

# Viewing Leadership in the 2000's: A Christian Worldview Analysis of Popular Theories

Mark D. Ward, Ph.D.  
Trinity Christian College  
Palos Heights, Illinois

Theories of leadership continue to capture the attention of the business community. Many books have been written on the subject and this paper seeks to analyze the eight most popular leadership books, based on library holdings and published since 2000, using the tools of worldview analysis. After describing worldview as an analytical tool, eight books are submitted to this analysis. By applying the ultimate questions of life (Olthuis, 1985) to leadership texts, the ways in which these books shape and are shaped by the culture can be discerned. This provides the context for more meaningfully connecting Christian faith commitments to leadership theories.

## Worldview as an Analytical Tool

**Definition of worldview.** The term worldview is used in a general sense to describe the situated perspective from which one views life. In a philosophical sense, worldview refers to systematic framework that guides the one's encounter with the world. Rooted in the German concept of *weltanschauung*, worldview seeks to frame thought and action in terms of life's ultimate questions. A rich body of worldview literature has emerged that defines worldview as a set of beliefs, a model, a framework, a picture, and a system that helps us make sense of the world and guides our action in the world (Ward, 2003).

These definitions highlight the dual functions of worldview. Worldview is *presuppositional*. It represents the sense-making process, often occurring sub-consciously, that orients us to the world around us. For example, a person may be said to see the world as a "glass, half-empty" or a "glass, half-full." This orientation to world is considered part of that individual's sensibility, often displayed in unintentional expressions of pessimism or optimism. In this function, worldview serves to explain behavior, helping make sense of the motivations for an individual or group's engagement with the world.

Worldview is also *propositional*. It serves as the basis for developing a cohesive engagement with the world. In this function, worldview can be made explicit. For example, the just war theory is an attempt by many in the Christian church to explicate the rationale for a response to a specific conflict. Analysis and debate are invited to insure that the Church's response is consistent with her fundamental convictions. In this function, worldview serves to orient behavior, helping guide its adherents to "respond prophetically and creatively to each new situation" (Walsh, 2002).

Peter Heslam (2003) highlights how these two functions intersect for the Christian.

Worldviews are not the end-point of our quest for insight, but our place of departure. This is because they are rooted in the most basic aspect of human existence – faith. This means that their tenets are not argued to, but from. It also means that having a worldview is not the issue. We all have one, simply by being humans made in the image of God. The question is the extent to which we are willing to allow our Christian

faith to inform our worldview. The less willing we are, the more likely it is that the dominant worldviews around us will maintain their way in our lives. (page 4)

***Elements of Worldview Analysis.*** Although there are several frameworks that can be employed to uncover the explanatory and orienting power of worldview, they all share an emphasis on fundamental questions of human existence. For this analysis, the following four questions as described by Brian Walsh and Richard Middleton (1984) will serve as the overarching worldview framework. The questions concisely incorporate the explanatory and orienting nature of worldview and can be addressed from the perspective of any faith commitment.

1. Who am I? (What is my purpose in the world? What does it mean to be human? What happens when I die?)
2. Where am I? (What is the nature of the world around me? What is real? What is the meaning of history?)
3. What's wrong in this world? (Why is it that I cannot attain happiness? What is the nature of evil? How do I know right from wrong?)
4. What is the remedy? (How can I be happy? How can evil be overcome? Do I have a future?)

***Strengths and Weaknesses of a Worldview Analysis.***

To by choosing a worldview approach one, in effect, is imposing a worldview since every worldview analysis proceeds from a set of presuppositions. In this case, those presuppositions include the belief that there are fundamental questions of human existence and that people seek coherence in the way they live in the light of those fundamental questions. Since any worldview analysis is self-consciously explicit about its situated character, what are the strengths and weaknesses of a worldview approach?

David Naugle (2002) identifies several strengths in approaching life from a worldview perspective. First, it is explicitly systematic. This allows for the analysis and critique of both the outcome and the process of analysis. Second, because of its broad perspective, it prevents a reductionistic approach to analyzing phenomena. Finally, its coherence and comprehensive nature has the power to foster personal transformational and positive change.

