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## Contents

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- 49 **Editorial: Worldview, Missions and Theology**  
Hans M. Weerstra
- 51 **Christian Worldview Development: Part II**  
Hans M. Weerstra
- 63 **The Arabized Berbers: An Unreached People that Once was Christian**  
Bethany World Prayer Center
- 65 **Biblical Theology and the Analogy of Faith**  
Daniel P. Fuller
- 75 **The Parsees: The Oldest Unreached People in the World**  
IJFM
- 79 **Worldview, Scripture and Missionary Communication**  
David J. Hesselgrave
- 83 **Conversion and Worldview Transformation**  
Paul G. Hiebert
- 87 **Towards a Biblical Worldview: Reflections of a South Asian and a North American**  
Natun Bhattacharya and Tom Eckblad
- 91 **The Holy Spirit's Role in Biblical Interpretation**  
Daniel P. Fuller
- 97 **Worldview and Discipling the Nations**  
Darrow L. Miller
- 

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# Editorial: Worldview, Missions and Theology

In this second special issue on worldview we want to explore in depth the mission implication of worldview, missions and theology? Specifically how does worldview relate to reaching the remaining unreached of the world? As we study the articles related to this fundamental subject, it should become obvious that mission personnel, including their support base, (not to say anything about the Church in general) should have a solid biblical worldview, that has been stripped of modern-day secular humanism, as well as all its other related “isms” of modern Western culture. Mission personnel must have biblical answers to the ultimate questions of life, especially as they face the unreached Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist non-Christian religions and cultures most of which are well developed systems of belief, having long standing traditions, all of which rest on an essential supernatural worldview.

Without such a worldview missionaries should stay at home and their supporters and directors should insist on this until they get a thorough biblical oriented worldview. Mission personnel should get all the help need to make this happen as soon as possible. A biblical worldview will give missionaries the “steadfastness of the faith” that will “thoroughly equip” them for the greatest of all “good works.” (See Col. 2:4, 5 and 2 Tim. 3:16, 17)

Three basic reasons could be given for this position: First, Christian faith and life, plus the Christian message that we communicate, cannot be divorced from the ultimate questions of life nor from the answers we give to them that make up a Christian worldview. Worldview determines our operational beliefs, which in turn controls and effects what we value and what we see as good and right, which determines what we think about life and living, which in the final analysis results in what we actually do or not do in life.

For instance, why are so few Christians involved in mission, either as “goers,” or “stayers” to support those who go? Might not this lack of mission interest and involvement be the main reason why so many of the world’s peoples today are still unreached? Indeed, might it not be a worldview issue? If it is true that we do what we value, and do not do what we do not value, and that what we value (or not value) is based on our operational beliefs, which rests on the answers we give to the ultimate questions of life, then in the ultimate sense we can conclude that our lack of interest and involvement in reaching the unreached must be a worldview issue.

Second, we cannot communicate the Gospel message adequately without a biblical theology which forms our worldview. Jesus specifically mandated that we take to the nations “this Gospel of the Kingdom.” But we cannot proclaim this Gospel without proper foundations of a biblical worldview that is grounded in true truth, that rests in biblical theology. Without a Christian worldview, it is highly unlikely that we will go to the nations, or if we go that we go with the proper motivation (values). If we do not have true satisfying answers to the ultimate questions of life concerning God and His character we should not go as missionaries. Also it is not likely that we will. When we deeply understand our God and that He is as much the God of the nations as He is our God, that He created all the worlds (Hebrews 13:3), both visible and invisible reality (Colossians 1:15,16) will we go and go with the right message and motive. Although God needed nothing in Himself, yet He created mankind from one source giving mankind everywhere life and breath, including a place to live, so that they should seek after Him because they truly belong to Him. (See Acts 17:24-27). To the degree that we ignore this, to that same degree will we remain uninvolved, or go

with wrong motives if we go, and likely preach “another gospel” rather than “this Gospel of the Kingdom.” (See Matt. 24:14)

Third, if for no other reason missions, especially to the unreached world, needs to develop a biblical worldview, that is non-Western and non-secular, *for strategic reasons*. The non-Western unreached world, are miles away from secularism and naturalistic systems of thinking and belief. They are far closer to a biblical (supernatural) view of life than any modern-day Western humanistic secularism.

The book *Touching the Soul of Islam*, by Dr. Bill Musk is to the point. In this valuable book Dr. Musk explores the worldview of Muslim people and shows how radically different it is from that of Westerners. Then he demonstrates how Christian missionaries should use the Bible to develop a biblical worldview. This is needed since the Bible expresses a worldview that is similar in many areas to Muslim thinking. In other words, missionaries must learn the Bible, and the worldview it reveals, since when we speak from this worldview it will help us communicate the Gospel in a meaningful and effective way to Muslims. It will help us bridge the gap and thus help us become more effective in our work.

This is equally true for every other unreached people. Missionaries can effectively reach the unreached in today’s world with relevant communication that is based on a biblically grounded worldview. It is impossible without it!

*Dr. Hans M. Weerstra*  
*IJFM Editor*  
*July 1997*  
*El Paso, Texas USA*

# Christian Worldview Development: Part II

*Both Church and Mission need a solid Christian worldview that is thoroughly supernatural, that provides a complete cosmology, that answers the ultimate questions of life in God's way based on objective truth as revealed in Scripture. Unless we develop a true biblical worldview there is every likelihood that the unreached of the world will remain unreached. Worse, without it Christian faith may not survive.*

by Hans M. Weerstra

In the last issue of the Journal, I addressed the urgent need of developing a Christian worldview. I attempted to define what worldview is and how it functions in culture including our own. I also listed the modern-day philosophies that make up our Western worldview. I called them the “currents of our times” since like strong winds that relentlessly blow on our lives they have the potential to destroy Christian faith and values at its roots. These currents have the power to rob us of biblical foundation for faith and life without which we cannot survive as the Church of Christ nor complete the task that remains. (See the discussion on Matthew 7:21-27 in my prior article, *IJFM* Volume 14:1, Jan.-March, 1997.)

In this article (Part II) we want to look at some additional philosophies of our Western (American) culture and what holds it together. We should be able to see that these modern thought systems are non-biblical, that they oppose Christian faith, and are true enemies of the Gospel. Furthermore, these modern philosophies of life are great barriers to the development of a biblical worldview. Understanding these philosophies is crucial since without it 1) we will not know what makes our Western world tick, nor, 2) will we understand how to effectively minister the Word of God to modern man, and worse, 3) we will not have a clue what is happening to Christian faith and life nor how to protect ourselves from its sinister effects bent on the destruction of our faith and life and mission as God's people in our generation.

There can be little doubt that our Lord would urge us, even command us, to develop a solid worldview, one based on God's Word and Spirit, one that would give us true answers to the ultimate questions of life. This means that we would get a biblical philosophy of life that is strong enough not only to resist the deadly effects of our secular culture but also is able to change our culture and world. Rather than be changed (contaminated) by secular humanism, as salt and light we need to change it for God's glory. Hence the Lord would strongly urge us to build deep-dug foundations that will withstand the modern-day “isms” of our culture that to some degree are all based on a philosophy of life that excludes God's truth. The Lord would warn us of these currents of our times that have pervaded our culture and have deeply changed our society, that undermine true faith since they have become part and parcel of our modern worldview.

We should realize that by means of our secularized worldview the enemy of our souls (of our life as Christians) sends its evil influence like poison gas as a silent killer into every aspect of our lives for the sole purpose of the destruction of faith and life. We must see that Satan can do that, and to a great degree has been successful, when he changes and uses worldview to his evil ends. He well knows that the worldview of our culture (of any culture) determines everything we believe, value, think and do. Satan knows that worldview effects the behavior of its people in

every area of their lives—not just in religion. Hence everything we think and do is ultimately controlled by our worldview which makes it paramount that the Church and Mission develop a solid biblical worldview.

In the prior article, we noted that the only way we can build biblical foundations for faith and life is by hearing and doing the Word of God, as taught by Jesus, as revealed in the Gospel, and as given to us in the Scriptures, i.e., especially in the Old Testament Scriptures. The obedience of faith is *the key dynamic* whereby we build those foundation, which is the same thing as saying that by means of God's Word and Spirit we develop a firm biblical worldview.

In this article we will look at three additional philosophies of life called existentialism, nihilism, and hedonism. Like the others we have studied, these are strong winds with great destructive potential to biblical faith. In a radical sense these modern philosophies of life undermine the deepest foundations of what Christianity is, what it stand for, and what it is meant to accomplish in the world.

## **Existentialism**

According to Webster existentialism as a philosophy is "an introspective humanism." It is a philosophy that is subjective and introspective. Webster defines it as a "theory of man which expresses the individual's intense awareness of his contingency and freedom; a theory which states that the existence of the individual precedes his essence;

specifically a theory which stresses the individual's responsibilities for making himself what he is." There also is what is called "Christian existentialism," which Webster defines as "a theory which stresses the subjective aspects of the human person considered as a creature of God." (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, sixth edition.)

A key element in this modern-day thought system is the fact that existentialism is "an introspective humanism." In my previous article we noted what humanism is, without which it is impossible to understand existentialism since the latter is an introspective version of the former. Humanism as a system of thought starts with mankind and by himself explains ultimate reality without additional assistance from outside of himself. Humanism is a way of seeing the world as centered upon distinctively human interests and ideals, but it does so at the expense of God and His revelation, done at the exclusion of the spiritual and supernatural, which are seen to be non-human concerns and interests. For the humanist, God and the supernatural (if such reality exists), pertain to non-human concerns, and therefore on that basis are excluded as valid concern, or are seen as impertinent and irrelevant.

Existentialism takes this one step further and holds that looking inside of oneself, or seeing reality subjectively as a human being, gives one clues as to who and what we are. According to existentialism, man's introspection of his own individual existence and experiences precedes and determines who and what he is. What one experiences subjectively and personally determines what is ultimately true, real and valid. As Webster stated, existentialism is "specifically a theory which stresses the individual's responsibilities for making himself what he is," or "that the existence of the individual (what man experiences) precedes his essence."

Although a true contradiction in terms, so called "Christian existential-

ism" stresses the subjective experiences Christians have, thus putting emphasis on "the subjective aspects of the human person considered as a creature of God." These subjective experiences are seen to validate and authenticate our lives as Christians and to a great degree determine the meaning and content of faith, i.e., making the subjective reality that we experience the foundations of faith. Like secular existentialism, so "Christian existentialism," holds that subjective experiences make us what and who we are and in a deep way determine our faith and beliefs, as well as the values that arise from them.

Even though "Christians existentialism" sounds good, especially to the uninitiated, it nevertheless is a dangerous enemy of the Gospel. The reason for this is that "Christian existentialism" is a subjective introspective version of humanism. The latter is a true enemy of Christian faith not because it stresses human concerns and ideals and experiences, which the Bible also stresses, but modern-day humanism sees the world as centered upon distinctively human ideals *at the expense and exclusion of God and the spiritual supernatural reality revealed in the Bible*. True humanism is a secular system of thought, including its introspective version of existentialism, sees the eternal and spiritual and supernatural as non-existent or irrelevant. A true humanist cannot take biblical spiritual reality seriously since they look (must look) at the world from within their humanistic perspective, i.e., looking at reality from "distinctively human interests and ideals."

What makes existentialism so appealing, although very dangerous, is that Christian faith and life is meant to be personal and experienced. In that sense Christianity is subjective and personal and truly fully human. For instance, no one who knows the Bible seriously would say that Christianity consists merely of giving intellectual

accent to a neat set of beliefs or doctrines, or simply agreeing with true teachings about God and the world. To the contrary, Christian faith is personal and is supposed to be lived and experienced; it needs to be appropriated on a personal level that involves all our human faculties. We are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength (Mark 12:30). Christianity is more than a system of thinking. It rather is a way of living that is fully human since it needs to personally appropriated and experienced in its fullness, which needs to happen on an on-going daily basis, in a loving relationship with our neighbors.

Having said that, we must see that our Christian experiences are totally different from existentialism. Christians faith and life, including our personal experiences, are radically different since they do not validate our faith nor determine its content. Christian existentialism would maintain that our human existence and the nature of our humanity is arrived at and formed by one's human subjective experiences, not by objective truth as revealed by God in Scripture. Christian existentialists would emphasize that our subjective experiences is what forms Christian faith, not because it is objectively true, nor because it is based on objective reality, but because we personally experience it. In modern existentialism, including so called Christian existentialism, things are true simply because one experiences truth, regardless of whether it is objectively true. For so called Christian existentialists, there is no outside objective truth, nor standard of truth, by which to evaluate it since no truth is possible or valid by which to evaluate it. There is no external objective standard that could be called upon to validate a given experience or feeling we or anyone has. In other words, whatever one feels and experiences is what is ultimately true and real.

Furthermore, faith for an existen-

tialist is something essentially irrational, something that has no reason, nor needs to be reasonable. In fact a reasonable explanation of faith may well ruin the reality that one has discovered and experienced. In a deep sense of the word, existential faith cannot be checked, nor verified, nor validated by any objective independent standard of truth because faith is a leap in the dark, that makes no real rational sense, that cannot be explained, that is often absurd, which from this perspective is seen as the deepest level of real faith. Because it is one's own subjective experience it cannot be validated by objective truth, including what is revealed in the Scriptures. Existentialism along with naturalism and humanism deny the miraculous and supernatural in religion. They reject objective revelation as a means of attaining truth. Hence it is a true enemy of biblical Christianity which is, and always has been, based on God's revealed objective will and truth.

In the existential world, the truth of something is validated and authenticated by what is subjectively and personally experienced. Its opposite is also true: Whatever is not personally experienced, i.e., anything independent of one's personal subjective experiences, is unimportant, is undermined, or worse, is seen as invalid and therefore is rejected as truth.

Existentialism undermines true truth, i.e., truth as it objectively exists, and therefore is pure subjectivism. As a modern day philosophy of life, existentialism is much like the Mormon experience of the "burning in the bosom" that authenticates the Mormon faith as a true simply because it is experienced.

It should be very apparent that existentialism plays hand in glove with the other currents of our times such as relativism and pluralism which hold that

everything is either relative (relativism) or everything is equally true (pluralism). Existential experiences are obviously relative and subjective, and none are ultimately true because none are ultimately wrong. All experiences as long as they are personal are true and equally valid even though all are also equally relative. As such existentialism is a great enemy of biblical Christianity, since it erodes the foundations of the objective revealed truth as God has given it and thus destroys true Christian faith and life on its deepest level, i.e., on Christian worldview level.

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## **The modern-day secular systems of thought are true enemies of the Gospel, having a non-biblical view of reality, and as such have the potential to destroy Christian faith at its foundations.**

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### **Nihilism and Hedonism**

Mankind without an objective truth and an objective standard of right and wrong is doomed to nihilism. This philosophy (worldview) holds that there is no such thing as objective truth, nor that there exists any grounds for it. This means that objective truth is non-existent and from this perspective is impossible to attain. In ethics it means that there is no objective standard for law, for right or wrong behavior, or for what the Bible calls righteousness.

Nihilism denies any and all objective grounds for moral principles or moral law. Since there is no standard of objective truth and accountability (as an objective absolute moral principle) life and living lose true meaning since nothing is either intrinsically right or wrong. In this system both right and wrong behavior are equally valid and good in the ultimate sense of the word.

Webster says that nihilism is "the doctrine that conditions in the social organizations are so bad as to make destruction desirable for its own sake, independent of any constructive program; especially, the program or doctrine of the Russian party of the 19th and 20th centuries, who proposed various schemes of revolutionary reform and resorted to terrorism. In a loose usage, (it means) revolutionary propaganda; terrorism."

Hedonism like nihilism rest upon the secularized worldview that no objective truth and standard of ethics exists.

Hedonism according to Webster is the "doctrine that pleasure is the sole or chief good in life and that moral duty is fulfilled in the gratification of pleasure-seeking instincts and dispositions." According to this perspective, one's life and way of life is centered on pleasure, on the pursuit of happiness, on the gratification of pleasure and its instincts. Since the underlying assumption is that there

is nothing else to life outside of one's own immediate existence, the biblical phrase fits the hedonist-materialist mentality to the tee: "Let us eat and drink (and be merry) for tomorrow we die." (See Is. 22:13 and 1 Cor. 15:32)

Modern day hedonism parallels Western materialism. Hedonism and materialism are logical extensions of each other that are based on the perspective of a closed universe, one closed to objective true reality, closed to the supernatural, that sees nothing else to life than this one consisting of this life and the present moment. Since modern man denies moral absolutes and objective reality outside of his own experience, since for him no "outside" absolutes exists, the logical conclusion is made: "Let's eat and drink and be merry. . . for tomorrow we die." In other words, why not gratify one's instincts and indulge in what gives one pleasure

now since there is nothing after or beyond this life.

There can be little doubt that our Western life of materialism, coupled with hedonism, based on existential humanism, fueled as it is by commercialism, is modern-man's deep seated philosophy of life, that more than anything else ensnares him. This philosophy as nothing else is what destroys modern man's soul (his life as a human being created in God's image). Like nothing else, this secular naturalistic worldview is leading, enticing, and enslaving modern man into a worldview that is bent on the total destruction of his life and soul.

(For a set of discussion questions on this all important issue, see the "Discussion Questions" at the end of this article.)

### Operational Beliefs

In the previous article on worldview we noted the distinction concerning theoretical and operational beliefs. We discovered that people, Christians included, hold beliefs in one of two ways, either as 1) theoretically beliefs, that act much like creedal statement which do not greatly affect our values nor behavior, or as 2) operational beliefs that do influence what we value and think including how we act and behave.

Modern-day philosophies function in our lives in the same way. As basic belief systems people can hold these theoretically, which means that they will not greatly affect their behavior either negatively or positively. We may be aware of these systems, but if held theoretically, they will not operate in our lives. As such they pose little danger to our faith and life as Christians.

What is far worse, however, is when we hold our Christian beliefs as theoretical, like creedal statements, and confess to be Christian in various areas of life, but not truly live or operate in those beliefs consistently or deep enough. If we hold our Christian beliefs as theoretical, we could fool others and our-

selves, even appear to be good Christians, yet in our daily lives act as secular humanists much like the world around us. We may even deny (in theory) that we are secular humanists or modern-day existentialists, in fact we may be totally ignorant of these concepts, yet on an operational belief level, we may in fact live and behave much like modern-day secular humanists.

For that reason, it is paramount that we examine ourselves and determine what our deep seated beliefs really are. What beliefs do in fact operate in our lives that determine (to a large or small degree) our values, what we think and what we do (how we behave or conduct ourselves in our daily lives). To help us we should pray what the Psalmist prayed: "Search me Oh God and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24)

As God's people we need to operate in true biblical faith that is much more than theoretical beliefs. In other words, our beliefs need to be based on God's Word, which need to be deep enough so that it will influence our values and move us to right action and God glorifying conduct. What good are neat creedal statements, even true biblical ones, unless we live them consistently, deeply and daily to the glory of God?

What follows in this article are three concern that will help us develop a biblical worldview. First, we will look at the place and function of the inspired Scriptures. The apostle Paul said that the Scriptures are able to make us complete "thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:17). Obviously it is very important that the Scriptures have the fullest possible impact in our lives as human beings, especially as God's people in order to be "thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Second, we will take a good look at how to properly study the Bible and

draw a critical distinction between systematic theology and biblical (historical) theology. Though most Christians may never have heard this before, we want to emphatically state that this is a very crucial concern to the pursuit of biblical faith and life, and absolutely essential to building firm foundations and developing a biblical worldview.

