A CULTURAL STUDY OF THE CITY OF ANTSIRANANA

AND THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH TO

TRADITIONAL RELIGION

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Lew Robert Johnson

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APPROVAL SHEET

A CULTURAL STUDY OF THE CITY OF ANTSIRANANA

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PREFACE

My interest in African cultures and African Traditional Religions (ATR) first began during a one-year mission assignment in Zambia. I was drawn to the people and fascinated by the culture. The more I learned from missionaries and African believers, the more I wanted to understand the culture and religion of the people. The foundation for this thesis was laid in that first year in Zambia and I have continued to build on that foundation as I worked among the Batooro in Uganda, North Africans in France, and the Malagasy in Northern Madagascar.

I am indebted to many missionary colleagues from across the world. They have sharpened my focus, taught me, and encouraged me to continue to be a learner. I am thankful and indebted to the many African friends who have patiently answered my questions and explained their cultures and beliefs. I want to thank Africa Inland Mission for giving me the opportunity to write this thesis. I want to thank the International Mission Board for the training opportunities and stretching me to learn worldview and culture.

My time at The Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary had an immense impact on my life for which I am forever grateful. I would not have made it this far without my professors at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, my doctoral supervisor, Dr. John Klaassen; and Dr. Jeff Walters. Thank you for pushing me beyond my comfort zone and encouraging me throughout this journey. My D.Miss cohort was influential in shaping my thinking, challenging me both in missions and in living the Christian life.

I want to thank our children, Elisabeth, Abigail, and Luke. It has not been easy moving from place to place, country to country, and experiencing the life of third-culture kids. I am excited to see how God will use each of you in the future as he shapes you into his own image (Mark 12:28-31).

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Brandi. We knew life would be an adventure, but we could not imagine all that Africa and so many places would hold for us. Thank you for encouraging me, praying for me, loving me, and enduring this D.Miss with me. You have stood beside me when you did not have to, and you have endured much for the sake of the cross. We have been stretched and bent, but not broken. I could not have done it without you. Nor, would I want to. I love you.

Lew Johnson

Starkville, Mississippi

May 2019

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The music was loud and the laughter boisterous as the noise from the small, tin house filled the air. Inside people, mostly women, danced to the music while others sat outside drinking beer and talking. One young man wore dark sunglasses and French colonial era clothing. The *tromba*[1] ceremony was in full swing by mid-afternoon as the people waited and called out for the spirits of the ancestors to arrive and possess someone. That night by nine, the cries had grown more frantic and the music louder. There was less laughter and talk outside and more pleas for the spirits to come. Lying in bed, not more than one-hundred feet away, sleep was impossible as the noise grew louder.

This was the scenario that greeted my family the first night of our weeklong homestay[2] with a Malagasy family in Antsiranana,[3] one month after our arrival in Madagascar. Our host family apologized profusely for the scene next door. When I inquired about the ceremony and the neighbors, our host responded that the family was calling on the spirits and ancestors. To my surprise, our hosts also informed us the family were members of a local protestant church! At that moment, questions swirled in my mind

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[1] *Tromba* can mean either the ceremony of calling on ancestral spirits, or it can mean the ancestral spirit itself. Robert H. Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare, True Accounts from the Lutheran Church of Madagascar* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2013), loc. 225, Kindle. Bennett defines *tromba* as "an ancestral spirit or a spirit possession ceremony."

[2] A homestay is a weeklong immersion time for African Inland Mission missionaries arriving in a new location. It is a time to bond with the local culture, observing and experiencing life as the locals. It is a time for observation and reflection on the new host culture where one will be serving.

[3] Antsiranana is the Malagasy name for the city. However, when the Portuguese controlled the port they called it Diego Suarez, which is the name the French also used for the city. Today, many people refer the city as Diego.

about what I had seen and heard. Were such practices normal? Were they acceptable in the church here?

Another event shortly after our arrival in Madagascar highlights the influence of African Traditional Religion (ATR) in Antsiranana. My wife shared the gospel with a taxi driver on her way home from town and invited him to our home to meet me. After meeting Dan, I invited him to come again when he had time to talk. He returned a few days later and we listened to his story and shared more about Jesus. Dan had grown up Catholic but converted to Islam in his twenties. His wife was not a Muslim, but was a member of a Protestant church near their home. Dan invited me to his home for a meal and to share the gospel with his family. Surprised, yet very eager to share the gospel with his family, I accepted the invitation.

When the day arrived, Dan came to my house and we traveled together to meet his family. As we neared his home, he suddenly stopped in his tracks. Dan looked around nervously and then whispered for me to be careful where I step because his neighbor had been using magic against his family. He explained that the neighbor would place items filled with magic on the ground near their home to harm his family and their work. He asked me to pray before we would go any farther so that we would be protected. I realized his reason for inviting me was that his family was seeking power to counteract the magic of his neighbor.

These stories highlight the paradox that exists in Antsiranana. ATR belief and practice exist side by side with other religious beliefs within the lives of many people. It is not uncommon to find families in which the husband and wife belong to different religions, with one praying at a mosque and the other praying at a church. There is no sense of the beliefs being opposed to one another but they are believed to be different paths to the same God. Many families and individuals follow a mix of ATR and Christianity or Islam. The resulting folk religion, whether Islam or Christianity, is accepted as normal.

There are thousands of people groups in the world. Each group possesses a unique culture. Every group presents challenges to those desiring to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with them. Of the thousands of people groups over 7,000 groups remain classified as unreached.[4] Today, there remain billions of people living under the weight of their separation from God.

This thesis focuses on the city of Antsiranana, located in Northern Madagascar. Antsiranana is the capital of the Diana Region and is the seventh largest city in Madagascar with an estimated population of 110,000.[5] The city is made up of people from all over Madagascar and from other countries. There are large populations of Antakarana, Sakalava, Merina, Indian, Comorian, and French. The mix of cultures has produced a unique Malagasy city with a blended culture.

Madagascar is the fourth largest island in the world with a population of 25 million people.[6] The Malagasy can be categorized into eighteen distinct people groups. There are two official languages: Malagasy and French.[7] Malagasy is a Malayo-Polynesian language with its closest related language on the island of Borneo. Each

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[4] PeopleGroups.org, accessed February 5, 2018, http://peoplegroups.org/. Unreached People Groups (UPG) are listed as 7,037 out of a total of 11,749 people groups. Joshua Project, accessed February 5, 2018, https://joshuaproject.net/. Joshua Project lists UPGs as 7,035 out of a total of 16,956 people groups. Although the number of UPGs is nearly the same, the total People Group (PG) count is far different, so depending on which set of numbers one uses will determine number of PGs and UPGs. The world population given by each site is also different: Peoplegroups.org lists 7.2 billion while it is listed as over 7.4 billion on Joshua Project. Discussing people group populations and number of groups in detail is beyond the scope of this thesis. The point I am trying to illustrate is that there are many people in the world remaining without a Christian witness and there is still much work to do in fulfilling the Great Commission. For more information on PG and UPG research, see IMB, "Global Status of Evangelical Christianity," May 2017, accessed February 5, 2018, https://www.imb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2017-05_GSEC_Overview.pdf; and Joshua Project, "All Progress Levels," accessed February 5, 2018, https://joshuaproject.net/global/progress.

[5] "Population Density Communes Madagascar," accessed August 25, 2017, http://www.madacamp.com/images/madagascar/Population_Density_Communes_Madagascar.xls. See line 1462 for population information for under "Diego Suarez."

[6] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook," accessed August 21, 2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ma.html.

[7] Ibid. Although French is an official language and is widely used in universities and higher education, Malagasy is more widely spoken by the general population.

Malagasy group speaks a dialect of Malagasy unique to their region. The Malagasy have a shared ancestry and many common beliefs, yet they also have distinct regional histories and cultures that make each region and people group unique. Originally settled by people from present day Indonesia, there have been other waves of settlers from Arab traders, Bantu Africans, and the French.

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to write a cultural study of the Malagasy people of Antsiranana and to examine their traditional religion as they practice it today. The cultural study is a guide for understanding the culture, worldview, and daily life of the Malagasy in Antsiranana. The study assisted in learning to effectively communicate the gospel with the desired outcome being thriving, Christ-centered churches in Antsiranana.

The reason ATR was studied in conjunction with the Malagasy in Antsiranana is because of the interconnectedness of worldview and religion.[8] From my initial experience in Antsiranana, there exists a considerable population of Malagasy who identify with a monotheistic religion, whether Christianity or Islam, yet they still participate in ATR practices and follow rituals to honor ancestors and seek their favor. Research needed to take place into what local Malagasy believe and practice, and what their churches are teaching and how they respond to ATR.

Considering the size of Africa with its diversity in culture, language, and traditions, it is difficult to speak for all people in terms of ATR. Irving Hexham explains, "Writing about 'African religions' is like writing about 'European religions' or 'Indian religions.' There are many different African religious traditions; therefore, it is impossible to speak about 'African religion' without qualification."[9] To study each people group or

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[8] Jack Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa: Engaging Syncretism in the African Church through Philosophical Analysis of Worldviews* (Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2013), 6.

[9] Irving Hexham, *Understanding World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 49.

tribe would most likely produce variations of religious practice among its adherents. However, some characteristics are widely accepted as universal among ATR. These characteristics are a belief in a Supreme God, spirits, and magic or mystical powers.[10] These common characteristics were the focus of a more thorough investigation, recognizing that even among these common characteristics there is diversity in application among different African cultures.

This research asked the question of how the local church is responding to ATR. How the churches see ATR influence both believers and unbelievers, and how the churches address the situation with the ancestors and *tromba*? Do the churches have a strategy to teach and deal with ATR directly, indirectly, or is it ignored altogether? Examining the response of African Instituted Churches (AIC)[11] to ATR and syncretism aided in looking for possibilities to address ATR within the context of Antsiranana. It was hoped that there would be positive examples of AICs addressing ATR and syncretism from which the local churches in Antsiranana would be able to learn.

Finally, this thesis examined a biblical response to ATR. How can the church address traditional religion biblically? If it is true for all members of the church that "the gospel is a reality that reconciles them to God and one another, and touches every area of their lives,"[12] then how can the church in Antsiranana make disciples which reflect this truth?

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[10] Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, rev. ed. (Nairobi: East African Educational, 2005), xi.

[11] AIC can mean "African Instituted Churches," "African Independent Churches," or "African Initiated Churches."

[12] Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 383.

Definitions

Some terms used throughout this paper require definition. Key terms such as *fear*, *power*, *African Traditional Religion* (*ATR*), *animism*, *worldview*, *culture*, *ethnography*, *evangelical*, *African Instituted Churches,* and *Malagasy* are explained in more detail later, yet a brief definition is appropriate here.

Fear. Fear is the response to spirits, the unknown, god, and is something to be avoided. Fear leads to individuals and societies attempting to control the spirits, gods, or nature leading to the use of power.[13]

Power. In response to fear of the spiritual world, humans attempt to use power to manipulate and control the unseen spiritual forces.[14] The desire is to harness power to be successful in life while also avoiding anything bad. David Burnett explains that powers can be either personal or impersonal and that the "concept of the existence of unseen powers that influence human life is one of the basic assumptions in all primal worldviews."[15]

African Traditional Religion (*ATR*). ATR is the response of Africans to the natural and supernatural world around them. Seeking answers to everyday questions of disease, sickness, life, and death leads many Africans to follow. Encompassing all of life, ATR is an African response to things unknowable or unexplainable.

Animism. David Sitton defines animism as "the belief that nonliving objects have souls (life) and that natural phenomena possess supernatural or magical power."[16]

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[13] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 21.

[14] Ibid, 22.

[15] David Burnett, *Unearthly Powers: A Christian's Handbook on Primal and Folk Religions* (Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1992), 24.

[16] David Sitton, "The Basics of Animism Spiritual Warfare in Tribal Contexts," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 15, no. 2 (June 1998): 69.

Worldview. Worldview is defined by Paul Hiebert as "what we think with, not what we think about. It is the mental picture of reality we use to make use sense of the world around us."[17] Worldview is used to process information and events, but rarely is it something which people think about.

Culture. Hiebert defines culture "as the more or less integrated system of belief, feelings and values created and shared by a group of people that enable them to live together."[18]

Ethnography. Ethnography is the process of writing about people. Brian Howell and Jenell Paris define ethnography as "a rich description and analysis of a culture that includes the anthropologist's experience of 'being there.'"[19] Ethnography involves observing and interacting with people and then recording what is observed and learned.

Evangelical. Evangelical refers to people or churches that focus on the good news of Jesus Christ. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) identifies "four primary characteristics of evangelicalism" that help define an evangelical: conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism.[20] They define each these terms in the following manner:

> Conversionism: the belief that lives need to be transformed through a "born-again" experience and a life long process of following Jesus.
> Activism: the expression and demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social reform efforts.
> Biblicism: a high regard for and obedience to the Bible as the ultimate authority.

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[17] Paul G. Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts: Anthropological Explorations for Contemporary Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 158.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Brian M. Howell and Jenell Williams Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 21.

[20] National Association of Evangelicals, "What Is an Evangelical?" accessed October 10, 2017, https://www.nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical/.

Crucicentrism: a stress on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as making possible the redemption of humanity.[21]

This thesis followed these characteristics and uses these definitions when referring to a church or a person as evangelical.

African Instituted Churches (AICs). According to the Organization of African Instituted Churches, "AIC's are homegrown African churches, founded originally during the colonial period, that have developed indigenous forms of worship, theology and social organization, all deeply inspired by a vision that is both Christian and African."[22]

Malagasy. Malagasy is the term used to describe both the language and the people of Madagascar. As a description of the people it includes the distinct groups and kingdoms when referring to the people of Madagascar. When used in reference to language, it encompasses all the dialects, as there is mutual intelligibility between them.

Background

Madagascar first came to my attention during my time as a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS), through a friend who had worked for a short time on the island. He shared about the many unreached people groups living there and my wife and I began praying for the people of Madagascar, hoping to work as church planters on the island one day. While working through the process to serve overseas with the International Mission Board (IMB), the time came for us to choose a ministry location and initially we accepted a position in Madagascar. Unfortunately, it did not materialize for us to minister among the Malagasy and we instead moved to Uganda, taking the Strategy Leader role among the Batooro people. Later, we moved from Uganda to France to work among North African immigrants.

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[21] National Association of Evangelicals, "What Is an Evangelical?"

[22] Organization of African Instituted Churches, "About Us," accessed February 7, 2018, http://www.oaic.org/?page_id=51.

Although it did not appear working among the Malagasy would become a reality, those years in Uganda, France, and a few years in the United States proved to be preparation for going to Madagascar. In 2015, my family and I accepted an invitation from Africa Inland Mission (AIM) and joined a team working among the unreached people groups in Antsiranana. Our team arrived in September 2016, to join our team leader who had already been living in Antsiranana for several years.[23]

During doctoral seminars at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) I read *The Gospel in Human Contexts* by Hiebert and was struck by his call to human exegesis: "It is clear that we must master the skill of human exegesis as well as biblical exegesis to meaningfully communicate the gospel in human contexts."[24] Hiebert continued his challenge to missionaries by writing, "They must also know how to put the gospel into human contexts so that it is understood properly but does not become captive to these contexts."[25] African cultures have complex social and religious structures. To understand what an African culture believes and why they function as they do one must take time to listen to their story. Although to an outsider it may appear chaotic, there is a reason for why they do what they do. Life has been shaped by the history of the people.

Through reading for other seminars at SBTS, it became evident that ATR must be understood for effective communication of the gospel among the Malagasy. Reading books by Paul Hiebert, Richard Gehman, Gaily Van Rheenen, David Sills, and others solidified the belief that knowing with whom I am trying to communicate, what they believe, and how they view the world and everyday events, are vital to communicating the gospel of Jesus. Ethnographic research focused on religious belief and practice will

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[23] Missionaries with AIM and the IMB have worked in Antsiranana in the past. Presently, only AIM has full-time missionaries in the city working alongside of Malagasy believers. The Lutheran church has missionaries come to work with their members, but the focus is on teaching English and not evangelism to unreached people groups.

[24] Hiebert, *The Gospel in Human Contexts*, 12.

[25] Ibid., 13.

aid the churches as well as missionaries in reaching the unreached people living in Antsiranana.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited by the very nature of working with a predominately oral culture. Much of the history of the Malagasy is oral, and it was not possible to speak with everyone and hear his or her story. E. Bolaji Idowu writes, "One of the greatest obstacles in the way of the study of African traditional religion is, of course, the lack of written records by Africans of their ancient past. All that we have from indigenous Africa are the oral traditions."[26] The written record has mostly taken place in the last one hundred years, and often by Westerners.

Delimitations for this study include several areas of consideration. First is the geographic area involved in the study as the research focused on the city of Antsirinana. Second, the churches were limited to evangelical churches. Third, although there are many Muslims in the city, no attempt was made to critique how Islam handles ATR as this study focused on the response of the church. Fourth, within the context of this thesis, a full ethnography was not possible. Instead, a cultural study, which is a shorter and simplified ethnography, was written. Fifth, although this thesis looked at AICs, a full treatment of AICs differing theological beliefs and practices was not possible.

Methodology

To effectively write a cultural study of the Malagasy in Antsiranana, it was necessary to learn the culture and religious beliefs through daily interaction. Howell and Paris write, "Participant observation is the primary method associated with ethnographic research."[27] David Fetterman explains:

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[26] E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), 83.

[27] Howell and Paris, *Introducing Cultural Anthropology*, 11.

> Participant observation is immersion in a culture. Ideally, the ethnographer lives and works in the community for 6 months to a year or more, learning the language and seeing patterns of behavior over time. Long-term residence helps the researcher internalize the basic beliefs, fears, hopes, and expectations of the people under study.[28]

I conducted my research into the study of Malagasy culture in Antsiranana by taking the role of a participant observer. According to Craig Storti, one advantage of learning the local culture is that "as you learn about the local culture, and especially as you learn the beliefs and values behind various local norms, you begin to see the world from that point of view."[29]

Through talking with local leaders of religious institutions, schools, neighbors, shopkeepers, families, and individuals, I was able to learn about the local culture and people. By living side by side with the Malagasy long-term and learning their language made more cultural information available than would have been available through only reading what others have written of the city or of Madagascar. Utilizing interviews with select people who were willing to talk in depth about their culture added to the authenticity of the research.

To guide the cultural study research, I loosely followed an outline provided by Daniel Sanchez of SWBTS. While a student at SWBTS, Sanchez introduced me to anthropology and the study of cultures. He graciously provided an outline for researching people groups which will be utilized for researching Antsiranana.[30]

Others have previously explored people groups in North Madagascar, and I have read their books and articles to glean information from their research. Andrew

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[28] David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step by Step*, Applied Social Research Methods Series 17 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 36-37.

[29] Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Intercultural Press, 2007), 110.

[30] Daniel Sanchez's Cultural-social-religious profile Instrument received via email, February 23, 2016. Sanchez's instrument is a good tool to get conversations started, and it gives some good direction as to what some important topics are that need to be addressed in studying a culture. See appendix 1 for a copy of the profile.

Walsh, Lisa Gezon, and Michael Lambek have all written about people and events in Northern Madagascar.[31] Although their writings are not specifically religious in nature, much was learned from them regarding culture and history of the people who now live in Antsiranana. In Southern Madagascar, examinations have been conducted focusing on churches, most coming from a Lutheran perspective, and they have been valuable for gaining insight into the history and challenges for missionaries.[32]

Literature Review

Previous research of ATR has been of tremendous assistance to this study. John Mbiti has written several books on the subject. *African Religions and Philosophy* and *Introduction to African Religion* stand out as the most influential.[33] These works reveal, from an African perspective, the inner workings and thought many Africans hold about ATR as well the thought and reasoning behind these beliefs. Idowu's *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* is an excellent introduction to ATR.[34] He introduces five key elements that make up the structure of ATR. These five elements are explored in depth in chapter 2 of this study.

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[31] See the following works for introductions to the Antakarana people and Northern Madagascar region. Andrew Walsh, "What Makes (the) Antankarana, Antankarana? Reckoning Group Identity in Northern Madagascar," *Ethnos* 66, no. 1 (2001): 27-48; Michael Lambek and Andrew Walsh, "The Imagined Community of the Antankarana: Identity, History, and Ritual in Northern Madagascar," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27, no. 3 (August 1997): 308-33; Lisa L. Gezon, "Of Shrimps and Spirit Possession: Toward a Political Ecology of Resource Management in Northern Madagascar," *American Anthropologist* 101, no. 1 (1999): 58-67.

[32] For books focusing on the indigenous revival movement called *Fifohazana* in Malagasy, see Cynthia Holder Rich, *The Fifohazana: Madagascar's Indigenous Christian Movement* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008): Rich, *Indigenous Christianity in Madagascar: The Power to Heal in Community* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*.

[33] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990); Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975).

[34] Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*.

One of the most insightful books on ATR is Gehman's *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective.*[35] In this book he sheds light on ATR from a biblical perspective as well as uses case studies from his many years living and teaching in Africa. Yusufu Turaki is another African writer who has influenced the study of ATR with his writings and his book *Foundations of African Traditional Religion.*[36] He introduces the main areas of belief in ATR, explaining them from the ATR perspective as well as addressing them biblically. This book does not go into great depth in topics, but it does give an overview of the general issues to arise between ATR and Christianity.

Van Rheenen's *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* is foundational for understanding animism.[37] He also relates practical ministry stories from his time working in Africa. His goal, as the title states, is for the gospel of Jesus to be proclaimed and understood by animists. *Understanding Folk Religion* by Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou walks through the process of understanding the spiritual world and evaluating the situation in which a missionary finds himself.[38] It is practical for training for missionaries as well as for the deeper understanding of culture and how to introduce the gospel for transformation of the culture.

Jack Chalk's book *Making Disciples in Africa* is a great resource for laying a foundational plan to address worldview.[39] Chalk's approach is of addressing the African worldview as the means to transform African cultures to true Christian cultures with biblical worldviews. He shares his plan for worldview transformation by focusing on

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[35] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion*.

[36] Yusufu Turaki, *Foundations of African Traditional Religion and Worldview* (Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006).

[37] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*.

[38] Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*.

[39] Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa*.

Genesis 1-11. Bruce Ashford's *Theology and Practice of Mission* has greatly impacted my thinking on how to minister to people in ATR.[40] His focus on the creation, fall, redemption, and restoration themes of Scripture lay the foundation for a biblical response. These will be explored in depth in later in this thesis.

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[40] Bruce Riley Ashford, ed., *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations* (Nashville: B & H, 2011).

CHAPTER 2

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

This chapter will explore the basic beliefs of ATR by presenting an overview

of the religion and common beliefs found among its followers. The chapter begins by

defining ATR and how the religion developed, followed by an examination of the historical

context of ATR. Next, a look at animism will show some of its similarities to ATR. Finally,

this chapter will examine five core areas of ATR: belief in God, divinities, spirits,

ancestors, and magic. Establishing a framework for ATR will allow for the church to have

a better understanding of the Malagasy worldview and culture in Antsiranana, which will

be shared in the following chapter, and how to best respond to traditional religion.

Defining ATR

The Lausanne Occasional Paper 18 (LOP 18) defines ATR as an "indigenous

faith and practice of African peoples which is the product of their perception, encounter,

reflection upon, and experiences of the universe in which they live."[1] The LOP 18 also

states,

> Generally the African world (i.e., universe) exists in two spheres—the visible,
> tangible, and concrete world of man, animals, vegetation and other natural elements;
> and the invisible world of the spirits, ancestors, divinities, and supreme deity. Yet, it
> is one world, indivisible, with one touching on the other. As one African proverb
> says: "Our world is like a drum; strike any part of it and the vibration is felt all over."[2]

According to this definition, the whole of life, both seen and unseen, is

connected and any event in any sphere, natural or spiritual, can affect everything that

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[1] Lausanne Movement, "LOP 18—Christian Witness to People of African Traditional
Religions," accessed October 21, 2015, http://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-18.

[2] Ibid.

takes place in one's life. ATR is not simple superstition, but a product of African's

encounters with the spiritual and physical world. These two worlds overlap and ATR is

the response of people trying to navigate the tumultuous collision of the differing realities.

Gehman describes ATR as a holistic worldview that encompasses everything

in life:

> Whether you farm or hunt, marry a wife or beget children, deal with sickness or
> famine, set out on a safari or reap a harvest, literally, whatever you do has religious
> implications. . . . ATR is not primarily belief, but the practice of people based on
> traditional worldview.[3]

ATR is more than mere belief—it encompasses all a person does and everything in life is

influenced by religious belief for the African.

