup> In other words, one cannot separate what he or she has from

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See my discussion, Lichtenwalter, *Revelation’s Great Love Story: More Than I Ever Imagined*, 119-124.

<sup>20</sup> Biblical apocalyptic prophecy ever casts a moral vision. It generates an ethic to go along with it, or it fails to keep its promise of offering a unity of life and the possibility of total fulfillment. See Carl E. Braaten, *Eschatology and Ethics: Essays on the Theology and Ethics of the Kingdom of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 20.

<sup>21</sup> An example is how the inseparable oneness between the Lamb and the Spirit is portrayed in the description of the Lamb who has “seven horns and seven eyes.” According to John, these seven horns and seven eyes “are the seven Spirits of God.” Here the Greek word “to have” indicates an organic relationship where the seven horns and seven eyes are part of the Lamb’s essential identity and being. This is in keeping with other descriptions and caricatures in the Apocalypse, i.e., 4:8; 12:3; 13:1; 14:1; 17:3 as opposed to eternal objects like in 7:2; 14:6; 14:14; 17:4; 20:1. These horns and eyes are an organic part of who He is as the slain Lamb. When you see the Lamb, the Spirit is present and evident.

what they are. This is part of Revelation's narrative characterization or caricature of its major actors in the unfolding story line, plot, and moral/spiritual point of view. For God's covenant people (the *loipos* - the remnant) to have "the testimony of Jesus" points to this life framing worldview, which defines who they are in the world. As the meaning of the word ἔχω also suggests that God's covenant people "hold" to "the testimony of Jesus,"<sup>22</sup> it implies their tenacious grip on this particular worldview no matter the encapsulating and coercive pressures of any other (14:12; 13:10; 2:10, 25; 1:9). The verb points both to self-defining realities as well as a tenacious grip on those self-defining realities as the only legitimate view of self in relation to reality as expressed in Jesus Christ.

Thus, Revelation knows only two kinds of human beings: *those who dwell on the earth* and *those . . . who hold to the testimony of Jesus*. There are those whose ultimate identity is with the old earth, which they adore. There are those who live with ultimate identity with the God of the coming new cosmos—the God in whom is their ultimate trust.<sup>23</sup> Within Revelation's unfolding narrative these two categories of human beings are at eternal odds with one another. The worldview articulated here (and throughout this study) is on the level of a moral spiritual frame of reference (lifeview) rather than that of everyday matters as per anthropology.

### Clash of Worldviews

The significance of this brief survey of these two groups of human beings for our discussion on worldview transformation and mission in the Book of Revelation is the reality of the respective moral/spiritual orientation and perspective of these contrasted groups—their world of

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Wherever the Lamb goes, whatever the Lamb does, the Spirit is present and at work. The Spirit qualifies essential features of the Lamb's being and work. Likewise the Lamb qualifies essential features of the Spirit's being and work. The "sevenfold Spirit" is so closely identified with Jesus that they are nearly one. One cannot remove the horns or the eyes, else the Lamb imagery and implications would not be complete. This does not diminish or blur the Spirit into the person of Christ or make them one in essence. Rather it accentuates the context in which the Spirit's work is envisioned in the Apocalypse.

<sup>22</sup> See discussion Gerhard Pfandl, "Identifying Marks of the End-Time Remnant in the Book of Revelation," in *Toward A Theology of the Remnant* (ed. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez; Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009), 148-150.

<sup>23</sup> Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*, 255.

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vision, their worldview. Worldview comes into play in how the universal scope of God's redemptive call contrasts sharply with the beast's destructive influence over the same worldwide audience (as per chapters 13, 17, and 18). Within this narrative the Everlasting Gospel in the context of the Three Angel's messages asserts a worldview even as it engages the people of the world in their respective cultures and integrating worldviews. At bottom the Three Angel's Messages asserts a clash of worldviews and resultant culture.

This clash of worldviews assumes "a crucial role in the hidden, spiritual battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan in which the very truth of things is at stake. Between these regimes a conflict of epic proportion rages for the minds and hearts, and thus the lives and destinies, of all men and women, all the time. Since nothing could be of greater final importance than the way human beings understand God, themselves, the cosmos, and their place in it, it is not surprising that a worldview warfare is at the heart of the conflict between the powers of good and evil."<sup>24</sup> History is the record of spiritual warfare with competing worldviews as the center.<sup>25</sup>

In the end, the matter of the shifting of worldview is significant as it integrates identity, theology, ethics, purpose (service and mission), and everyday life, etc. Revelation's unfolds how everyone's worldview is questioned and at stake—either shifted, abandoned, or held on to firmly.

At its core, the language of the First Angel's Message asserts that we must take the worldviews of other people seriously, not because we agree with them, but because we want to understand the people we serve in order to effectively share with them the good news of the eternal gospel and the truths it proclaims about Jesus and end-time issues.<sup>26</sup> This is essential, required, and the fundamental beginning point of genuine compassionate concern for the people of the world.

However, taking the worldviews of our world's varied people groups seriously in order to better understand them and serve them is only part of Revelation's meaning. We are to understand their respective worldviews

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<sup>24</sup> Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>26</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 69.

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in order to transform their worldview and thus transform them (as individuals and people) where such transformation is necessary for a genuine conversion experience and vital connection with the living God.<sup>27</sup>

While no culture needs to undergo total transformation in order to become Christian, worldview themes and cultural expressions that are contrary to biblical truths must be challenged and changed. While seated in culture, the gospel is both trans-cultural and countercultural. It has the power and intent on transforming where possible and necessary the very culture in which it is seated.

This does not mean Colonialization where missionaries or Christians from wherever promote the values and lifestyles of their own culture or sub-culture as superior to those they are evangelizing or serving—thus trying to squeeze everyone into their own mold of Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

Nor does this mean contextualizing the gospel as if, because of genuine cultural sensitivity, one could divest the gospel of one cultural form and re-dress it in another. Nor does it mean divesting the gospel of its intrinsic nature and truths.

Rather the First Angels' Message points to the universal scope and universal critique of the biblically informed and shaped worldview via the eternal gospel. This means recognizing how the biblically informed and biblically shaped worldview ("the testimony of Jesus") rightly challenges all other worldviews as well as the cultures and the lifestyles each worldview engenders.

