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**UNDERSTANDING WORLDVIEWS AND CONVEYING  
BIBLICAL BELIEFS AND VALUES  
IN TEACHING SACRED LITERATURE OF THE WORLD**

by

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# UNDERSTANDING WORLDVIEWS AND CONVEYING BIBLICAL BELIEFS AND VALUES IN TEACHING SACRED LITERATURE OF THE WORLD

## Introduction

At the center of each of the major religions of the world lies a collection of sacred writings or wisdom. The purpose of these sacred writings described by Crim is to “express and provide identity, authorization, and ideals for the people of the tradition” (as cited in Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). The sacred writings hold a special place in society, as they are used to transmit tradition, values, beliefs and even culture from one generation to the next.

Sacred Literature of the World is one of the courses offered at Asia-Pacific International University for the English majors. As most of the students come from Buddhist, Christian or Confucius backgrounds, studying the sacred literature of the world in class provides a wonderful opportunity to look at the different world religions, their worldviews, and their sacred literature. It also provides an “open door” to dialogue about the values and beliefs that are central to each of the religions, not only to explore the commonalities and differences the various religions share, but also to emphasize the Christian biblical worldview so important in keeping the Christian faith in this postmodern age.

The general purpose and the objective of this essay is to examine the worldviews, beliefs, and values of selected sacred literature of the world and to establish the Christian biblical worldview which provides real answers to the deep questions of life and help Christian educators to effectively communicate the gospel to their students.

The specific objectives are to guide students in their search for truth in the teaching of sacred literatures ; to develop a list of common values and beliefs in different faith groups; to identify important differences that set apart Adventist beliefs and values that are “Bible based, Christ-centered, service-oriented, and kingdom-directed” (Rasi, 2009); to provide specific ways to integrate faith and learning and values through various assignments; and to understand the best methods possible in witnessing to students from other faith groups without demeaning, shaming or criticizing their faith.

Some words need to be defined at the outset to avoid misunderstanding. First, “sacred literature” in this essay refers to writings of a particular religion that is considered holy, that may be of divine origin and that reveals the ultimate truth and reality (Voorst, 2006).

Next, “scripture” may be defined as “writing that is accepted and used in a religious community as especially sacred and authoritative” (Voorst, 2006, p. 5). The scriptures may vary in their literary form as historical narratives (as found in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and to some extent Islam) or poetry, prose, myths, legends, prophecy, sermons, love poems, law codes, moral precepts, metaphysical philosophy (for example, the Hindu *Upanishads*), moral philosophy (the Confucian *Analects*, the wisdom literature of the Jewish and Christian *Bible*), divination, magic and many others (Voorst, 2006).

Lastly, a term used often in the essay is “worldview.” Harris (2004) in his book *The*

*Integration of Faith and Learning: A Worldview Approach* defines worldview as “a comprehensive and unifying way of looking at all of life” (p. 77). Each one carries a worldview about reality and meaning of life which may be developing and changing according to life’s experiences.

### **Five Major Worldviews of the World**

Teaching Sacred Literature of the World introduces students not just to the sacred writings of various religions but also to the worldviews they embody. Though these worldviews may at first seem confusing, they can help students to develop greater understanding of people coming from different religious backgrounds. Of utmost importance is the fact that the study of the Christian Biblical worldview introduces non Christians to the uniqueness of the biblical worldview and strengthens the faith and beliefs of the Christian students.

Whatever backgrounds the students may have, their quest in college or university is not just for knowledge, but a search for life’s most important questions asked by all:

1. Who am I?
2. Why am I here?
3. What is wrong with the world?
4. How can what is wrong be made right? (Baucham, 2009, p. 59).

Asia- Pacific International University caters to the needs of many students coming from South East Asia where Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity are some of the practicing religions. Each of these students has similar questions about life that they want answered even though they may not articulate the exact questions.

Baucham (2009) believes that Christians will fail in fulfilling the gospel commission if they do not provide an opportunity for people to examine their worldviews from a biblical context. Therefore there is a need to understand the various worldviews our students may hold as a starting point to connect with them and understand them.

For a big picture of the worldviews, see Appendix A that presents a comparison chart of the five major worldviews by McCallum. Since it is not possible to look at each of the worldviews in great detail, the worldviews of five of the major religions are portrayed briefly and some suggestions are made to integrate faith, values, and beliefs while teaching the sacred literature of these religions.