Gehman also points out that ATR is man-centered, not God-centered. The goal

for those practicing ATR is to gain power in order to be successful. Writing about ATR, he

states, "The whole emphasis is upon man gaining the power needed to live a 'good' life."[4]

In response the question of what ATR is, P. A. Dopamu writes,

> African Traditional Religion comprises the religious beliefs and practices of the
> Africans which had been in existence from the immemorial, and are still adhered to
> today by many Africans. It is the indigenous religion of the Africans which has been
> handed down by their forebears.[5]

E. Ikenga-Metuh believes that ATR is a religion that is localized in each tribe

and area. Some areas of belief are general to all adherents of ATR, yet in the end it is an

ethnic religion. He writes, "African religion is ethnic religion. It is folk religion which

has grown out of the experience and practices of the people and therefore tailored to suit

the particular needs and situations of each ethnic group."[6]

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[3] Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, rev. ed. (Nairobi: East African Educational, 2005), 55-56.

[4] Ibid., 56.

[5] P. A. Dopamu, "Towards Understanding African Traditional Religion," in *Readings in African Traditional Religion: Structure, Meaning, Relevance, Future*, ed. E. M. Uka (Bern, Germany: Peter Lang AG, 1991), 21.

[6] E. Ikeng-Metuh, "Methodology for the Study of African Religion," in Uka, *Readings in*

For the purpose of this thesis, ATR is defined as a holistic indigenous faith and practice, encompassing all of life as man attempts to live harmoniously with both the seen natural world and the unseen spiritual world. ATR is indigenous to Africa and learned from ancestors. It is holistic in the sense that no area of life that one may encounter is outside of the reach of ATR. The goal is to live in harmony with nature, whether having good crops or a successful business, and includes having good relationships with men and women, as well as having good relationships with the spiritual world.

Historical Context of ATR

The study of ATR started when Europeans began to encounter the people of Africa. Gehman writes, "The elementary formal study of ATR began during the colonial period when Europeans entered the continent towards the end of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century."[7] The study continued as Europeans encountered more and more tribes and people, and as they sought to understand their religion. Gehman continues, "By the 1960's both Africans and expatriates began writing general surveys of traditional religion throughout Africa. They generalise and synthesise the many religious expressions found among the ethnic communities throughout the continent."[8] Many have laid the groundwork for the study of ATR today. This study was guided by learning from those who have gone before, African and non-African, as well as learning from today's ATR practitioners.

ATR is anthropocentric and is concerned with maximizing life of man in the present world. There is an assumption that life is good and one needs to enjoy it, yet the

African Traditional Religion, 139.

[7] Gehman, _African Traditional Religion,_ 15.

[8] Ibid.

forces of the world are against man and he must harness the power of this world to avoid misfortunes.[9] One of the major goals of ATR is to avoid what is bad by manipulating power for one's own benefit. This is seen as the only way to succeed in the world. Being man-centered, ATR has no problem using all that is available—spiritual forces, power, and natural resources—for the enjoyment and pleasures of life.

Elia Shabani Mligo begins *Elements of African Traditional Religion* by stating, "African Traditional Religion is the religion of the indigenous people in Africa. It is the way in which indigenous people relate to the Supreme Being in their own context."[10] His statement gives insight into the history of ATR being indigenous to Africa and that it arose from the need for people to relate to someone or something more powerful than themselves. ATR arose from man's attempt to explain and relate to God.

ATR has shaped African cultures and is intertwined with culture so deeply that to separate religion and culture is impossible in most circumstances. Mbiti claims that religion

> is by far the richest part of the African heritage. Religion is found in all areas of human life. It has dominated the thinking of African peoples to such an extent that it has shaped their cultures, their social life, their political organizations and economic activities. We can say, therefore, that religion is closely bound up with the traditional way of African life, while at the same time, this way of life has shaped religion as well.[11]

For most Africans, religion is culture and they are not easily, if ever, separated. In *African Primal Religions*, Robert Mitchell states, "Religion is a natural part of every aspect of the

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[9] A. Scott Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 47.

[10] Elia Shabani Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion: A Textbook for Students of Comparative Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 1, Kindle.

[11] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland, 2015), 10, Kindle.

tribal African's daily life."[12] All of life for many, if not most, Africans is religious in the sense that it influences or mandates behavior.

The African continent is diverse in languages and cultures. It is therefore difficult to speak of ATR among every people group as being identical. Mbiti points out,

> The African heritage is rich, but it is not uniform. It has similarities, but there are also differences from time to time, from place to place, and from people to people. Some of this heritage originated on African soil; it is, therefore, genuinely African and indigenous. But some developed through contact with peoples of other countries and continents.[13]

Each context, being different, has led to diversity in belief and practice throughout Africa. However, even in diversity, there is unity in ATR, as can be seen in culture and oral practices.

Oral History

African cultures pass on their history and traditions orally. This passing of culture orally is also true of their religious beliefs. Sacred texts do not exist for followers of ATR for scholars to consult and examine. Records of how tribes came into being are found in oral stories, songs, and poems that have been passed down for generations. Idowu writes, "One of the greatest obstacles in the way of the study of African traditional religion is, of course, the lack of written records by Africans of their ancient past. All that we have from indigenous Africa are the oral traditions."[14] Mligo writes that ATR "is a religion that is mainly based on oral transmission from one generation to another. Its teachings are not written on paper, but in the hearts, minds, oral history, rituals, shrines, and religious functions of people who believe in and practice this religion."[15] Ikenga-

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[12] Robert Cameron Mitchell, *African Primal Religions*, Major World Religion Series (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1977), 20.

[13] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 3.

[14] E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 83.

[15] Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion*, sec. "Peculiar Features of African

Metuh agrees: "Traditional African societies are pre-literate societies. African Religions therefore have no written documented sources. There are no sacred scriptures. Rather, the religion is written on the hearts, minds, spoken language, beliefs and practices of the people."[16]

To know and understand ATR in a specific culture or people group, one must take the time to learn from the people and not from written records alone. As Mligo states, if ATR is written on the hearts and the culture of the people, then to really understand ATR one must learn from the people. Relationships are vital to Africans. Through these relationships one can learn the history, culture, and religion of the people. Advocating for limiting one's area of study geographically, Idowu writes, "Any study of African traditional religion that is to be thorough and academically effective and profitable should be regional or one that covers only a limited area. The more limited the area covered the more effective and honest the study will be."[17] For this reason this study was limited to the city of Antsiranana, in Northern Madagascar.

Oral culture and religion have been passed down in Africa from one generation to the next. Although not in writing, this heritage and history is vital for the life of the community. Through this history, younger generations learn how the older generation navigated life in this world and how they answered basic life questions.

ATR and Its Adaptation to Christianity and Islam

ATR has historically been referred to as a primal religion or traditional religion and classified with other non-Western religions which do not have written scriptures.[18]

Traditional Religion."

[16] Ikenga-Metuh, "Methodology for the Study of African Religion," in Uka, *Readings in African Traditional Religion,* 139.

[17] Idowu, *African Traditional Religion,* 106.

[18] Irving Hexham, *Understanding World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 49.

This historical classification does not make ATR less of a religion than Christianity or one of the other major world religions with a historical written text. Being a traditionally oral religion does however make it difficult for those studying its history to know for certain what the beliefs have historically been versus how they have changed and adapted over the years. These changes have occurred as ATR has encountered the world religions, mainly Christianity and Islam. Jacob Olupona writes of ATR:

> Being mainly an oral culture, the advent of Christianity and of Islam has swept away evidences of its vitality, nature, and scope. To the extent that the beliefs, doctrines, and rituals of these two monotheistic religions filtered into the remnants of the traditional religion, they have changed the perspective of the people.[19]

Olupona is claiming ATR has changed due to Christianity and Islam. This change has taken place as these two religions have influenced and changed the perspective of the Africans. ATR adapts to changes in society, and this is what took place when it encountered Christianity and Islam. It was able to absorb beliefs from these religions and produce a syncretistic form of Christianity or Islam. Whether Christianity changed ATR or ATR changed Christianity depends on one's perspective.

Emergence of ATR

Describing ATR can be difficult because it is such a diverse religion. It is an animistic religion in that the belief in spirits, power, and magic are involved in its observance. ATR came about as men and women sought to explain the events which took place around them. Dopamu describes ATR in this way:

> African Traditional Religion is a revealed religion, but is has no historical founder like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Confucianism. The religion is revealed in the sense that it came into existence, like any other religion, as a result of human experience of the mystery of the universe. In an attempt to solve the riddle of the mystery of the universe, man everywhere has asked questions, searched for answers

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[19] Jacob K. Olupona, "Major Issues in the Study of African Traditional Religion," in *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 26.

to these questions, and come to the conclusion that this mystery must be a supernatural power, to whom belong the visible and the invisible.[20]

There was a need to explain the basic questions of life, and ATR is the response of Africans to that need. Just as a secular man will explain an event in scientific terms based on his beliefs and view of the world, an adherent to ATR will explain events with regard to a spiritual view of the world. There is an enormous gulf between how Africans and Westerners view the world. Most Westerners have been influenced by the Enlightenment and view the world from a scientific standpoint. For Westerners, the natural and the supernatural realms are separate. However, Africans view the world much differently and see the natural and supernatural realms to be interconnected. Irving Hexham writes,

> Western people tend to think of the "natural" and "supernatural" as two entirely different realms. As a result many people find it extremely difficult to believe that any form of reality exists beyond what is directly observed by our senses. But, as we shall see, what is reality," how it is best observed, and what counts as "sense experience" are not easy questions to answer. In most traditional African thought, there is nothing more natural than the supernatural.[21]

The connectedness of the spiritual world and the natural world is something which ATR does not question. It is simply the reality that both worlds are present and interact daily. In this regard ATR shares many beliefs and practices with animism. Therefore, an examination of animism will shed light on many of the beliefs and practices of ATR.

Animism

Animism is practiced by millions of people throughout the world. Although there is no standard or orthodox animism per se, most followers adhere to many common elements. For the animist, the world is best explained through the lens of spiritual forces, both good and bad, influencing everyday activities of men and women. God cannot be known but there are many spirits through whom he works and with whom men can interact.

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[20] Dopamu, "Towards Understanding African Traditional Religion," in Uka, *Readings in African Traditional Religion,* 21-22.

[21] Hexham, *Understanding World Religions,* 56.

Spirits are manipulated in an attempt to control the outcome of daily activities and life events. It is of utmost importance for animists to not upset or offend the spirits as there may be serious consequences. Therefore, animists live in fear of the spirits as they go throughout their everyday lives.

Dean Halverson writes, "The term 'animism' comes from the Latin word *anima*, which means 'soul' or 'breath.'"[22] Animism is practiced among most cultures of the world. From villages dotting the Savannah of Africa to the high-rise apartment block in African cities, animism can be found. It takes on many forms and is highly adaptable to the situation in which the practitioner finds himself. Animists seek power from the beings or forces that operate in both the spiritual and the natural world.

Excluded Middle

Hiebert wrote of the "excluded middle" Western missionaries need to consider when dealing with animists. Hiebert opened a discussion on how to reach animists, of which ATR is a part. A key component is the spiritual realm which cannot be dismissed. Although religion does answer the ultimate questions of what happens to man, the common events of everyday life are what concern most people. These common events are what ATR and other animistic religions seek to address.

The first level is the natural world man perceives and lives in. In this world man operates and sciences are developed to explain what takes place here. The middle level is made of spiritual beings and forces. Although not seen, spirits are believed to exist in the world with humans in the seen world. There can be interaction between these two levels. The highest level or top level is other worldly. This is the transcendent world where the heavens exist.

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[22] Dean C. Halverson, "Animism: The Religion of the Tribal World," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 15, no. 2 (June 1998): 59.

Most Western missionaries operate within a scientific and a religious world that does not intersect with the spiritual world. Nature works scientifically. If something goes wrong with a harvest for example, there is a scientific explanation. Yet for animists, the spirit world is intimately involved with the natural world.

Hiebert sheds light on the "middle level" of which many missionaries have little knowledge. For animists there is no luck or chance in the case of accidents, but every event has a spiritual explanation. It is in this middle level that animists are concerned. Here they determine when to plant and harvest, when to take a journey, or why something bad has taken place.[23]

This middle level is where animists participate daily seeking to control events. Missionaries must address the middle level if the gospel is to impact animists. Defining animism will lead to a better understanding of how to address the middle level.

Definition of Animism

Before getting into some basic beliefs that hold true for most animists it is best to define animism. One simple definition offered by Eugene Nida and William Smalley is that animism is the "belief in spirit beings."[24] Not everyone who believes in spirit beings is an animist, although all animists do believe in spirit beings. Such a definition, although correct, is too broad. Others have offered more in-depth definitions, which will prove more useful in working with animists.

Sitton writes, "Animism is the belief that nonliving objects have souls (life) and that natural phenomena possess supernatural or magical power."[25] There is more

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[23] Paul G. Hiebert, "The Flaw of the Excluded Middle," *Missiology* 10, no. 1 (January 1982): 35-47.

[24] Eugene A. Nida and William A. Smalley, *Introducing Animism* (New York: Friendship Press, 1959), 3.

[25] David Sitton, "The Basics of Animism Spiritual Warfare in Tribal Contexts," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 15, no. 2 (June 1998): 69.

depth with this definition and evidence of the all-encompassing aspect that is part of an animist's life. Everything has a reason, a spiritual reason, for taking place. There are no accidents in life. Every aspect of a person's life is controlled or influenced by the spiritual realm. Sitton continues,

> Is animism a religion or a culture? In reality it is both. Religion, relationships and culture are inseparable in the tribal world. Their spiritualistic religion is an integral part of the culture and the tribal way of life. Following the rituals of their religion is a totally taken-for-granted requirement of living in the tribe. Animism is an all-of-life daily experience based upon spiritualistic beliefs. In contrast, the Christian religion (not Biblical Christianity), as commonly understood in the Western world, is merely a set of dogmas to be believed. These dogmas are easily labeled as spiritual and can be separated from the rest of life which is considered secular.[26]

Halverson writes, "Animism is the religion that sees the physical world as interpenetrated by spiritual forces—both personal and impersonal—to the extent that objects carry spiritual significance and events have spiritual causes."[27] He agrees with Sitton, holding to the view that animists see events in life as having a spiritual significance and cause. The unified nature of the spirit world with the physical world is an important aspect of the animistic belief. Van Rheenen goes further and gives a comprehensive definition of animism, stating it as

> the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power.[28]

Five areas are addressed in this definition. First, animism is a belief system through which reality is perceived. Everything taking place in this world is filtered through the beliefs of the animist. The relationships between spirits, people, and other divine beings all make up the belief system of animists, which can be very different from

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[26] Sitton, "The Basics of Animism Spiritual Warfare," 69.

[27] Halverson, "Animism," 59.

[28] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 20.

one group of people to the next. There is not a separation of the religious and the secular for animists. Every aspect of life is included in their beliefs.[29]

Second, animists believe in beings and forces. Beings are described as "personal spirits that include God, gods, ancestors, ghosts, totemic spirits, nature spirits, angels, demons, and Satan." [30] Forces are impersonal and include such things as magic and witchcraft. Not all cultures will describe these forces and beings in the same manner, however these generalizations are common to many animistic cultures.

Third, the spirits or forces have the power to control or influence human events. These may include death, power over the harvest, relationships, sickness, and health in general.[31] The animist sees everything that takes place in life as influenced and controlled by the spiritual realm.

Fourth, because of this interaction between humans and the spirits, animists live their lives in fear of these spirits and forces as they seek to discover what beings and forces are influencing their lives. The animists are constantly seeking to not upset the spirits and to bring disaster upon themselves and their families. They are cautious of anything new and unusual, which could be interpreted as a bad sign or an angry spirit. Fear controls them, or at the least, influences much of what they do each day. [32]

Fifth, animists want to control and manipulate the powers by discovering which forces and beings are influencing them. Manipulation and control are how the animist is able to use the spirits and forces for their benefit. The belief that these forces can be controlled leads animists to seek ways to appease and use them to experience good things and positive events and not evil in their lives. This desire to control the powers, forces, or

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[29] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ*, 20.

[30] Ibid., 21.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

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beings leads to all types of rituals and activities, which can be categorized as magic, all for the sake of manipulation of these unseen spirits or beings. [33]

Clearly power, spirits, and forces have a major influence in animism. Animism shares many of the same basic beliefs with ATR. A closer examination of the common beliefs of ATR will reveal the same basic principles at work.

Common Beliefs of ATR

In ATR, like other religions of the world, there exist common beliefs which are held by the adherents. These common beliefs are at the core of ATR. The degree of importance placed on each category may be different from culture to culture or tribe to tribe, or even from individual to individual, yet these core common beliefs are found in almost all forms of ATR. Idowu writes that five elements make up ATR in general: (1) "belief in God," (2) "belief in divinities," (3) "belief in spirits," (4) "belief in the ancestors," and (5) "the practice of magic and medicine."[34]

Within these five areas of belief there is often overlap. Not all scholars group these common beliefs the same way. For example, the LOP 18 lists seven beliefs instead of the five of Idowu.[35] This disagreement does not in any way diminish the legitimacy of ATR, but it shows the complexity of the religion. I will follow Idowu's by grouping ATR into five sections as it best encompasses the beliefs and practices of ATR.

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[33] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ*, 22.

[34] Idowu, *African Traditional Religion,* 139.

[35] Lausanne Movement, "LOP 18." The LOP 18 calls them "elements of faith" and lists them as belief in the existence of God and gods (or divinities), belief in spirits: both good and evil, belief in cultic prohibitions (called taboos) and moral violations which can cause disruption of human relationship, belief in sacrifices, belief in continuing existence of the dead in the invisible world, belief in reincarnation among some tribes, and in partial reincarnation among others, belief in judgment from God and/or from dead or living elders. (Ibid)

Belief in God

   Among followers of ATR there is a belief in God. Dopamu states,

> There is an underlying identity in the traditional religions of the Africans that enable us to say with conviction that African Traditional Religion is a unified religion. There is a regular rhythm in the general pattern of the people's beliefs and practices. This regular rhythm is the universal belief in the Supreme Being as in integral part of African worldview and practical religion.[36]

The way in which they view God and his relationship with man may differ from tribe to tribe, yet, there is a universal belief among all Africans that God exits.[37] No missionary going to Africa has had to convince Africans that God exits. This is a unanimous belief traditionally and it has only changed as secularism from the Western world has taken root. Mbiti writes, "All African peoples believe in God. They take this belief for granted. It is at the centre of African Religion and dominates all its other beliefs."[38]

   Even though there is a universal belief in God, what do the people believe about him? E. M. Uka writes, "In many parts of Africa, many people traditionally believe in one single, Supreme God who is the creator of the world and of man. He is believed to be all knowing, all powerful, all wise."[39] Vincent Mulago writes that God "is conceived as the original source of all life and of all the resources of life, the Father of mankind and of things, who covers everything he has created with his divine providence."[40]

   Idowu lists four main comprehensive attributes of God. First, God is real to Africans. What Idowu means by this is that God is not made up or imaginary. He is known

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[36] Dopamu, "Towards Understanding African Traditional Religion," in Uka, *Readings in African Traditional Religion*, 23.

[37] E. M. Uka, "The Concept of God in African Traditional Religion," in Uka, *Readings in African Traditional Religion,* 39.

[38] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 45.

[39] Uka, "The Concept of God in African Traditional Religion," in Uka, *Readings in African Traditional Religion,* 43.

[40] Vincent Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," in Olupona, *African Traditional Religions*, 130.

by the people and they have a name for him that is special and not used for other beings. Second, God is unique. He is not like a person or like the other deities, he is unique and different from all else. Third, God is the absolute controller of the universe. Idowu writes,

> The absolute control of the universe and of all the beings is due, in African thought, basically to the fact that all other beings exist in consequence of him; and that whatever power or authority there may be exists in consequence of him; because it derives from him and because he permits it.[41]

Fourth, God is One, the only God of the whole universe. He is the same for all mankind. He is the same in his justice and his dealings with men. Even though most tribes have a sacred place that they consider to be the center of the world and where life and creation began, they still believe God to deal with men all over the world the same way.[42]

Other writers add more attributes of God in addition to these four.[43] Mbiti writes that "God is the creator of all things."[44] He continues by stating that God is the ruler of the universe, provider for what he has created, is good, merciful, holy, all powerful, all knowing, present everywhere, limitless, self-existent, the first cause, is spirit, never changes, and is unknowable.[45]

These attributes of God are interesting to consider when looking at the history of Africa and ATR. They do have some things in common with God in the Bible, yet at the same time as one probes deeper into the understanding of God in ATR there are differences. One major difference is the lack of worship of God in ATR. Africans respect God, but few tribes, if any, directly worship the Creator or Supreme God. Instead, they

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[41] Idowu, *African Traditional Religion,* 156.

[42] Ibid., 148-65.

[43] See Gehman, *African Traditional Religion,* 318-21; Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion*, 57-62; Mitchell, *African Primal Religions,* 23-24.

[44] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 49.

[45] Ibid., 52-59.

spend more time and attention on keeping the other spirits and divinities satisfied.[46]

Malcolm McVeigh writes, "Africans conceive of God as far away and remote, and this conception has its influence on their worship life. In general, they do not go to God directly or make regular prayers to Him."[47]

There are differing ways of describing and relating to God, yet the belief that God exists, created everything, and is in control is not disputed. How he rules and relates to humans varies, yet there is no question God exists. Chalk describes it well: "The one glue that seems to hold all the other ATR beliefs together is the belief that God is there, above all things, the source of all things and the reason for all things, giving everything a reason for being."[48]

Having belief of God, yet not worshipping him directly, leads to a question: where did this belief in God come from? The answer is provided in original monotheism. In *Neighboring Faiths,* Winfried Corduan explains that the beginning of religion was in God. Starting from a place of monotheism cultures gradually moved away from monotheistic worship. As they incorporated new spirits, rituals, and practices, they continued to hold onto the belief in God. Corduan identifies this falling away as either decay or corruption of the original monotheistic belief. As religion moves further away from monotheism it retains vestiges of God, yet spirits and magic increase in importance until they dominate religious practice.[49]

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[46] Uka, "The Concept of God in African Traditional Religion," in Uka, *Readings in African Traditional Religion,* 44.

[47] Malcolm J. McVeigh, *God in Africa: Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion and Christianity* (Cape Cod, MA: Claude Stark, 1974), 109.

[48] Jack Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa: Engaging Syncretism in the African Church through Philosophical Analysis of Worldviews* (Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2013), 94.

[49] Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 40-46.

Romans 1:18-25 explains the process. People knew God at one time. By their own choice they moved away from him and began to worship creation instead of God. This creation could be spirits, trees, rivers, or anything other than God. This moving away from God and into worshipping creation explains why God is known, yet not worshipped in ATR.

Original monotheism is evident in ATR's belief in God. Different cultures have moved away from original monotheism to different extents. Moving into the ATR belief in divinities highlights the complexities that emerge as God is pushed further away from the center of religious life.

Belief in Divinities

Divinities are separate from God, ancestors, and spirits. They have roles to perform and powers assigned by God. Uka describes the divinities best when he writes,

> The general belief about divinities is that they are created by God to perform specific roles. They did not come into existence on their own volition. Their status is mediatorial, they are believed to be intermediaries between God and man, a means to an end, not the end in themselves. As emanations of God, they share the limitation of all other creatures. Their powers are limited to the performance of specific functions assigned to them by God. None of them enjoys the unlimited powers ascribed to God.[50]

One of the main roles of the divinities is to mediate between God and man, along with elders and ancestors, and God cannot be approached without the help or mediation of a divinity.[51] Although they are not on the same level as God, they do have power and are important in maintaining relationship with God. Mligo states that a "divinity is a locally oriented being and is a means to an end."[52] According to Mligo, the divinities are mediators between God and man, with God being the end means that man is attempting

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[50] Uka, "The Concept of God in African Traditional Religion," in Uka, *Readings in African Traditional Religion,* 45.

[51] Moreau, *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions,* 47-48.

[52] Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion,* 96.

to reach. Gehman writes that divinities are "below the Supreme Being, but above the ancestral spirits. These spiritual beings are said to be ministers of God."[53] Using a divinity as mediator with the Supreme Being is done because many believe they have easier access to God than men.[54]

The divinities present one of the most difficult aspects of ATR. The beliefs about them are more diverse than with other areas of ATR. Uka believes the divinities to be created. Yet Idowu believes it is incorrect to say the divinities are created but they are "derivatives" of God, however they are not God. They are divine because they come from him, uncreated, yet limited in ability and power. [55] Mligo also believes divinities to be created but with no power of themselves only what God gives them, similar to the function of angels in the bible. He states, "To Africans, a divinity is a reality in nature and in history. Divinities were created and have no independent power of their own. They depend on God for their power."[56]

The divinities are mediators between man and God. Therefore, in his quest for power in life, men look to divinities. Whether or not Africans worship divinities may be difficult to know for certain. Yet, this is a question that needs to be addressed. There are different views among African writers themselves as well as scholars who have studied ATR.

Mbiti advocates the viewpoint that divinities, ancestors, and other beings are not worshipped. Mbiti believes acts of giving food and libation offerings to ancestors is how the family can show respect and hospitality. The living stay in touch with those who have already died through these acts. Mbiti claims these are not acts of worship, but

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[53] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion*, 185.

