

# Worldviews

## Supplement Contents

<b>Worldview Definitions.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Key Persons .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Key Sources .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Key Scripture .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Naturalism: The World As We See It.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Transcendentalism: The World as We Want It.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Theism: The World From God’s Hand .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The Biblical Worldview .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Four Models of Western Thought.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Christianity and Humanism</i> by Rick Wade.....	9
<i>Consequences of Bad Worldviews</i> by Nancy Pearcey .....	15
<i>To Understand God’s Word: When is Our Worldview Truly Biblical</i> by T.M. Moore .....	18
<i>Not a Threat: The Contributions of Christianity to Western Society</i> by Rick Wade.....	20

**For additional worldview material see speaker notes for Mr. John Stonestreet and Dr. Noebel.**

# World of Worldviews

## Resource Supplement

### I. What is a worldview? A. Definitions

“The term *worldview* refers to any ideology, philosophy, theology, movement, or religion that provides an overarching approach to understanding God and the world.”

David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: The Story of the Biblical Christian, Marxist/Leninist and Secular Humanist Worldviews* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 8.

“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.”

William E. Brown and W. Gary Phillips, *Making Sense of Your World: A Biblical Worldview* (Sheffield Publishers, 1996), 29.

“A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or unconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.”

James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 17.

“A worldview is a way one views the whole world. A worldview is a way of viewing or interpreting all of reality. It is an interpretive framework through which or by which one makes sense out of the data of life and the world. A worldview is like a set of colored glasses. If one looks at the same object through green colored glasses he will see it as green, while another looking at the same object through red glasses will see it as red.”

Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins, *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on Worldviews*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 11.

“I have defined a worldview as a vision about life and the world that is rooted in and expressed through the human heart. I base this definition on what the Bible teaches about the heart as the core of the human person and the single most significant component to human nature. It is the seat and source of the intellect, affections, will, and spirituality. Life, it seems to me, proceeds ‘cardioptically’ out of a vision of the heart with its deeply embedded ideas, affections, choices, and object of worship. For this reason, Proverbs 4:13 states, ‘Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.’ As I said above, yes indeed, everyone has a worldview or a vision of life rooted in their hearts, whether they know it or not. If they don’t know it, they need to come to know it as a significant step toward self-understanding and personal maturity. The unexamined life, Socrates said, is not worth living. It’s time for people, especially believers, to step back and discover what perspective on reality is governing their lives, and to make sure in a Christian sense that the Scriptures are their guide to every aspect of life.”

David Naugle, author of *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) in an interview with T.M. Moore, editor of *Findings*, in October 2003.

“A worldview is not the same thing as a formal philosophy; otherwise, it would be only for professional philosophers. Even ordinary people have a set of convictions about how reality functions and how they should live. Because we are made in God’s image, we all seek to make sense of life. Some convictions are conscious, while others are unconscious, but together they form a more or less consistent picture of reality.”

Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004), 23

“I am totally convinced the Christian faith is the most coherent worldview around. Everyone: pantheist, atheist, skeptic, polytheist has to answer these questions: Where did I come from? What is life’s meaning? How do I define right from wrong and what happens to me when I die? Those are the fulcrum points of our existence.”

Ravi Zacharias, author, speaker and Christian apologist, in an interview with Julia Duin from *The Washington Times*, 2003.

**NOTE:** For a Worldview Dictionary of Terms see <http://www.summit.org/resource/dictionary/>

## II. Key Persons

J. Budziszewski, *University of Texas (Austin)*  
William E. Brown, *Cedarville University, OH*  
Norman L. Geisler, *Southern Evangelical Seminary, Charlotte, NC*  
C.S. Lewis, *deceased*  
Ronald H. Nash, *Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, FL*  
David A. Noebel, *Summit Ministries, Manitou Springs, CO*  
Francis A. Schaeffer, *deceased*  
James W. Sire, *InterVarsity Press*

## III. Key Sources

### **BOOKS**

Brown, William E. and Phillips, W. Gary, *Making Sense of Your World: A Biblical Worldview*. (Sheffield Publishers, 1996).  
Colson, Charles and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999).  
Geisler, Norman L. and William D. Watkins, *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on Worldviews*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (reprinted by Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003).  
Moreland, J.P. and William L. Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).  
Nash, Ronald H., *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).  
Naugle, David K., *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Eerdmans, 2002).  
Noebel, David A., *Understanding the Times: The Story of the Biblical Christian, Marxist/Leninist and Secular Humanist Worldviews*. (Eugene, Or: Harvest House Publishers, 1991).  
Pearcey, Nancy, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004)  
Sire, James W., *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004). Concerning this book Os Guinness said: “To think intelligently today is to think worldviewishly, to come to grips with the mosaic of meanings systems that that make up modern thinking. This book is a clear introduction and invaluable guide.”

### **WEBSITES**

(These website links are excellent resources for essays on worldview topics, recommended books and links to other helpful sites, especially if you are researching for a paper or project.)  
[www.summit.org](http://www.summit.org) (The official website for Summit Ministries in Manitou Springs, Colorado.)  
[www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org) (“Renewing the Mind, Equipping the Church, Engaging the World”)  
[www.leaderu.com](http://www.leaderu.com) (“Telling the truth at the speed of life”)  
[www.xenos.org](http://www.xenos.org) (Xenos is known for its equipping ministries for developing Christian workers and leaders.)  
[www.rzim.org](http://www.rzim.org) (The official website of Ravi Zacharias.)  
[www.mckenziestudycenter.org](http://www.mckenziestudycenter.org) (An institute of Gutenberg College)

#### IV. Key Scripture

Matthew 22:34-40  
Philippians 2:5  
I Corinthians 2:16  
Romans 12:1-2

Ephesians 4:22-24  
I Chronicles 12:32  
Daniel 1:17  
I Corinthians 9:19-23

Colossians 2:1-8  
I Peter 1:13-16

#### V. Naturalism: The World As We See It

##### A. Key Beliefs

“Naturalism projects the view that ultimate reality is material. The physical universe is all there is. There is nothing beyond or separate from that which we can see, touch, and measure. Matter and energy are the basic ‘stuff’ from which all existence is derived. Such a view of reality implies that all obtainable answers for the questions relating to the universe and mankind can be found by the investigation of physical phenomena. Naturalists do not deny the real existence of such things as thoughts, plans, language, and so on, but they claim that these things are explainable as a form or function of some material entity.” (Brown & Phillips, *Making Sense of Your World*, 44)

All problems have scientific/materialistic solutions.  
No external rules to follow (Moral Relativism).  
Each person determines own purpose and meaning.  
No life after death.

##### B. Key Naturalists

John Dewey, education  
Julian Huxley, humanist  
Frederick Nietzsche, philosopher  
Paul Kurtz, humanist  
Bertrand Russell, philosopher

Stephen Jay Gould, evolutionist  
Sigmund Freud, psychiatrist  
Karl Marx, economist/ sociologist  
Carl Sagan, cosmologist

##### C. Key Scriptures

Hebrews 11:1-3  
2 Corinthians 4:18; 10:5  
Romans 1:18-20  
Genesis 1:1

Psalms 14:1-3  
Romans 1:21-32  
Luke 12:16-21  
2 Timothy 3:7

##### D. Key Sources

Noebel, David A., *Understanding the Times: The Story of the Biblical Christian, Marxist/Leninist and Secular Humanist Worldviews*. (Eugene, Or: Harvest House Publishers, 1991).  
Colson, Charles and Nancey Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishers, Inc., 1999).  
Sire, James W. *The Universe Next Door* 4<sup>th</sup>, ed. (Downer’s Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2004).  
Zacharias, Ravi, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1994).

## VI. Transcendentalism: The World As We Want It

### A. Key Beliefs

“First, the transcendental God and the universe are inseparable. This does not necessarily mean that God and the universe are equal (although pantheistic monism believes this is true) but that the two are inextricably intertwined in one fabric of reality. This leads to the second difference: the transcendental God is not a personal being... For the transcendentalist, God is the impersonal force, principle, or spirit behind the created world. Man’s solution to his problems is not to be found outside himself. Truth, salvation, peace, and enlightenment are all found within... A person’s ideal goal should be... (to) move beyond his individualness and ‘become one’ with ultimate reality. As long as a person sees himself as a separate reality he will never escape the prison of incarnation. He is doomed to the cycle of birth and death until he breaks free from the bondage of selfish living. Thus, reincarnation is a fundamental feature of transcendental philosophy. Successive rebirths form the links in the chain of the individual soul’s journey back to the One.” (Brown and Phillips, *Making Sense of Your World*, 56-57.)

"Pantheism is in fact the permanent natural bent of the human mind; the permanent ordinary level below which man sometimes sinks, under the influence of priestcraft and superstition, but above which his own unaided efforts can never raise him for very long." (C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, 82-83).