Third, we will conclude with a study on the "mysteries of the kingdom" also called the "mysteries of the Gospel" or the "mysteries of God." We want to conclude with this important subject since Christian worldview development cannot happen without it. The mysteries of God, or the mysteries of the Gospel, need to be revealed and disclosed to us if we are to develop a biblical worldview.

### All Scripture

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine (teaching), for reproof, for correction, for instruction, in righteousness (justice), that the man of God may be complete (fitted), thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16, 17)

Nowhere is the revelation of God and the purpose and meaning of the created order, including the origin and purpose of mankind, more clearly disclosed than in the Scriptures. As most of us know, God's Word consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Bible is called the Word of God because God by the Holy Spirit is the principal author of all Scripture. What we find written in the Scriptures originated in the mind of God Himself, and for that reason is called the Word of God. The Scriptures are inspired or "God-breathed" and as such give us life—the life of God the Creator as well as the life of Jesus Christ. In the same way that Adam became a living soul when God breathed into him the breath of life so in the same way we receive the life of God through the

"God-breathed" Word of God. (See Deuteronomy 4:1, 8:1-3, 30:15 and 30:19, 20; also Proverbs 11:19 and 12:28 and Matthew 4:4 and John 5:39-40, 10:10; and 20:30, 31)

To say that "all Scripture" is "God-breathed," implies that the Scriptures are closely linked to the breath of God which denotes at least two things: First, the Scriptures come from God, specifically from the Holy Spirit, who in the original languages is seen as "the Breath or Wind of God" and the "Breath or Wind of Christ." Second, the Bible gives life to those who listen to it, it revives those who believe what it says who act on what it reveals. For this reason the apostle Paul is able to say with full conviction that the Bible is so profitable, i.e., able to teach and correct, able to make men and women mature and complete (fitted), able to instruct in righteousness so that we become "thoroughly equipped for every good work."

The inspired Scriptures are designed to be the source of our faith and life as God's people. This is true especially concerning the area of worldview. The Scriptures are designed to give us true, trustworthy and reliable answers to the ultimate questions of life. They give us the building blocks for faith and life and so help us develop a worldview that is fully in line with the objective truth as God has revealed it. Furthermore, because the Bible is inspired (God-breathed, Latin *spirare*) we can say with full confidence that there is no greater more authoritative book than the Bible and that without it there is no way to develop firm foundation for life. No book or source outside of the Bible exists that could give us a true and reliable (as well as satisfying) worldview regarding the ultimate reality of the universe and its purpose. God has chosen to authenticate the Bible by itself, i.e., by its

own witness about itself, since no greater witness exists that could authenticate the Bible.

In view of the fact that the primary author of Scripture is God Himself, who personally stands behind it, validating and confirming and even swearing to its every truth and promise, we can take full confidence in what it reveals. This is not only true with reference to so called religious, moral and spiritual (supernatural) reality, but applies to

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**To some degree all Christians stand in need to develop a biblical worldview. This is most urgent in our day since Christian beliefs and values concerning biblical truth and ultimate reality are under relentless attack.**

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all truth the Bible addresses in its pages, including the origin of the universe, the purpose of mankind, the meaning and purpose of history, including man's problem, the existence of evil, and God's provision to deliver man from sin and evil.

We might ask, Who in the final analysis becomes "complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work"? Scripture is clear: It happens to those who like the wise man hears God's Words, and hears them deeply so that he acts on them and puts them into practice. It happens to those who accept and believe what God reveals, who then act on it in the "obedience of faith."

Notice that this is not blind faith that just believes because one has to believe. Rather it is the kind of faith that sees God's Word as reasonable, that understands what He has said in its proper context and background, and always sees Scripture in light of who God is and what He has said about Him-

self in terms of the ultimate questions of life and reality. In other words, biblical faith is a reasonable (truly rational) endeavor that involves our intellect and will, (our mind) as well as our heart and emotions. Therefore, Christians must be careful not lay aside their intellect or mind, nor undermine any other of their God given faculties. Christians must not commit mental suicide to believe. Just the opposite is true: We cannot have biblical faith without using our minds

and intellect, as well as all our other God given faculties, to its full potential. Biblical faith is not an irrational absurd leap in the dark as so called Christian existentialism would have us believe.

In this light note what the Bible says about itself in 2 Peter 1:19-21 and Psalm 119:89. Also carefully note 1 Thess. 2:13, Gal. 1:11,12 and John 10:35. This last verse is very significant because

in this passage Jesus confirmed the fact that Scripture comes from God, calling the Scriptures the Word of God.

We also need to note one additional concern raised in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17. When Paul talked about "all Scripture..." he does not mean the New Testament Scripture. Unfortunately this is a great surprise to most Evangelical Christians who do not, maybe cannot, see this. They would say: "Sure all Scripture. . . especially the New Testament." But this was not what Paul had in mind when he originally penned these awesome words, nor was this the message the original readers heard. Originally "all Scripture" meant *all of the Old Testament*. This was the original meaning since the New Testament had not been written yet when Paul penned these words. In fact 1 and 2 Timothy is in process of becoming part of the New Testament. One thing is sure, Paul did not refer to his own writing in 2 Timothy as being part of "all Scripture" even

though there is good reason for us today to include it as part of the Scriptures. However, Paul primarily was talking about all of the Old Testament Scriptures, which he said was God-breathed, which because of its divine inspiration was (and today is) profitable to teach and correct and train people in goodness and righteousness, making them complete men and women and thus become equipped for every good work.

Perhaps to many Christian today this seems odd and even questionable. Most Christians, (Evangelical Christians) are essentially New Testament Christians who want to have New Testament faith, be like New Testament believers, and belong to a New Testament church, etc. From that vantage point it is hard to see the great profitability of the Old Testament, what it is, what it does, what it can change us to be, namely, making us “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Due to this limited (New Testament) perspective we have tried to be good Christians without the proper foundations of “all Scripture” as given in the Old Testament. In fact as the truth of “all Scripture” is discovered and receives its full impact in our lives, we will come to see that it is impossible to understand the New Testament, in any adequate sense of the word, without a prior understanding of the Old Testament. This insight leads us into an even more radical discovery: What the Old Testament reveals in the first eleven chapters of Genesis is in fact the basis for the rest of Genesis, which forms the basis for the entire Old Testament. Properly understood then, the first eleven chapters of Genesis form the bedrock foundation for the whole Bible including the New Testament, since the New Testament rest upon the foundation as revealed in the Old Testament.

At this point it is worth our while to hear what the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer said about this crucial all important matter:

The battle for a Christian understanding of the world is being waged on several fronts. Not the least of these is biblical study in general and especially the question of how the opening chapters of the Bible are to be read. Modern writers commenting on the book of Genesis tend to treat the first eleven chapters as something other than history. For some, this material is simply a Jewish myth, having no more historical validity for modern man than the Epic of Gilgamesh or the stories of Zeus. For others, it forms a prescientific vision that no one who respects the results of scholarship can accept. Still others find the story symbolic but no more. Some accept the early chapters of Genesis as revelation in regard to an upper-story religious truth, but allow any sense of truth in regard to history and cosmos (science) to be lost.

How should these early chapters of Genesis be read? Are they historical and if so, what value does their historicity have? In dealing with these questions, I wish to point out the tremendous value Genesis 1-11 has for modern man. In some ways these chapters are the most important ones in the Bible, for they put man in his cosmic setting and show him his peculiar uniqueness. They explain man's wonder and yet his flaw. Without a proper understanding of these chapters we have no answer to the problem of metaphysics, morals or epistemology, and furthermore the work of Christ becomes one more upper-story 'religious' answer.” (From preface of Volume 2 “A Christian View of the Bible as Truth: Genesis in Space and Time” by Francis Schaeffer from *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer, A Christian Worldview*.)

Because this quote is so far reaching with so many deep implications we need to understand what Dr. Schaeffer said: First, he wants to stress the “tremendous value Genesis 1-11 has for modern man.” He says that in some way these first chapters of the Bible are the most important because they give man his proper setting, they tell him who he is, they tell him his great value (uniqueness) as well reveal his problem (flaw). Without this fundamental setting no one can properly (biblically speaking) believe. Furthermore, we cannot obtain any real answers “to meta-

physics, morals or epistemology.” This simply means that the answers to the ultimate questions of life, including how we know what we know, including correcting the modern-day thought systems, are impossible endeavors. Hence Schaeffer reminds us to see the great importance of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, that we need to see them as historical revelation, not as another myth or legend, not as a “prescientific vision,” nor as something that has lost “a sense of truth in regard to history and the cosmos (science).”

Schaeffer correctly tells us that no real answers to problems concerning “morals or epistemology” is possible without a deep understanding of the original revelation given in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. He would maintain that any morals or ethical behavior without a righteous just and ultimate law and Law Giver is impossible. Also, any meaningful and reasonable “epistemology” is impossible without Genesis 1-11, which means that the method and grounds of knowing, including what is actually known, i.e., the knowledge we have, is impossible to obtain or verify. Epistemology asks how do we know what we know, and how valid and true is what we know, and what is the source and limitations if any of the knowledge we have. Genesis 1-11 gives true, reasonable and reliable answers to these ultimate questions. Without God's revelation given in the first chapters of Genesis no true reliable knowledge of ultimate reality, including the visible and invisible existence, (empirical and non-empirical reality) is possible. One cannot attain the deep answers concerning life, its origin, meaning and purpose without this fundamental basic reality as God has given it in Genesis 1-11.

Secondly, we need to understand what Schaeffer meant by “upper-story religious truth,” as “one more upper-story religious answer.” So called “upper-story reality” is part and parcel of the fab-

ric of modern-day culture and Western secular humanistic existentialism. As a matter of fact, it is the warp and woof of modern-day life, including much of modern Christian faith and life. We need to come to see that “upper-story” truth deeply undermines Christian biblical faith and if not corrected will ultimately destroy it.

Therefore, so called “upper-story truth” including upper-story personal experiences, are based on a wrong understanding of Paul’s phrase “all Scripture.” People who believe in “upper-story truth” hold to a believe that Scripture is not really inspired in all it speaks about. For them “all Scripture” is reinterpreted to apply only to those parts of Scripture which speak of religious “upper-story truth.” These people do not hold to a full view of Scripture. For them the Bible does not speak truth about everything it speaks about. Such people, including Christians, believe and say that Scripture is inspired only in areas where it speaks about religious and spiritual and personal matters. From this perspective, the Scriptures do not speak with inspired truth about history, about the universe, about its origin and purpose, about biology and most other scientific matters since these are not religious “upper story” concerns. They would hold that the “all Scripture” only speaks with inspiration and truth about religious matters, as well as personal spiritual experiences. In this sense not “all Scripture” is inspired because the Scripture do not intend to speak infallibly and truthfully about scientific historical issues. Its only purpose is to speak about faith and religious (non-scientific) matters. From this vantage point, only when the Bible speaks in the religious spiritual area of life is it inspired by God.

What we are left with, according to this view, is a Bible either full of errors

in matters pertaining to scientific and historical matters, or simply the Bible’s revelation concerning such matters is irrelevant. From this view point we can and should discard the parts of the Bible that deal with science, history, and observable empirical reality. Schaeffer would call the latter “lower-story” or “bottom-story reality,” i.e., that which deals with history, with objective empirical reality, like matters concerning the universe, its origin and all that we see and touch, in its form as we know it. Lower story reality is the rightful domain of scientific observation and study, but not the proper concern of the Bible.

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What are the implication of this position? If in fact the Bible’s message concerning lower story truth is not true, or is impertinent, then indeed all we are left with is religious spiritual matters of truth and reality. This means that “the work of Christ becomes one more upper-story religious answer,” which would imply that it really has no true basis in history, that ultimately the Christian faith has no basis in historic reality, nor has proof of verification, which means that Christian faith is relegated to another personal and relative “existential experience” or is simply relegated to another mythology.

It should be clear that the ground for “upper-story religious truth” lies in modern-day existentialism, or so called Christian existentialism, both of which are enemies of the Gospel since both undermine objective truth. They are enemies of the objective revealed truth of “all Scripture” since it relegates to myth or legend any all

historic time-space reality, including everything that happened in so called “pre-recorded history” i.e., the history that is revealed in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. This implies that all pre-Abrahamic revelation must be regarded either as myth or legend or allegory. Genesis 1-11 deals with non-historic reality or with religious truth and therefore needs to be interpreted in an allegorical way in terms of spiritual or religious reality. What we are left with in this perspective is a Bible that has lost its historical foundations and any basis of verification. It only deals with upper story level truth, that is personal and relative, that is religious (non-scientific) much of it, or all of it, being non-historical.

Because to some degree we have done this with the Bible we have lost the basis of true biblical faith. This is especially true with regard to the first eleven chapters of the Genesis without which it is impossible to develop a faith that is truly and wholly biblical. Without true faith it is impossible to please God, without which we cannot become whole men and women, without which we cannot be “thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (See Hebrews 11:1-7 and 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.)

We therefore conclude that all of Scripture is inspired (God-breathed by the Holy Spirit who is the Breath of God), including God’s revelation in Genesis 1-11, including all truth revealed in Scripture concerning bottom-story historic reality—that is objectively true and real. Although the Bible does not speak exhaustively about bottom-story historical reality, yet what the Bible does reveal about this is fully true.

For instance, although Genesis 1 does not speak in exhaustive detail on how God made the sun, the moon, and the stars, which as we know includes our solar system and the Milky Way, with thousands and perhaps even millions

## Biblical Worldview Development

of other galaxies of the universe, nevertheless, what Genesis 1 says concerning the creation of the sun, moon and stars, although not exhaustive truth, nevertheless is true in the fullest sense of the word, because it was revealed by God by inspiration and therefore is truly profitable for teaching and correction, able to make us complete, able to give us proper foundations for faith and life which can equip us for "every good work."

### Systematic vs. Biblical Theology

Most of us are well aware of the fact that there are lots of theologies out there, both good and bad. There is Evangelical theology, Catholic theology, Greek Orthodox theology; there is Lutheran, Presbyterian and Methodist theology; there is Liberal and Modern theology. There are traditional and contemporary theologies. We could also know that there is systematic as well as biblical theology. As we study the Scriptures we should ask, what theological reference should we follow? It is true that one's theology does effect what we see and how we interpret Scripture. Our premise is as follows: If we want to study the Bible correctly in God's way, and receive the full measure and impact of revealed truth, we need to understand the difference between systematic theology and biblical theology. Then we need to proceed to study the Scriptures from the reference point of the latter, of Biblical Theology.

Although defining these two types could take an entire article (see article by Dr. Daniel Fuller on "Biblical Theology and the Analogy of Faith" in this issue) here we will need to settle for the brief version.

Essentially systematic theology follows a thematic study of God's Word, explaining in a logical (systematic) way what the various themes and subjects (doctrines) of Scripture are, what they mean and how they relate and how they apply to our lives. Systematic theol-

ogy is an in-depth study of the various themes of the Bible usually studied from one's own church or denominational perspective, (what Dr. Fuller called "the analogy of faith") and then organizing them into a logical whole. If it is good systematic theology, it will try to say what the Bible intends to say about the various themes (doctrines) of Scripture. When all the different doctrines have been studied, the author puts them into a book, (usually a very thick one) consisting of several volumes, and it is called systematic or dogmatic theology.

Biblical theology, in comparison to systematic theology, studies the Bible in its own context, in its own historic setting. It will draw out of a given passage of Scripture what it says and intends to say to its original hearers, in the historic setting and context of the original authors and hearers. It will therefore focus on what the original authors wanted to communicate to the people it was originally addressed to. It stays away from putting meaning or interpretation into the text, that may be true for us in our context, but that was not originally there in the first place.

Unlike systematic theology, the hallmark of biblical theology is that the chronology or the historical sequence and development of the Bible receives its due impact. Biblical theology studies the Bible chronologically, rather than by themes or doctrines as does systematic theology. So the chronological context and historical development of the Bible receives its full significance in biblical theology.

Allowing the text of Scripture to say what it says in its own context, or drawing out of Scripture what it says is not necessarily easy, but it must be done. Drawing out of the Bible to say what it says is called exegesis. The "ex" is a Greek suffix which means "out of," while the "egesis" comes from the Greek verb that means to "guide." So a good exegete of Scripture is one skilled to take

(guide) out of Scripture what it says, what it intended to say to its original hearers and what it meant for the original authors.

Eisegesis is the opposite of exegesis. The Greek suffix "eis" means "into" or to "put into". One who does eisegesis, (instead of exegesis) is one skilled in putting meaning and interpretations into the text of Scripture that is not there in the first place, that is not in line with the original meaning and purpose of the biblical passage. It is putting more meaning, sometimes wrong meaning, usually one's own meaning, into the text of Scripture that one cannot be found in the original text itself.

We may think a given text or passage says one thing, or proves a given point, but because most of us are not skilled exegetes of Scripture, nor know how to do it, we fall into the trap of putting meaning into the text that is not there in the original passage. Frequently, it may not even be in accord with the plain meaning and intent of our own translations and versions of the Bible.

When Jesus said "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21) what did He mean to say? What was Jesus' original intention when He spoke these words? When we have determined what Jesus meant to say, in the historical context that He said it, including what He intended His original hearers to hear, then we come closest to the objective truth of God's Word about this part of His revelation. Then based on what it originally meant in its own context we have laid the proper ground work and are now prepared to come to the understanding what God's revelation means for us today in our historic setting. But it must happen in that order: Biblical theological exegesis must be first, then the interpretation and application of it to our own lives in our setting.

To some degree we are all biased. Due to our particular backgrounds

that inevitably color our perception we see things, including the Bible, from our own personal and subjective perspectives. It is like putting on a set of colored glasses that gives a certain tint to everything we see, that also effects what we do and/or not do. To the extent possible, we need to take those colored glasses off, and look at Scripture as objectively as we can, always allowing the text of Scripture to speak for itself, to say what it says and intends to say. Good biblical theology helps us take off our subjective biases since it always seeks to do sound exegesis which is at least one step removed from our own subjective pursuits and what this personally means. Biblical theology seeks to determine the meaning of the text of Scripture in its own context before seeking to interpret and apply it to one's own faith and life and times.

#### Timeless Categories

A main hallmark of biblical theology is that it seeks to discover the integrating theme of the Bible as it historically unfolds from generation to generation. One of the pitfalls of systematic theology is to study the Word of God in timeless categories. This means that we study the various themes of Scripture out of their time sequence or pay little regard to the historical development of Scripture. When we do that we lose a great deal of the full impact of God's revelation. Without it, we may never find God's purpose for our lives and for our generation. Truly we run the risk of missing the purpose and meaning of our lives in our *kaïros* moment. If we do not understand what God's purpose and plan was for His people in former generations, and how His purpose and plan have developed through history it is virtually impossible to see it for our own.

