

PART 4: BOOK REVIEWS**DISCIPLINING NATIONS: THE POWER OF TRUTH TO
TRANSFORM CULTURES****by Darrow Miller****YWAM Publishing, 2001**

The thesis of this book is that God's truth not only breaks the spiritual bonds of sin and death but also frees whole societies from deception and poverty. It is ideas, Miller says, that have the most powerful consequences. When we have the right ideas driving our actions, everything else will come in its time. It is not more money, greater manpower, programs or systems that we need in order to help the needy but rather a biblical worldview. This is the most effective and powerful tool we have for our work. The author states that both development professionals and missionaries report that this book has given them the holistic framework they have been seeking for their work. I have personally found it helpful, both as a framework for development work and in my ministry of personal discipleship.

The book begins with a section called 'The Story'. In this section, Miller explains that each culture has its worldview or its 'story' that is used to explain and understand the world. He addresses three main worldviews in the book: biblical theism, secularism and animism. The author points out that each worldview has certain elements of truth as well as elements of lies and idolatry. Cultures aren't neutral. He then goes on to show how each worldview explains the existence of poverty and how that explanation determines the way they deal with it or address it. Miller states,

Everybody has a world view... It is essential that you examine your worldview because it affects everything you do, even how you obey Christ. Our values and behaviour (and their consequences) all flow from our assumptions about reality. Those of us who want to work effectively with the poor need to learn three distinct worldviews: our own, that of the culture we're trying to disciple (our host culture) and biblical theism. (p. 74)

Miller then takes us systematically through a look at biblical truth about God as King, His kingdom and our part as stewards of the King. He addresses how various worldviews interact with these truths. Concerning God as King, he discusses the facts that God is a person, he is rational and he is good. Miller then applies these truths to how we understand the universe. He then addresses God's kingdom, which is an open system where God can and does step in and work,

as well as being governed by certain laws that God himself created and respects. Again, Millar applies these truths to worldview and helps us see how each worldview accepts or distorts these truths. The nature of man and the nature of community are the main points he discusses concerning our being stewards. He then addresses several tasks; specifically stewardship, economics, work and time/history, and God's purpose in light of Biblical truth and other worldviews.

I found this book helpful because it gave me tools to understand and analyse what is going on in a situation or culture. It helped me understand the influence of my western, secular worldview on my thinking. I was also challenged to see that cultures aren't just neutral. Biblical truth will always transform a culture and needs to transform it.

I found the charts comparing the three worldviews very helpful. Millar uses many illustrations and I appreciated two in particular. In the illustration 'Ideas Have Consequences,' you have a tree. The roots represent beliefs, the trunk values, the branches behaviour and the fruit consequences. The branches and fruit, meaning behaviour and consequences, grow out of our deep-seated beliefs and values. Much secular training, development, and unfortunately also Christian discipleship, often address issues at the branch or behavioural level.

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An illustration of this in development work is public health campaigns to combat AIDS. The programs target behaviour – giving out condoms, to address the consequences of the 'problem' of unprotected sex. However, they never address the beliefs that spawn the behaviour that creates the consequences. Addressing the top part of the tree is like trying to paste apples on an orange tree. You aren't going to see lasting change. 'Growing Healthy Cultures' is another illustration from Miller's book that uses the image of a tree. The roots of a tree (beliefs) are mainly composed of lies for those outside of Christ, with some roots of truth in here and there. The resulting tree is rather weak and scrawny. As lies are replaced by truth in discipleship, the tree grows stronger and healthier. He gives the example of Rwanda as a place where this did not happen. He says,

In part, what happened in Rwanda was that the nation was 'converted' but not discipled at the profound level of culture. The tribal mindset that sees one tribe as superior to another was not challenged. The blood of Christ was not applied to the breaking down of the dividing wall of hostility between Hutu and Tutsi. The ancient hostilities of tribalism were not broken by the powerful truth that Tutsis and Hutus are of 'one blood,' having one set of first parents – Adam and Eve. It was tribalism, the mindset of poverty that led to the genocide... If the church

does not disciple the nation, the nation will disciple the church.

Rwanda is an extreme example of this principle.

Thus, in a country where well-dressed neighbours greeted each other on the way to church on Sundays, a year later these same neighbours were slaughtering each other.

The book can be dense at times and some parts are a bit hard to get through. However, the abundance of charts, illustrations and stories are very effective at summarizing and clarifying the author's points. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who wants to be more effective and deeper in their discipleship, both on an individual level and on a community and cultural level.

Reviewed by PR

PR and her husband (Americans) have been involved in evangelism, discipleship and CP in Europe and North Africa for 19 years.