According to Revelation, the worldview of every human being is to be challenged and transformed via the proclamation of the eternal gospel. We are to remember that, even with careful packaging, the gospel eventually

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Cultures are not neutral. They all have good and evil that must be checked against biblical standards. And yet every culture is a valid way of living for members of its expressions of reality and must be seen as the context where mission happens, even where God has been active before the arrival of a missionary bearing the gospel message. Cultures are not to be replaced or rejected but embraced, critiqued, and shaped according to biblical values and truths. No culture should be viewed as the Christian default culture or as superior over other cultures. See Paulo De Oliveira, "Worldview: Vital for Mission and Ministry in the 21st Century," *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 5, no. 1 (2009): 26.

becomes a disruptive force in the life of the people who accept it.<sup>29</sup> The gospel renders every human being incapable of participating fully in his or her own given culture.<sup>30</sup> Wherever the gospel is preached it disrupts local customs, religion, and economy. It disrupts every worldview. Thus the eternal gospel of the Three Angels Messages, and anyone, who accepts it and preaches it, is a change agent, which disrupts any native culture with the gospel. There is no other way.

### III. Worldview as Narrative, Theology, and Ritual The Concept of Worldview

There's a fair bit of ambiguity about the fascinating concept of Worldview. On the one hand we can intuit what it is, yet on the other hand it is difficult to define clearly or adequately describe.<sup>31</sup> Its usage in diverse fields including philosophy, philosophy of science, history, anthropology, sociology, ethics, and Christian thought,<sup>32</sup> contributes to this ambiguity as each discipline comes to the discussion with a different set of glasses and purpose. After all, all human beings see things from aslant, Christians included. And so, any view of worldview is itself worldview dependent.<sup>33</sup> Human beings are captive to their worldview. So much so that even when one comes to Scripture as their authority or to the Book of Revelation in particular they are already expressing a worldview. No single definition of worldview is agreed upon by all.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, there are some important

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<sup>29</sup> P. Richard Choi, "All Things to All Men': Paul Preaches to the World," in *A Commentary on the Sabbath School Lesson for July 5-11, 2008* (Spectrummagazine.org, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*; Dennis P. Hollinger, *Choosing The Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 61-88; Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*; Philip Graham Ryken, "What Is the Christian Worldview?," (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2006), 7, 8.

<sup>32</sup> "Since its inception in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in 1790, the notion of Weltanschauung has become one of the central intellectual conceptions in contemporary thought and culture" (Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, 66.)

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>34</sup> The production and influence of multiple conceptual worldviews can be attributed to the rulers, the powers, the world forces of darkness, and the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12).

things we can understand about worldview and its important personal, cultural, and social functions.

Broadly put, worldview is the story we tell to answer existential questions: Why is there anything at all? How can we know for sure? How did we get here and why are we here? What does it mean to be a human being? Why have things gone so badly wrong? Is there any hope of things getting any better? What should I do with my life? Where will it all lead in the end? What about God? Is He there? If so what is He like? What difference does the existence of deity make in the scheme of things? Is there a dark side to reality, to spirituality? Does evil exist?

Beyond these basic questions, a worldview has to do with viewing the cosmos and all things within it through a particular set of lenses or from a specific point of view. Our worldview is our way of looking at life, our interpretation of the universe, the orientation of our inner world. A cosmic blueprint, so to speak. It is a well-reasoned framework of beliefs and convictions that gives a true and unified perspective on the meaning of human existence. Worldview provides the overarching perceptual categories (theological, philosophical, moral) through which we interpret reality. It is the structure of understanding that we use to make sense of our world. Our worldview is what we presuppose.

Revelation unfolds a worldview in which God, human existence, and the spiritual/moral conflict at play are both spiritually and morally framed.<sup>35</sup> The reader is invited to enter this explicit world, assured that what the book says about God, human beings, the moral/spiritual issues, central characters, and moral/spiritual nature of the conflict, is in fact both true and God given (1:1; 21:5; 22:6, 18, 19).<sup>36</sup> The foundational themes articulated

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<sup>35</sup> See, David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1998), 3-5; Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 171-177; Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 181-184; Smalley, *The Revelation to John: Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*, 16-19.

<sup>36</sup> The apocalyptic medium establishes its own world in which one must enter in order to fully grasp. The modern reader enters a worldview vastly different from their natural perspective. The first task then is to understand Revelation's outlook. Revelation is wrapped in a worldview and language quite alien to modern times. See Joseph R. Jeter, "Revelation-Based Preaching: Homiletical Approaches," in *Preaching Through the Apocalypse: Sermons from Revelation* (ed. Cornish R. Rogers and Joseph R. Jeter; St.

in Revelation's worldview provide a broad conceptual canvas against which an understanding of the gospel and its call to life transformation unfolds.

### **Revelation's Narrative, Theology, Ritual**

Worldview is manifested in three basic and interrelated ways: through a narrative component, a rational component, and a ritual component. All worldviews tend to manifest themselves in these forms.<sup>37</sup>

A worldview's narrative component embodies the stories we tell to make sense of reality. Plato said it well when he asserted: "Those who tell stories rule society." Stories have culture shaping power. Power to establish a context for life. Life-defining power. They stir the mind and imagination. Great stories freight world-sized ideas, ideas worthy of contemplation and conversation. Their weightiness and their plots develop and mold the human mind and consciousness.<sup>38</sup> Such worldview narratives create a particular kind of "mind" and serve as "controlling stories."

Revelation's most basic literary structure has a narrative character.<sup>39</sup> It is a story with an intriguing cast of characters and an engaging plot.<sup>40</sup> It is

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Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1992), 10; Richard Melick. "Preaching and Apocalyptic Literature," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching* (ed. Michael Dudit; Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 382, 383; Larry Paul Jones and Jerry L. Sumney, *Preaching Apocalyptic Texts* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999), 9-23.

<sup>37</sup> Hollinger, *Choosing The Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World*, 63-64; Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, 291-330. Naugle outline of worldview components include semiotics, narrative, reason, hermeneutical, and epistemological components or functions of worldviews.

<sup>38</sup> Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, 297.

