

## The ABC's of a Christian Worldview

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Two introductory comments are necessary in preparation for the following discussion. A, B and C are only the first letters of the alphabet, inviting us to continue further and to discover those remaining letters needed to write, to read and to understand. This paper also only lays a foundation. It is in no way a complete treatment of the given subject. Secondly, I deliberately work against an assumption in many circles that a Christian worldview must start with Christ. It does so, of course, for Christ is the Alpha and Omega. Through Him all things were made. He is the Word, who is God and with God.

However there are two reasons, why I choose to abstain from starting with Jesus Christ. First, I am a human being, who has come to recognize Him in that place and honor as a result of a Biblical perspective, not as a presupposition.

Secondly, in our present climate, a Christian worldview too readily separates Jesus from the Father, the New Testament from the Old, and spirituality from the rational and physical order of creation. That is the only stage for life, thought and the reality of God and Man. I want to avoid a modern embrace of the old Gnostic heresy. A worldview must view the world, in which everybody has to live, as it really is. Only a God who respects creation, with Man as a distinct part in it, could also help us see ourselves and Him truthfully.

The discussion of a Christian worldview must focus on more than the views of a Christian. It should be a discussion about truth and falsehood, not a collection of opinions, experiences and testimonies of personal faith. We are reminded of Jesus' prayer that we should be sanctified by the truth (Jn. 17:17), not by faith, experiences or community in a story.

We recently read to Isaac from a geography book used about 40 years ago. It introduces fourth graders to the world we live in. It opens up the diverse aspects of the physical world of our globe and the way people live and work on the different continents. The book lists distinctions to be noticed on a journey around the world. We learn to observe and to discern important aspects of our physical and human reality.

Stones and soil remain the same at all times. They do not have the dynamic of biological life, which involves some change in animals and plants. These change according to known patterns and without variation. People are different again. They change by choice. Animals are born with their coats of fur or feathers; people create their covering with tremendous variety. Animals build nests typical of each specie, while human beings have to build houses with their creative efforts.

Many people in different parts of the world follow historic, communal patterns. Yet others invent variety, make improvements and experiment with alternatives in the face of unacceptable conditions. Some build their houses themselves, limited by their skill and accepted custom. Others hand the task over to a specialist for a more solid, spacious, and varied structure. By that choice, more is accomplished by a few, while others are set free to refine their own skills in turn. They do not follow an "again-and-again" mentality, but explore alternatives, improvements and individuality.

The book not only introduces the reader to a wider world, but a world of distinctions. There are structural distinctions, typical for each climate, instinct pattern and template. But in human beings, most of the distinc-



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September, 1999.

tions reveal a mindset, chosen attitudes and priorities. There is a world which can be understood as facts and figures. But that same world is changed by people who view it through their ideas about what they believe: about themselves, about the world around them and the place and purpose for their individual lives.

### Distinctly Human

The differences express what is essential to human beings. Our unique distinctive as people is the reality of choice, of ideas about life and the real world. Our choices express both individuality and imagination (Gen. 1:18). In addition, the areas and the content of choices express both freedom and bondage: freedom to be a person, not an animate object; and bondage in submission to tribal and natural patterns.

People live in a variety of philosophically ordered landscapes with practical social, economic, and moral results. They construct their lives as a reflection of their worldviews. Different ideas about the basic building blocks of life have their source in people's minds, where they interact with and interpret the events and observations, the joys and pains of life itself. Hinduism or materialism, fatalism or nihilism are not natural instincts. They are views created in response to the basic questions man has always asked in the context of his reality.

Human beings are not programmed naturally like animals, but choose to live according to insights and priorities. They choose their various perspectives about all of life and follow principle assumptions about the human existence.

