

THE HERALD

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The Importance of a Christian Worldview by David Dockery

Everyone Has a Worldview

A Chinese proverb says, “If you want to know what water is, don’t ask the fish.” Water is the sum and substance of the world in which the fish is immersed. The fish may not reflect on its own environment until suddenly it is thrust onto dry land, where it struggles for life. Then it realizes that water provided its sustenance.

Immersed in our environment, we have failed to take seriously the ramifications of a secular worldview. Sociologist and social watchdog Daniel Yankelovich defines culture as an effort to provide a coherent set of answers to the existential situations that confront human beings in the passage of their lives. A genuine cultural shift is one that makes a decisive break with the shared meaning of the past. The break particularly affects those meanings that relate to the deepest questions of the purpose and nature of human life. What is at stake is how we understand the world in which we live...

The reality is that everyone has a worldview. Some worldviews are incoherent, being merely a smorgasbord of options from natural, supernatural, pre-modern, modern, and post-modern options. An examined and thoughtful worldview, however, is more than a private personal viewpoint; it is a comprehensive life system that seeks to answer the basic questions of life. A Christian worldview is not just one’s personal faith expression, not just a theory. It is an all-consuming way of life, applicable to all spheres of life.

Distinguishing a Christian Worldview

James Orr, in The Christian View of God and the World, maintains that there is a definite Christian view of things, which has a character, coherence, and unity of its own, and stands in sharp contrast with counter theories and speculations. A Christian worldview has the stamp of reason and reality and can stand the test of history and experience. A Christian view of the world cannot be infringed upon, accepted or rejected piecemeal, but stands or falls on its integrity. Such a holistic approach offers a stability of thought, a unity of comprehensive insight that bears not only on the religious sphere but also on the whole of thought. A Christian worldview is not built on two types of truth (religious and philosophical or scientific) but on a universal principle and all-embracing system that shapes religion, natural and social sciences, law, history, health care, the arts, the humanities, and all disciplines of study with application for all of life.

Followers of Jesus must articulate a Christian worldview for the twenty-first century, with all of its accompanying challenges and changes, and to show how such Christian thinking is applicable across all areas of life. At the heart of these challenges and changes we see that truth, morality, and interpretive frameworks are being ignored if not rejected. Such challenges are formidable indeed. Throughout culture the very existence of normative truth is being challenged.

For Christians to respond to these challenges, we must hear afresh the words of Jesus from what is called the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:36–40). Here we are told to love God not only with our hearts and souls but also with our minds. Jesus’ words



refer to a wholehearted devotion to God with every aspect of our being, from whatever angle we choose to consider it—emotionally, volitionally, or cognitively. This kind of love for God results in taking every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:5), a wholehearted devotion to distinctively Christian thinking (or as T. S. Eliot put it, “to think in Christian categories”). This means being able to see life from a Christian vantage point; it means thinking with the mind of Christ...

We Believe in God, Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Worldview Starting Point

A worldview must offer a way to live that is consistent with reality by offering a comprehensive understanding of all areas of life and thought, every aspect of creation. As we said earlier the starting point for a Christian worldview brings us into the presence of God without delay. The central affirmation of Scripture is not only that there is a God but that God has acted and spoken in history. God is Lord and King over this world, ruling all things for his own glory, displaying his perfections in all that he does in order that humans and angels may worship and adore him. God is triune; there are within the Godhead three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To think wrongly about God is idolatry (Ps. 50:21). Thinking rightly about God is eternal life (John 17:3) and should be the believer’s life objective (Jer. 9:23–24). We can think rightly about God because he is knowable (1 Cor. 2:11), yet we must remain mindful that he is simultaneously incomprehensible (Rom. 11:33–36). God can be known, but he cannot be known completely (Deut. 29:29).

