Worldviews Through History – Compared to a Christian View

Kerby Anderson provides a summary of how mankind has viewed the world from the Romans until today. This summary provides us a perspective against which to compare and contrast a Christian, biblical worldview based on New Testament principles.

Roman Worldview

On the Probe Web site we often talk about worldviews. I want to explain how the worldviews we talk about developed through history. We will be using as our foundation an excellent book written by Professor Glenn Sunshine whom I have met and also had the privilege of interviewing. His book is *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home.*{1}



Glenn Sunshine is a member of the church that Jonathan Edwards attended when he was at Yale. Professor Sunshine gave a lecture about Jonathan Edward's worldview at a conference they held, and Chuck Colson invited him to teach with the Centurions program. He gave a talk about "How We Got Here" and then later turned it into *Why You Think the Way You Do*.

Since we will be talking about worldview, it would be good to begin with Glenn Sunshine's definition. "A worldview is the framework you use to interpret the world and your place in it."{2} You do not need to be a philosopher to have a worldview. All of us have a worldview.

Although Glenn Sunshine begins with the worldview of the Roman world, he quickly takes us back to neo-Platonism. It was the religion and philosophy based upon Plato's ideas. Neo-

Platonism was the belief that the fundamental ground of reality is non-physical. Instead it is found in the world of ideas (and is known as *idealism*). These ideas cast shadows that cast other shadows until they arrive at the physical world.

According to this worldview, the whole universe exists as a hierarchy. The spiritual is superior to the physical. This provides a scale of values for the world, but also provides a scale for humanity. In other words, those who are superior should rule over those who are inferior because they have demonstrated their ability to rule or conquer.

This view of hierarchy led to the idea of the father having superiority over all members of the family. It led to the idea that men are superior to women. It led to the idea that the emperor should rule and be worshipped. And it led to the idea that slaves are inferior to free people and nothing more than "living tools."{3}

This explains not only the success of Rome but also its ugly underside. Essentially there are two pictures of Rome: "the glittering empire and the rotten core."{4}

In Rome, human life did not have much value. While it is true that Romans abandoned human sacrifice, they engaged in other practices equally abhorrent. "They picked up the Etruscan practice of having people fight to the death in games in honor of the dead."{5}

Slavery provided the economic foundation for the empire. Abortion and infanticide were regularly practiced. "Roman families would usually keep as many healthy sons as they had and only one daughter; the rest were simply discarded."{6} And Roman law required that a father kill any visibly deformed child.

Transformation of the Pagan World

How did Christianity transform the pagan world? In AD 303, the Roman emperor Diocletian began a severe persecution of Christians. But because Christians were faithful and even willing to go to their deaths for their beliefs, their credibility increased. Eventually they were accepted and allowed to exercise their faith. Constantine even legalized the Christian faith by AD 313.

Once that took place, Christian ideas were allowed to percolate through society. One of the most important ideas was that human beings are created in the image of God. This idea has a profound impact. First, it meant that people are fundamentally equal to each other. No longer were there grounds for saying that some people are superior to others. In fact, "Christians were the first people in history to oppose slavery systematically."{7}

Christians (who believed that all are created in the image of God) treated the sick differently. They believed that even those who were deathly ill still deserved care. Dionysius of Alexandria reported that Christians (often at great risk to their own lives) "visited the sick fearlessly and ministered to them continually."{8} They would rescue babies abandoned in an act of infanticide. They would oppose abortion.

In economics, we can also see the influence of Christianity. The idea that God created the universe and then rested showed that God worked. That would mean that human beings (made in the image of God) are expected to work as well. God gave Adam and Eve intellectual work (in naming the animals) and physical work (in tending the Garden). Contrast this with the Roman world where physical work was seen as something that only slaves would do. Christians saw labor as something that was intrinsically valuable.

Labor is good; drudgery is bad. Drudgery is a result of the

Fall (Genesis 3). So Christians were the first to develop technology to remove drudgery from work. Other civilizations had technology, but the West uniquely applied such things as water power to make work more valuable and worthwhile by eliminating the drudgery and repetitive nature of certain tasks.

Property rights were also well-developed during this period. "The medieval world under the influence of Christianity has a much stronger emphasis on property rights than other cultures had."{9}

These ideas come from a biblical worldview and began to be developed during the Middle Ages. This led to a complete transformation of western society and set it on a trajectory to our modern world.

Christianity and Politics

Glenn Sunshine points out that in the West, the dynamic between church and state is unique. Christianity was originally a persecuted minority religion. Even when Christianity was declared a legal religion, the church did not depend upon the state. So the question of the relationship between church and state has been an open question.

During the Middle Ages, two men helped shape political thinking. The first was Augustine, who described two realms: the City of God and the City of Man. He argued that human government is the result of sin. He believed that it is based upon selfishness. Government itself is corruption. In the absence of government, anarchy reigns. So government is a necessary evil.

The City of God is different in that it is not based upon force or coercion. It is based upon love, charity, and repentance. That doesn't mean that the City of Man and the City of God cannot work together. But overall, Augustine had a

more pessimistic view of government.

Aristotle had a different view of government. As people in the Middle Ages began to rediscover Aristotle, they began to develop a different view of government. They saw government as a necessary institution that God has placed in the world. It had positive and legitimate functions.

Aristotle believed that government had a more positive role in society. But the Christian theologians had to also deal with the problem of original sin. They wanted to find a way to prevent original sin from corrupting the government. The tension between these two views is what drives the discussion of western political theory.

Sunshine notes that "another check on civil government involved the idea of rights."{10} We normally associate the idea of rights, especially inalienable rights, with eighteenth century political theorists. However, John Locke's idea that we have inalienable right to life, liberty, and property is already found in the writings of medieval theologians. The basis for this is a belief that all are created in the image of God. Therefore, all of us have a number of natural rights that the state cannot remove. Natural law was the idea that God wove moral laws into the fabric of the universe.

There also was the belief that there should be limitations on the jurisdiction of civil government and church government. One example is the Magna Carta, that stated that the English church was to be free and its liberties unimpaired by the crown.

The Renaissance and Enlightenment

What about the transformation into the modern world? In the early modern period, starting with the Renaissance in the fifteenth century to the seventeenth century, there are a whole series of events that shook the worldview consensus that

developed in the Middle Ages.

Previously there were certain beliefs about truth: (1) that truth was absolute, (2) that truth is knowable to the human mind, and (3) that truth is necessary for society (a society could not be based upon a lie). The best good guide for truth would be the great civilizations of the past that lasted for so long and thus must have been based upon truth.

The idea was to go to the past to find truth. During the Renaissance scholars were very successful in collecting manuscripts and finding ancient sources. Unfortunately, they found so many sources that they discovered there was not a coherent perspective. The ancient writers disagreed with each other. In a sense, the Renaissance was a victim of its own success. There was too much information. The more ancient sources they found, the less likely they would find agreement in the perspectives. Once it became obvious that this grand synthesis was not possible, the entire purpose of intellectual activity was thrown into question.

Then there were the wars of the Reformation in which various factions fought over who was the true follower of the prince of peace. The devastation of the religious wars left many people wondering if there really was religious certainty. No longer was the question “is Christianity true” but rather “which Christianity is true?” Now you had a multiplicity of options that left people confused. This also generated questions about the role of religion in society.