<sup>39</sup> Like any good story, there is an introduction (1:1-8) and a conclusion (22:6-21). The story in between these bookends however, is unique in that the narrative is told by three seemingly separate, vastly different, yet profoundly interrelated and corresponding stories about Jesus and moral/spiritual realities: (1) the story of why John was at Patmos, his vision of the eternal Christ and subsequent letters to the seven churches (1:9-3:22); (2) the opening of the sealed scroll in the middle of celestial worship with the subsequent unfolding of the seven seals and seven trumpets and resumption of worship (4:1-11:19); and (3) the cosmic dragon pursuing a cosmic woman who is eventually defeated by a cosmic warrior resulting in the establishment of a wholly new cosmic order (12:1-22:5).

<sup>40</sup> One cannot but be amazed at the sheer number and diversity of characters encountered throughout the story as well as the interwoven story lines. There are characters belonging to different worlds, human and divine, as well as a menagerie of strange creatures, bestial and angelic. There are major and minor characters and cameo appearances by

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a prophetic apocalyptic narrative, which asserts a specific point of view—a worldview.<sup>41</sup> It places all other meta-narratives in context and assesses their credibility.

A worldview's rational component reflects our attempt to give a logical or analytic formulation to our beliefs and commitments. Things need to make sense, line up logically, be explained, and have foundation in something other than a compelling story. And so we deal with information, facts, evidence, arguments, and logic/reason. We seek to understand systematically and logically. How do we best explain the origin and nature of the universe as well as the human condition and the facts of history?<sup>42</sup> The rational component of a worldview engages foundational themes as: the existence and character of God, origins, human nature, the basis of authority and norms, theodicy and the problem of evil, time, space, self and the other, and hope (the final consummation of things). There is also the question of epistemology. How do we know what we know? How do we know what is truth? How do we know what is morally right or wrong? Stories only go so far.

On the surface Revelation's rational component appears modest, and yet it is forcefully reflected in the book's descriptions, explanations, self-interpretation, vivid contrasts and juxtapositions, hymns and outbursts of praise, interludes, transitional passages, rhetoric, verbal and thematic allusions from Old and New Testament Scripture, temporal focus of historical setting and sequences, and as well as its controlling point of view. Themes of creation/de-creation/re-creation, holiness, justice, covenant faithfulness, truth, judgment, sin, redemption, idolatry, and keeping God's commandments, come into view for both consideration and moral/spiritual

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well-known figures. One sees bizarre and wonderful scenes, characters, creatures, and events (Revelation is a visual feast) as well as hears voices and noises.

<sup>41</sup> See Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation*; David L. Barr, *Waiting for the End that Never Comes: The Narrative Logic of John's Story* (ed. Steve Moyise; New York, NY: T & T Clark, 2001); David L. Barr. "The Story John Told: Reading Revelation for its Plot," in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (ed. David L. Barr; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 11-23; Adela Yarbro Collins, "Reading the Book of Revelation in the Twentieth Century," *Interpretation*, xl, no. 3 (1986): 242; Gilbert Desrosiers, *An Introduction to Revelation* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2000), 10-24; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

<sup>42</sup> Questions like, "Does God Exist?"



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orientation. Revelation puts the reader in a moral and spiritual context. It informs the reader who the players are. It tells what condition human life is in. It advises us where we are and where we are going. It informs us what questions need to be answered. It provides a philosophical map for the larger moral vision against which its various moral and spiritual themes are addressed. In doing so it brings understanding on the historical, theological, moral, spiritual, and interpretive levels.<sup>43</sup> Twice there is exhortation for the understanding of the book's mysteries (13:8; 17:9). The reader is to hear and keep what she learns from the book (1:3; 2:7; 22:7). Thus, the reader is addressed both rationally and emotionally.

Finally, the symbols we use and the customs/rituals we perform both embody and reinforce our worldview. This is the stuff of culture as worldview is the deepest level of culture and culture is the outward visible manifestations of worldview assumptions.<sup>44</sup> Culture and customs are full of worldview reflecting symbols and rituals.<sup>45</sup> Worldview via culture always expresses itself in tangible ways. Even the immaterial dynamics of worldview/culture are realized in temporal and material forms. Here we move into the realm of cultural ideas, feelings, and values as expressed in behavior and ritual. Here is envisioned our concrete engagement with the marketplace, celebrities, music, TV, fashion, sports, art, advertising, commerce, entertainment, theme parks, political correctness, social mores,

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<sup>43</sup> Revelation's rational component asserts such things as: (1) a morality consistent with human existence and life; (2) divine creation of the world as the overarching worldview for ethics; (3) sin and "fallen" human nature as the underlying spiritual/moral reality within which ethical thought, choice, and action are both found and expressed; (4) the "warfare worldview" (*Great Controversy*) as backdrop for the existence and nature of evil, human choice and moral accountability, and divine character and action; and (5) divine grace and redemption as providing an "already and not yet" scope to ethics, as well as the ground of moral action and victory.

<sup>44</sup> Oliveira, "Worldview: Vital for Mission and Ministry in the 21st Century," 27.

<sup>45</sup> As H. Richard Niebuhr correctly notes: "Human effort presses on to employ in concrete, tangible, visible, and audible forms what has been imaginatively discerned. The harmony and proportion, the form, order and rhythm, the meaning and ideas that men intuit and trace out as they confront nature, social events, and the world of dreams, these by infinite labor they must paint on wall or canvas, print on paper as systems of philosophy and science, outline in carved stone or cast in bronze, sing in a ballad, ode or symphony. Visions of order and justice, hopes of glory, must at the cost of much suffering be embodied in written laws, dramatic rites, structures of government, empires, ascetic lives." H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1975), 36, 37.

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societies, etc. which both reflect and reinforce what we believe and value.<sup>46</sup> Here at births, initiations, marriages, funerals, harvest celebrations, and other rituals our worldview assumptions are most evident.<sup>47</sup> These concrete behaviors buttress our fundamental beliefs with emotional reinforcements so that they are not easily destroyed. Whether the arts, music, architecture, customs and lifestyle, fashions, habits, values, beliefs, or ways of looking at things—each in their own way tell a story, both express and help create a world view. They have an uncanny way of slipping past our conscious mind. Circumventing our defenses. Impacting us in subtle ways. Not all this is bad, of course. Much of any culture is neutral and even more is mundane. Yet evil is tragically present in both the societal and personal expressions. Culture’s symbolic and ritual expression of worldview is a very human and earthly endeavor that often distracts us from what is really important.

