

Institute for Christian Teaching  
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**TEACHING LITERATURE  
THROUGH WORLD-VIEW ANALYSIS:  
AN APPROACH TO THE *ILLIAD* AND THE *ODYSSEY***

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## Introduction

Literature teachers in secondary and tertiary levels have encountered soul-searching questions. These are questions like *Should I teach the works of Homer or Shakespeare? Aren't these secular literature? Do they have a place in Adventist schools?*

In most cases, it is not even a question of whether they should be taught or not. Subjects like English Literature or World Literature include not only the writings of Homer and Shakespeare but a host of other authors. Which means while some of us may exercise personal judgment which literary pieces to include in our syllabi, we are confronted with the fact that we have to teach secular literature in Adventist schools.

The right question to ask, I think, is *How do we teach secular literature in a Christian perspective?*

Teaching literature in a Christian perspective calls for careful thinking. I have tried several approaches, some of which can be found in the later part of this paper under Suggestions to Literature Teachers. One will be discussed at length—teaching literature through world-view analysis. This approach aims to sharpen critical and analytical skills of students and teachers and is a tool for integration of faith and learning.

### Why Teach Literature through World-View Analysis

Sire states the basis of the world-view analysis approach: “the key to reading well is to read worldviewishly” (Sire, 1990:162). The teacher and the student should read literary pieces with the world-view questions in mind. These are questions which confront us like who we are; what is life; what do we live for; how do we achieve happiness; why is there suffering; where are we in the scheme of things—how are we related to our fellowmen, to things around us, to that Supreme Being we call God, who are we to Him and who is He to us. Sire further expounds that literature

embodies a *view of reality* (reflecting the world view of the writer) that is captured in *concrete terms* (rather than philosophic terms) and given a *linguistic structure* which is appropriate to the various ideas and attitudes that make up the view of reality and which will evoke an *appropriate experience* of these ideas and attitudes in a *skilled reader* (1990:165).

Ryken expounds that when we read with the worldview questions as the backdrop of our consciousness, we see “the author and the text in a larger cultural context” (1976:163). A literature class should achieve this because man’s main benefit from reading literature is to “understand who we are as a human family in all our diverse and glorious yet fallen splendor” (Ibid.).

Through this approach I have learned to value literature highly knowing that it is a tool to understand others better especially those holding a worldview different from mine. I have also realized that literature and life have depth and breadth and height that they pose tough questions which my students and I must answer in very personal terms and whose answers should be the underlying philosophy that influences thoughts, decisions and actions. Ackerman et al. (1973) expresses the same idea.

As students hear various points of view expressed and as they attempt to understand the basis for those views, we hope that students will become more tolerant of one another and will attempt to understand how a man's point of view influences everything he says, does, and thinks.

### **How to Teach Literature through the World-View Analysis Approach**

Ryken explains that a "world view can be identified by observing the identity of the literary characters, by identifying the nature of their experiment in living, and by noting the outcome of their experience" (1976:16).

Literary scholarship has adopted different methods in analyzing texts. Among these are movements (Beck, 1991: 67) like "Marxism (political struggles perceived in plots and in characters' motivations), feminism (male-dominant literary cannon and view of literature) and reader response (the agenda of different communities of readers and how those agenda influence interpretation)." Some scholars have said that the best way to critique a work is to study it separate from biographical and historical details because the author's background has nothing to do with the text. On the other hand, other critics say that to do this is to dehumanize the humanities.

I share the view of Beck (1991:68) that the text does not come in a vacuum. The text is an expression of an author's life and worldview. To study a text apart from the author is to deny the value of man and the inspiration of God upon the human mind. Ellen G. White says, "Every gleam of thought, every flash of the intellect, is from the Light of the world" (Education: 14). We recognize that God uses people to articulate his message to mankind.

The process of world-view analysis as I approach it is as follows:

1. I read the text to understand and to evaluate it, asking questions like *Is it relevant to my students? Is evil sensationalized and glorified or does it reveal its theme in the backdrop of the great controversy where at the end goodness is rewarded and wickedness is punished? Will this piece of material lead my students to a better understanding of the world we live in and our place in it? Will our reflection on this make us better persons? Will the study of this work draw my students and me closer to God, help us to understand ourselves and others better? Why should questions like these be asked?*

Because while we are convinced of the valuable function of literature, we do not deny that there are literary materials that are harmful. Ellen G. White warns us of infidel writers like Paine and Ingersoll (FE: 92-94). These are authors who try to steal the affections of students away from God.

2. If the text passes my scrutiny, I go into a deeper level of reading, that is focusing on the elements of the story like character, setting, plot, theme, dialogues and narratives.