Then you also had the discovery of the New World and whole people groups that had never heard the gospel. Some began to ask questions like: Is it fair of God to send them all to hell because they had never heard of Christianity? Or, in light of biblical history, where did they come from? How do these people fit with the story of Noah? These discoveries called into question biblical morality and biblical history.

Also, people started using a new way of looking at knowledge. They began to use the scientific method to evaluate everything. This begins a significant shift in how we understand the world. There is a movement away from certainty toward probability. There is also a movement away from studying ancient authors toward scientific experimentation.

In the modern world, therefore, truth is not found in the past but in the present and future. With this is also questioning of biblical authority.

The Modern World and Christianity

Let me conclude by talking about our modern world and how Christians should respond. Sunshine concludes his book with chapters on "Modernity and Its Discontents" and "The Decay of Modernity." Essentially the modern world has left humans with a loss of truth, certainty, and meaning in life. "Materialism provides a ready answer to the question of the meaning and purpose of life: there is none."{11} From a Darwinian perspective, our only purpose is to pass our genes on to the next generation.

This rejection of spirituality and meaning has ushered in various other worldviews as alternatives. These would be such worldviews as postmodernism, neo-paganism, and the New Age Movement. Sunshine argues that in many ways we have been catapulted back to Rome.

Like Rome we value toleration as the supreme virtue. Rome believed that toleration was important because it kept the empire together. If you go beyond the lines of toleration, you are persecuted. This is similar to the mindset today. The highest value in a postmodern world is toleration. Toleration so defined means that we will embrace any and all lifestyles people may choose.

The Romans lived in an oversexed society.{12} So do we. Rome

practiced abortion. So does our society. Rome was antinatal and made a deliberate attempt to prevent pregnancy. They focused on sexual enjoyment and did not want to bother with kids. In our modern world, birthrates in most of the western democracies are plummeting.

Western civilization is a product of ancient Roman civilization plus Christianity. Sunshine argues that once you removed Christianity, modern society reverted back to Roman society and a recovery of the ancient pagan worldview.

So how should Christians live in this world? Of course, we should live out a biblical worldview. Every generation is called to live faithfully to the gospel, and our generation is no exception.

This is especially important today since we are facing a society that is not willing to accept biblical ideas. In many ways, we face a challenge similar to the early church, though not as daunting. From history we can see that the early church did live faithfully and transformed the Roman world. Christians produced a totally new civilization: western culture. By living faithfully before the watching world, we will increase our credibility and earn the respect from those who are around us by living in accordance with biblical principles.

Notes

1. Glenn Sunshine, *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).
2. Ibid., 13.
3. Ibid., 31
4. Ibid., 20
5. Ibid., 30
6. Ibid., 33-34
7. Ibid., 43

8. Ibid., 44
9. Ibid., 76
10. Ibid., 91
11. Ibid., 177
12. Ibid., 33

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The Clash of Two Worldviews

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The image of a plane slamming into the World Trade Center is indelibly imprinted in our minds. It was more than just an evil act—it was a horribly accurate illustration of the crash of two worldviews.

America works because it was built on the foundation of the Christian worldview, and because we have been richly blessed by God. But for the Arab world, much of it living a seventh-century lifestyle, trying to enter the modern world hasn't worked. Importing the goodies of America's prosperity—things like jet planes, e-mail and McDonald's—is easy. Importing what it takes to produce these things isn't. America is blessed with things we take for granted—a free market, accountability in our political systems, and the rule of law. These things work because they are based on a Christian worldview.

The founding fathers embraced the Christian beliefs in both the intrinsic value of the individual as God's image-bearer and the sinfulness of fallen man living in a fallen world. So they wisely set up checks and balances that allowed self-expression and self-government to flourish while at the same time setting limits to restrain the sin nature. Our political

system splits power between the executive, judicial and legislative branches. Our free market system results in the benefits of competition. America's political and economic systems work because they are based on a Christian worldview. The Islamic worldview doesn't see man as fallen and sinful, just weak, misled and forgetful of God. There is no room for individual freedom or expression, and we see this in the lack of development of Islamic science or technology or creativity.

The rule of law is such a part of America that many of us don't know what it is. It means we are a nation of laws rather than men; we are governed by laws rather than by individuals. It means no man is above the law. This comes from a biblical worldview that teaches all men are fallen creatures who cannot be trusted to govern well unless they submit to a transcendent authority. In an Islamic worldview, where there is no concept of separation of church and state, political leaders can and do demand submission to themselves. They ARE the law.

Many Muslim leaders hate the West because the decadent pleasures of Western culture are luring the faithful away from Islam. Of course, many Christians share this abhorrence for the culture's indulgence in immorality, pornography, sexual perversion and divorce. But regardless of whether it's the positive strengths that are a result of our foundational Christian worldview, or the negative worldly pleasures that result from abandoning it, our current war on terrorism is the result of a clash of worldviews. Which is why it won't be solved easily or anytime soon, and we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

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Worldproofing Our Kids (commentary)

A mother camel and her baby camel are talking one day when the baby camel asks, “Mom, why do I have these huge three-toed feet?” The mother camel answers, “So when we trek through the desert your toes will help you stay on top of the soft sand.” A few minutes later the baby camel asks, “Mom, why do I have these great big long eyelashes?” The mother camel says, “To keep the sand out of your eyes on trips through the desert.” After a little while he says, “Mom? Why do I have these big old humps on my back?” “To help us store water for our long treks across the desert, so we can go without drinking for long periods.” The baby camel answers, “That’s great, Mom. So we have huge feet to stop us from sinking in the sand, and long eyelashes to keep the sand out of our eyes, and these big humps to store water, but Mom?” “What?” “What are we doing in the San Diego zoo?”

We parents have a similar challenge in today’s culture. Our kids come equipped for an eternal, supernatural, transcendent kind of life—but they live in a world that doesn’t recognize it. We have the important task of worldproofing our kids—preparing them to be in the world but not of it, helping them avoid being squeezed into the world’s mold.

One way is to raise some basic questions that Lael Arrington suggests in her book *Worldproofing Your Kids*. One question is, Who makes the rules? We need to help our kids understand that there are only two answers to that question. Either God makes the rules, or man makes the rules. We can point out the orderliness of traffic patterns because someone else has decided that red means stop and green means go. We can talk about what it would be like if everybody made up their own traffic rules. We can watch videos together like Alice in Wonderland and Lord of the Flies that show what happens when

anybody and everybody can make the rules.

Another important question is, Where Did We Come From? This isn't about sex and the stork, but about creation and evolution. Either God made us because He loves us, or we are nothing more than an accident in an uncaring universe. My pastor has a routine with his kids. He asks, "How EVER did I get so blessed to be your daddy and get you for a son? His kids answer, "Because God gave me to you!" Jeff's kids know God made them, and that they are God's gift to their father.

A third question to talk about with our kids is, Why am I here? We have the awesome privilege of casting a vision for them for their part in the larger story of life, one that involves a planning and purpose for their lives, a calling from God to play their specially designed and gifted part. We can tell our kids that there isn't anybody quite like them in the whole world, and God has a part for them that will bring joy and fulfillment because they're doing what they were created for.

Our privilege as parents is to teach our kids that they were created for God and for heaven, not for this world. Just like camels were created for the desert and not the zoo.

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Confident Belief

Introduction

It's hard to imagine how any Christian at any time in history could live life completely free from any doubts about the truth of the faith. Suffering, inconsistent behavior among

Christians, the lure of the world, intellectual misgivings—these things and others can lead us to question whether it's all true.