Revelation’s symbolic (ritual) component is evidenced in its rebuke and exhortations to the Seven Churches. There concrete actions and experiences were wrought with incredible meaning: i.e., calling oneself a Nicolaitan or Jew, eating things sacrificed to idols, immorality, keeping, deeds, or the sixth trumpet where individuals refused to repent of idolatry and corresponding ethical failures. On the larger scale there is the mark of beast, the name of the beast, and the number of his name, there is the buying and selling, the image to the beast, the seal of God, etc. Revelations worship motif itself implies some kind of ritual and or appropriate behaviors (falling down at least, no angelology, etc.). There too, are the people of God who worship the Creator, keep the commandments, keep the testimony of Jesus, don’t soil their garments, etc. Each of these has

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<sup>46</sup> See Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (New York, N.Y.: Little, Brown and Company, 2002); Jon Pahl, *Shopping Malls and Other Sacred Spaces: Putting God in Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2003); Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 29. They are reenactments of our view of reality, a ritualizing of our beliefs and moral commitments. For example, when a marriage is celebrated, we ritualize our beliefs and moral commitments about marriage, family, sexual intimacy, and children. And when we gather at a funeral we reenact and reinforce our beliefs and moral commitments regarding the meaning of life, death, eternity, and God.

tangible cultural/ritual dimensions in terms of ideas, feelings, values and actions as an outworking of Revelation's worldview.

All three of these worldview components play a role in moral/spiritual formation and life. And because they are each present both in the Book of Revelation as a whole and in the Three Angels Messages in particular, each component must be kept in view as we would seek to better understand the link between worldview transformation and mission, as expressed within the book. Worldviews play an important role in ethics and are at the heart of moral reflection and action, there is always in interplay between worldview and ethics, or worldview and ethos.

### **Revelation's Worldview Themes**

What themes or issues do worldviews contain? We've already mentioned some of them above, but for our purposes here we can briefly list them as questions about: God, Origins, Human Nature, Norms/Authority, the Problem of Evil, Hope for the future.

A biblical informed worldview as per the Book of Revelation includes:

God—God exists as a heavenly trio—God, Son, Spirit (1:4-6). He is almighty, holy, righteous and just, gracious, covenant keeping (1:4, 8; 4:8; 15:3, 4; 19:1-6; 21:1-8). He is Creator and Judge, King (4:11; 14:7; 15:3). He is the living God who acts in keeping with His holy character and covenant relationship (1:4, 8). Revelation's God is personal (4:11; 14:7).

Creation and Human Nature—Divine creation of the world is Revelation's overarching worldview for ethics and spiritual life. It touches human reality expressing the value and nature of human beings. God is worshiped as a personal Creator (4:11).<sup>48</sup>

Ethics—Revelation's moral vision encompasses a morality consistent with genuine human existence and life. The "tree of life" motif and the Holy City's "insiders and outsiders" posit moral/spiritual life in keeping with the created order and human nature (22:11-15; 12:17; 14:12; cf. 9:20, 21).

The Genesis Fall and Human Nature—Sin and "fallen" human nature are the underlying spiritual/moral reality within which ethical thought, choice,

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<sup>48</sup> See my discussion, Larry L. Lichtenwaller, "Creation and Apocalypse," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 15, no. 1 (Spring 2004).

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and action are both found and expressed (11:18, 19; 1:5; 3:21; 2:13; 18:4, 5; 22:11; 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11; cf. Gen 6:11-17; 19:1-29)

Warfare Worldview—The Great Controversy is the backdrop for the existence and nature of evil, human choice and moral accountability, as well as divine character and action (chapters 12-14). God has been in an age-long (but not eternal) battle against Satan and this conflict is the major dimension of the ultimate canvas against which everything within Revelation’s narrative is to be painted and understood.

Time and History—Time and history is the sphere in which human beings live life. History is the arena of God’s activity in human affairs. Thus Revelation assures us that: 1, earth matters—where we are (1:4; 2:1-3:22; 2:13; 14:6); 2, time matters—when things happen (1:1, 3, 19; 4:1; 12:1-17); and 3, history matters—the chronicle/story of what happens, the when and the why, i.e., the churches (2:1-3:22); the seals and trumpets (6:1-9:21); the open scroll and two witnesses (10:1-11:19); historic apocalyptic sequence of great controversy with the cross as history’s turning point, final conflict, and harvest of the earth (12:1-14:20).

Space and Proximity—Spatial realities are expressed in an organically linked three-tiered universe (heaven, earth, abyss). Sanctuary imagery highlights the link between heaven and earth—providing perceptions of reality, history, and proximity of the divine, demonic, and human interaction. Time and space (this earth) is the sphere in which we live life and in which God is able to act. Thus Revelation assures us that space matters (where things happen).

Atonement and Helping Grace—The Apocalypse provides the help it promises—grace (1:4-5; 22:21; 19:7, 8). Divine grace and redemption provide an “already and not yet” scope to human life, as well as the ground of moral action and victory (1:5, 6; 5:9-10; 6:9-11; 8:3-4; 12:17; 14:12; cf. 14:1-5; 7:9-15). Substitutionary atonement factors largely in the picture of redemption and release from sin and our fallen world (1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:10, 11; 17:14; 22:14). God has set the redeemed into a new position, i.e., priest and kings. (1:6; 5:10). The problem of sin has been resolved via the blood of the Lamb (1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11).

Final Consummation—Revelation’s vision of a new heavens and a new earth with evil finally vanquished celebrates the victory of God in covenant faithfulness to His creation (20:1-22:5). Resurrection life. Satan bound, destroyed. Sin and the sin-hardened removed. Moral accountability and justice of final judgment. A new heavens and a new earth. Face to face

communion with God. City insiders and outsiders. Eternal peace. No more sea, tears, death, mourning, crying or pain. But yet now opportunity to experience it all still open (20:27; 22:17).