[54] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 68.

[55] Idowu, *African Traditional Religion,* 169.

[56] Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion,* 96.

communion: "African religious activities are chiefly focused upon the relationship between human beings and the departed."[57] He gives examples of people groups who sacrifice to the spiritual world. These sacrifices include animals, food, and drinks. He writes, "As a rule, there are no sacrifices without prayers."[58] Mbiti does not deny sacrifices are made to ancestors, the living dead as he refers to them, or to spirits or divinities, yet he claims they are not worshiping these beings.[59]

In *Introduction to African Religions*, Mbiti points out the reason for making these sacrifices and offerings to others beside God. He concludes that these divinities, ancestors, and spirits are intermediaries between God and man. It is necessary to go through these spiritual beings to access God. Mbiti claims Africans use these beings to help them feel closer to God. Mbiti expresses approval of these acts because the "the important thing is for people to feel at ease, satisfied and happy as they practise their religion and go through life's experiences."[60]

In contrast to Mbiti's viewpoint, Turaki responds to this issue in *Foundations of African Traditional Religion and Worldview*. He writes of the difficulties Africans have in differentiating between the worship they offer to spirits, divinities, or God.[61] The worship is the same and it is all mixed together in his opinion. Turaki claims most of the time God is not even included in worship. He is simply ignored and the divinities or spirits or ancestors are the focus. Turaki writes that this type of worship in ATR is what the Bible condemns and calls idolatry. He makes a great point that the Bible is clear that

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[57] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 26.

[58] Ibid., 61.

[59] Ibid., 8-9, 25-26, 60-61.

[60] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 69.

[61] See also Gehman, *African Traditional Religion,* 185-210. Gehman makes the point that man must align his worldview with the Bible and not the Bible to the culture. He rightly addresses the arguments and puts the Bible as the standard to which man should conform.

having knowledge of God is not the same as being monotheistic or worshiping him. Turaki points to the fall of man as the cause of this spirit worship. He then references Romans 1, showing how it has come to pass in ATR. Turaki sums up his argument: "By offering worship to lesser deities, African Traditional Religion is idolatrous, as are all non-biblical religions. The number of deities involved means that the religion is undoubtedly also polytheistic."[62]

Man's quest for power leads to divinities. Turaki writes,

> finding gods and divinities is like window shopping. While dealing with one god, one keeps one's eyes open for another god who may have something greater or more powerful to offer. Worship or solicitation goes to the one who makes the best offer, whether it be a minor divinity, a major one, or even the Supreme Being himself.[63]

The goal of divinities is to interact with men and mediate with the Supreme Being. They can be found in many places in many forms and require different levels of loyalty. They have limited power and for that reason men may find it profitable to work with several divinities at the same time, or to have several to which they can turn if they have problems. According to ATR, divinities are not the only beings with which men must contend in this world. Having a very different role are the spirits that inhabit this world.

Belief in Spirits

Belief in spirits is universal in ATR. Spirits are everywhere and inhabit all things in nature. They can also be tied to a location, such as a shrine, tree, or mountain and these become places to go when a person needs help or places people avoid out of fear.[64]

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[62] Yusufu Turaki, *Foundations of African Traditional Religion and Worldview* (Nairobi: Word Alive, 2006), 63. See pp. 61-71 for Turaki's full argument.

[63] Ibid., 66-67.

[64] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion*, 215.

Van Rheenen describes the spirits as "beings" and "forces."[65] According to Turaki, "evil spirits can possess people and inflict all kinds of diseases and sufferings."[66] Although their origin and nature is not known exactly, they are normally believed to be from humans who were not given proper burials or who died unnatural deaths.[67] Consider this quote from the book *Understanding Folk Religion* about spirits of the dead who did not get to join the realm of ancestors:

> Other ancestors become malignant spirits. In much of the world ghosts are seen as the souls of people who have not lived fulfilled lives or who have died tragic deaths. They are thought to exist in a halfway house between the human world and the world of the ancestral spirits, and to search for a human body which they can enter and make sick through their nefarious activity.[68]

The spirits are normally believed to be malevolent and intent on causing harm to men. They are often used and manipulated for evil purposes. Due to the uncertainty of spirits, people fear them. Writing about the spirits, Gehman states that they are "unknown and unpredictable and therefore dangerous."[69] For this reason people spend a great deal of time trying not to offend the spirits.

Spirits can be good or bad, helping men and women or hindering human activities. Because of such diverse beliefs and rituals associated with spirits, it is imperative to investigate thoroughly the beliefs of each culture, community, or family to fully understand what they believe about the spirit world and man's interaction with it.

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[65] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts,* 21.

[66] Turaki, *Foundations of African Traditional Religion and Worldview,* 65.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 104.

[69] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion,* 215.

Belief in Ancestors

Africans' relationship with their ancestors is one of the most complex beliefs for an outsider to understand. Ancestors are both greatly respected and greatly feared. They are respected because they have already passed from life to death and have the ability to help those who remain on earth. They are feared because they can punish those on earth for violations of cultural taboos or codes of conduct.

Ancestors are still considered part of the family in ATR.[70] They are referred to as the living dead in that death has transitioned them from the land of the living to the spiritual realm. The ancestors remain a part of the family to which they belonged while living on earth and they still are addressed with the appropriate titles like "father" or "mother."[71]

Ancestors are more important than the spirits or the divinities in ATR because they are truly concerned about what happens to their family members. Since the ancestors are still considered part of the family, they still have input into what needs to take place for the family to live appropriately and prosperously. Simply because they have died physically does not mean they have ceased to exist or to care about what takes place in the life of the family.[72]

One important role of the ancestors is to be an intermediary between God and man. The ancestors know the family and care about their well-being. Now that they have departed the land of the living and are in the spiritual world they also know how to best please God, the divinities, and spirits. Since they have knowledge of both the living and the dead they are responsible to guide the living in the right actions and behavior.[73]

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[70] Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 61.

[71] Idowu, *African Traditional Religion,* 184.

[72] McVeigh, *God in Africa,* 34-35.

[73] Idowu, *African Traditional Religion,* 184.

A point of debate is whether Africans worship their ancestor or if they are only showing tremendous respect to them. Most would answer that they are simply respecting their elders who have gone on before and honoring them even if it appears as worship to an outsider. This is an area where it is difficult to know the correct answer as an outsider to ATR and caution is advised before labeling ancestor rituals as worship or veneration.[74] In fact, it may differ from person to person or family to family. One person may only be honoring their ancestors while another is worshipping them. As with many traditions and customs there is a fine line between worshipping and showing honor and respect.

However, some Africans see nothing wrong with veneration of the ancestors or their worship.[75] Mulago writes,

> Belief in survival and interaction between the living and the dead is the basis of the veneration of ancestors and of the deceased in general. With the veneration of ancestors, we associate the cult of heroes. In certain ethnic groups, we also encounter the worship of genies and of earth spirits. From the viewpoint of Christian faith, we can see absolutely nothing at odds in principle with the practice of making ancestors and other dead persons' beings the object of veneration, or even of a religious cult, provided that this does not exclude the worship due the Supreme Being. Now, in the groups we have studied, the worship of God does often underlie the worship given to the dead.[76]

This is truly a disturbing thought from a Christian perspective. Worship given to anyone or anything other than God, the Supreme Being in Mulago's words, is contrary to biblical teaching (Exod 20:3; Deut 5:7, 10:12). Ancestors may be important and honoring them is not necessarily evil or wrong, yet Mulago's implication, that by worshiping ancestors a

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[74] Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 121-22. Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou caution against passing judgement about whether someone is worshiping or venerating ancestors before understanding how the people think of the matter themselves. They point out that Scripture says to respect parents but not worship them. This is wise counsel.

[75] According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* to *venerate* is to "regard with great respect." Worship can be defined as "the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity" or "great admiration or devotion." Although there is technically a difference in definition, in practice it appears the lines are blurred. For a fuller discussion of whether divinities, spirits, ancestors, and beings are worshipped in ATR, see section on belief in divinities earlier in this chapter. (2004), s.v. "venerate."

[76] Mulago, "Traditional African Religion and Christianity," in Olupona, *African Traditional Religion,* 130.

person is worshiping God, is misplaced. His viewpoint falls flat in the face of biblical admonitions to worship God only.[77]

A helpful summary about ancestors is found in *Understanding Folk Religions.* Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou give five reasons ancestors are highly esteemed:

1. They are the founders of the family, and therefore, have a natural interest in caring for it.
2. All humans face the question of what follows death, and ancestors have experienced it.
3. Great ancestors are remembered for their power and achievements.
4. For the most part, ancestors are thought to have the wellbeing of the family at heart.
5. Ancestors are often seen as intermediaries between God and humans.[78]

The ancestors are one of the most difficult areas to work through in ATR. Discovering what meaning the practice holds for every person or group takes time. Realistically, there could be different motives with different groups when they address the ancestors.

Belief in Magic

One of the core tenets of ATR is the belief in magic and medicine to manipulate the spirits. Magic is used to attempt to receive a favorable outcome from the spirits. Magic could be used to the detriment of another person or simply used to find favor for oneself. In *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts,* Van Rheenen writes,

Animists believe that all impersonal power (whether used only benevolently, for both good and evil purposes, or malevolently) can be manipulated by magic. Magic is the use of rituals and paraphernalia to manipulate spiritual powers. By means of magic, people attempt to project human control over spiritual forces.[79]

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[77] Exod 20:12 and Lev 19:3 instruct Israel to honor and respect their parents. Nowhere does the Bible allow or teach the worship or sacrifice to ancestors.

[78] Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 120-21.

[79] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 218.

Instead of submitting to the more powerful force however, people attempt to control or manipulate the force or power by rituals. Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou explain, "Magic is a specific attempt to force a response that will result in changing the status quo."[80]

Magic is carried out by practitioners. They are called practitioners because "they are noted for what they can do."[81] People who desire to control the spirits or communicate with the ancestors or divinities utilize these practitioners who have a proven ability to connect with the spirit realm.

Some ways in which the spirits are contacted and attempted to be controlled are through priests, prophets, shamans, mediums, witches, and sorcerers. These people connect the spirits through various means, results, and differing motivation. For example, shamans normally use their power for the good of people and to benefit the community. However, witches and sorcerers use their powers to do bad and harm other people. Magic itself is not considered bad in ATR because it can be used for both good and bad. However, when used for malevolent purposes, magic can make the person who uses it the target of retaliation. [82]

Writing about the usefulness and purpose of magic, Mbiti states,

> African traditional societies and their religion found or invented magic and witchcraft to explain human experiences of pain and suffering and sorrow. They also discovered or invented medicine to cure and to protect themselves against these forms of evil and to promote health and welfare. These discoveries or inventions are the fruit of many and long experiences of life throughout the centuries. They satisfied people's search for explanations and solutions of their problems. They are still valid for many people in the villages.[83]

Mbiti makes clear that magic is useful for several reasons in ATR. Not only can it protect people, but it also satisfies the curiosity of those looking for answers to unexplainable

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[80] Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 69.

[81] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts,* 146.

[82] Ibid., 149-66.

[83] Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 173.

events. Magic is used because it is perceived to produce results. Understanding and accepting this concept will lead to a firmer grasp on the overall importance of ATR in people's lives.

Conclusion

Hiebert was correct about the excluded middle. The spiritual world, which many missionaries had excluded because of their Western cultural training, is a major factor in ATR. The separation between the natural and supernatural worlds is minimal if it exists at all for adherents of ATR. Therefore, both must be addressed to understand this world. People are living in a physical world surrounded by spiritual forces that influence everything that takes place and therefore must be considered in every life situation.

ATR is animistic in its essence. It shares many of the same beliefs about spirits and power as animism. Belief in a supreme being, spirits, powers, and an interaction between the spirit world and the natural world are all evident in ATR.

ATR seeks to answer spiritual as well as natural questions for the African communities in which it is practiced. It pursues what is practical to live a good life in this world, before joining the ancestors in the spiritual world. Turaki points to this motivation when he writes, "People want a religion that they can use to meet their needs and provide for their wishes."[84] ATR is such a religion.

Having explored the basic beliefs of ATR and animism, chapter 3 will focus on the beliefs of the people in Antsiranana, Madagascar. Looking through the lens of ATR a clear picture will begin to emerge of Malagasy culture and belief. Through interviews and observation, what the people believe and how the church has been impacted by ATR will clearly be seen.

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[84] Turaki, *Foundations of African Traditional Religion and Worldview,* 15.

CHAPTER 3

A CULTURAL STUDY OF ANTSIRANANA

Introduction

In *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues,* Hiebert writes,

"Missionaries do not enter cultural vacuums. The people to whom they go are members

of ongoing societies and cultures."[1] This quote serves as a reminder to cross-cultural

missionaries that they are not working with a blank slate. People already have culture and

a worldview. In *Global Church Planting*, Craig Ott and Gene Wilson state, "People are a

product of their past and cannot be understood apart from their collective experiences."[2]

Missionaries must study and seek to understand the cultures to which they go. Societies

have in place structures for family life, social interaction, economic viability, and religious

belief. Missionaries attempt to understand the existing culture and worldview of a specific

people group with the goal to live out and share the gospel of Jesus Christ among them.

This chapter examines the Malagasy culture of Antsiranana. The cultural study

was adapted from Daniel Sanchez's Cultural and Religious Profile, which is utilized to

study people groups when engaging a new culture.[3] Four areas were examined: family,

social, economic, and religious structures. Looking at ATR, as seen within these different

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[1] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 75.

[2] Craig Ott and Gene Wilson, *Global Church Planting: Biblical Principles and Best Practices for Multiplication* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 187.

[3] Daniel Sanchez's Cultural-social-religious profile Instrument received via email, February 23, 2016. Sanchez's instrument is a good tool to get conversations started, and it gives some good direction as to what some important topics are that need to be addressed in studying a culture. See appendix 1 for a copy of the profile.

culture structures, a picture begins to develop of the culture and worldview of Antsiranana. To begin, a brief explanation of the culture study will allow the reader to understand how the interviews were carried out.

Cultural Survey

To understand the culture of Antsiranana, 26 interviews involving 36 people were completed during May and June 2018, in Antsiranana.[4] Each person or group of people to be interviewed was briefed on the purpose and scope of the interview. Those agreeing to participate were asked questions about family, social, economic, and religious structures in Antsiranana.[5]

The interviews were conducted in French and English with Malagasy from various backgrounds. Differing economic, education, and social contexts were sought out for the interviews. The participants included university students, pastors, businessmen, retirees, Christians, Muslims, market vendors, teachers, and a university professor.[6] The cultural survey gives insight and understanding of family life, social life, economic life, and religious structure in Antsiranana in relation to ATR.

Religious Structure

Antsiranana is a religiously diverse city. Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, and followers of traditional religion call Antsiranana home. Despite the diversity there are few conflicts between the various religions. Disagreements arise from time to time, but the majority of the time everyone lives together harmoniously.

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[4] All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research and Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

[5] All interviews were confidential; the names of the interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement. See a copy of the cultural survey questions in the appendix 2.

[6] A list of interviews can be found in appendix 3. The interview number is listed along with a brief description of the interviewee.

One of the goals of this thesis was to discover the response of the church to ATR. Understanding what the people believe and practice is a necessary step in determining the response the church should take. Therefore, looking at a brief history of the church will begin the process of understanding the religious situation in Antsiranana.

Evangelical Church in Antsiranana

Traveling through the city a visitor will see many church buildings in Antsiranana. There are a few big and beautiful church buildings, reminiscent of European architecture; however, most churches meet in simple buildings that are small and rudimentary, yet sufficient for a group of worshippers to gather. Many denominations are represented in the city: African Initiated Churches (AIC), Assemblies of God, Baptists, Catholics, Communanté Evangélique Indépendante de Madagascar (CEIM), Fiangonana Jesosy Kristy de Madagascar (FJKM), Lutherans, and various branches of Pentecostals.

This thesis focused on two evangelical churches. The Baptist Church, officially called Fiangonana Baptista Biblika and CEIM Antsiranana. The reason for the focus on these two churches was twofold: (1) they are evangelical churches, and (2) I worked closely with these churches while living in Antsiranana; therefore, I was able to observe and interact with them on a weekly basis at minimum.

History of the Church

The first European to "discover" Madagascar was the Portuguese navigator, Diego Dias. In August 1500, he claimed the large bay and the land surrounding it in Northern Madagascar. Near the end of the seventeenth century, a French pirate established a colony called Diego Suarez.[7] The city was named Diego Suarez until Madagascar received its independence from France. At this time the city was renamed Antsiranana.[8]

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[7] Bonar A. Gow, *Madagascar and the Protestant Impact: The Work of the British Missions, 1818-95* (New York: Africana Publishing, 1979), 2.

[8] Many still refer to the city as Diego Suarez, or Diego for short. Most tourists use this name as

The first missionaries arrived in Madagascar in 1818, from the London Missionary Society. Arriving at the port city of Tamatave on the east coast, they were soon welcomed by the Merina tribe who controlled the center of the country. The missionaries started schools to teach reading and writing, as well as trade schools. It was these trade schools that taught European technology that most interested the Malagasy and allowed the missionaries to establish themselves in the country.[9]

The mission was growing and there were many converts in the early years. Converts were expected to conform to European standards of dress, food, and culture. If a convert did not accept Western ways, then their conversion was not accepted as genuine by the missionaries. Opposition to the missionaries began to occur when biblical teaching ran contrary to traditional religion. The Merina king wanted to keep both his position as the king as well as benefit from the technological advances the missionaries taught. For this reason, he tolerated the missionaries in his kingdom.[10]

After the king died, his wife took the throne. Queen Ranavalona I was hostile toward Christians and in 1835, she began persecuting them. This persecution led to the expulsion of missionaries from the country. Despite the lack of a missionary presence, the church continued to grow during this time. By 1869, there was a new queen, Ranavalona II and her prime minister who accepted Christ and burnt the royal idols. At this time, the Queen allowed missionaries to return to Madagascar.[11]

Interestingly, from 1869 onward "Protestant Christianity in Madagascar became known first and foremost as the religion of the Merina Queen, and only secondly

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it is shorter and easier to pronounce, especially for foreigners. For the thesis I have chosen to use the official government name.

[9] Gow, *Madagascar and the Protestant Impact*, 1, 12.

[10] Ibid., 12-13.

[11] J. T. Hardyman, *Madagascar on the Move* (London: Livingstone Press, 1950), 121-22.

as a European religion."[12] From the time the Queen accepted Christianity it opened avenues for the gospel to spread to many areas of Madagascar. Yet, along with this also came many who became Christian in name only and not in practice. They did not follow Christ, but the royal leaders. As a result, Christianity became a social status or identity rather than a deep faith.[13]

This identification of Christianity with the Merina people has had a profound impact on the church in Antsiranana. Unfortunately, it was not a positive impact. Antsiranana lies in the Antankarana kingdom. Like the Merina, the Antakarana's history includes a king converting to a non-traditional religion, but instead of Christianity he converted to Islam.[14]

At one time the Merina had attempted to take control of all of Madagascar and bring all the people groups under their authority. When they encountered the Antakarana, many of the Merina soldiers were Christians. The Antakarana people associate the attempted Merina conquest with atrocities committed by the soldiers of the Merina king. Therefore, Christianity is guilty by association in the minds of many Antakarana people. They see Christianity not being a foreign religion coming from the West, but foreign as being the religion of their enemy, the Merina.[15]

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[12] Karina Hestad Skeie, *Building God's Kingdom: Norwegian Missionaries in Highland Madagascar 1866-1903* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 58.

[13] Gow, *Madagascar and the Protestant Impact*, 95.

[14] For a history of the Antakarana conversion to Islam, see Michael Lambek and Andrew Walsh, who explain the history of the conversion and the impact it has today. However, that discussion is outside of the scope of this thesis as I focus not on how the Antakarana became Muslims, but how ATR has influenced the church and how the church can respond to ATR. Michael Lambek and Andrew Walsh, "The Imagined Community of the Antakarana: Identity, History, and Ritual in Northern Madagascar," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 27, no. 3 (August 1997): 308-33; Andrew Walsh, "Constructing 'Antankarana': History, Ritual and Identity in Northern Madagascar" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1998).

[15] From personal conversations I had with Malagasy believers and unbelievers in Antsiranana as well as in Ambilobe.

Colonization by France enabled churches to build and start work throughout the entire island. Even with the historical tension between the Antakarana and the Merina, the French influence accounts for the churches in the city today. Historically, the majority of the evangelical work has been in the central highlands, but there has been a recent push into other areas of the country, including Antsiranana.

The Church Today in Antsiranana

The Baptist church is located in the Ambalavola quartier, which is a district within the city. They celebrated their twenty-five-year anniversary in December 2017. The current pastor has ministered, along with his wife, to the people of Antsiranana for fifteen years. He studied and was trained at the Baptist seminary in Antsirabe. He and his wife are Merina and speak Official Malagasy and French. Official Malagasy is also the dialect used in the Malagasy bible.

The church members come from all over Madagascar. Most have a family heritage of Christianity. Many university students attend, with a majority of them coming from the Mandritsara region of North Central Madagascar. Although many areas are represented in the church, the language used in worship is Official Malagasy and not the local dialect. When asked why they do not use the local dialect in church, the first response was because the bible is in Official Malagasy. When pressed further about why they do not use the local dialect, the pastor and an elder admitted that the members are more comfortable using Official Malagasy and not the local dialect.

The CEIM church has a similar story. Established twenty years ago in Antsiranana, it too has a pastor from among the Merina people. One difference in the CEIM story is that they do not own a building. When I first encountered this church they were renting a room at a local school where the pastor's wife was a teacher. However, due to a new law that forbids any public schools to be used for religious meetings, they were forced to find a new location. They bounced from place to place for a few months before securing a lease on an old bar in the Scama quartier.

This move has been difficult but also a blessing. It was difficult because many of their members live far away from the new location, making travel to meetings costly and time consuming. Yet, this change also ignited a fire for the members to do outreach into the local quartier. This quartier is growing and there are not many churches in the area. However, they too insist on using Official Malagasy and not the local dialect in their services.

The dialect choice for worship explains why many locals continue to view both churches with suspicion. Given the history between the local Antakarana and the Merina, a natural tension and distrust exists. Lisa Gezon points out the tension: "The historical memory of the Merina as the enemy fuels contemporary enmity between the politically and economically dominant Merina and the Antankarana."[16] The church is not willing to reach out by using the local dialect, and the people of the city are not interested in joining a group associated, in their history, with foreign aggression. This challenge needs to be addressed in some way if the church is to have a greater and lasting impact in Antsiranana.

Unfortunately, the choice of dialect is not the only obstacle the church faces. Traditional religion is rooted in the people's lives. Moving now to an examination of ATR in Antsiranana will highlight the extent of the challenge for the church today.

ATR in Antsiranana

The interviews reveal that ATR is woven throughout all of life in Antsiranana. Although not explicit in every instance, there are undertones of ATR in the family, social, and economic structures of everyday life as well as the religious structures. Beginning with family life, each area will be examined separately showing how deeply ATR is embedded in the culture of Antsiranana.

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[16] Lisa L. Gezon, "From Adversary to Son: Political and Ecological Process in Northern Madagascar," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 55, no. 1 (1999): 74.

ATR in Family Life

Malagasy family life is diverse. Given the various backgrounds of the Malagasy who live in the city, it is not a surprise that there are differing views on family. People from all over Madagascar flock to Antsiranana looking for work and a life of enjoyment. It is seen as a place to escape village life. People come to the city believing they will be able to start a new life.

Many *vazaha*, or foreigners (mostly single, retired French men), live in the city making it attractive to young women who desire to marry a foreigner. They believe marrying a *vazaha* will provide the financial means necessary for the "good life" they dream of. The "good life" as described by the people includes money, jewelry, gold, silver, cars, concrete houses, partying, nice clothes, and easy or no work. The *vazaha* are perceived to have all these things and the Malagasy desire the same.[17]

To attain the so called "good life," family life suffers greatly. Life is expensive in Antsiranana. It is said to be the most expensive city in Madagascar. One result of seeking the "good life" is men and women work hard but neglect their children and family.

Young women migrate to Antsiranana or are sent by their families to find a *vazaha.* As a result, they will not marry a Malagasy man. In fact, marriage is almost non-existent in town. Men and women simply live together. They may have children together, yet one of them will leave if they find a better partner with more money. Sometimes, they simply tire of the other person and search for someone else. Often, the reason to move on is as simple as to try and improve economic situation.[18]

The young women, along with their families, seek the blessing of the ancestors in the pursuit of a *vazaha*. They make a vow and promise to bring an offering or sacrifice to the ancestors if they will allow the young lady to marry a *vazaha*. The vow usually

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[17] Interviewees 5, 14, 22, interviews by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[18] Interviewee 6, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

involves cows, as they are what the ancestors prefer, even though they are expensive. If the young lady finds a *vazaha* and has secured a relationship with him, she will then return to the site of the vow and make a sacrifice thanking the ancestors.[19]

As the women seek out a man, they often turn to witchcraft hoping to gain an advantage over other women. They buy charms, traditional medicine, and curses. They use traditional medicines to make themselves attractive to men so that men will fall in love with them. A woman may place a curse on another woman to keep her from stealing her man, or to keep the rival woman from finding a man at all.