### B. Transcendentalism in Culture

Eastern Religions – Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Hare Krishna

(See *Seven Years in Tibet*; also Richard Gere, Tiger Woods, Alanis Morissette, Tom Cruise)

Other Religions – New Age Movement, Ba’hai, Unitarian/Universalist, GAIA, Wicca Paganism, Scientology

(See *Charmed*, *Buffy*, *Sabrina*; also Shirley McLain, John Travolta, Madonna)

In Culture – Horoscopes, psychics, yoga, meditation, numerology, martial arts, hyper-environmentalism

(*The Matrix*, *Dharma & Greg*, *Star Wars*, *Groundhog Day*, *Harry Potter*)

### C. Key Transcendentalists

Shirley MacLaine

Deepak Chopra

James Redfield

Dali Lama

### D. Key Scripture

Genesis 1:1

Jeremiah 17:9

Hebrews 9:27

Ephesians 2:1-3

Isaiah 37:16

Acts 12:21-23

Acts 17:24-25

Isaiah 44:24

### E. Key Sources

Ankerberg, John and John Weldon, *The Facts on the New Age Movement* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1988).

Sire, James W., *Shirley MacLaine and the New Age Movement* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988).

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1988).

Lewis, C.S., *Miracles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1969).

McDowell, Josh and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today’s Religions* (Thomas Nelson, 1992).

Tucker, Ruth, *Another Gospel: Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989).

## VII. Theism: The World From God's Hand

### A. Key Beliefs

"Theism begins with the assumption that God exists. Acknowledging the existence of God is not merely a sentimental belief in a kindly 'Father in the sky'; it is a bold and powerful declaration concerning the origin and meaning of the universe. Unlike naturalism, theism holds that real things do exist beyond the physical realm: God, angels, the human soul, immortality, and the like. Christians can speak of eternal things not seen (Gen. 1:1; 2 Cor. 4:17; Heb. 11:1) - there is more than meets the eye. Unlike transcendentalism, theism sees the created world as a work of art from the hand of the Creator. Theism also delivers an indictment against man because of his personal rebellion against God." (Brown and Phillips, *Making Sense of Your World*, 70)

### B. Theistic Religions

1. Judaism- "God is just and merciful; awaiting a Messiah."  
Inception- 2,000 BC  
Founder- Abraham and Moses  
Scripture- Old Testament
2. Islam- "God is just and vengeful; awaiting judgment."  
Inception- AD 600  
Founder- Mohammed  
Scripture- Koran
3. Christianity  
Inception- AD 30  
Founder- Jesus  
Scripture- Old Testament, New Testament

## VIII. The Biblical Worldview

"Humanity and the universe in which they reside are the creation of the God who has revealed himself in Scripture." (Ron Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict*, 52.)

"A biblical worldview is a worldview that is shaped and tested, formed and reformed by the Bible. More specifically, a biblical worldview would be a fundamental perspective on life that is based upon the 'pillar points' (as I like to call them) of creation, the fall, and redemption. The story of creation is told in Genesis 1-2 and answers such important questions as where are we, who are we, and why are we here? Genesis 3 tells the story of the fall of humanity into sin and addresses the issue of what has gone wrong with the world and how we should account for the tragic human condition. The rest of the Bible from Genesis 3:15 all the way to Revelation 22 presents the narrative of redemption, which informs us about the divinely provided remedy to sin and the tragic human condition. God promises redemption in the Old Testament, and He fulfills His promises in Christ in the New Testament. This redemption that Christ has accomplished is both 'already; present but is 'not yet' fully complete. When Christ returns, He will consummate His redemptive task and usher in the new heavens and earth." (David Naugle, author of *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) in an interview with T.M. Moore, editor of *Findings*, in October 2003.)

### A. Biblical Christian Worldview (supported by Scripture)

**Theology:** Affirmation of the existence of an intelligent, powerful, loving, just, and awesome God. This same God took upon Himself human form in the person of Jesus Christ and died for our sins. Thus, in addition to being theistic, Christianity is *Christus Nexus*, Christ at the center. "Christianity is Christ. The person and work of Christ are the rock upon which the Christian religion is built. If he is not who he said he was, and if he did not do what he said he had come to do, the foundation is undermined and the whole superstructure will collapse. Take Christ from Christianity and you disembowel it; there is practically nothing left. Christ is the center of Christianity; all else is circumference." (John Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 21. (**Gen. 1:1; Colossians 2:9**))

**Philosophy:** The single most important philosophical truth in the Bible is that Jesus Christ is the Logos of God. Christian philosophy, especially metaphysics, is grounded in **John 1:1-4**. Christ the Logos is the explanation for the universe and all things therein. (**John 1:1-4, Col. 1:17, Rev. 19:13**)

**Sociology:** Both the individual and the social order are important to God, mankind and society. Christ died and rose again for each person as an individual; God ordained social institutions to teach love, respect, discipline, work, and community. God ordained certain social institutions. Family, church, and state are three of the most important. (**Gen. 4:1; Luke 1:30-31; Is. 9:6**)

**Law:** Christian or Divine Law consists of both natural and Biblical law originating in the very character of a righteous and loving God. Divine law is eternal, and will be used one day to judge the world in a judgment based on natural and revealed law. God established human government and the rule of law primarily to keep in check man's sinful nature (**Romans 2:12ff; 13:1-4**). Human rights involves the Biblical doctrine of man's creation in the image of God. (**Gen. 3:11; 49:10; Rev. 5:5**)

**Ethics:** God's moral nature is absolute, eternal and unchanging. God created the world with a specific moral order revealed to man via both general (natural law) and special revelation (Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ). Ethical standards transcend the relativistic whims of society. (**Gen. 2:9; John 1:9; John 3:19,20**)

**Biology:** Christianity trusts the Genesis model of creation above and beyond the theories of modern science. However, Christianity is not anti-science, requiring only that science begin from a Christian theistic presupposition. Science and Christianity are compatible in that the universe when properly studied reflects that God created all things. (**Gen. 1-3; John 1:4; John 11:25; Col. 1:16**)

**Psychology:** Only Christianity, with its emphasis on the spiritual and its understanding of man's fallen nature can truly address the innermost concerns of the individual. Humans may truly get in touch with themselves by realizing their own sinfulness and consequential status before God, as well as the grace of God which removes all sin and guilt. Self-esteem is realistic only as it follows a true statement of who we are with and without Christ. (**Luke 1:46-47; I Thess. 5:23; Titus 2:13**)

**History:** The Christian worldview, unlike many other religious (especially transcendental) worldviews, is firmly rooted in historical events such as the events of the nation of Israel and the life, death, and resurrection of the historical person Jesus Christ. The Bible is an historically accurate book, describing events that actually occurred and are continually being vindicated via archeology and other historical proofs. (**I Cor. 15; John 1:14; Gal 4:4**)

## **B. Key Sources**

Brown, William E. and Phillips, W. Gary, *Making Sense of Your World: A Biblical Worldview*. (Sheffield Publishers, 1996).

Henry, Carl F.H., *The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1978).

\_\_\_\_\_, *God, Revelation and Authority*. 6 vols. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983).

Lewis, C.S., *Mere Christianity*. (reprinted by Broadman and Holmann Publishers, 2000).

Moreland, J.P. and William L. Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

Nash, Ronald H., *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992).

Noebel, David A., *Understanding the Times: The Story of the Biblical Christian, Marxist/Leninist and Secular Humanist Worldviews*. (Eugene, Or: Harvest House Publishers, 1991).

Plantinga, Cornelius, *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning and Living* (Eerdman's, 2002).

Schaeffer, Francis A. *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982).

Stott, John, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967).

## FOUR MODELS OF WESTERN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

	SECULAR HUMANISM	MARXISM/ LENINISM	COSMIC HUMANISM	BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY
<b>Source</b>	Humanist Manifesto I & II	Writings of Marx & Lenin	Writings of Spangler, Ferguson, etc	Bible
<b>THEOLOGY</b>	Atheism	Atheism	Pantheism	Theism
<b>PHILOSOPHY</b>	Naturalism	Dialectical Materialism	Non-Naturalism	Supernaturalism
<b>ETHICS</b>	Ethical Relativism	Proletariat Morality	Ethical Relativism	Ethical Absolutes
<b>BIOLOGY</b>	Darwinian Evolution	Darwinian/ Punctuated Evolution	Darwinian/ Punctuated Evolution	Special Creation
<b>PSYCHOLOGY</b>	Monistic Self-Actualization	Monistic Pavlovian Behaviorism	Collective Consciousness	Dualism
<b>SOCIOLOGY</b>	Non-Traditional World State Ethical Society	Abolition of Home, Church and State	Non-Traditional Home, Church and State	Home, Church, and State
<b>LAW</b>	Positive Law	Positive Law	Self-Law	Biblical/Natural Law
<b>POLITICS</b>	World Government (Globalism)	New World Order	New Age Order	Justice/Freedom/Order
<b>ECONOMICS</b>	Socialism	Socialism/ Communism	Universal Enlightened Production	Stewardship of Property
<b>History</b>	Historical Evolution	Historical Materialism	Evolutionary Godhood	Historical Resurrection

## Christianity and Humanism

### Rick Wade

Humanism: Devotion to the humanities/literary culture... Merriam-Webster

What does it take to be human?