Since the days of the early church there have been objections to the gospel which have given pause to Christians. Can I really believe this? *Should* I believe this? Doubt is part of human experience, and Christians experience it no less than non-Christians. Doubts about our faith are more momentous than many we deal with, however, because of their implications. I have my doubts about whether my favorite football team will be in the Super Bowl, but I can still hang in there with them as a fan. The claims of Christ are much more momentous, however. Our individual destinies and more are at stake.

We find ourselves today in the West beset by two different schools of thought which can cause us to doubt. On the one hand are the modernists, heirs of the Enlightenment, who believe that reason is sufficient for true knowledge and that Christianity just doesn't measure up to sound reason. On the other hand are postmodernists who don't believe anyone can know what is true, and are astonished that we dare lay claim to having *the* truth about ultimate reality.

I'd like to look at these two mindsets to see if they have legitimate claims. The goal is to see if either should be allowed to rob us of our confidence.

Modernism and Certain Knowledge

Modernists believe that our reason is sufficient to know truth, in fact the *only* reliable means of attaining knowledge. Only that which can be scientifically measured and quantified and reasoned through logically can constitute true knowledge.

What does this say, however, about things that *can't* be so measured, things such as beauty, morals, and matters of the spirit? Can we not have knowledge of such things? We have inherited the belief that such things are at best matters of

opinion; they are subjective matters having to do only with the individual's experiences and tastes.

This way of thinking is disastrous for religious beliefs of almost any kind. Christianity in particular makes claims that can't be weighed or counted or measured (although there *are* elements which *can* be empirically tested): the nature of God, justification by faith, the deity of Christ, and the reality of the Holy Spirit are a few examples. Since these elements are central but don't fit within our logical, scientific mindset, they are said to be matters of personal opinion at best, or figments of our imagination at worst.

The matter of the "knowability" of the faith is a problem for nonbelievers, but it can be a worse problem for believers. Those whom Daniel Taylor calls "reflective Christians" often find themselves betrayed by their own doubts; they feel the weight of providing for themselves the kind of evidences a nonbeliever might demand and feel guilty when they cannot produce in their own minds a logical certainty for their beliefs.{1} What such a believer typically does is continue to mount up evidence and arguments and think and talk and think some more and hope that one day either the missing link will come clear or he will be able to "call off thoughts awhile," in the words of poet Gerard Manley Hopkins.{2}

Postmodern Skepticism

Times are changing, though, and the problem Christians face more and more is the challenge coming from the other end of the spectrum. If modernists demand indubitable knowledge, postmodernists deny the very possibility of true knowledge at all. While on the one hand modernists say there is not enough evidence to trust our beliefs, on the other hand postmodernists tell us our evidences mean nothing regarding the truth value of our faith.

Postmodernists believe that truth is a construct of our own

imagination and desires. They believe there is no single, unifying account of reality that covers everything, one *metanarrative* as they call it. They believe one must leave everything an open question, that one shouldn't settle anywhere since there is no way to know ultimate truths at all. Our own realities are created for us partly by our society and partly by our own exercise of power, often by the very words we use.

Is the Christian, then, now to think of her faith as just that? *Her* faith? Something that has validity for *her* and her *group* but not necessarily for everyone? This kind of thinking fosters religious pluralism, the belief that truth is found in many different religions. This is disastrous for Christianity for it leaves us wondering why we should hold to these beliefs when others might be more attractive.

Thus, there is on the one hand the modernist who thinks we can know everything we need to know using our reason, and on the other the postmodernist who thinks the search for knowledge is a waste of time. In the face of these mindsets, what should we do? Should we resign ourselves to feeling guilty and maybe a little intellectually perverse because we can't assign mathematical certainty to our beliefs? Or do we swallow the skepticism of postmodernists and just hold our beliefs as the creations of our own minds and wills? It is my contention that we needn't be bound by either position on truth and knowledge, but that we can have knowledgeable confidence in the truth of the faith.

Modernism: The Enlightenment Search for Knowledge

Modernity was the era which had its roots in the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries, and which continued until recent years. Although postmodernism seems to be the order of the day, one worldview doesn't come to a screeching halt one

day and another pick up the next. Thus, there are still many people who view life in modernist terms.

Modernists believe that reason is the only truly reliable source of knowledge. Revelation is set aside. Since reason is the authority, only that which has logical or mathematical certainty can be accepted as true knowledge. Anything less can only have some level of probability. The attacks of empiricists such as David Hume apparently rendered Christianity highly *im*probable.

Lesslie Newbigin argues that this demand for indubitable knowledge gave rise to the skepticism of our day. In fact, postmodern skepticism is a sharp rejection of Enlightenment thought.

Let's look briefly at the Enlightenment ideal of knowledge.

René Descartes and the Search for Certainty

In response to the skepticism of the 17th century, mathematician/philosopher René Descartes accepted the challenge of providing an argument for the existence of God which would be beyond doubt.{3} Descartes's approach was to use the tool of the skeptics—which is *doubt*—as his starting point. He threw out everything that couldn't be known indubitably, and was left with one idea which he couldn't doubt: I think, therefore I am. He developed his philosophy from this starting point.

Two important points are to be made about Descartes's method. First, he made the break from starting with God as the measure of all things to starting with the individual person. Human reason was now the supreme arbiter of truth.{4} Second, Descartes established doubt as a principle of knowledge.{5} In modern times, critical thinking doubts everything until it is proved true.

On this basis, Western man devoted himself to knowing as much

as he could about his world without any reference to God, and with the idea that knowledge had to be logically or mathematically certain. Knowledge is quantifiable; one must strip away anything other than brute, objective facts which can be weighed, counted, or measured or deduced from facts which can be so quantified. Knowledge was to be objective, certain, and dispassionate—not subject to personal feelings or values or faith commitments. As theologian Stanley Grenz says, "The new tools of research included precise methods of measurement and a dependence on mathematical logic. In turning to this method, Enlightenment investigators narrowed their focus of interest—and hence began to treat as real only those aspects of the universe that are measurable."{6}

On the heels of Descartes came Isaac Newton who gave us a vision of the cosmos as being an orderly machine, an idea in keeping with the rationalism of Descartes. The universe could be understood once its laws were understood. Although Descartes and Newton believed their ideas gave support to their Christian beliefs, they were subsequently used for just the opposite. "The modern world turned out to be Newton's mechanistic universe populated by Descartes's autonomous, rational substance," says Grenz. "In such a world, theology was forced to give place to the natural sciences, and the central role formerly enjoyed by the theologian became the prerogative of the natural scientist."{7}

Was Descartes's method significant in Western History? Grenz notes that "Descartes set the agenda for philosophy for the next three hundred years" by making human reason central.{8} In time, this approach was applied to other disciplines as well, from politics to ethics to theology. "In this way," says Grenz, "all fields of the human endeavor became, in effect, branches of natural science."{9}

Time has proved the value of scientific and mathematical reasoning. We all enjoy the benefits of technology. This being the case, however, why is it that we at the turn of the

century find ourselves so skeptical? What has happened to the confidence modern man had in his ability to know?

Postmodernism: The Rejection of the Enlightenment Idea

With the acceptance of René Descartes's idea that truth was to be found ultimately in reason, and that the starting point for knowledge was doubt, the die was cast for the period of history we call modernity. Using just his reason, and denying anything which wasn't certain, the individual could come to true knowledge with no reference to God.