### **Buddhism**

*Origin.* Buddhism began in India in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC; it did not grow as a major religion in India, but rather spread to Asia and has more than 376 million adherents (as of 2001) over the world” (“Major Religions,” 2007). Buddhism for some is more of a philosophy and culture rather than religion because it is not based on belief in god or gods, but based on the teachings of Buddha.

*Sacred text.* The sacred text of Buddhism is called *Tripitaka* (threefold basket) as they were written in palm leaves in the pali language and preserved in three baskets. The first is called “Vinaya Pitaka” or “Discipline Basket” containing rules for monks and nuns and guidelines for monastic life. The second is called “Sutta Pitaka” or “Discourse Basket” which contains a collection of Buddha’s sermons. The third is called “Abhidhamma Pitaka” or “Further Teaching” which is an explanation and analysis of Buddha’s teachings.

*Belief in god.* The idea of a personal God is lacking in the Buddhist religion. Buddhists are generally peace loving people who are happy without a God, and feel no need for one. In fact, they strongly believe it is only the *karma* of a person that will lead to *nirvana* and not even a Buddha can pardon sin or interfere in the process of *karma*. So in short there is no place for God in Buddhism even if one exists (Buddhist Tourism, 2007).

*Principal beliefs.* There are various branches of Buddhism such as Theravada, Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism. However, they share two key concepts in their worldview: First, Buddha did not claim to be god but a man. Second, each person has to, by his/her own effort, find freedom from bondage and suffering (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). The main beliefs are as follows:

1. The Four Noble Truths: Life is *dukkha* (suffering) from birth to death whether it be pain, illness, worry, dissatisfaction, etc. The origin of suffering is *tanha* which is selfish desire, greed, envy, and ignorance. There is a way out of suffering. Following the Eightfold Path leads to removal of suffering and achievement of *nirvana* (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007).
2. The Eightfold Path: Right view (attitude or understanding), right aspiration (motive or thought), right speech (no gossip, or lies), right conduct (action), right livelihood (means for living), right effort, right mindfulness (awareness of things), right contemplation (concentration, meditation) (Voorst, 2006).

*Questions about life.* Buddhists asking the important question about life may give the following response:

- Who am I? I am a “collection of *skandhas* (heaps or particles which are constantly changing)’ (Palmer, 2002).
- Why am I here? No clear purpose is indicated but one fact is certain—life is full of suffering. According to Theravada Buddhism, only the monastic way of life leads to *nirvana*, so the lay people can hope to be reborn as a monk or nun to achieve *nirvana*. On the contrary, Mahayana Buddhists believe “Buddhahood is not limited, but is the Real Nature of living beings, with them from the very beginning, and only needing to be revealed” (Palmer, 2002, p. 107).
- What is wrong with the world? The world is full of suffering caused by selfish desire and an improper understanding of the nature of “self”. Buddhists believe there is no permanent unchanging self (*anatta*) but only a combination of ever-changing physical and mental energies grouped in five aggregates (*skandhas*): form or matter which makes the physical body, feelings, perception, mind contents (acts of will leading to good or bad activities), and finally consciousness as a way of responding to our five senses (Burnett, 2002).

- How can what is wrong be made right? In Buddhism no one can help another person to attain *nirvana*. It is only by following the Eightfold Path can one achieve *nirvana*. However, some Mahayana Buddhists pray to certain Bodhisattvas (persons who have reached enlightenment but choose to stay on earth to help others) for help (Matthews, 1991).

*Integration of faith.* When teaching the Four Noble Truths, the teacher can contrast the Christian concept of sin and suffering introduced in the earth through the fall of Adam and Eve and gift of salvation offered through Jesus with Buddhist concept of suffering and *nirvana*. When reading about the “Chain of Causation” of Buddhism from the *Dhammacakkapparattana Sutta* 1-8, the teacher could emphasize the theme of the great controversy and the origin of sin and suffering. In addition, the Ten Commandments of love could be compared to the Eightfold Path and the concept of high moral values that both the religious writings share.