3. After a thorough knowledge of the elements, I go to the next step, that is, to study the author—his life, the conditions of his times, his intended audience. I sift the text and its biographical and historical background and ask questions like *Why did he hold such views? Was there an experience in his life that molded his way of thinking and feeling? Who were his audience? Why did he choose this specific genre? What did the people believe in during his times?*

4. I read the material again and give answers to the world-view questions quoting lines for support.

5. I analyze the worldview I have gleaned from the material in the light of Biblical worldview. Some of the questions to be asked are: *Is the worldview I see in the material supported by Scriptures? In what ways are they the same? Different? How can I use this information to make me a better person and make this world a better place? How can I relate better to the persons holding this kind of worldview?*

While this process emphasizes the role of the teacher, the students are not excluded in this approach. In fact, this activity highly involves the students especially on the cognitive and affective level. The point is the teacher must undertake the process first before he can lead the students through each step.

The reader will find that this process while giving analytical emphasis more heavily on the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* has made a brief analysis of the Bible alongside it. I did this because I believe that the Bible is first and foremost in the parade of great literary works and that it embodies the truth upon which we base other truths wherever we may see them. Beck affirms that “Scripture is literature; and without it and its Author, other literature would have no absolute basis for its being and function” (1991:69). The Bible is indispensable in the study of literature. Beck adds that “Literary criticism must be established upon a bibliocentric worldview, beginning with God and his special and general revelation, then working outward to extrabiblical literature.”

### **The World-View Questions**

Sire defines worldview as “a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world” (1990:30). While we may pose our world-view questions in many ways, I have adopted for this approach the questions articulated by Sire:

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?

When a literature class uses the approach of world-view analysis, it does not mean that a piece of literary material will provide answers to all seven questions. The reason for this is not all works are comprehensive and the literary piece under study may tackle only one world-view question, the one that concerns the author most at the time of his writing. Many literary masterpieces, though, do suggest answers to most of the seven questions. This is so because a masterpiece typically deals with answers to people's deep questions about life, about themselves, about the supernatural, about the beyond. That is why people appreciate it and read it time and time again.

That is what Christians and even non-Christians do with the Bible. That is what the Greeks of old and of today, even non-Greeks, do with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. To the Greeks, the *Iliad* was their bible (Robbins and Coleman).

### **World-View Analysis of the Bible**

Judaism and Christianity are two religions that value the Bible. They feel that its contents "were under the direct control of God." Much more, they believe that it is one book that addresses their world-view questions. *What can one know about God? What is His nature? How does he view man? What happens when man dies? Is there life after death? If so, what form does it take?* These questions are difficult to answer. Man cannot just look around and say, "Hey, this is it." Not from his experience, not even from others'. So where does he turn for answers? Gabel and Wheeler say the answers "must come from a supernatural revelation," that is, the Bible (Gabel and Wheeler, 1986: 249).

Jews and Christians consider the Bible as a guide on how they behave towards themselves and treat one another. Reading the Bible daily gives the reader a sensitivity that he may be able to interpret events in his life which he can take as divine guidance (Gabel and Wheeler, 1986: 250).

### **Historical Background of the Bible**

God and certain human beings composed a book we call the Bible. We claim it as infallible. Beck observes that it reveals God "in historically accurate and richly poetic narrative" (1991:69). The writing of the text was inspired although not dictated.

Basing on history, the period when Israel became a great nation at the time of David (about 1000-961 B.C.), Ackerman et al. (1973:4) suggest that the date of the Old Testament narratives was the second millennium B.C. They set Abraham's times sometime between 2000 and 1600 B.C.

### **The Bible As Literature**

The richness of literary genres found in the Bible is evidence of its artistry and therefore its place in literature. It has history, poetry, prophecy, prose narratives, songs, letters, speeches, sermons—all these written in elevated language, universal themes and studied structure. It teems with literary devices such as simile, metaphor, personification, irony, paradox, rhetorical question, onomatopoeia, rhythm and scheme. Much more could be said if it is studied in the language it was written.

### **Analysis of the Bible through World-View Analysis**

1. **What is prime reality?** God is the ultimate reality. He is a Trinity—God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He is eternal and His ways are perfect.
2. **What is the nature of prime reality, that is, the world around us?** God created the heaven and the earth and the seas and everything that is in them. But sin has distorted the otherwise orderly creation. At the present, there is a conflict between good and evil. But God in His mercy to man and His power over Satan, exercises control over the affairs of men and the world. At times, in ways man cannot understand, God allows evil to gain the upper hand. When God will come the second time, He will restore everything to its perfect state.
3. **What is a human being?** In Ps. 8 David asks, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" The answer is God made man "a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor." Man is acknowledged "as God's most excellent creature—the only living thing made in the image of God" (Ackerman et al., 1973:40). He is created with a purpose, that is, to be fruitful and multiply and to act as steward of God's created world. Though man fell into sin, God has offered him salvation through His death on the cross.
4. **What happens to a person at death?** Because of sin, man will die. In death, he sleeps and knows nothing. But what awaits him, if he has accepted God's offer of salvation, is a glorious destiny. After the resurrection, God will grant him a joyous life without end in a place where there is no more sin and death.
5. **Why is it possible to know anything at all?** God created man in the image of God—an all-knowing God. God has given him the capacity to know and understand. The relationship of the Creator and the creature continues—"the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom."