But skeptical attacks continued through such philosophers as David Hume. In response, Immanuel Kant formulated a new understanding of knowledge. He believed that knowledge came from data received by the senses which was then formed into understandable ideas by the workings of our own minds. Thus, the structure of our own minds became a crucial component of the known world. With Kant, the thinking individual was now firmly established as the final authority for truth. Even with this, however, Kant still believed there *is* a reality external to us, and that all our minds work the same way to understand it.

Although Kant believed that we could truly know the world around us, his ideas pushed us a significant step *away* from that reality. He believed that we are thus incapable of knowing things as they are *in themselves*; we only know things as they *appear* to us. Thus, since God doesn't appear to us empirically, we do not have real knowledge of Him. Philosophers following him began to pick away at his ideas. Johann Fichte, for example, accepted Kant's ideas for the most part, but denied the idea that there *are* things-in-themselves; in other words, that there is something to reality apart from our perceptions of it. What we perceive is what is there. Now the way was made clear to think in terms of "alternative

conceptual frameworks." There could now be multiple ways of understanding and interpreting the world.

Nietzsche

Other philosophers picked away at Kant as well, but we'll only consider one more, the man who has been called the "patron saint of postmodern philosophy,"{10} Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche was a true foe of modernism. He believed the whole project of building up these "great edifices of ideas"{11} was fundamentally flawed. Our attempts to abstract general knowledge from the particulars around us only results in distortion, he thought. He argued that "what we commonly accept as human knowledge is in fact merely a self-contained set of illusions. He essentially viewed 'truth' as a function of the language we employ and hence believed that truth 'exists' only within specific linguistic contexts."{12} Our world is only a construction of our own perspective, an aesthetic creation. And it has its roots in the will to power, "the desire to perfect and transcend the self through the exercise of personal creative power rather than dependence on anything external." Thus, "Motivated by the will to power," he thought, "we devise metaphysical concepts—conceptions of 'truth'—that advance the cause of a certain species or people."{13}

This is the heart of postmodern thought, and it surrounds us today. We cannot know the truth about reality; we only know our own constructions of it. We can hope to convince others to join us in our beliefs, but there is no room for rational argumentation, because one's views about the world are no better or worse than any others. As Stanley Grenz says, "all human interpretations—including the Christian worldview—are equally valid because all are equally invalid."{14} No one can really know, so believe what you want. But in attacking the possibility of knowing truth, postmodernism has cut off the limb upon which it sits. One writer has noted that postmodernism has destroyed itself. "It has deconstructed its

entire universe. So all that are left are pieces. All that remains to be done is to play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces—that is postmodern."{15}

These, then, are the primary choices our society offers for considering the truth value of Christianity. Either we can affirm the modernist attitude and be satisfied only with scientific or mathematical certainty, or with the postmodernist we can throw the whole truth thing out the window.

Impossible Demands, Groundless Limitations: A Critique

When challenged directly or indirectly by the world about the validity of our faith, what do we do? Do we continue to use modernistic ways of thinking to make a case for the faith, believing that we must provide logically certain proof? Or do we offer a postmodern, "true for me" argument relying on subjective matters which we use to persuade people to believe?{16} The answer lies in rejecting both the demands of modernism and the limitations of postmodernism.

Neither Mathematical Certainty . . .

In his book *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship*, Lesslie Newbigin argues that the modern approach was essentially wrong-headed, that it called for something which was unattainable.

With respect to the insistence on mathematical certainty, Newbigin notes first that this way of thinking takes us away from the real world rather than moving us closer to it. He says, "The certainty of mathematical propositions, as Einstein often observed, is strictly proportionate to their remoteness from reality."{17} For example, there is no such thing as a point as understood mathematically. Certainty belongs to the world of pure forms, not that of material things. "Only

statements that can be doubted make contact with reality," he says.{18}

Second, thinkers in the Romantic period argued that "mathematical reason could not do justice to the fullness of human experience." Such things as art and music and cultural traditions can't be mapped out mathematically.{19}

Third, the ambition of dealing with facts apart from values or other non-factual biases is an impossible dream. We are never value-free in our thinking, even in the laboratory. As writers such as Thomas Kuhn and Michael Polanyi have shown (both of whom were scientists turned philosophers), what one studies and for what purpose, how one acts ethically in the lab and in the reporting of studies, what ones overall goals are for particular scientific work—all these reflect unproved value commitments; no one gives indubitable evidence for their validity. For all practical purposes it is impossible to remove such values held by faith.

In addition, I suggest that it isn't merely practically impossible to remove these faith/value commitments: it would be *wrong* to attempt to do so. One must always situate one's work in a framework of values to give it any significant meaning at all. Otherwise we are just acting, just doing things with no purpose to give coherence and direction.

Someone might object here that ones value commitments *can* be verified so as to render them no longer just faith commitments. To this Newbigin responds that faith is fundamental, even to doubt! For even doubt must rest on beliefs which are not themselves doubted. This is because one doubts something because it conflicts with something else one already believes. If that prior belief is also subjected to the test of doubt, it, too, can only be doubted because of something else one believes, and so on. Further, if one's doubt itself is based upon certain criteria of truth, then those criteria themselves must be believed. If they, too, are

subjected to doubt, then the criteria for evaluating *them* must be believed to be true criteria, and so on again. Of course, one could simply doubt everything—in other words, become a skeptic. But no one can live consistently as a skeptic. To get in a car and drive on the highway indicates that one believes the brakes will work. And we expect people to have a basic understanding of some normative moral values. Newbigin sums up: "One does not learn anything except by believing something, and—conversely—if one doubts everything one learns nothing. . . . Rational doubt always rests on faith and not vice versa."{20}

It's important to realize, too, that the mathematical model simply doesn't apply across the board. Few areas of our lives are governed by such a high standard. Christianity isn't just a set of ideas to be logically constructed and evaluated. It is a Person relating to persons in particular historical contexts. We can place no stricter demands on this relationship regarding the certainty of knowledge than we do on the relationships we experience with people on earth in particular historical contexts.

On the plus side, we *do* have a significant body of evidence supporting our belief including historical evidences, rational arguments, and matters of the human experience such as the question of meaning—things which can't be quantified and thus find no place in modernistic thought. We also have no reason to adopt the reductionistic naturalism of modernism just on modernists' say so, but rather recognize the reality of and intrusion of the supernatural into our world.

In addition, it must also be kept in mind that the truth of Christianity doesn't rest on the fragility of human reason, although it is through our minds that we recognize its truth. It rests on the faithfulness of God who has made Himself known to us.{21} Our assurance comes from the combination of knowing, believing, and following the One who is true, not just from working out logical arguments.

Thus, we conclude that beliefs do *not* have to be indubitable to be held as true—in fact, very little of what we know has indubitable certainty—and unproved values form a necessary part of our knowledge. Modernists are not justified in requiring us to conform to their narrow standards for rationality.

. . . Nor Postmodern Skepticism

Although modernism was naïve in its expectations of reason, the reaction of postmodernism has been too severe.

In its reaction against modernism, postmodernism threw off the classical understanding of truth—namely, correspondence with reality. Having rejected the possibility of knowing what is real external to us, postmodernists have left us with only our own minds, wills, and words. Truth is the product of the creative activity of the individual.