## **Confucianism**

*Origin.* Confucianism began with China’s first great philosopher, teacher, and political reformer Confucius or K’ung Fu-Tzu in 551 BC. People following the Chinese traditional religion constitute more than 394 million worldwide (“Major Religions,” 2007). Like Buddhism, it is more a “way of life, a code of behaviour, rather than a religion” (Wilkinson & Charing, 2004).

*Sacred Text.* The Confucianism canon includes the *Five Classics* and the *Four Books*. *The Analects*, which is one of the *Four Books*, is the most famous collection of Confucius’ discussions and sayings.

*Belief in gods.* Confucius considered himself as a teacher and imparter of knowledge. Confucianism differs from other religions in the sense that it does not emphasize the worship of gods or goddesses in its doctrines or observances (Palmer, 2002). Confucians practice the teachings of Confucius with a belief in any god or none. In fact, there is a saying that no matter what specific religion the Chinese may be, whether Buddhist, Taoist, Muslim, or Christian, they are also Confucian (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). They do worship different gods, spirits and their ancestors.

*Principal beliefs and values.* Some of the values that Confucius stressed were the virtues of the superior man such as benevolence or virtue (consideration and humaneness for fellow humans), filiality (reverence for parents and worship of ancestors), propriety (good manners or ritual correctness), the love of learning, and basis of good government (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007).

*Questions about life.* In Confucianism, asking the important question would illicit the following response:

- Who am I? I am a good person. Mencius, the next significant person after Confucius, believed in the innate goodness of a person (Voorst, 2006).
- Why am I here? My purpose is to be a superior person. Morality, propriety, filiality, and benevolence are encouraged in a person to be a superior man.

- What is wrong with the world? The world is losing its moral standards (Palmer, 2002).
- How can what is wrong be made right? One can achieve high moral and social standards by practicing virtues such as filiality, humaneness, faithfulness and propriety (Voorst, 2006). No global solutions are present from any divine being.

*Integration of faith.* There are a few similarities found in Confucius' writings and the writings from the Bible. When teaching from *Analects* 4.1-6 about "Benevolence," the teacher could compare it to the Christian idea of charity or love in 1 Corinthians 13 and also emphasize the greatest commandment of love: "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'" (Mark 12:28-30 NIV).

An important point of difference between Confucius' writings and the Bible is the idea of "The Goodness of Human Nature" found in Mencius 6.1.1-4, 6. Students who have the opinion of the goodness of man can often fail to grasp the need of a Savior. Therefore, the concept of sinful human nature and the need of the Savior can be stressed as the Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

## Hinduism

*Origin.* Hinduism originated in vedic Indian civilization in the second and first millennium BC and is considered the world's oldest known religion with more than a billion followers (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009; Major Religions, 2007). Narayanan (as cited in Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007) points out that Hinduism is an ancient and complex religion with no single founder or teacher, prophet, and no one particular sacred book accepted by all as of the most importance. Similar to Buddhism and Confucianism, "Hinduism is more a culture than a creed," revealed Radhakrishnan, former president of India (Wilkinson & Charing, 2004).

*Sacred Text.* The main sacred texts of Hinduism include the *Shrutis* (that which is heard because they were believed to have always existed and heard directly by scholars from God) and the *Smritis* (that which is remembered) written by scholars and poets (Wilkinson & Charing, 2004). The *Shrutis* contain the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* which describe the eternal principles of Hinduism. The *Smritis* are the practical applications of the eternal principles in the *Shrutis*. One of the famous *Smritis* is the one written by Manu, a great *rishi* (master) on the four stages of life and division of labour through class system (Palmer, 2002). The *Smritis* also contain information on law, ritual, mythology and the two well loved epic poems *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

*Belief in gods.* Hinduism has hundreds of gods, but is still one religion. Some explain that there is an absolute reality called Brahma who takes on many manifestations. One way Brahma reveals himself is through the *Trimurti*, trio of three gods: Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer and re-creator (Wilkinson & Charing, 2004). Here the co-existence of both good and evil is seen in one entity. There is also a faint similarity in this idea to the Christian Trinity though vastly different in their personality and function.

*Principal beliefs.* Some important concepts from the *Upanishads* are the beliefs in Brahma, *atman*, *maya*, *karma*, *samsara*, and *moksha*.

