

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

by Robert C. Walton

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW I

Introduction - What is a Worldview?

Today Christians live in a world where we seem to be overwhelmed by competing ideas about how the universe is to be understood and interpreted. No longer may Christians blithely assume that all to whom we speak share our fundamental understanding of the nature of reality. Because of the changes in the culture of the Western world that produced this situation, it is important for us as believers to consider, not only the foundation of our understanding of the universe, but also the alternatives espoused by those around us. Only then will we be able to live in a fully biblical manner. With renewed minds (Romans 12:2) we are not only able to take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ (I Corinthians 10:5), but also to give an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope we have (I Peter 3:15).

In pursuing the topic before us, we will begin, after today's introductory material, with an examination of the Christian worldview and its major components. As we look at Creation, Fall, and Redemption, we will not only examine such key questions as our assumptions about the nature of God, the nature of man, and the meaning of history, but will also see the implications of these fundamental assumptions for everyday living. Then we will turn to an examination of a sampling of non-Christian worldviews. During this central segment of the course, we will seek to understand how many around us view reality, not only for the purpose of contrasting these worldviews with biblical Christianity, but also because we need to know how others think in order to communicate with them effectively. Finally, we will spend our last few weeks considering the outworkings of the Christian worldview in our perceptions of contemporary society and the decisions of our daily lives.

DEFINING OUR TERMS

Before we can do any of these things, however, we need to understand what a worldview is. While it is true that a worldview consists of what a person believes, we are talking here about a special kind of beliefs. A worldview involves a set of *presuppositions* - assumptions about the nature of reality. Several things should be noted about the assumptions that constitute a worldview.

First of all, because they are assumptions, they are not subject to proof, either rational or empirical. Instead, they provide the framework within which every person determines what constitutes proof. Thus those who argue about things like the existence of God and the existence of the soul are engaging in a futile exercise in the sense that no evidence, no matter how convincing, is likely to alter the fundamental framework within which a person understands the world in which he lives. While a Christian looks at the brilliant display of a winter sky in the country and exclaims that "the heavens declare the glory of God," the atheist will look at the same evidence and remark about the wonders of the evolution of the universe.

Secondly, though presuppositions are not subject to proof, they may nonetheless be evaluated on the basis of certain simple criteria. Francis Schaeffer noted that there are three questions by which worldviews can and should be judged - Is your worldview internally consistent? Does it correspond with what we see in ourselves and in the world around us? Can it be lived out in the decisions of daily life? Thus discussions about the fundamental questions of life need not boil down to dueling presuppositions - "We each have certain unprovable assumptions about things, so we can't

expect to discuss these matters in any meaningful way” - but rather can lead us to test our understanding of the world against meaningful criteria. In this regard, the Christian can proceed with confidence. Because God made us and made the world in which we live, only a Christian worldview successfully meets these criteria.

Thirdly, we must understand that the presuppositions that constitute a person’s worldview deal with the most fundamental questions of human existence. The questions that have preoccupied philosophers throughout the ages - Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? Is there a God? How can I know anything? What is truth? What is beauty? How can I tell right from wrong? Does life have any meaning? - these are the questions with which a worldview concerns itself.

It is important to note that God’s revelation to us is given in the context of a worldview. Certain assumptions are made in the Scriptures, with no thought of proof, that serve as the foundation of the truth God has given us. The most important of these, of course, is the existence of God Himself (Genesis 1:1; Hebrews 11:6). Scripture also makes assumptions about the existence of external reality (Genesis 1:1 again), the nature of man (Genesis 1:26), and the purpose of history (Romans 8:18-21; Philippians 2:10-11). These are simply stated, and are never argued or supported with empirical evidence.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A WORLDVIEW

Worldviews matter. Our tolerant age would tell us they don’t - that any set of beliefs is equivalent to any other set of beliefs (unless it makes exclusive truth claims, of course) - but it isn’t very difficult to see what difference a worldview makes. Take, for instance, the question of the existence of right and wrong. Do you think it would make a difference to you if your next-door neighbor assumed that morals didn’t exist? Or what about the matter of human nature - if man is essentially good and society is a corrupting force, your neighbor would not only not discipline his children, but might well blame you for their misbehavior! We could multiply examples, but that isn’t the purpose of our introductory lesson. We will encounter many of these examples in the weeks that follow. For now, it is enough for us to realize that worldviews make a difference in everyday behavior.