But this clearly isn't the way we live. We assume that whenever we say something like, "It's raining outside," or even, "It's wrong to wantonly destroy the earth," we intend our words to reflect what really is the case.{22} Even the postmodernist will believe that injustice and oppression are wrong and shouldn't be tolerated. Otherwise, how would we know that one act is morally acceptable and another unacceptable, even across cultures?{23} Thus, we reveal that we believe truth is there and accessible. Is there any reason to think that spiritual beliefs can't also correspond with reality? I can't think of any, *unless* one simply presupposes that spiritual realities can't be known.

What's more, we typically act as if we believe truth is *objective*, by which we mean that something really is the case apart from whether we believe it or not.{24} How can we meaningfully interact with the world around us if we don't think we can truly know it and not simply our individual or group construction of it?

Postmoderns' belief that there can be multiple and conflicting truths must be rejected also, for if truth is that which conforms to reality and reality itself cannot be contradictory, truth cannot be either. Either it is raining outside my window or it's not. It can't be doing both at the same time in the same location. Likewise, for example, either God exists or He doesn't. It can't be both.

Against postmodernism, we hold that there is no reason to think there *can't* be one explanation for all of reality *unless* one accepts a radical perspectivalism; i.e., that our beliefs are *only* our own perspectives and not reflections of reality itself. For the postmodernist to say this is to reveal that he assumes he has the inside scoop on ultimate reality which he claims no one has. This is therefore a faith commitment. Furthermore, there's no reason to think we can't know what the true explanation *is*, especially if the One who knows about it perfectly tells us.

Postmoderns also believe that truth is a construct of language. Because the meanings of words can vary, each linguistic group has its own truth. However, the fact that there are different words for the same thing doesn't change the fact that the referent is the same. We don't change the nature of something simply by changing the words we use for it. This is the weakness of what has been called "political correctness." It is thought, it seems, that by using different words for something we thereby change the thing itself. While a change of terminology might change our *attitude* about something, it doesn't change that something itself.

Thus, we reject the skepticism of postmodernity and confidently rest on the faith we hold as describing the way things really are.

We believe that there is no reason to accept postmodern skepticism. Skepticism is ultimately unlivable, and we needn't spend our lives "playing with the pieces." There is no reason

in principle to assume we *can't* know ultimate realities just because of our human limitations. It is arbitrary to simply decide God cannot reveal truth to us because of our limitations.

Further, there is no reason why there can't be one explanation of reality. The good news for postmodernists is that we *have* been met by the One who created the "story" of the world and is able to put the pieces together into a coherent whole. His is the one true explanation of reality. We deny that we are trapped behind our own perspectives, cut off from direct contact with reality,{25} and thus not able to "impose" truth on others. Truth is knowable and sharable.

Postmodernists believe that each person can only have his or her own "story" or life's situation, that each of us can only have his or her own little piece. We respond that we have a story that puts all the pieces together, a story which is coherent and consistent and which matches the nature of the needs of humanity. As we look around the world we see that we all are very much alike in our basic needs and aspirations. If there is such a thing as human nature and a human condition, it isn't unreasonable to think there could be one explanation of it.

Summary

Modernism served to produce doubts through its insistence upon certain knowledge, and postmodernism produces doubt through its insistence that no one can really know ultimate truths. Can we have confidence in the trustworthiness of our beliefs in the face of modernist and postmodernist ideas?

In response to doubts produced by modernism we look to Jesus, a historical Person who has revealed to us more than our reason is capable of discovering on its own. In response to doubts engendered by postmodernism, we look to Jesus the Creator of all and the final Word who has revealed to us

ultimate truth. In him we find truth in its fullest sense, as the one who is real and trustworthy and who speaks. We can have confidence in our beliefs.

Notes

1. Daniel Taylor, *The Myth of Certainty: The Reflective Christian and the Risk of Commitment* (Waco: Word Books, 1986), 18-19.

2. Ibid., 19.

3. Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 20.

4. Carl F.H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 22-23, 227-28.

5. For this reason Descartes has been called the father of modern philosophy. Dagobert D. Runes, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1983), s.v. “Descartes, Ren,” by St. Elmo Nauman, Jr.

6. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 66.

7. Ibid., 67. Grenz notes that “Descartes set the agenda for philosophy for the next three hundred years” by making human reason central.

8. Ibid., 64.

9. Ibid., 67.

10. Ibid., 88.

11. Ibid., 89.

12. Ibid., 90.

13. Ibid., 92.

14. Ibid., 164,

15. Jean Baudrillard, quoted in Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: 2000), 169.

16. There are some who believe we can put to use some of the perspectives of postmodernism, but it would take us too far afield of our subject to develop that now. For our purposes, I'm only concerned with the central skepticism of postmodernism.

17. Newbigin, 51.

18. Ibid., 52.

19. Ibid., 31.

20. Ibid., 24, 25.

21. Ibid., 67.

22. For a recent study on truth in relation to postmodernism, see Groothuis, *Truth Decay.*

23. Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 197-199.

24. Against modernism, however, we can affirm that believing in objective truth doesn't require that there be no non-provable elements involved in coming to know truth.

25. Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 63.

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The Need to Read Francis Schaeffer

Todd Kappelman provides us with a compelling introduction to the thought and writings of Francis Schaeffer, one of the great Christian thinkers of the 20th century. As a Christian scholar and a visionary worldview thinker, Schaeffer applied Scriptural truth to the issues people are dealing with in the modern world. He demonstrated that Christ's truth is universal both across time and cultures.

The *Need to Read* series began several months ago with a program on C.S. Lewis . The rationale for this series is that many of the great writers who have helped many Christians mature are now either unknown or neglected by many who could use these authors insights into the faith.

This installment focuses on Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984), one of the most recognized and respected Christian authors of the twentieth century. He saw so much more in what he was looking at and agonized over it much more that the rest of us. He was one of the truly great Christians of our time.{1} If this is the case, and I and many others believe that it is, then this question follows: What was Schaeffer looking at? The remarkable answer to this question is all of human history and the long chain of events which have led to modern man as we see him today.

In a time when true scholarship is often equated with specialization in a particular period, people, or subject, Schaeffer was a grand generalist. He was a true Renaissance man who knew something about everything, as opposed to everything about something. In addition to his remarkable and encyclopedic knowledge of human history, he was able to

connect important events together such that Christians can see what has happened in human history, what is happening now, and what will happen if man continues on his present course. Schaeffer was a visionary who had an uncanny understanding of the times we live in and what mankind can expect in the near future.

Schaeffers greatest gift, like that of C.S. Lewis, was his concern for the average Christian. He believed philosophy, theology, and ethics should not be reserved for the conversation of learned academics; rather they should be the daily concern of the man on the street. The price for ignorance of the subjects could be our life, or more importantly, our very souls. The Scriptures are very clear concerning the price of ignorance. The prophet Hosea said that Gods people perish for lack of knowledge.{2} In light of this observation, Schaeffers genius was his ability to communicate extremely difficult philosophical and theological issues on a non- technical level. His writings provide Christians with access to some of the most pressing concerns of our times.

Several aspects of Schaeffers style and sweeping concerns will be discussed in this essay. First, he perceived the wholeness of the created order. There is a basic need in all human beings to know the answers to the great questions of life, and Schaeffer believed that God has given man the answers in the form of natural and specific revelation.

Second, Schaeffer believed that man has a natural inclination to desire the reasonable. Schaeffer argued that the Christian faith is not only true, but that it is the most plausible account for the existence of man and his place in the universe. He contended that an irrational faith is not what God intended to communicate to man.