### **Revelation's Overarching Narrative**

While we can identify various themes and issues of Revelation's worldview as per above, it can be pared down to bottom line narrative truths:<sup>49</sup>

Revelation's worldview implies the objective existence of the triune God whose essential character establishes the moral order of the universe and whose character, Word, and commands define and govern all aspects of created existence.<sup>50</sup>

Revelation's worldview implies that human beings as God's image and likeness are anchored and integrated in the heart as the subjective sphere of consciousness which is decisive for shaping a vision of moral and spiritual life and fulfilling the function typically ascribed to the notion of worldview.<sup>51</sup>

Revelation's worldview implies the catastrophic effects of sin on the human heart and mind, resulting in the fabrication of idolatrous belief systems in place of God and the engagement of the human race in cosmic spiritual warfare in which the truth about reality and the meaning life is at stake. This is the great controversy.<sup>52</sup>

Revelation's worldview implies the gracious in-breaking of the kingdom of God in to human history in the person and work of the resurrected, exalted, glorified Jesus Christ, who atones for sin, defeats the principalities and powers, and enables those who believe in Him to obtain a knowledge of the true God and a proper understanding of the world as His creation.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> This has been adapted from Naugle in his *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, xix. Contemporary worldview theory reflects a sociological relativity while a biblical understanding of worldview connects it with a proper view of objectivity and subjectivity as well as the doctrines of sin and spiritual warfare, grace and redemption.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 260-267.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 267-274.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 274-284.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 284-289.

Revelation's worldview affirms that Jesus loves us (1:5; cf. 3:9, 19). That Jesus has adequately cared for the sin problem through his substitutionary death (1:5; 5:9-10; 12:10-11; 7:14).<sup>54</sup> That Jesus has set us in a new position in the world as kings and priests (1:6; 5:10). That Jesus is victor over all and determines the final outcome of human history (5:1-8:1). That Jesus will come again (1:7; 22:7, 12, 20). This in fact, is essentially Revelation's worldview narrative. It communicates that the link between God and His people is close and decided.<sup>55</sup>

Revelation's worldview is one of creation, fall, gracious divine covenant faithfulness, redemption in context of final judgment and justice, and new-creation.<sup>56</sup> It posits both the age-long (but not eternal) great controversy between Christ and Satan and the Lordship of Christ over the cosmos and the whole of human life. Revelation's Lamb is Christus Victor.

#### **IV. Revelations' Transforming Worldview**

The very heart of any discussion of worldview transformation and mission however, goes beyond matters of worldview components, themes, and narrative per se. It touches the possibility and need of worldview transformation itself, i.e., personal conversion, the changing character, thought, values, feelings, and conduct. It raises the questions of how one's functioning worldview is actually challenged, shifted and transformed. Does it come because of fear, coercion, pragmatism, reason, cultural dominance, or deception? Or is there an element that captivates the inner self with hope, grace, and peace?

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<sup>54</sup> In Revelation sin is seen as enslaving bondage (1:5); incalculable debt (5:9); moral/spiritual defilement (7:14); and guilt and condemnation (12:11). In each case the Lamb's blood has incredible power. It release one from the bondage of sin (1:5). It purchases us for God—i.e., pays our debt of sin before God with merits beyond which we could ever imagine (5:9; 8:2-3). It cleanses one deep within from moral/spiritual defilement so as to stand before the throne of a holy God (7:9, 10, 14, 15). It justifies and releases us from all condemnation before God and the accusing voice of Satan and/or conscience (12:10, 11; cf. Rom 8:1, 31-34).

<sup>55</sup> Ellen White notes that "One thing will certainly be understood from the study of Revelation—that the connection between God and His people is close and decided" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 114.)

<sup>56</sup> Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, xx.

Any worldview has a profound existential nature.<sup>57</sup> In order for a worldview to be transformed, whatever challenges it must become more than abstract ideas or compelling truths about reality. It must touch the inner self.

It is a truism that unless one completely rejects their worldview, they will never fully accept another. Only when one either questions or thoroughly rejects one worldview will they be able to be open to another. Syncretism implies a modifying of worldviews or merging of worldviews because they somehow can accommodate one another or the individual has some dissonance within them. Revelation does not allow such syncretism. And so the question regarding Revelation's worldview vision: What causes someone to altogether reject one worldview for another? If Revelation posits worldviews in conflict and the eternal gospel's worldview set in the context of "the testimony of Jesus" as the worldview of choice, how does it critique, challenge, and change an individual's earthly worldview, and thus their life? What is it that would cause one to make a clean break with an earthly worldview in order to accept one forged by "the testimony of Jesus"?

#### **The Lamb's Book of Life**

To answer this question there is need to return to our above discussion of "those who dwell on the earth." The most significant statement in Revelation about "those who dwell on the earth" is not that they follow the beast and worship him, not that they shed the blood of saints and prophets, nor that they cannot see beyond the seen, but rather that their names have not been written in the Lamb's Book of Life (13:8; 17:8; cf. 21:27; 20:15).<sup>58</sup> "All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain" (13:8); "And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come" (17:8). Twice Revelation asserts this characteristic of "those who dwell on the earth." Interestingly, the grammar switches from the plural "those that inhabit the earth" to the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>58</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 502.

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singular relative pronoun οὗ (οὗ οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ) to stress that “not one single person” among those who dwell on the earth is named in the Lamb’s Book of Life.<sup>59</sup>

Revelation’s Book of Life is specifically identified as “the Lamb’s book of life” (13:8; 21:27). Here the sacrificial death and substitutionary work of Christ on the Cross is clearly in view. As such the death of Jesus Christ on Cross has not only made the Book of Life possible but the entry of each name within that book as well. There is little doubt that the substitutionary death of Christ has something to do with the meaning of the Book of life. Why is this? What does it suggest?

While “those who dwell on the earth” do not have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life, God’s Remnant people who hold to the testimony of Jesus do. This is evidenced in how they overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their personal testimony regarding His sacrifice on their behalf (12:11). It is also evidenced in Revelation’s intentional paralleling of the Remnant in 12:17 with the vision of the 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mt. Zion and the Three Angels Messages with its focus on the eternal Gospel, unmixed judgment of the lost in the presence of the Lamb, and dying in the Lord (14:1-13).<sup>60</sup> It is here that the link between worldview transformation and conversion in Revelation is the clearest. In Revelation 14:1-5 John gives another glimpse of those spoken of in 12:17. We can only briefly relate some of the details here, but the overarching narrative is clear.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. In 17:8 the relative pronoun is plural, i.e., ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα yet the verb (been written) and the noun (name) are both singular.