Worldview analysis also has its limitations. It can become a repressive and self-justifying ideology. As Brian Walsh (2000) points out,

... worldviews become ideologies when they become total systems of unconditional finality that have lost their Biblical dynamism, thereby becoming irrelevant or inconsequential to changing culture contexts, because they are preoccupied with the protective ethos of an enclosed community. (page 8)

Thus, it is important to understand that a worldview analysis can contribute to understanding, particularly for the Christian seeking to engage the broader culture. However, it is only one tool for analysis and should not be seen as the only analytical approach.

### **Analyzing Popular Approaches to Leadership**

***Surveying Popular Approaches to Leadership.*** Books and articles on leadership are plentiful. However, determining what books are popular (in the sense of having mass influence) is not an easy task. For the purposes of this study, eight books will be analyzed. These books were selected based on the following criteria. First, these books are self-described as leadership books in that each one uses the word "leadership" as a key descriptor. Second, these books have

the potential to reach the widest audience in the long term because they represent the top titles as measured by the number of libraries holding the title. Finally, they represent current thinking about leadership in that all were all published since 2000. These books are described in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**Top Leadership Books Published in 2000-2003**  
(In order of number of libraries holding the book)

1. *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap - and others don't* - James C. Collins
2. *Jack: Straight from the gut* – Jack Welch and John A. Byrne.
3. *Execution: The discipline of getting things done* – Larry Bossidy, Ram Charan, and Charles Burck
4. *Primal Leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence* – Daniel Goleman, Richard E. Boyatzis, and Annie McKee
5. *Warrior politics: Why leadership demands a pagan ethos* - Robert D. Kaplan
6. *Lives of moral leadership* - Robert Coles
7. *Leadership* – Rudolph W. Giuliani and Ken Kurson
8. *Leading Quietly: An unorthodox guide to doing the right thing* – Joseph Badaracco

***Applying Worldview Analysis to the Leadership Approaches.*** Each of the books being analyzed was written with a specific goal in mind, and the analysis must acknowledge the intention of the author(s). These eight books display, with varying degrees of emphasis, the pre-suppositional and propositional nature of worldview. On one end of the spectrum are the autobiographical works, such as *Leadership* and *Jack*. These can be characterized as pre-suppositional. Worldviews tend not to be stated directly and must be inferred from the narrative. Because narratives do not claim to be comprehensive frameworks, they do not present a systematic or completely logical presentation of worldview. Lived worldviews reflect the fallen nature of humanity in the inconsistency between intentions and actions. However, these books, as an attempt by the authors to make sense of their lives, do present evidence of a worldview. What is included and how it is presented represents conscious or subconscious decisions about what is important.

On the other end of the spectrum are prescriptive works, such as *Good to Great* and *Leading Quietly*. These tend to be propositional in nature and the worldview can be more directly identified in the text. There is a more conscious effort to be systematic and to make truth claims about the material being presented. However, these books may not claim to present a comprehensive worldview and therefore some elements of worldview will be more explicit while others are not.

Table 2 presents a summary of each book in terms of the author's stated or implied purpose, the key claims being made, and the answers to Walsh and Middleton's four worldview questions embedded in each text.

**TABLE 2**  
**Summary of Key Claims and Implied Worldview**

<i>Text</i>	<i>Answers to Worldview Questions</i>			
<i>Purpose &amp; Key Claims</i>	<i>Who am I?</i>	<i>Where am I?</i>	<i>What's the problem?</i>	<i>What's the remedy?</i>
<p><b>GOOD TO GREAT: WHY SOME COMPANIES MAKE THE LEAP - AND OTHERS DON'T</b>            Purpose: <i>To identify the process that leads to sustained performance in business.</i>            Key Claim: <i>Several key processes can be identified that help insure great performance.</i></p>	<p>My purpose is to achieve greatness.</p> <p><i>Being human means ability to control one's destiny.</i></p> <p>Ultimately, family matters, not work.</p>	<p>World has underlying simplicity.</p> <p><i>What is real is hid by the superficial and life is unfair.</i></p> <p>Meaning of history is what you make it to be.</p>	<p>Happiness escapes because of a lack of discipline.</p> <p><i>Evil is the seduction of satisfying.</i></p> <p>Right/wrong is determined by results.</p>	<p>I can be happy by setting good priorities.</p> <p><i>Evil can be overcome with discipline.</i></p> <p>My future is in my hands.</p>
<p><b>JACK: STRAIGHT FROM THE GUT</b>            Purpose: <i>To share leadership lessons from Jack Welch's experience.</i>            Key Claim: <i>Leaders can make a difference when they lead with intelligence and passion.</i></p>	<p>My purpose is to find my passion and the passion of others.</p> <p><i>Being human means wanting to be significant to others.</i></p>	<p>World has tremendous opportunities for those who take them.</p> <p><i>What is real is results and relationships.</i></p> <p>Meaning of history is found in relationships.</p>	<p>Happiness escapes because we don't know ourselves</p> <p><i>Evil is when procedures stop us from pursuing our passions.</i></p> <p>Right/wrong becomes evident over time.</p>	<p>I can be happy keeping my personal goals #1.</p> <p><i>Evil can be overcome by enlisting others in the fight.</i></p> <p>My future is determined by my convictions.</p>