Does that sound like an odd question? One is human by birth, right? J. I. Packer and Thomas Howard seek to explain and answer that question in their book *Christianity: The True Humanism*.<sup>[1]</sup> This delightful and insightful book, first published in the mid-'80s is now back in print. Since it provides valuable insight for apologetics--and is one of my favorites--I'd like to share a few of its insights.

To bring out a Christian view of what makes for a truly fulfilling human experience, the authors contrast it with that of secular humanism. Secular humanism is the belief that mankind can truly find itself apart from any reference to God. It seeks to elevate the human race through a confidence in our ability to understand and order our world guided by our own reason and standing on the findings and possibilities of science.

One note before continuing. Some have objected to connecting the word *humanism* with *Christian*. Doesn't it suggest the exaltation of people? If you are familiar with either of the authors, you'll know that isn't their intent at all. As they say, "This book is an attempt to describe the sense in which the Christian religion both undergirds and nourishes all that seems to mark our true humanness."<sup>[2]</sup>

Because *Christianity: The True Humanism* explores the meaning of Christianity for the human experience, it adds to our apologetic for the faith. The authors write: "The best defense of any position is a creative exposition of it, and certainly that is the best means of persuading others that it is true."<sup>[3]</sup>

#### What Do We Need to be Human?

So, what *do* we need to live a full life? It might be hard to get started answering that, but once the answers start they come in a rush. A sense of identity is one thing we need. How about adequate food, companionship, peace, beauty, goodness, and love? Freedom, a recognition by others of one's dignity, some measure of cultural awareness, and a worthy object of veneration also fill certain needs. Recreation, a sense of one's own significance, and meaning in life are a few more.

Animals don't seem to be concerned about most of these things. As the authors say, "Once you get a dog fed he can manage. Give a puffin or a gazelle freedom to range around and it will cope without raising any awkward questions about esteem and meaning."<sup>[4]</sup>

Far from being a religion of escape which calls people away from the realities of life, as critics are wont to say, Christianity calls us to plunge in to the issues that matter most and see how the answer is found in Jesus Christ. The good things in life are pursued with God's blessing. The difficult things are taken in and worked through, leaving the results to God. Here there is no need for submerging oneself in a bottle of alcohol to relieve the stress, no approval for running from the faults of a failing spouse into the arms of another, no settling for a grimy existence from which there is no escape but death.

What is the testimony of saints around us and those who've gone before us? "If what the saints tell us is true," say the authors, "Christian vision illuminates the whole of our experience with incomparable splendor. Far from beckoning us away from raw human experience, this vision opens up to us its full richness, depth, and meaning."<sup>[5]</sup> They tell us that to run into the arms of Christ is not to run away from one's humanness, but to find out what it means to be fully human. Even our imaginations give testimony that there is more to life than drudgery; we might try to walk machine-like through life ignoring its difficulties, but our imaginations keep bringing us back. There is something bigger. "Our imaginations insist that if it all comes to nothing then existence itself is an exquisite cheat,"<sup>[6]</sup> for it keeps drawing us higher.

In this article we'll consider four issues--freedom, dignity, culture, and the sacred--as we explore what it means to be fully human.

## **Freedom**

What does freedom mean to you? When you find yourself wishing to be free, what is it you want? Are you a harried supervisor facing demands from your superiors and lack of cooperation from your subordinates? Freedom to you might mean no demands from above and no obligations below. Are you a student? Freedom might mean no more course requirements, no more nights spent hunched over a desk while others are out having a good time.

My Webster's dictionary gives as its first definition of freedom: "not under the control of some other person or some arbitrary power; able to act or think without compulsion or arbitrary restriction." [7] To be free is thus to be able to do something without unreasonable restriction. Of course what will constitute the experience of freedom will vary from person to person according to our interests and desires. But are there any commonalities rooted in human nature which will inform everyone's understanding of freedom?

### *A Christian View of Freedom*

When we think about freedom we typically focus on our external circumstances which hinder us from doing what we want. If only our circumstances were different we could *really* be free. But if freedom lies primarily in being able to do as we please, very few of us will ever know it. So, freedom can be very elusive; it comes in fits and snatches, and too often our sights are set on things outside our reach anyway.

Given the contrast between the dimensions of our dreams and the restrictions we face, is it possible for anyone to truly be free? It is when we understand our true nature and what we were meant to be and do.

Let's first distinguish between *subjective* freedom and *objective* freedom. *Subjective* freedom is that psychological sense of contentment and fulfillment which comes with doing the best we know and want to do. *Objective* freedom is that condition of being in a situation well-suited to our own makeup which provides for our doing the best thing. It lies, in other words, in being and doing what we were meant to be and do. Like the car engine that is free when the pistons can move up and down unhindered--and not flop wildly in all directions--we, too, are free when we operate according to our makeup and design.

Because we were created by God according to His plan, freedom results from aligning ourselves with God's design. This requires understanding human nature generally so we can know those things which are best for all people, and understanding ourselves individually so we can know what we are best suited to be and do. This understanding of human nature and of ourselves is then subjected to the law of love in service to others. Because we are made like God, we are made to do for others; to sacrifice for the good of other people. It is God's love which has set us free, and which enables us to let go of our own self-interests in order to reach out to others. This is true freedom in the objective sense. "When nothing and no one can stop you from loving, then you are free in the profoundest sense." [8] But this means being free from any desires of our own which would hinder us from doing those things for others we should be doing.

This focus on love of others contrasts sharply with what we're told in modern society, that freedom means focusing on ourselves. "It is the stark opposite of all egocentrism, self-interest, avarice, pride, and self-assertion--the very things, so we thought, that are necessary if we are ever to wrest any freedom from this struggling, overcrowded, and oppressive world of ours." [9]

The key figure to observe, of course, is Jesus. We might consider Him bound by his poverty and by the rigors of His ministry. But remember that He freely accepted the Father's call to sacrifice Himself for us. His very food was to do the will of the Father. Jesus was free because He fit perfectly in the Father's plan, and there was nothing that could keep Him from accomplishing the Father's wishes which were also His *own* desire.

In summary, the freedom people long for--of being rid of expectations and restrictions so one can do what one wants--turns out to be illusory. We are free when we rid ourselves of the things which prevent us from living in obedience to the God who has loved us and given Himself for us, for this is what we were designed to do.

## **Dignity**

### *The Imago Dei*

One of the words seldom heard today to describe a person is *dignified*. What does that word bring to mind? Perhaps a stately looking gentleman, dressed formally and with impeccable manners . . . but looking all the world like he'd be more comfortable if he'd just relax!

Packer and Howard believe that dignity is an important component of a full humanity. Dignity is "the quality of being worthy of esteem or honor; worthiness." It refers to a "proper pride and self-respect" [\[10\]](#) True dignity is not the stuffiness of some people who think they are not part of the riff-raff of society. When we react against such arrogance we need to realize that our reaction is not against dignity itself. For it is our innate sense of the dignity of all people, no matter what their place in society, that makes such airs objectionable.

Dignity is defined objectively by our nature, and is subjectively revealed in the way we act. What is that something about us that warrants our being treated with dignity and calls for us to act dignified (in the best sense)? That something is the *imago Dei*, the image of God, which is ours by virtue of creation. We have a relationship to the Creator shared by no other creature because we are like Him. This gives us a special standing in creation, on the one hand, but makes all people equal, on the other.

Secular humanism, by contrast, sees us as just another step on the evolutionary ladder. Our dignity is dependent upon our *development* (as the highest animal currently). Although at present we might demand greater honor than animals because we're on the top, there is nothing in us by nature that makes us worthy of special honor. "By making dignity dependent upon development," Packer and Howard say, "the humanist is opening the door to the idea that less favored, less well-developed human beings have less dignity than others and consequently less claim to be protected and kept from violation than others." [\[11\]](#) Hence, abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia. One has to wonder, too, if there is a connection between we've been taught about our lack of natural worth by evolutionists and the lack of concern for behaving in a dignified manner in public life.