Women are not always successful in their pursuit of a *vazaha*. However, women still need money and there are not many opportunities for work in Antsiranana. Sadly, prostitution is often the answer. Thousands of women have been or are currently engaged in prostitution. Most families see nothing wrong with it and even push their daughters into the sex trade. Girls, often as young as fifteen years old, are introduced to prostitution in the hopes of providing income for the family. As they get older, into the upper teens and early twenties, they seek out a relationship with a *vazaha*.[20]

Children are normally left with grandparents to raise or are sent to live in the village with family. There are many single mothers in town and men do not have much role to play in their children's lives. Most children have many half-siblings as their mothers have children from several men.

Another dimension of society is that of *mamasosy* and *jambilo*. Basically, a *mamasosy* is an older woman who has money and takes a young man as lover. Yet, the man will often have another Malagasy woman. He receives money from his *mamasosy* to support his other woman, especially if the *mamasosy* is a foreigner.[21]

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[19] Interviewee 7, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[20] Interviewee 5, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[21] Interviewee 17, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

A *jambilo* is a Malagasy man who partners with a Malagasy woman, and together they search for a *vazaha* for her to marry. The couple lives together, are sexually intimate and may in fact love each other. Yet, the goal is for her to marry a *vazaha* and then she can support herself and her *jambilo* with the *vazaha's* money. She may even get her *jambilo* a job working for her *vazaha*. When her *vazaha* is not around, she is intimate with her *jambilo*. Supposedly, the *vazaha* are ignorant of such arrangements.[22]

This arrangement is common and is seen as a legitimate way to make a living and provide for oneself. There are hundreds of *vazaha* in Antsiranana, mostly French men. They are older, retired, and looking for a young Malagasy woman. It is common to see a sixty-year-old man or older with a girl in her twenties as his "woman." For the Malagasy it is seen as a good business.

The pursuit of material possessions has led to the formation of this system of young women seeking older French men and not being committed to a Malagasy man. The men for their part have found a way to profit from this by helping their woman get a man in return for easy money. In this way they do not have to work but can chase other women and chew *khat*. *Khat* is a plant containing a strong natural stimulant. Users chew the leaves of the plant, often causing the person to stay awake for long periods of time and causing him to act aggressively. Few relationships are monogamous. In fact, men and women often juggle several different relationships at the same time to see which one will be the most beneficial financially.[23]

Although the lack of marriage is prevalent in Antsiranana, a few respondents shared about the traditional marriage contract still in place in villages. It seems that family life in Antsiranana is very different from the traditional Malagasy approach. Though uncommon, Christian or Muslim marriages take place if people so choose.

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[22] Interviewee 17, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[23] Interviewee 22, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

To combat the sexual lifestyle within the church, the Baptist church hosted a wedding in December 2016. The church offered to pay for the legal marriage certificates for members and to host a church ceremony and party. Five couples accepted the offer. The church went to the mayor's office for the legal ceremony and then hosted a celebration at the church building for the five couples.[24]

Most people living in Antsiranana, inside and outside the church, are not choosing either religious or traditional marriages. They are content following the highly mobile practice of living together until a better opportunity comes along. The result has been a breakdown of the traditional Malagasy family. This breakdown has had social repercussions which will be explored next.

ATR in the Social Structure

A typical home is made of tin, consists of two or possibly three rooms, often with a concrete floor. In the tropical heat the tin makes being inside unbearable at times. For this reason, many activities take place outside among neighbors. Families typically share communal toilets and bathing areas with a few other houses. Homes are arranged for communal living with the door opening toward a shared courtyard. The courtyard is a place for cooking, washing clothes, play area, social activities, and eating.

Fihavanana is a word that summarizes much of what the interviews revealed about social life and structure. Cynthia Holder Rich writes that *fihavanana* is a relationship between family and friends, with people in this world and beyond, which includes

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[24] I was present for the marriage ceremony at the mayor's office. Five couples along with many members of the church participated in the ceremony in which the mayor conducted the legal, state ceremony and signed the marriage certificates. Most, if not all, of the couples who were married that day were already living together and had children together. Within the church there appear to be monogamous relationships, as this is the teaching at the Baptist and CEIM churches. However, they also have many of the same problems as the culture outside of the church in relationships and lack of marriage. Interviewee 6, a pastor, said that many within the church do not marry but simply live together. It is highly probable that even relationships within the church are not monogamous, and sexual promiscuity is a problem. Several of the teenage girls, who are members of the church, have children out of wedlock.

mutually taking care of each other.[25] It is the idea of community life and helping others. However, according to one university student interviewed, in Antsiranana, *fihavanana* is not a reality today, only a theory.[26]

Sharing with neighbors is an expectation of living in community. However, one needs to participate in giving as well as receiving or else they will be labeled as selfish and others will avoid them. A man who works as a night watchman and nurse commented that life is difficult and expensive. For this reason, it is important to have community to go through life with. Despite leading difficult lives, he said the Malagasy like to laugh and joke together.[27]

A result of *fihavanana* is the continuation of ATR worship in the community. There are social repercussions if a person does not respect or remember the ancestors by participating in ATR. It is not simply that spirits will be upset, but often family members will disassociate with someone who refuses to participate in ancestral rites and ceremonies. A community worker and Bible teacher said that people will follow ATR even if they do not believe in it because of other people. The Malagasy are afraid to lose their connection to family and therefore continue to participate in practices they do not believe to be right.[28]

If a person does not participate in a funeral for example, then he may be accused of causing the person's death by magic.[29] If a person refuses to participate in a sacrifice he may be blamed for anything bad that happens in the family from that day forward. Therefore, a person must participate in ATR or be cut off from the *fihavanana.* Within

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[25] Cynthia Holder Rich, *Indigenous Christianity in Madagascar: The Power to Heal in Community* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), xviii.

[26] Interviewee 11, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[27] Interviewee 1, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[28] Interviewee 22, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[29] Interviewee 12, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

this communal culture, the threat of ostracism from family is often a threat to the very survival of the person. As a result, most Malagasy continue to participate in ancestral practices due to this pressure.

Funerals are important for *fihavanana*. Upon hearing of a death people gather together and sit with the family members. Being present shows unity and solidarity with the family. The community collects money and rice.[30] This helps the family provide for visitors as food and drink must be served to those who visit.

Normally these funeral sittings last all night long. The family sleeps inside the home while the people outside keep up a vigil of singing and eating so that the family does not grieve alone. Often these events have the feel of a family reunion or a party for the community. As one pastor shared, death makes the community come together because people respect the dead.[31]

Part of the social responsibility of Malagasy men and women is to ensure the proper traditional funeral practices and sacrifices are carried out for their family members. Funeral traditions not only comfort the family, but also ensure the deceased individual transitions into an ancestor. If the traditional process is not followed, the dead person will not become an ancestor. This would be a tragedy for the Malagasy. The process includes proper mourning by the family. They must show through their mourning that the deceased person was respected. Proper burial practices could include things such as being buried in the family tomb or making sacrifices. The sacrifices could include giving rice, alcohol, or an animal. The deceased person's social and economic status determines what should be sacrificed.

Despite the traditions holding considerable influence on the lives of the people, the values in Antsiranana are not promoting *fihavanana* in the same way as in the past.

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[30] Interviewee 2, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[31] Interviewee 6, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

When discussing what people value, the answers point to what was previously described as the "good life": money, jewelry, gold, silver, clothes, partying, chewing *khat*, holidays, and music. It is evident that material possessions are what most respondents believe the people value. In fact, some said these are even more important than family and community relationships. When interviewing three relatives together, each expressed that if given the choice between community and family or money, they would choose money over family because "money is more important than family."[32]

One consequence of the social and family changes is a breakdown in teaching the next generation. This has led to a lack of respect, or a lack of *fihavanana*, with older generations. Respect was a word repeated often in the interviews, normally to say that people, specifically children, do not respect other people. The children do not have authoritative parents who guide and teach them and the grandparents with whom they normally live are not able to control them. Therefore, the young people do as they please and do not respect their parents. They follow the path of their parents in loose sexual relations with many partners and seek to acquire material goods by any means possible. Children believe their parents' responsibility is to give material goods. Love or guidance for children is all but forgotten.[33]

Young people are not as involved in many of the traditions because they do not know them, yet they are still very active in ATR. They use ATR for their personal benefit and not for the benefit of their families. They are becoming more individualistic, while also seeking community.

This family and social breakdown can be seen clearly in the rise of *la foroche*. *La foroche* is the name given to local gangs, of which there are many. Many young men seek community and comradery by joining these gangs. Normally these gangs are formed

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[32] Interviewee 5, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[33] Interviewees 16 and 22, interviews by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

within quartiers. The focus of these gangs are "soft" targets: stealing purses, robbing the elderly, or children sent to the market. Yet, they will attack anyone who they believe to have money or goods.

La foroche are most apparent in late afternoon and evening as young men walk in large groups from the quartiers or in town. Not all groups of young men are looking for trouble or belong to the gangs, yet the danger exists and is a reality for the Malagasy and foreigners in Antsiranana. Many Malagasy consider *la foroche* to be a problem for the community and blame social situations which has lost the ability to teach children.[34]

The relationship breakdown between parents, children, and grandparents has had a huge impact on the city. Lack of respect at home transfers to lack of respect at school and in the community. This has led to an increase in *la foroche* and insecurity problems community wide as young people search for a place of belonging.

Many interviewees contrasted the lack of respect in town with its importance in village life. In the village, children are taught respect for parents and elders. Village life follows a different rhythm. Parents and family members take time to teach children how to farm and they learn *fihavanana*. For this reason, many children are sent to the village to live with relatives. Not only do they learn traditional ways of life, but it is economically advantageous to have children in the village farming rather than the city where goods are more expensive.[35]

Some people believe the solution to the social issues in Antsiranana can be found in a return to ATR. If the children will learn the way of the ancestors, or appreciate *fihavanana*, then they will follow the sacrifices and rituals and the ancestors will be satisfied. When the ancestors are content, they bless. When they are forgotten, they curse.

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[34] Interviewees 7, 8, and 22, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[35] It is possible that this is glamourizing the past or the village life and the reality is much different. However, this is what several respondents replied. As my experience is limited mainly to Antsiranana at this time, there is no way to compare the village life to Antsiranana.

Most people do not see ATR as an outdated system that needs to be thrown out, but as the system that holds Malagasy life together, and a return to it is what the city needs. ATR is present in and influences all areas of Malagasy life. This is equally true of the economy of Antsiranana as well, which will be seen next.

ATR in the Economic Structure

The economy of Antsiranana is complex. Agriculture is important with some believing it is the driving force. Others disagree because most of the food is imported. Nearly everyone agrees that fishing is important to Antsiranana, but they feel that few people benefit from the export of fish and shrimp. However, at the local markets fish is available daily for local consumption. Tourism also fuels the economy. Hotels, restaurants, markets, transport companies, and many other industries and businesses rely upon tourists to buy their goods and services.

The Indian community controls most of the economy. They are the main importers of the goods distributed to the smaller shops. They own most of the property in town, or a large portion of it, especially in the older sections. However, they are viewed as harsh and treat the Malagasy terribly. One person went so far as to say that the Indians treat the Malagasy as slaves.[36] The Indian community works together and is very wealthy compared to the Malagasy majority. This wealth causes problems with the Malagasy who see the Indian community as taking advantage of and exploiting them.

ATR is evident in the economic life of Antsiranana. As the Malagasy attempt to make a living and build businesses that will prosper, they often turn to ATR for help. Upon entering shops or market stalls, protective charms or symbols are often strategically placed, which protect the business against magic or to bless it with success.

People are constantly looking for advantages and protection. To get an advantage, they may go to a witchdoctor to buy medicine or charms that will allow their

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[36] Interviewee 5, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

business to grow and do well. Similarly, they can purchase magic that harms a competitor, which in turn allows their own business or trade to do better. There is medicine they can purchase to protect them from magic someone may use against them. People are always searching for something more powerful than other people have. ATR itself can be a very profitable trade for those who know how to use magic and manipulate the spirits on behalf of others.

Despite living in poverty, people spend large sums of money on magic charms for protection. They buy animals for sacrifice to the spirits to gain a blessing and make money. When they want to build a building or start a business, they must first get the blessing of the ancestors, which requires sacrifice. Nearly all the buildings in town prominently display the skull and horns of the cow that was sacrificed for the blessing of that building.

In family and social life as well as the economy, ATR interacts with the lives of the Malagasy. There is no area of life outside ATR's grip. Yet, some practices are placed squarely in the religious structure of life. It is the religious realm which will now be explored more fully in Antsiranana.

ATR in Religious Structure

There is a traditional Antakarana celebration when a child's two bottom teeth come in. When the two teeth come in the family celebrates because it marks when a child is considered a human. Before having the two bottom teeth, a child is not thought of as human. When the bottom two teeth arrive, it is believed the child's spirit has decided to stay in the body. Traditionally, a child could not be buried if it died before this time. Instead, its body was thrown in a tree. This provided a way for the spirit of the child to find its way back to the spirit world. This practice is now illegal, but the belief persists. Today, if a child dies before having two front bottom teeth, it is buried in a shallow grave

at a sandy spot near a river or the ocean. In this way the spirit can easily return to the spirit world via the river or ocean and will not get lost.[37]

The city of Antsiranana has forced a change in burial practice, but the people have not changed their belief about babies. This practice was followed at the Baptist church when a member had a baby that died. The infant girl lived for only one day. I visited the father on the day of the birth and celebrated with him. The next day I called the pastor of the church to ask about the proper procedure for my family to visit the new mother and baby. I was shocked and saddened to learn the baby had died. Inquiring about the funeral and how I could participate or help, the pastor informed me the burial had already taken place. The baby had died in the late evening. At sunrise, the pastor and elders from the church, along with the family, had traveled to a sandy spot by a stream which flowed into the ocean and buried the baby. As I asked about this practice, the pastor would not talk about it. Next, I asked one of the elders who had participated. He said it was how they do things in Madagascar. When pressed for more information, he simply said it was *fomba*, or a custom.

Even among the church members, pastor, and elders, ATR practices persist. Whether they believed the baby needed to be buried by the river for its spirit to return to the spirit world, or they were simply following a traditional practice for the benefit of the family is unclear. What is clear is the presence of practices in the church that promote ATR belief is problematic. By not only allowing the practice, but by direct and open participation in this practice, church leaders have approved of ATR within the congregation.

The many people interviewed admit that church members practice ATR as well as going to church. Church members admit that some people in church practice ATR. Most respondents said ATR is not compatible with Christianity, yet they acknowledged

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[37] Interviewee 18, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018. This information was also shared by my language teacher during session while I was studying the Malagasy language and culture.

members still participate secretly. They admit it will be difficult to stop syncretism within the church from taking place.

Another way in which ATR has infiltrated the church is through interfaith relationships. It is a well-known practice in Antsiranana for Christian and Muslim men and women to live together.[38] This allows the religions to mix in the home. When a Muslim and Christian live together, each continues in their own faith. In reality they mix Christianity, Islam, and ATR. The Christians (and Muslims) see nothing wrong with this because of the common belief among residents of Antsiranana that both religions are the same and will lead to the same destiny. Therefore, the specific religion one follows is not important. The most important thing is to honor the traditional practices of ATR, and to keep the ancestors content.[39]

It seems contradictory to an outsider when first examined, but the adaptability of ATR to Christianity has allowed for such a practice. As long as the people believe in ancestors and see them as the main intermediaries between God and man, then they are not following Christ but ATR. The syncretism in the church is an admission and indictment that the gospel has not taken root.

A local pastor said ATR practices are not allowed in the church. He did not specify whether members of his congregation participate in ATR, but only that it is forbidden to do so. He did share that in the month of August many people go to the town of Ambilobe to bathe in the sacred river which flows through town. Additionally, people travel to the town of Mahajanga to buy the power of an ancient king through *tromba*

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[38] While we were living in Antsiranana, several of my friends lived with women from a different religion than their own. When I asked how this affected family and religious life, they said it had no impact because each person follows his or her own religion. However, each person also participates in major celebrations of the other religion as well. In Antsiranana there appears to be no problem for a Christian to celebrate Ramadan, or for a Muslim to celebrate Christmas or Easter. This does not mean the church, or the mosque approves, but this is the practice of the people. The unifying practices in relationships revolve around ATR and not Islam or Christianity in most situations.

[39] Interviewee 25, interview by author, Antsiranana, June 2018.

ceremonies. They spend a lot of money to travel and to pay the fees for the *tromba,* hoping to gain power for life.[40] *Tromba* is the ritual and ceremony associated with the ancestors possessing an individual. This subject will be discussed in greater detail when ancestors are examined more closely.

Another local pastor says the Bible teaches against ATR and that it is a great sin. Yet, he admits most people in churches still practice ATR. Not surprisingly, he gave the example of members of another church participating in ATR but would not say if his members do or not.[41] Unfortunately, he participated in the burial of the infant who died after one day mentioned previously.

The mixing of ATR, Islam, and Christianity is not seen as a problem by many in Antsiranana. ATR has infiltrated the church and is molding Christianity to fit the culture. Instead of the church changing the culture and worldview of Antsiranana, ATR has changed the church from its biblical foundation.

ATR in Antsiranana is complex. It is holistic and involves every area of life. The belief in God, in spirits, ancestors, and magic will be examined next. In this discussion of ATR in Antsiranana I have not added a section on the divinities. The Malagasy people with whom I spoke shared about *Zanahary*, *tromba*, *razana* or the ancestors, and spirits. They did not speak of them as being divine, except for *Zanahary*.[42] Therefore, I chose to

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[40] Interviewee 6, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[41] Interviewee14, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[42] Robert H. Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid: Demon Possession and Spiritual Warfare, True Accounts from the Lutheran Church of Madagascar* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing, 2013). Bennett discusses a difference he found working in southern and central Madagascar between *Zanahary* and *zanahary.* In his book he says many divinities among the Malagasy use the same word, but he refers to them with a lower case "z" to differentiate them from the creator with a capital "Z." Ibid., 33-38. However, in Antsiranana in northern Madagascar, I found the conversation to focus on spirits and ancestors, with the ancestors being intermediaries coming from the spirits of those who died and not being divinities. Neither did I find sufficient evidence the spirits were divinities; however, it is an area in which further research in Antsiranana would be helpful to clarify.

limit my assessment to the four categories of God, spirits, ancestors, and magic. Understanding who God is in Antsiranana is critical to understanding ATR there.

God. The Malagasy name for the creator is *Zanahary.* This is the term most people in Antsiranana use for God. Another name is *Andriamanitra*, which means the sweet-smelling prince.[43] The Bible, which is in the Official Malagasy dialect, uses *Andriamanitra.* According to a pastor in Antsiranana, the reason the church uses *Andriamanitra* is to distinguish the God of the Bible from other religious views. The church does not want the people to believe that the God of the Bible is the same as Allah of Islam or that he is the same as *Zanahary* in Malagasy traditional religion.[44]

Everyone believes in *Zanahary*. He is all powerful and holds a place of honor above all the other spirits and ancestors. One respondent, a tour operator and a believer, explained it this way: *Zanahary* is on top, then the *razana* are intermediaries, and men are on the bottom. She also repeated the common sentiment that although they know and believe *Zanahary* created the world, they are unaware of how he did it.[45]

A university student explained that even though every Malagasy believes in God, they still do not accept Jesus. She also said most people simply ignore God. However, she then repeated a common saying in Antsiranana: "If you believe it, God will help you." She tied a Malagasy *fomba fatiny,* or proverb, to this saying as well: "When you do nothing, you do not deserve anything."[46] A young man expressed a similar belief many Malagasy hold about God: "He does not help people who do nothing."[47] These sayings

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[43] Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 35.

[44] Interviewee 6, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[45] Interviewee 16, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[46] Interviewee 24, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[47] Interviewee 12, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

reinforce the common theme of evil spirits doing bad and being responsible for difficulties and failure. God is responsible for success, even if on does not go directly to him or acknowledge him.

One associate pastor at a church believes God is the creator. Yet, he also says that the world has always existed according to traditional religion. He does not know a traditional creation story outside of what the Bible teaches.[48] According to a language teacher in town who has studied Malagasy culture, there is no Malagasy creation story even though God created the world. She pointed out that schools teach evolution, but everyone believes God is the one who made the world.[49]

An observation about creation can be made at this point. In the previous chapter, original monotheism was discussed affirming that religion began with God and then was corrupted. This appears to be the case with Malagasy traditional religion. Although they hold the belief that *Zanahary* is the creator, the story of how he created has been lost, if one existed. The general assumption is everything has existed forever, yet this raises the question of why God would be called creator.

Additionally, although there is universal belief in Malagasy tradition religion about God, he is not the focus of religious life or practice. The ancestors are the focal point. Ancestors will be explored in depth later in this chapter.

Contrary to this point of view, a local cultural leader and Muslim Iman in Antsiranana claims that when the Malagasy pray at rocks or rivers, the people are praying directly to God, not to the physical place. He believes that when they call out to ancestors they are also praying to God. In his opinion, they pray to God but give sacrifices to the ancestors. They ask the ancestors instead of God for a blessing. They sacrifice cows at special trees or mountains. They believe their ancestors enjoy the gift. Nothing is given to

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[48] Interviewee 13, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[49] Interviewee 18, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

God as a sacrifice. Interestingly, they do not ask God for a blessing, but they ask ancestors.[50] It appears, by his observations and comments, that contrary to his claim, the people do not worship God but the ancestors.

Zanahary is creator and powerful but not the primary focus of worship in Antsiranana. People fear him, but they do not approach him under normal circumstances. Many Malagasy, especially those in churches, want to reconcile the traditional view of God with the biblical God. One major difference, however, is God's approachability. In *I Am Not Afraid,* Robert Bennett raises this issue between the biblical God and the traditional Malagasy *Zanahary*. Bennett points out *Zanahary* does as he wishes and is not able to be approached by men and women.[51]

The lack of *Zanahary's* approachability leads to spirits and ancestors. Since *Zanahary* does not relate to men and women, what can they do? They find an intermediary to go between man and God. For this reason, most Malagasy are concerned with the spirits, to whom this study will now turn.

Spirits. In animistic religions, spirits are central to religious life. ATR in Antsiranana is no different. The spirits are central to daily life as people attempt to not upset or offend them.

One interviewee is a businessman and church elder. According to him, spirits can be found everywhere, and the people are afraid of them. Territorial spirits reside in rivers, mountains, or trees. According to him, spirits can be found at certain places in the road and cause accidents. Many claim to have seen *lolo*, which are ghosts. He knows many who have seen one, but when they speak to the *lolo* it disappears. Normally, people are afraid something bad will happen because they have seen the spirit.[52]

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[50] Interviewee 25, interview by author, Antsiranana, June 2018.

[51] Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 35-36.

[52] Interviewee 7, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

Spirits are accused of causing sickness and accidents. When someone dies, it is almost always attributed to a spirit, even if the person was very old. This is why many are afraid of them. However, people also seek out spirits to look for blessings or an advantage in life. Normally this is in the form of gaining an economic advantage over someone.

There are two views on the spirits. First, many Malagasy said the spirits are bad and should be avoided because of all the bad things spirits do to people and the problems they cause. People believe that by avoiding the spirits one can potentially avoid these bad things. Most who responded with this view are active in churches which teach that spirits are evil. Holding this view does not mean a person does not interact with the spirits, it means they prefer to not interact with them if possible.

Second, some believe the spirits are good and should be respected and obeyed. In this second view, the spirits only do harm if an individual disobeys the spirit, thereby offending it. In this case, the person deserves the punishment inflicted by the spirit. In this view, if people do not want bad things to happen, then they should carry out the desires of the spirits.

A university student spoke of the need to make restitution if a person offends a spirit. If a person does bad, then the spirit will harm the person or a family member. An example of something bad is defiling a sacred place in some way, such as urinating at the sacred place. To appease the spirit, a person must make a sacrifice. Normally this a cow, but it must involve blood. He says the blood is necessary to clean the "dirtiness" of the offense.[53]

Spirits are very much a part of ATR in Antsiranana and they influence the lives of many people. Whether spirits are good or bad depends on the person's perspective.

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[53] Interviewee 12, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018. These are examples interviewee 12 gave but is not an exhaustive list. He also made clear they do not believe in sin as the Bible teaches. He said that they believe if something makes your life better it is ok for you to do it. What is missing is any effect one's actions may have on another person. People do not sin; they simply make mistakes.