<i>Text</i>	<i>Answers to Worldview Questions</i>			
<i>Purpose &amp; Key Claims</i>	<i>Who am I?</i>	<i>Where am I?</i>	<i>What's the problem?</i>	<i>What's the remedy?</i>
<p><b>EXECUTION: THE DISCIPLINE OF GETTING THINGS DONE</b>  Purpose: <i>To share the leadership lessons of Larry Bossidy.</i>  Key Claim: <i>Executing plans is the key to leadership.</i></p>	<p>My purpose is to have a vision and make it happen.</p> <p>Being human means being deeply and passionately engaged.</p>	<p>World has an inherent structure that can be uncovered.  <i>What is real is seen in the results of people.</i></p> <p>Meaning of history is the story of human accomplishment.</p>	<p>Happiness escapes because of a lack of follow-through.  <i>Evil is found in inconsistent and mediocre behavior.</i>  Right/wrong requires ongoing learning to uncover.</p>	<p>I can be happy by getting results.</p> <p><i>Evil can be overcome by giving people a plan to follow.</i>  My future is determined by the consistency of my plans and actions.</p>
<p><b>PRIMAL LEADERSHIP: REALIZING THE POWER OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE</b>  Purpose: <i>To explore the role of emotional intelligence in leadership.</i>  Key Claim: <i>Resonant leaders excel by connecting with other using emotional competencies.</i></p>	<p>My purpose is to live a life of “resonance.”</p> <p><i>Being human means being creative and connected to others.</i></p>	<p>World has the potential to be a great place.  <i>Reality is constructed by the group, not the individual.</i></p> <p>Meaning of history is in the power of Relationships.</p>	<p>Happiness escapes because of “dissonance.”  <i>Evil is a lack of self-awareness.</i></p> <p>Right/wrong is determined through relating to others.</p>	<p>I can be happy by becoming emotionally aware.  <i>Evil can be overcome by developing passion.</i>  My future depends on how well I connect self and others.</p>
<p><b>WARRIOR POLITICS: WHY LEADERSHIP DEMANDS A PAGAN ETHOS</b>  Purpose: <i>To provide ancient advice for current foreign policy leadership.</i>  Key Claim: <i>“Constructive pessimism” is the appropriate perspective for foreign policy.</i></p>	<p>My purpose is to pursue self-interest, alongside others.  <i>Being human means the ability to be free.</i></p> <p>Ultimately, there is nothing beyond the present life.</p>	<p>World is a place of competing self-interests.  <i>What is real is the confusing of choices and interests.</i></p> <p>Meaning of history is found in heroes who pursued self-interest.</p>	<p>Happiness escapes because there are no good solutions.  <i>Evil is acting out of hypocritical virtue.</i></p> <p>Right/wrong is found in results, not in intentions.</p>	<p>I can be happy fighting for self-interest.  <i>Evil can be controlled through exercise of power.</i>  My future is what I make it to be.</p>