1. The Brahma is considered the cosmic power or Supreme Spirit and is “the divine reality at the heart of things” (Molloy, 2001, p.68). However, it is controlled by the priests during their chants and sacrifices. Brahma is described as the Truth. “An invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. Thou art That.” Thus is Brahma described in the *Chandogya Upanishad* translated by Juan Mascaro (as cited in Molloy, 2001, p. 69).
2. *Atman* (self or soul) is possessed by each individual. However, the *Upanishads* explain all humans as sharing the same *atman* which is “divine, holy, and timeless” (Molloy, 2001, p. 69). In fact, the two terms Brahman and *atman* can be used interchangeably as the former refers to divine reality in nature and the latter refers to the sacred in oneself. The concept of god within each person is prevalent.
3. *Maya* (illusion) is both “magic” and “matter” and reality is like unexplainable magic. The world and time is not real solid but are like thoughts and dreams which shift and change (Molloy, 2001). Death in the *Upanishads* is not seen as something terrible, but individuals have the divine spirit in them that does not die when the person dies. Therefore, the idea of reincarnation comes which suggests every living being has its own life force which when it loses one form is reborn into another (Molloy, 2001).
4. *Karma* is the moral law of cause and effect and people are careful how they live because the choices they make can determine rebirth into a lower form of existence such as a dog or pig or a higher form of existence such as a super human being or demigod (Molloy, 2001).
5. *Samsara* portrays the cycle of constant rebirth and therefore is aptly referred to as the wheel of life which the Hindus may at one time want to get off and find escape or freedom (Molloy, 2001).
6. *Moksha*, defined as “freedom” or “liberation,” is the ultimate goal of the Hindus. Specific ways of achieving it are not clearly outlined in the *Upanishads* but leaving home, showing kindness to all people and animals, showing an unselfish spirit can gradually lead one from the self to the sacred reality.

*Question about life.*

- Who am I? The Hindu believes that a small part of the divine exists in each individual and therefore the individual is divine as the traditional greeting “*Namaste*” suggests: “I bow to the divine in you” (Wilkinson & Charing, 2004). Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, reported in a paper read at The World’s Parliament of Religion in 1893:

So then the Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce, him the fire cannot burn, him the water cannot melt (or make wet)- him the air cannot dry. The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is located in the body and that death means the change of this centre from body to body. Nor is the soul bound by the conditions of matter. In its very essence it is free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect. But

somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter, and thinks of itself as matter (Vivekananda, 1893).

- Why am I here? The main reason for the Hindu's existence is to help the *atman* (soul) return to Brahma—the ultimate reality or “God.” The Hindus have four aims in life: religious duty (*dharma*), wealth, pleasure, and *moksha*—total freedom from pain and suffering and from the cycle of birth and death (Burnett, 2002).
- What is wrong with the world? The present situation in life for a Hindu whether it be happiness or sadness, richness or poverty, is the result of past action. Therefore the Hindu lives to build up good *karma* (Burnett, 2002).
- How can what is wrong be made right? By striving for *moksha* or release from the cycle of life, death and rebirth and doing their *dharma*—law, duty, justice, and virtuousness a Hindu can aim for freedom (Wilkinson & Charing, 2004).

*Integration of faith.* Hinduism along with Buddhism offers a pantheistic worldview. Pantheism is defined by Owen as, "God is everything and everything is God ... the world is either identical with God or in some way a self-expression of his nature" (as cited in Levine, 2007). The pantheistic idea of an impersonal and unknowable God (McCallum, 2009), can be contrasted to the Christian God who is personal and revealed in the Bible, in the beauty of nature, and in the life of Christ.

An important aspect of Hinduism that can be highlighted, when reading “The Practice of Yoga” from *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* 2.8-15, is the fact that contrary to popular opinion, yoga is not just a kind of exercise. Yoga goes into a deeper level of meditation allowing the mind to be controlled by various spirits. As Max Muller reveals, “Yoga is a spiritual and mental discipline to promote knowledge that the individual-soul and the world-soul are one. It does so by harnessing the power of the body to this end, but is not (as often thought and practiced in the West) primarily a method of exercise with some meditation thrown in” (as cited in Voorst2006, p. 51). This important fact can be a word of caution to the students who may see it as a harmless activity.

Furthermore, while reading on the topic of “Sin and Forgiveness” from the Rig-Veda 7.86, the gift of forgiveness and salvation that Jesus offers could be shared. The concept and role of Christian trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost could be emphasized to teach about the personal God who would send His Son to die so that those who believe in Him can receive the gift of salvation.