Some see the benefits gained from the spirits as worth the cost of the sacrifices or the protective amulets they purchase.

There is a lot of overlap between the spirits and the ancestors in Malagasy ATR. Ancestors are spirits, but not all spirits are ancestors. Even if a person does not have much to do with the spirits, everyone must deal with the ancestors.

Ancestors. *Razana* is the word for ancestor. *Fomban-drazana* are the traditions of the ancestors that every Malagasy is expected to follow and obey. The customs are numerous, complex, and vary from family to family. The one common thread is that the ancestors are the key to living a good, productive, fulfilling, and financially stable life for the Malagasy.

The ancestors are an extension of the living family. Although they have died physically, they are not completely gone but instead live in the spirit world. The ancestors relate to their family and each family must care for its ancestors. Everyone acknowledges certain ancestral spirits, like kings or queens, but in most situations a person is only concerned with blood relatives. The role of the ancestors is to give guidance to the family as they navigate the world and to protect the family. Since the ancestors live in the spirit world, they are able to see events that the living cannot see and therefore they guide people, so they can be protected and successful.

One word associated with the ancestors is *tromba*. Contained in this word is the entire ceremony of calling up the ancestors. *Tromba* can be used to refer to the ancestors or spirits in general. Antsiranana is a diverse city and depending on the background of the person the word can have a slight difference in meaning.

The dictionary definition of *tromba* is "an evil spirit possessing someone."[54] A Malagasy language teacher describes *tromba* as the spirit of dead people, referring to

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[54] *Diksionera Malagasy-Anglisy* (Antananarivo, Madagascar: Trano Printy Loterana, 1973), 95.

ancestors.[55] Bennett explains t*romba* as an ancestral spirit or a possession ritual with the intent of a medium being possessed by an ancestor spirit.[56] Normally this takes place to receive guidance from the ancestors to deal with a situation in life that a living person cannot navigate alone.

The *tromba* ceremony involves lots of singing, dancing, and alcohol. The event can go for several hours before a spirit comes to possess a person. The ancestors only speak through a living person. It is for this reason that the ceremony must take place. It is considered a great honor to be chosen as the one possessed by an ancestor.

At the culmination of the *tromba,* the spirit possesses an individual and speaks through him or her. Nearly everyone willing to speak about *tromba* said the same thing: it was the voice of the ancestor speaking and not the possessed person. Examples are common of grandparents returning to speak to their families or of ancient kings speaking to the people.

People seek out these ancestors because they are looking for guidance. They need or want something but need help attaining it. Since *Zanahary* is not approachable by men, they use ancestors as intermediaries. They believe the ancestors want what is best for them and therefore good advice will be given by them. It is also in the interest of the ancestors to help the living. If the person on earth is successful, then they are obligated to bring an offering or sacrifice to the ancestor. It could be an offering of honey, beer, rum, money, or an animal.

Another way the ancestors are respected is through *famadihana,* or the turning of the bone's ceremony.[57] When a person dies he should be buried in the family tomb in

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[55] Interviewee 3, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[56] Bennett, *I Am Not Afraid*, 37-38.

[57] I acknowledge that *famadihana* is normally performed in the central highlands among the Merina. However, many Merina and other people from the central plateau have immigrated to Antsiranana and imported the belief and practice of *famadihana* with them. It has impacted the community, especially

most instances. Approximately two years after death, family members gather at the family tombs for a reunion. All members of the family are expected to participate in this event. They hold a sacrifice, offering cows and prayers to the ancestors, followed by a feast on the sacrificed animals. After the sacrifice, they open the tomb and remove the body. They clean what is left of the body and rewrap it in new cloth and rebury it. Often, they will also clean and rewrap the bones of several of the ancestors in the same tomb.[58]

A taxi driver described the ancestors as little gods who live in the society. He says they will bless you if you honor them. If a person is struggling, then they can pray to the ancestors and seek a blessing from them. When a person gets what they asked for, they give the ancestors gifts in return.[59]

One response from a local cultural leader and Muslim Iman was as enlightening as it was shocking. He says Christianity and Islam teach that *tromba* is bad, but he disagrees. He says that *tromba* is a teacher, a way to a good life and a way to understand how to be successful in life. He believes if the people will only ask, the ancestors are able to give advice about medicines that have been forgotten. Yet, the advice is not just for medical purposes, but for all of life. Although a religious leader in his community, he is not happy with the approach of the Muslims or Christians to ATR in Antsiranana. Shockingly, he teaches people at his mosque to follow Malagasy ATR first and foremost, then when practical to follow the teachings of foreign religions like Islam or Christianity.[60]

Ancestors are involved daily in the lives of people. They look out for the family they were part of while on earth. As the interviews draw out, the Malagasy of Antsiranana are influenced greatly by those who have gone before them. There is a powerful connection

the Christian population. Although not as widespread of a practice in other regions of Madagascar, it still needs to be considered as an influential practice among the Malagasy living here.

[58] Interviewee 20, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[59] Interviewee 17, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[60] Interviewee 25, interview by author, Antsiranana, June 2018.

between the living and the dead. The Malagasy of Antsiranana are always trying to honor

the dead and show them proper respect. What Lesley Sharp writes about Madagascar in

general applies to Antsiranana today:

> Throughout Madagascar, ancestors are central to indigenous concepts of collective and local identity. This honouring of ancestors takes precedence over, or may eclipse, all other beliefs: regardless of one's religious affiliation, level of education, or (European) cosmopolitan experiences, Malagasy throughout the island make painstaking efforts to honour their dead.[61]

Ancestors provide a vital link between the living and power for life. Often, to

get the most out of this relationship, people need help in accessing the power of the

ancestors. To tap into the full potential of the ancestors' power they can go to specialists

who specialize in magic.

Magic. The spirits and the ancestors can be manipulated. Their power can

benefit the person doing the manipulation or harm another person. In most situations it

takes a spiritual specialist, a witch or a sorcerer, to effectively harness the spiritual power

of ancestors or spirits. In *The Fifohazana: Madagascar's Indigenous Christian*

Movement, Rakotojoelinandrasana Daniel writes,

> Leaders of animistic religions, including sorcerers, diviners, and traditional healers, communicate with spirits for the benefit and protection of the people to whom they want to give favor. Conversely, the spirits can be called upon to attack and destroy enemies and people they want to harm. Superstition and magical practices are an integral part of animism.[62]

The Malagasy believe magic is very powerful when a person knows how to use

it. Often, the Malagasy use magic to either protect themselves from harm, or to actively

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[61] Lesley A. Sharp, "The Power of Possession in Northwest Madagascar: Contesting Colonial and National Hegemonies," in *Spirit Possession, Modernity & Power in Africa,* ed. Heike Behrend and Ute Luig (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 5.

[62] Rakotojoelinandrasana Daniel, "Holistic and Integrated Care for Spirit, Mind, and Body as Practiced by the *Fifohazana,*" in *The Fifohazana: Madagascar's Indigenous Christian Movement,* ed. Cynthia Holder Rich (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 86.

seek to harm someone. Magic can be used to kill someone, make them sick, or to steal something from a person.[63]

Another way *tromba* is used is in magic and sickness. *Tromba* is said to cause sickness if a neighbor uses it against a person. To protect themselves people can wear red bracelets, red arm patches, or black cloth.[64] The bracelets and cloth are special items that must be purchased from specialists called *ombiasy.* An *ombiasy* is a medicine man or woman, a shaman, or diviner.[65]

Ordinarily, if there is an accident it is blamed on magic or sorcery. In a group interview with people from an evangelical church, it was explained that if a person cuts himself with a knife it is because of sorcery, not carelessness. There is no such thing as an accident. There is a spiritual cause for every single event.[66]

The goal of magic is to gain an advantage, normally for economic reasons, over someone. *Grigry* is sorcery and is employed most often by young women who desire to marry a *vazaha*. *Grigry* is used on a *vazaha* so he will fall in love and marry the young lady. In this way she gains economically. Getting this power over someone is expensive, but for many the potential for gaining the financial stability they desire makes the investment worthwhile.

People desire magic and *grigry* to bring security and stability to their life. Unfortunately, it often has the opposite effect. Magic breeds mistrust among neighbors, friends, and family. If one person does well, others will say it is because of magic. If a person fails in an endeavor, they blame magic that someone used against them. It is an

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[63] Interviewee 25, interview by author, Antsiranana, June 2018.

[64] Interviewee 23, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[65] *Diksionera Malagasy-Anglisy*, 78.

[66] Interviewee 10, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

endless cycle of blame and retribution. Individuals are constantly afraid someone is using magic against them, and therefore they constantly look for the most powerful protection.

Conclusion

Antsiranana is not what it appears at first sight. Entering a relatively modern city, one could be persuaded to think they have left the village behind. The outward appearance may be one of secularism, Islam, or Christianity but this is often a mirage. A thorough exam reveals the heartbeat of the culture is ATR. When the pulse of the people is taken, animistic beliefs flow from deep within the culture.

Sadly, the church too is driven by ATR belief and practice. Even though there is a denial of this, the reality is that animistic and ATR practices are woven throughout the life of the churches. Ancestors are honored. Customs and belief contrary to biblical teachings are followed. Too often the churches are not the light, but they have added another layer of darkness to the already light starved city of Antsiranana.

The diagnosis is not good for the church or the community. The heart of the people and church needs to be exposed. The next chapter will explore the response of the church to ATR and what has been attempted to counter traditional belief and practice. Additionally, a biblical response to ATR that churches and missionaries can utilize to address ATR will be examined.

CHAPTER 4

A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO AFRICAN
TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Introduction

This thesis examines the challenge of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and syncretism within churches in Antsiranana. Historically there have been several responses from missionaries and churches to ATR, ranging from complete rejection to total acceptance. Today, churches in Antsiranana struggle to address ATR biblically. This struggle is due partially to cultural pressures and partially as a result of a lack of understanding what to teach and how to address ATR from a biblical perspective. Addressing ATR in Antsiranana calls for an approach that is biblical and contextualized to the city and people. It is evident from the responses of the cultural survey that many church members also participate in ATR.

This chapter begins by looking at definitions of worldview, culture, and syncretism. The chapter moves next to a brief exploration of historical and current responses to ATR in Africa and then to Antsiranana specifically. Next is an examination of how to influence worldview change. This chapter concludes with an examination of the four central themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration as found in the Bible.

Definitions

Before exploring responses of the church to ATR it is important to define key terms. Worldview, culture, and syncretism are important areas to address in ATR and will be defined. Understanding these terms is helpful in the formation of a biblical response to ATR.

Worldview

Chalk expresses worldview as "a person's or group's universal theories (philosophical in nature, based upon religion, and lived out in relationships), which explain the appearance of truth or reality in their lives."[1] Worldview is well known and taught, however, many people struggle to express their worldview because it is ingrained into them and they do not think about it while processing information. Chalk writes,

Worldviews are implicit (expressed indirectly) by their nature. People are usually not aware of the ways their categories, systems of logic and basic assumptions form the way they see the world. One does not think about their worldview, but worldview does direct their thinking.[2]

Hiebert explains worldview as the foundational framework a group of people use to evaluate the world around them. He defines worldview as the "the foundational cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people makes about the nature of reality which they use to order their lives."[3] It is how people see the world and what they look for in the images, sounds, colors, and other stimuli that take place around them. Worldview is not something which requires effort to process in normal circumstances because it is well known.

James Sire gives a comprehensive definition of worldview:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.[4]

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[1] Jack Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa: Engaging Syncretism in the African Church through Philosophical Analysis of Worldviews* (Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2013), 18.

[2] Ibid., 16.

[3] Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming World Views: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), chap. 1, e-book.

[4] James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 17.

Sire explains that a worldview is a commitment; a matter of deep conviction. It can be shared as a story although it really is not a story at all, but a belief system. The beliefs may be true or not, but they are believed and held as true by an individual or group. Sire believes that worldview is often not known by a person, but it is shown by words and actions.[5]

Culture

Culture is patterns shared by a group and learned in a group. Culture is the rules of life people learn from parents, teachers, and others who have come before them. It is not something a person is born with, but something learned.[6] According to Richard Lewis culture is shared with other people and "incorporates such distinguishable attributes as language, attitudes, religion, artifacts, dress, beliefs, music and dance, art, sport, tools, etiquette, values, behaviors, food, and other material and nonmaterial components."[7]

Hiebert writes, "Cultures are made up of three interacting dimensions: ideas, feelings, and values."[8] These three dimensions guide the behaviors of individuals and the community as societies attempt to organize and regulate the thoughts and feelings of its members about God, other groups, and the world at large.[9] In *The Cultural Imperative,* Lewis shares, "A nation's culture is its *blueprint for survival* and, hopefully, success. It is an all-embracing pattern of a group's entire way of life, including a shared system of

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[5] Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 20-22.

[6] Harvie M. Conn, "Culture," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 253.

[7] Richard D. Lewis, *The Cultural Imperative: Global Trends in the 21st Century* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 2003), xxiii-iv.

[8] Hiebert, *Transforming World Views*, chap. 2.

[9] Conn, "Culture," 252.

values, social meanings, and agendas passed on from generation to generation."[10]

The goal is for a group to define themselves and to teach their values to those who come after them or desire to join them. Lewis states, "Culture has been succinctly defined as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one category of people from another."[11] People have been taught, or programmed, to know their culture, and culture is what separates them from other groups. This is the reason a cultural survey was carried out in Antsiranana—to learn the culture from the residents themselves. Understanding the culture will shape the response the church needs to reach the city with the gospel of Jesus.

Syncretism

Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou write that syncretism is "the mixing of different beliefs and practices in ways that distort the truth and power of the gospel."[12] It is important to understand syncretism because the cultural study of Antsiranana found many practices within the city which are not biblical in nature. This itself is not surprising in a culture where ATR is practiced because the focus is on gaining power for daily life. In this pursuit of power, individuals naturally adopt practices from others that help them in daily life. This is problematic in churches when members participate in ATR rituals and follow ATR beliefs.

When Christian teachings and practices are combined with traditional animistic beliefs and practices, syncretism occurs. Syncretism only not involves mixing animism and Christianity, but it can also occur when secular thought and beliefs are mixed with Christian teaching. One problem in the case of syncretism in Antsiranana churches is that

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[10] Lewis, *The Cultural Imperative*, xxiii.

[11] Ibid., 13.

[12] Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 13.

ATR is valued as much, or more, than the Bible and Christian teaching. The entire Malagasy Christian worldview needs transformed so they look at life from a biblical worldview and not from a traditional animistic Malagasy worldview.[13]

Understanding worldview, culture, and syncretism assist the church in responding to ATR. A lack of addressing ATR worldview has allowed many churches and individuals to be syncretistic in their worship of God. Next this chapter looks at the historical approach to ATR by missionaries and churches and how churches in Antsiranana have approached ATR.

Response of the Church

Throughout history, groups have addressed ATR differently. This section begins with a summary of how the earliest missionaries addressed ATR. Second, a look at how the African Initiated Churches (AICs) address ATR is examined. Finally, looking at the Baptist church and the Communanté Evangélique Indépendante de Madagascar (CEIM) church of Antsiranana, this section shows how the church responds to ATR in Antsiranana today.

Historical Response

Initially, the church ignored ATR and labeled it as a primitive religion, one not worth understanding. This view rose from the earliest missionary encounters with adherents to ATR and the accompanying ethnocentrism carried by the missionaries.[14] By their treatment of ATR a deeper issue was revealed. According to Irving Hexham, ATR was marginalized by many of the earliest writers on religion because of a racist heritage. He carefully points out that he is not calling these authors racist, only that a racial bias has

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[13] Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 378.

[14] Geoffrey Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962), 9-20.

resulted in their work. In *Understanding World Religions*, Hexham reveals the bias of many writers by the amount of material devoted to differing religions.[15]

Hexham makes the case that African religions continue to be neglected today. In his opinion the reason for this neglect is a lack of written religious texts. Hexham notes that most religious scholars study religions based on written texts, and as there are no written texts for ATR, this makes the study difficult.[16]

Hexham is not alone in his assessment of the neglect of African religion and culture. Not all call it racism, but the result is still the neglect of the African culture, and therefore of ATR. John Parratt writes,

> There was a tendency of missionary Christianity to devalue traditional African culture and especially to dismiss traditional religion as heathen or pagan. This attitude left no room for a sympathetic appreciation of all that was good in African culture, nor for the assimilation of traditional ideas and rituals into Christianity.[17]

One result of this missionary view of African culture is that ATR has not been treated adequately. The belief in the superiority of Christianity and Western culture was held by most early missionaries. Western culture and Christianity were tightly intertwined. This resulted in forcing Africans to abandon their culture in favor of Western culture if they accepted Christianity. This view ultimately resulted in a suppressed discussion about how to address ATR. The focus was not on Scripture alone, but Scripture and conversion to secular western thought. Unfortunately, this led to many African Christians struggling with the question of how to be an African Christian.[18]

The AIC movement grew from the neglect of ATR and African culture by missionaries and the colonial governments. Many of the founding leaders of AICs had been

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[15] Irving Hexham, *Understanding World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 31-45.

[16] Ibid., 43-44.

[17] John Parratt, introduction to *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. John Parratt, 2nd ed., SPCK International Study Guide 23 (London: SPCK, 1997), 3-4.

[18] Ibid., 4.

trained under and worked for the missionaries and churches during the time of colonial governments. Many AICs started during the independence movement in much of Africa. These experiences contribute to the response that AIC churches have to ATR.[19]

AIC Response

Many AICs were started as a result of African leaders and churches throwing off colonialism and paternalism in the churches. There are many different movements of AICs and many differing theologies associated with them. This section gives an overview of why AICs came about and some general beliefs they hold.[20]

This statement from the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) defines who AICs are: "AIC's are homegrown African churches, founded originally during the colonial period, that have developed indigenous forms of worship, theology and social organization, all deeply inspired by a vision that is both Christian and African."[21] These churches developed in response to a neglect of African culture by missionaries.

A political element is also involved, which is seen in the reference to colonialism. ATR is a holistic religion that involves all of life, as such, it includes not only God and spirits, but also leadership, politics, family, and social life. According to Mbiti, the AICs were formed as "attempts by African peoples to 'indigenize' Christianity and to

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[19] Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001), 23-29.

[20] Ibid., 10-20; 45-186. Anderson explains the history of AICs and the major categories. There exist two major categories of AICs: Ethiopian and Zionist. Ethiopian AICs are commonly called "African," while the Zionist are called "prophet-healing" or "spiritual" churches. The Ethiopian churches broke away from European mission churches as a political reaction against mission-funded churches and European leadership. However, they still utilize the same European structure, use translated hymns, and often the leaders use European style clerical robes. Zionist churches are the largest group of AICs and they get their authority from their prophet leaders. Zionist churches stress the Holy Spirit and healing, often being formed based on a leader's spiritual vision and power. Ibid., 15-16.

[21] Organization of African Instituted Churches, "About Us," accessed February 7, 2018, http://www.oaic.org/?page_id=51.

interpret and apply it in ways that, perhaps spontaneously, render Christianity both practical and meaningful to them."[22] AICs grew in part because they provided an avenue to throw off western and missionary authority. Churches could now dictate not only their own theology, but worship style, leadership system, and communicate their own standards for conduct to the people.

The basic beliefs of AICs are laid out in a document titled "AICs' Concept of Theology." [23] Among member churches there is a broad concept of theology. Each church is free to practice as they feel best and there is not an oversight of theological practices. The AICs make clear they do not believe in separation between religious beliefs and secular life. According to AICs, every aspect of life is theological.

AICs have four sources of theology: the Bible, the Holy Spirit, ATR, and "their own experiences or encounter with God."[24] Here is an interesting mix of authority for the churches. Not only are the Bible and the Holy Spirit seen as authoritative sources, but so are the experiences of men and ATR. It is clear in the document on theology that part of this experience is the vision of the founder of the different churches. These visions are placed on the same level as Scripture and the Holy Spirit.[25]

African Church Leader Response

Some African leaders attempt to make Christianity the fulfillment of ATR. ATR and African culture are portrayed in a good light and not painted in the negative light as many Westerners had done. Continuity is the belief that Africans can be saved through ATR. Gehman defines continuity as "the belief that all religions contain divine revelation

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[22] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 227.

[23] Organization of African Instituted Churches, "Downloads: Concept of Theology," accessed September 27, 2018, http://www.oaic.org/?page_id=1386.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

and are a means of salvation, though Christianity may be recognized as 'final' and 'superior.'"[26] Writing about continuity, Chalk states, "The idea here is that seeds of salvific beliefs can begin in ATR and can continue to develop into the full fruit of biblical salvation in Christianity."[27]

Gehman identifies Mbiti, Idowu, Emmanuel Twesigye, and J. N. K. Mugambi as proponents of continuity between ATR and Christianity.[28] Chalk adds Kwame Bediako to the group of men who accept ATR as a pre-Christian expression of God's revelation.[29] In the continuity model, general revelation is seen as key to salvation in ATR. In this view, God made himself known through nature to Africans. Therefore, by following ATR, one can be saved through the worship of the Supreme God or Creator as they sacrifice and pray to ancestors or other spirits.[30]

In addition to the examples given by Gehman and Chalk, a more recent example of the belief of continuity between ATR and Christianity is found in *Elements of African Traditional Religion*, by Mligo. Mligo clearly states his belief that ATR is sufficient for Africans. He boldly writes about the new wave of Africans rejecting Christianity as

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[26] Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, rev. ed. (Nairobi: East African Educational, 2005), 396.

[27] Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa*, 136.

[28] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion*, 397-98. For a full discussion on continuity and discontinuity see ibid., 396-402; Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa,* 136-52. Chalk and Gehman make the argument for Jesus being the only way to salvation while at the same time affirming that God often prepares the way for the gospel in a culture. However, this contradicts Idowu, Mbiti, Mugambi, Twesigye, and Bediako, who see ATR fulfilled in Christianity. See Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longmans, 1962); J. N. K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1989); Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*; John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1975).

[29] Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa*, 137-42. Chalk critiques Bediako and uses his writings as an example of continuity, which allow for salvation through ATR. For a fuller explanation of Bediako's views, see Bediako, *Christianity in Africa.*

[30] John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 65-69.

brought by Europeans and accepting traditional African customs and religion. He writes, "Many people in Africa have started to believe anew. African people have started to think of their religion as the one that worship the same God as that of Christianity and Islam."[31] Mligo continues by writing that many African scholars and missionaries, whom he does not name, believe that the

> traditional understanding of God share[s] much in common with the Christian understanding of God. In fact, many African scholars continue to urge Christian scholars to re-assess their assumptions, about the uniqueness of the Christian God and to acknowledge that God's revelation is not limited to the Jews alone, but has been extended similarly to many other people as well.[32]

Mligo attempts, like many Africans, to be what Chalk calls African Christians rather than Christian Africans.[33] In such a case they identify with their African culture more so than biblical Christianity. They reject the biblical claim of the exclusivity of Jesus in the name of African culture.

The acceptance of traditional beliefs and the rejection of the exclusivity of Jesus contradicts the biblical teaching that general revelation is not enough for salvation. Romans 1:18-2:16 teaches that general revelation leads to guilt, but not salvation. Only special revelation of who Christ is leads to salvation. General revelation does serve several purposes in preparing men and women for the special revelation of Jesus, but it cannot save.

In *Theological Pitfalls in Africa,* Byang Kato argues that universalism is a great threat to African Christianity. He highlights the danger in allowing ATR to influence the church and to dictate the beliefs of Christianity. Kato points to the African desire of seeking

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[31] Elia Shabani Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion: A Textbook for Students of Comparative Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 23, Kindle.

[32] Ibid., 55-56. Additionally, Mligo writes of a "hidden Christ" in ATR. He holds the view that through ATR man can know God. Through revelation in ATR Africans can know Christ who is hidden within its customs and traditions. Ibid., 103-4.

[33] Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa*, 152.

a unified community as one of these dangers. Desiring unified community results in the belief that all people will be saved, regardless of biblical teachings.[34] According to Chalk, some African theologians would like for Africans to be able to become Christians without having to change religions.[35] However, universalism must be rejected, and Christ alone must be taught as the way to a restored relationship with God. This is true in Antsiranana given the response of the churches there.

**Baptist and CEIM Church Response
in Antsiranana**

In the cultural survey conducted for this thesis, interviewees were asked about the relationship between the churches in Antsiranana and ATR. The desire was to discover how the churches addressed ATR in their teaching and discipleship. The hope was to find a teaching outline or specific material the church taught to adherents of ATR or for those coming to church out of ATR backgrounds in the city. Unfortunately, a response of the church is lacking in both direction and effectiveness was discovered.