What is worse is that we can easily fall into the trap of studying the Bible with a non-biblical grid, approaching the Scripture with a Greek dualistic (Platonic) paradigm. Greek dualism divides reality into two spheres: the material on the one hand and the non-material on the other. It sees that evil and sin reside in the material, (in matter, including the human body, including time-space historical reality) while the good resides in the spiritual (in the non-material part of existence, including the whole world of ideals and all non-empirical reality). Much of systematic

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## When we know the objective reality of God's Word, we are then prepared to come to a true understanding what God's revelation means for us today in our historic time-space setting.

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theology has been influenced by Greek dualism since it studied Scripture by themes, with little or no regard for its time historic categories. The result has been that much of systematic theology has as its basis a non-biblical worldview, i.e., one resting in Greek philosophy rather than in biblical truth in line with a biblical world and life view of reality.

(For a set of discussion questions on the place and role of the Scriptures and Biblical Theology see the "Discussion Questions" at the end of the article.)

#### Mysteries of the Kingdom

"Then the disciples came and said to Him (Jesus), Why do you speak to them (crowds) in parables? And He said to them, (disciples) because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to

them (the crowds) it has not been given. For to him who has more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them (the crowds) in parables because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (Matthew 13:10-13)

There are mysteries in the Bible, sometimes translated "secrets" in our English versions. Scriptures speak of the "mysteries of the Kingdom." and "the mysteries of the Gospel" as well as the "mysteries of God" and even "the mysteries of Christ" etc. (See Matt. 13, Eph. 1:9; 3:9; 6:19, and Col. 4:3)

A discussion on the mysteries of the Kingdom at the end of this article is included since it will help us realize two things: 1) Help us identify key aspects of worldview, one of them being the Kingdom of God, i.e., God's rule and control over life including mankind, and 2) Show us how from God's

perspective we can know the mysteries, how God reveals the mysteries, under what conditions and to whom it is disclosed. Without knowing the mysteries of the Gospel it is impossible to obtain a biblical Christian worldview.

What then does the Bible mean when it speaks about the "mysteries of the Kingdom" or the "mysteries of the Gospel"? Upon a close study of this concept it is best not to translate it "secrets." The word "secrets" denotes something that is kept hidden from others, which is revealed to a few, or never revealed to anyone. However, that is not the idea of the "mysteries of the Kingdom" nor the "mysteries of the Gospel." God wants to truly disclose the full measure of His Word and revelation to all. So in this sense in God's Word there never are any real true secrets. The "mysteries" in the Bible never refers to some revelation, that needs to be kept

hidden, something that can only be revealed to the initiated of a club or members of a select group.

The basic idea of the biblical "mysteries" refers to things that God has not yet disclosed to people. They are the undisclosed truths of the Word of God, or the unrevealed message that God has not yet made known to some people. The question is who are these people, and why has God's Word not been revealed to them? Also we might ask, Why has it been revealed to some and not to others?

### The Gentiles

One answer is as follows: God has not revealed His Word nor the Gospel of salvation to the peoples of the world, whom the Bible calls "the Gentiles" or "the nations" of the earth, because they have not heard it. Why haven't they heard? The Gentile nations have not heard the Gospel since the Lord's laborers (missionaries) have not as yet gone to them. For the Gentiles the Gospel and the Kingdom of God is a mystery. (See Romans 10:13, 14 and 15 for this process.) It has not been disclosed to them, i.e., the Gospel has not been revealed to them, because no one has been sent to communicate it to them. For the Gentiles (nations) the Gospel and God's revelation in the Bible is a mystery. It will remain such until someone goes and tells them the Gospel and teaches them God's Word. In Ephesians Paul sees the mystery of God revealed to the Gentiles in this way. When the Gospel has been revealed to them, when God's purpose and plan of redemption in Christ is accomplished among them the mysteries of the Kingdom cease to be mysteries. (See Eph. 3:8-12 and 6:19, 20)

### Heart Condition

There is a more subtle meaning of the "mysteries." According to the Matthew 13 passage our Lord did not reveal the mysteries to most of the people who heard him. He spoke to the

crowds in parables, and did so on purpose. The text leaves little doubt that the Lord spoke to the crowds in parables so that (for the purpose that, not just as a result of) hearing they would not hear nor understand.

The Lord's intent was not to disclose the mysteries of the Kingdom to the crowds and multitudes. The mysteries were only revealed to His disciples. But we ask, Why not to the crowds and multitudes? And why only to the disciples? The answer lies in the variant conditions of their hearts. The Lord knew the hardness of the hearts of the crowds and therefore spoke to them only in parables. He did this on purpose, "so that hearing they would not hear," "so that seeing they would not see," saying later on "lest they should perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn back and be healed" (See Matt. 13:14, 15)

Why, we ask, would the Lord not want to reveal to the crowds the mystery of the Kingdom? The answer must lie in the following: If the Lord had in fact revealed the mysteries, or disclosed the meaning of the parables to the crowds, knowing full well that they would not believe, knowing that they would not act on what they heard, it would have increased their condemnation. Since He did not come to condemn but to save He did not reveal the mysteries of the parables to the crowds. It was really the loving thing to do. For that reason Jesus only spoke to crowds in parables. All they heard was interesting stories.

In contrast, the Lord knew the heart condition of His disciples. He knew that their hearts were towards Him, open to the things of God, willing to know God and learn of Him and to put into practice what He would reveal to them. He knew that they would believe what He revealed, that they would take it serious enough to act on it.

As we have seen before, the Bible calls this the "obedience of faith" or the "obedience that comes from faith"

(see Romans 1:5, Romans 16:26, and Acts 6:7), which is what justifies people then and now. Works, even good works, done in His name, do not justify anyone. Only faith in God and His Word does. But it must be serious faith, deep faith in God's character, including the trustworthiness of His Word, which must eventuate in corresponding changes in behavior, the kind of faith that produces obedience to God and His Word. That is the faith that saves and gives us life. This is the faith that will save the world!

Today as then the Lord wants to reveal to us the deep things of His Kingdom and Gospel. But He will only do this if we have "ears to hear" and "eyes to see." He will only reveal it to those who want to understand, who are willing to believe, whose faith results in obedience. In other words, God will only reveal His Word to those who want more of Him, whose hearts are not hardened, who want to know His purpose and plan for the world, who are willing to line up their lives with it.

(For a set of questions on the "mysteries of the Kingdom" see the "Discussion Questions" at the end of the article.)

### By Reason of Use

In the prior article we started with the parable of the wise and foolish man. Both heard the words of the Lord, both had access to the Word, and both belonged to the household of faith. Yet only the wise man, who had wisdom, survived. We find a very helpful insight into having wisdom and being wise in Hebrews 5:12-14. It says: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of

use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

There are many Christians who should be teachers of others but are not able. Many Christians seem to be perpetual babes that do not grow up, nor seemingly can. They need baby food and cannot digest solid food. They are unskilled in the word of righteousness because they are babes and they seem to remain in that state.

Why is it that some Christians cannot grow up while others do? Hebrews 5 gives us the answer: "Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." The author of Hebrews is saying that Christians become strong and of full age, i.e., they become mature in the faith able to teach others, "by reason of use" i.e., by actually doing the Word of God, or by obedience do what is right. By such use they exercise their senses, or they get wisdom and understanding, which gives them the ability to discern what is good and what is evil.

Here is the key: If we never obey the Word of God, or if we never really use it in our lives, we will remain perpetual babes, always needing milk instead of solid food. In this state Christians will never grow up nor ever get the wisdom needed to discern what is good from what is evil. Proverbs 2:10-12 is to the point: "When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil. . . ." Verse 20 adds, "So you may walk in the way of goodness, and keep to the paths of righteousness."

Therefore, genuine faith in God's Word is primary. This results in obedience to the Word of God, what Hebrews 5 calls "by reason of use," which results in maturity, becoming "of full age," strong in the Lord, which produces wisdom in us that gives us the abil-

ity to "discern both good and evil." This is God's design and will for our lives as His people. By the obedience of faith we will receive the wisdom of God and become of "full age." We will become mature and strong. What Paul said will and can happen: We will be "complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." So may it be!

#### **Discussion Questions Related to Existentialism, Nihilism and Hedonism:**

1. How is existentialism and modern-day humanism related?
2. Is there something appealing to existentialism, especially to so called Christian existentialism? What might that be?
3. What is essentially wrong with existentialism as compared to Christianity, especially as compared to the biblical Christian faith and the Word of God and the objective truth revealed in the Word of God?
4. For biblical Christian life, what authenticates or validates, and even determines, whether something is true or not true? Even though Christians do have subjective feeling and personal experiences do these make it true simply because they are experienced? Or is it something else, something objective to personal introspection, something external to our subjective feelings that determines whether or not something is true and is truth?
5. How does existentialism play hand in glove to modern-day relativism and pluralism?
6. Do you clearly see that existentialism as an "introspective humanism" is a very serious enemy of the Christian faith? Have you personally been affected by it? To what degree? How can you, or any Christian, come clean of this modern day stronghold in our hearts and in our worldview?
7. Do you see that faith as defined in existentialism is irrational, that it truly is a leap in the dark? Can you explain

how and why existentialism defines faith in this way?

8. Can you see that the Christian faith is rational, i.e., that it is reasonable, that it is not an irrational leap in the dark? Can you see that? What do you think Christian faith is?
9. What makes nihilism as a worldview so devastating? From a nihilistic perspective explain why acts of terrorism can be justified as perfectly valid, necessary and good?
10. In a nihilistic-hedonistic world why would it make perfect sense to eat, live and be happy for tomorrow we die? Would you live for number one, for yourself, as a nihilist? Would you be a hedonist? Why not be a hedonist, or a modified hedonist, maybe a Christian hedonist?
11. Are you in agreement with the statement that what makes our Western world tick is materialism coupled with hedonism, based as it is on existentialism, which is fostered by commercialism? Do you see this is modern-man's main philosophy of life? Would you say that this as nothing else is what destroys modern man's soul and life and is leading him (enticing him) into ultimate destruction?
12. As an assignment, look up in a good dictionary what is meant by determinism and fatalism. Then interact with the definition. Ask yourself how determinism (fatalism) relates to Christianity as a system of life, especially to the biblical position concerning human freedom. According to the Bible, are we essentially free in our actions and decisions, in our life as human beings, or are things predetermined by necessity by God or by fate/chance or karma and therefore life is basically fatalistic? Make sure you save your answer and compare it after your study on "free acts" in lesson two, and lesson four coming up in the course.
13. How does your dictionary define

## Biblical Worldview Development

deism? Is this an essential Christian position? Is it a viable biblical position? If not, why not? What is basically wrong with a deistic worldview?

### Discussion Questions on the Inspired Scriptures and Biblical Theology:

1. Why do Christians call the Bible the Word of God? What makes it the Word of God?
2. What do some of the above passages in Deuteronomy, Proverbs, Matthew and John teach? Please study some of these great passages concerning the Bible's own witness about itself.
3. Why do we need life from God? Don't we have life already? Isn't the life we have enough? Will the life we now have just keep on going by itself, including after we die? Do you know what the Bible says about these important questions of ultimate reality?
4. What do you think it means that the Scriptures are inspired by God? What does that tell us about the Scriptures and what does that mean for us who read and study the Scriptures, who have access to the Scriptures?
5. What does it mean when we say that the Bible is inspired? If it is inspired is it trustworthy? Why is that?
6. Why should we believe what the Scriptures say about the origin of the universe and life and humanity as being created by God? Is it trustworthy in this area? Can we trust it to be true in giving us historical facts that occurred 2,000 years ago, or 3,000 or 6,000 or more years ago?
7. How can we get to see the big picture of the whole Bible without knowing every every chapter and every verse of every book, without knowing every detail of the Bible? Is this possible? How is it possible?
8. What does 2 Peter 1:19-21 say about the Bible or about prophecy of Scripture? What does this mean for you personally? Please explain.
9. What is the main difference between systematic theology and biblical-historical theology?
10. What are the main hallmarks of biblical theology? What are some pitfalls of systematic theology?
11. How can we see and understand the purpose for our generation today?
12. If we study the Bible chronologically, beginning in Genesis and then see what develops over time, closely observing what God does and says from generation to generation, all the way through the book of Revelation, what would you discover? What do you think is the central integrating theme of the whole Bible? Can you explain what it is or what it would be?

### Discussion Questions on the Mysteries of the Kingdom:

1. What should we understand with the biblical idea of the "mysteries of the Kingdom" or the "mysteries of the Gospel"? Are they deep secrets that only a few are will know, that no one is really supposed to know?
2. Why does God reveal His Word and purpose to some and not to others? Apply that to your own heart and life?
3. What makes some Christians

strong Christians, able to stand and survive the trials of life, while others buckle under? Some can survive the winds and currents while others are destroyed? Does this have anything to do with the mysteries of the Kingdom? Does it have anything to do with developing a Christian biblical worldview? Explain.

4. What have you learned about building firm foundations for your life as a Christian? How does this compare to developing a strong biblical worldview?
5. For your personal reference, list the most important concepts (key concepts) that you have learned in this first lesson. Also list the ways you plan to apply them to your life. Remember, it is one thing to hold beliefs theoretically, but quite another to hold them as operational. Ask yourself, how can I make the new insights and the new beliefs operational in my life? How do they, how can they become operational in the lives of believers?
6. Do you think other Christians should learn these key concepts? Can you help them teach them so they can also learn them? How would you go about that?

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# The Arabized Berbers: A Muslim Unreached People that Once Was Christian

Today, the vast region of Northern Africa is predominantly inhabited by Arab Muslims. But this was not always the case. The territory was once dominated by the Berbers, a non-Arab people who at one time were mostly Christians. The Berbers successfully withstood numerous invasions before finally being overrun by the Muslim Arabs.

Beginning in the seventh century, Arab invasions caused many non-Islamic tribes, including the Berbers, to be displaced. The Berbers were particularly affected by the mass immigrations of Arab Bedouins in the eleventh century. At that time, some of the Berbers fled. Others were driven into the desert, where they began displacing or enslaving the Negroes who lived there. Many Berbers remained and submitted, becoming "Arabized" in language and, to some extent, racially mixed with the Arabs. All of the Berbers, without exception, embraced Islam.

Today, most of the Arabized Berbers still identify themselves as Berbers. However, elements of Arabic origin have now become so prominent that it is difficult to distinguish them from the Arabs.

## **Their Way of Life**

For the Berbers, "Arabization" occurred in three overlapping stages. The first stage was the initial contact with the Arab invaders in the seventh century. The second stage began with the arrival of the Bedouins in the eleventh century. The third stage of Arabization, which took place between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, was accelerated by the arrival of refugees from Andalusia (a region in southern Spain).

Traditionally, the Berber economy

rested on a fine balance between farming and breeding cattle. Each tribe, without exception, depended heavily on domestic animals for carrying heavy loads, milk and dairy products, meat, and hides or wool. Similarly, there was not a single tribe that did not also rely on agriculture for survival.

The arrival of the Bedouins in the eleventh century brought competition for pasture land. The Bedouins were numerous enough to compete with the Berbers who lived in the plains, but were not able to dislodge or greatly influence the mountain tribes. For this reason, the Arabization of the Berber was confined to the plains and plateau areas.

Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Andalusian refugees settled in towns. They brought with them a richer and more classical form of Arabic speech. This had a profound effect on the partially-Arabized Berbers, causing the differences between urban and rural dialects to become even greater. Certainly, those who retained the original Berber language have also retained more of the traditional Berber culture and customs.

The adoption of Arab speech is only one aspect of Arabization. Many Berber groups resisted Islam at first; but by two or three centuries after the Arab invasions, they had all converted to the Islamic faith, at least in name. Wherever Arabic replaced the Berber language, laws from the Koran replaced the traditional tribal order.

The harshness of the Berber lifestyle in Northern Africa has led many of the Berbers to immigrate. Today, large communities of Arabized Berbers can be found in several nations, particularly Europe. Although most of them are only involved in unskilled or semi-skilled

labor, they are able to earn more than they would "back home."

The Arabized Berbers, like many other groups that have immigrated to other nations, send much of their earnings back home to support their larger, extended families. Similarly, members of the extended families often travel to Europe, where they will live and work for short periods of time before returning home.

## **Their Beliefs**

Today, virtually all of these tribes are 100% Sunni Muslim, with most belonging to the Malikite branch of Islam. Islam is a major world religion that is based on five essential duties or "pillars": (1) A Muslim must affirm that "there is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet." (2) Five times a day he must pray while facing Mecca. (3) He must give alms generously. (4) He must fast during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim year. (5) He must try to make at least one pilgrimage to Mecca in his lifetime. Muslims are also prohibited to drink alcohol, eat pork, gamble, steal, use deceit, slander, and make idols.

While the Berbers adopted the five pillars of Islam, each was modified a little to fit their local traditions and tastes. For instance, many are very casual about prayer. Also, among some tribes, the giving of alms was not accepted because it was perceived as being some type of tax.

## **Their Needs**

There are several Christian resources available to the Arabized Berbers; however, most of the tribes remain less than 1% Christian. Several missions

*(Continued on page 100)*

# Biblical Theology and the Analogy of Faith

*Every theology regarding itself as Christian would want to affirm that it was in agreement with the Bible. The development of a theology that is truly Biblical is the sine qua non of Biblical worldview development.*

by Daniel P. Fuller

There may be another authority alongside the Bible, as in Roman Catholicism, which regards church tradition as a separate source of authority. But since Roman Catholicism never regards these two sources as clashing with each other, it would always affirm heartily that its theology is biblical.

It is noteworthy, however, that the term “biblical theology” first appeared in the followers of the Reformation, among those who espoused the principle of *sola scriptura*. This principle affirmed that since the church was founded upon the teachings of the prophets and apostles, the authority for its teaching and practice must be derived only from the Bible. To support the legitimacy of a claim to know what the prophets and apostles taught, the reformers made several radical departures from the way theologians had been content to interpret the Bible in preceding centuries.

For one thing they rejected the medieval practice of finding in a biblical passage a fourfold sense: the literal, the allegorical, the moral, and the anagogical (or mystical, ultimate) sense. At the end of his life Luther summarized this hermeneutical principle in these words:

The Holy Spirit's words cannot have more than one sense, and that the very simplest sense, which we call the literal, ordinary, natural sense. We are not to say that the Scriptures or the Word of God have more than one meaning. We are not to introduce any metaphorical, figurative sayings into any text of Scripture, unless the particulars of the words compel us to do so. For if anyone at all were to have power to depart from the pure, simple words and to make inferences and fig-

ures of speech wherever he wished. [then] no one could reach any certain conclusions about any article of faith.<sup>1</sup>

Studying the Bible in the original Greek and Hebrew was another way the reformers earned the right to make claims about what the Bible taught. Both Luther and Calvin strove to master the language conventions of the biblical Hebrew and Greek so they could more readily grasp the meaning the biblical writers attached to their own terms, and be less apt to impute current meanings back onto those ancient words. But they also wanted their conclusions about the Bible's meanings to be made available to as many as possible, and so they stressed the need for translating the Bible into contemporary language. The more people could read the Bible for themselves, the more the Bible itself (*sola scriptura!*) would directly teach individual Christians, and consequently there could be a priesthood of all believers.