6. **How do we know what is right and wrong?** Man is a rational being, created by a God who is good. Moreover, God has given man supernatural revelations—His Word, Jesus' life and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
7. **What is the meaning of human history?** While God has given man the freedom of choice, He is actively involved in the destiny of man especially those who seek His will. He has good plans for His people. Among these are to prosper him, to make him a steward to carry on His holy purpose, that is, to spread the good news of salvation.

### **World-View Analysis of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey***

#### **An Introduction to Greek Literature**

To the Greeks, literature is a means of understanding human life, “especially in their struggles to explain the place of man”—what he is and his worth, his behavior “and what his behavior means in some embracing scheme of comprehension” (Bowra: 34). They believe that their literature elucidates their identity whether on a personal level or as a people.

#### **About the Books**

The *Iliad* is a story of war; the *Odyssey* a story of peace. The *Iliad* is a story of love and hate; the *Odyssey* of love and adventure. Serrano and Lapid (1987) sees these two books as “great epics, studies of man and the life of man, and the way of life and ideals of a great civilization which has vanished but is still wonderfully alive in men’s hearts.”

The *Iliad* is set on the rich soils of Troy, in the tenth year of the Trojan War. It is spun around the wrath of Achilles, the bravest and the greatest of the Greek heroes toward Agamemnon, the commander-in-chief of the Greek army; the tragic results of his sulking which led to the defeat of the Greeks and the death of his friend Patroclus; his reconciliation with Agamemnon; his victory over Hector, the greatest champion of Troy; and his nobility in handing over the corpse to Priam. The story ends with the funeral rites of Hector.

The *Iliad* is not the story of the siege of Troy. It is narrower than that. In fact it begins in the tenth year of the war and spans a period of 45 days (Chase and Perry, 1950: xiv) or 49 days (Robbins and Coleman). It ends with the city still unconquered. It is a story within a story—the story of Achilles, a great man with a fault who dives into the depth of human baseness beyond the expectation of men and gods—he drags the body of Hector around and around the walls, so unexpected of a Greek prince who is supposed to embody strength of character and body. In the end, however, he rises into a more noble state than where he was when he finds in his heart to forgive and hand over to King Priam the corpse of Hector. His greatness is shown not only in his mighty deeds of war but in the hospitality and humility that he displays when he receives Priam, the head of the enemy camp.

The *Odyssey* tells of the journey of a victorious hero home after his treacherous devising of the wooden horse that resulted in the heart-rending sack of Troy. Odysseus' journey takes him to a ten-year struggle on land and sea, against powers beyond what his human strength can overcome, and his recognition that without the gods man is nothing. The greatest test of his wit and strength is reserved for the last when he is finally home on his rugged, rocky Ithaca, confronted by suitors who have feasted over his wealth and pestered his loyal wife Penelope and anxious son Telemachus beyond relief. He passes the test of stringing the bow "of the great Odysseus" and of shooting through twelve axes. He slaughters all the suitors and fumigates his house, himself and his son. Eager to be reunited to his wife whom he has so longed for twenty years of absence, he passes the last test—the test of his identity—whether he knows of the bed that is immovable and steadfast, the symbol of a matrimonial pledge undefiled in spite of pressure, uncertainties and two decades of separation.

Regarding their structure, Bowra observes that "in both poems the action becomes simpler and more concentrated in the later books, as the various threads are brought together towards the dramatic finale" (Bowra:38).

In the past the *Iliad* was the better loved, but later generations have preferred the *Odyssey* because of its comprehensibility. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a revival of interest in the *Iliad*. Chase and Perry called this book the greatest of all epics, one which provided "the most profound descriptions of the pity and terror, the splendor and the squalor of war and of the nobility and baseness which it calls forth in men and women" (1960: vii).

The *Iliad* is divided into twenty-four books; the whole story into three great acts or movements. The first movement ends when Achilles spurns all offers of reconciliation of Agamemnon; the end of the second movement displays him in inconsolable grief over the death of his friend Patroclus and the third ends with the restoration of Hector's body to his father and people (Chase and Perry, 1950: xvii).

The *Odyssey* is divided also into twenty-four books. The story begins when Odysseus is farthest from home. It ends with his meeting his father and reconciliation with the family members of the suitors. It is an example of a tragicomedy for having expounded on the extreme spectrum of human emotions—the depths of despair and the ecstasy of joy.