## **Islam**

*Origin.* Prophet Muhammad (570 – 632 C.E.) received the first revelation at the age of 40 in a cave in the hills surrounding Mecca. According to Muslims, the message of Islam did not begin with the revelation to Muhammad, but at the creation of man (Cole, 2004). Islam is one of the fastest growing religions in the world and it is also the second largest religion in the world with over 1.3 billion adherents (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). Gaining wide popularity



in Europe and America, “it will soon be the second most practiced religion” (Johnsson, 2007, p. 9).

*Sacred Text.* *Quran* (recitation or reading in Arabic) is the ultimate authority in Islam with the *hadith* (narrative tradition about Muhammad) following close as the second authority. Muslims, however, believe that their God, Allah, spoke to many prophets in the past, but Muhammad was the last and final prophet and he received the *Quran* from God and God is its only author (Voorst, 2006). Muhammad then recited or spoke the *Quran* to his followers. The *Quran* is best communicated by oral recitation (Molloy, 2001).

*Belief in God.* Islam is a monotheistic religion along with Judaism and Christianity. One of the pillars of faith central and of utmost importance in Islam is belief in the one all powerful, transcendent God, the Creator and Controller of the universe (Molloy, 2001).

*Principal beliefs and values.* The five Pillars of Faith are as follows: belief in one God; belief in God’s prophets like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and final prophet Muhammad; belief in angels—Gabriel who spoke to Muhammad and also Iblis (Satan) who tempts people; belief in final judgment and also day of resurrection (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). The Muslims also have Five Pillars of Practice: repetition of the creed “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah”; prayer five times a day; giving alms; fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and pilgrimage (*Hajj*) to Mecca as a sign of their piety and devotion to Allah (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 200, p. 93).

*Questions about life.* Muslims may answer the four important questions of life accordingly:

- Who am I? Man is God’s creation as noted in *Quran* 96:2-5 “Recite in the name of your Lord who created—created man from clots of blood. Recite! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, who by the pen taught man what he did not know” (Voorst, 2006, p. 288,). Like the Bible, the *Quran* too has the story of Adam and Eve who were created by God a little higher in the order of nature.
- Why am I here? One of the purposes of man is to praise God and give glory to Him. Another purpose is to place one’s life in total submission and surrender to God as the word Islam is defined as “surrender” or “submission” (Molloy, 2001, p. 411). Therefore a Muslim is one who submits to God (Allah). Finally, Muslims are also encouraged to enjoy not only the beauty of nature but also the fact that “the world is made for humans to enjoy” (Mathews, 1991, p. 390). Therefore, having food, drink (no alcohol), wealth, comfortable clothing, shelter, marriage is good as long as the poor are also given help. In fact, “Islam never encouraged its adherents to turn their backs on the world to pursue some supposed spiritual reality” (p. 390). This seems to be in sharp contrast to the Bible that says in 1 John 2:16 “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.”
- What is wrong with the world? Similar to Christianity, Islam, too, makes reference to Satan who caused the fall of Adam and Eve and tempts human beings to do evil. However, the cause of Satan’s fall is very different compared to that in the Bible. *Quran* 2:34 says, “And when We said to the angels: ‘Prostrate yourselves before Adam,’ they

all prostrated themselves except Satan, who in his pride refused and became an unbeliever” (Voorst, 2006, p. 299). The original Sin of Satan here is not the sin of pride, but refusal to worship Adam. The sin of Adam is not seen as having an extended consequence on other human beings (Mathews, 1991). Sin is also seen as a refusal to “submit to the will of God revealed through his prophets, especially his final one, Muhammad” (p. 392). Tied with this concept is the idea of predestination that the events in the believer’s life are predestined by the will of Allah. Therefore the common saying “*in sha’a Allah*” (if God wills).

- How can what is wrong be made right? Human beings can gain salvation when they acknowledge “that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is his prophet” (Mathews, 1991, p. 392). Like Christians, Muslims too believe in the Day of Judgment and the Day of Resurrection when all people will stand before God to be judged according to their beliefs and good deeds (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). The Christian belief in salvation by faith in Jesus stands in sharp contrast.