### Visions and Insights

A worldview is what a person believes about himself in the objective world around him. In distinction to matter or biology, to stones or animals, people act, create and choose on the basis of their worldview. We are not instinctual beings. Kant suggests as the distinguishing mark of man his autonomy, his ability to make choices. The Bible describes us as beings in the image of God; able and constrained to make moral, intel-

lectual and sensual choices. We agree with this, because of a fundamental correspondence between these proposals and our own humanity. We discover our distinct humanness by usage and in our imagination, our feeling, sensitivity, knowledge, aspiration, our recognized self-deception and our hopes. How we interpret events and define happenings will be the primary influence on our behavior, our pleasures, our self-judgments and our sense of purpose.

### Corrective Glasses

A worldview is like a pair of glasses, by which we put into focus a host of impressions. Without glasses to correct our vision, we see something, but not clearly. With the wrong glasses we again see something, which may be as wrong or inadequate as doing without them. Neither will serve us well in the struggle to make sense out of life's many events.

A worldview is more than an opinion or a personal experience. It is the conclusion I come to after much doubt, many impressions, an honest desire to understand and to make sense out of the pieces in my life. It may be imposed on others, to whom it becomes a habit and a basis of association.

### Childhood Discoveries

We started to build such a worldview as very young children, when we begin to figure out the world we live in. Who is the face I associate with pleasure? How can I descend the stairs without being hit by the floor coming up against me? How is language used? What is the difference between people and things? What is true? What is the difference between a story and a real event? Why do bad things happen, even when I did not have a choice?

Later questions about right and wrong, about identity and meaning, about the individual and the group are added to this. Our literature and films are full of these questions, without always being able to give enough satisfying, realistic and coherent answers.

I mentioned the distinctions between people from the geography book. The uniqueness of the human person is found everywhere. People are different from all other things. But the encouragement to responsible creative action is central only to the Biblical worldview. People in other parts of the world are not pushed into that understanding, because they see the life of human beings through different glasses. The real difference is not racial or genetic, it is not primarily a difference of age or schooling.

At heart, the difference is one of mind set and true information. There are opposing ideas about human existence in the real world. Materialist and religious frameworks repress honest curiosity and a seriousness about finding true, not necessarily comfortable, answers. Both enclose the person in a situation without alternative. The former reduces man to a part of a machine, the latter binds man to the will of (the) god(s).

For each person the difference results from the choice of doubt, humility and confidence or belief, arrogance and fear: Do I doubt the finality of my understanding and therefore continue to seek sufficient answers; or do I believe that I already know and need no adjustments? It is the difference between being closed or open, between seeking to find and believing to have found for all situations a personal answer.

### Body of Ideas

We do well to consider the body of ideas, which have enabled some people in the human geography to stand out as landmarks. We will then very quickly perceive an obvious overlap between the influence of Biblical Christianity and the thinking, social arrangements and practical ways to cope with life in many distinct contexts. The ability of people to live physically and intellectually rather than to survive is the result. They understand themselves to be individuals rather than part of a human chain. They will not be forever caught in the cycle of "again-and-again" of nature,

fate or tradition so characteristic of other worldviews.

### Accessible Knowledge

From the very beginning the Bible honors the need of man to know the world we live in. It speaks in a language common to us about a world we are familiar with. It places its propositions and descriptions squarely in the playing field of human existence. It honors our need to know with verifiable information and rewards our doubt with evidences. It singles out real people and addresses us a human being in the image of God, the eternal person, who created a real world with people in it. As they communicate in language, God also addresses them in real language. God came to His creation. He does not call us elsewhere. Repentance is a change of mind and practice, not of location or constitution.

The Biblical worldview starts with the reality and relatedness of both the physical and the metaphysical realms. We live in a world of fact and meaning. Both God and man exist as real persons, with minds, language, rationality and ethics in a continuum. What is true to God is also true to man. God made, acts into and speaks about the real world. From the creation of a real world by an eternal Trinity, to the description of the lives of man made in God's image as male and female persons, the Bible gives glasses to bring us in touch with true reality. The Bible is the script which explains the prior actions, real characters and final ending of what we have in our moments on stage in the human existence.