### **Background of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey***

Among the questions students ask in the study of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is *Did the Trojan War really happen?* Modern archeology has proved that it did (read the works of Schlieffmann). Lattimore says that, "The Greeks of the post-Homeric period, the classical Greeks and their successors, that is, those Greeks who were literate and left articulate records of their beliefs, considered that one of the episodes in the early history of their own

race was the Trojan War” (1951:12). Furthermore he asserts that while there has been disagreements as to the details of this war, what caused it and what it meant, “it was a piece of history, not a piece of legend or myth” and that scholars were in general agreement as to the actual names of characters and the important events. Reinhold supports the idea of the siege of Troy as historical (1946: 8). He adds that the event happened in 1184 B.C. (Ibid.)

As to what caused the Trojan War, some scholars surmise that the cause was not really Helen, the runaway wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. Helen was only the excuse; the truth was the Greek kings had in mind the great treasures of Priam. Troy, being situated on the coast of Asia Minor and in control of the Hellespont, the only passageway to the east, had amassed much wealth from the tariff. Another assumption was that Troy had been raising the tariff to a usurious level that the Greeks thought was too much. Homer, though, asserts that the cause was Helen. He describes her as like a goddess to look upon—beautiful and helplessly alluring. In Book III of the *Iliad* Trojan old men exclaim, “No wonder Achaians and Trojans have been fighting all these years for such a woman! I do declare she is like some divine creature come down from heaven.” Wise describes her as “the face that launched a thousand ships.” To take Homer, the beauty of Helen, the volume of her treasures, and the love of Menelaus brought this war into a reality.

The background of the story can be summarized as follows: Paris, one of the sons of King Priam and Hecabe, sailed to Sparta. While there he enjoyed the hospitality of Menelaus. When it was time for him to leave, Menelaus heaped him with good gifts. But Paris coveted the king’s greatest treasure, Helen, who at that time was acclaimed as the most beautiful woman in the world. He took her with him to Troy where she lived for twenty years.

Menelaus summoned all Greek leaders who before had made a pledge to restore her to him if ever she would be stolen away. They sealed this agreement among themselves when they vied for her hand—that to whosoever Helen would become wife, the choice must be respected and whosoever disregarded that would suffer from their concerted claim of justice.

For ten years they prepared for war, building a thousand and more ships and welding bows and arrows and spears and other articles of war. The armada was led by Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and elder brother of Menelaus. The rest were men of renown and valor, kings and princes of their own islands—Achilles, Odysseus, Diomedes, Idomeneus and Nestor. They gathered at Aulis in Boiotia and sailed for Troy.

The siege went on for nine years but they could not open the city gates nor smash down the impregnable city walls. They spent the days plundering and looting nearby towns.

Sometime in the tenth year, on one of their raids, they captured two ladies: Chryseis, beautiful daughter of a priest and Briseis. They gave Chryseis to Agamemnon as a prize and Briseis to Achilles. Then the Achaian host experienced a plague which they found out to be a punishment from a god for the capture of Chryseis. Achilles advised Agamemnon to return the girl. Agamemnon did but took Briseis for himself. The quarrel between the two great warriors began.

### **Homer and His Times**

The Greeks recognized Homer as a blind poet who lived on the island of Chios sometime between 800 and 1000 B.C. Reinhold believes that Homer was born a “generation or two after the reigns of the biblical kings David and Solomon (1946:6).

The authorship of the two books has been ascribed to him not without doubts. Some scholars believe that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed by one man called Homer. Others are of the opinion that they were works of separate poets put together in the sixth century (Bowra, 1966:35). The first idea though prevails.

Homer learned the story from the lips of bards. The events had been sung through generations of singers who were seen as guardians of a wealth of inherited stories, a rich heritage. Bowra proposes that Homer wrote it based on what he learned and how he imagined it. Like the Jews and Christians, the Greeks acknowledged the role of inspiration. While working on a basic material, Homer begins his epic “with a summons to the Muse.” Bowra expands that to a Greek one can only do his best when a “divine spirit is at work in him” (1966:26-27) Especially for a creation like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, a masterpiece in terms of themes, exposition of historical figures and events, and elevated language—to a Greek it was not humanly possible.

Homer lived in a world of superstition. Horrible monsters haunted the minds of his people (Bowra, 1966: 46). In his time, “valor or excellence was based on material splendor, manly prowess, and generous hospitality...” (Ehrenberg, 1965: 9) His society created gods and goddesses to whom men were dependent (Ibid.). What Homer did was to fuse “the past and the present into an indissoluble, harmonious whole (Bowra, 1966: 67).

### **Analysis of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* through World-View Approach**

#### **1. What is prime reality—the really real?**

The Greeks believed in gods and goddesses. Hamilton observes that Homer depicts them with low morality and undignified for their status as gods. “They deceive each other; they are shifty and tricky in their dealings with mortals; they act sometimes like rebellious subjects and sometimes like naughty children and are kept in order only by Father Zeus’ threats” (1942: 284). But it was a great achievement—a long road from savagery (Ibid.)