<sup>60</sup> As one follows the narrative and temporal zigzags and recapitulations of Revelation chapters 12-14 a parallel between the Remnant of the woman’s seed in 12:17 and the 144,000 and the Three Angels Messages of 14:1-13. These chapters include apocalyptic prophetic sequence textual markers which enable us to locate various parts of the narrative in history in relation to the Cross of Christ and end times. See Jon Paulien, “The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic--Part Two,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 17, no. 1 (Spring 2006).

<sup>61</sup> Rev 13-14 as a unit: (A) I saw – 13:1-10, here is the patience 13:10; (B) I saw – 13:11-18, here is wisdom 13:18; (3) I saw – 14:1 . . . I saw – 14:6 . . . here is 14:12 . . . this pattern shows that 144,000 is part of the 3AM.



### **Renewed Minds and Transformation**

Revelation 14:1 opens with a vision of the Lamb on Mount Zion and the 144,000 standing with him. That little preposition “with” speaks volumes (cf. 17:14). It speaks of relationship, identity, and moral/spiritual orientation. Then the writer asserts that this 144,000 have the Father’s name and the Lamb’s name in their forehead (14:1). Those acquainted with biblical imagery of both name and forehead understand that Revelation is again speaking of worldview—i.e., how the 144,000 think and feel, what they value and would do, what they are deep down within their inner private world of character and being. Here it is clear that the redeemed remnant have what the apostle Paul would term “the mind of Christ” (cf. 1 Cor 2:16; Phil 2:5-8). They have the mind of God. They are transformed by the renewing of their minds. The 144,000 both see, experience, and express what God values. This suggests radical worldview transformation in keeping with the biblical principle that one is “transformed by the renewing of their mind” (cf. Rom 12:2).

Furthermore, the text provides some incredible information about these 144,000 who are with the Lamb:

- (1) twice it asserts that they are purchased from the earth (14:3, 4);
- (2) they consciously disassociate themselves from religio/cultural elements inconsistent with their identity and calling, i.e., worldview, they understand who they are and who they are to be (14:4);
- (3) they follow the Lamb wherever He goes (14:4), which in Revelation is the way of self-sacrificing death to self in order to have the moral spiritual authority to win souls for the kingdom of heaven;
- (4) their moral life is in harmony with the moral realities of Revelation’s worldview, i.e., there is no lie in their mouth, they are blameless (14:5);
- (5) as first-fruits of a larger harvest they personally experience the realities of the eternal gospel before they can proclaim it with saving influence and power (14:4).

There is little doubt here that worldview transformation and the personal experience of redemption overlap in the context of what it means to be with the Lamb (14:1; 17:14; cf. 1:5, 6; 5:9-10).

### **Washing One’s Robes**

Revelation provides two complementary views of the 144,000. One is found in the context of the question of how one is able to stand when

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Jesus returns, i.e., how is one saved, while the other is in the context of transformed character and life.

In chapter seven, John hears that the 144,000 are sealed in their forehead (7:1-4). But in chapter 14, He sees part, at least, of what that sealing entails—the names of the Father and Lamb, thinking like God and the Lamb, being like God and the Lamb, moral spiritual orientation rooted in God and the Lamb. Back in chapter 7 one learns how John hears 144,000 are sealed, and yet he sees an innumerable multitude who are clothed in white robes washed in the Lamb’s blood: “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14).

The interpretive principle of how what John sees in vision interprets and or complements what he hears in vision suggests that the seal of God on the forehead and the washing of one’s robes white in the blood of the Lamb are two ways of looking at the same moral spiritual reality.<sup>62</sup> For sure, in chapter 7 washing one’s robes white in the blood of the Lamb interprets what it means to be sealed of God in the forehead. Together the two images answer the pregnant question of the sixth seal, “Who is able to stand?” (6:17). The only way one is able to stand when Jesus returns is to have washed one’s robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). This is what it means to be with the Lamb and share his victory (17:14; cf. 13:8; 12:11). In chapter 14 such sealing is symbolized as having the Father’s name and the Lamb’s name in the forehead, which is linked twice to the existential

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<sup>62</sup> The key to John’s vision of the 144,000 (7:1-4) is to recognize the contrast between what he hears (7:4) and what he sees (7:9, 10). In Revelation, John often hears things and then sees what he hears which most often is something radically different from what is heard. The pattern of hearing and seeing is a significant interpretive literary element within the book: “I John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and say, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things” (22:8). John hears a trumpet, but sees the living Christ (1:10-13). He hears that the Lion from the tribe of Judah overcame, but sees a slain Lamb instead (5:5, 6). He hears of a prostitute sitting on many waters, but sees her riding on a scarlet colored beast (17:1-5). He hears of the Lamb’s Bride and sees a holy city (19:6-9; 21:1-5). He hears that a 144,000 are sealed but sees an innumerable multitude (7:4, 9-10). What John sees interprets what he hears. What John both hears and sees are to angles of the same reality. Same entity, different angle, different insight. Together they bring fullness of perspective and understanding. See Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 74; Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 424-425; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary*, 136-140.

reality of Christ's redemptive work of being purchased from the earth (14:3, 4)—via the blood of the Lamb according to Rev 5:9-10, cf. 1:5-6.<sup>63</sup>

This washing of one's robes and making them white in the blood of the Lamb is an incredible existential reality and speaks to the heart of Revelation's worldview transformation (7:14, 15). As garments in Revelation symbolize character and one's very self and inner private world, such imagery of washing one's robes in the blood of the Lamb suggests the immersing of one's very self into the substitutionary merits of Christ's blood. Worldview is primarily the work of the heart in its essential operation, thereby defining the person, and supplying the fundamental assumptions upon which life is based.<sup>64</sup> The biblical worldview "entails God's gracious redemption that delivers the hearts of man and women from idolatry and false views of life engendered by satanic deception and the blindness of sin, and enables them through faith in Jesus Christ to come to a knowledge of God and the truth about his creation and all aspects of reality."<sup>65</sup>

But how does that happen? What nudges one toward that kind of experience?