Most of the interviews conducted for this thesis revealed the belief that it is not good for members of the church to follow ATR. When talking with church members, pastors, and elders of the Baptist and CEIM churches, all agreed traditional religion and *tromba* are not compatible with biblical teaching. However, this good news is offset by the reality acknowledged by respondents that many church members still participate in ATR. Since the churches teach against ATR, those who still practice it do it secretly.[36] A tourism office manager and leader in the local church said that although ATR is hidden by those who practice it, everyone knows who does it.[37]

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[34] Byang Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (Kisumu, Kenya: Evangel Publishing, 1975), 11-17.

[35] Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa*, 150.

[36] Interviewee 10, 16, 22, interviews by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[37] Interviewee 16, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

The basic response of church leaders to ATR in Antsiranana is to condemn it with no clear plan to combat it. In the Baptist church, when asked how they disciple someone coming out of ATR, the pastor's response was to teach the Bible. The pastor said teaching people how to follow and grow in Jesus is important to fight ATR, yet he did not have specifics beyond the statement. The pastor said it is a grave sin to follow traditional religion. He also pointed out that ATR causes family tension as well over whether someone participates in a ceremony for the ancestors or not.[38]

The pastor of the CEIM church said members are not allowed to practice ATR openly, although he admits some churches do allow it. To address ATR, he preaches the gospel and teaches the Bible. However, he does not have a specific teaching plan to disciple someone out of ATR. When he faces a situation where a person is possessed by an evil spirit, he teaches *tromba* is not good and will ask a person if they want to go to heaven. If the person says they want to go to heaven, then he prays for them until the spirit leaves the person.[39]

When dealing with members of the CEIM church who may be active in ATR, the pastor confronts the person directly. He does not make them leave the church because he says Jesus will change the person, not him as the pastor. His hope is that if the person continues in the church, then the person will continue to hear the gospel and eventually change.[40]

Local churches in Antsiranana are united in their condemnation of ATR. However, they also lack a clear biblical teaching to combat the problem. Given that many church members practice ATR secretly, according to the interviewees, a solid biblical response is needed. The worldview of the Malagasy needs to be addressed so they can

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[38] Interviewee 14, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[39] Interviewee 6, interview by author, Antsiranana, May 2018.

[40] Ibid.

begin to develop a biblical worldview. Attention is next given on how to influence worldview change.

Influencing Worldview Change

One problem with Christianity in ATR contexts is the ready acceptance of Jesus without any worldview change taking place. Many people in Antsiranana, as chapter 3 demonstrated, follow both ATR and attend church. True transformation can only come by the power of the Holy Spirit teaching and empowering Christians to walk as Jesus walked, and to see the world as God sees the world. Malagasy Christians must develop a biblical worldview to effectively live for Christ in Antsiranana.

Developing a Biblical Worldview

In *Transforming Worldviews,* Hiebert writes, "When we seek to win people to Christ, we look for some evidence of conversion. Our first tendency is to look for changes in behavior and rituals."[41] As Hiebert traces mission engagement from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, he comes to the conclusion that changing certain beliefs will not be sufficient to plant gospel-focused churches.[42] The reason is that people will often use biblical terms but attach different meanings. Hiebert believes that "underlying explicit beliefs is a deeper level of culture that shapes the categories and logic with which people think and the way they view reality."[43] Hiebert gives three areas that need addressed in conversion, and thus in becoming a disciple of Jesus: behavior, beliefs, and worldview.[44]

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[41] Hiebert, *Transforming World Views*, introduction.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

Hiebert rightly claims that if a person's

> behavior is based primarily on traditional rather than Christian beliefs, it becomes
> pagan ritual. Conversion must involve a transformation of beliefs, but if it is a change
> only of beliefs and not of behavior, it is false faith (James 2). Conversion may include
> a change in beliefs and behavior, but if the worldview is not transformed, in the long
> run the gospel is subverted and the result is a syncretistic Christo-paganism, which
> has the form of Christianity but not its essence. Christianity becomes a new magic
> and a new, subtler form of idolatry.[45]

Hiebert's assessments are observable among the people and churches in Antsiranana.

Beliefs have not been transformed or changed. Going to church is an added activity but

the underlying traditional belief system has remained the same. The actions of church

members have not shown a worldview change. Christianity has become a new magic to

protect against evil.

A biblical worldview is not simply a moral or a political statement, or even a

doctrinal statement. Although these are all good, a biblical worldview is much more. Sire

writes that worldviews are a matter of the heart.[46] He uses heart to mean the defining

element of a person. A person's worldview comes from the heart and the heart is where

"all thoughts and actions proceed," according to Sire.[47]

Fred Smith wrote *Developing a Biblical Worldview: Seeing Things God's Way*.

As the title makes clear, his goal is for Christians to not only profess allegiance to Jesus,

but to have a worldview that reflects biblical convictions. Smith walks through questions

and actions that will begin to lead someone to developing a biblical worldview.

According to Smith, developing a biblical worldview "is not something we

'adopt' in a single moment, but rather it is something we 'develop' over a lifetime."[48] It

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[45] Hiebert, *Transforming World Views*, introduction.

[46] Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 18.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Fred C. Smith, *Developing a Biblical Worldview: Seeing Things God's Way* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 5.

is not an instantaneous event because it takes time to grow and mature as a Christian. As a person learns more about the Bible, his worldview should change to incorporate the new biblical teachings he is learning.

Hiebert claims that worldviews are first changed at a specific point in time through a conscious decision and second by a process over time as new information is gathered and processed.[49] Hiebert agrees it does take time to change worldview, but he thinks the process can begin at a definitive time. As people or culture are exposed to biblical truth, they can decide to accept it at a specific time and change their worldview. However, as people are exposed over time to biblical teaching, they gradually change areas of belief and practice resulting in a worldview change. Worldview is changed at both a specific time and through the process of time.

Sire uses seven questions to consider as one examines worldviews. The answers to these questions are what essentially form a person's worldview.

1. What is prime reality—the really real? . . .
2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us? . . .
3. What is a human being? . . .
4. What happens to a person at death? . . .
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all? . . .
6. How do we know what is right and wrong? . . .
7. What is the meaning of human history?[50]

Smith uses four worldview questions to lead his readers into developing a biblical worldview: Who am I? Where am I? What is wrong? and What is the answer? In effect, by answering these questions one must deal with the four themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Answering these biblically will lead to a biblical worldview.

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[49] Hiebert, *Transforming World Views*, chap. 11.

[50] Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 20.

Smith makes clear that the way to develop a biblical worldview requires both time and intentionality.[51] Smith notes ways a person can be intentional in the process of developing a biblical worldview. First, exposure to the Bible. Intentionally reading Bible stories and passages, as well as entire books of Bible, is critical to developing a biblical worldview. Only by regular Bible intake can a person know what the Bible teaches. This step requires a time commitment to read and time for the Word of God to take root. Just as planting and harvesting do not take place at the same time, but a season of growth and maturing are required after the seed has been planted, so it is with worldview development: it takes time and patience.

According to Smith, the second way a person can be intentional in worldview development is by attending the teaching of the Bible. Smith describes this process as listening to preaching, participating in Bible studies, memorizing the Word, and meditation on the Word. Third, be exposed to people who have studied the Bible. Read what others who have studied the Bible have said about it, but do this after meditating on it for oneself.[52]

In *The Universe Next Door*, Sire explains several different worldviews. In his conclusion he gives four characteristics that a worldview should possess as a person considers adopting a worldview.[53] The worldview must be (1) intellectually coherent and consistent—an inconsistent worldview is of little use;[54] (2) able to deal with the data of reality and incorporate it appropriately;[55] (3) able to explain the world, human actions,

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[51] Smith, *Developing a Biblical Worldview,* 161-71. In these pages, Smith lays out how to change a worldview.

[52] Ibid., 161-71.

[53] Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 246-48.

[54] Ibid., 246.

[55] Ibid., 246-47.

emotions, and other things that it claims to explain;[56] and (4) able to meet personal needs.[57] Sire suggests that a person's worldview should be true because, in the end, truth is what will satisfy people.

Results in worldview may appear quickly for some people. For others it will be a much more gradual process. However, it is important to remember the overall goal is lasting worldview change, which will normally be a gradual process over time. The role of followers of Jesus is to be the catalyst to begin the process of worldview change. The process begins when an individual or group encounters the biblical truth. Although this process may take a long time to complete, it must have a starting point. Missionaries and churches must put into place ways to help Christians learn and study the Bible, whether through telling Bible stories, through podcasts, video, written, or other media. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit working in individuals and communities will lead to lasting worldview change.

Worldview Engagement in Africa

Chalk expresses his belief that the best way to combat syncretism in the church is through teaching a biblical worldview instead of doctrine alone.[58] He is not against teaching doctrine, but he is concerned about African Christians living faithful lives in everyday actions and not only adding Jesus to ATR: "Teaching doctrine that does not assimilate into one's worldview will ultimately be rejected and will not bring about change in praxis."[59] Chalk believes the teaching order of doctrine and worldview needs to be reversed. Instead of teaching doctrine first and then trying to make worldview fit into

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[56] Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 247.

[57] Ibid., 247-48.

[58] Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa*, 175.

[59] Ibid.

doctrine, Christians should be taught a biblical worldview and then doctrines will fit into their worldview. He explains,

> What is needed in an African convert to Christianity is a change in worldview to one that can assimilate Christian doctrines as they are learned. The current approach is to teach the particulars expecting the universal to change. In my opinion, the equation needs to be reversed. My recommended approach is to teach the universal—the biblical worldview—and the Christian particulars will fall into place.[60]

Chalk's strategy to change the African syncretism is to teach Genesis 1-11. He believes these chapters contain all of the foundational elements of a biblical worldview. Referring to Genesis 1-11, Chalk writes, "It explains the way the universe was originally and why things are the way they are now. It tells why there is sin in the world and why mankind is separated from the physical presence of God. It also introduces God's plan to restore that separation."[61]

Worldview is key to making disciples in ATR contexts. It is necessary for those coming to Christ to begin to make changes in how they view the world and how they respond to the world around them. It is a process that takes time and effort from the local believers as well as missionaries. Bible intake is vital. Memorization of Scriptures, learning from Scriptures, and meditating on them are important areas on which to focus. A forest does not grow overnight and neither do Christians from an ATR background gain a biblical worldview overnight. Yet, having a solid biblical worldview is foundational to transforming ATR cultures and syncretistic churches into biblical churches and cultures.

Biblical Response to ATR

Responding to ATR is vital for the life and effectiveness of the church. Teaching the Bible is central to a biblical response. However, there needs to be a focused approach and not random, disjointed teachings. ATR is diverse and no single response will work

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[60] Chalk, *Making Disciples in Africa*, 175.

[61] Ibid., 176.

everywhere and address all the questions that arise.[62] For this reason, any response will need to be adapted to a specific setting.

The Bible is a narrative telling the story of God throughout history. It reveals who God is, why man is on earth, what has gone wrong, what solution to life is, and what the future holds. Beginning with creation and moving story by story through the Bible, God reveals himself to man. God reveals how man should live, what the ultimate purpose of life is, and how to experience daily power for this life.[63]

Using this approach, the Bible tells God's story in a way that is true to the Bible and understandable to the Malagasy. Looking at creation, fall, redemption, and restoration in the biblical narrative reveals God's character and work. The Malagasy view of spirits, divinities, ancestors, and magic is addressed biblically through stories of creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration.

Creation

Genesis 1and 2 teach the biblical account of creation. These chapters are foundation for Christian belief and worldview. Creation is the beginning for mankind and all physical material. Readers are introduced to God, the world, and man, which are seen in their original condition. There is much to learn in these opening two chapters of the Bible. A few themes arise in creation which will be explored: man's relationship with God, man's relationship with other people, man's relationship with himself, and man's relationship with creation.[64]

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[62] Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 370.

[63] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 63-64.

[64] Bruce Riley Ashford, "The Story of Mission: The Grand Biblical Narrative," in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Riley Ashford (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 7-16.

Creation teaches that men are to love God. The Bible reveals this, as does creation itself. Romans 1:18-20 makes it abundantly clear that man has known of his need to love God. Ashford writes, "Indeed man's highest call is to love the Lord God."[65]

God created the world, but he is not of this world. He is involved with the world, but he does not come from the earth. Ashford writes about two truths to remember: "God relates to the world, but the world is not God; God's world is good, but it is marred by the effects of human rebellion."[66]

Men and women were also created to love one another and for community. Man was created to be in relationship with God and with other people. In Genesis 2:18, God said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper as his complement." This is community as it should be with the "man and woman depending upon one another, as they both depend upon God."[67]

Samuel Kunhiyop refers to community as "being social."[68] Being social, intelligence, emotions, having a conscience, and the ability to relate to God, are what constitute the *imagio Dei*. *Imagio Dei* is central to the scripture and, as Carl F. H. Henry writes, teaches "that humanity by creation uniquely bears the image of God."[69] Bearing God's image is unique to mankind and sets man apart from all other created things. Wayne Grudem explains, "The fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God."[70]

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[65] Ashford, "The Story of Mission," 9.

[66] Ibid., 7.

[67] Ibid., 9.

[68] Samuel W. Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 67.

[69] Carl F. H. Henry, "Image of God," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 591-94.

[70] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 442. For a full discussion on the *imagio Dei*, see pp. 442-50 as Grudem explains this concept in detail.

Man was created to work and was given the responsibility to care for creation in Genesis 1:28. Man related to the creation by ruling over and subduing it. There was no tension between man and creation. Man was given dominion over the animals, to care for them and not abuse them. Man expressed his dominion by naming the animals that God made and brought to him, and by working the garden of Eden where God had placed him.

Everything God created was good. Nothing was described as bad or evil. The Bible reports that after creating everything, God looked at all his creation and said it was very good. All the material world, including the man and woman, were created good. This is an important truth. Sin did not exist in creation and evil was not present. The question to be answered is this: if there was no sin at creation everything was created good, what happened? The answer is found in the fall of man.

Fall

Everything God created was good: the earth, the animals, the plants, and man. The man, called Adam, had community with his wife, who was named Eve. Adam worked in God's garden that provided for his needs. Everything was perfect. What went wrong?

Adam and Eve chose to disobey by eating fruit from a forbidden tree. God told Adam and Eve they could eat from any tree in the garden except for one: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told them if they ate from this tree they would die. The Bible recounts how the serpent spoke to Eve and twisted God's words, thus deceiving her. Eve looked at the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and saw it was good and pleasing to the eye. Then she took some fruit from the forbidden tree, ate it, and gave some to her husband who was with her. Their eyes were opened, and they then knew that they were naked. Adam and Eve attempted to cover their nakedness by sewing fig leaves together.

Man's relationship with God was forever altered as a result of disobeying him. The relationship God and man shared in the garden of Eden was broken. Ashford states,

Adam and Eve sought goodness and happiness on their own, apart from God, but when they ate the fruit and their eyes were opened, they did not see goodness and happiness; rather, what they saw was their own nakedness. They were naked before him and unable to clothe themselves, not just physically but in every respect: physically, spiritually, morally, intellectually, and emotionally.[71]

Adam and Eve attempted to hide from God, but they could not. Their sin was found out and there now existed a broken relationship with God that they could not fix. There was a spiritual death and separation that occurred in the fall.

Man's relationship with other people was also broken at the fall. This is clearly seen when Cain murders Abel. In Genesis 6, the Bible informs the reader that because of sin, God was destroying the earth and man. Marriage was also affected by sin. Genesis 3:16 says Eve would desire her husband but he would now rule over her. Although God had made man and woman and joined them together, strife entered the marriage relationships because of sin. This is evident in Antsiranana as sin and corruption of God's design is clearly seen. Chapter 3 outlined how marriage is corrupted and men and women do not marry but they pervert the relationship which God established.

As a result of the fall, man began worshipping created things rather than God, the Creator. Man is in love with himself and not with God. Romans 1:24-25 is clear: men worship the creation and not the creator. Men create idols for themselves instead of worshiping God. In Genesis 11, men sought to make a name for themselves, in essence being in control of themselves by the building of the tower of Babel.

Sin broke man's relationship with the creation as well. Work would now be difficult. The ground was cursed and would produce thistles and thorns. By the sweat of man's brow, he would now have to work and make a living. Romans 8:22 points out the world is groaning under the curse of sin. Natural disasters now occur. The woman would have pain in childbirth. Physical death comes with the brokenness between man and creation. Man's body, created from the dust of the ground, would now die. Disease and

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[71] Ashford, "The Story of Mission," 11.

sickness would make their way into the world and man would not live forever physically with God.

The result of the fall is far reaching for all men and women. A broken relationship with God and all of creation are a direct consequence of sin. Knowing where man comes from and why the situation of the world is like it is leads to the ability to answer the next question: What is the solution or answer to the problems man faces?

Redemption

When God cursed Eve for disobeying him, he also revealed hope. Genesis 3:15 states that there is hostility between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, or Satan. There would be someone to destroy the serpent. Ashford writes, "The biblical story is a redemptive story, the story of God redeeming his image-bearers. Indeed, all of creation awaits its freedom from bondage to corruption, which will be accomplished with the revealing of God's sons (Rom. 8:18-25)."[72] God saving man or redeeming him is the very heart of the gospel. Ashford points out that the Bible reveals this message to man throughout its entirety: "Jesus Christ is the Redeemer, and the gospel is the good news that Jesus is the Savior of the world."[73]

According to Bob Calvert and David Crane, animists see no need for redemption. They do not have a correct view of the creation and fall. As a result, they hold to an incomplete or distorted view of God. This has led them to only seek power for this life and not concern themselves with establishing a relationship with God. Instead, the most important thing in life for the Malagasy is to have a good relationship with ancestors and not offend the spirits.[74]

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[72] Ashford, "The Story of Mission," 12.

[73] Ibid., 13.

[74] R. L. Calvert and David R. Crane, "Mission to Animists," in Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 273-74.

Gehman also argues that redemption is not found in ATR. Gehman writes,

Throughout our study of ATR, we have found one major significant void: the absence of any traditional hope or provision of salvation from sin and divine wrath. . . . [R]edemption from sin is lacking in ATR. The hope of eternal life with God is absent in ATR.[75]

To be unredeemed is to be condemned. Ashford writes, "To be without God is to be without hope" and "to be saved is to have hope, to be restored to relationship with God."[76] Yet, through Jesus, man can be redeemed to God once again. Redemption is buying back sinners from the bondage of sin. Grudem describes it as Jesus paying the ransom and "we have been delivered from bondage to the guilt of sin and from bondage to its ruling power in our lives."[77] Colossians 1:13 says God the Father "has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves." The atoning sacrifice of Jesus has provided a way for man to be brought back into relationship with God.

In Mark 12:29-30, Jesus says the greatest commandment is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." This command can only be realized through a redeemed people who have a relationship with God. There is no way to love God without knowing him from Scripture.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, man becomes a new creation if he is in Christ. The old has gone away, been buried, and the new man is to look differently and think differently. Instead of living to please the sinful desires of the flesh, man is seeking to live holy and please God. The new outlook is a transformed one which seeks what is best for others instead of for oneself. The end result which is sought is restoration.

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[75] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion*, 367.

[76] Ashford, "The Story of Mission," 13.

[77] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 580-81.

Restoration

The reality of being restored into a relationship with God is one that should give peace to the Christian. Restoration corrects what went wrong at the fall when man sinned against God. Restoration is not only a future reality of salvation, but it is significant for the present. Creation, which has been marred by sin, will be restored.

In *The Mission of God,* Christopher Wright outlines restoration in the biblical context. He uses the Jubilee as an Old Testament example of God's concern for his people. The Jubilee encompasses social, economic, theological, and practical living for Israel in the Old Testament. According to Wright, the Jubilee was meant to offset the natural tendencies of men to sin against each other and God, while also pointing the people to future hope in the messiah.[78]

Central to restoration is Jesus' death on the cross. Without the cross of Jesus there is no redemption or restoration. Wright points out that only in the cross (1) there is forgiveness, "justification, and cleansing for guilty sinners"; (2) evil powers are defeated; (3) there is "release and freedom from the fear of death"; (4) enemies are reconciled; and (5) all of creation will finally be healed[79]

Ashford writes, "The Scriptures teach that, in the end, man's relationship with God will be finalized. Those who die apart from Christ will receive eternal torment (Matt. 5:22; 8:12), while those who die in Christ will receive eternal life (Rev. 21:2-4)."[80] Eternal life or eternal torment will be final. Once judgement has occurred there is no changing one's outcome. The only way to be restored to God is through Christ.

Restoration in relationship with other people. A result of the cross and the restoration for man to God is the restoration of relationships between men and women. In

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[78] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 289-23.

[79] Ibid., 315.

[80] Ashford, "The Story of Mission," 15.

the New Testament, Jesus shares the greatest command is to love God with all one's being, quoting Deuteronomy 6:4-5 from the Old Testament. Jesus also made clear the second command was to love one's neighbor as one loves himself, by quoting Leviticus 19:18. If a person is following Christ, he must be restored to God through the cross, which will lead to a love for God and a love for other people. Loving others should lead to restoring broken relationships in this life. Ultimately, relationships will be restored in the future when God restores the entire world; what was broken at the fall will be restored in the end.

Loving others the same as loving oneself also addresses the many problems with magic and curses so prevalent within ATR. People use magic to gain an advantage over other people because people love themselves more than they love God or others. The Bible teaches to love people, not curse them. Salvation restores relationships and transforms worldviews and should result in the decline of magic use among church members.

Restoration of heavens and earth. According to Isaiah 65:17 God will create new heavens and a new earth. Second Peter 3:13 also points to the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells. In Revelation 21:1, John saw a vision of a new heaven and new earth because the first heaven and first earth had passed away.[81] Ashford writes, "This is the doctrine of creation come full circle."[82] Grudem explains, "The new creation will be a place of great beauty and abundance and joy in the presence of God."[83]

God will be present in the new creation and his people will be in His presence forever. It will be a place of genuine worship.[84] Man will be able to experience the fullness of a good relationship with God once more.

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[81] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1158.

[82] Ashford, "The Story of Mission," 16.

[83] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1163.

[84] Ibid., 1164.

No need for restoration in ATR. As noted, Geham makes clear that "hope of eternal life with God is absent in ATR."[85] About ATR Kunhiyop writes,

> There is no clear, systematic teaching regarding judgment after death, but it is generally understood that a good life will result in being joined with the ancestors after death, while an evil life will result in total oblivion, the idea of which is totally abhorrent to Africans.[86]

Followers of ATR do not believe in restoration with God because they will either become an ancestor spirit continuing to live in the spirit world or they will cease to exist.

Calvert and Crane agree that animists do not see a need for restoration with God. ATR teaches that a person dies and joins the spirit world. There is no punishment for sin or reward for good living after death. In ATR, if a person has no relationship with God it is not a problem after death. The only place for punishment or reward, according to ATR, is in the present physical life a person lives. In ATR, death brings transition to another form of living, as a spirit, not restoration or punishment.[87]

Having looked at creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, it is good to remember that each of these parts "is not only God's plan, but it is also his story."[88] Solid biblical teaching is necessary to effectively disciple Malagasy people in Antsiranana. The struggle within the churches and in the city with people following ATR can only be addressed by a changed worldview. The worldview of men and women must be derived from Scripture, not from ATR traditions.

Understanding worldview and culture are important when responding to ATR. Developing a biblical worldview among the members of the Malagasy churches is vital in

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[85] Gehman, *African Traditional Religion*, 367.

[86] Kunhiyop, *African Christian Theology*, 213.

[87] Calvert and Crane, "Mission to Animists," 274-75.

[88] George Robinson, "The Gospel and Evangelism," in Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 77.

the battle against ATR. Practical approaches to teach the Bible and address the struggles of those coming from ATR backgrounds are explored next.

Practical Cultural Engagement

There is truth in the response to ATR by the local pastors and churches in Antsiranana. The Bible does need to be taught. The Bible is what changes lives. The pastors and churches need to teach the people of the city to consume the Bible as the living word of God. However, having a teaching plan is also beneficial. A strategic approach to address ATR and make disciples is better than randomly teaching passages of Scripture. The search for a practical, effective, and contextualized approach to reach the Malagasy and combat ATR now leads to an examination of the 3D Gospel.

3D Gospel

In *The 3D Gospel*, Jayson Georges writes about three themes that emerge from the fall: shame, guilt, and fear. These themes become the building blocks of three types of cultures: honor-shame, guilt-innocence, and fear-power. Georges explains that these types of cultures are the primary way a particular group views the world.[89] He is clear, however, that every culture is influenced by all three, yet one is more dominant in each culture.[90]

The predominant response among the Malagasy of Antsiranana is fear, which is clearly seen in the cultural survey and must be addressed if the Malagasy are to be evangelized and discipled. The people are afraid of the ancestors, spirits, and magic because they are perceived as being powerful. To deal with the power of the spirts and magic, the Malagasy look for more power. Georges explains,

> Fear-power cultures live in constant fear of invisible powers. They fear a potential misstep may open a vulnerable point for spiritual influence or expose them to harm—

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[89] Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* (n.p.: The 3D Gospel, 2014), 10-11.