Except for one occasion of human sacrifice which was looked throughout the story as a horrible wrong, there was no more mention of such kind. The Greek viewed that

- a) Their gods and goddesses mingled with men and intervened in their affairs.

“I don’t blame you, my dear, I blame only the gods, for sending the host of enemies to bring tears to your eyes.” Priam to Helen, Book III, *Iliad*

“... Why do you wish to befool me? Will you carry me away somewhere still farther off, to some city... where you have another friend among the sons of men! Suppose that ‘s why you are here with more of your tricks and schemes. Go and sit by him yourself. Forget the way to Olympus, and never let your feet feel it again! Fuss about the man, take good care of him, and perhaps he will make you his wife one day, or his slave at least...” “Don’t try me too far, hard-hearted woman! Or I may be angry and leave you, and hate you as much as I love you desperately now!”.... Helen was terrified and followed her in silence.... Helen and Aphrodite, Book III *Iliad*

“... I am ashamed; I shudder at myself! .... I wish a whirlwind had carried me off to the mountains on the day that I was born, or thrown me into the roaring sea—I wish the waves had swept me away before all this was done! But since the gods ordained it so,...” Helen, Book VI *Iliad*

- b) The gods were immortal, free from old age and death.

- c) Zeus was the most powerful—omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent.

“Gods or men, I am stronger than them all!” Zeus, Book VIII *Iliad*

“O Father Zeus, almighty and most glorious, lord of Ida! O Sun, who seest all things and hearest all things!” Book III *Iliad*

“Such must be the pleasure of Almighty God, for his power is greatest of all.” Agamemnon in a speech to his men, Book VIII *Iliad*

- d) The minor gods and goddesses were not all-knowing.

“But I must go and see my dear child, and hear what trouble has come to him so far from the battle.” Thetis, Book XVIII *Iliad*

- e) Their gods will show them justice, that in the end righteousness was rewarded and deceit punished.

... Zeus Cronides, enthroned on high in the heavens himself will shake his black mantle over them in wrath for this deceit. Book IV *Iliad*

- f) The gods did not hear their prayers all at once.

“Well, well, the gods do not give us everything at the same time.” Nestor to Agamemnon, Book IV *Iliad*

- g) Their gods and goddesses intermarried with men and women and bore with them children.

h) Their gods and goddesses had wives and husbands and children.

2. **What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?** The order of the world and the lives of men and even of the gods' were controlled by fate and by certain laws—justice for the wronged (that is why Troy must fall and Helen must be restored), hospitality to the stranger, respect for the dead and the aged. Homer made the world rational. Their view of the gods with human attributes “delivered them from the terror of the unhuman supreme over the human” (Hamilton, 1942: 290). Homer banished “the ugly and the frightful and the senseless”; he portrays gods as like men (Ibid., pp 290-291). Hamilton continues to say that Homer through the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* directed his people to move to a higher height, that was, away from magic to reason.

3. **What is a human being?** The Greeks did not have a singular way of looking at man. They saw him as inferior to the gods but in many instances Homer mentions that some of his characters appear like a god as when he describes Achilles and Helen.

a) He was inferior to the gods in wisdom and physical strength.

“Man’s might is nothing against God on high, for he is stronger far than you or I.” Nestor to Diomedes, Book VIII *Iliad*

“O ye Muses who have your home in Olympus! You also are divine, you are present among us, and you know all things; but we hear only a rumour and know nothing at all!” Book II *Iliad*

“Beware, Diomedes! .... Do not try to put yourself on a level with the gods; that is too high for a man’s ambition. The immortal gods are one race, men that walk upon the earth are another.” Apollo, Book V *Iliad*

b) His existence had little meaning. He had no hope of an eternal life.

“For I think there is no more unhappy thing than man, of all creatures that breathe and move on the earth.” Cronion, Book XVII *Iliad*

c) His fate had been destined by the gods or by a higher force called fate though he was given a certain degree of freedom of choice.

“My mother Thetis Silverfoot says, that two different fates are carrying me on the road to death. If I stay here and fight before the city of Troy, there will be no home-coming for me but my fame shall never die; if I go home to my native land, there will be no great fame for me, but I shall live long and not die an early death.” Achilles, Book IX *Iliad*

“As long as he lives and sees the light of the sun he has only sorrow, and I can do nothing to help him.” Book XVIII *Iliad*

4. **What happens to a person at death?**

a) At death, a person’s soul went down to Hades. Death was a separation of the soul and the body.

Even as he spoke, the shadow of death covered him up. His soul left the body and went down to Hades, bewailing his lot,....” Book XVI *Iliad*

“... many of our people lie dead upon the field..., their souls have gone down into the house of death.” Book VII *Iliad*

b) The soul came back to appear before living men and give them messages.