The reformers also realized that theologians had kept the Bible from speaking for itself because they were so prone to construe its statements in terms of medieval scholasticism, which drew so heavily upon the philosophy of Aristotle. Luther said, “This defunct pagan [Aristotle] has attained supremacy [in the universities]; [he has] impeded, and almost suppressed, the Scripture of the living God. When I think of this lamentable state of affairs, I cannot avoid believing that the Evil One introduced the study of Aristotle.”<sup>2</sup>

In arguing against the Roman Catholic view of transubstantiation, Calvin said:

The doctrine which we have put for-

ward has been drawn from the pure Word of God, and rests upon its authority. Not Aristotle, but the Holy Spirit teaches that the body of Christ from the time of his resurrection was finite, and is contained in heaven even to the Last Day.<sup>3</sup>

Seeking in these ways to let the Bible speak for itself, the reformers demonstrated how much of the principle of *sola scriptura* they had grasped. Ebeling has remarked,

Reformation theology is the first attempt in the entire history of theology to take seriously the demand for a theology based on Scripture alone. Only among the followers of the Reformation could the concept “biblical theology” have been coined at all.<sup>4</sup>

## Luther and the Analogy of Faith

But the reformers also emphasized a hermeneutical principle that is commonly called “the analogy of faith.” This principle was used when the time came to combine what two or more biblical writers said about some article of faith like the law (Moses or Paul), or justification (Genesis, Paul, and James). In general, the analogy of faith principle of hermeneutics affirms that the norm for interpreting other parts of the Bible is certain passages in the Pauline letters, which supposedly set forth biblical teachings with the greatest clarity and precision.

In stating this principle Luther said, “It is the attribute of Holy Scripture that it interprets itself by passages and places which belong together, and can only be understood by a rule of faith.”<sup>5</sup> On the surface, the statement that “scripture interprets itself” seems to be another pillar upholding the principle of *sola scriptura*. But Luther's additional statement that passages...can only

be understood by a rule of faith” raises the question of how anyone acquires the authority for knowing just what that rule is. As we consider how Luther and Calvin elaborated on this principle of the analogy of faith, it becomes clear that, in the final analysis, the subjective preference of the theologian himself is the only basis upon which this all-important norm for interpreting the rest of scripture is established. Consequently, the analogy of faith principle does not undergird but undermines the *sola scriptura* principle.

In elaborating this principle in another place Luther said, “Every word [of scripture] should be allowed to stand in its natural meaning, and that should not be abandoned *unless faith forces us to it* [italics added].”<sup>6</sup> Luther’s readiness to let faith force him to suppress the natural meaning of a text becomes evident from his famous statement made in his Disputation thesis, *De fide*, September 11, 1535. There he affirmed, “Scripture is to be understood not contrary to, but in accordance with Christ. Therefore Scripture is to be referred to him, or else we do not have what represents Scripture. If adversaries urge Scripture against Christ, we will urge Christ against Scripture.” Likewise, “If it is to be a question of whether Christ or the Law is to be dismissed, we say, Law is to be dismissed, not Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

Commenting on these statements of Luther, Ebeling says:

Luther was no biblicist...No biblicist speaks like that [Luther] had not thoroughly thought [the hermeneutical problem] through from the methodological point of view and therefore the methodology of theology in general remained obscure in decisive questions of fundamental importance. It was not made clear what the principle of *sola scriptura* means for the procedure of theology as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

For Luther there really were places where Christ should be urged against scripture. In his thinking, the term “Christ” often represented the whole of his understanding of justification

by faith. Luther was convinced that what James said about justification could not be reconciled with Paul’s teaching on that subject. In the conclusion to an introduction to Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation, Luther said, “Many sweat hard at reconciling James with Paul, but unsuccessfully. ‘Faith justifies’ [Paul] stands in flat contradiction to ‘faith does not justify’ [James 2:24]. If anyone can harmonize these sayings, I’ll put my doctor’s cap on him and let him call me a fool.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently Luther put James and these other books, each of which, in his view, had objectionable features, at the end of his New Testament (of September, 1522). In his introduction to James itself, Luther said, “[This book] cannot be defended against [its] applying to works the sayings of Moses in Genesis 15, which speaks only of Abraham’s faith, and not of his works, as St. Paul shows in Romans 4... Therefore I cannot put him among the chief books.”<sup>10</sup>

In another place he singled out the books of the New Testament which did properly “urge Christ.”

To sum it all up . St. John’s Gospel [not the synoptics!], and his first epistle, St. Paul’s epistles, especially those to the Romans, to the Galatians, and to the Ephesians, and St. Peter’s first epistle—these are the books which show you Christ and teach everything which is needful and blessed for you to know even if you don’t see or even hear any other book. Wherefore St. James epistle is a true epistle of straw compared with them, for it contains nothing of an evangelical nature.<sup>11</sup>

The foregoing statements indicate what Luther meant by his assertion “Scripture interprets itself by passages and places which belong together, and [scripture as a whole] can only be understood by a rule of faith.”<sup>12</sup> They give concrete examples of how the analogy or rule of faith justified singling out certain parts of scripture as the norm by which other parts of the canon were to be judged. Surely Luther’s submission to the Bible, implied in his rejection of the fourfold meaning,

scholasticism, and church tradition, enabled him to learn and transmit many scriptural teachings that have greatly profited the church. But when he set up his understanding of justification by faith as the basis for suppressing such books as the Synoptic Gospels, Hebrews, and James, he then made it impossible for these books to deepen or improve his understanding of this doctrine. He also made it harder for these books to inform him on other subjects which they taught. So his use of the analogy of faith undercut the *sola scriptura* principle not only for himself but for all those who have followed his hermeneutical lead ever since.

This conclusion is confirmed by what Matthaeus Flacius (a Lutheran) said about the analogy of faith in his *Key to the Scriptures* (1567), the first hermeneutics book to emerge from the Reformation. According to Flacius,

Every understanding and exposition of Scripture is to be in agreement with the faith. Such [agreement] is, so to speak, the norm or limit of a sound faith, that we may not be thrust over the fence into the abyss by anything, either by a storm from without or by an attack from within (Rom. 12:6). For everything that is said concerning Scripture, or on the basis of Scripture, must be in agreement with all that the catechism declares or that is taught by the articles of faith.<sup>13</sup>

This statement of Flacius shows how Luther’s use of the analogy of faith principle had made church tradition, fixed in creeds and catechisms, the key for the interpretation of scripture. Even though this tradition was now of a Protestant rather than of a Roman Catholic variety, yet the barrier which it erected against letting biblical exegesis improve or correct that tradition was exceedingly hard to surmount.

### Calvin and the Analogy of Faith

John Calvin followed the same hermeneutical procedure as Luther. In his “Prefatory Address to King Francis,” designed to gain recommendation for his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin appealed to Romans 12:6 and

its phrase according to the analogy of faith<sup>14</sup> as his best argument for why his teaching should be regarded as true. He said:

When Paul wished all prophecy to be made to accord with the analogy of faith [Rom 12:6], he set forth a very clear rule to test all interpretation of Scripture. Now, if our interpretation be measured by this rule of faith, victory is in our hands. For what is more consonant with faith than to recognize that we are-weak... to be sustained by [Christ]? To take away from us all occasion for glorying, that he alone may stand forth gloriously and we glory in him?<sup>15</sup>

There are, to be sure, many passages where scripture teaches that “no human being should boast in the presence of God,” but “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord” (1 Cor 1:29, 31). Those who are committed to *sola scriptura* want their understanding of such passages, as well as those setting forth all other biblical teachings, to be deepened and corrected by a careful exegesis of all of them.

But *sola scriptura* was threatened when Calvin, like Luther, made the Gospel of John the “key” for understanding the Synoptic Gospels. Concerning the Gospel of John, Calvin said, “The doctrine which points out to us the power and fruit of Christ’s coming appears far more clearly in John than in [Matthew, Mark, and Luke]...For this reason I am accustomed to say that this Gospel is the key to open the door to the understanding of the others.”<sup>16</sup> The problem, however, is that one who is convinced that John’s teaching is the key for understanding the other Gospels will devote more energy to learning what John teaches than he will to learning what a Synoptic Gospel teaches. This in itself would be contrary to *sola scriptura*, which requires one to be equally docile to all of scripture.

Calvin also required Exodus through Deuteronomy to be understood in terms of Paul’s view of the law. Indeed, Calvin concluded, just from the

exegesis of the Pentateuch itself, that “the *same* [italics added] covenant, of which Abraham had been the minister and keeper, was repeated to his descendants by the instrumentality of Moses.” But then when he considered what Paul said about the Mosaic law, he said, “Paul opposes [the Mosaic law] to the promise given to Abraham, because as [Paul] is treating of the peculiar office, power and end of the law, he separates it from the promises of grace [that are found in Abraham and Moses].”<sup>17</sup>

Thus, according to Calvin, the message of Exodus through Deuteronomy could not be properly grasped simply by studying these books. One must first know about the antithesis Paul drew between Abraham, on the one hand, and parts of Moses, on the other, before his study of Exodus through Deuteronomy would produce accurate results. For Calvin, unless one knew that the promises in these books constantly shift back and forth between conditional and unconditional ones,<sup>18</sup> he would be led astray in his study of them. So Calvin concluded the introduction to his harmony of Exodus through Deuteronomy by saying, “I have thought it advisable to say this much by way of preface, for the purpose of directing my readers to the proper *object* [italics added] of the history.”<sup>19</sup>

But there are numerous passages in scripture where such blessings as eternal life, and inheriting the kingdom of God, are given because of the good works men have done. According to Matthew 25:34-36, 46, the blessed will inherit the kingdom of God and eternal life because they have done such things for “Jesus’ brethren” as feeding them when they were hungry. Likewise, Paul commands, “Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.” (Col. 3:23-24). In his *Institutes*, Calvin interpreted these two passages by calling in statements

from such remote contexts as Ephesians 1:5-6, 18 and Galatians 4:7. According to Calvin, these affirm that “the Kingdom of heaven is not servants wages but sons inheritance, which only they who have been adopted as sons by the Lord shall enjoy, and that for no other reason than this adoption.” So, “even in these very passages [Matt 25:34-46 and Col. 3:23-24] where the Holy Spirit promises everlasting glory as a reward for works, [yet] by expressly terming it an ‘inheritance’ he is showing that it comes to us from another source [than works].”<sup>20</sup>

Here is a concrete example of how the analogy of faith hermeneutics worked in Calvin’s thinking. He has to construe Matthew 25 and Colossians 3 in terms of other passages drawn from such distant contexts as Ephesians 1 and Galatians 4. These he selects because they accord well with his understanding of the analogy of faith, that only God, and not men, should be glorified.<sup>21</sup> Then he applies these remote-context passages to the ones in Matthew and Colossians, whose own terminology does not affirm so clearly that God alone is glorified in man’s salvation. They even say, on Calvin’s own admission, that “the Holy Spirit [!] promises everlasting glory as a reward for works.” But this statement as it stands must be suppressed and replaced by the passages from Ephesians and Galatians, so that the passages in Matthew 25 and Colossians 3 will make it clear that the inheritance spoken of there “comes to us from another source [than works].”<sup>22</sup>

So long as the exegesis of biblical passages is conducted by such analogy of faith hermeneutics, it would be difficult for systematic theology to be nourished and corrected by exegetical considerations from the biblical text. But this was the course which the reformers left for theology to steer. While the reformers themselves introduced into biblical exegesis many practice which

greatly furthered the cause of *sola scriptura*, yet because they did not grasp how their analogy of faith principle clashed with *sola scriptura*, they gave a strong impetus for Reformation theology also to revert to a scholasticism not unlike the medieval sort against which they had rebelled. Thus Ebeling argues,

This lack of clarity became apparent in the degree to which Reformation theology, like medieval scholasticism, also developed into a scholastic system. What was the relation of the systematic method here [in the post-Reformation] to the exegetical method? Ultimately it was the same as in medieval scholasticism. There, too, exegesis of holy scripture went on not only within systematic theology but also separately alongside of it, yet so that the possibility of a tension between exegesis and systematic theology was *a priori* excluded. Exegesis was enclosed within the frontiers fixed by systematic theology.<sup>23</sup>

There was one big difference, however. The post-Reformation era could not completely forget the several strong impulses which the reformers had given toward *sola scriptura*. So the more post-Reformation theology became scholastic, the more it clashed with these latent *sola scriptura* impulses. Consequently, it was inevitable that a methodology would arise which (whatever its name) would seek that full conformity with *sola scriptura* that systematic theology, with its analogy of faith principle, could not achieve.

### Rise of Biblical Theology

A century after the Reformation the term "biblical theology" was first used. At the outset the term signified a corrective which certain precursors of Pietism felt Protestant Orthodoxy sorely needed. Philip Spener, one of the founders of Pietism, remarked in his *Pia Desideria* (1675) how two court chaplains in the parliament at Regensburg had complained some years earlier that "scholastic theology," expelled by Luther through the front door, had now come in at the back door to suppress "biblical theology."<sup>24</sup> In his later writings

Spener drew an antithesis between "biblical theology" and "scholastic theology." But in making this contrast Spener was not trying to discard systematics in favor of another theological method. He merely wanted to encourage theological students to spend less time mastering philosophical subtleties and more time learning the "simple" teachings of Christ and the apostles. As a result of Spener's plea there appeared a number of books which assembled proof-texts from all over the Bible to substantiate the affirmations of systematic theology.<sup>25</sup>

It was a century later that Johann Gabler used the term "biblical theology" to designate a method for ascertaining Christian teaching which should supersede systematic theology. In his inaugural address as a professor at Altdorf in 1787 he drew a sharp distinction between biblical and systematic theology. "Biblical theology," he said, "always remains the same since its arguments are historical."<sup>26</sup> What was "historical" had an unvarying quality about it, since "what the sacred writers thought about divine things" was something fixed in the past and represented to us today by an unchanging text of scripture. Dogmatic theology, on the other hand, "is subjected along with other human disciplines to manifold change." "It teaches what every theologian through use of his reason philosophizes about divine things in accordance with his understanding, with the circumstances of the time, the age, the place, the school [to which he belongs]" "Therefore," Gabler argued, "we are carefully to distinguish the divine from the human and to undertake a separation between biblical and dogmatic theology."

Thus biblical theology should be pursued in order to grasp exactly how each of the biblical writers thought. To do this, Gabler recommended that two steps be taken. First, every effort must be directed to "what each of [the biblical writers] thought concerning divine things...only from their writings." A

vital requisite for this is to learn "the time and place" where any single literary unit was composed. Second:

We must carefully assemble all ideas of the several writers and arrange them in their proper sequence: those of the patriarchs, those of Moses, David, and Solomon, those of the prophets, each of the prophets for that matter....And as we proceed we are for many reasons not to despise the Apocrypha. In similar fashion, from the epochs of the new form of doctrine, [we must carefully assemble and arrange in proper sequence] the ideas of Paul, Peter, John and James.

After accomplishing these two steps, the interpreter's third step is

...to investigate which ideas are of importance to the permanent form of Christian doctrine, and consequently apply to us, and which were spoken only for the people of a given age or were intended for a given form of instruct... Who, I ask, would relate the Mosaic regulations, long since done away with by Christ, to our time, and who would insist on the validity for our time of Paul's exhortations that women should veil themselves in the sacred assembly? The ideas of the Mosaic form of instruction, which are confirmed neither by Jesus and his apostles nor *by reason itself* [italics added], can therefore be of no dogmatic value. We must zealously examine what we must regard as belonging to the abiding doctrine of salvation; what in the words of the apostles is truly divine and what is fortuitous and purely human. Then the consequence is in fact a "biblical theology." And when such solid foundations of "biblical theology" have been laid after the manner we have described, we shall have no wish to follow uncertain ideas set forth by a dogmatic theology that is conditioned by our own times.<sup>27</sup>

In Gabler's first two steps there is the implication that each biblical spokesman should be studied with equal diligence. But then came his third step of drawing a distinction between "the permanent form of Christian doctrine," and "ideas for the people of a given age." Later revelation (that of Jesus and his apostles) as well as "reason" were the criteria for making this distinction. The problem with Gabler, and with all biblical theology for the next cen-

tury, was that the criteria for carrying out the third step, and especially “reason,” were so amenable to the prevailing philosophy of a certain age that in the teaching produced by biblical theology, the prophets, Christ, and the apostles sound very similar to current modes of thinking.

An example of this is Bernhard Weiss’s *Biblical Theology* (1868), which argued that the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus existed to the degree that the disciples surrounding Jesus made progress in living up to his ethical principles. Weiss said that “the dominion of God begins to be fulfilled when a company of disciples gather around Jesus, in whose midst is the kingdom of God.”<sup>28</sup> Although Weiss conceded that “Jesus nowhere directly designates the fellowship of his adherents as the kingdom of God,” yet on the basis of verses like Matthew 21:31, “tax collectors and harlots precede you [Pharisees] into the kingdom of God,” he confidently affirmed that “in [the disciples’] fellowship [the kingdom] begins to be realized. [Its] success depends on the condition of men’s hearts.”<sup>29</sup> It was the kingdom of God understood in these terms which “must spread over the whole nation, like the mustard seed which grows from small beginnings to a disproportionate greatness.”<sup>30</sup>

Such an understanding of the kingdom of God, however, was saying scarcely anything different from ethical idealism, the prevailing philosophy of that time. This understanding was a virtual reduplication of the theology of Albrecht Ritschl, who stressed that the kingdom which Jesus founded was a community committed to the practice and furtherance of his ethical ideals.

We recall how Gabler had confidently predicted that as his three-step program for a biblical theology was carried out, the result would be ideas that belonged to the permanent form of Christian doctrine. These would replace the teachings of dogmatic theology, which

have no permanence in that they are always conditioned by the thinking of their own times. But when a man as deeply committed to biblical authority as Bernhard Weiss practiced biblical theology and came up with an understanding of Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God that accorded so well with the prevailing philosophy and theology of his time, it seemed that biblical theology was as vulnerable to the influence of current thinking as was dogmatic theology. The ideal of *sola scriptura* would be achieved only when the exegetical method left the interpreter with no alternative but to let the text speak for itself in its own terms.

### Impact of *Religionsgeschichte*

About the middle of the last century, certain biblical scholars became aware of many parallels between Jesus’ language in the Gospels and the Jewish apocalyptic literature. The use of such writings as an aid for understanding what Jesus meant in his frequent references to “the kingdom of God” would be an example of one application of the exegetical procedure of *Religionsgeschichte*, or “the history-of-religions school.”

In 1892 Johannes Weiss included this procedure in his exegetical method in which, as he put it, “we attempt once more to identify the original historical meaning which Jesus connected with the words ‘Kingdom of God,’ and... we do it with special care lest we import modern, or at any rate alien, ideas into Jesus’ thought-world.”<sup>31</sup>

Weiss noted his father’s concession that nowhere did Jesus equate the kingdom of God with his disciples.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Jesus did say, in Matthew 12:25-28, that the kingdom had already come, but the meaning here is that the kingdom was present in that Jesus had power to cast out demons and to dismantle Satan’s realm. So while Jesus was on earth, the kingdom of God was invisible and only indirectly evident

through Jesus’ miracle-working power. But according to Luke 17:20-24, what is now invisible will come, *in the future*, with the highest visibility when Jesus returns as the “Son of man” spoken of in Daniel 7 and in numerous places in the Jewish apocryphal book of Enoch.