Furthermore, secular humanism treats people according to their usefulness, either actual or potential. "To be valued for oneself, as a person, is humanizing," say the authors, "for it ennobles; but to be valued only as a hand, or a means, or a tool, of a cog in a wheel, or a convenience to someone else is dehumanizing--and it depresses. . . . Secular humanism, though claiming vast wisdom and life-enhancing skills, actually diminishes the individual, who is left in old age without dignity (because his or her social usefulness is finished) and without hope (because there is nothing now to look forward to)." [\[12\]](#)

### **Worship--Drawn Up to Full Height**

If recognizing our dignity means understanding our highest self or nature, in what kind of situation or activity is our dignity most visible? Packer and Howard say it is in worshipping God that our dignity is most fully realized.

Why is that? There are a couple of reasons. First, we are made to worship, and dignity is found in doing what we are made to do. "The final dignity of a thing is its glory--that is, the realizing of its built-in potential for good. . . . The true glory of all objects appears when they do what they were made to do." [\[13\]](#) Like a car engine made to operate a certain way, we were made to bring all of our life's experience into the service of glorifying God.

Second, the object of one's worship reflects back on the worshipper. Those who worship things lower than themselves end up demeaning themselves, being brought down to the level of their object of worship. But those who worship things higher are drawn up to reflect their object of worship. To worship God is to be drawn up to our full height, so to speak. We are ennobled by worshipping the most noble One.

### *Moral Life--Marking the Dignity of Others*

Does all this mean non-Christians have no dignity or aren't worthy of being treated in a dignified manner? Of course not. The authors summarize their idea this way: "To the Christian, every human being has intrinsic and inalienable dignity by virtue of being made in God's image and realizes and exhibits the full potential of that dignity only in the worship and service of the Creator." [\[14\]](#) Because of our inherent value as human beings, we all deserve to be treated in a certain way. Christians are to treat people according to their innate worth. We love people as Christ loves us. We also seek to guide them to the place of their highest fulfillment which is in Christ.

Thus, Christianity "reveals us to ourselves as the most precious and privileged of all God's creatures." [\[15\]](#) And therein lies our dignity.

### **Culture**

What does it mean to be cultured? In one sense it has to do with the finer things in life. People visit the great museums and cathedrals and concert halls of this and other countries, take evening classes at the local college, learn

foreign languages, take up painting and pottery making as hobbies. Even those who have little interest in the fine arts have an appreciation for skilled craftsmanship.

Being cultured also can mean being well-mannered, knowing what is considered appropriate and inappropriate in social interaction.

What is at the root of what it means to be cultured? Personal preference is part of it, if we're thinking of the arts for example. But culture goes deeper than that to matters of *taste*. "Taste is a facet of wisdom," say Packer and Howard; "it is the ability to distinguish what has value from what does not." It has to do with *appropriateness*, with fitness and value.

But how do we measure appropriateness? Traditionally we have measured it by our view of the value of humankind. Does what comes off the artist's easel in some manner elevate our humanness? Or at least does it not degrade humanity? Do we treat people in a way which shows respect for them, which is the essence of good manners? To be in good taste is to be characterized by being appropriate to the situation. With respect to culture, it is to be appropriate given our nature. On the other hand, to be in poor taste is to be "unworthy of our humanness."[\[16\]](#) To appreciate the value in people and in their creative expression is to be cultured.

Should Christians be concerned about culture? While Christianity *per se* is indifferent to matters of culture (for the message is to all people of all cultures, and we should value the contributions of all cultures), Christians ourselves aren't to be indifferent. In our daily lives we should be demonstrating habits and tastes informed by the Gospel, and these should mark whatever we put their hands to. We are to treat people with respect as having been made in God's image. We also apply ourselves creatively in imitation of God, and our creativity should reflect God's view of mankind and the world. Our creative activity in this world is what some refer to as the "cultural mandate." "When man harnesses the powers and resources of the world around him to build a culture and so enrich community life, he is fulfilling this mandate," say our authors.[\[17\]](#) In doing this we reflect the redemptive work God has been doing since Adam and Eve.

While, on the one hand, we should appreciate the cultural contributions of anyone which elevate mankind and more clearly reflect God's attitude toward us and our world, on the other hand we are under no obligation to accept anything and everything in the name of "creativity." We can't applaud the blasphemous or immoral. And this is where Christianity stands against secular humanism. For the latter, in its demotion of man to the level of animal and its elevation of human liberty above all transcendent standards, must allow wide freedom in creativity, whether it be crucifixes in urine or erotic performance art. But in doing so it ultimately degrades us rather than exalts us. A sweeping look at the 20th century with its horrific assaults on humanity offers a clue as to the strength of moral standards devoid of God's will.

A few important notes here. First, although the Bible doesn't teach standards of beauty, "it charges us to use our creativity to devise a pattern of life that will fitly express the substance of our godliness, for this is what subduing the earth, tending God's garden, and having dominion over the creatures means."[\[18\]](#) Second, "the Gospel is the great leveler."[\[19\]](#) There is no room for pride, for exalting one culture above others.

One final note. Even given all that has been said about the significance of culture and our contribution to it, it is important to note that the demonstration of God's goodness to those around us through love and works of service is more important than "cultural correctness." We cannot turn our nose up at those who prefer comic books to classics or rap to Bach. For to do so is to deny the foundations of all we have been talking about, the inherent value of the individual person.

## **The Sacred**

### *Convention, Taboos, and the Divine*

In his book, *The New Absolutes*, William Watkins argues that people today aren't truly relativists; they've merely swapped a new set of absolutes for the old.[\[20\]](#) It's fairly common for conventions and taboos to change over time, rightly or wrongly. One important question we need to ask, according to Packer and Howard, is this: "Which way of doing things does a greater service to what is truly human in us?"[\[21\]](#)

Taboos have to do with bedrock issues of fitness and decency. Packer and Howard tell us that our many social codes of behavior are "a secular expression of our awareness of the sacred, the inviolable, the authoritative, the 'numinous' as it is nowadays called--in short, the divine."[\[22\]](#)

Wait a minute. Isn't it a bit of an exaggeration to talk about taboos and conventions in terms of the divine? No, say our authors, for what we are seeking in all this is what is ultimate and fixed. Wherever there are conventions or attitudes which have such binding authority over us that to disregard them is taboo, "there you have what we called the footprints of the gods--an intuition, however anonymous and unidentified, of the divine."[\[23\]](#) As ideas and beliefs exert authority over our spirits, they become sacred.

We are a worshipping race. Because of our createdness we naturally find ourselves looking for the transcendent (although we typically look in the wrong places, and although secularists will deny they're looking for anything higher than what we ourselves can produce). We naturally find ourselves giving obeisance to one thing or another, often without conscious thought. "You can no more have a tribe, community, or civilization without gods," say our authors, "than you can have one without customs."[\[24\]](#) It is the rare secularist who is never pushed to the point of offering up a prayer in hopes that there is Someone listening. An awareness of the reality of the sacred seems to be built in to us.

In our post-Christian world there are a number of substitute religions. Even secular movements like Marxism become religions of a sort with icons and symbols and sacred books. In shrinking the sacred down to our own proportions we lose what we sought, however, for as the theology becomes debased, so does the religion. And debased religion in turn debases its devotees. Note what Paul said about this in Romans chapter 1.

#### *The Meaning of Sacredness*

With respect to God, sacredness refers to His holiness and inviolability and to the value that inheres in all He has made. He is set apart from and above us. "He is not to be profaned, insulted, defied, or treated with irreverence in any way."[\[25\]](#) God both *cannot* and *ought not* be challenged.

Furthermore, that which He has made is due a measure of honor, and those things which are set apart for special service are deserving of special honor. We wouldn't think of tearing up the original copy of the Constitution of the United States or of splashing paint on the Mona Lisa. Likewise--but even more so--we shouldn't think of abusing that which has come from the Maker's hand or treating that which has been set apart for His use as cheap. Here's an example of the latter: How many of us think of our church buildings and their furnishings as sacred in any sense? We no longer have the Temple; but are buildings erected expressly for the purpose of God's service really just cinder blocks and wood?

#### *Sin and the Sacred*

If we aren't to treat the objects of this world as less than they deserve, much less should we mistreat those who have been made in His image. To sin against others is to violate their sacredness and our own, for in doing so "we profane and defile the sacred reality of God's image in us."[\[26\]](#)

For the secularist, as we've said before, without God all things have functional value only. As things or people outlive their usefulness they are to be discarded. The unborn who are malformed are of no use; they can be discarded. So, for example, the aged, now costing society rather than contributing to it, are to be assisted in death. But not so for the Christian. In taking seriously the sacredness of God and of what He has made, we preserve ourselves and provide protection against those things and ideas that would lessen or destroy us.

Freedom, dignity, culture, and the sacred--four aspects of the human experience. When we look at the Christian world view and at secularism, it is clear which provides the greater promise for mankind. It is Christianity, and not secularism, which provides for human life in its fullness.

#### **Notes**

1. J. I. Packer and Thomas Howard, *Christianity: The True Humanism* (Berkhamsted, Herts, England: Word Publishing, 1985).