This perspective avoids several problems often faced with enormous, but unrewarded heroism elsewhere. Without these glasses of the Bible, most people around the world err about in unexamined obedience to an inevitable fate, under the dictate of nature or driven by history. They live out the answers given by non-Biblical religions, including the religion of atheism.

There, the believer is one who is not allowed to ask. His fears are fed, not removed. His ignorance is blessed, not

replaced with insight. His present situation remains unresolved. Any real life, he is told, starts later and somewhere else, if at all. Each person is wrapped in a web of sayings, patterns and repetitions. Any human experience is a part of an inevitable normality, of tradition or of the will of god. Man is not in the arms of a loving God, but like a stone in the river bed of nature and time.

### Unified Field of Knowledge

In our own historic and cultural context we have largely lost these Biblical glasses. The Enlightenment denied the possibility of clear and rational speech from God, of revelation. Subsequently, even Christians have arrived often at the same point with an emphasis on personal faith and experience as revelation at the expense of an objective truth.

Inevitably, this leads to three tragic dilemmas. First, some people ground all of life in the scientific world of facts, but have no answer to values and meaning. This is the positivists' dilemma which places hope in salvation through material progress and positivist law. Technology and lawyers will solve the remaining problems. It is easy to recognize that both may be an aid to man, but never his security.

Secondly, others focus on human imagining, romantic ideals and personal truth without a need for a credible certainty. The despair of total relativism is avoided by a belief in one's story of faith, in the goodness of man, the power of a dream and of wishful thinking. Against all observable evidence in the real world of history, they affirm the good will of themselves and others. They believe in their own reason naturally, but lack any realization of the need for an objective reality, an original definition to both Man and to what is good.

A third group replaces the Biblical glasses by the search for a real and meaningful life through self-sacrifice. The idealists in the history of revolutionary movements across Europe, Asia and America are forerunners of the modern despair found in the idealis-

tic consensus politics of the present. Whether the few in Paris of 1789 or the many in the UN today, their effort gives neither definition nor direction to the good, the righteous or the human.

Scientism, Romanticism and modern Relativism are the result of a denial of the Biblical worldview. Without the information that things and morals were defined from the beginning, and binding for both God and Man, modern man lacks a substitute and becomes visionary. Without the information of perfection lost through the Fall and its effects on all of life, modern man has only plans and programs for an U-topia ("good" or "no" place!) to hope for, to promise or even to impose.

### God, then Man

The Biblical worldview starts with the affirmation of a moral, factual and rational world, created by the infinite-personal God. God made a world of things in their distinctions (Gen. 1-3) and man in his image, male and female (Gen. 1:27). Sexuality is a part of that image in both. It can only be found in the relationship between a man and a woman. There is no homosexual who is not the child of a man and a woman.

There is only one human race. Eve is taken from Adam, and there is no man who is not born from a woman. All racism is unfounded and repulsive.

Man is a rational and physical being. He chooses to create, to love and to obey. He can also believe what is not real. In God's unfinished creation man is the responsible regent. He must use his mind and body together. He is not a soul, but a person with a body. Man uses language to communicate, and by means of language God communicates with him.

The covenant between man and God has two partners. Both can hold the other to their promise and obligations. God's goodness is a statement of character, not of power. Only when man's creativity confuses between what is real and what is imaginary, sin with its destructive effects

enters the good creation. And God grieves, battles on and works an additional eighth day. In his love he gives his Son Jesus a sacrifice for our sins. We must accept that gift of a substitute and receive pardon for our wrong. Christ's work gives us new life. The Holy Spirit seals it forever towards its fullness in the future.

### Moral Universe

The eternal persons of God make the world a moral place. Not all things, nor all choices, are the same to God. He has a distinct character. His creation has characteristics. His laws affirm the shape of the created universe, warn against evil and call to resistance. They are not symbols of power, an authority demanding obedience. There are certain things which God cannot do, others which man cannot invent differently.