In sleep came to him (Achilles) the soul of unhappy Patroclos, his very image in stature and wearing clothes like his,.... “Bury me without delay, that I may pass the gates of Hades. Those phantoms hold me off, the souls of those whose work is done; they will not suffer me to join them beyond the river, but I wander aimlessly about the broad gates of the house of Hades. And give me that hand, I pray; for never again shall I come back from Hades when once you have given me my portion of fire. ... One thing more I say, ...do not lay my bones apart from yours, Achilles....” Book XXIII, *Iliad*

c) The soul was a phantom.

He stretched out his arms as he spoke, but he could not touch, for the soul was gone like smoke into the earth, twittering. Book XXIII, *Iliad*

“This is the law that rules/ all mortals at their death. For just as soon as life has left the white bones, and the sinews/ no longer hold together bones and flesh,/ when the erupting force of blazing fire/undoes the body, then the spirit wanders: much like a dream, it flits away and hovers, now here, now there.” Book XI, *Odyssey*

d) The living made offerings of prayers and food to make a confrontation with the dead. (see *Odyssey* Book XI)

e) The dead were sacred.

...bring them where the ships lie, that we may take home the bones for their sons when we return to our native land.” Nestor to Agamemnon, Book VII, *Iliad*

“...where friends and kinsmen shall do the last rites with barrow and pillar; for that is the honour due to the dead.” Zeus to Apollo, Book XVI, *Iliad*

f) The dead lived in hopeless state.

“Hades, home/ of shades of faded men, the helpless dead?” Book XI, *Odyssey*

“Achilles, ...In life indeed/ we Argives honored you as deity;/ and now among the dead, you are supreme.” Book XI, *Odyssey*

“Odysseus, don’t embellish death for me./ I’d rather be another’s hired hand./.... Than to rule over all whom death has crushed.” Book XI, *Odyssey*

5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?

a) The Greeks’ way of knowing the will of the gods was through omens which came in the form of birds and snakes and thunder.

As he said this, a lucky bird appeared on the right, an eagle flying high. The Achaian army took heart at the omen and cheered loudly. Book XIII (see also in Book XII) *Iliad*

- b) Another was through the counsel of soothsayers as in the case of Calchas who revealed the cause of the pestilence that struck the Achaian camp (see Book I, *Iliad*)
- c) The gods also spoke to men and advised them what to do. As for being unwise, they blamed Zeus for taking away their sense. Book XIX *Iliad* When they came to counsel or help men they usually disguised themselves into the form of men. Book XXI *Iliad*
- d) Revelation from the dead.  
 “You will not die at sea:/the death that reaches you will be serene./ You will grow old—a man of wealth and ease—/surrounded by a people rich, at peace./ All I have said will surely come to be.” Book XI, *Odyssey*
- e) Dreams as experienced by Agamemnon (see Book I, *Iliad*)

6. **How do we know what is right and wrong?** There was an unwritten moral code which was assumed as general knowledge. It was based on justice and honor, hospitality to strangers (see *Odyssey*, Book IX), respect for elders, fidelity to marriage vows (theme of *Odyssey* and implied also in the *Iliad*), faithfulness to duty (as in the case of kings, warriors, wives, and slaves).

“That’s the way you shall say good-bye to our ships, I think, you presumptuous Trojans! Never satisfied with your violence, after all the insults and outrage you have done to me, you dirty dogs! And you did not fear the wrath of loud-thundering Zeus, the protector of the hospitable house, who shall yet destroy your city utterly. You robbed me of my wedded wife, after you had been guests in her house, and away you sailed with my wealth, quite reckless: and now you want to set fire to our ships and slay us all. No, somewhere you shall be stopped! Book XIII, *Iliad*

7. **What is the meaning of human history?** Fate and gods controlled the destinies of men and everything that surrounded them. The death of Patroclus, the defeat of Homer in the hands of Achilles, the routing of the Achaians in the ships, the death of Achilles and sack of Troy had been planned by the heavenly council. Men lived to fulfill their mission as stated by Diomedes: “Two of us will go on fighting, Sthenelos and I, until we make our goal for God has sent us here.” Book XI, *Iliad* Better men were those that fought for a united cause (as Odysseus was contrasted to the Suitors) and those who worked in the fields and served their masters faithfully. There was marked roles for a man and a woman as articulated by Hector: “Go home now, and see to your household work, the loom and the distaff, and keep your servants to their tasks. War shall be men’s business, and mine especially of all those who are in Ilios.” Book VI, *Iliad* They believed that it was the gods that set their kings: “Zeus has placed in your hands the scepter and the law, that you may take counsel on their behalf.” Nestor to Agamemnon, Book IX, *Iliad*

**Comparative Presentation of the Biblical and Pagan Worldview As  
Seen in the Bible and the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey***