Third, Schaeffer was one of the original cultural critics of the twentieth century. He believed that mankind, both Christians and non-Christians, was adrift on a sea of

irrationality. He further believed that this drift was intensifying to the point that true, orthodox Christianity was being lost.

Schaeffer and *The God Who Is There*

Francis Schaeffer developed some important themes in three of his books: *The God Who Is There, Escape from Reason,* and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent.*

Lets consider *The God Who Is There* first. The major thesis in this book is that modern man has abandoned the idea of truth, and that has had widespread consequences in every area of life.

In his argumentation, Schaeffer summarizes the last half of the twentieth century, tracing the development of the intellectual climate in Western society. Previous generations had grown up with a basic operational belief that the law of non-contradiction was true. What Schaeffer would have us understand about the law of non- contradiction is this: a statement cannot be both true and false in the same way at the same time. For example, you are either reading this essay or you are not. You cannot be both reading this and not reading it at the same time. Either you are or you are not—choose one.

When we hear something like this, our first reaction is of course we believe in this law of non-contradiction. We believe in it and live by it, even if we did not know what it was called until just a few moments ago. But Schaeffer points out that there has been a gradual decline of belief in this basic principle beginning with philosophy in the late eighteenth century. This first step in the movement away from reason is followed by second and third steps in the areas of art and music. These are, in turn, followed by the fourth steps of general culture and theology. There is much debate about which step came first and who followed whom. The important thing to realize is that after the seventeenth and eighteenth century

Enlightenment in Europe, and certainly before the height of the Industrial age, men in the highest positions of academic and artistic life began to think very differently.

In the first half of this century, Western man began to think in terms of mutually exclusive truths. In other words, we began to believe that two people could believe mutually exclusive truths simultaneously and both of them could be correct. This would be like two people seeing an object and one claiming that it existed and the other claiming that it did not exist. The two men shake hands and say that they are both right in their conclusions. Objective reality is completely undermined and nothing is true. The result of this thinking is that man begins to despair of his condition.{3} He doesnt know what is ultimately true.

Schaeffers ambition was to help Christians be salt and light in our world. And to do that, we have to understand how people think. Schaeffer also cautions Christians against capitulation to irrationality themselves.{4} In the spirit of cooperation, many Christians are choosing to remain silent when they hear people say that all religions are the same, or that Christianity may be true for one person, but not true for another. Christians cannot afford to remain silent in a world that is embracing irrationality. The unity of orthodox Christianity should be centered and grounded on truth. This is not always easy, but it is absolutely necessary.

Escape from Reason

In *The God Who Is There,* Schaeffers main thesis is that modern man is characterized by his willingness to live a life of contradictions. In the book *Escape from Reason,* he shows how we arrived at this position, and what can be done about it.

Francis Schaeffer believed that one of the great watershed periods of human history occurred in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The Reformation was a fifteenth

and sixteenth century movement, but it was religious in nature and ultimately resulted in the formation of the Protestant churches. The Renaissance, argues Schaeffer, largely emphasized human reason and the achievements of man. In sharp contrast, the Reformation emphasized the will of God and the authority of the Holy Scriptures. It must be remembered that Schaeffer is generalizing in much of what is said here and that both movements had good and bad aspects.

Schaeffer maintains that men in the Renaissance believed they were great because of the wonderful art, literature, and architecture they produced. The Reformation man believed he was great because of the God who had made him. Man was made to have a relationship with his creator, but the Renaissance man found himself more and more concerned with the things of this world.{5}

As the emphasis on man increased, the importance of God decreased. This movement was further facilitated by discoveries in the sciences which allowed man to understand the universe on purely naturalistic principles. The result of mans success in explaining some aspects of the universe through reason alone was that he began to try to explain every aspect of the universe through reason alone.

Men found that they were able to explain much through reason, but the larger philosophical questions proved to be too great. In addition, they discovered that there were many questions that could not be answered by reason alone. Some of these questions were: How did everything begin? Why is there something rather than nothing? What happens to us after we die? These questions are traditionally answered by theology, and the answers usually included an appeal to a divine being called God.

Modern man, thus, was faced with two possibilities. Either he could return to the answers found in the Scriptures, or he could live as though life had meaning even though he did not

believe that it really did.{6} Schaeffer argued that men in the Western philosophical tradition largely opted for irrational existence, escaping the requirements of reason, hence the title *Escape from Reason.* Schaeffers conclusion to this problem is that Christians must return to a serious belief in the Scriptures and their ability to answer the big philosophical problems, and that we must live our faith consistently in front of the world.{7} In addition, Schaeffer believed that the days are gone when the average man on the street would respond to the Gospel. The language has changed, and we must learn to speak in this new language.{8} We must educate ourselves and be ready to give an account of how modern man got into his present state of affairs.

He Is There and He Is Not Silent

In the analysis of the previous two books, we have seen that Schaeffer explains the development of modern history and how mankind has largely embraced non-reason in the area of morals. In *He Is There and He Is Not Silent,* Schaeffer outlines a solution for the predicament that faces modern man. He argues that there are three areas in which modern mankind has an absolute necessity for God: metaphysics, morals, and epistemology.{9} These are three areas of philosophy which have to do with, respectively, the problem of existence, the problem of mans moral behavior, and how man can come to a true knowledge of anything at all.

Prior to the seventeenth century, philosophy and theology recognized that they were dealing with the same basic questions. The only difference between the two disciplines was that the former appealed largely to reason and natural revelation, while the latter appealed mostly to reason and special revelation. In the middle ages, philosophy was said to be the handmaiden to theology. Theology was understood to be the queen of the sciences. When philosophy took the lead, it soon became apparent that it was not up to the task of

answering the big questions. The reality of God known through His revelation, however, does provide the answers for such questions.

Lets consider the areas of metaphysics, moral, and epistemology. The metaphysical need for the existence of God implies that there must be something or someone who is big enough, powerful enough, wise enough, and willing enough to create and maintain the universe we live in. If these requirements are not met, then man is forced to admit that he is here by chance occurrence and has no special destiny.{10}

The moral necessity of Gods existence centers on man as a personal being and a being who distinguishes between right and wrong. There are only two options. Either man was created from an impersonal beginning and his moral system is a product of his culture, or man had a personal beginning and was given laws to follow and an internal sense of right and wrong.{11} The moral necessity of God is founded on the philosophical need to account for why man is both cruel and wonderful at the same time. This can only be explained in terms of the biblical account of the Fall.

The epistemological necessity of Gods existence addresses our ability to know what is ultimately real. Much of the modern problem in the area of knowledge began in the seventeenth century. As the scientific revolution developed, the criteria for truth became that which could be demonstrated in a laboratory. The result was that belief in God and the miraculous, which cannot be demonstrated in a laboratory, came into doubt and were eventually dismissed by many. The final result was pessimism regarding theological truths and, more recently, any truth at all. We have all encountered the individual who asks, How do you know that? And often this question is repeated for every subsequent answer.

The only answer to these three dilemmas is an appeal to the God who is there, and to His natural and special revelation.

The basis of Christianity is the belief that God is there and that man can communicate with Him. If this is not true, then we are without a foundation.