[90] Ibid., 15-16.

such as an accident, a bad dream, or even possession. People in fear-based contexts never know what evil the capricious spirits might inflict. To control the unknowns of life and ward off evil influences, they resort to magical rituals. Secret techniques harness spiritual power to avoid harm and invite blessings. People strive to live in peace with the forces that cohabitate their world. Disharmony with the spiritual could prove disastrous.[91]

People constantly look for power to protect themselves. How can the gospel be proclaimed in such a culture? What would prove to be the most effective means for the Malagasy to hear and understand who the God of the bible is and who Jesus is? Georges asserts that to effectively make disciples in differing cultures one must contextualize the message of the gospel. In a fear-power culture, one needs to utilize the vocabulary of spiritual combat language.[92] The gospel message remains unchanged, yet it needs to be shared in language and in a form relevant to the listener, not the communicator. In *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God*, Rick Love shares an example when he recounts,

> I got little response from my Muslim friends when I told them that "Jesus was sent by God to take away our sins' (1Jn 3:5). This standard presentation, which focuses on forgiveness, didn't meet their felt need. However, when I said, 'Jesus was sent by God to destroy the works of the devil' (1 Jn 3:8), I received their undivided attention.[93]

For men and women to follow Christ and turn from darkness, they need to hear the truth of the gospel in a way that speaks to their heart. They also must be able to trust this truth. To trust the truth, people must see that Jesus is more powerful, and by following him, he can overcome the spirits and the evil of this world. Trusting Jesus will lead to a power encounter. Then, after knowing Jesus and experiencing he is trustworthy, the gospel must also transform their culture and community. For the gospel to take root, these three encounters are necessary: truth encounter, power encounter, and cultural encounter.

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[91] Georges, *The 3D Gospel*, 26.

[92] Ibid., 59-60.

[93] Rick Love, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God: Church Planting among Folk Muslims* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 99.

Truth encounter. Love describes truth encounters as being "both personal and propositional."[94] People must personally encounter Jesus. John 14:6 lays out that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Having knowledge of Jesus is not enough. The Bible teaches that people need a relationship with him. In this way, the truth is personally known through a relationship with Jesus.[95]

Love explains that truth is also propositional. To be a believer, one must encounter Jesus personally and "believe certain truths about him."[96] The teachings that connect the creation of the world, demonstrate God's place of authority as creator, and what went wrong are necessary to know for those in ATR societies. Douglas Hayward reminds missionaries of the need for truth among animists: "Animists are a people who do not have the full light of God's revelation and as a consequence suffer from spiritual ignorance and even Satanic delusions."[97]

Additionally, ATR communities need to know the Bible stories showing Jesus overcoming Satan and spirits since the fall of the world. They need to connect the creation and fall with the redemption Jesus provides. They must know the truth of the Bible in order to stand firm in the faith when they face resistance from Satan in what is referred to as a power encounter.

Power encounter. ATR followers who have heard and know the truth may still not accept the message because ATR is about power. The spirits and ancestors in Antsiranana control the people through fear. For people to neglect the ancestors and follow Jesus completely, they need more than knowledge. Fortunately, the Bible is not just about

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[94] Love, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God*, 90.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid., 91.

[97] Douglas J. Hayward, "The Evangelization of Animists: Power, Truth or Love Encounter?" *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 14, no. 4 (1997): 156.

words, but is about a demonstration of the power of God. In 1 Corinthians 2:4-5, Paul writes that he did not come with human wisdom and speech by a "powerful demonstration by the Spirit, so that your faith might not be based on men's wisdom but on God's power." The same is true today among followers of ATR. They need to hear the truth, but they also need to see the power of God work.

Love defines a power encounter as "the demonstration of God's power, through God's servants, over the work of Satan and demons, based on the work of Christ, the Great Commission and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, resulting in the salvation of the lost, the upbuilding of the Body and the glory of God."[98] Van Rheenen writes about the power of God:

> The issues of everyday life are dealt with in relation to the reality of the sovereignty of God and our allegiance to him. The idols of pagan gods must be torn down. Ungodly magic must be shown to be ineffective before the mighty power of God. Those oppressed and possessed by animistic powers must be freed by God's mighty hand. The inroads of Satan into our institutions and customs must be confronted, and the ethics, morality, and purity of God must be reestablished. These confrontations with the forces of Satan require visible demonstrations of the power of God in animistic contexts.[99]

Followers of ATR live in fear of the spirits and the ancestors. To change their allegiance and surrender to Jesus, they must experience his power over these spirits, divinities, and the magic. They must know who it is that has overcome these powers. Once they know who Jesus is and see and experience his power, they are able to trust him as Lord and Savior, which will begin the process of a cultural encounter.

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[98] Love, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God*, 113. Love writes that there are two camps in dealing with power encounters. A broad view focuses on all spiritual warfare and conflicts believers face with the spiritual world. A narrow view has an emphasis on signs and wonders. Love's view of power encounter is a broad view. While not stating signs and wonders do not exist, he does not focus on them. Power encounter in a broad view is spiritual warfare, which takes place in an individual's life as the gospel is shared and comes against the powers of Satan, and although it may include signs and/or wonders, they are not a requirement in a power encounter.

[99] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 62.

Cultural encounter. Van Rheenen writes, "Power encounter confronts non-Christian elements in society rather than allowing these powers and sometimes superstitions go unchecked."[100] The purpose of the power encounter is for conversion of the individuals and the transformation of culture. A cultural change must take place after the unbiblical elements have been identified and Christ proven stronger. Otherwise, as Van Rheenen explains, "Christian conversion without worldview change in reality is syncretism."[101]

Three main type of rituals are to be addressed among followers of ATR. First are life-cycle rituals, such as birth, death, marriage, and circumcision. An example from Antsiranana is the Malagasy celebration of when a child's two front teeth come in. Second are calendar rituals often associated with agriculture or religious rites. Examples include planting, harvest, full moon, or new moon. The last category are crisis rituals. These deal with sickness, droughts, accidents, or curses.[102]

To effectively transform a culture, rituals need to be addressed. They need to be evaluated from a theological standpoint by the church. Some of the rituals may be kept as they are, others may be outright rejected by the church, and still other rituals may be kept and transformed to give them clear biblical meanings.[103]

Conclusion

This chapter looked at culture and worldview, expressing the view that having biblical worldview is key to transforming ATR societies into Christian cultures. Historically, the church and missionaries have neglected ATR beliefs, and as a result they

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[100] Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts*, 87.

[101] Ibid., 89.

[102] Love, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God*, 178-79.

[103] Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, 386.

have dismissed African culture. The response from AICs has not been sufficient to change worldview, and in many cases it sought to make Christian beliefs fit into ATR worldviews.

A proper biblical response involves teaching a biblical worldview, which includes having a proper understanding of creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration as taught in the Bible. In ATR cultures, the best method of Bible teaching is chronological Bible storying. It contextualizes the gospel into a method from which Africans best learn: stories. Learning these stories will lead to worldview change as well as doctrinal fidelity within the African context.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This thesis focused on a cultural study of the city of Antsiranana in Northern Madagascar and how the church responds to ATR. Examining the city and people by utilizing a cultural study identified traits that need to be addressed to have healthy Christ-centered churches. Focusing on ATR practices and beliefs has shed light on the culture and the people. This final chapter will synthesize the observations and information from the previous chapter into a practical approach to effectively communicate the gospel leading to thriving, Christ-centered churches in Antsiranana.

What Has Been Learned

To communicate the gospel effectively in Antsiranana there needs to be an understanding of the setting and the people. Following is a summary of what has been learned through the research for this thesis. Looking at African Religion, culture, and the church situation in Antsiranana will lead to the heart of what needs to be addressed to establish Christ-centered churches in the city.

African Religion

ATR is complex and encompasses all of life. Not every African culture believes or practices ATR in the same manner, which accounts for the variations found from place to place. A person is born into the religion, and as such, it is learned from a young age. ATR beliefs are passed on orally and not written, which makes the study of ATR difficult.

In ATR there is widespread belief that God exists and is the creator of the world, both the seen physical world and the unseen spiritual world. In ATR, God is real, unique,

and the absolute controller of the universe.[1] However, God is distant from man and not approachable.[2]

As shown in chapter 2, belief in divinities is complex in ATR. The purpose of divinities in ATR is to interact with men and mediate between God and man.[3] Divinities are believed to be able to easily access God because they are spiritual beings and therefore men must go through divinities to reach God.[4]

However, in Malagasy culture in Antsiranana, the people do not concern themselves with divinities. In their belief structure, the ancestors are the main intermediaries between God and man. The Malagasy structure would include God, spirits, ancestors, and magic, omitting the divinities but still having mediators between man and God. The role the divinities are responsible for, mediation between God and man, is still accounted for, but through a different means.

In ATR there is a universal belief in spirits. Spirits can be good or bad. Spirits can be associated with a specific location or object.[5] Spirits may aid or hinder the work a person is trying to accomplish. Most of the time, men and women try to avoid encountering spirits because they are unpredictable and considered dangerous to humans.[6]

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[1] E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 148-65.

[2] Malcolm J. McVeigh, *God in Africa: Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion and Christianity* (Cape Cod, MA: Claude Stark, 1974), 109.

[3] Elia Shabani Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion: A Textbook for Students of Comparative Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 96, Kindle.

[4] John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2015), 68, Kindle.

[5] Richard J. Gehman, *African Traditional Religion in Biblical Perspective*, rev. ed. (Nairobi: East African Educational, 2005), 215.

[6] Ibid.

Ancestors are well respected and considered a part of the family even though they have physically died.[7] They care for and protect families in addition to punishing those who break rules. According to ATR, ancestors were once living men and women who now have died and live in the spirit world. Because they possess knowledge of both worlds, they act as mediators between man and spirit world.[8]

Magic is used to manipulate the spirits to gain an advantage over other people. Specialists carry out the practice and can use magic for good or evil. Magic itself is seen as neutral, but the purpose and intent of the person using it makes it either good or bad.[9]

In Antsiranana, ATR shapes all of life for its followers. The worldview of adherents is shaped by God, spirits, ancestors, and magic. All of life is explained by ATR belief and practice with the ancestors acting as living guides for life and mediators between the living and the dead. ATR influences and dictates behaviors in every area of life, including the family relationships, social relationships, economic practices, as well as church and religious practice.

Culturally

Rapid growth of the city has resulted in many changes to the traditional Malagasy way of life in Antsiranana. There has been an increase in the number of new residents from all over Madagascar, as well as from foreign countries, leading to the mixing of cultures. City life is different from the village life many people grew up knowing, contributing to the changes in the way people live and relate to one another. Difficult economic situations that many people find themselves in has led to changes in

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[7] Paul G. Hiebert, R. Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tiénou, *Understanding Folk Religion: A Christian Response to Popular Beliefs and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 61.

[8] Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, 184.

[9] Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1991), 149-66.

the family structure, social relationships, and responsibilities. Many Malagasy grapple with these realities as they seek a better life in Antsiranana.

Some of the areas highlighted in chapter 3 are of concern because of the resulting struggles they bring to everyday life. The breakdown of families in Antsiranana is a serious problem and the abandonment of marriage causes many problems in homes and in the city. Men and women seek money and neglect family responsibility, which leads to social struggles. The people turn to ATR and *tromba,* the ceremony of being possessed by a spirit or ancestor, to gain guidance to navigate these struggles.

Fihavanana, a Malagasy traditional way of life in which people mutually care for each other while sharing resources and living life together, is breaking down in the city, leaving many people searching for community. Many young people are gravitating to the gangs known as *la foroche*. These gangs cause many problems for residents in various communities around the city.

ATR influences business through the utilization of magic. Many business establishments, from small scale-market vendors and small shops owners to larger companies use magic to gain an advantage over competitors. They purchase amulets from specialists as they seek protection against rivals who may use magic against them. Additionally, many people sacrifice cows to gain favor with the spirits and ancestors so they can be successful in their work.

Religiously, the belief in *Zanahary,* Creator or God, is widespread, and spirits influence daily life. People try to avoid upsetting the spirits or encountering them. They seek protection from them in magic and charms. The ancestors control much of people's lives. The people seek to appease the ancestors as well as seek out their guidance and blessing through offerings and sacrifices. Magic is used against neighbors, family members, and others to gain any advantage in life. People fear magic but at the same time seek its power to be able to live a better life.

Church Situation

Church members and community leaders confess that people often attend church and participate in ATR rituals and practices. Church leaders say they recognize ATR is not good and that it should be rejected; however, their actions send a different message. One glaring example was given in chapter 3, describing the burial of an infant. The pastor and elder of the church, by participation in the traditional burial practice, have given their approval to ATR by their actions while condemning ATR in speech.

Church leaders state that teaching the Bible is the solution when dealing with ATR. Although they realize the need to combat ATR with Bible teaching, churches find themselves without a clear plan of action. Teaching the Bible is a correct response but knowing what to teach is vitally important. Many church members have accepted Jesus without changing their worldview and belief system. The result is syncretism and it needs to be addressed.

Many people identify as Christian yet still participate in ATR practices and rituals. The influence of ATR in the churches and in the lives of church members is a concern. Syncretism is a problem within the churches. ATR is far reaching and involved in many areas of church members' lives. The church should be different because it should be established on biblical teaching and not Malagasy traditional life. Yet, previous chapters have shown how ATR has influenced the church, pastors, and elders, resulting in syncretism.

How can churches in Antsiranana make disciples whose lives are changed and shaped by the gospel and not traditions? A biblical response to ATR is needed. Chapter 4 explored that need. This chapter goes further and proposes an action plan for teaching the biblical themes outlined in the previous chapter: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

Addressing ATR in the Church

If the church is to confront ATR and respond biblically, then a strategic response is needed. Based on what has been learned throughout this thesis, the primary area of

concern deals with worldview engagement. The Malagasy worldview that has entered the church needs to be replaced with a biblical worldview, creating a biblical Malagasy worldview approach to life.

The proposed method of worldview engagement is through biblically addressing ATR through the themes of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. These themes should be taught using Chronological Bible Storying (CBS) at the foundational level. To ensure everyone in the church is taught and equipped, the teaching should be divided into three levels: (1) general member teaching; (2) leader and pastor training; and (3) Bible school for advanced training. Before looking at the various levels of training, it is important to understand orality.

Orality

Orality must be understood properly if the Bible is to be communicated effectively in ATR contexts. Many missionaries come from literate backgrounds and need to understand how oral cultures learn. Missionaries must learn to communicate in ways that oral learners can understand if the gospel is to be accepted and digested by oral cultures. As previously mentioned in this thesis, because ATR is passed on orally it has led to some researchers to dismiss ATR and African culture altogether. However, orality is not a crutch or a blemish on African society, but it needs to be understood in order to teach the Bible effectively.

In *Tell the Story: A Primer on Chronological Bible Storying,* Hayward Armstrong compares preferred learning styles of oral and literate learners.[10] According to Armstrong, people who are predominately oral communicators learn by hearing and seeing, observing and imitating. They talk about events rather than talking about words and their meanings. They use stories to store information to share or for personal use.

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[10] Hayward Armstrong and Southern Baptist Convention, *Tell the Story: A Primer on Chronological Bible Storying* (Rockville, VA: International Centre for Excellence in Leadership, 2003), 15.

Oral communicators are also extremely good at memorizing information from the past. Many of these learning methods are different from literate communicators who read, study, and analyze. Literate communicators talk about words and concepts and store information in groups or categories in print form. Since they can store information in print form, they seek new information that they can learn without needing to memorize all of it.[11]

David Sills makes a compelling argument for using oral teaching methods in *Hearts, Heads, and Hands*.[12] According to Sills, most people in the world are not able to read at a high enough level to learn new information. For this reason, using literate models and only using books is not the solution to reaching many people in this world. Sills notes that 90 percent of evangelism, discipleship, and leadership training materials are created for literate people.[13] However, only 20 percent of the people in the world are able to read new information, follow the author's thesis and argument, and then respond in writing to what they have read.[14] Even though many people can read news headlines and words on a page, it is not proof that they understand what they read. Sills concludes, "Pastoral training models must consider the reading abilities and learning styles of the world's cultures."[15] Sills' focus is pastoral training, but his conclusion is applicable to not only pastors but to all members of the church when seeking to make disciples.

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[11] Armstrong and Southern Baptist Convention, *Tell the Story*, 15.

[12] M. David Sills, *Hearts, Heads, and Hands: A Manual for Teaching Others to Teach Others* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 6-9.

[13] Ibid., 7.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

Chronological Bible Storying

CBS is a method of telling Bible stories chronologically to lay a biblical

foundation and communicate the gospel of Jesus accurately and effectively.[16] The goal is

for the hearers to easily place the Bible stories in a chronological order that makes sense,

while also being able to draw biblical truths out of each story as they formulate a biblical

theology. J. O. Terry wrote a training manual on storying for the International Mission

Board called the *ISC Storying Manual*. He describes CBS:

> A special form of Bible Storying which follows a biblical timeline, taking advantage
> of presenting the Old Testament foundation to adequately prepare listeners before
> introducing the Gospel. Other forms of Bible Storying may not follow a longer
> timeline but may be more thematic or may even be a single appropriate story or two
> at a time of ministry. In all of these there is an intentional preserving of the integrity
> of the Bible story—keeping it as accurate as practical for a good oral story and *not
> interrupting* the narrative to insert our teaching.[17]

CBS is effective in ATR societies where historically most people have been oral

learners. ATR is passed on orally as they do not have written texts, and therefore listening

to religious stories is a part of life for many people in ATR cultures. The goal of CBS is to

lay a solid, biblical foundation based on the Old Testament to effectively share the gospel

of Jesus. Without a solid Old Testament foundation, many will not understand why Jesus

is important.

George Robinson writes "Each part of God's mission—creation, fall,

redemption, restoration—is not only God's plan, but it is also his story."[18] Robinson

explains how in each part God answers basic life questions. Creation answers the question

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[16] Grant Lovejoy, "Chronological Bible Storying: Description, Rationale and Implications,"
10, accessed November 13, 2018, http://reachingandteaching.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2014/06/
CBS.pdf1.

[17] J. O. Terry, "ISC Storying Manual," 4.

[18] George Robinson, "The Gospel and Evangelism," in *Theology and Practice of Mission:
God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Riley Ashford (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 77.

of where people come from. The fall answers what went wrong. Redemption provides the answer to what hope there is. Finally, restoration responds to what the future holds[19]

There are different methods to share the gospel using CBS. According to Terry, the most effective method is to tell one story at each sitting. However, this does take time and commitment on both the story teller and the listeners. Second, a teacher could tell a cluster of stories at one sitting. This will save time and often the stories told can be around a certain theme. Third, a teacher could tell the entire biblical story or an evangelistic version in one sitting in a fast-tracked story. An example of this is the Creation to Christ story, which can be told in about 15-20 minutes. It covers from creation to the resurrection of Jesus. Finally, someone could tell one appropriate story for the context or a non-chronological cluster of stories. This is often called situation storytelling and it lets the specific situation determine what story to tell.[20]

Story sets. Calvert worked with the Maasai in East Africa. He developed a forty-two story set[21] for teaching the Maasai about God, bringing them to Jesus and starting churches.[22] In his story set, he begins by addressing the creation of the spirit world, because this is an area of concern for his listeners. In ATR, the spirits and ancestors play a major role, and understanding where they came from is vital for a full understanding of the gospel.[23]

The goal of CBS is to accurately communicate the Bible orally in a way that is reproduceable for the learners. Armstrong provides a core Bible story set of thirty-one

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[19] Robinson, "The Gospel and Evangelism," 81-88.

[20] Terry, "ISC Storying Manual," 18-20.

[21] See appendix 4 for a list of Calvert's forty-two bible story set.

[22] "Credits | HIStorycloth.Com," accessed November 2, 2018, http://historycloth.com/credits/.

[23] R. L. Calvert and David R. Crane, "Mission to Animists," in Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 269-70.

stories, which he believes are essential for evangelism strategies.[24] Additionally, Armstrong provides a list of what he believes are the basic Bible truths that lead to salvation.[25]

Comparing Armstrong's core story set with Calvert's core story set, it is evident that Calvert utilizes more stories. It is important to remember that different stories need to be told based on the circumstances and worldview of the target people group. Additional stories can always be inserted later as the discipleship process continues. Calvert was specifically targeting the Maasai people and Armstrong is giving a general story set, not specifically for ATR, but a basic biblical foundation on which to build.

Chronological Bible Teaching

Another method of teaching Bible stories is called Chronological Bible Teaching (CBT).[26] In CBT, stories are told in a similar way as in CBS with the major difference being that there is much more teaching content provided to the learners. CBT mixes storying with teaching the meaning of the story.[27] Terry writes, "*Chronological Bible Teaching* does not attempt to preserve the narratives intact but may only refer to the stories or story summaries which contain the Bible truths being taught in the lessons."[28] CBT focuses on teaching biblical truth using a story. CBS teaches the story and then,

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[24] Armstrong and Southern Baptist Convention, *Tell the Story*, 25-27. See appendix 5 for Armstrong's list of essential Bible stories.

[25] Ibid., 23. See appendix 6 for a full list of Bible truths leading to salvation.

[26] Stan and Iva May utilize CBT in leading Bible studies and daily devotionals. They build their teaching around stories and the fourteen eras that they trace throughout the Bible. See "Chronological Bible Teaching," accessed November 2, 2018, https://chronologicalbibleteaching.com/.

[27] Don Fanning, "Chronological Bible Storying/Teaching," *Themes of Theology That Impacts Missions* Paper 6 (2009): 2, http://digitalcommon s.liberty.edu/cgm_the o/6.

[28] Terry, "ISC Storying Manual," 5.

instead of teaching what it means, utilizes discussion questions for the learners to draw out the meaning from the story.[29]

Sills praises CBS as one of the best ways for oral learners to be taught, but he cautions it is not the only oral method.[30] According to Sills, oral learners can also benefit from catechisms and an interactive question and answer time after teaching material. To use CBT, it is best to have a common theme of the class on which the oral learners can be focused and explore during the teaching time.[31]

CBS and CBT can be complimentary in the disciple making process. CBT utilizes more teaching content to inform learners while CBS uses questions to let the learners draw the truth out of the story. Depending on the situation, either approach could be used effectively. Sills points out the usefulness of CBS in reaching people who have no understanding of the Bible or the gospel. CBS is good for laying the foundation of the Bible, while CBT is more effective after a group has a foundational understanding of the Bible.[32]

Using CBS to share the gospel gives cohesion to the biblical story. Starting with creation and moving forward allows for a foundation to be laid on which later stories will be able to build. Later, these core evangelism stories can also be revisited and used for discipleship and leader training incorporating CBT or situational storying. The core Bible story set is important for everyone in the church to know and for this reason it constitutes the first level member training everyone in the church is taught.

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[29] Fanning, "Chronological Bible Storying/Teaching," 3.

[30] Sills, *Hearts, Heads, and Hands*, 550.

[31] Ibid., 551.

[32] Ibid., 550-51.

Level 1: Member Training

Level 1 training is for all members of the church. This training utilizes the core story set used for evangelism and is taught to all members of the church. A standard story set is used so that all members learn the same core Bible stories. Using Calvert's forty-two story set is best in Antsiranana as it addresses the needs of animists and those from ATR cultures. Additionally, many resources are available to use for visual aids or outlines of the stories for literate learners.[33]

This core Bible story set is used in evangelism as well as lays a worldview foundation among church members. By learning the core story set, church members are forced to reflect on what the Bible teaches versus what their own worldview teaches about God, divinities, spirits, ancestors, and magic. As they are faced with biblical truth, their worldview will begin to be shaped by the Bible. Over time, the goal will be a shift to a biblical worldview.

Depending on the literacy level of the learners, the core Bible set can be taught entirely in an oral format or can incorporate literate materials. Producing the core story set in an updated version in the local dialect and putting it into a simple book is ideal for literates. This book is not a word-for-word Scripture translation or copy of the Bible, but the stories are translated into the everyday language of the people, which is spoken in the area.[34] When producing the story books, great care is needed to ensure that they are accurate to Scripture. To ensure accuracy takes time and translators from various backgrounds. The key elements of the story are the focus. Each translator produces a translation of the story. Next, all translators begin working together to decide on the best

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[33] "English | HIStorycloth.Com," accessed December 16, 2018, http://historycloth.com/downloads/english/. Many resources available for download can be useful in storying. Pictures, songs, and story summaries are all available. Additionally, it is possible to order story cloths to use while teaching. Utilizing some of these tools adds to effectiveness of the stories for some groups who prefer visual aids.