Seven World-View Questions	Biblical Worldview (The Bible)	Pagan Worldview (The <i>Iliad</i> and the <i>Odyssey</i> )
What is prime reality?	God is a Trinity (God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit)	Gods and goddesses who were immortal but imperfect
What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?	Orderly but affected by the entrance of sin. There is conflict between good and evil.	Order was controlled by fate and the gods.
What is a human being?	Created in the image of God, now in fallen nature	Inferior to the gods in wisdom and physical strength
What happens to a person at death?	Death is a state of sleep. Man will be resurrected in God's second coming.	His soul leaves his body and goes down to Hades.
Why is it possible to know anything at all?	Man was created in the image of God—an all-knowing God, who has put in his mind the inherent ability to know.	The gods and goddesses reveal themselves through omens, soothsayers, direct association with humans, dreams, visitation of the soul
How do we know what is right and wrong?	God reveals His will through His Word, Jesus' life and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.	Through an unwritten moral code which was based on justice and honor
What is meaning of human history?	God is involved in the affairs of man but gives him freedom of choice.	The gods and goddesses intervened in human affairs.

**Suggestions to Literature Teachers**

There are other ways to teach the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* aside from the world-view analysis approach. Enumerated below are activities the literature teacher may adopt as she teaches these two books or other literary pieces in a Christian perspective.

1. Beautiful Lines. The teacher asks the students to read through the text marking phrases and sentences that are beads of sparkling thought strung together in choice words. I call these beautiful lines. The aim of this activity is to develop in the students a taste and love for great ideas and beautiful words and create in them an awareness that their presence in a literary work is a mark of greatness, as they are a mark of a great man. Among those found in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are:

“Words empty as the wind are best unsaid.” Book XI, *Odyssey*

“It was like a storm of shrieking winds when the dust on the roads is thickest, blowing up the dust in great whirling clouds.” Book XIII, *Iliad*

“It was like some winter torrent in flood which thrusts away all dikes: no dike can hold it, no walls of the fruitful orchards, when it comes with a sudden burst swollen by the pouring rain, and beats down in ruin the noble works of strong men.” Book V, *Iliad*

“The hosts were like two opposite lines of reapers driving their swathes in the wheat or barley of a great farm, while thick the handfuls fall.” Book XI, *Iliad*

“Not so loud are the waves of the sea booming against the land, when it rolls in from the deep before the blustering northeaster; not so loud is the roar in the glens of a blazing mountain, when fire leaps upon the forest; not so loud is the shrieking wind in the treetops, the angriest wind that roars,....” Book XIV, *Iliad*

2. **Thematic Analysis.** Most works do not come with one theme alone. It has many—major or minor ones. From these two books we find the following concepts: unity and discord, sanctity of friendship, superiority of wisdom and physical prowess for men; wisdom and beauty for women, wanderings and homecoming.

3. **Character Analysis.** Lattimore believes that the strength of a story lies in its characters and the way they are depicted. Writers usually portray their characters as people, real people with identifiable characteristics, strengths and weaknesses. They make them as credible as they can so readers may be able to empathize. Their problems are people’s problems and their solutions may be people’s solutions. From the way the characters live their lives, readers may be enlightened that they may live better lives than the way they have lived.

To help students go into character analysis, the teacher may ask them to make a table which may look like this:

Character Analysis of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

Character	Strength	Result	Weakness	Result
Achilles	Hospitality toward King Priam	Inward peace	Overwhelming wrath	Defeat of the Greeks and death of Patroclus
Menelaus	Loyalty to his men	Loyalty of his men to him		
Penelope	Faithfulness to her husband	Being reunited with him and a happy life ever after		
Odysseus	Wisdom and determination to return home	Being reunited with his wife and a happy life ever after	Treachery and pride	Delayed homecoming

The teacher can lead the students to reflect on the rewarding results of good values (strength) and tragic results of negative character traits (weakness). Students may share their

experiences when they were rewarded for their strength and punished for their weakness. Further discussion can be pushed towards the symbolism of Penelope's faithfulness and happy reunion with her husband. This can be a metaphor of the trials of God's church as it waits for the Bridegroom. In the end, there will be a slaughter of the suitors and all the maids that connived with them (the evil ones) and the reunion of Penelope, Telemachus and the faithful maids and fieldhands (the righteous ones) to Odysseus (the Bridegroom). The teacher though should not fail to point out that Odysseus is not a perfect metaphor for the Bridegroom. The table clarifies that he has a weakness while God is perfect.

4. Another activity is the analysis of customs and traditions of the people. The theory behind this is that in a literary material is embedded the people's way of life. By doing this, the teacher widens her students' insight into other cultures. Among these are folk medicine (see Book XI, *Iliad*), mourning for the dead (see Book XVIII, *Iliad*), cremation of the dead and the games that follow (see Book XXIII, *Iliad*), dowry and bride price (see Book IX, *Iliad*).