### **The Lamb That Was Slain**

Revelation's vision of worldview transformation suggests that it is experienced in response to the self-giving and self-sacrifice of the slain Lamb: "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth'" (5:9, 10; cf. 1:5, 6; 17:14). There is a new standing before

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<sup>63</sup> The reader should note the distinction, yet correspondence and overlap, between the biblical reality of gospel sealing which is experienced at conversion when one receives Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord on the one hand (Eph. 1:13; 4:30; cf. John 3:16-21; 2 Timothy 2:19; Rev. 9:4), and on the other hand that of apocalyptic sealing which is an experience of eschatological preservation of gospel truth which is deepened both intellectually and experientially in the context of the end-time crisis (7:1-4; 17:14; 22:11-15; Cf. Ezek 9:3-11).

<sup>64</sup> Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, 291.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

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God. A new position in the Great Controversy. A new identity. A new calling. A global mission. Because of the Cross of the Lamb of God.

Also, those who washed their robes and made them white in the *blood* of the Lamb, are *for that very reason* of being washed, “before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple” (7:15). The nations are reconciled (purchased) to God and become a new reconciled people (a kingdom) with the Lamb’s blood (5:9, 10; 1:5, 6; cf. 17:14; 12:11). The Lamb’s blood is the only way to overcome (12:11). And some will sacrifice their lives because the love the Lamb who was slain for them even more than their own lives (12:11). This implies incredible worldview transformation—i.e., the adjustment of values, priorities, and the vision of one’s self in relation to them. The ultimate value is no longer the preservation of one’s life, it is in honoring and following the Lamb who was slain (5:12; 14:4; 17:14)

The slain, resurrected, exalted Lamb—who He is, what He has done, what He is doing, what He will do, what He can do—is central to the Three Angels’ Message in particular and Rev 12-14 as a whole. In chapter 12 there is the Lamb who overcomes and through whose blood the believer overcomes and no longer places priority on their own life here on earth (12:7-12). In chapter 13 there is the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (13:8). In chapter 14, the Lamb stands in midst of 144,000 and leads His redeemed whom He has purchased (14:1-5). Within the Three Angels’ Messages itself, one finds the Lamb presiding personally over the judgment of the lost who will experienced the unmixed wrath of God in the Lamb’s very presence (14:6-13). The Lamb is the center in chapter 12. The Lamb is center in chapter 13. The Lamb is center in chapter 14.

This eternal gospel thread unfolding the very heart of the testimony of Jesus runs through each of the Three Angels’ Messages. The Three Angels’ Message is the gospel—not just the first. We are told “The Third Angel’s Message must be presented as the only hope for the salvation of a perishing world.”<sup>66</sup> In it Jesus is lifted up as center and as man’s only hope. Jesus promised, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:32). The cross of Christ alone can break through

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<sup>66</sup> Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 196.

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worldviews and bring worldview transformation resulting in one having “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:1-16).

Throughout the book, Revelation assumes a human response to this incredible hope—repent, come, receive, wash, keep. The biblical notion of repentance implies a change of direction. Coming implies one has been elsewhere. Receiving implies a welcoming and acceptance, etc. There are those who refuse to repent (2:21; 9:20; 16:9, 11). And there are those who strongly desire what God offers and willingly wash their robes in the Lamb’s blood and follow God’s new vision of life (22:17, 14; 7:14; 12:17; 14:12). Those who dwell on the earth both resist the witness of Scripture and refuse to atoning merits of the Lamb’s blood (11:10; 13:8; 17:8). In following their worldview, they earth drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb (14:10).

Revelation tells of a moment when those who worship the beast and His image or receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand “will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (14:9, 10). One wonders what this imagery means: Why moral beings are to receive judgment and be tormented in full view of other moral beings—holy angels and the Lamb. Is this right? Just? Is this how a loving God does it? Will these holy angels and the Lamb take some kind of ghoulish delight on that dreadful day? Is this something they are looking forward to seeing? Or for some reason, “must” see?

We cannot help but wonder, is it the fire and brimstone that torments in the final phase of judgment, or will it be the presence of holy angels and the presence of the Lamb that torment? Could it be that it is the sense of love scorned (grace turned down) that torments most? Could it be that it is the soul shocking reality that one has been given every warning, every invitation, every opportunity, every provision to be saved, but they chose otherwise, kept putting it off, or just didn’t get around to knowing about Jesus and all He did for them? To die in the presence of holy angels who did everything possible to help you come to the Lamb (Heb. 2:14). To die in the presence of the Lamb who was slain in your behalf and whose own soul cried out in inconsolable abandonment in your stead (even as yours does now) must be the most dispiriting insight any soul could ever

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experience. Even as the lost envisioned here drink the bitter dregs of final judgment and die the “second death” the Lamb is there to say, “This is not what I wanted, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love and have drawn you with lovingkindness’ but you have been ‘unwilling to come to me so that you may have life’ (Jn 5:40; Jer 31:3).” “You didn’t come to Me.” Even now as they die they do so knowing there was a slain Lamb whose blood could have released them from this very moment. Nothing will be more horrifying to the lost soul than to know they didn’t need to die. That the very source of life is even now before them, but it is too late.

This is the bottom line of Revelation’s worldview—the sense of (or the absence of the sense of) sin and personal inadequacy along with the need of a Savior from sin.

Earlier in Revelation John himself falls down before the glorified living Lamb of God (1:17). John is a microcosm of the Church and every human being who is confronted with self and their need in relation to God who reveals Himself.<sup>67</sup> He is a brother of his hearers who shares with them a threefold treasure: “the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus” (1:9; cf. 14:12). He is on Patmos because of the “word of God and *the testimony of Jesus*” (1:9, italics mine). His experience with Jesus whose eyes are like a flame of fire and face as the sun shining in its fullness is paradigmatic, suggesting that one can share John’s existential experience when beholding the eternal Christ (1:14, 16; 2:18). That when one sees the risen, majestic living Christ, they see within, they see themselves. For the radiance and the purity of Son of Man is overwhelming. Jesus radiates heat and light as the holy One of God who searches the mind and hearts (2:18, 23). That whenever we see God we see something about ourselves. That whenever God reveals Himself, He reveals something of ourselves. John’s response mirrors this internal worldview of heart (cf. Dan 10:9-16; Isa 6:1-5; Ezek 1:26-2:1; 3:22-23; Acts 9:4). John also experiences the incredible personal touch of Christ who sets him on his feet and sends him into the world to declare what he has seen and heard (1:17-19; cf. Ezek 2:1-3; 3:24; Isa 6:6, 7). This vision of self in relation to Christ is linked to revelation’s geography of the heart and transforming mission in the world.