To sin is to be foolish in the face of the real world. It is to believe the inventions of our minds rather than the facts and their definition in the real world. Adam could not become like God, being a creature himself. He could not pretend to love God and disregard the mark of obedience, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

### Tragic World

The Bible describes the tragedy of life in a fallen world. It is no longer the way it was made in the beginning. All areas of life are cracked, damaged and in need of repair. Nature itself is no longer a model for health or cohesion. God does not identify with normality. He is not the author of evil in any form. A critical perspective, informed by God's word about all areas of life, is not limited to the spiritual realm. All of life is to be evaluated. Even God is to be argued with in light of the gap between reality and the character of God. Moses, Job, Jeremiah, Habakkuk and Jesus are powerful examples of such an approach. God rewards them richly and with passion.

Death is a result of sin, not a normal part of a life cycle. It is to be opposed in any of its ugly masks. Genesis 3 gives a number of expanding circles of death after the Fall.

They need to be resisted and to be repaired. Adam and Eve were called to work on their marriage and on themselves. They were not to despair, but accept the promise of the Messiah. They were called to work with their hands against the thorns and thistles in the field, to have children against the return to dust of their own broken bodies. The whole Bible is the account of God's battle for our redemption and resurrection, and of man's wise and foolish choices in history.

### Factual Reality

This worldview has very practical consequences in all areas of life. It demands a respect for facts and evidences against the resignation to mere opinions. What actually is true, what happened and who did it are more important than how people feel about themselves. Accurate knowledge and a factual ethic are more important than feeling good about oneself, or believing something.

The scientific search, criminal investigation, a jury system and an enterprising mind set are all linked to this perspective. Truth matters more than my feeling about truth. I must argue with reality, not merely notice it. I must think rationally in a world of cause and effect, of choice and consequences, of lasting results to existential choices. We are not at home in this world, yet what we do effects our life in it. We must seek what is good in a world that is far from good. We are called to live by God's word, not by bread alone (Deut. 8:3).

### Priority of the Human

The Biblical worldview gives dignity to each person, sick or well, old or young, liked or not. Even the enemy is to be loved as a person. We do not lie about abilities and handicaps. We reward differently effort and accomplishment. We give a different value to life than to death, to beauty than to ugliness, to music than to noise. We respect what people feel, but distinguish this from what is true and noteworthy.

There are no unwanted children in this perspective, no need for a death with dignity. There are no roles fixed to associate

with importance. Human rights are given from the beginning. They are founded on the definition of man and woman. They are not granted by others on the basis of accomplishment or pity. You do not become a person, since you are one. For, anything conceived in a woman's womb is a person. There is no basis for discrimination on the level of human identity and worth, for we are of one human race. Even the smallest sin is sin, and we all fail perfection. We are to extend grace to all, for they never lose their face.

### Whole People

Each person exists as body and soul. In contrast to the Gnostic view, the whole person is valuable. Even the dead in Christ wait for the bodily resurrection, without which we have no hope. We encourage medical intervention to save the whole person. We protect both body and mind and soul against decay. This life, now, is the only one we have today in an unending eternal life. We do not wait to become someone other, but to be changed from all brokenness.

### Individuality

The Bible affirms our individuality, each unique name. We sign our efforts, we single out criminals and heroes. This is a marked contrast to both annihilation and reincarnation, where finally there is no individual person.

Living in a defined world as creative persons, we require wisdom, knowledge and commitment to be truthful, virtuous and free persons. Being spiritual is characterized by more critical discernment rather than less. We add to knowledge in order to be free from the dictates of circumstances, the tyranny of nature or the exploitation of our longings by coercive utopians. We therefore educate, train people in critical thinking.

### Arguing for the Sake of Truth

We argue with God and man. We know of Jehovah and Ba'al, of good and bad kings, just and unjust judges, true and false

prophets. Therefore we are not surprised when we need more information and tools for examination. We are suspicious of any finality, of any call to blind acceptance. We reason with God and people, including ourselves. We are blessed, because Thomas doubted for us (Jn. 18). We do not trust merely one source of information. We work for an educated, critical public with many different sources of information, because of the sinfulness of man and the attraction of sin, which always comes in the guise of a false hope.