We maintain that God is personal and is differentiated from other beings, from nature, and from the universe. This is in contrast to other worldviews that say God is in a part of the world, creating a continual process, and that the process itself is God—or becoming God. God is self-existent, dependent on nothing external to himself. God is infinite, meaning that God is not only unlimited but that nothing outside of God can limit God. God is infinite in relation to time (eternal), in relation to knowledge (omniscience), and in relation to power (omnipotent). He is sovereign and unchanging. God is infinite and personal, transcendent, and immanent. He is holy,

righteous, just, good, true, faithful, loving, gracious, and merciful.

God, without the use of any preexisting material, brought into being everything that is. Both the opening verse of the Bible and the initial sentence of the Apostles’ Creed confess God as Creator. Creation is the work of the trinitarian God. Creation reveals God (Ps. 19) and brings glory to him (Isa. 43:7). All of creation was originally good but is now imperfect because of the entrance of sin and its effects on creation (Gen. 3:16–19). This is, however, only a temporary imperfection (Rom. 8:19–22), for it will be redeemed in the final work of God, the new creation.

The Creator God is not different from the God who provides redemption in Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit. God is the source of all things. This means that God has brought the world into existence out of nothing through a purposeful act of his free will. A Christian worldview affirms that God is the sovereign and almighty Lord of all existence. Such an affirmation rejects any form of dualism, that matter has eternally existed, or that matter must, therefore, be evil since it is in principle opposed to God, the Source of all good.

A Christian worldview also contends that God is set apart from and transcends his creation. It also maintains that God is a purposeful God who creates in freedom. In creation and in God’s provision and preservation for creation, he is working out his ultimate purposes for humanity and the world. Human life is thus meaningful, significant, intelligent, and purposeful. This affirms the overall unity and intelligibility of the universe. In this we see God’s greatness, goodness, and wisdom.

General Implications of a Christian Worldview

A Christian worldview becomes a driving force in life, giving us a sense of God’s plan and purpose for this world. Our identity is shaped by this worldview. We no longer see ourselves as alienated sinners. A Christian worldview is not escapism but is an energizing motivation for godly and faithful thinking and living in the here and now. It also gives us confidence and hope for the future. In the midst of life’s challenges and struggles, a Christian worldview helps to stabilize life, anchoring us to God’s faithfulness and

steadfastness.

Thus, a Christian worldview provides a framework for ethical thinking. We recognize that humans, who are made in God's image, are essentially moral beings. We also recognize that the fullest embodiment of good, love, holiness, grace, and truth is in Jesus Christ (see John 1:14–18).

A Christian worldview has implications for understanding history. We see that history is not cyclical or random. Rather, we see history as linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God's purposes for humanity (see Eph. 1)...This truth is another distinctive of Christian thinking, for Christianity is historical at its heart. In the sense that according to its essential teaching, God has acted decisively in history, revealing himself in specific acts and events. Moreover, God will act to bring history to its providential destiny and planned conclusion...

Developing a Christian worldview is an ever-advancing process for us, a process in which Christian convictions more and more shape our participation in culture. This disciplined, vigorous, and unending process will help shape how we assess culture and our place in it. Otherwise, culture will shape us and our thinking. Thus a Christian worldview offers a new way of thinking, seeing, and doing, based on a new way of being.

A Christian worldview is a coherent way of seeing life, of seeing the world distinct from deism, naturalism, and materialism, existentialism, polytheism, pantheism, mysticism, or deconstructionist postmodernism. Such a theistic perspective provides bearings and direction when confronted with New Age spirituality or secularistic and pluralistic approaches to truth and morality. Fear about the future, suffering, disease, and poverty are informed by a Christian worldview grounded in the redemptive work of Christ and the grandeur of God. Moreover, a Christian worldview offers meaning and purpose for all aspects of life.

