

Different worldviews, different worlds

A lot of the challenge faced by Christian missionaries and others in West Africa is the gulf between worldviews. Westerners find the climate and the landscape very different from what they know at home. If anything, the 'landscapes of the mind' are even more different. Let's eavesdrop on the training of a West African spiritual healer ...

Usually we were sitting in his room, he in his wooden chair, I on the floor in front of him. He always began his instructions with, 'Do you listen, my son?' I still remember his gestures and his voice, when he taught me, 'On top of every juju [written-down spell] stands, 'In the name of Allah, gracious and merciful.' Then I take a verse from the Holy Qur'an and write it down on the paper. I also add some names of demons. If the juju should do something evil to a person then the name of the devil is written on the juju paper. I draw a circle on the paper and write the name to whom the juju is directed in the circle.

'If the juju does not work my client will return to me. I will open the juju and will add the name of the father, grandfather, and grandmother of the person in the circle. This will help the demons to find the right person. The demons can do anything they want to do against that person to whom the paper is directed. If the paper should attack several people I will use numbers because every Arabic letter has a number. So if you see numbers on the paper, they represent names of certain people who are going to be harmed. People can even be made crazy or can be killed.

Can the gospel reach into these (to many of us) remote landscapes?