*Integration of faith.* There are many similarities found in the *Quran* and the Bible such as the story of creation, God’s absolute oneness, “There is no god but Him, the Creator of all things” (*Quran* 6:100-103), names of God (Compassionate, Merciful, etc.), references to Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael and Jacob, the concept of resurrection, and judgment and others. These similarities can also be noted in the Bible.

However, there are subtle differences that can be pointed out. Some of them are, for example, the idea that “God is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten” (*Quran* 112). This idea denies the divinity of Christ as the Son of God. Man is described as being created from “dry clay” (*Quran* 15) and in another instance from “clots of blood” (*Quran* 96:5). This idea is opposed to the biblical idea of man being created by dust (Genesis 3:19). Finally, an important difference is the denial of Jesus’ death by crucifixion and the thought that His death had “no saving effect” (Voorst, 2006, p. 301). Last of all, when teaching from the *Quran* 9:1-7, 3:38-50;2:111-121, 132-137 on “Unbelievers, Jews, and Christians” the teacher could focus on Jesus as the Son of God and not just a prophet.

## **Christianity**

*Origin.* Christianity began with the followers of Jesus proclaiming His resurrection and His supremacy as the Son of God after His death in AD 30. Though it began with just a handful of Christ’s followers, it spread over the Roman Empire like a tidal wave (Jackson, 1999). Today there are over two billion Christians coming from various denominations and making up the largest religious tradition in the world (Voorst, 2006).

*Sacred Text.* The sacred text of the Christians includes the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. In fact, though the various denominations differ in belief, practice, or organization, the New Testament remains the common factor. The Bible has had such significance in world events that it is said to have shaped the Western culture (Voorst, 2006). Vishal Mangalwadi, an international lecturer, social reformer and author in his writings talks about the significance of the Bible in transforming not only individual lives but also society at large. He suggests, “But the only civilization that has looked largely to the Bible for its

inspiration, the West, has been able to conquer human cruelty, hopelessness and degradation with such success that it has become the envy of the rest of the world” (Mangalwadi, n.d.).

*Belief in God.* Like Jews and Muslims, Christians believe in one God, who is Omnipotent (all powerful), Omnipresent (present every where), and Omniscient (knowing all things). However, unlike them, Christians believe in one God that consists of a unity of three co-eternal Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This vital belief is based on the Bible. Thus, the attributes of the God of Muslims differ from those of the God of the Hebrews or Christians (Dolphin, 2008). In the Bible God is described by different names, though He is the same person, to show His power and wonderful attributes. Some examples are El (God mighty, strong, and prominent); Elohim (God as Creator, Preserver, Transcendent, Mighty and Strong); El Shaddai (God Almighty or God all Sufficient); Jehovah (the Self-Existent One), etc. But perhaps one of the best characteristics of God described by John is found in 1 John 4:8 “God is love” which sums up all of His wonderful attributes.

*Principal beliefs and values.* Though it is difficult to briefly summarize the basic principles of the Christian beliefs and values in so little space and time, I will share only a few basic points.

First, God is the only self-existent God. There is no other. “Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: ‘I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; Besides Me *there is no God*” (Isaiah 44:6 NKJV).

Second, God reveals Himself to us through His Son—Jesus, through His word—the Bible, and through His creation—nature. Jesus came to reveal the truth about the Father. He said, “He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him [Father]” (John 8: 26 ). Jesus is also God and our Creator and our Redeemer as Colossians 1: 14,16 states: “in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins...For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.” Next, God reveals Himself and His plans through His word as Psalm 119:105 reveals: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” Finally, God reveals Himself through nature as the Psalmist indicated, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1).

Third, God gives us eternal life in Jesus. “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (I John 5: 11-13).

Fourth, truth is found only in Jesus. Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:6-7 NIV).

Fifth, reality is found only in Christ. Colossians 2:17 states, “the reality, however, is found in Christ.” Jesus is the true God who is the source of all wisdom and knowledge.

Sixth, true knowledge is found in God and Christ as Paul declares , “My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3 TNIV).