<i>Text</i>	<i>Answers to Worldview Questions</i>			
<i>Purpose &amp; Key Claims</i>	<i>Who am I?</i>	<i>Where am I?</i>	<i>What's the problem?</i>	<i>What's the remedy?</i>
<p><b>LIVES OF MORAL LEADERSHIP</b>  Purpose: <i>To share the leadership stories of those who inspired Robert Coles.</i>  Key Claim: <i>People of moral character can make a difference.</i></p>	<p>My purpose is to participate in the "moral drama."  <i>Being human means the ability to choose being good and bad.</i>  Ultimately, we face a future constructed by our moral choices.</p>	<p>World is full of complex moral situations.  <i>What is real is both our motives and our actions.</i>  Meaning of history is in the actions of ordinary people.</p>	<p>Happiness escapes us when we don't accept duty to make moral choices.  <i>Evil is human degradation.</i>  Right/wrong is found in the intersection of self and others.</p>	<p>I can be happy by living a life of integrity.  <i>Evil can be overcome by small acts of the good.</i>  My future is a result of our moral interconnectedness.</p>
<p><b>LEADERSHIP</b>  Purpose: <i>To share leadership lessons from the life of Rudi Giuliani.</i>  Key Claim: <i>Effective leaders have strong beliefs and act on them.</i></p>	<p>My purpose is to be responsible in acting on my convictions.  <i>Being human means seeking responsibility and involvement.</i>  Ultimately, death brings us back to fundamental relationships of life.</p>	<p>World is full of challenges, but also opportunities.  <i>What is real are relationships.</i>  Meaning of history is in the heroism of the ordinary person.</p>	<p>Happiness escapes me because I lose sight of my purpose.  <i>Evil is embodied in bullies who seek to exert undue influence.</i>  Right/wrong is intuitively evident to most people.</p>	<p>I can be happy by being loyal to self and others.  <i>Evil can be overcome with combination of altruism/self-interest.</i>  My future ultimately must be faced alone</p>
<p><b>LEADING QUIETLY: AN UNORTHODOX GUIDE TO DOING THE RIGHT THING</b>  Purpose: <i>To present a model of "everyday" leadership.</i>  Key Claim: <i>Most of the world's accomplishments come from quiet leaders</i></p>	<p>My purpose is help make the world a better place.  <i>Being human means the ability to look beyond self.</i>  Ultimately, my future depends on the world I leave behind.</p>	<p>World is made of interconnected actions.  <i>What is real is the minute by minute experience of life.</i>  Meaning of history is in the small deeds of people.</p>	<p>Happiness escapes me when I don't attend to small things.  <i>Evil is technique without character.</i>  Right/wrong is conceived in the process..</p>	<p>I can be happy by pursuing restraint, modesty, tenacity.  <i>Evil can be overcome by caring about the world.</i>  My future depends on the little acts of my self and others.</p>

When analyzed through the worldview framework, it becomes evident that each book does, in fact, address the fundamental questions of life. Each book is written from a set of presuppositions and seeks to propose certain leadership actions. The range of ideas found in these eight books can be identified using Walsh and Middleton's four questions

The question of "Who am I?" is answered in one of two major ways. In some of the texts, human beings are considered to be autonomous in terms of their relationships to other humans and in terms of their relationship to God. *Good to Great* proposes that humans control their own destiny and *Warrior Politics* emphasizes human freedom and self-interest. Other texts consider humans being to be interconnected. *Leading Quietly* suggests that humans are able to look beyond themselves. *Primal Leadership* emphasized being connected with others.

There is a comment element in the answer to "Where am I?" Every text recognizes that there is a mixture of good and bad in the world. Most of the texts present good and bad as inextricably intertwined. Thus, one key consideration for leaders is discerning what is real in the midst of the confusion of life. The texts differ in the meaning of history. They range from a focus on the individual (*Good to Great*) and "hero" (*Warrior Politics*) to a focus on the group (*Primal Leadership*) and ordinary people (*Lives of Moral Leadership* and *Leading Quietly*).

What is wrong with the world? Each of these texts recognize the presence of some evil, however, they differ on the source of that evil. Most present evil as coming from within the individual. Thus, the absence of happiness is primarily due to weakness of the will: we fail to accept our moral duty (*Lives of Moral Leadership*), pay attention to the small things (*Leading Quietly*), lack discipline/follow-through (*Good to Great*, *Execution*, *Leading Quietly*), and don't live for ourselves (*Jack*). *Warrior Politics* is unique among these texts in placing evil outside of the individual. Evil is intractable, and thus leaders must learn to accept it.

In addressing "What is the remedy?" the focus is on aspects of our destiny that we can control. This is consistent with the general intention of these books; to provide a guide for leaders. The primary distinction among these texts is the implied object of the remedy. All of the books discuss the impact of the remedy on the individual leader and some books make the impact on the individual leader the primary focus. (*Good to Great*, *Jack*, *Warrior Politics*). Other books balance a focus on the individual leader with a focus on others (*Lives of Moral Leadership*, *Leading Quietly*, *Execution*).