We read God's word with an open mind. We need to know, but we also understand that all knowledge is the result of hard work. We discuss, listen, oppose, and dig in order to be less confused, less prone to merely believe that we already know.

### History

The worldview of the Bible gives historic responsibility to each person. History is not a book already written. Men and women significantly affect each person's life. We live in the results of Adam and Eve's choices. We are poorer because of sin and richer because of some creations by the hands of others left for us to enjoy.

### Work

The Bible gives dignity to all types of work. Through it each person expresses his freedom, his imagination, his purpose. It is not a curse, though often it gets done in the sweat of the brow. The creativity and accomplishment are the reward, our stamp in the flow of things. We learn to excel, partially also in order to stand against the results of the fall. We serve through our abilities and skills. Christ served us in a task, which he alone was qualified to accomplish.

### Public Life

We work also to restrain evil, lawlessness and death. The Christian works with governments to facilitate human existence. We argue for better laws as a framework for free human beings. We hunger after truth for the sake of peace. Our concern is jus-

tice, in which each person is given the experience of the results of his choices, for good and for bad.

### Natural Evil

The Biblical worldview also demands resistance to natural evil. All of God's creation is affected by the Fall. Nature brings storms at sea and famine in the land. There are locusts and floods. We do not take nature as a closed book or a perfect model. Man is to maintain dominion in a fallen world, in order to give a corrective shape to a broken creation. God made the world to be inhabitable (Is 45:18). The Bible sees the future as a time when each man will be able to eat the harvest, sitting under his fig tree.

### Stewardship

We are not children of nature, but of the living God. Our stewardship is informed by God's word, not by natural resources, natural events or chains or natural interaction. We are not stewards of the status quo, but of God and man, to honor the creator of good things as well as to facilitate the life of our neighbor. We are not part of an earth cycle, but men and women with eternal life.

We do not approve of the survival of only the fit, but care also for widows and orphans, the stranger in the land. His physical needs and his intellectual/moral/cultural needs are also to be met and false views to be corrected lovingly.

Only a Christian worldview has ever put enough food on the table. Only on that background have people worried about species threatened by extinction. Only in that context has anyone ever found a justification for human rights.

### Creative Arts

A Christian worldview is also the source for beauty. Human life is more than a passage through time along a program. Individuals mark themselves as individuals. Personal taste, colorful experimentation, alternate form of language and creative imagination are all used to express the hi-

larity of human life as well as the burden by all means to tell the truth.

### Universal Truth

Finally, the Biblical worldview stands and falls with its truthfulness. That is a matter of verification. What the Bible speaks about, must be able to be confirmed in human beings anywhere around the world. Find a human being who is not a person, who does not think or choose, and you have come to the end of Christianity. Biblical truth must be universal, which is both a burden and an obligation. That truth is not limited to tribal territories, sexual characteristics or degrees of knowledge. It is not a truth for time, but must itself last forever to be true.

It must be verifiable in the most basic arena of daily human existence. And that it is. God became flesh and dwelt among us. Many saw him, touched him and told about him. He is the way, the truth and the light. Where Pilate had given up in his question: "What is truth", Jesus gives an historic answer in his own person, who rose from the dead and invited his disciples to breakfast. Then he ascended, was seen at the right hand of the Father, and has promised to come again in like fashion in real history.

### Conclusion

The Biblical worldview is not an invitation to a set of glasses which hide the real world from my eyes. They rather enable man to face the facts of reality in their precision, definition and color. With them, human existence has an explanation that ennobles people, answers their questions and lays the foundation for living hope. Without these glasses, the blind are still leading the blind.... They are unable to feed the hungry, to give justice to the oppressed, to know about a heavenly father, the forgiveness from sin and a continuing individual life with meaning.