[34] This method was used with great success among the Batooro people of Uganda. Using the core Bible story set, local pastors and leaders translated the stories into modern everyday Rutooro. The result was a story book that literate learners could use to learn the stories exactly as the team taught them to oral learners.

version that is accurate to the Scripture and is accurate to the local dialect. Each story is tested with story groups who give feedback on what they heard and learned. This group can be a mix of Christians and non-Christians. The feedback from the stories are brought back to the translation group and the overall best wording is chosen.[35]

Bible translations are often older and utilize antiquated language, which is more difficult to understand and does not flow well to modern readers.[36] These story books could lay a foundation for a future translation of the Bible into one of the major dialects in the north of Madagascar. According to Don Fanning,

> The objectives of Bible Storying are to *publish* the Bible orally, encourage strategic church planting, disciple believers [that is, make them learners of the stories and the applications from the stories], and train emerging leaders, empowering them to teach the Bible in a form that is understandable, memorable and reproducible for their own people.[37]

It is important to stress that the stories in the story book are taken from the Bible, yet there are more stories in the Bible than contained in the story book. The story books are a place to start in evangelism and discipleship but there is much more to learn. Much like a children's Bible, which lays a foundation for children to understand the Bible as they grow, story books lay a foundation for men and women coming from a non-biblical worldview perspective to be introduced to God as the Bible presents.

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[35] The process of translating the stories took roughly one year to complete in the Rutooro language and a feedback loop was used to check for errors. During this year, the stories were tested with several groups who gave their feedback. Some believers wanted a word-for-word translation from the Bible in their dialect. Others liked the fluidity of the translation as it was easier to tell. Many non-believers commented that the stories were easier to understand than the Bible or teaching they had heard before. Several pastors from different denominations were consulted and they gave feedback as well while checking for errors in the story or phrases or words. All feedback was taken into consideration and the team of translators chose the best words and phrases to communicate clearly in the modern language.

[36] The Malagasy Bible is in the Merina or Official dialect translated in the 1800s. Although it is readable and understandable, the language has changed some over time and new phrases are used and others have been dropped. To put the Bible stories in modern language works best for flow and reproducibility. Additionally, in Antsiranana, many people speak dialects that do not have Bible translations. Putting the stories in the everyday vernacular makes it more acceptable to the people.

[37] Fanning, "Chronological Bible Storying/Teaching," 5.

After the initial core set is learned by the members, it is easy to continue adding stories as the discipleship process continues. If a specific issue needs to be addressed in the church, the pastor is able to put together a short story set to address it or return to the core list and use stories from it to address the issue.[38] This is a continual process of adding stories and growing as disciples. However, some will move to level 2, which is leadership or pastoral training.

Level 2: Leader Training

Level 2 training is for pastors, elders, and teachers identified by the churches. Level 2 training builds upon level 1 and the core story set. Sills writes, "The two essential and primary roles of a pastor are to teach truth and to live a life that practices truth."[39] Level 2 training wants to produce leaders who know the truth, teach the truth, and live the truth.

Level 2 utilizes the book *Hearts, Heads, and Hands* as a guide. Teaching through the modules presents a uniform training for all the leaders in the city and region. The teaching schedule works within the city of Antsiranana as well. Sills notes the goal is to hold one-week intensives every four months over a three-year period.[40] This model allows for students to continue working and leading in churches while also getting the training they need. What is learned in an intensive is put into practice in the months between teachings.

Like level 1 training, utilizing *Hearts, Heads, and Hands*, does not require the leader to be literate. The material can be taught orally with no obstacles. However, there is also the possibility to use a more literate approach if it suits the participants being trained. Similarly, level 2 can be taught using a mix of oral and literate methods and use

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[38] Armstrong and Southern Baptist Convention, *Tell the Story*, 51.

[39] Sills, *Hearts, Heads, and Hands*, 3.

[40] Ibid., 12.

handout materials for the lessons if helpful. After this level training is complete, a third level of training goes deeper.

Level 3: Bible School

The third level training is for leaders who churches identify as gifted and called and need additional training. This additional training is more in-depth and time consuming than levels 1 and 2. Although it is not essential for pastoring the local church, it will aid in the overall goal of addressing worldview issues and giving guidance to the church. This level of training requires a level of literacy not required at the previous two levels.

The curriculum to be utilized is *Bible Training for Pastors* (BTCP).[41] BTCP consists of ten courses covering a wide range of topics helpful for leading and teaching in churches. The curriculum is:

1. Bible Study Methods and Rules of Interpretation

2. Old Testament Survey

3. New Testament Survey

4. Preaching Biblical Messages and Pastoral Ministry

5. Bible Doctrine Survey

6. Personal Spiritual Life

7. Church Ministry/ Administration/ Education

8. Teaching Principal and Methods

9. Church History Survey

10. Missions/Evangelism/Discipleship[42]

BTCP builds upon what is learned in training levels 1 and 2 and dives in deeper to the study of the Bible. One drawback of BTCP is that the books are not available in

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[41] "What We Do | Bible Training Centre for Pastors," accessed December 6, 2018, https://bibletraining.com/get-to-know-us/what-we-do/.

[42] "BTCP Manuals | Bible Training Centre for Pastors," accessed December 16, 2018, https://bibletraining.com/curriculum/btcp-manuals/.

Malagasy. However, French is used for schooling and most people who can read are able to read French. This is one reason it is a level 3 training as it is further out of reach for many believers.

Although the classes would be taught locally in Antsiranana, they will require more class time and therefore a greater time commitment from participants. Yet, this third level will allow for leaders to gain additional training without having to move to another part of the country for several years, as is currently the case. Establishing a Bible school in Antsiranana will allow for continued local ministry involvement and local church engagement by leaders and pastors while they receive further training.

These three levels of training address many of the issues that arise from the cultural study. First, a biblical worldview would be taught through the forty-two core story set. Beginning with the spirit world and creation allows for discussion about the differences between the Malagasy worldview and the biblical worldview. Second, everyone will be able to learn the Bible since it is presented in oral form. Everyone would be able to attend the teaching and understand it. Third, leaders will be given more instruction as they are identified by the churches. They can in turn teach the material to their members in the way the people understand. Fourth, there will be an option for more advanced training at a Bible school.

Throughout these three levels of training, leaders and pastors begin to grapple with ATR in their community and church. Utilizing the instruction received, leaders can work through a biblical way to deal with customs, rituals, and other areas of the culture. They learn the tools from the Bible to biblically evaluate their culture.

Final Thoughts

The goal of this research was to learn more of the culture in Antsiranana and how the church responded to ATR. This has been accomplished. Although the hope was that the church would be handling ATR differently than discovered, there is still hope for the church to respond biblically to ATR. Identifying worldview issues as a core area to

address is a start on the path for the churches and their members to stand against ATR. Utilizing CBS and CBT as primary methods in the churches to teach a foundational biblical worldview is a key to transforming the culture of Antsiranana.

One goal was to discover what needs to take place to plant Christ-centered churches in Antsiranana. Worldview transformation is key. Without challenging a traditional worldview and teaching a biblical worldview there will be no Christ-centered churches—there will only exist gatherings that mix tradition with some Bible, but not one is fully obedient to Christ and the scriptures. However, people's lives will be transformed as they engage the Bible and are taught orally, in ways they can best understand biblical truths.

Many of the issues discovered in family, social, and economic areas are directly related to worldview. A holistic approach is needed in Antsiranana to see a change. Addressing worldview is the area to begin with and there is no better place than within the churches. Teaching easy to learn Bible truths in story form that can be quickly reproduced by all learners and passed on to others is foundational to city transformation. Although I have learned many things about the city and the Malagasy of Antsiranana, there is much more to learn and explore.

What Would I Do Differently?

Much has been learned from this research and study of Antsiranana and the response of the church to ATR. Many cultural insights were learned during the research. Many relationships were formed within the city, both with church members and those outside of the church. However, if given the opportunity I would do some things differently.

First, I would spend more time exploring the cultural ceremonies and practices associated with ATR in Antsiranana. This would have given a better understanding of the influence cultural ceremonies and ATR practices have over people and how worldview is influenced by these practices. Understanding cultural practices and ceremonies would

also open up dialogue with pastors about concrete actions to pursue in relation to these ceremonies. The pastors could begin to evaluate, from a biblical perspective, these ceremonies and find biblical teachings about them and decide how to approach the ceremonies within the church.

Second, I would have attempted to dialogue with more churches. Although I contacted many pastors in the city, most were not open to talking about the issue of ATR and its influence in the church. This was possibly a result of not having a deeper relationship with these pastors. However, if I had pursued more intentionally, a wider range of opinions could have made this study richer. To have input from other leaders in the city and would broaden the study.

Areas for Further Study

Although much has been covered and learned in this research, there are still areas to consider for further study. First, a broader church study in Antsiranana would be beneficial. A study focusing on churches to which I did not have a relationship could be carried out to discover if they have similar struggles with ATR. Seeing how different church traditions and denominations deal with the challenge of ATR would most likely benefit the entire spectrum of churches in the city.

Second, it would be beneficial to study other cities in northern Madagascar to see if they have similar struggles as the churches in Antsiranana. For example, Hell-Ville on the island of Nosy Be, is a smaller city than Antsiranana, yet many tourists and *vazaha* have settled there. Do they struggle with similar issues in family and social areas? What influence does ATR have on the churches there? Looking for common patterns could also lead to discovering biblical responses that could impact all of northern Madagascar. Additional cities to consider would be Ambilobe, Ambanja, or Mahajanga. These cities would present different challenges, but they are larger towns in the north and it would be interesting to see the similarities and differences in dealing with ATR.

A third area that needs a fuller exploration is the possible bridges to sharing the gospel. Diving fuller into the customs and practices of ATR, as followed in Antsiranana, could reveal a traditional redemptive story or myth that could bridge to the gospel. This could potentially be a key area of research for reaching the Malagasy of Antsiranana.

Fourth, given the fact that Antsiranana is a destination for migration within Madagascar, another area of further study would be into whom might be best positioned to share the gospel in the city. With so many people coming to the city for various reasons, what near culture people group would best be able to communicate the gospel and be respected by the people so they would listen to the message? For example, there is a historical distrust between the Merina of central Madagascar and the people groups of the north. This has proven a hinderance within the churches as they have Merina pastors and use the official Malagasy dialect. Finding the right people group, whether a Malagasy tribe or a people group from another country, could prove vital in getting a hearing for the gospel. Or, possibly the people group does not matter but simply the method of communication and language are important. These are areas to explore further.

Finally, one of the most fascinating areas of further study is that of *fihavanana.* This idea of community and belonging could be a key to reaching Antsiranana. In the interviews, it was discovered that this was missing among the people of Antsiranana today. However, what would a Christian *fihavanana* look like? If the church were to fill the void in the family and social life of the people with a biblical version of community, or Christian *fihavanana*, how would that impact the city? What would it look like and what would need to be addressed? Digging deeper into *fihavanana* would take time, but it could prove vital in the transformation of the city and the church.

Challenge

Before his ascension, Jesus said in Matthew 28:18b-20,

All authority has been given to Me in heaven and earth. Go, therefore, and make
disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and

of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Reflecting on the story in the first chapter of the *tromba* ceremony at the home of a local church member, it is obvious the commands of Jesus have not been fully carried out. There is much work remaining in Antsiranana in disciple making and teaching all Jesus commanded. The work is difficult, and Satan will oppose those who go, but Jesus said he will be with us always. May the church rise to the challenge and make disciples who know God fully, love him with all their being, and live their lives to make Jesus known for the glory of the Father.

APPENDIX 1

CULTURAL-SOCIAL-RELIGIOUS PROFILE
TARGET PEOPLE'S WORLD VIEW
DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT

This instrument is designed to be used among a target population that can usually be identified by culture, language and geography. The questions are primarily illustrative of those needed in developing a people's world view. For some target populations this set of questions might be complete and sufficient for identifying a target population's world view. However, in most situations, other questions will need to be considered and some of these revised. Therefore, this is a model more than the actual questionnaire that will be used.

1. FAMILY STRUCTURE
1.1_ Is the family monogamous or polygamous? Describe characteristics and conditions?
1.2_ Is the family matriarchal or patriarchal? Describe "head of house."
1.3_ What are the authority lines in the family? Who makes decisions - how, when, and why? (Approval/Forgiveness)
1.4_ What are the roles and consequent relationships between family members? Husband/wife/children. Strata? Age?
1.5_ Identify the kinship lines and patterns of the extended family.
1.6_ How do families support themselves? Traditional and non-traditional patterns.
1.7_ How does the family structure change as a result of death, marriage, separation, incapacity, incompetence or other significant changes?
1.8_ How is a family's heritage passed from one generation to the next?
1.9_ How is authentic news passed on within the family?
1.10_ What are the rules of inheritance?
1.11_ What are the sexual and mating roles in the family? Marriage rites and rules. Separation, divorce, mistreatment.
1.12_ What are the child-rearing practices and traditions?
1.13_ What are the special days or events for families?
1.14_ How is the family changing?

2. SOCIAL STRUCTURE
2.1 How is the society of a village organized? What are the homogenous and heterogenous, facets of society?
2.2 How do different families relate to each other?
2.3 How does the society relate to foreigners? From another city, another race, another country.
2.4 How is real estate handled? Ownership/selling/buying.
2.5 How are leaders chosen? Who is eligible? When are they eligible?
    2.5.1 Under what conditions are leaders changed?
    2.5.2 What are the responsibilities and rights of leaders?

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2.5.3 How do leaders lose the right to lead?
2.5.4 How do people relate to leaders?
2.6 What are the basic values within society that give it cohesion and security?
2.7 What are the basic taboos within society?
2.8 What are common traditions within society?
2.9 What are the valued arts in society?
2.10 How is communication carried out? With whom? Under what conditions/rules?
2.11 What are the channels for news? Who bears news? How? When is it official?
2.12 What rights do individuals have? Families have? Clans have?
2.13 How are individuals educated? Is it pervasive? Respected? Secular or religious or mixed?
2.14 Describe the vocational respect ladder. Who are teachers? What are levels? What are settings?
2.15 Describe law and order in society. Structure/processes.
2.16 What is society's medical structure?

3. RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE
3.1 Describe the predominate religious system/s. (Vertical or horizontal structure.)
3.2 Where does the power reside in the religious? What is the source of authority/power?
3.3 What are the primary documents of the religion?
3.4 What are religious rites and events?
3.5 What are the basic beliefs: about God/about good and evil/life (creation)/mankind/spirits/ eternity/salvation/sickness/securing converts/deviates/view of women.
3.6 How does religion involve society?
3.7 How does religion involve family?
3.8 How does religion involve individuals?
3.9 Who are religious leaders? How chosen? What conditions? How recognized and sanctioned?
3.10 Is religion animistic or mixed with animism?

4. ECONOMIC STRUCTURE
4.1 Is society's economic structure agrarian, industrial or mixed?
4.2 What are primary drivers of the economy? Capitalism/socialism/mixed. Describe.
4.3 What are the primary economic and vocational categories and division in the economy?
4.4 What are the structural patterns with society?
4.5 How are prices determined? What are the major influences on prices?
4.6 Who is in control of the flow of money?
4.7 Who is in control of the financial institutions? Are the private financial processes as strong or influential as the public institutions?
4.8 Describe the traditional classes in the economy. Lower/middle/upper.
4.9 Is a barter culture existence? Does it predominate? Is it insignificant?
4.10 How does the economy relate to other countries?
4.11 How is social security provided? Within social structure? Within economic structure? Mixed?

5. NATIONAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE
How does it differ from the local structure?

APPENDIX 2

ANTSIRANANA CULTURAL STUDY INTERVIEW

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to understand the Malagasy culture of Antsiranana and to examine traditional religion as it is practiced today. This research will also examine how the church is responding to traditional religion. This research is being conducted by Lew Johnson for purposes of completing a thesis for a doctorate of Missiology. In this research, you will respond to questions relating to family, social, economic, political, and religious structures in Antsiranana. Additionally, you will be asked about church belief and practice in relation to traditional religions. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential,* and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this interview, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

      [ ] I agree to participate

      [ ] I do not agree to participate

Please respond to the following questions in as much detail as possible, giving any examples or stories which will help to convey a cultural understanding of Antsiranana and the people living here.

Family Structure
Can you describe how families function (interact) and are structured in Antsiranana?

What are special days or events for families?

Social Structure
Can you describe the social or community structure of Antsiranana? (How do people relate to each other?)

What do people in Antsiranana value?

What are the common traditions?

What are the common taboos?

Political Structure
Can you describe the political structure of Antsiranana?

How are leaders chosen and who is eligible to be a leader?

Economic Structure
Can you describe the economic structure of Antsiranana?

What "classes" are there? (low/middle/upper?)

Religious Structure
Can you describe religion in Antsiranana?

How does religion involve the family, individually and collectively? (How does religion influence family life?)

Do people practice or follow more than one religion?

In Antsiranana, what are the general beliefs about God?

Good/evil?

Creation?

Spirits?

Man?

Ancestors?

Salvation/Afterlife?

Sickness?

Changing religious beliefs?

Do people still believe the same as their parents/grandparents? (If no, what has changed and what influenced this change?)

What are people in Antsiranana afraid of? How do they handle this fear? (Follow-up with are there people or places they fear?)

How do churches address traditional religion?

Do the churches accommodate ATR/animistic beliefs?

How do churches disciple people who come out of traditional religion?

If church members participate in traditional ceremonies, at what level do they participate?
How do churches respond if members do participate? Is it done secretly or openly?

APPENDIX 3

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Interview 1	Night watchman and nurse
Interview 2	University student
Interview 3	Malagasy Language teacher and English tutor, works in tourism, previously he worked with United States Peace Corp in Antsiranana
Interview 4	Small business of buying and selling goods
Interview 5	Participant 1 is a teacher; participant 2 is a market vendor; participant 3 is a day laborer; all three were relatives living in the same house trying to make a living in Antsiranana
Interview 6	Pastor of evangelical church
Interview 7	Businessman and church elder
Interview 8	University graduate, French language teacher and entrepreneur
Interview 9	Engineer and pastoral apprentice
Interview 10	Church members at CEIM, teachers and market vendors
Interview 11	University student
Interview 12	University student
Interview 13	Associate pastor at a local church
Interview 14	Pastor of evangelical church
Interview 15	Participant 1 is a University Professor and church elder; participant 2 is a teacher; they are a father-daughter interview
Interview 16	Tourism office manager
Interview 17	Taxi driver
Interview 18	French and Malagasy language instructor, Malagasy cultural teacher
Interview 19	Participant 1 is an engineer and pastoral apprentice; participant 2 is studying electronics and pastoral ministry apprentice; participant 3 is studying to be a teacher

Interview 20	Small scale business endeavors and married to a *vazaha*
Interview 21	Retired policeman
Interview 22	University graduate, working in community development, and is a bible teacher at her church
Interview 23	Local shop worker
Interview 24	University student
Interview 25	Imam, teacher, cultural ministry worker, and Antsiranana cultural expert
Interview 26	Church worker and small business operator

APPENDIX 4

BOB CALVERT STORY SET

Story 01 Satan and the Angelic Rebellion

Story 02 The Creation

Story 03 Adam and Eve

Story 04 Cain and Abel

Story 05 Noah's Ark - The Tower of Babel

Story 06 God's Promise to Abraham

Story 07 Abraham's Sacrifice

Story 08 Jacob and Esau

Story 09 Jacob's Dream

Story 10 Jacob's Family

Story 11 Jacob Wrestles With An Angel

Story 12 Joseph

Story 13 Moses' Early Years

Story 14 Moses and the Burning Bush

Story 15 Plagues of Egypt

Story 16 The Death Angel Passes Over

Story 17 Parting of the Red Sea

Story 18 Ten Commandments

Story 19 The Golden Calf

Story 20 Building the Tabernacle

Story 21 Promised Land

Story 22 Samuel and Eli

APPENDIX 5

CORE BIBLE STORY LIST FROM *TELL THE STORY*

1. How God's Word came to us (not a core story but often an essential story for people who do not know the Bible as the source of authority).

2. Creation of the Spirit World (*not a core story but a needed story for people who live in fear of evil spirits or who worship or appease spirits they fear*).

3. Creation of the physical world.

4. Creation of man and woman.

5. The first sin and God's judgment.

6. God's judgment of a sinful world and salvation through God's grace & man's obedience.

7. God's promise to Abraham (*Promise of One to bless all peoples*).

8. God provides the substitute sacrifice for Isaac (*God will provide the Lamb*).

9. The Passover—the sign of blood and the lamb (*saved by obedience and the sign of blood*).

10. God gives His Holy Law—the Ten Commandments.

11. The Sacrifice System—shedding of sacrificial blood as temporary covering for sin.

12. The Prophets' message and promise of a Redeemer who would suffer for man's sin.

13. Birth of Jesus according to prophecy (*Isaiah, Micah, Matthew & Luke*).

14. Baptism of Jesus—testimony of God the Father, the presence of the Holy Spirit and testimony of John—"Behold the Lamb of God".

15. Jesus and Nicodemus—"You must be born again of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God".

16. Jesus and the Samaritan Woman—Jesus is the source of living water of salvation (John 7:37-38).

17. Jesus taught as one having great authority (*speaking words of the Father and doing what he saw the Father doing*).

18. Jesus has authority over demons—man in synagogue.

19. Jesus has authority to forgive sin—for example, man paralyzed and four friends.

20. Jesus is the resurrection—for example, Jesus raises Lazarus to life.

21. Jesus has power over nature—for example, Jesus walks on water.

22. Story of Prodigal Son—God the Father forgives and restores those who repent and return to him.

23. Abraham, Lazarus and the rich man—Man must believe the message of the prophets in this life.

24. The Wedding Feast and refused invitations.

25. The Last Supper—"This is my body and my blood shed for you".

26. Jesus is betrayed, arrested, falsely accused, tried and sentenced to death as he said would happen.

27. The crucifixion, decisions for and against Jesus by the two criminals, "It is finished", testimony of the Centurion.

28. The resurrection and appearance to disciples and other followers—"He is alive!"

29. Jesus returns to the Father, the Ascension.

30. Jesus the true High Priest, an advocate before the Father making intercession for believer's sins (*esp. for Catholics and Hindus*).

31. Return of Jesus to receive believers unto himself, to judge and punish unbelievers, Satan and the evil spirits.

APPENDIX 6

UNIVERSAL BIBLE TRUTHS LEADING TO
SALVATION FROM *TELL THE STORY*

1. God is one God, sovereign, creating and acting in history.

2. God is all powerful, all knowing, the source of all grace and provision for all people's needs.

3. God is ever present in His Creation, yet is holy and separate from His Creation.

4. God communicates with people by His Word, He is faithful to his Word, keeping His promises.

5. God loves all people, wants fellowship with all.

6. Satan fights against God and God's will. He is a liar and a deceiver and hates humankind.

7. God is righteous, hating sin.

8. God's righteous nature demands that sin be judged and punished by eternal punishment (separation from God).

9. Men and women are accountable to God for all they say and do.

10. Men and women are sinners by inherited nature (birth) and by freewill choice and are separated from God by their sin.

11. Sin is failure to do what God wants, whether by rebellion or ignorance.

12. People can do nothing to save themselves from God's judgment and ultimate punishment for sin.

13. A person can be reconciled with God (and sins forgiven) only through the justifying means God has provided through a perfect (acceptable) substitute sacrifice (Promised One who died in the sinners' place).

14. Jesus the Son of God (the Promised One come from God) is the only perfect sacrifice for sin.

15. Salvation for all people involves turning from sin, seeking God's forgiveness, and having faith and trust in God's provision by believing on Jesus as the only Savior to restore the broken relationship with God and redeem one from God's eternal punishment.

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ABSTRACT

A CULTURAL STUDY OF THE CITY OF ANTSIRANANA
AND THE RESPONSE OF THE CHURCH TO
TRADITIONAL RELIGION

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019
Chair: Dr. John M. Klaassen

This thesis examines ATR in the city of Antsiranana in Northern Madagascar. I wanted to discover how the church responds to ATR and makes disciples of men and women from an ATR. The purpose was to discover a biblical response that would be effective in making disciples in Antsiranana and other places where ATR is deep rooted in the culture.

To learn the culture and worldview of the Malagasy in Antsiranana, my family and I lived among the people in the city, worshiped with the churches, and had daily interaction with Malagasy people. I carried out a cultural study covering family life, social life, economic life, and religious life in Antsiranana. The focus was on religion and how the people believed and perceived for themselves the religious climate of the city. As there is diversity within those who identify as Christian, this thesis focuses on evangelical churches, and more so on two churches in particular: the Baptist church and the CEIM church.

Chapter 2 provides a general overview of ATR. The basic beliefs and practices are examined as well as some of the obstacles faced in the study of ATR. Chapter 3 processes the cultural survey questions and the responses of Malagasy residents of Antsiranana. Chapter 4 explored worldview, culture, and the various responses to ATR, as well as examines how the churches in the city deal with ATR, and various other

African response to ATR. The chapter suggests a biblical response to ATR and worldview influence.

The conclusion reached is that worldview must be addressed when dealing with ATR. One must consider how to formulate a biblical worldview for those coming from ATR cultures. The proposal of this thesis is to focus on chronological Bible storying as a means for worldview change among animistic and ATR societies.

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