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<sup>67</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001), 55.

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Revelation affirms how Christ's self-giving and self-sacrifice has moral power to break down barriers between God and man and man and man. The death of Christ breaks down the wall of hostility that separates peoples. It enables an entirely new kingdom of people from every people group (5:9-10). In Christ we become one people—a new people (1:5, 6; 5:9-10; cf. Eph. 2:14-18). This is worldview transformation on both the individual and people-group levels.

The imagery of John commissioned to write or the 144,000 in relation to Three Angels' Messages implies the reality that those proclaiming the eternal gospel must themselves taste of its hope, saving power, and be transformed (1:19; 14:1-5). And it is the patience of the saints amidst the worlds turmoil that gives holy power and evidence of such transforming power (14:12, 13; 11:11-13).

Again, what motivates one's yielding to the transforming of worldview? "I said to him, 'My lord, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.'" (7:14, 15). While the imagery of Revelation 7 is proleptic of the redeemed rendering God willing obedience throughout eternity because of their redemption through Christ's blood, the principle has temporal implications for today. It's a worldview, which has to do with owning Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior with all the existential moral and spiritual implications such owning of Christ entail.<sup>68</sup>

These are the life transforming issues and implications that are communicated through the three elements of worldview evident in Revelation: the narrative component, the rational component, and the ritual component.<sup>69</sup>

As Revelation's imagery of nations, people groups, languages, tribes/clans, social status and roles imply the reality of integrating culture, which mirrors, expresses, and fosters the unique characteristics of a given

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<sup>68</sup> See Rodríguez, The "Testimony of Jesus" in the *Writings of Ellen G. White*, 234-235.

<sup>69</sup> Hollinger, *Choosing The Good: Christian Ethics in a Complex World*, 63-64; Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, 291-330. Naugle outlines semiotics, narrative, reason, hermeneutical, and epistemological components or functions of worldviews.

society. As they assume too, worldview(s), which a given culture likewise mirrors, expresses, and fosters within that particular society. As the delineation of roles and societal standing (“small and great,” “poor and rich,” “free and slave,” kings, commanders, noblemen, etc.) suggest the existence of disparate worldviews on both the structural level and existential perception/experience of individuals within society. So also Revelation asserts the power of the eternal gospel to critique, challenge, and change individuals within those very contexts (14:6; 5:9-10; 7:9-10).

The heart of the gospel’s scope and critique ultimately touches the geography of the heart—where worldview is both held and hoped in. The gospel’s appeal is for the heart to accept a vision not just of the world and culture, but of one’s own self—before God, before one’s own face, before others, and in relation to the world. This is the level on which the proclamation of the gospel must go forth.

As Naugle asserts, “Since nothing could be of greater final importance than the way human beings understand God, themselves, the cosmos, and their place in it, it is not surprising that a worldview warfare is at the heart of the conflict between the powers of good and evil.”<sup>70</sup> Nor should it be surprising that the eternal gospel in the context of the Three Angels Messages is integral to that conflict between the powers of good and evil as it asserts a biblically informed worldview even as it engages the people of the world in their respective cultures and integrating worldviews. At bottom Revelation posits a clash of worldviews and resultant culture—that of *those who dwell on the earth* and that of *those who . . . hold the testimony of Jesus*. It is the Lamb whose dominance pervades the book Who wields the greatest power. A moral power rooted in his Cross and strong enough to break through serpentine presuppositions of heart and mind and transform any worldview and the cultural forms and behaviors it engenders within one’s heart (5:6-10; 12:10-11; cf. John 12:24, 32, 33; Rom 2:4)

## **V. Implications for Adventist Missions**

This study has explored how a worldview (a life view) is formed, its encapsulating components, and to what extent its transformation toward a biblically informed vision is a process dependent upon the gracious activity

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<sup>70</sup> Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept*.



of a sovereign God through the preaching of the eternal gospel.<sup>71</sup> At bottom the gospel's scope and critique ultimately touches the geography of the heart—where worldview is both held and hoped in—with the truth of Christ's substitutionary death and the power of His blood to meet the soul's deepest questions and need. It is evident that Revelation casts as worldview and envisions worldview engagement, critique, and transformation as fundamental issues in the age-long (but not eternal) great controversy between Christ and Satan. In doing so, Revelation speaks to genuine conversion as opposed to mere head knowledge (doctrinal or theological) and behavioral change. Worldview transformation is at the heart of its narrative, theology, and ritual.

The implications for Adventist mission are manifold:

1. There is need to understand the importance of worldview in mission—not just the behavioral or doctrinal matters.
2. There is need to take seriously the reality that those we serve live and think and move within a given worldview.
3. There is need to enter another's worldview deep enough to understand its philosophical and existential underpinnings. Why do people cling to their worldview? What makes them tick? Where is the dissonance and pain?
4. There is need to articulate the biblical worldview in a positive non-judgmental way, and yet in a way which allows for its challenge and critique.
5. There is need to let the gospel via the Holy Spirit bring conviction on the deeper level of self and conscience.
6. There is need to articulate how culture reflects worldview and show how the ritual (cultural) components of worldview both expresses and influences worldview. This is key for a younger generation.
7. There is need to tell the biblical story in an understandable way using vocabulary and imagery familiar to individuals within their given culture. Worldview narrative casts moral vision if articulated properly.
8. There is need to understand the existential level of worldview and the realities of conversion within that perspective.
9. There is need for those proclaiming the gospel to envision conversion and to enable those to whom it is preached to envision conversion as well.

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

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10. There is need for those proclaiming the gospel to be able to articulate the whole worldview phenomenon with the desired transformation—story, theology, ritual, and conversion.

11. There is need for a Theocentric/Christocentric<sup>72</sup> reading of Scripture, which focuses on God and the person and work of His Son Jesus on the cross and how the fullness of the atoning death of Christ reaches us and is made available to every human being through history and within the individual life. We are to lift up the Lamb who alone transforms worldview.

12. There is need to understand how conversion is the true sign of worldview paradigm shift.

*“And I saw another angel flying in midheaven,  
having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth,  
and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people.”  
—Revelation 14:6*

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<sup>72</sup> Rather than anthropocentric reading which often focuses on ideas and behavior rather than the realities of the heart in relation to God who alone is holy.