On the basis of many other statements of Jesus about the futurity of the kingdom, and a rather constant allusion to similar thinking about the kingdom of God in Jewish apocalyptic literature, like *The Assumption of Moses*, *The Testament of Daniel*, *Enoch*, and *4 Ezra*, J. Weiss concluded,

The kingdom of God as Jesus thought of it is a wholly supernatural entity that stands completely over against this world. It follows from this that in Jesus’ thought there cannot have been any place for a development of the kingdom of God *within the framework of this world*. On the basis of this result it seems to be the case that the dogmatic religio-ethical use of this idea in recent theology, which has divested it completely of its originally eschatological-apocalyptic meaning, is unjustified.<sup>33</sup>

Weiss’s conclusion regarding Jesus’ understanding of the kingdom of God was much better established than his father’s conclusion, because the son argued not only from a mass of evidence in the Synoptic Gospels, but also from evidence provided by *religionsgeschichte*, that is, from similar ideas in Jewish apocalyptic literature, which were pertinent because they stemmed from the same general milieu in which Jesus lived. Faced with such double evidence, it became virtually impossible for a modern man to understand Jesus’ statements about the kingdom of God in terms of cherished contemporary concepts.

This is why J. Weiss’s *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1892) represents a great turning point in the history of biblical interpretation. It was this book and Wilhelm Wrede’s *Das Messias geheimnis in den Evangelien* (Goett-

ingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1901) that provided Albert Schweitzer with the key for showing that nineteenth-century liberalism could no longer find support for its teachings from the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels. As Krister Stendahl has said:

The alleged biblical basis for what has been called "liberal theology" in the classical form... was not shattered by conservatives but by the extreme radicals of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (history of religions school). [The exponents of this school] could show, on the basis of the comparative material, that such a picture of Jesus or of the OT prophets was totally impossible from the historical point of view and that it told more about the ideals of bourgeois Christianity in the late nineteenth century than about the carpenter from Nazareth or the little man from Tekoa.<sup>34</sup>

So the history-of-religions school presented biblical theology with an exegetical tool which made it virtually impossible for the Bible's message to be molded according to the current philosophy of a given culture. Now the Bible had to speak in terms of the meanings which the biblical writers had intended by the words they used. *Sola scriptura* was now within the reach of all those who would work with the biblical text to grasp its intended meanings and who were not obligated to shape those meanings to conform to some analogy of faith.

But as *Religionsgeschichte* forced one back to the way the Bible thought in its own times and cultures, the relevance of the biblical message seemed, for many, to vanish. As Johannes Weiss expounded the Gospels' own view of the kingdom, he observed that "most people will neither be satisfied with this more negative description of the concept [of the kingdom of God as that which triumphs over Satan], nor want to understand it in this completely supernaturalistic way of looking at things, which is mythological from our standpoint."<sup>35</sup> And Stendahl observes that "the resistance to the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* was openly or unconsciously against its disre-

gard for [contemporary] theological meaning and relevance."<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, *Religionsgeschichte* had made it possible for biblical theology to tell "what it meant," but there is little market for exegetical labors which merely describe, with an antiquarian interest, the thoughts of a by-gone age. There is, however, a very strong desire to know "what the Bible means,"<sup>37</sup> and this desire has sought fulfillment in two very distinct theological procedures.

### Two Alternatives

Karl Barth's procedure for affirming "what the Bible means" begins with the presupposition that though the biblical writers and the present-day interpreter are far removed from each other in terms of their culture, yet they have very much in common in that both have immediate access to the "subject matter" of the Bible. At the beginning of his *Church Dogmatics* Barth affirmed,

Language about God has the proper content, when it conforms to the essence of the Church, i.e., to Jesus Christ. . . *eite prophetjean kata ten analogian ten pisteos* (Rom. 12:6). Dogmatics investigates Christian language by raising the question of this conformity. Thus it has not to discover the measure with which [dogmatics] measures, still less to invent [that measure]. With the Christian Church [dogmatics] regards and acknowledges [that measure] as given (given in its own thoroughly peculiar way, exactly as the man Jesus Christ is given us).<sup>38</sup>

Since Christ is given for us today, just as he was for the writers of the New Testament, it is understandable why Barth, at the very outset of his theological career, recommended an interpretational procedure which regarded all exegetical labors with a text's historical and philological data as mere "preliminary work," which was to be followed quickly by a "genuine understanding and interpretation," which means

...that creative energy which Luther exercised with intuitive certainty in his exegesis; which underlies the systematic interpretation of Calvin [who]

having first established what stands in the text, sets himself to re-think the whole material and to wrestle with it, till the walls which separate the sixteenth century from the first become transparent! Paul speaks, and the man of the sixteenth century hears. The conversation between the original record and the reader moves around the *subject matter* [italics added], until a distinction between today and yesterday becomes impossible.<sup>39</sup>

An example of how this all-important subject matter" (which in another place in the *Church Dogmatics* is stated as "revelation remains identical with Jesus Christ"<sup>40</sup>) controlled Barth's interpretation of the text is his handling of passages like 1 Corinthians 15:51-54, which affirms that believers "shall all be changed, from mortality into immortality" (vv. 51, 52, 54). But Barth said that in the Christian hope, "there is no question of a continuation into an indefinite future of a somewhat altered life [but, rather] an 'eternalizing' of this ending life." His reasoning behind this surprising statement is, it seems, that if believers did actually undergo the inherent change of being resurrected, then something of what is revealed in Jesus Christ would be transposed from Christ over to created beings. But since Barth's *Sache*, or analogy of faith, bars revelation from extending itself beyond Jesus Christ, and since this *Sache* confronted both Barth and Paul, despite great cultural differences between them, therefore Barth regarded it as proper to restate 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 from his knowledge of it, even though his words communicated a different meaning from Paul's. As Stendahl puts it,

Orthodoxy never had repristination as its program in the periods of its strength. The possibility of translation was given—as it is for Barth—in the reality of the *subject matter* [italics added], apart from the intellectual manifestations in the thought patterns of the original documents. God and Christ were not Semites in such a sense that the biblical pattern of thought was identified with the revelation itself.<sup>41</sup>

The problem with Barth's procedure is that even though Christ might be regarded as given to all believers in church proclamation, yet this Christ will be preached somewhat differently from church to church, and so each interpreter will read the text in a different light. Hence this procedure will produce as many interpretations of the text as there are interpreters, and not even as profound and wise a thinker as Barth has any basis for claiming that his interpretation of a biblical text should be taken seriously. Stendahl observes that

Barth speaks as if it were a very simple thing to establish what Paul actually meant in his own terms. . . [But] biblical theology along this line is admittedly incapable of enough patience and enthusiasm for keeping alive the tension between what the text meant and what it means. [In Barth] there is no criteria by which they can be kept apart; what is intended as a commentary turns out to be a theological tractate, expanding in contemporary terms what Paul should have said about the subject matter as understood by the commentator.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast, biblical theology, controlled only by philological and historical considerations, regards its first order of business that of construing an author's intended meaning in his own terms. Stendahl argues that biblical exegesis has reached a point where this is now possible for much of the biblical material:

Once we confine ourselves to the task of descriptive biblical theology as a field in its own right, the material itself gives us the means to check whether our interpretation is correct or not. From the point of view of method it is clear that our only concern is to find out what these words meant when uttered or written by the prophet, the priest, the evangelist, or the apostle—and regardless of their meaning in later stages of religious history, our own included.<sup>43</sup>

Stendahl regards Oscar Cullmann's procedure for establishing Christian teaching as representing the alternative to Barth's way. Cullmann is distressed with Barth for not subject-

ing his theological thinking to the meaning of the text of scripture as determined by philological and historical considerations. "Barth is particularly open to this danger, not only because of the richness of his thought, but because systematically he seems to treat philological and historical explanations as too exclusively preliminary in character."<sup>44</sup> Cullmann argues that the Holy Spirit who inspired the biblical writings

...can only speak in human language, and that language must always bear the stamp of the period and of the individuality of the biblical writer. For this reason . . . [all philological and historical considerations] help to provide us with a "transparency through which, by an effort of theological concentration, we may see with the writer the truth which he saw and with him may attain to the revelation which came to him. We must thoroughly understand this historic "transparency"; our vision through it must be so clear that at any moment we may become the actual contemporaries of the writer.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to Barth, Cullmann wants to find the subject matter of any literary unit in scripture simply by submitting himself to the pertinent historical and philological data, and by means of these alone to construe an author's intended meaning. Only as the interpreter is thinking along "with the writer [of the text]" will he have access to the author's subject matter. Cullmann rejects Barth's idea that the interpreter should have prior access to the subject matter through the church's proclamation of Christ. He says:

When I approach the text as an exegete, I may not consider it to be certain that my Church's faith in Christ is in its essence really that of the writers of the New Testament. In the same way, my personal self-understanding [*contra* Bultmann], and my personal experience of faith must not only be seen as exegetical aids, but also as possible sources of error.<sup>46</sup>

How then does Cullmann proceed where the Reformation foundered,

namely, in the matter of avoiding subjectivity when the time comes to bring all the teachings of the Bible together? He answers that with the closing of the canon,<sup>47</sup>

the thing that is new in this concluding new interpretation is the fact that not just individual excerpts of salvation history are presented, as was the case prior to the composition of the last book in the canon], but that now, through the collection together of various books of the Bible, the whole history of salvation must be taken into account in understanding any one of the books of the Bible. When we wish to interpret some affirmation coming from early Christianity not merely as an isolated phenomenon, but as an actual biblical text, as a part belonging to a totality, we must call upon salvation history as a hermeneutical key, for it is the factor binding all the biblical text together.<sup>48</sup>

Thus Cullmann affirms that "a dogmatics or ethics of salvation history ought to be written some day."<sup>49</sup> To the objection that making redemptive history the perspective for understanding any given passage of scripture is just as subjective as any of the other rules, or analogies of faith, Cullmann answers that salvation history is what called forth certain writings as canonical in the first place, and therefore only salvation history can provide the perspective from which they are to be interpreted. "I simply do not see any other biblical notion [besides salvation history] which makes a link between all the books of the Bible such as the fixing of the canon sought to express."<sup>50</sup> It should also be observed that, for Cullmann, salvation history never allows the thinking of one writer to be suppressed in favor of another (as the various analogies of faith do). He says,

...[the scholar] must resist the temptation to bring two texts into harmony when their affirmations do not agree, if he is convinced that such a synthesis is incompatible with the critical control exercised by philology and history; this he must do, however painful the biblical antinomy with regard to one point or another, once the synthesis has been rejected.<sup>51</sup>

Cullmann, however, does have statements where he speaks of later events in redemptive history as providing “re-interpretations” of earlier ones. For example, when the Old Testament *kerygma* passes on into the New Testament, he says, “This *kerygma* passes through new interpretations more radical than all those undertaken within the sphere of the Old Testament, because they are all subsequently oriented toward the Christ event. Furthermore, “The evangelists [Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John] still offer their reinterpretation of the form of a life of Jesus at a relatively late stage in the formation of the primitive Christian *kerygma*.”<sup>52</sup>

But this “reinterpretation” does not mean that older interpretations of a redemptive event are discarded as no longer useful. The “correction” of the interpretation of a past saving event never happens in such a way that an earlier account is disputed. Rather, aspects formerly unnoticed are by virtue of the new revelation now placed in the foreground, creating a correspondingly wider horizon.”<sup>53</sup> Elsewhere he uses such words as “completed” and “refined”<sup>54</sup> to define what he means by “reinterpretation,” and he also expressly criticizes Von Rad’s understanding of later interpretations in redemptive history as invalidating earlier ones.<sup>55</sup> Therefore older interpretations of a redemptive event continue to make valid contributions to our understanding of that event, even though later revelation adds new information about it so that the perspective by which we view it shifts from that provided merely by the earlier interpretations.

On the basis of such an approach, Cullmann argues that one hears what the Bible itself is trying to say, and the very objectivity of this message, arising from the sequence and meaning of the Bible’s redemptive events, constitutes the proper object to which faith responds. The very “otherness,” or “strangeness,” of the biblical message increases, rather

than detracts from, the Bible’s applicability to life. In that the biblical message is so out of step with human thinking in any age, it calls for a response from men that involves a complete break with the ways they are prone to view things. Cullmann affirms,

The “application of the subject matter to myself” [paraphrasing the famous statement of Bengel given in the eighteenth century] presupposes that in complete subjection to the text (te totum applica ad textum [Bengel]), silencing my question, I struggle with the “res”, the subject matter. But that means that I must be ready to heat something perhaps foreign to me. I must be prepared to hear a faith, an address, running completely contrary to the question I raise, and in which I do not at first feel myself addressed.<sup>56</sup>

At this point George Ladd criticizes Cullmann for not having taken the “second step in biblical theology—that of interpreting how the theology of salvation history can be acceptable today... Biblical theology must be alert to this problem and expound reasons why the categories of biblical thought, admittedly not those of the modern world, have a claim upon our theological thinking.”<sup>57</sup>

One reason Ladd gives for why men should welcome the claim made in the Bible’s history of salvation is that because “Christ is now reigning as Lord and King,” and will continue to reign until he has put all enemies under his feet (1 Cor 15:25), therefore “his reign must [eventually] become public in power and glory and his Lordship universally recognized (Phil. 2:10-11).”<sup>58</sup> A salvation history in which so many promises already have been fulfilled and which now promises that all the enemies that presently bring us such woe will someday be banished, inspires a confidence for the future which, it would seem, all men would most readily welcome!

#### End Notes

1. Quoted by W. G. Kummel, *The New Testament: The History of the*

*Investigation of its Problems* (Nashville/New York: Abingdon, 1972) 22-23.

2. M. Luther, *An Appeal to the Ruling Class. Martin Luther, Selections from His Writings* (ed. J. Dillenberger; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1961) 470-471.

3. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (LCC 20, 21, ed. J. McNeill; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 21, 1393 (IV, xvii, 26). All further references to the *Institutes* follow this edition.

4. G. Ebeling, “The Meaning of Biblical Theology,” *Word and Faith* (London: SCM, 1963) 82.

5. Quoted by C. Briggs, *Biblical Study* (New York: Scribner’s, 1884) 332. A century later the Westminster Confession (I, ix) used similar language in enunciating this hermeneutical principle: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself, and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold but one), it must [“may”] in the American edition be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”

6. Briggs, *Biblical Study*, 332.

7. Taken from the Latin given by Ebeling, “Meaning of Biblical Theology,” 82.

8. Ebeling, “Meaning of Biblical Theology,” 82.

9. Quoted by Kummel, *History of Investigation*, 26.

10. *Ibid.*, 24-25.

11. Quoted by E. Reuss, *History of the Canon of the Holy Scriptures in the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: Hunter, 1891) 322, 329.

12. *Supra*, n. 5.

13. Quoted by Kummel, *History of investigation*, 30. We note Flacius’ reference to Romans 12:6, where Paul exhorts his readers that if they have the gift of prophecy, they are to exercise this gift “according to the analogy of faith” (*kata ten analogian tes pis-*

teos). Paul's point is that each Christian should exercise his spiritual gift in accordance with the appropriate inner faith, or inclination, that he has by virtue of that particular gift. So it is clear that "faith" in this passage does not represent the objective body of truth. But that is the sense in which this passage was taken by Flacius, and by Origen, who as nearly as I can determine was the nearest to use the words "according to the analogy of faith" to urge people to conform their language and thinking about a passage of scripture to an *a priori* understanding of what God's Word must be like (*De principiis* 4.26).

14. Cf. *supra*, n. 13.

15. Calvin, *Institutes*, 20, 12-13.

16. J. Calvin, *The Gospel according to John*, 1-10 (edd. D. and T. Torrance; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 6.

17. J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1950)1, 314.210/211

18. In my opinion, however, Calvin never demonstrated the existence of an unconditional promise in the Pentateuch, or anywhere in the Bible. A major emphasis of his system is that the gospel calling for faith comprises unconditional promises, whereas law appears in every conditional promise. See *Institutes*, 20, 575 (III, ii, 29) where he makes a most basic statement regarding this distinction.

19. Calvin, *The Four Last Books of Moses*, I, 316.

20. Calvin, *Institutes*, 20, 822 (III, xviii, 2).

21. *Supra*, n. 15.

22. To the objection that we must remain with the analogy of faith hermeneutics or else we will let passages like Matthew 25 and Colossians 3 lead us right back to Rome and salvation by works, my answer is twofold. First, we must determine, regardless of consequences, what the intended meaning of each of the biblical writers is. We

must let each one speak for himself and avoid construing him by recourse to what another writer said. Otherwise there is no escape from subjectivism in biblical interpretation. Since the Bible itself does not point to certain parts as the norm to which other parts must conform, one would be free to set up any analogy of faith that he or she chooses so long as one can adduce a handful of verses, preferably from the New Testament, to support it.

23. Second, when we cannot quickly escape from passages running counter to our theological presuppositions by an analogy of faith procedure, then we are driven to hear out a biblical writer with an intensity that is not otherwise possible. I am convinced that the whole problem of faith and works, which the analogy of faith hermeneutics is most often called in to solve, evaporates as one probes more deeply into biblical theology. A good starting-point for solving this problem is an understanding of what Paul meant by a "work of faith" (1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:11). Works done from the motivation of faith preclude the possibility of any boasting and give all glory to God, yet these works are so vital to a saving faith that those lacking them are not saved. On this line of reasoning Colossians 3:23-24, Matthew 25, and many other passages could speak for themselves without having to be muzzled by the analogy of faith hermeneutics.

24. Ebeling, "Meaning of Biblical Theology," 82-83.

25. *Ibid.*, 83-84.

26. E. C. Baur, *Vorlesungen Ueber Neutestamentliche Theologie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, repr. 1973) 3, provides a list of these books.

27. This and subsequent quotes from Gabler are taken from Kuemmel, *History of Investigation*, 98-100.

28. *Ibid.*, 99-100.

29. B. Weiss, *Biblical Theology*

*of the New Testament* (2 vols., 3rd ed.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1882)1, 67.

30. *Ibid.*, 68.

31. *Ibid.*, 69.

32. J. Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (Lives of Jesus Series; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 60.

33. *Ibid.*, 68.

34. Quoted by Kuemmel, *History of Investigation* 228.

35. K. Stendahl, "Contemporary Biblical Theology," *IDB* (4 vols.; Nashville/New York: Abingdon, 1962) 1,418.

36. J. Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation*, 81.

37. Stendahl, "Biblical Theology," 419.

38. I am indebted to Krister Stendahl, in his article on "Biblical Theology," cited above, for this apt way of stating the difference between the exposition of a text's meaning and its application for today.

39. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936)1/1, 11-12.

40. K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (6th ed.; New York/Toronto: Oxford, 1933) 7. This is a statement Barth made in his foreword to the second edition of this book in 1921.

41. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956)1/2, 118.

42. Stendahl, "Biblical Theology," 427.

43. *Ibid.*, 420.

44. *Ibid.*, 422. Barth opposes letting biblical theology have this sovereignty in determining Christian teachings. He regards it as having an equal share of the responsibility along with dogmatic history, systematic theology, and practical theology. "Biblical and exegetical theology can become a field of wild chasing and charging when it bows to the idol of a supposedly normative historicism and when therefore, without regard to the positively significant yet also warning ecclesiastical and dogmatic

history, or to its co-responsibility in the world of systematic theology (in which it may perhaps make a dilettante incursion), or to the fact that ultimately theology in the form of practical theology must aim to give meaningful directions to the ministry of the community in the world, it claims autonomy as a kind of Vatican within the whole" (Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1962] IV/3, 881). But in reply we ask: How else can the principle of *sola scriptura* be realized unless we seek to remain silent and let each biblical writer speak for himself, in his own terms? In the earlier parts of this essay we have heard the warning, we believe, from what happened at the Reformation and afterwards when the analogy of faith hermeneutics, such as Barth advocates, led theology down the road to scholasticism.