2. Ibid., 38.
3. Ibid., 13.
4. Ibid., 37.
5. Ibid., 39.
6. Ibid., 44.
7. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed. (1999), s.v. "free."
8. Packer and Howard, 60.
9. Ibid., 68.
10. *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, 4th ed. (1999), s.v. "dignity."
11. Packer and Howard, 138-39.
12. Ibid., 160.
13. Ibid., 152.
14. Ibid., 155.
15. Ibid., 160.
16. Ibid., 167.
17. Ibid., 177.
18. Ibid., 178.
19. Ibid., 172.
20. William D. Watkins, *The New Absolutes* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House Publishers, 1996). An article I wrote on this book can be found at Probe's web site (<http://www.probe.org/docs/new-abso.html>). This article was reprinted in Jerry Solomon, ed., *Arts, Entertainment, and Christian Values: Probing the Headlines That Impact Your Family* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000).
21. Packer and Howard., 187.
22. Ibid., 187-88.
23. Ibid., 189.
24. Ibid., 188.
25. Ibid., 195.
26. Ibid., 206.

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## Consequences of Bad Worldviews

### Nancy Pearcey

*From the article "Century of Cruelty: Making Sense of Our Era," by Nancy Pearcey, Copyright © 1999. All rights reserved. International copyright secured. Nancy Pearcey is a fellow of the Discovery Institute in Seattle, and managing editor of the journal Origins and Design. This article is based on her new book, How Now Shall We Live?, co-authored with Chuck Colson.*

As the century ends, a rash of books has appeared tracing the trends and tragedies of our era. But many authors overlook the overriding factor of our time: The most destructive forces of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were unleashed by ideologies aggressively hostile to Christianity.

In *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, British moral philosopher Jonathan Glover recounts, in gruesome detail, why ours is the bloodiest century ever--from the Nazi Holocaust to the Soviet Gulag, from Pol Pot's decimation of the Cambodian population to tribal and ethnic conflict.

The worst of these modern atrocities Glover lays at the feet of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, the self-proclaimed Antichrist who announced the death of God. As the idea of a God-given morality lost hold, into the vacuum rushed a host of ideologies justifying government-sponsored terror--"festivals of cruelty" that fill page after page of Glover's book.

These ideologies mirror the basic elements of the religion they replaced--so closely that the best way to analyze them is by comparing them to the Christian worldview. Classic Reformed thought breaks the Christian worldview down into three structural elements: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. The world was created good, but fell into sin and evil through a moral choice by our first parents. Yet God has provided a way to pay the price for sin and restore us to our original purpose.

Parallels can be detected in every alternative worldview or ideology. Translated into general terms, *Creation* means ultimate origins: Every worldview, every philosophy starts by explaining where the world came from. The *Fall* means the source of evil and suffering. Again, every belief system has to account for war, conflict, and oppression. And given this basic flaw in the world, *Redemption* asks: How can it be fixed? How do we create a better world?

Every worldview can be analyzed by breaking it down into these three elements. Consider some of the most powerful ideologies that shaped--and continue to shape--our world today.

#### **The Total State**

Most of the ideologies that have bloodied our century--and that so horrify Glover--were influenced by Jean Jacques Rousseau. His writings inspired Robespierre, Marx, Lenin, Hitler, Mao, and Pol Pot. Why was Rousseau's worldview so revolutionary?

Political philosophy begins by asking what kind of political institutions fit human nature. To locate our true nature, Rousseau said, we must strip away everything that has developed through culture and history, and imagine a "state of nature" that is pre-social, pre-political, even pre-moral. What's left is the lone, autonomous individual--"autonomous" literally meaning "self-legislating," or choosing one's own values and identity.

And if this self-defining individual is the ultimate reality, then society is *contrary* to our nature: artificial and confining. Rousseau's most influential work, *The Social Contract*, opens with the famous line, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains." He called on reformers to liberate people from society's rules, institutions, customs, and traditions.

To grasp how revolutionary this was, contrast it to classical political philosophy. Aristotle taught that people are by nature social beings, and therefore social institutions *express* our true nature, instead of oppressing it. Christian thinkers agreed that we are naturally social. For we are made in the image of a God who in Himself is a community of being--namely, the Trinity. Moreover, God did not create a lone individual, He created a couple--the basis for both family and society.

But for Rousseau, society was artificial and confining. And what would be the agent of liberation? The state. It would destroy all social ties, releasing the individual from loyalty to anything except itself. "Each citizen would then be completely independent of all his fellow men," Rousseau wrote, "and absolutely dependent on the state."

The idea that the state could be a liberator was revolutionary. Thus was born what Christian political theorist Glenn Tinder calls "the politics of redemption," the idea that politics can be the means not only of creating a just society but of actually transforming human nature, creating "the New Man."

So how do we run Rousseau's ideas through our grid of Creation, Fall, and Redemption? His starting point is the autonomous individual in the "state of nature," his substitute for the Garden of Eden. The source of evil is society; and Redemption is wrought by the state. Small wonder Rousseau's philosophy inspired so many totalitarian systems.

But this philosophy lies at the root of our own political life as well. In *Democracy's Discontent*, Michael Sandel says the dominant political philosophy in America today is a liberalism that regards the individual as the ultimate reality. Social and moral ties are *not* ultimate; they are created by the individual's choice. There are no objective moral obligations, given by God and rooted in our nature.

Today, issues from abortion to religious liberty to family law are cast within the paradigm of the autonomous individual. The controversies tearing apart the fabric of our own society reflect the on-going influence of Rousseau's worldview.

### **Marx for Today**

Surely one of the worst in Glover's catalog of horrors was the Soviet police state. And though the iron curtain has fallen, Marxism retains a powerful influence in many places . . . like the American university campus. A famous French political philosopher recently said, "Nowadays, when we want to debate a Marxist, we have to import one from an American university."

Even more pervasive are trendy forms of multiculturalism and political correctness, which have been labeled neo-Marxism because they keep the same forms of analysis and simply fill them with new content. The classic theory of the proletariat oppressed by the capitalists has been replaced, in radical feminism, with the idea that women are oppressed by men. Or, in so-called "queer studies," that homosexuals are oppressed by straights. Or, in civil rights theory, that blacks are oppressed by whites. Victim groups are urged to raise their consciousness and resist their oppressors.

This explains why liberation movements often blend and merge. Marxism and black liberation are linked in a course at the University of California at Santa Barbara called "Black Marxism." Black and homosexual liberation merge in a Brown University course titled "Black Lavender: Study of Black Gay/Lesbian Plays." And everything is mixed in a single cauldron in a Stanford course titled "Women of Color: The Intersection of Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Gender." What unites all these liberation movements is a common, neo-Marxist core. The characters have changed, but it's still the same play.

In Marx's philosophy, the creator is matter itself. As Lenin wrote, "We may regard the material and cosmic world as the supreme being, the cause of all causes, the creator of heaven and earth." Marx's counterpart to the Garden of Eden is the state of primitive communism: Humanity fell from this state of innocence into slavery and oppression through the creation of private property and, from this follow all the subsequent evils of exploitation and class struggle.

Redemption is wrought by reversing the original sin: destroying the private ownership of the means of production. The redeemer is the proletariat, who will rise up against the capitalist oppressors. In the words of historian Robert Wesson, "The savior proletariat will, by its suffering, redeem mankind, and bring the kingdom of heaven on earth."

Marxism fits our three categories so cleanly that some have dubbed it a religious heresy. The ultimate origin of everything is matter. That's why Marx taught economic reductionism: Since humanity is defined by its relationship to the creator, in Marxism we are defined by the way we relate to matter--by the way we manipulate it and make things from it. Which is to say, by the means of production. The Fall is the rise of private property, and Redemption means overthrowing the oppressors and recreating the original state of communism.

This analysis explains why Marxism continues to have such widespread influence, despite its dramatic failure to produce a classless society; and why it spawns ever-new liberation movements--because it taps into the deep human need for redemption. This religious dimension explains why neo-Marxist trends today have taken over entire departments on some college campuses.

### **Sex as Ideology**

America is in the midst of its own holocaust in terms of sheer numbers killed, especially when we consider abortion. And this holocaust is likewise rooted in an ideology--a sexual ideology. The left/right split in American politics used to be over economic issues, such as the distribution of wealth; but today it is over social and moral issues: abortion, fetal experimentation, homosexual rights, no-fault divorce, spousal benefits, sex education.

Why? Because sexual liberation has become nothing less than a worldview—a vision of reforming human nature and creating a new society. Consider the writings of one of the key architects of the sexual revolution: Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood.