Francis Schaeffer and "The Man Without a Bible"

The purpose of this discussion of the works of Francis Schaeffer is that we hope Christians will once again turn to this great apologist for the Christian faith and learn from him. In closing, we will address one of his lesser known works titled *Death In The City.* In chapter seven, The Man Without a Bible, Schaeffer offers some advice for Christians living in a post-Christian world. He argues very convincingly that the church in America has largely turned away from God and the knowledge of the things of God. This occurred in just a few short decades, from the 1920s to the 1960s.{12}

We must always bear in mind that many people do not believe that the Bible is inspired or authoritative. For these people the Bible is just another book. The dismantling of biblical authority has been very efficient in the last 150 years. Very few of our major secular universities treat the Bible as authoritative anymore. Yet many of these universities were founded at a time when no one would have doubted the importance of the Holy Scriptures. The majority of men at the end of this century hold vastly different views about the Bible than did their ancestors at the close of the previous century. So, how do we share the Christian message with the man without the Bible?

Schaeffer cites three instances where Paul spoke to non-Christians and did not appeal to the Scriptures. These are found in Acts 14:15-17; 17:16-32, and Romans 1:18-2:16. The reason that Paul did not use the Scriptures on these three occasions is that the people he was addressing did not recognize the claims that the Holy Scriptures made on their

lives. In approaching these individuals, Paul appealed to the moral knowledge that men possess as a feature of their created being. Schaeffer refers to this as the manishness of man.

In Romans 1:18 we have the description of Gods wrath being poured out on man. Schaeffer believes that this is an ideal place to approach modern man. We may tell the modern non-believer that he knows that God exists and that he has suppressed this knowledge. (The knowledge of God must be understood here as natural revelation, and not the gospel.) Paul means that each and every man, regardless of what he says, knows that God exists. This knowledge of God that the non-believer possesses is supplemented by the moral argument for Gods existence. The fact that men hold beliefs about right and wrong betrays the fact that they know that God necessarily exists. Men willingly suppress this knowledge of God and this brings His wrath.

The man without the Bible has suppressed the natural revelation of God, not the special revelation found in the Scriptures. The man without the Bible has not followed his initial knowledge of God to the proper conclusions and therefore remains lost. The many men without the Bible present both an opportunity and a challenge for the Christian. The opportunity is that this man is lost and Christians can share their faith with him. The challenge is in showing these lost people how the world around them and the human nature within them point toward the existence of God.

Francis Schaeffer was wonderful at discussing Christian truths with non-believers without appealing to the Scriptures. It is our loss if we do not familiarize ourselves with, and use, the works of one of this countrys greatest Christian thinkers.

Notes

1. J.I. Packer, forward to *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy,* by Francis Schaeffer (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 1990), xiv.

2. Hosea 4:6.

3. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* in *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 1990), 109-114.

4. Ibid., 196.

5. Ibid., 217-224.

6. Ibid., 225-236.

7. Ibid., 261-270.

8. Ibid., 207-208.

9. Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* in *Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy* (Wheaton: Crossway Publishers, 1990), 277.

10. Ibid., 275-290.

11. Ibid., 291-302.

12. Ibid., 211.

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Worldviews

A worldview is like a pair of glasses through which we view the world. Everyone has one. Jerry Solomon examines the basic worldviews and some of the beliefs and questions that they involve.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

A friend of mine recently told me of a conversation he had with a good friend we will call Joe. Joe is a doctor. He is not a Christian. This is how the conversation went: "Joe, you're an excellent doctor. You care deeply about your patients. Why do you care so much for people since you believe we have evolved by chance? What gives us value?" Joe was stunned by the question and couldn't answer it. His "worldview" had taken a blow.

The concept of a worldview has received increasing attention for the past several years. Many books have been written on the subject of worldviews from both Christian and non-Christian perspectives. Frequently speakers will refer to the term. On occasion even reviews of movies and music will include the phrase. All this attention prompts us to ask, "What does the term mean?" and "What difference does it make?" It is our intent to answer these questions. And it is our hope that all of us will give serious attention to our own worldview, as well as the worldviews of those around us.

What is a Worldview?

What is a *worldview*? A variety of definitions have been offered by numerous authors. For example, James Sire asserts that "A worldview is a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic makeup of our world."{1} Phillips and Brown state that "A worldview is, first of all, *an explanation and interpretation of the world* and second, *an application of this view to life*. In simpler terms, our worldview is a view *of the world* and a view *for the world*."{2} Walsh and Middleton provide what we think is the most succinct and understandable explanation: "A world view provides a model *of the world* which guides its adherents *in the world*."{3} With the realization that many subtleties can be added, this will be our working definition.

The Need for a Worldview

Worldviews act somewhat like eye glasses or contact lenses. That is, a worldview should provide the correct "prescription" for making sense of the world just as wearing the correct prescription for your eyes brings things into focus. And, in either example, an incorrect prescription can be dangerous, even life-threatening. People who are struggling with worldview questions are often despairing and even suicidal. Thus it's important for us to give attention to the formulation of the proper worldview. Arthur Holmes states that the need for a worldview is fourfold: "the need to unify thought and life; the need to define the good life and find hope and meaning in life; the need to guide thought; the need to guide action."{4} Yet another prominent need for the proper worldview is to help us deal with an increasingly diverse culture. We are faced with a smorgasbord of worldviews, all of which make claims concerning truth. We are challenged to sort through this mixture of worldviews with wisdom. These needs are experienced by all people, either consciously or unconsciously. All of us have a worldview with which we strive to meet such needs. The proper worldview helps us by orienting us to the intellectual and philosophical terrain about us.

Worldviews are so much a part of our lives that we see and hear them daily, whether we recognize them or not. For example, movies, television, music, magazines, newspapers, government, education, science, art, and all other aspects of culture are affected by worldviews. If we ignore their importance, we do so to our detriment.

Testing Worldviews

A worldview should pass certain tests. First, it should be rational. It should not ask us to believe contradictory things. Second, it should be supported by evidence. It should be consistent with what we observe. Third, it should give a

satisfying comprehensive explanation of reality. It should be able to explain why things are the way they are. Fourth, it should provide a satisfactory basis for living. It should not leave us feeling compelled to borrow elements of another worldview in order to live in this world.

Components Found in All Worldviews

In addition to putting worldviews to these tests, we should also see that worldviews have common components. These components are self-evident. It is important to keep these in mind as you establish your own worldview, and as you share with others. There are four of them.

First, **something exists**. This may sound obvious, but it really is an important foundational element of worldview building since some will try to deny it. But a denial is self-defeating because all people experience cause and effect. The universe is rational; it is predictable.

Second, **all people have absolutes**. Again, many will try to deny this, but to deny it is to assert it. All of us seek an infinite reference point. For some it is God; for others it is the state, or love, or power, and for some this reference point is themselves or man.

Third, **two contradictory statements cannot both be right**. This is a primary law of logic that is continually denied. Ideally speaking, only one worldview can correctly mirror reality. This cannot be overemphasized in light of the prominent belief that tolerance is the ultimate virtue. To say that someone is wrong is labeled intolerant or narrow-minded. A good illustration of this is when we hear people declare that all religions are the same. It would mean that Hindus, for example, agree with Christians concerning God, Jesus, salvation, heaven, hell, and a host of other doctrines. This is nonsense.

Fourth,**all people exercise faith**. All of us presuppose certain things to be true without absolute proof. These are inferences or assumptions upon which a belief is based. This becomes important, for example, when we interact with those who allege that only the scientist is completely neutral. Some common assumptions are: a personal God exists; man evolved from inorganic material; man is essentially good; reality is material.