45. O. Cullmann, "The Necessity and Function of Higher Criticism," *The Early Church* (ed. J. Higgins; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956) 16.

46. *Ibid.*, 13. Note Cullmann's use of Barth's key word, "transparency" (supra, n. 38). 20

47. O. Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (New York: Harper, 1967) 68-69. A Lutheran, Cullmann nevertheless believes Luther's rule of faith ("What urges Christ," supra, n. 7) needs to be modified to include the whole of redemptive history (*Salvation in History*, 297-98).

48. For Cullmann's understanding that the canon imposed itself upon the church and was not established by some arbitrary bias in the early church, see *Salvation in History*, 293-304, and his essay, "The Tradition," *The Early Church*, 55-99,

49. Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, 297.

50. *Ibid.*, 292. There is, I believe, a similarity between the sort of theological treatise which Cullmann envisions,

and that which Jonathan Edwards hoped to live long enough to develop from his *History of the Work of Redemption*, which was a series of sermons he gave in 1739. His son re-edited this series after his father's death so they would read as a continuous treatise. It begins with God's creation of the world (and even his purpose in creating it) and inquires how each successive redemptive event, such as the call of Abraham, the Exodus, and so on, makes its distinctive contribution to the realization of God's one great purpose in history. At the beginning of this work Jonathan Edwards said, "In order to see how a design is carried on, we must first know what the design is. Therefore that the great works and dispensations of God that belong to this great affair of redemption might not appear like confusion to you, I would set before you briefly the main things designed to be accomplished in this great work, to accomplish which God will continue working to the end of the world, when the work will appear completely finished" (J. Edwards, *The Work of Redemption. The Works of President Edwards* [4 vols.; New York: Leavitt & Allen, 1858] I, 302). In the editorial introduction to this work, the son remarked that his father "... had planned a body of divinity, in a new method, and in the form of a history" (*Ibid.*, I, 296. Italics added).

51. Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, 298.

52. Cullmann, "The Necessity and Function of Higher Criticism," 15. Cullmann believes that such antinomies exist in scripture because he says, "That there were distorting influences involved in the interpretation of the historical character and the kerygmatic meaning of the event should certainly not be disputed" (*Salvation in History*, 96). He thinks, however, that he can detect which interpretation is a distortion and can correct it by looking more closely at the event which it was try-

ing to interpret. My problem with this is that redemptive events in scripture are always so inextricably bound up with interpretations that I despair of ever separating an event from the interpretation given it by the one reporting it. Furthermore, even if one could remove all interpretive features from a reported event, one could not then work back from this bare event to decide which interpretation was more valid. For example, knowing only that a man named Jesus rose from the dead carries with it no implication of its significance.

53. Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, 113.

54. *Ibid.*, 88.

55. *Ibid.*, 112, 136.

56. *Ibid.*, 88.

57. G. Ladd, "The Search for Perspective," *Int.* 25 (1971) 48. Stendahl ("Biblical Theology," 421) voices the same criticism. It should be noted, however, that Cullmann deliberately avoids pointing to any psychological or existential need which the biblical message fulfills, because of the danger that such a need would become an "analogy of faith" by which every biblical line of thought would then be interpreted. This is what has happened in Bultmann's thinking, and Cullmann wants none of that.

58. G. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 630.

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# The Parsees: The Oldest Unreached People in the World

**P**arseeism was founded before 3000 BC in Persia by Zoroaster. The kings of the ancient Persian empire, including Cyrus and Darius of the Bible, were followers of this religion. Parsees revel in the past splendor of the former Persian empire and strongly consider themselves to be of a royal race.

This clinging to their past was perhaps brought about by the brutal and ruthless slaughter of this people by Alexander the Great and then more severely by the invading Arab Muslims some 1000 years later. Like the Jewish people after Hitler, the Parsees bear scars which only the blood and wounds of the Messiah Jesus can heal. Zoroastrian Parsees believe that fire is their principal god. They also fervently worship and pray to angels and to the elements of nature.

## **Fire God**

Fire is called the son of god and occupies the highest place of worship and adoration. No religious ritual is done without the presence of a burning fire. Marriages, initiation into the religion, purification of souls, and rituals for the deceased are all done in the presence of fires fueled by sandalwood and oil.

At the fire temple, these fires are never allowed to go out. Parsees pray and often prostrate themselves before the fire. A Parsee home will typically have a fire burning at all times.

## **The Creator and Angels**

Parsees profess to believe in and call on what they name the All-Wise Creator or Wise One. Wisdom is the most significant attribute they assign to this god they call Creator.

Parsees also believe in and invoke angels, especially guardian angels

of various elements of nature. The primary archangel is the angel of conscience. He holds almost as much prominence as fire. Parsees call on angels to do whatever they wish; i.e., there is no real concept of Lordship.

## **Ethics**

A typical Parsee is proud of the tenets of his religion. The Gathas, their supreme scriptures, specifically instruct every individual to do what he thinks is the most rightful thing to do. "Reflect with a clear mind, man by man for himself," wrote Zoroaster in the Gathas. Another of their books holds the tenet of Good thoughts, good words, good deeds, as preeminent; however, few Parsees really strive for that.

In their homes Parsees display pictures of deceased relatives, friends, and leaders. They pray to the spirits of these people, facing the pictures, and at times kneeling before them. Some of them even have demonic spirits manifesting themselves in the likeness of their loved ones.

## **Resurrection**

Mainline Parsees do not believe in reincarnation, though they do consider theirs the supreme religion and race. They definitely believe in resurrection. Salvation is by grace of the Wise Creator. They like to believe their deceased relatives have made it to heaven and have escaped hell.

Ten days in August, the end of their calendar year, are dedicated to the spirits of their deceased loved ones and leaders. At that time, Parsees all over the world invoke spirits of the deceased to join them. Worship of these spirits starts early in the morning and proceeds through out the day. Christians are requested to ESPECIALLY fast

and pray in the month of August for the Parsee People. (See Special Alert which follows.)

## **Major Influences**

Parsees have typically won a place in the heart of the general population of India, Pakistan and Iran due to their kindness, their gentleness, their honesty and primarily for their many charities which are available to all peoples without distinction. Parsees are generally business men and professionals. Parsee families like the Tata, Wadia, Cama and Godrej in India, and Avary, Cowasjee, Minwalla, and Eduljee Dinshaw in Pakistan have been gracious employers to tens of thousands of non-Parsees.

Parsees also occupy high places in the Government, Judiciary and the Armed Forces. Parsees have also shaped the history of nations from behind the scene. Zubin Mehta, the renowned musician, is a Parsee. The two highest leaders of the Shiite Muslims are Ali and Imam Hussain. Hussain was married to a Parsee. The wife of the founding father of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, was a Parsee. The late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India was married to a Parsee. The founder of Nuclear energy in India was Bhabha, a Parsee.

The Bible teacher of the Islamic leader prophet Mohammad himself was Salman Farsi, who was a Parsee high priest. Parseeism in a real sense is the very root of Islam. In the Old Testament while the Babylonians destroyed the Temple of God, it was the Parsees who rebuilt it. Persian kings Cyrus and Darius were Zoroastrian Parsee kings.

According to the Bible, Cyrus, a Parsee, is the only gentile in the Bible that the Lord called his anointed. You

## The Parsee People

would be hard pressed to find any one who has known a Parsee and not been influenced to some degree by him positively.

Perhaps for self-preservation, the Parsees have striven to excel in areas of business and professions. In India and Pakistan, they are among the most successful business men, hoteliers, shipping company owners, and doctors. Parsees have also occupied high government positions in the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary arms of government. In the USA and the Western world, Parsees are prominent in business and technology. Also for self-preservation, Parsees are normally very close knit. In India and Pakistan they live in colonies. They typically take over a large tract of land and then allot pieces of the land only to other Parsees.

In the USA and UK, they meet regularly as a community and have formed associations. All the associations in North America have joined together to form a federation, as have the Parsee associations in other parts of the world.

### Closed Membership

Typically only the child of a Parsee father can become a Parsee. To become a legitimate Parsee, one has to go through a blood covenant ritual performed by Parsee priests.

A Parsee woman who marries a non-Parsee is stripped of her membership and Parsee privileges. She and her family, like other non-Parsees, are not allowed in the fire temple or allowed to participate in other major rituals. Her children may never become Parsee unless through initiation by an unauthorized rebel priest. Even if the child of a non-Parsee father manages to convert into the Parsee fold he/she is generally not accepted by the community.

### Blood Covenant

Before the age of puberty, a child born of a Parsee father is led through a ritual of blood covenant with their gods.

The child is first purified with a bath by older women; then he goes through a short ritual with the priest, who is present by the bathroom. In this ritual, he is given urine of a bull to drink in order to firmly establish his covenant with the gods. The concept is that the blood of their god enters the child, bringing his soul into oneness with the god.

His soul having been offered for possession and surrender to the god, the child is then escorted to an open arena, where he is cloaked with the pure white cotton shirt of righteousness. Then a covenant band is tied around his waist in a certain ritualistic way. The child is to wear the shirt and the band at all times. He is expected to renew his vows before the god several times a day in a ritual of untying and tying the covenant band. Most modern-day Parsees do it only once a day, finding the whole thing unfulfilling and empty.

### Obstacles to Conversion

Parsees are very close knit, bonded, greedy for wealth, power hungry, sensual, and self righteous. On the other hand they are also honest, generous to the poor, and merciful to the needy.

A great obstacle to their conversion is due to the fact that when Parsees turn to Christ they cannot find the kind of community support and bonding from the Body of Christ that they once found in the Parsee brethren community. Hence, they easily revert back to Zoroastrianism. Their high level of honesty and generous giving to the poor give them false assurance of their right standing with God.

Their descent from the Persian kings Cyrus and Darius gives them a sense of superiority over others. This is a major reason that they do not allow conversions or marriages with those of other religions. Also it is a major reason that they do not want to leave their faith and religion.

The main strongholds that control the Parsees are the spirits of Antichrist,

witchcraft, deception, and idolatry. Satan accuses them of rebelling against God whenever they move towards Christ Jesus.

### Evangelization

They respect all gods and religions. They will typically not throw away a Bible or other gospel material, due to its religious content.

Many respect Christ. In fact, a leading Parsee teacher of India recognizes Christ as a major Messiah.

Recently in Texas, I visited the home of a Parsee high priest for friendship evangelism. Among the many idols and pictures in his room, the picture of Jesus was notably the largest and occupied the most prominent place.

Where Parsees live together in clusters of 100 or so families, it is easy and fast to reach them all in concerted evangelical efforts with specialized gospel literature, etc. More than 90 % of Parsees are literate in English.

There are many sicknesses among the Parsee people. Faith healers are invited there every now and then. Cancer and heart disease are common killers.

Parsees in India and Pakistan generally like the American people and things that come from America and Europe.

This article has been written by a born-again Parsee Christian who is currently a member of a Full Gospel Fellowship of Churches and Ministers International of this church. The author was born and raised in a Parsee home, and was educated in a Parsee school. Before his conversion to Christ, he taught Parsee classes in his home for Parsee adults, and served on two committees of the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America. In 1992, the Holy Spirit started befriending the author and after four months of "friendship evangelism" the Holy Spirit led him to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior. In like fashion, the Lord Jesus physically appeared to the author's

father. His parents and family still need to give their hearts to Jesus. Please pray that very soon God save every Parsee worldwide with gentleness, mercy and grace.

### Prayer Concerns

1. Promote awareness and a passionate burden in Christian ministries to actively pursue fasting and intercession, servant-evangelism and discipleship of Parsee People, with the goal of church planting among the Parsee.

2. Send teams of Christian intercessors to the areas where Parsees live, to intercede on-site for the Parsees.

3. Pray that Bible studies with sound doctrine take place in all Parsee homes.

4. Send born-again Parsees to the pagan Parsees to reveal the Messiah to them with wisdom and understanding, goodness and love, with comfort and compassion.

5. Pray that Life-giving indigenous churches may be planted among the Parsees, where sound Bible doctrine is taught, and Jesus is worshipped as the only Lord and Savior.

6. Be involved in spiritual warfare. Spiritual warfare is real and intense among the Parsee People.

7. Pray that born-again Christian Parsees and their families may remain faithful and be preserved and grow in their faith and knowledge and service unto Jesus Christ.

8. Pray for wisdom and knowledge, strategy and skill, Divine Authority, Anointing, Adequate Provision and Resources, and Prayer partners for ministry to the Parsees (Neh 2:7-9).

9. Pray for wise and skillful, humble and submissive helpers in outreach ministry to the Parsees.

10. Pray for open doors and Divine connections, and God's favor with Christian leaders, in doing ministry (Neh 1:11b, 2:8b ). Pray for enhancement

of existing ministry partnerships and godly relationships.

11. Pray for favor with government, civil, and religious authorities.

12. Pray for the Lords protection, safety, and healing for the author and his family. Please also pray against strife of tongues. His mother (born-again, who lives in Asia) needs protection and safety. His parents need encouragement, peace strength, and lots of care and love.

### Prayer Alert

Few Christians know of the heightened spiritual activity worldwide in August as the adherents of the Parsee religion mark their high holy days. During this time Parsees everywhere, even in North America and the United Kingdom, will celebrate Satan, exalt fire, and invoke devils.

Most members of the sect are concentrated in India, Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. However, large numbers live in the West, many of them professionals in business and technology. Parsees worship fire, angels, and elements of nature. The yearly observance begins with the ten days of Muktaad. During Muktaad, Parsees gather each day at dawn to begin calling on the spirits of dead relatives and leaders. Through the remainder of the day, families worship the spirits of their deceased loved ones, including in elaborate rituals at their fire temples and at rivers, seas, and other places of nature. Demons sometimes manifest themselves to the devotees, usually in the likeness of some departed loved one or leader.

Pateti (August 21 this year by the Lunar calendar) is the tenth day of Muktaad, and the Parsee's New Years eve. On this day, the Parsee People spend much time in introspection, asking their gods to forgive the sins committed the preceding year. They go to wells and to their fire temples, or even before a fire lit at home, and repent of past sins.

August 22 brings the great festivities called Shahenshahi Navroz (New Years day) meaning "New Day," to rejoice in newness of life and their "freedom" or "salvation." The annual cycle ends August 27 with Khordad Saal. At that time, fervent celebrations commemorate the birthday of Zoroaster, who brought their ancient religion to prominence in about 3000 B.C.

Due to this festive season, July-August is a traditional time for families to initiate their children into Zoroastrianism. Parents bring young boys and girls into blood covenants with their gods through elaborate rituals which include drinking bull's urine. Each child who is thus handed over to Satan's possession receives a special sash and undergarment. He or she wears these as tokens of faithfulness throughout life.

On August 21 and 22, Parsees will be repenting of their sins and seeking divine favor. Please pray the Lord put a passionate burden on Christians worldwide to be in special intercession and fasting at that time, for the Parsees to find the true and living God.

Please consider asking your fellowship and ministry to fast during these ten days and to pray that the Lord Jesus do a sovereign work in the hearts of the Parsees, bringing them out of darkness into salvation in Christ the Lord.

*For more information for praying and getting involved in reaching the Parsee People contact the editor: IJFM, 321 West Rio Grande, El Paso, TX 79902. Tel: 915-533-4975. Fax: 915-532-0990. His Email: 103121.2610@CompuServe.com*

# Worldview, Scripture and Missionary Communication

*A more serious and strategic use of God's Word, when accompanied by prayer, has the potential for effecting one of the most significant spiritual breakthroughs in the history of missions.*

by David J. Hesselgrave

David Wells writes, "Two decades ago, the debate was over the nature of Scripture; today the debate should be over its function"<sup>1</sup> One could wish that debate would not be necessary, that the responsible and full use of Scripture in church and mission would be so evident that only discussions having to do with enhancing effectiveness would be necessary. As many have pointed out, however, the Bible is so variously used, misused and unused that Wells's enjoiner is both appropriate and necessary. In fact, at this late date in my missiological pilgrimage, I have come to believe that, accompanied by prayer, a more serious and strategic use of God's Word has the potential for effecting one of the most significant spiritual breakthroughs in the history of missions .

With that potential in mind, I invite readers to consider certain assumptions and propositions relevant to missionary communication strategy. Perhaps we are in agreement on certain pre-suppositions and, if so, we might also agree on certain conclusions that could revolutionize the way many of us have gone about this all-important business of communicating Christ to the nations.

## Initial Assumptions

Certain basic assumptions undergird the approach to missionary communication being advocated here. Apart from them, we would be more or less free to proceed as we think best. If we accept them as true, however, certain propositions and conclusions would seem to follow necessarily.

*Assumption 1:* As originally inspired and written, the Old and New Testaments constitute the complete, inerrant and authoritative Word of God. Of all words written by men, only those contained in the autographs of Scripture were so inspired and directed by the Spirit of God that together they can truly be called God's Word to mankind. All other words, no matter how true and meaningful, are still man's word and man's word alone.

*Assumption 2:* Concerning the nature of Christianity, it is, as Carl F. H. Henry has suggested, a "book religion" and that book is the Bible.<sup>2</sup> With Herbert Klem we can accept the idea that the Bible can be communicated orally as well as in printed form.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Christians are "people of the book" and that book is the Bible.

*Assumption 3:* With the authors of Scripture and the Lord himself we affirm that it is the Bible that the Holy Spirit uses to bring light, conviction, salvation and Christian maturity. To quote the Psalmist, "The unfolding of Thy words gives light," (Ps. 119:130). The Lord Jesus promised that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11). He does it by means of the Word He himself inspired.

*Assumption 4:* Though Christian missions do many good and commendable things in the world, a priority was established by our Lord himself when he told us to "disciple the *ethne*" by going into all the world, baptizing in his name, and teaching them to observe all he commanded. (Matt. 29:19,20)

Evangelizing and gathering those who believe into New Testament churches is what the late Donald McGavran used to term "Great Commission mission."

*Assumption 5:* Conversion and Christian growth involves a worldview change in which the follower of Christ comes to understand and embrace God's revelation of truth and reality. This assumption requires somewhat more explanation. Thanks to the insights of anthropologists, theologians and others, we have come to understand better the relationship between worldviews (thought systems; assumptions about the nature of the world; the ways in which various peoples "see" the world) and Christian conversion and growth. As Robert Kurka says, worldviews have to do with such areas as "... what is God, or what is ultimate reality? What is the nature of man?... Where is history going. What happens to people at death?..." and so on.<sup>4</sup> Given that understanding it is apparent that the "change of mind" and "renewing of the mind" involved in biblical conversion and Christian maturation is first and foremost a changed worldview. Whatever terms might be used, worldview change is intrinsic to discipleship. Christian values, behavior and institutions emanate from a changed worldview .