## Conclusions

The worldview analysis summarized in the previous section has implications for how we respond to popular portrayals of leadership as well as implications for other areas of analysis. David Naugle (2002) suggests that a worldview approach addresses issues of the heart: it uncovers what is flowing out of our heart (our presuppositions) as well as what we are pouring into our heart (the propositions).

***The Oriented and Orienting Worldview in Popular Leadership Texts.*** According to Walsh and Middleton (1984), worldviews are both shaped by the culture from which they emerge and have the power to shape the future worldview of that culture. In these eight texts we have a snapshot of the present culture's dominant beliefs. These texts have captured the wallets of book buyers in great part because they resonate with the buyers. They function as a mirror of popular culture. What is evident in these books is a strong "do-it-yourself" emphasis, consistent with the modern emphasis on individual autonomy. As the same time, these texts recognize the connectedness of people and actions. There is an openness to things outside of one's self. These

cultural beliefs are important to uncover because they help us identify the “heart” of the texts’ messages. We examine the presuppositions of these leadership books so that we can discern what is flowing out of the authors’ hearts and align that with what should be flowing out of our hearts.

These texts also shape our culture’s perspective of leadership. Their dominance in the marketplace of ideas gives these texts the ability to influence a future generation of leaders. Many of these books present a pragmatic, ends-directed, approach to leadership: The proof of leadership is in the results and results justify the means necessary to achieve these results. They also present a conflicted view of how the individual leader balances his or her need against the needs of other people. We examine these proposals in order to make sure that what flows into our hearts is consistent with our worldview. Embedded in these books are elements of universal truth, but we need to be careful to identify where these books’ proposal actions that are inconsistent with, or at the very least, are incomplete responses from a Christian worldview.

***The Broader Implications of Worldview Analysis.*** In addition to the impact of these texts on our understanding of leadership, this analysis raises broader issues related to our encounter with the world. First, these texts highlight an enduring challenge for the Christian church: Acknowledging God’s sovereignty while accepting human responsibility. The leadership texts that were analyzed appropriately emphasized human responsibility. However, in that emphasis, it is easy to lose sight of God’s role in our life and in human history. The challenge for Christians is to present the complete gospel message – God is in control and human beings have choices and responsibilities. Second, these texts highlight the role of common grace. God, in his infinite wisdom, may entrust non-Christians with certain presuppositions that are consistent with Christianity. Thus, non-Christians may propose approaches that contribute both to a faithful response on the part of Christians and to a faithful response on the part of the broader society. A worldview approach allows us to engage these ideas using a structure and language that is more likely to find the elements of truth that may exist in non-Christian theories and in a way that can be accessed by non-Christians and well as Christians.

## Bibliography

- Badaracco, Joseph. *Leading Quietly: An unorthodox guide to doing the right thing*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.
- Bossidy, Larry, Ram Charam, and Charles Burck. *Execution: The discipline of getting things done*. New York: Crown Business, 2002.
- Coles, Robert. *Lives of moral leadership*. New York: Random House, 2000.
- Collins, James C. *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap - and others don't*. New York: HarperBusiness, 2001.
- Goleman, Daniel, Richard E. Boyatzis and Annie McKee. *Primal Leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2002.
- Giuliani, Rudolph W. and Ken Kurson. *Leadership*. New York: Hyperion, 2002.
- Heslam, Peter. *Wanted: A Contemporary Christian Worldview*. Retrieved from [www.acalltobusiness.co.uk/userdownloads/contemporary\\_worldview.pdf](http://www.acalltobusiness.co.uk/userdownloads/contemporary_worldview.pdf), July 11, 2003.
- Naugle, David. *Worldview: History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Kaplan, Robert D. *Warrior politics: Why leadership demands a pagan ethos*. New York, Random House, 2002.
- Olthuis, James H. "On Worldviews." *Christian Scholars Review* 14.2, 1985.
- Walsh, Brian. "Transformation: Dynamic Worldview of Repressive Ideology?" *The Journal of Christian Education and Belief*, 4.2, 2002.
- Walsh, Brian J. and J. Richard Middleton. *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian Worldview*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1984.
- Ward, Annalee R. "Worldview Analysis: An Intersection Between Media, Rhetoric, and Ethics." Paper presented at Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, IL, April, 2003.
- Welch, Jack, and John A. Byrne. *Jack: Straight from the gut*. New York: Warner Books, 2001.