*Questions about life.* In Christianity, asking the important question would illicit the following response:

- Who am I? I am a priceless, valuable child of God and the “crowning glory of the creation of God” (Baucham, 2009). Psalm 8:5 clearly defines my existence: “For You [God] have made him [man] a little lower than angels, and you have crowned him with glory and honor.” I am not an accident or result of random evolution as modern culture or philosophy states.
- Why am I here? I am here for a reason and a purpose to bring glory and honor to God, (Baucham, 2009). “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” states Colossians 1:16 (NIV).
- What is wrong with the world? The world is taken captive by Satan and his evil angels tempting us to rebel against God, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).
- How can what is wrong be made right? Only God can make things right through the love He showed us in Christ “But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” Colossians 1:22 (NIV).

*Integration of faith.* The theistic concept of God as being personal and distinct from His creation is an important idea to be understood by the students. Students can be shown through the creation story how they are created in the image of God, and how sin has marred the image of God. Through the story of Jesus, they can be led to believe and accept that His supreme sacrifice in the cross was to draw people of all nations and language and tribe to God to receive forgiveness and the gift of salvation.

### **Ways to Integrate Faith, Values, and Learning**

Integrating faith and learning and values in the Sacred Literature class could be done in a variety of ways.

First, the teacher could ask the students to take a short five- minute devotion at the beginning of the class on one of the values that are common in the major world religions such as the following:

1. Love of learning or importance of wisdom (Confucianism and Christianity)
2. Benevolence or charity (Confucianism and Christianity)
3. Honesty (Christianity and Buddhism)
4. Purity of body and mind (Buddhism and Christianity)
5. Temperance—avoiding drugs, alcohol, nicotine (Christianity and Buddhism)
6. Propriety or orderliness (Christianity and Confucianism)
7. Prayer (Islam, Christianity)

## 8. Giving alms/helping the poor (all religions)

Second, the teacher could invite a guest lecturer from the Faculty of Religious Studies to talk about the sacred literature of Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam from a Christian perspective and provide time for question and answer for students on important issues. This is very helpful as it gives a Christian perspective to the study of other religious texts.

Another way could be by showing DVDs on Christian themes. Students usually like watching movies, and this is an effective way to share stories from the Bible, history or individuals that can strengthen their faith in God. Some examples are the DVD from Bible Series-- *Jeremiah* 1998 directed by Harry Winer, *Amazing Grace* (2007) directed by Michael Apted, and *The Resurrection* by Max Lucado. Asking the students to write a reflection paper after watching the DVD and having a class discussion after that to voice questions and provide answers for any doubts can be a rich learning experience.

A fourth way could be the use of major assignments that can be a tool to integrate faith and learning. Some of the assignment could be as follows:

1. Writing five directed journals on the following:
  - a. Analysis and evaluation of a movie with a predominately religious theme
  - b. Comparing 20 verses from two different scriptures (Bible and Koran on creation or the story of Abraham)
  - c. Analysis of the student's personal ideas about religion, religious background and religious beliefs and values
  - d. Reflections on selected proverbs from the book of Proverbs.
  - e. Analysis and evaluation of two religious services (a church , synagogue, temple, mosque)
2. Memorizing 20 verses from the Bible or any other sacred literature. Many of the eastern religions have a strong tradition of chanting or reading from scriptures and this though it may sound old fashioned can be one of the best ways to hide God's words in the hearts of the students.
3. Writing a research paper on one of the topics such as
  - a. A Christian writer (musician, speaker) and his/her influence on the society
  - b. Analysis of a biblical story in terms of setting, theme, symbolism plot or characterization
    - i. Ruth and Boaz and the theme of the Kinsman Redeemer
    - ii. Parables of Jesus
    - iii. Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel Chapter 2

In addition to using assignments, the teacher could also emphasize some of the basic fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church while teaching the Sacred Literature of the World. Some of the biblical beliefs that could be stressed could be about the Holy Scriptures, nature of man, trinity, the great controversy, creation, resurrection of Christ, etc.

Finally, as part of the integration of faith and learning in the curriculum, the teacher can evaluate the outcome in two ways. First, the teacher can evaluate if there is a change in the students' perception and worldview by some specific examination questions. The examination question could be stated thus: What is your present worldview and why do you believe in it?

Has your worldview changed as a result of taking this course and if so how and why did it occur? The second way of evaluating the outcome would be to ask the students to write reflection papers on the values they have consciously developed in class and if they have carried it over to their life experience out of the classroom situation. The students would reflect on the values emphasized during class devotions and class discussions and then perhaps be asked to write two self-assessment papers giving specific examples of how the values were developed in a particular situation.