As we dialogue with people who have opposing worldviews, an understanding of these common components can help us listen more patiently, and they can guide us to make our case more wisely.

Six Worldview Questions

Have you ever been frustrated with finding ways to stir the thinking of a non-Christian friend? We are confident the following questions will be of help. And we are also confident they will stir your thinking about the subject of worldviews.

We will answer these questions with various non-Christian responses. Christian responses will be discussed later in this article.

First, **Why is there something rather than nothing?** Some may actually say something came from nothing. Others may state that something is here because of impersonal spirit or energy. And many believe matter is eternal.

Second, **How do you explain human nature?** Frequently people will say we are born as blank slates, neither good nor evil. Another popular response is that we are born good, but society causes us to behave otherwise.

Third, **What happens to a person at death?** Many will say that a person’s death is just the disorganization of matter. Increasingly people in our culture are saying that death brings reincarnation or realization of oneness.

Fourth, **How do you determine what is right and wrong?** Often we hear it said that ethics are relative or situational. Others assert that we have no free choice since we are entirely determined. Some simply derive "oughts" from what "is." And of course history has shown us the tragic results of a "might makes right" answer.

Fifth, **How do you know that you know?** Some say that the mind is the center of our source of knowledge. Things are only known deductively. Others claim that knowledge is only found in the senses. We know only what is perceived.

Sixth, **What is the meaning of history?** One answer is that history is determined as part of a mechanistic universe. Another answer is that history is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without purpose. Yet another answer is that history is meaningless because life is absurd.{5}

The alert Christian will quickly recognize that the preceding answers are contrary to his beliefs. There are definite, sometimes startling differences. Worldviews are in collision. Thus we should know at least something about the worldviews that are central to the conflict. And we should certainly be able to articulate a Christian worldview.

Examples of Worldviews

In his excellent book, *The Universe Next Door*, James Sire catalogs the most influential worldviews of the past and present. These are Christian Theism, Deism, Naturalism, Nihilism, Existentialism, Eastern Pantheism, and New Age or New Consciousness.{6}

Deism, a prominent worldview during the eighteenth century, has almost entirely left the scene. The Deist believes in God, but that God created and then abandoned the universe.

Nihilism, a more recent worldview, is alive among many young

people and some intellectuals. Nihilists see no value to reality; life is absurd.

Existentialism is prominent and can be seen frequently, even among unwitting Christians. The Existentialist, like the Nihilist, sees life as absurd, but sees man as totally free to *make himself* in the face of this absurdity.

Christian Theism, Naturalism, and New Age Pantheism are the most influential worldviews presently in the United States. Now we will survey each of them.

Christian Theism

Let's return to the six questions we asked earlier and briefly see how the Christian Theist might answer them.

Question: **Why is there something rather than nothing?** Answer: There is an infinite-personal God who has created the universe out of nothing.

Question: **How do you explain human nature?** Answer: Man was originally created good in God's image, but chose to sin and thus infected all of humanity with what is called a "sin nature." So man has been endowed with value by his creator, but his negative behavior is in league with his nature.

Question: **What happens to a person at death?** Answer: Death is either the gate to life with God or to eternal separation from Him. The destination is dependent upon the response we give to God's provision for our sinfulness.

Question: **How do you determine what is right and wrong?** Answer: The guidelines for conduct are revealed by God.

Question: **How do you know that you know?** Answer: Reason and experience can be legitimate teachers, but a transcendent source is necessary. We know some things only because we are told by God through the Bible.

Question: **What is the meaning of history?** Answer: History is a linear and meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God's purposes for man.

Christian Theism had a long history in Western culture. This does not mean that all individuals who have lived in Western culture have been Christians. It simply means that this worldview was dominant; it was the most influential. And this was true even among non-Christians. This is no longer valid. Western culture has experienced a transition to what is called Naturalism.

Naturalism

Even though Naturalism in various forms is ancient, we will use the term to refer to a worldview that has had considerable influence in a relatively short time within Western culture. The seeds were planted in the seventeenth century and began to flower in the eighteenth. Most of us have been exposed to Naturalism through Marxism and what is called Secular Humanism.

What are the basic tenets of this worldview? First, God is irrelevant. This tenet helps us better understand the term Naturalism; it is in direct contrast to Christian Theism, which is based on *supernaturalism*. Second, progress and evolutionary change are inevitable. Third, man is autonomous, self-centered, and will save himself. Fourth, education is the guide to life; intelligence and freedom guarantee full human potential. Fifth, science is the ultimate provider both for knowledge and morals. These tenets have permeated our lives. They are apparent, for example, in the media, government, and education. We should be alert constantly to their influence.

After World War II "Postmodernism" began to replace the confidence of Naturalism. With it came the conclusion that truth, in any real sense, doesn't exist. This may be the next major worldview, or anti-worldview, that will infect the

culture. It is presently the rage on many of our college campuses. In the meantime, though, the past few decades have brought us another ancient worldview dressed in Western clothing.

New Age Pantheism

Various forms of Pantheism have been prominent in Eastern cultures for thousands of years. But it began to have an effect on our culture in the 1950s. There had been various attempts to introduce its teachings before then, but those attempts did not arouse the interest that was stirred in that decade. It is now most readily observed in what is called the New Age Movement.

What are the basic tenets of this worldview? First, all is one. There are no ultimate distinctions between humans, animals, or the rest of creation. Second, since all is one, all is god. All of life has a spark of divinity. Third, if all is one and all is god, then each of us is god. Fourth, humans must discover their own divinity by experiencing a change in consciousness. We suffer from a collective form of metaphysical amnesia. Fifth, humans travel through indefinite cycles of birth, death, and reincarnation in order to work off what is called "bad karma." Sixth, New Age disciples think in terms of gray, not black and white. Thus they believe that two conflicting statements can both be true.

On the popular level these tenets are presently asserted through various media, such as books, magazines, television, and movies. Perhaps the most visible teacher is Shirley MacLaine. But these beliefs are also found increasingly among intellectuals in fields such as medicine, psychology, sociology, and education.

Conclusion

We have very briefly scanned the subject of worldviews. Let's

return to a definition we affirmed in the beginning of this article: "A worldview provides a model *of the world* which guides its adherents *in the world*." If your model of the world includes an infinite-personal God, as in Christian Theism, that belief should provide guidance for your life. If your model rejects God, as in Naturalism, again such a belief serves as a guide. Or if your model asserts that you are god, as in New Age Pantheism, yet again your life is being guided by such a conception. These examples should remind us that we are living in a culture that puts us in touch constantly with such ideas, and many more. They cannot all be true.

Thus some of us may be confronted with the need to think more deeply than we ever have before. Some of us may need to purge those things from our lives that are contrary to the worldview of Christian Theism. Some of us may need to better understand that our thoughts are to be unified with daily life. Some of us may need to better understand that the good life and hope and meaning are found only through God's answers. Some of us may need to let God's ideas guide our thoughts more completely. And some of us may need to let God's guidelines guide our actions more fully.

Paul's admonition to the believers in ancient Colossae couldn't be more contemporary or helpful in light of our discussion. He wrote:

> *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ (Col. 2:8).*

Notes

1. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988), 17.
2. W. Gary Phillips and William E. Brown, *Making Sense of Your World* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 29.

3. Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1984), 32.
4. Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 5.
5. Sire, 18.
6. Ibid.

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