5. Viewing the film version. Most literary works have been translated into film. Among these are Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*; Lucy Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series; Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Macbeth*; Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*; and many more including the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. When the teacher uses this activity, she must remember that the reading of the text must precede the viewing of the film. In the reading, she allows the students to recreate the scenes alive in their own imaginations. This develops in them creative imagination, the ability to picture out in the mind something which is not present. This skill is necessary to prepare students to come up with creative solutions to life's problems. In another place and time, the demand for new thought patterns is real.

Some sample questions are: Are your interpretations and the director's the same? What are the differences? Which is more credible? What are your bases? Which is more faithful to the text? What values do you learn from the film? Did the character make the right choice? If you were he, what would you have done? Which of the characters do you want to emulate? Why?

It will be helpful if the school can create a committee to preview films for student viewing whether for recreation or class critique.

6. One of the activities which my students enjoy the most is dramatic interpretations. I give them excerpts of the text, usually *Iliad's* Book VI, The Farewell between Hector and Andromache and Book XXIV, Priam Ransoms the Body of Hector. The class is divided into groups and each group assigns the cast—director, scriptwriter, props and costume coordinators and actors and actresses. It is necessary that the teacher checks the script and makes necessary comments (students' imagination can sometimes leap out of

bounds) in spite of my injunction to use their sanctified imagination as Youngberg (1968) calls it. From this activity the students learn teamwork, creativity, and responsibility. They also internalize the elements of the story and experience what the characters go through. Caution must be taken that the material does not sensationalize evil. The teacher must exercise judicious choice of her materials. One of the aims of this activity is to elaborate the good themes so that in the students may be created a desire that these themes become the themes of their lives. Students become what they imitate and idolize.

7. The teacher can encourage her students to point out ideas which they do not agree with. These ideas will be discussed in the class with a Biblical frame of reference.

- a. "When one fights a fellow that finds favour in the sight of God, he simply tempts providence and brings tribulation rolling upon himself." Menelaos Book XVII, *Iliad*
- b. "But Zeus gives rank and honour still to every creature at his will." Menelaos, Book XVII, *Iliad*
- c. "The persuasion of a friend often brings a happy end!" Book XV, *Iliad*
- d. "No man will send me to my grave unless it be so ordained. But destiny is a thing which no man can escape, neither coward nor brave man from the day he is born." Hector to Andromache Book VI, *Iliad*

8. A literature teacher may find it interesting that the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey* and the Bible have many strikingly similar phrases and lines. Homer makes many allusions to the teachings of the Bible. Among these are:

- a) The pestilence motif as a result of sin.
- b) The dream motif as a revelation of God's will.
- c) The burnt offerings, their procedures and purpose which is cleansing and reconciliation to a Supreme Being. (see Book I of *Iliad*)
- d) The idea of intercession (Thetis interceding in behalf of Achilles, Book I, *Iliad*)
- e) Allusion to the fall of Lucifer (conversation of Hephaistos and Hera in Book I, Zeus to all the gods in Book VIII, *Iliad*)
- f) Allusion to heaven and the activity of the angels  
... a splendid harp with Apollo to play it, and the Muses singing turn by turn in their lovely voices. Book I, *Iliad*
- g) Reference to the story of Joseph. Book VI includes a story of Bellerophon who was trapped by lady Anteia for her lust for him but she could not persuade him (see Book VI, *Iliad*).
- h) Reference to the Biblical view of God as a giver of gifts (note what Polydamas told Nestor in Book IX, *Iliad*)

The teacher should not stop at the similarities but lead the students to probe into the why of things. Why are there marked similarities in *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and the Bible? Many reasons can be surmised here. The best is that God is first; His Word is first. As people dispersed to different parts of the world they carried with them the concept of God.

So deep has this settled in their consciousness that no effort could totally eradicate it. As they searched for meaning in a Godless society their view of God surfaced. Sprinkled all over in their literary creations is God's truth though in fragmented form.

### Conclusion

Using the world-view analysis approach is one way to integrate faith and learning in a literature class. It is an in-depth exercise which fulfills many objectives—helping the students to develop analytical and critical minds, and to clarify their own worldview as they look into the worldview of the author and the people he represents. Much more the teacher actualizes the purpose of Christian education: “To form the mind, to stretch the understanding, to sharpen one’s intellectual powers, to enlarge the vision, to cultivate the imagination and impart a sense of the whole....” (Holmes, 1975: 30).

This approach is a launching pad upon which the teacher can rise to her higher mission, that is, to help the students appreciate their knowledge of the truth and awaken in them a sense of urgency and dedication to share the good news with others who hold a different worldview, a worldview not based on God's truth. The story of the Ultimate Reality who is loving and just must be told.

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