The best methods possible to witness to students of different faith are to respect their beliefs and values, affirm positive and common values other faiths have with Christianity, give the students freedom of choice in making a decision to accept or reject biblical worldview, and most important, build strong bonds of friendships that reflect God's all encompassing, unconditional, and practical love.

### **Conclusion**

Understanding the various beliefs and faith our students come with provide us deeper appreciation and understanding for our students. Finding common ground in a group of inter-faith students can provide a starting point for witnessing. Exposing our students to the beliefs and values of different faiths can give them opportunity to analyze their own beliefs and values and make a conscious decision to accept people from different faith and know how to live in peace and harmony with them. As a result of a deeper study of the Christian beliefs and values, the students can get a clearer picture of a God who loves them and provides salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus. In our classrooms, we can provide students an opportunity to make a decision to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Jesus marked His ministry with a strong emphasis on relationships, and He portrayed God as a powerful yet personal God willing to relate to us, and with deep courtesy knocking at the door of our hearts seeking for an intimate relationship. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door. I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." Revelation 3:20. In our attempt to integrate faith, values, and learning in our teaching, we must not overlook the relationship aspect. Students remember not so much what we taught them in the class as how we related to them. As Jan Paulsen (2007), President of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists stated "What then are the values that should mark our relationship with those who do not share our faith? Respect, sensitivity, and a desire to move beyond caricatures toward mutual understanding—let this be our goal as we continue to engage in the mission that has been entrusted to us."

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## Appendix

### Five Worldviews

	REALITY	MAN	TRUTH	VALUES
<b>Naturalism</b> Atheism; Agnosticism; Existentialism	The material universe is all that exists. Reality is "one-dimensional." There is no such thing as a soul or a spirit. Everything can be explained on the basis of natural law.	Man is the chance product of a biological process of evolution. Man is entirely material. The human species will one day pass out of existence.	Truth is usually understood as scientific proof. Only that which can be observed with the five senses is accepted as real or true.	No objective values or morals exist. Morals are individual preferences or socially useful behaviors. Even social morals are subject to evolution and change.
<b>Pantheism</b> Hinduism; Taoism; Buddhism; much New Age Consciousness	Only the spiritual dimension exists. All else is illusion, <i>maya</i> . Spiritual reality, <i>Brahman</i> , is eternal, impersonal, and unknowable. It is possible to say that everything is a part of God, or that God is in everything and everyone.	Man is one with ultimate reality. Thus man is spiritual, eternal, and impersonal. Man's belief that he is an individual is illusion.	Truth is an experience of unity with "the oneness" of the universe. Truth is beyond all rational description. Rational thought as it is understood in the West cannot show us reality.	Because ultimate reality is impersonal, many pantheistic thinkers believe that there is no real distinction between good and evil. Instead, "unenlightened" behavior is that which fails to understand essential unity.
<b>Theism</b> Christianity; Islam; Judaism	An infinite, personal God exists. He created a finite, material world. Reality is both material and spiritual. The universe as we know it had a beginning and will have an end.	Humankind is the unique creation of God. People were created "in the image of God," which means that we are personal, eternal, spiritual, and biological.	Truth about God is known through revelation. Truth about the material world is gained via revelation and the five senses in conjunction with rational thought.	Moral values are the objective expression of an absolute moral being.
<b>Spiritism and Polytheism</b> Thousands of Religions	The world is populated by spirit beings who govern what goes on. Gods and demons are the real reason behind "natural" events. Material things are real, but they have spirits associated with them and, therefore, can be interpreted spiritually.	Man is a creation of the gods like the rest of the creatures on earth. Often, tribes or races have a special relationship with some gods who protect them and can punish them.	Truth about the natural world is discovered through the shaman figure who has visions telling him what the gods and demons are doing and how they feel.	Moral values take the form of taboos, which are things that irritate or anger various spirits. These taboos are different from the idea of "good and evil" because it is just as important to avoid irritating evil spirits as it is good ones.
<b>Postmodernism</b>	Reality must be interpreted through our language and cultural	Humans are nodes in a cultural reality – they are a product	Truths are mental constructs meaningful to	Values are part of our social paradigms as well. Tolerance, freedom of