Generally remembered as a champion of birth control, Sanger also expounded a complete worldview. In *The Pivot of Civilization*, she offers a "scientific" view of sexuality based on Darwinism. She portrays the drama of history as a struggle to free our bodies and minds from the constraints of morality, the "cruel morality of self-denial and sin." Sexual liberation is touted as "the only method" to find "inner peace and security and beauty." It is even proffered as the way to overcome social ills: "Remove the constraints and prohibitions which now hinder the release of inner energies [which for Sanger meant sexual energies], and most of the larger evils of society will perish." Sanger boldly borrowed religious language to describe her utopian vision: "Through sex, mankind will attain the great spiritual illumination which will transform the world, and light up the only path to an earthly paradise."

Taking recourse to our three-part grid, in Sanger's sexual ideology Creation, or the account of origins, is evolution. As a result, human identity is found in the biological, the natural, the instinctual—especially the sexual instincts. The Fall, or source of evil, is the rise of Christian morality. And Redemption equals sexual liberation. Sex researcher Alfred Kinsey, who had an enormous influence on American attitudes through his *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, sometimes spoke as if the introduction of a Bible-based sexual morality were *the* watershed in human history—a sort of "fall" from which we must be redeemed.

This analysis helps us to understand why it is so difficult to reform sex education or to halt the sexualizing of the entertainment industry. Sexual liberation has become a moral crusade, in which Christian morality is the enemy, and opposition to it is a heroic moral stance.

Film critic Michael Medved learned this the hard way. He once publicly praised the work of a couple who were both Hollywood film producers. They'd been together for 15 years, had 2 children, and he spoke of them as a married couple. Later, he heard from friends of the couple, who said that they were certainly *not* married—and that they would be "offended" to hear themselves described that way.

Why such an indignant response? Because by rejecting marriage, the couple was taking a high-minded stand for freedom against an oppressive moral convention.

Philosopher John Stuart Mill once wrote, "The mere example of nonconformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a service." By giving an example of liberation, folks like this Hollywood couple feel they are performing a service to humanity.

## **A Moral History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

If we really want to understand why the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the bloodiest yet, the key lies in analyzing worldviews. The problem is not that large numbers of people suddenly underwent some mysterious moral degeneration; the problem is that they adopted worldviews based on faulty definitions of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. Nature was defined as our creator, and some aspect of the world was defined as the source of evil and suffering. Enormous moral outrage was then directed toward fixing that "evil."

It's precisely because ideological movements inspire a sense of righteous outrage that they are so dangerous. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, people are much more likely to be cruel *not* when they're doing something bad, but when they are convinced they're doing something good.

Author and dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn once asked an old peasant why Russia had suffered so much under a totalitarian system. The peasant replied that it's because "we have forgotten God." The new millennium can signal a return to a more humane and humanitarian society only if we reject morally bankrupt ideologies, and restore a robust and vigorous Christian worldview.

# To Understand God's Word: When is Our Worldview Truly Biblical

By T.M. Moore

*But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. - Luke 18:34*

Foundational to the development of a Biblical worldview is understanding the teaching of the Bible as it relates to every aspect of human life and interest. This is so foundational, in fact, that it seems hardly necessary to assert. However, there are two very good reasons why we need to make this point, and to remind ourselves of it again and again.

The first is that it is easy, in these days of "Christian media" overload, to seek our worldview understanding at one remove. The proliferation of books, journals, tapes, websites, and conferences addressing some aspect of Biblical worldview is, indeed, heartening. We should make lavish albeit critical use of all such sources (including this column). But if secondary materials are our *exclusive* or even our *primary* source of worldview understanding, then, we may legitimately ask, to what extent can our worldview, such as it is, be truly Biblical?

The second reason relates to a faulty view of what it means to *understand* Biblical worldview, or, for that matter, anything else the Bible teaches. It is possible, in other words, to acquire a good deal of information about Biblical worldview, even from the Bible itself, and yet not truly *understand* the Scriptures or their truth for our lives. The mere acquisition of knowledge, even the ability to recall, elaborate, or defend that knowledge, is no guarantee that true understanding has been attained.

The experience of the disciples in Luke 18:31-34 can be instructive for us. Had someone asked the disciples what Jesus had spoken to them as they journeyed on their way, they no doubt could have recalled His words accurately: "He said we are going to Jerusalem where the Son of Man will be handed over and crucified, and on the third day He will rise again." Had someone challenged them with respect to this report, they no doubt could have defended their claim concerning what they had heard against any detractor. Yet Luke tells us plainly that they understood *none* of these things. *Nothing* of what Jesus had spoken to them managed to penetrate beyond the level of mere hearing to the deeper strata of true understanding. What can we learn from this for our work of developing a Biblical worldview?

## The Danger of Preconceived Notions

First, we should be warned against the dangers of preconceived notions. So set were the disciples in their popular understanding of the Messiah and what He would do that they could not receive His straightforward teaching about the most central aspect of His work. Everybody knew the Messiah, when He came, would overthrow the Romans, renew the throne of David, and restore Israel's greatness. Those who took His side in this work stood to gain riches and power. So whatever this business of being handed over, dying, and rising again must mean, it had to fit somewhere in this scenario. Even forty days after the resurrection, after Jesus had been instructing them *explicitly* about the Kingdom of God, the disciples were still banking on some kind of temporal and material power-sharing experience (cf. Acts 1:1-8).

We have been exposed to a variety of pop myths all our lives, through education, the media and pop culture, and the views of our friends. Myths like the theory of evolution, the success syndrome, the materialist idea of happiness, the superiority of naturalistic thinking, the separation of faith from real life, and so forth. These pop notions are so ingrained that they create false boundaries within which many religious people try to think about their faith. They tend to read the Bible through the lens of these myths, or they allow these myths to be the hermeneutical Rosetta stones for understanding the Bible. Hence we get theistic evolution, the prosperity gospel, therapeutic (hot tub) faith, the Jesus Seminar, and politicians who swear that their religious views will not be allowed to influence their work in office. All such attempts to make the Biblical worldview fit within the demands and parameters of modernist and postmodernist myths reveal a fundamental lack of understanding of the Gospel, the work of Christ, and the Biblical worldview.

## The Danger of Hidden Revelation

Second, we need always to keep in mind the prophetic word given through Isaiah concerning the unique nature of God's truth (Is. 55:8, 9). God's truth is very often not what we might expect; indeed, at times it can seem precisely the opposite of what reason and common sense might seem to require. How could one who had fed multitudes, raised the dead, and walked on water be handed over and killed by *anyone*? To the disciples, it just didn't make sense. Something else must be intended here.

But God calls us to receive His Word in faith, to secure the on-the-surface meaning of any text and then to wait on Him to make its deeper, more mysterious meanings clear. Those who insist on making every word, promise, or warning from God fit the demands of human logic or experience, or conform to our preconceived notions of what God might or should do, may find that He hides His truth and will from them. They may prattle on in high-sounding words, promulgating imaginative and wholly reasonable schemes, but where faith and waiting on the Lord in prayer are lacking, so will any true understanding of the purposes and will of God. To minds not inclined to receive His truth *as such*, with all its mysterious and sometimes painful implications, God will conceal His truth, and they will understand nothing.

## Casting Ourselves on the Lord

Finally, our text suggests that, since God alone is sovereign in making His will and purposes known, in the work of Biblical worldview we need to cast ourselves entirely upon Him. Only His truth can lead us to overcome our preconceived notions of how the world works. And only His Spirit can lead us into all truth and enable us to make every thought obedient to Jesus Christ. This entails three obligations.

1. *Search the Scriptures*: Like the Bereans of Acts 17:11 we need to make sure that all our use of secondary sources in developing our Biblical worldview is run through the filter of the Word of God. This means we need to read and study the Scriptures faithfully, carefully, and exhaustively, and hold off on any worldview conclusions we might make until we have allowed the Bible to shed its full and glorious light on the subject in question.

2. *Abide in Christ*: Second, we need to trust in Christ and rest in His good and perfect will. This will involve many things, but chief among them will be the calling to become fishers of men, to make all the nations disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Biblical worldview is not a trophy to be displayed but a life to be lived and a mission to be fulfilled. As we abide in Christ – seeking Him in meditation and prayer, and reflecting on His mission to earth – we will find that our desire to grow in understanding the Biblical worldview will impel us toward mission, toward wanting to reach out to teach, encourage, and evangelize others.

3. *Keep within the tradition*: It's a good idea, as we study secondary resources in the light of Biblical revelation, and seek to abide in Christ, to stay in touch with the teaching of the Church in previous generations. Since the earliest days of the Church faithful preachers, teachers, and theologians have left records of their thoughts, reflections, and conclusions on such worldview subjects as the conflict of worldviews, the doctrines of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, and the requirements of love for God and neighbors. By becoming familiar with their works in these and other areas we can compare our own conclusions with those that have served the Church faithfully for hundreds of years.