I appreciate the fact that the foregoing assumptions—or, at least, the ways in which I have stated them—are open to discussion and debate. But they are integral to what follows. To the degree that they are acceptable to readers the propositions that follow in the next section of this paper would seem

to be axiomatic. Four axioms fundamental to Scripture use and mission strategy follow.

#### Four Axioms

*Axiom 1:* It is the Bible itself, not just its messages, message on even its central message, that must be communicated to the world's peoples.

Insofar as communication without interpretation is possible, it is first of all the biblical text—not our interpretations, summations, or adumbrations—that is at once most needful and effective in the world today. This would seem to be obvious, but it is not at all self-evident when one reviews the ways in which much (most?) Christian communication proceeds. On the one hand, some of us have made this matter of communication unutterably complicated. On the other hand, the vast majority of us have proceeded under the assumption that the biblical Word and the biblical message as we understand and state that message are one and the same thing.

John Stott is helpful at this point. He writes:

The Bible does not just contain the gospel; it is the gospel. Through the Bible God is himself actually evangelizing, that is communicating the good news in the world. You will recall Paul's statement about Genesis 12:3 that 'the scripture...preached the gospel before-hand to Abraham' (Gal. 3:8 RSV). All Scripture preaches the gospel; God evangelizes through it.<sup>5</sup>

William Dyrness makes a similar case.

I will argue...that it is Scripture, and not its "message," that is finally transcultural... What is transcultural is not some core truth, but Scripture—the full biblical context of Christ's work. It is this that must be allowed to strike its own spark in the light of the needs of particular cultures<sup>6</sup>

When one thinks about it, does it not seem quite presumptuous that almost two millennia after God closed his special revelation we come along with our 1300-1350 cubic centimeters of cortical tissue pretty much locked into the cognitive and experiential domains of

one or two cultures, and hemmed in by the limitations of one (or two or three) linguistic codes, propose to theologize and contextualize in ways that purport to improve upon the Word of God by pressing it into molds of our own making?

*Axiom 2:* As is the case with all truly Christian theologizing, the arch or starting point for Christian communication should be the Bible and biblical theology.

This axiom adds yet another dimension to our understanding. Theologians and missiologists of a more liberal bent have often given preference to sociopolitical ideologies, cultural themes and religious histories, and even the struggles of the poor (or a combination of these) as starting points for doing theology and missiology. In spite of our commitment to Scripture, we conservative evangelicals all too often give preference to the findings of social scientists, or to our own devices such as the Four Spiritual Laws, or the "five things God wants you to know," or "redemptive analogies," dynamic-equivalent "transculturations" and so on. All such may indeed have their place, but we desperately need to remind ourselves that Christian theologizing, sermonizing and missionizing do not begin with religious history, human needs, philosophical constructs or cultural distinctives. Rightly understood, these begin with the Bible itself and with biblical theology!

This is extremely important. Merely saying "the Bible says..." is not the same as noting where the text is, turning to it, reading it, and explaining it in context. Biblical theology is not simply theology that is biblical. It is that type of theology that deals with the words and acts of God in history as they are revealed in the Old and New Testaments with a view to displaying their progression, meaning and significance.

As for doing theology, B. B. Warfield insisted that biblical theology in

this sense is the basis of all theologizing and voiced the hope that the time would come when no commentary would be -thought of as complete until "... this capstone [i.e., biblical theology] is placed upon its fabric."<sup>7</sup> What a change Warfield's philosophy would make in current books designed to teach biblical truth.

As for mission and dialogue with the world, though it is unfortunate that Lesslie Newbigen restricts revelation to the form and substance of "biblical events," he nevertheless makes an important point when he insists that our day calls for a new arch for thought, and that arch is to be found in the Bible.<sup>8</sup>

*Axiom 3:* In Gospel communication, the Bible must be allowed to determine its own priorities, set its own agenda, and unfold its own plan.

People of all cultures have ways of deciding what is important, why it is important, and how it is to be considered. Philosophically, they speak of "truth." Ethically, they speak of the "good." Politically they speak of issues. Psychologically, they speak about "needs." Religiously, they speak of "power." Anthropologically, they speak of "values." Ethnically, they speak of "origins."

Now the problem here is not so much that people of all cultures are in all ways and at all times wrong. The problem is that, left to themselves, even sincere and brilliant unbelievers go only so far in thinking God's thoughts after him. In fact, even sincere and brilliant Christians may go only a few steps farther. What is needed always and everywhere—and especially in those cultures long separated from God and his Word—is a new and careful attention to the agenda and priorities already divinely set forth in Scripture.

Walter Kaiser Jr. puts it this way: "Rather than selecting that theological data which strikes our fancy or meets some current need, the text will already have set up priorities and prefer-

ences of its own.”<sup>9</sup> He then goes onto show how these priorities and preferences can be identified.

The importance of this axiom can hardly be overstated. Shortly after the end of World War II, a missionary friend of mine was invited to preach in an historic Congregational Church in Kyoto, Japan. He spoke on idolatry—on the true God and false gods. After the service a deacon approached him and said, “Sensei, I have been a member of this church for fifty years. Never once in all that time have we heard a message on idolatry.” Imagine it! That church was located just a stone’s throw from the throne room where Japan’s “heavenly emperors” have been crowned for centuries. Those people had lived through a war designed to demonstrate the superiority of the gods of Japan over all other gods. And they had never once heard a sermon on idolatry!

We missionaries and pastors tend to set our own agendas and determine our own priorities. And sooner, but usually later, we discover that issues having to do with idolatry, ancestor veneration/worship, homosexuality, divorce, child-rearing, feminism and what have you creep up on us and catch us unawares. Shame on us!

*Axiom 4:* The whole of Scripture—the Bible in its entirety—must be communicated. For decades missions people have stood on the shoulders of theologians and trumpeted Christ’s words, “All authority has been given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore....” For several decades the emphasis in evangelical missions has shifted from “all authority” to “all the *ethne*” (defined as “people groups”). The time may yet come when beleaguered missionaries will find cause to emphasize in a new and meaningful way Jesus’ promise, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

What we should ask ourselves now is this: “What about Jesus’ command to teach them to observe all he com-

manded?” Would not more attention to this particular universal represent more complete obedience and result in more lasting fruit? Scripture—all of it—is profitable and, rightly communicated, makes for adequately equipped people of God. Paul’s point in 2 Timothy 3:16,17 is not so much that all Scripture is *authoritative* as that it is all *profitable*. Why, then, do we stop short of Jesus’ command to teach them to observe all he commanded? Probably because we are intimidated by the breadth and depth of Scripture and fail to realize the fact that the “big story” of Scripture is essential to understanding and owning a Christian worldview. Worldviews, after all, are not a composite of complementary but poorly integrated notions and values. Rather, they are seamless garments with an unbroken pattern. They are blueprints with every feature of the building intact and in place. They are big stories—and stories within that story—with a plot and its resolution, with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

#### Six Corollaries

Before concluding I would like to identify six methods of communicating Scripture that may be considered as corollaries of the above axioms. Each of them is worthy of elaboration that I cannot provide here at this time. They are listed because of their importance to “worldview change with regard to missionary communication” and to encourage attention to other writings that deal with them in more detail.

*Corollary 1:* We should begin by drawing attention to the Bible itself; by a consideration of the kind of book it is; by explaining its importance; by modeling its proper use.

Knowledge of God and his ways does not come by ecstatic spiritual experience as in Hinduism. It does not come by phantasmagoric myths handed down by wise men of the tribe or nation as in Shintoism. It does not come by Talmudic discussions as in modern Judaism. It does not come by mastering a hook and

language of heaven as in Islam. It comes from a humble preaching and hearing, reading and study, of the Bible. So that is where we should begin. (Or, that is where we should gravitate to as soon as possible.)

*Corollary 2:* We should make sure that the chronological unfolding of the plan and precepts of God in Scripture forms the primary context of gospel communication.

In a way, the classic argument as to whether the missionary should begin with Christ and the Gospel (narrowly defined) or begin with God and creation is a moot issue. In reaching unreached peoples close attention to the Christ of the Gospels would quickly refer us back to the God of creation, and careful attention to the Law and the Prophets would sooner or later lead us back to Christ and the Gospel.

*Corollary 3:* We should give precedence to biblical narrative as a form of contextualized communication.

In our culture many think that teaching by relating stories is for children only. And many theologians seem to feel that the narrative form of much of Scripture is incidental to its understanding and communication. Nevertheless, narrative has been the mode by which worldviews have been transmitted and understood by the people of almost all cultures all down through history. Hindus have their stories of Brahma and the World Egg. The Chinese have the story of Pan-Ku. The Japanese have their story of Izanagi and Izanami. Naturalistic evolutionists have their story of the primordial mists from which life somehow emerged. In an important sense it makes little difference whether or not these stories are “true” in the usual sense of the term. In one way or another, they “make sense” to those whose world-view they encapsulate and invigorate!

The God of the Bible revealed his person and plan in much the same way. To be sure, he did not restrict him-

self to narrative, but he did exploit its full potential. How tragic, then, when we neglect that narrative, especially when in the Bible we have not just a story but a true story, not just an interesting story but an absorbing story, and not just another mythological story but an “historical story.”

*Corollary 4:* We should make full use of pictures, drawings, charts, drama and other art forms as aids to an understanding of Scripture.

We are all aware of biases that result from past usages of such things as dispensational charts and grotesque artistic conceptions of Johannine visions. But the fact is that our sophistication can get in the way of effective intra-cultural and intercultural communication in two ways: by over-reliance on electronic media on the one hand, and by underestimating the potential of readily producible charts and drawings—and drama and mime—on the other.

*Corollary #5:* We should encourage the church to function as a “hermeneutical community.”

Members of the local congregation are in the best position to understand the language, rituals, problems and questions that arise from their own culture, especially in missionary situations. Missionaries and pastors, therefore, should gather the members of the congregation; learn from them; and then lead them in an examination of relevant Scripture. This may seem unrealistic to those trained in the intricacies of hermeneutical questions and methods. But basic hermeneutical principles can be taught and modeled even in missionary contexts. And with great promise!

*Corollary 6:* Insofar as possible, we should integrate all learning with a study of the biblical text.

Ralph Winter, William Osborne, James Oliver Buswell III and their colleagues at the U.S. Center for World Missions have done this in a way most

appropriate for our Western world.<sup>10</sup> They have devised a course of study (The World Christian Foundations) that actually gives consideration to geological, historical, philosophical, cultural, linguistic and other relevant writings at appropriate junctures within the framework of a chronological study of the Bible. To replicate the approach in our existing educational institutions in the Western world would not be easy. But for its intended audience in the West, and for many situations in the non-Western world, this approach has unprecedented possibilities.

### Conclusion

Charles H. Spurgeon once said that it is unnecessary to defend the Bible. The Bible is like a lion. Unleash it and it will defend itself. Of course, his statement is an overstatement. We all know that a defence of the Bible is both appropriate and necessary. But Spurgeon made an important point. Because the Bible is indeed the Word of God, its dissemination and proclamation can be expected to yield results quite apart from its defense.

Similarly, Gospel communication may take a variety of forms. We have no quarrel with that. But after all has been said and done, it is God’s Word that is to be made known to all peoples in all cultures. That Word is like a lion. Christian communicators should first of all unleash that lion!

### End Notes

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9. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), pp. 11-12.
10. Cf. Ralph D. Winter, “Radical Breakthrough: Combatting the 2nd Largest Obstacle in Missions.” *Missionary Frontiers Bulletin*, March-April 1994, p. 3.

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# Conversion and Worldview Transformation

*The process of doing theology in a particular setting must be that of critical contextualization in which the culture is studied, then Scripture, and finally Biblical truth and morality are used to judge and correct the culture and its worldview. This is the key to worldview transformation.*

by Paul G. Hiebert

Can a non-literate peasant become a Christian after hearing the Gospel only once? Imagine, for a moment, Papayya, an Indian peasant, returning to his village after a hard day's work in the fields. His wife is preparing the evening meal, so to pass the time he wanders over to the village square. There he notices a stranger surrounded by a few curiosity-seekers. Tired and hungry, he sits down to hear what the man is saying. For an hour he listens to a message of a new God, and something he hears moves him deeply. Later he asks the stranger about the new way, and then, almost as if by impulse, he bows his head and prays to this God who is said to have appeared to humans in the form of Jesus. He doesn't quite understand all of it. As a Hindu he worships Vishnu, who incarnated himself many times as a human, animal, and fish to save humankind.

Papayya also knows many of the 330 million Hindu gods. But the stranger says there is only one God, and this God has appeared as a human only once. Moreover, the stranger says that this Jesus is the Son of God, but he says nothing about God's wife. It is all confusing to Papayya. He returns home and a new set of questions flood his mind. Can he still go to the Hindu temple to pray? Should he tell his family about his new faith? And how can he learn more about this Jesus? He cannot read the few papers the stranger gave him, and there are no other Christians in his village. Who knows when the stranger will come again?

Can Papayya become a Christian after hearing the Gospel only once?

This depends, in part, on what we mean by the term "Christian." If by this we mean that he can be born again and enter the family of God, the answer must be yes. If by this we mean that he understands the Gospel adequately enough to communicate it without essential distortion to others, and knows what it means to live a Christian life, the answer must be no. If we form a church of one hundred Papayyas and no further biblical teaching, the heart of the Gospel will soon be lost. Their traditional worldviews will turn it into another Hindu sect. We see examples of this in the case of Simon the converted sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), the sons of Sceva (Acts 19:11-16), the people of Lystra (Acts 14:8-13) and Malta (Acts 28:3-6)<sup>1</sup>

In planting churches we must differentiate between what is essential in the conversion of new believers, and what is a true understanding of the Gospel and Church in their cultural and historical settings—in other words, what constitutes salvation, and what is the goal of Christian discipleship and maturity. We need to keep both in mind. We need evangelists to lead people to Christ, but if we expect them to grow on their own in Christian knowledge and life without discipling them, they and the church will be weak. We need biblical scholars, theologians and elders to help us understand Scripture accurately and to grow in Christian faithfulness, but without evangelism the church soon dies.

## Cultural Transformation Levels

What must change in Christian conversion and discipleship? Throughout

history missionaries have given different answers to this question. Early missionaries often viewed conversion in terms of orthopraxy—in terms of behavioral changes. For example, from 1542 to 1544 Francis Xavier evangelized the Paravas on the East coast of South India. For baptism he required new converts to recite after him the twelve items of the catechism, the ten commandments, a memorized prayer and a confession. He baptized those who did so, sometimes a thousand at one time. He held Saturday night services to disciple women, and Sunday morning services for men. Many Protestant missionaries assessed Christian faith in terms of public confessions of faith, regular church attendance, abstinence from strong drink and immoral behavior, and wearing clothes.

Certainly we should expect behavioral changes to occur on conversion, and more to follow in Christian growth, but are these sufficient to determine who are Christians and who are not? On the one hand, there may be little change at first in the lives of young converts, and it is not at all clear what changes are definitive characteristics of conversion. On the other hand, many people learn to act like Christians, but lack the personal inner faith necessary for salvation.

Many missionaries began to measure conversion in terms of orthodoxy—in holding correct beliefs. True converts had to affirm the virgin birth, the death and the resurrection of Christ, as well as their lost condition and their dependence on Christ for salvation. Orthodox beliefs are essential in maintaining

the Christian faith over time, but new converts such as Papayya would fail even the most elementary biblical and theological examination. Are they then not saved? On the other hand, if they do know all that is essential to salvation, why stress theological training?

Protestant missionaries sought to lay solid biblical knowledge through translating the Bible into local languages, starting schools to teach people to read, and establishing Bible schools and seminaries to train church leaders. By these they sought to go deeper—to the conversion of the underlying beliefs and attitudes that give rise to behavior. Today missions are emphasizing the need for each new church to do theology and answer the unique questions it faces. Christians in each culture must hear God’s Word for them in their particular cultural and historical contexts.

Learning the truth of divine revelation given us in Scripture—what we call orthodox theology—is an important part of Christian transformation, but is that enough to preserve the faithfulness of the Church over the generations?

In the case of Papayya, it is clear that he needs not only to believe in Jesus Christ, God incarnate, who has died for his sins and saves him from eternal judgment; he must, in time, change his understandings of the nature of the categories and assumptions he uses. His concepts of *devudu*, *avatar*, *papamu*, and *moksha* have only vague resemblances for the concepts of God, incarnation, sin and salvation as presented in the Bible. Papayya uses *devudu* for ‘god,’ but in his worldview gods are finite beings who sin, are often reborn as ants or humans, and ultimately need *moksha* as much as humans. For him *papamu* is to break the moral law of

*karma* which is binding on all beings including the gods, and *moksha* means “salvation,” which consists of release from the weary cycle of rebirths dictated by this law of *karma*, and merger back into the ultimate cosmic field. There are no words to translate these concepts accurately in Telugu. The missionary must begin using words Papayya understands, even if these do not convey fully the Biblical message. The missionary and later on the church leaders must teach Papayya how the very words he uses must be radically redefined for him to understand the truth revealed in Scripture.

Graphic here  
Figure 1  
“Levels of Transformation”

Returning to our original differentiation between conversion and spiritual growth, Papayya can be converted using his old worldview. People hear the Gospel in their languages and cultural contexts, and, through the work of the Holy Spirit, they can make a meaningful response to it. But that worldview must be transformed in the process of spiritual growth and maturity. No humanly constructed worldview is adequate to fully explicate the Gospel. All of them fall short of the worldview we find in Scripture. The Gospel itself challenges all worldviews, and calls for their transformation. There is not enough space here to debate whether there is or is not a “biblical worldview.” My position is that in the Old Testament

God prepared a people to be His witnesses, and a worldview through which He could adequately communicate the Gospel. If the Gospel does not have to do with worldview matters, it remains surface and transitory. Worldview deals with foundational matters. They determine our understandings of reality and truth. To the argument that there are several worldviews in the Old Testament, my response is that worldviews do change over time, but that at the deepest levels they continue over many generations. Just as we modern humans live in essentially a Greek worldview, so the worldview

of Christ and the early Church was built on the growing common understandings of God, sin, sacrifice, salvation and other key concepts in the historical progression of the Old Testament. Christ built on Abraham, Moses and the prophets. He did not introduce *de novo* a totally new worldview.

It is increasingly clear that for true Christianity to continue over the generations there must be a transformation in the world-

views people have (Figure 1). An analogy may help us here. Culture is like an iceberg. Behavior and beliefs are what we see above the surface of the ocean. The worldview is the large hidden mass beneath the surface that holds the whole iceberg up. If we convert only beliefs and behavior, in time the worldview will take the Christian beliefs captive. The result is “Christopaganism.”

### Nature of Worldview

How do we transform worldviews? Before we answer this question, we must examine more deeply the nature of worldviews. Behind the behavior and beliefs of human cultures seem to lie certain “givens” about the way

the world is put together. These include the categories and logic people use, as well as the assumptions they make, about the nature of reality. Three sets of assumptions come into play.

#### *Existential assumptions*

These assumptions provide a culture with the fundamental cognitive structures people use to explain reality. In the West they include such things as atoms, viruses and gravity. In South India they include *rakshasas*, *apsaras*, *bhutamams*, and other spirit beings. In the West we assume that time runs like a straight line from a beginning to an end, that it can be divided into uniform intervals such as years, days, minutes and seconds, and that it never repeats itself. Other cultures see time as cyclical: a never-ending repetition of summer and winter; day and night, and birth, death and rebirth.