Particular Applications

While many examples could be offered, here are six particular applications where a Christian worldview provides a difference in perspective:

1. **Technology**—Technology can become either an instrument through which we fulfill our role as God's stewards or an object of worship that will eventually rule us...
2. **Sexuality and marriage**—Sexuality has become a major topic for those entering the third millennium. Much confusion exists among Christians and non-Christians. Sexuality is good in the covenant relationship of mutual self-giving marriage. Sexual intimacy, separated from covenant marriage, in hetero-sexual or homosexual relations is sinful and has a distorted meaning, a self-serving purpose and negative consequences.
3. **The environment**—Environmental stewardship means we have a responsibility to the nonhuman aspects of God's creation. Since God's plan of redemption includes his earthly creation, as well as human (see Rom. 8:18–27), we should do all we can to live in it carefully and lovingly.
4. **The arts and recreation**—The arts and recreation are understood as legitimate and important parts of human creativity and community. They express what it means to be created in the image of God. We need to develop critical skills of analysis and evaluation so that we are informed, intentional, and reflective about what we create, see, and do.
5. **Science and faith**—For almost two centuries science has been at the forefront of our modern world. We must explore how we see scientific issues from the vantage point of a Christian worldview...
6. **Vocation**—Important for any culture is an understanding of work. Work is a gift from God and is to be pursued with excellence for God's glory. We recognize that all honest professions are honorable, that the gifts and abilities we have for our vocation (vocatio/calling) come from God, and that prosperity and promotions come from God.

These are only a few examples that could be cited that will help shape our thinking in other areas.

Conclusion

Thus Christian thinking must surely subordinate all other endeavors to the improvement of the ⇒

mind in pursuit of truth, taking every thought captive to Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). At three places in the book of 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds us that we cannot presume that our thinking is Christ centered. In 2 Corinthians 3:14 we learn that the minds of the Israelites were hardened. In 4:4 Paul says that the unregenerate mind is blinded by the god of this world. In 11:3 the apostle says that Satan has ensnared the Corinthians' thoughts. So in 10:5 he calls for all of our thinking to be liberated by coming under the lordship of Christ... That is a high calling indeed as we move forward and faithfully into the twenty-first century.

Adapted from Dockery's chapter in "Shaping A Christian Worldview"

The Conversion of John Whitcomb at Princeton University

Written by Dr. John Whitcomb

I look back in total amazement at the providence of God in bringing me to Princeton University in the summer of 1942. I was not a Christian, and neither were my parents. Knowing something of the academic standards of that university, they wisely sent me to a prep school in Tennessee for two years. What they did not know was that the headmaster, Dr. J. P. McCallie, was a strong Christian.

Only two weeks after I began my study of evolutionary geology at Princeton in June, 1942, a previous graduate of McCallie School invited me to a Sunday afternoon Bible class taught by Dr. Donald B. Fullerton, a former missionary to India and Afghanistan, who had graduated from the university in 1913.

I politely rejected his invitation at least twice. But between these times he did something I later came to understand -- he prayed for me in the Name of Christ the Lord! Finally, I agreed to attend the class at Murray-Dodge Hall, the student center on campus. Dr. Fullerton gave an outstanding message from the Bible, but I was not convinced that this was God's Word.

Finally, after several months of hearing his presentations, he sensed that I was ready for a visit to my room at Pyne Hall. He did not discuss the theory of evolution, but carefully and graciously presented the way of eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, the unique and eternal Son of God. He knew from many years of Christian ministry that "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:12-13).

That was enough! I accepted Christ as my Savior! I now realized that He died on that cross to pay the full penalty of my sin, and rose from the dead to confirm that the price had been paid! When I emerged from that dormitory the next morning, everything looked different. The sunshine came from a star that God had created. The green grass, the colorful flowers, the stately trees, the marvelous birds, and, especially, human beings! Time and chance were no longer my "god". How I praise God my Father, Christ His Son, and the blessed Holy Spirit, for creating the universe, and for providing eternal salvation for all who believe His Word.

FUNNIES

Why does a slight tax increase cost you two hundred dollars and a substantial tax cut save you thirty cents?

A young girl visited a farm one day and wanted to buy a large watermelon.

"That's three dollars," said the farmer.

"I've only got 30 cents," said the young girl.

The farmer pointed to a very small watermelon in the field and said, "How about this one?"

"Okay, I'll take it," said the little girl. "But leave it on the vine. I'll be back for it in a month."