It's not enough just to read, listen to lectures, or participate in studies of Biblical worldview. We seek *understanding*. And for true understanding to be gained, we need to make certain that we're not being held captive by false presuppositions or deluding ourselves into thinking that mere knowledge is all we need. By searching the Scriptures, abiding in Christ, and working within the framework of tradition established by our forebears in the faith, we can gain real understanding of Biblical worldview, and know the kind of life such understanding produces.

**For reflection:** What is your own approach to developing a Biblical worldview? What place does Scripture have in your studies? How are you seeking to make your studies part of your mission or calling from Christ?

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# Not a Threat: The Contributions of Christianity to Western Society

Rick Wade

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*Christianity has given us hospitals, civil liberties, abolition of slavery, modern science, the elevation of women, regard for human life, great works of art and literature, workable systems of justice, education for common people, the free-enterprise system, and much, much more.*

## What If You'd Never Been Born?

Do you remember this scene in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*?

GEORGE (cont'd): Look, who are you?

CLARENCE (patiently): I told you, George. I'm your guardian angel. [George, still looking at him, goes up to him and pokes his arm. It's flesh.]

GEORGE: Yeah, yeah, I know. You told me that. What else are you? What . . . are you a hypnotist?

CLARENCE: No, of course not.

GEORGE: Well then, why am I seeing all these strange things?

CLARENCE: Don't you understand, George? It's because you were not born.

GEORGE: Then if I wasn't born, who am I?

CLARENCE: You're nobody. You have no identity. [George rapidly searches his pockets for identification, but without success.]

GEORGE: What do you mean, no identity? My name's George Bailey.

CLARENCE: There is no George Bailey. You have no papers, no cards, no driver's license, no 4-F card, no insurance policy . . . (he says these things as George searches for them) [George looks in his watch pocket.]

CLARENCE (cont'd): They're not there, either.

GEORGE: What?

CLARENCE: Zuzu's petals. [George feverishly continues to turn his pockets inside out.]

CLARENCE (cont'd): You've been given a great gift, George. A chance to see what the world would be like without you. [\[1\]](#)

Do you remember George Bailey's encounter with Clarence the angel? George didn't think life was worth living, and it was Clarence's job to show him he was wrong. To do so, he showed George what Bedford Falls would have been like if George had never been born.

In desperation, George races through town looking for something familiar. After observing him for a little while, Clarence utters this bit of wisdom: "Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives, and when he isn't around he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?" [\[2\]](#) Inspired by the plot of *It's a Wonderful Life*, in 1994 D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe wrote a book titled *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* [\[3\]](#) The authors determined to show what the world would be like if, like George Bailey, Jesus had never been born.

Christianity has come under attack from many different directions. It is often derided as the great boogeyman of human civilization. It is presented as an oppressive force with no regard for the higher aspirations of humankind. To throw off its shackles is the way of wisdom.

Kennedy quotes Friederich Nietzsche, a nineteenth century philosopher whose ideas continue to have a profound effect on our society. Said Nietzsche: "I condemn Christianity; I bring against the Christian Church the most terrible

of all the accusations that an accuser has ever had in his mouth. It is, to me, the greatest of all imaginable corruptions; it seeks to work the ultimate corruption, the worst possible corruption. The Christian Church has left nothing untouched by its depravity; it has turned every value into worthlessness, and every truth into a lie, and every integrity into baseness of soul."[\[4\]](#)

This article will--we hope—show just how beneficial Christianity has been, even for its critics. Drawing from Kennedy and Newcombe's book in addition to other literature, we will examine the impact of Christian beliefs on society. The four areas we'll consider are science, human freedom, morality, and healthcare. A theme which will run throughout this discussion is the high value Christianity places on human beings. Far from being a source of oppression, the message of Christ serves to heal, set free, and provide protective boundaries.

### **Contributions to Science**

Perhaps the area in which Christianity has been the most vociferously attacked in this century has been the area of science. Religion and science are thought by many to be like oil and water; the two simply don't mix. Religion is thought to offer superstition while science offers facts.

It would seem, however, that those who make such a charge haven't given much attention to the history of science. In their book, *The Soul of Science*,[\[5\]](#) authors Nancy Pearcey and Charles Thaxton make a case for the essential role Christianity played in the development of science. The authors point out four general ways Christianity has positively influenced its development.[\[6\]](#)

First, Christianity provided important presuppositions of science. The Bible teaches that nature is real, not an illusion. It teaches that it has value and that it is good to work with nature. Historically this was an advance over pagan superstitions because the latter saw nature as something to be worshipped or as something filled with spirits which weren't to be angered. As one theologian wrote, "Nature was thus abruptly desacralized, stripped of many of its arbitrary, unpredictable, and doubtless terrifying aspects."[\[7\]](#)

Also, because it was created by God in an orderly fashion, nature is lawful and can be understood. That is, it follows discernible patterns which can be trusted not to change. "As the creation of a trustworthy God, nature exhibited regularity, dependability, and orderliness. It was intelligible and could be studied. It displayed a knowable order."[\[8\]](#)

Second, Christianity sanctioned science. Science "was justified as a means of alleviating toil and suffering."[\[9\]](#) With animistic and pantheistic cultures, God and nature were so closely related that man, being a part of nature, was incapable of transcending it, that is, of gaining any real control over it. A Christian world view, however, gave man the freedom to subject nature to his needs—with limitations, of course—because man relates primarily to God who is over nature. Technology—or science applied—was developed to meet human needs as an expression of our God-given duty to one another. As one historian put it, "the Christian concept of moral obligation played an important role in attracting people to the study of nature."[\[10\]](#)

Third, Christianity provided motives for pursuing scientific knowledge. As scientists learned more about the wonders of the universe, they saw God's glory being displayed.

Fourth, Christianity "played a role in regulating scientific methodology."[\[11\]](#) Previously, the world was thought to work in perfectly rational ways which could be known primarily through logical deduction. But this approach to science didn't work. Planets don't have to orbit in circular patterns as some people concluded using deductive logic; of course, it was discovered by investigation that they didn't. A newer way of understanding God's creation put the emphasis on God's will. Since God's will couldn't be simply deduced through logical reasoning, experimentation and investigation were necessary. This provided a particular theological grounding for empirical science.

The fact is that it was distinctly Christian beliefs which provided the intellectual and moral foundations for the study of nature and for its application through technology. Thus, although Christianity and some scientists or scientific theories might be in opposition, Christianity and science are not.

### **Contributions to Human Freedom**

One of the favorite criticisms of Christianity is that it inhibits freedom. When Christians oppose funding pornography masquerading as art, for example, we're said to be unfairly restricting freedom of expression. When Christians oppose the radical, gender feminism which exalts personal fulfillment over all other social obligations,

and which calls for the tearing down of God-given moral structures in favor of "choice" as a moral guide, we're accused of oppression.

The problem is that people now see freedom not as self-determination, but as self-determination unhindered by any outside standard of morality. Some go so far in their zeal for self-expression that they expect others to assist them in the process, such as pornographic artists who expect government funding.

There are at least two general factors which limit or define freedom. One we might call the "rules of the game." The other is our nature.

The concert violinist is able to play a concerto because she knows the "rules of the game." In other words, she knows what the musical notation means. She knows how to produce the right sounds from the violin and when to produce them. She might want the "freedom" to make whatever sounds she wishes in whatever key and whatever beat, but who would want to listen? Similarly, as part of God's universe, we need to operate according to the rules of the game. He knows how life on earth is best lived, so we need to live according to His will and design.

Our nature also structures our freedom. A fish can try to express its freedom by living on dry land, but it won't be free long; it won't be alive long! We, too, are truly free only in so far as we live according to our nature—not our fallen nature, but our nature as created by God. This is really another way of looking at the "rules of the game" idea. But it's necessary to give it special focus because some of the "freedoms" we desire go against our nature, such as the freedom some want to engage in homosexual activity.

Some people see Christianity as a force which tries to inhibit proper expression of who we are. But it is the idea of helping people attain the freedom to be and do as God intended that has fueled much Christian activity over the years. For example, Christians were actively engaged in the battle against slavery because of their high view of man as made in God's image.[{12}](#)

Another example is feminism. Radical feminists complain that Christianity has been an oppressive force over women. But it seems to have escaped their notice that Christianity made significant steps in elevating women above the place they held before Christ came.[{13}](#)

While it is true that women have often been truly oppressed throughout history, even by Christian men, it is false that Christianity itself is oppressive toward them. In fact, in an article titled "Women of Renewal: A Statement" published in *First Things*,[{14}](#) such noted female scholars as Elizabeth Achtemeier, Roberta Hestenes, Frederica Mathewes-Green, and May Stewart Van Leeuwen stated unequivocally their acceptance of historic Christianity. And it's a sure thing that any of the signatories of this statement would be quite vocal in her opposition to real oppression!