#### *Affective assumptions*

Affective assumptions underlie notions of beauty and style, and influence the people's tastes in music, art, dress, food and architecture as well as the ways they feel about themselves and life in general. For example, in cultures influenced by Theravad Buddhism life is equated with suffering. By contrast, in the U.S. after World War II, many people were optimistic and believed that by work and planning they could achieve a happy, comfortable life.

#### *Evaluative assumptions*

These provide the standards people use to make judgments about right and wrong. For instance, North Americans assume that honesty means telling people the way things are, even if doing so hurts their feelings. In other countries, it means telling people what they want to hear, for it is more important that they be encouraged than for them to know the facts.

Taken together, the cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions provide people with a way of looking at the

world that makes sense out of it, that gives them a feeling of being at home, and that reassures them that they are right. Martin Marty calls a worldview the "mental furnished apartment in which one lives." Thus worldview serves as the foundation on which people construct their explicit belief and value systems, and the social institutions in which they live their daily lives. Most people take their worldview for granted and those who challenge it are seen not as wrong but as crazy!

Worldviews are largely implicit. People in a society are often unaware of the way their categories, logic and assumptions shape the way they see their world. Their worldview is what they think with, not what they think about, or, to shift metaphors, worldviews are the glasses through which people look, not what the people look at. Often we become aware of our own worldview only when we live deeply in another culture, and then return to view our own culture through outside eyes, with a different belief and value system.

### **Worldview Comparisons**

One way to see worldviews is to compare one with another. An examination of Papayya's worldview, our Western worldview and the Biblical worldview helps us understand the need for the transformation of both Papayya's and our modern worldviews in planting mature, faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. (See Figure 2 at the end of the article)

This comparison makes it clear that worldviews need to be transformed if the Church as a community of believers is to understand and preserve the truth of God over time. Papayya can be converted in his old worldview, but if his worldview and that of other new converts is not transformed through the processes of discipling and teaching, the Church will soon lose the Gospel and become a form of Christo-paganism in which the Gospel message is distorted

by the categories and assumptions in which it is expressed.

This process of defining the categories, logic and assumptions found in divine revelation is the on-going task of the church. We are part of the worldview we have, but we must continually examine that worldview in the light of Scripture, and consciously work to change its understanding of reality. In this light, the Church must act as a hermeneutical community. It needs Biblical scholars, theologians, pastors, and laity to help it understand the message of the Gospel in its historical and cultural context. The process of doing theology in a particular setting must be that of critical contextualization in which the culture is studied, then Scripture, and finally Biblical truth and morality are used to judge and correct the culture and its worldview. These truths must be taught to new believers so that they grow in a knowledge of God's truth as they begin to walk in righteousness. In the case of Papayya, discipling must begin with teaching him what the Bible teaches about the nature of God, the nature of reality, the meaning and purpose of history, the righteousness in Christ and how we can live it in Him from day to day.

### **End Note**

1. A good example of the subversion of the Gospel is found in Latin America. See Christian Parker. 1996. *Popular Religion and Modernization in Latin America*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

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Figure 2

<b>A Comparison of Three Worldviews</b>		
<b>Indian (Hindu) Worldview</b>	<b>American (Western) Worldview (Traditional Western)</b>	<b>Biblical Worldview</b>
<p>1. <b>Brahman:</b> The ultimate reality is the cosmic energy field. Out of this emerges the gods, humans and worlds. All are under the law of <i>karma</i> which rewards good and punishes evil. Gods and humans are finite and sinful, and are reborn as ants and other creatures. All humans are part of the divine.</p> <p>2. <b>Maya:</b> The natural world has no ultimate reality. It is a world of subjective experiences--a transitory, ever-changing creation of our minds. Truth is found inside ourselves, and is personal and subjective. We gain it by <i>yoga</i> and a flash of insight</p> <p>3. <b>Dharma:</b> Right and wrong depend on a person's place in the cosmic and social order. There is no absolute morality.</p> <p>4. <b>Jati:</b> People belong to different <i>jatis</i> by birth. These castes are hierarchically ranked from high to low. Low caste people should never try to rise in rank, for they are low as a penalty for previous sins. Public life is based on and patron-client relationships. Duty to one's caste obligations and rule by the high castes is the best.</p> <p>5. <b>Moksha:</b> Salvation is to be released from the endless cycle of rebirths and the hardships of life and to merge back into the cosmic Brahman.</p>	<p>1. <b>Natural and Supernatural:</b> The ultimate supernatural being is God. The natural world is autonomous, and is made up of quarks, atoms and other forms of matter and energy. On the supernatural level, God dictates what is good and evil. On the human level, good and evil are culturally defined.</p> <p>2. <b>Empiricism:</b> The natural world is real and orderly. It operates as an autonomous reality according to natural laws. There is a sharp distinction between natural and miracle. Truth can be found through a systematic study of nature.</p> <p>3. <b>Values:</b> People are responsible for building a society on 'self-evident principles such as freedom and respect for the rights of others.</p> <p>4. <b>Individualism:</b> People are autonomous individuals of equal worth and with equal rights, including that of freedom. Self-fulfillment is an unquestioned value. Democracy, in which people chose their own leaders is the ideal form of government. Work relationships are based on contracts between equals. People join together in clubs based on shared interests.</p> <p>5. <b>Salvation:</b> Salvation on earth is to live a comfortable, self-fulfilling life. Success and progress are unquestionably good. They are measured by the ability to produce results. In eternity salvation is to go to heaven when one dies.</p>	<p>1. <b>God:</b> The ultimate reality is God who is eternal, all powerful, and all knowing. Righteousness and love are the main characteristics of God. There is no cosmic law of good and evil which God must obey. God's moral character is reflected in and incumbent on all creation.</p> <p>2. <b>Creation:</b> The natural world is created by God, and is sustained continually by Him. The order in it is "God's habits," not autonomous natural laws. Truth can be found in studying nature, but ultimately it comes to us through divine revelation.</p> <p>3. <b>Morality:</b> God's moral character is reflected in and incumbent on all creation. Sin is disobedience and rebellion against God. The consequence is divine judgment.</p> <p>4. <b>Covenant Community:</b> The individual is fully human only in a community characterized by <i>shalom</i>. Care for the other is valued over self-fulfillment. Righteousness, love, cooperation, sharing, and justice are central moral values. The reign of God is the ideal government. The Church is a spiritual family that seeks to be and model a caring fellowship that pursues God's will for His creation.</p> <p>5. <b>Salvation:</b> Salvation involves the whole person, the human community and creation. It is to be delivered from sin and evil in and through Christ and to be restored to the perfect existence God originally intended for His creation. It involves both this world and the next.</p>

# Towards a Biblical Worldview: Reflections of a South Asian and a North American

by Natun Bhattacharya and Tom Eckblad

In a training exercise we recently held for future missionaries, 28 people were divided into four groups of seven and assigned to a representative cultural group. Each group represented a different region of the world with a list of values that were associated with that region. One group valued change while another valued tradition. One culture valued being masters of the earth's resources while another group took on the value of being in harmony with the earth. Each of the representative groups was given seven values to assimilate in their thinking and then they were asked to view video clips from different parts of the world and project their values into interpreting the video. In other words, they were to change their worldview while seeing the video. It was a very difficult exercise.

As they strained to get outside of their own worldview and into another worldview they felt uncomfortable and frustrated. It was like borrowing someone else's glasses and not being able to bring the world into focus. They worked hard at it but a change in worldview generally does not come about in a drastic moment of change but in a gradual accustoming of the eyes to the light that strikes them. We have to say that worldview generally changes gradually but in some situations, like in a dramatic Christian conversion, a worldview can be substantially altered in a short period of time. However, in this article we would like to examine some of the basic elements of how a person's worldview changes using our personal experiences and how these changes in worldview affect a person's faith and life.

In many mission discussions, worldview is often portrayed as a static view of reality held by a particular people group in the world. There can be the Western worldview, the Hindu worldview, the Muslim worldview, the Chinese worldview, and so on. This approach is very helpful for discussion and comparative insights on different regions of the world and different people groups or cultures. However, there is a trap to be avoided and that is to think that everyone in a specific culture has the same worldview and that this worldview does not change. Worldview is both individualistic and collective, like looking out the same window together but with different glasses on. It is both changing and resistant to change. It is both able to be examined as part of our self understanding, and difficult to really be seen objectively because it is such a part of us. How then can we help ourselves and other missionaries to see our own worldview, to see the worldview of others, and to understand the dynamics and process of a changing worldview among the people with whom we are living and ministering?

The first step is to reflect on one's own personal worldviews and how they have changed over a period of time. In our preparation to write this article the three of us sat down together to discuss how our worldview had changed over the last decade or so. All of us are cross-cultural trainers with Mission Training International and are always helping others to examine their worldviews. What was noted, as seen in the following dialogue, was that our worldviews had changed from our home culture worldview and that this

change had been heavily influenced by our experiences in cross-cultural settings and working on multinational teams. Here are some excerpts from our discussion. The interviewer is Paul Nelson director of Mission Training International (MTI).

**Paul:** Tom, you lived for over 10 years in Latin America and have been focused toward that region for more than 20 years, how has this changed your worldview?

**Tom:** I would say that when I went to South America at the age of 23, my worldview was still in a formative stage. I already had a strong view of spiritual realities, such as, evil spirits, wrestling in prayer, and the conscious presence of the Lord. But these areas became a daily living reality in Bolivia, and in a much more sharper focus.

**Paul:** How did this sharper focus on spiritual realities come about?

**Tom:** There were two major factors during our initial years in Bolivia. The first was that the people with whom we were living and ministering were much more involved in this area. Whether it was the tribal group who believed in the spirit of the bird god, or the highland people who believed in mother earth or the syncretism of a mixed Catholic and folklore religion, I was always living and ministering among people with a totally different worldview than I had been accustomed to. This daily interaction with a different worldview led to the second factor that brought about change, which was being forced to look at Scripture and seeing how it spoke to these issues. There was a lot of personal struggling on my part during our first term to have a

## Towards a Biblical Worldview

biblical worldview, and what I realized was that though I couldn't simply adopt the people's worldview with whom I was working, I certainly had a lot to learn from them about seeing spiritual realities from a different perspective.

**Paul:** Was a change about spiritual realities the only thing that changed in your worldview?

**Tom:** No, a second major area was in personal relationships and material wealth. Though I had not grown up in a wealthy family I didn't understand real poverty until I lived in Latin America. We had one mother offer us her baby because she couldn't afford to feed him. Physical need was a constant, daily issue; many times involving life and death issues. And yet the depth of intimate, caring relationships was so fulfilling in spite of these conditions, or maybe because of them, that my worldview about material things and relationships was deeply affected.

**Paul:** What was the change that you saw in your worldview in these areas?

**Tom:** I guess the best way to describe it was my change in my view of man. To view each individual as an opportunity to build a relationship. Below the surface of titles, education, material belongings, and cultural customs there is a person to get to know and enjoy. The Bolivians invited me into their lives and in doing so showed me a window on the world I had never looked through before. I know that I filtered what I saw through my own set of glasses, but I would have never seen the world through a new window if they had not invited me into their lives.

**Paul:** So a big factor in changing your worldview is to relate deeply with others of a different worldview?

**Tom:** Yes, and I found out that it doesn't come naturally but with a lot of stretching and pain.

**Paul:** Is it necessary for all missionaries to go through the stretching and pain in order to examine and change their worldview?

**Tom:** It is necessary to go through it in order to communicate the Gospel in such a way that it will touch the people with whom the missionary is working in a deep way. Dr. Wilson Awasu, from Ghana, who was on the MTI staff used to talk about deep level conversion. A conversion that reaches down into a person's personal and cultural worldview and dynamically and dramatically changes it. Without communication on that level we will have surface conversions without a deep level or true biblical conversion.

**Paul:** What kind of stretching and pain are you talking about.

**Tom:** The stretching and pain of constantly going back to Scriptures every time my worldview is challenged. And it will be challenged a lot if you interact deeply with others from other cultures. The first tendency when our worldview is challenged is to back off and defend our position or to get so busy that we don't have to interact with another worldview. It is the natural reaction we all have when challenged. What we do in our training programs when a person feels like their worldview is being challenged is to invite them to go to Scriptures and draw out the eternal principles that God has revealed in His Word and then to interact with other worldviews. It is hard work but worth it.

**Paul:** Natun, how has your worldview changed since 1972 when you became a Christian from an orthodox Hindu background in South Asia.

**Natun:** I practised pantheistic monism as a way of life. This is a radically different from Christian Theism as possible. I grew up believing that god is one, infinite, an impersonal reality. In other words, god is cosmos. All that exists are part of that ultimate reality and are one with it. If anything that is not god seems to exist, it is an illusion. My pilgrimage in worldview began when I learned from the Bible that God is infinite, yet personal, transcendent, and

yet immanent. God created the universe, 'from nothing'. It is not an extension of Himself. This transformed my outlook concerning my surroundings and how I viewed God.

**Paul:** You have now lived and ministered in the North American cultural context for the last 17 years. How has this further impacted your worldview?

**Natun:** After my conversion to Christianity, I lived and worked in India for several years. The person who brought me to Christ and influenced me most was a South Indian Christian from Karala. Initially, I attended an Indian church, I fellowshiped with other Indian believers, and became acquainted with stories of indigenous Christian believers. When I was first introduced to North Americans and other Westerners as part of an Operation Mobilization team, and later in Bible college, I thought that as Christians our worldviews would be exactly the same, but soon I discovered that our presuppositions about the basic make up of our world, about reality, were not always the same.

**Paul:** What were the differences you noticed?

**Natun:** I noticed that we had different assumptions which we grew up with. Since arriving in the States, I have wrestled further with this issue. During the last few years, I sought to explain some of the differences in our assumptions. First, various worldviews other than the Christian theism, such as naturalism, existentialism, Greek philosophy, and more recently, eastern religions, have been superimposed upon the Western world. These worldviews have influenced the way of life for both Christians and non-Christians. Secondly, both non-Western Christians, such as South Asians like myself, and my North American brothers and sisters are journeying toward a fuller understanding of God's worldview as revealed in the Bible. We both tend to visualize it through our own imperfect lenses of understanding.

We have not yet reached a perfect understanding.

**Paul:** What are some of the areas in the North American worldview which you have struggled with in your life and ministry?

**Natun:** In my interaction with the North American worldview I have thought through a number of different questions. Some of the questions I have are, 'Is the mechanistic worldview of the West, which encourages an analytical approach in which life is compartmentalized, and all things must be comprehended, consistent with the teachings about the mysteries of God which are sometimes unfathomable? Is the growing emphasis on materialism and physical well being a result of naturalism or a result of a false understanding of our capacities as humans made in the image of God? Has the extreme individualism and self reliance in Western society been born out of the human tendency for self-sufficiency? Are not human relationships more important than the overemphasis on time and task? Does the West's overemphasis on the visual world undermine unseen spiritual realities? Does it distract us from our perspectives on eternity and spirituality? Does it make us focus on only the present material world?' As I have wrestled with some of these issues, I sought a fuller understanding of a Biblical worldview standing in between my own former background of pantheistic monism and the various worldviews that have shaped the contemporary North American culture. I think my understanding of a Biblical worldview has deepened with exposure to worldviews outside of those I grew up with and encountered when I first became a Christian. I believe a cross-cultural communicator of the Gospel, whether a North American or a non-Westerner, benefits from taking this kind of personal journey and becomes effective in ministering to people of other cultures.

**Paul:** Tom, do you feel as the world grows smaller in communication and transportation that we will be moving toward a more homogeneous worldview?

**Tom:** I think that we have to be careful to be maintain a view of how deep a person's and a society's worldview really goes. With short-term missions, doing missions in English rather than the mother tongue and the great interchange of leadership from all parts of the world we can begin to think that we all have the same worldview. A lot of the cultures of the world are buying into the material comforts of the Western world without necessarily buying into a materialistic view of the world. It reminds me of seeing a little boy in the middle of a South American jungle wearing a Denver Broncos teeshirt. And then a few hours later being in a major Latin American city surrounded by computers and cell phones. Our North American tendency will be to interpret another person's worldview based on their material possession. Worldviews around the world are changing but we must be careful not to equate material change with a change in a person's worldview.

**Paul:** Natun, you have talked about your personal pilgrimage in influencing your worldview, do you think the worldviews in both the West and the East are radically changing too?

**Natun:** I think changing worldviews is a two way street. The East has been influenced immensely by the West because of technological advancement and international communications. There is an increasing tendency to adopt Western materialism, individualism, and other characteristics of the predominant worldviews of the West, especially among the younger generation in the East. Therefore, at least in some way, the worldview is changing in the East. At times, the change is on a deep level. During my last trip to India, I recently witnessed many manifes-

tations of Western influence on the indigenous culture. Likewise, Eastern mysticism, new age philosophy, and pluralism have contributed to the development of a highly syncretic and eclectic worldview among many in the West. Thus what seemed to be such an abnormal worldview in the past, is no longer viewed that way because these thoughts have become part of the West's contemporary culture. Over the last few years I have increasingly seen this to be more so. This two way change creates many implications for the communication of the Gospel in both the East and the West.

**Paul:** Having discussed your perspectives on worldviews, and being a bi-cultural person, how has worldview changed your ministry?

**Natun:** I have, above all, learned to be sensitive to who I am ministering to. Sometimes missionaries have a comfortable tendency of "one approach fits all". My systematic theological training did not really equip me to be sensitive. However, as I have listened to people and dialogued with other Asians, North Americans, and people from other minority cultures in the U.S., I have come to appreciate how each people group holds a unique set of beliefs and assumptions consciously and subconsciously about the world around them. The result of this persistent encounter has made a profound impact on me. I am convinced today more than before that relevant contextualization of the Gospel produces eternal results for the Kingdom of God.

In our discussion together we realize that worldview is so deeply ingrained in us it is as natural as breathing. We do not stop and examine our actions, beliefs, and social systems in the light of our worldviews but it is always there with us. Nevertheless, our worldview provides a solid framework for explaining the life surrounding us. A person really cannot totally reflect on nor fully comprehend any worldview other

## Towards a Biblical Worldview

than his or her own. However, their understanding is greatly increased as they step out for a while from their own worldview into any person's worldview. In our own experience we can affirm this: As we undertake this journey into understanding, questions about reality, truth, knowledge, human beings, and life's beginning arise within us. Though some worldviews have a complete or consistent answer to some of these questions nevertheless, all reveal logical and truth intrinsic flaws. What makes the Biblical worldview genuine is not only the historical reality of God's revelation to us, but our personal discovery of the grandeur of God in our own pilgrimage. Here our working framework in worldview is not based on religion nor on a conscious or vague philosophizing, but rather on the personal God who is infinite, omniscient, sovereign, transcendent, immanent, full of goodness and love, true and consistent toward all peoples and cultures everywhere in all His dealing with mankind!

### Conclusion

Communicating what worldview is and how it affects missionaries as they seek to share the Gospel with their people is an integral part of the continuing dialogue the MTI staff carry on. In addition to the theoretical discussion on worldview there is also the realization that each needs to be constantly reflecting on their own worldview and nurturing a strong desire that our own personal perception of reality would be shaped by a strong Biblical worldview.

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