The problem isn't that Christianity is opposed to freedom, but that it acknowledges the laws of our Creator who knows better than we do what is good for us. The doctrines of creation and redemption define for us our nature and our responsibilities to God. His "rules of the game" will always be oppressive to those who seek absolute self-determination. But as we'll see, it is by submitting to God that we make life worth living.

### **Contributions to Morality**

Let's turn our attention to the issue of morality. Christians are often accused of trying to ram their morality down people's throats. In some instances this might accurately describe what some Christians have done. But for the most part, I believe, the criticism follows our simple declaration of what we believe is right and wrong and our participation in the political and social arenas to see such standards codified and enforced.

The question that needs to be answered is whether the high standards of morality taught in Scripture have served society well. Has Christianity served to make individuals and societies better and to provide a better way of life?

In a [previous article](#) I wrote briefly about the brutality that characterized Greco-Roman society in Jesus' day.[{15}](#) We often hear about the wondrous advances of that society; but do you know about the cruelty? The Roman games, in which "beasts fought men, men fought men; and the vast audience waited hopefully for the sight of death,"[{16}](#) reveal the lust for blood. The practice of child exposure shows the low regard for human life the Romans had. Unwanted babies were left to die on trash heaps. Some of these were taken to be slaves or prostitutes.[{17}](#) It was distinctly Christian beliefs that brought these practices to an end.

In the era following "the disruption of Charlemagne's great empire", it was the Latin Christian Church which "patiently and persistently labored to combat the forces of disintegration and decay," and "succeeded little by little in restraining violence and in restoring order, justice, and decency."[\[18\]](#)

The Vikings provide an example of how the gospel can positively affect a people group. Vikings were fierce plunderers who terrorized the coastlands of Europe. James Kennedy says that our word *berserk* comes from their fighting men who were called "berserkers."[\[19\]](#) Gradually the teachings of Christ contributed to major changes in these people. In 1020 A.D., Christianity became law under King Olav. Practices "such as blood sacrifice, black magic, the 'setting out' of infants, slavery and polygamy" became illegal.[\[20\]](#)

In modern times, it was Christians who led the fight in England against slavery.[\[21\]](#) Also, it was the teaching of the Wesleys that was largely responsible for the social changes which prevented the social unrest which might have been expected in the Industrial Revolution.[\[22\]](#)

In an editorial published in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1986 titled "Religious Right Deserves Respect,"[\[23\]](#) Reo Christenson argues that conservative Christians have been vindicated with respect to their concerns about such things as drinking, the sexual revolution, and discipline in schools. He says that "if anybody's values have been vindicated over the last 20 years, it is theirs." He concludes with this comment: "The Religious Right is not always wrong."

To go against God's moral standards is destructive to individuals and societies. In a column which ran in the *Dallas Morning News* following the shootings at Columbine High School,[\[24\]](#) a junior at Texas A&M University asks hard questions of her parents' generation including these: "Why have you neglected to teach us values and morals? Why haven't you lived moral lives that we could model our own after?"[\[25\]](#)

Why indeed! In time, our society will see the folly of its ways by the destruction it is bringing on itself. Let's pray that it happens sooner rather than later.

### **Contributions to Healthcare**

Healthcare is another area where Christianity has made a positive impact on society. Christians have not only been involved in healthcare; they've often been at the forefront in serving the physical health of people.

Although some early Christians believed that disease came from God, so that trying to cure the sick would be going against God's will, the opposite impulse was also seen in those who saw the practice of medicine as an exercise of Christian charity.[\[26\]](#)

God had already shown His concern for the health of His people through the laws given through Moses. In his book, *The Story of Medicine*, Roberto Margotta says that the Hebrews made an important contribution to medicine by their knowledge of personal hygiene given in the book of Leviticus. In fact, he says, "the steps taken in mediaeval Europe to counteract the spread of 'leprosy' were straight out of the Bible."[\[27\]](#)

Of course, it was Jesus' concern for suffering that provided the primary motivation for Christians to engage in healthcare. In the Middle Ages, for examples, monks provided physical relief to the people around them. Some monasteries became infirmaries. "The best- known of these," says Margotta, "belonged to the Swiss monastery of St Gall which had been founded in 720 by an Irish monk; . . . medicines were made up by the monks themselves from plants grown in the herb garden. Help was always readily available for the sick who came to the doors of the monastery. In time, the monks who devoted themselves to medicine emerged from their retreats and started visiting the sick in their own homes." Monks were often better doctors than their lay counterparts and were in great demand.[\[28\]](#)

Christians played a significant role in the establishment of hospitals. In 325 A.D., the Council of Nicea "decreed that hospitals were to be duly established wherever the Church was established," says James Kennedy.[\[29\]](#) He notes that the hospital built by St. Basil of Caesarea in 370 even treated lepers who previously had been isolated.[\[30\]](#)

In the United States, the early hospitals were "framed and motivated by the responsibilities of Christian stewardship."[\[31\]](#) They were originally established to help the poor sick, but weren't intended to provide long-term care lest they become like the germ- infested almshouses.

A key factor in making long-term medical care possible was the "professionalization of nursing" because of higher standards of sanitation.<sup>{32}</sup> Before the 16th century, religious motivations were key in providing nursing for the sick. Anne Summers says that the willingness to fracture family ties to serve others, a disciplined lifestyle, and "a sense of heavenly justification," all of which came from Christian beliefs, undergirded ministry to the sick.<sup>{33}</sup> Even if the early nursing orders didn't achieve their own sanitation goals, "they were, nevertheless, often reaching higher sanitary standards than those previously known to the sick poor."<sup>{34}</sup>

There is much more that could be told about the contributions of Christianity to society, including the stories of Florence Nightingale, whose nursing school in London began modern nursing, and who saw herself as being in the service of God; or of the establishment of the Red Cross through the zeal of an evangelical Christian; or of the modern missions movement which continues to see Christian medical professionals devote their lives to the needs of the suffering in some of the darkest parts of the world.<sup>{35}</sup> It is obvious that in the area of medicine, as in a number of others, Christians have made a major contribution. Thus, those who deride Christianity as being detrimental are either tremendously biased in their thinking or are ignorant of history.

## Notes

1. Downloaded from the Internet at [http://www.clarence.com/iawl/script/script\\_19.html](http://www.clarence.com/iawl/script/script_19.html) on May 11, 1999.
2. Downloaded from the Internet at [http://www.clarence.com/iawl/script/script\\_20.html](http://www.clarence.com/iawl/script/script_20.html) on May 11, 1999.
3. D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994)
4. *Ibid.*, 5.
5. Nancy R. Pearcey and Charles B. Thaxton, *The Soul of Science: Christian Faith and Natural Philosophy* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1994).
6. Pearcey and Thaxton, 36-37. Taken from John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 19-33.
7. Pearcey and Thaxton, 25.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 36.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 36-37.
12. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Christianity."
13. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 376.
14. "Women of Renewal: A Statement," *First Things* No. 80 (February 1998): 36-40.
15. Rick Wade, "[The World of the Apostle Paul.](http://www.probe.org/docs/apospaul.html)" ([www.probe.org/docs/apospaul.html](http://www.probe.org/docs/apospaul.html))
16. Will Durant, *The History of Civilization: Part III. Caesar and Christ: A History of Roman Civilization and of Christianity from their beginnings to A.D. 325* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1944), 133-34.
17. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 72.
18. Joseph Reither, *World History at a Glance* (New York: The New Home Library, 1942), 144; quoted in Kennedy, 165.
19. Kennedy and Newcombe, 164.
20. Sverre Steen, *Langsomt ble Landet vaart Eget* (Oslo, Norway: J.W. Cappelens Forlag, 1967), 52-53, quoted in Kennedy, 164-65. See also *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Scandinavia, History of."
21. Earl Cairns, *The Christian in Society: Biblical and Historical Precepts for Involvement Today* (Chicago; Moody Press, 1973), 78-91.
22. *Ibid.*, 67.
23. Reo M. Christenson, "Religious Right Deserves Respect," *Chicago Tribune*, September 1986.
24. Littleton, Colorado. Two young men killed 12 students and a teacher, and then killed themselves.
25. Marcy Musgrave, "Generation has some questions," *Dallas Morning News*, 2 May 1999.
27. Roberto Margotta, *The Story of Medicine*, ed. Paul Lewis (New York: Golden Press, 1968), 36. Referenced in Kennedy, 142.
28. Margotta, 117-18.
29. Kennedy, 145.
30. *Ibid.*, 146. From Margotta, 102.
31. Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Care of Strangers: The Rise of America's Hospital System* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 8. From Kennedy, 147.
32. Kennedy, 148. Quote is from Rosenberg, 8.
33. Anne Summers, "Nurses and Ancillaries in the Christian Era," chap. 12 in *Western Medicine: An Illustrated History*, 134.
34. *Ibid.*
35. See Kennedy, 149-154.