It is worth noting, of course, that because worldviews make a difference in everyday behavior, the lives of Christians should be different from those of their neighbors. If this too often is not the case, we must ask ourselves whether the worldview we proclaim is really the one that controls our decisions, or if we in reality espouse the worldviews of our neighbors while giving lip-service to a biblical understanding of life. Are we worshipers of idols who purport to be worshipers of God? We need to be aware of the constant temptation to fall into the life patterns that dominate the age in which we live.

THE EXAMINED LIFE

One of the great truths about worldviews is that everyone has one; the other is that most people have no idea what their worldviews are. Because worldviews consist of a set of assumptions, most people rarely give them any thought and live essentially unexamined lives. One of the

consequences of this is that, for most people, their worldviews are neither pure nor consistent. As we examine a variety of worldviews later in the course, we will find that American society today is influenced by all of them, and that people seem perfectly capable of switching smoothly from one to the other without ever noticing that they are contradicting themselves. Christians who live unexamined lives are subject to the same problem. If our thoughts, and thus our decisions, are not consciously subjected to the Word of God and the glory of Christ, we will slide from one worldview to another as it fits the need of the moment and never realize that we are doing so. Thus an examined life becomes important for everyday living. Our study of a Christian worldview and the contrasts between it and other worldviews thus serves a practical purpose - that of subjecting every thought to obedience to Christ and enabling us to be more consistently faithful to God in our daily decision-making.

COMMUNICATING THE TRUTH IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

It is also important to realize that most of the people around us have no conscious perceptions of their own worldviews, nor any appreciation for ours. Because this is true, we cannot simply assume that those to whom we speak will understand the perspective from which we interpret the events of our lives. Such matters must be enunciated clearly, or people around us will simply interpret our statements in the light of their own worldviews, and in the process miss the real meaning of our words.

Such an understanding also has apologetic value. If it is true that most people are unconscious of their own worldviews and that those worldviews are wildly inconsistent, it is also true that gently leading people, first to examine their own belief systems, then to see the inconsistency and inadequacy of those systems, can open them up to the communication of the Gospel (what Francis Schaeffer called “taking the roof off” - helping a person to see the inadequacy of his own way of understanding reality in order to drive him to seek the only suitable alternative, the truth of God’s Word). This, after all, is one aspect of “speaking the truth in love” to our neighbors.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW II

Foundations of a Christian Worldview - Creation

God's Grandeur
by Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God,
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell; the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh morning, at the brown brink eastward springs -
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

In our consideration of the basic components of a Christian worldview, we will begin with the idea of Creation. We live in a created universe, and we ourselves are created beings. Christians thus make certain assumptions about the answers to three fundamental questions.

WHO IS THE CREATOR?

A creation requires a Creator. Christians presuppose, on the basis of God's self-revelation, that the Creator of all things is both infinite and personal. He is infinite with regard to time, space, knowledge, and power. He has no equals (repudiating dualism and polytheism), nor is He dependent upon nor accountable to any other being. He is personal in that He is characterized by self-consciousness, intellect, emotions, and will, and is thus a God who communicates and establishes relationships (note that because of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, these things have always been true of God - He communicated and was in relationship even before He created the universe and man). It is because of God's communication that we are able to know Him and worship Him.

What may seem simple and obvious to the Christian is of profound significance in a world where many deny these things. Because we believe in "the God who is there," to borrow Francis Schaeffer's phrase, we do not suffer the pangs of alienation that plague those who believe that they are alone in the universe. Only the existence of a God who is both infinite and personal can provide the basis for a proper understanding of the universe and our place in it.

WHAT HAS HE CREATED?

God has created a universe by His spoken word, out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Matter is not eternal, but was brought into being by God. It is neither independent of God (dualism), nor did He shape it from primeval chaos. The heavens declare His glory by their very existence and beauty (Psalm 19:1). What are some of the implications of this truth?

First of all, the universe is orderly because it is the creation of an infinite and personal God. The faithfulness of God is the foundation for the orderliness of the created universe, and is also the foundation for science. Apart from the presumption of the predictability of the natural order, science could not exist.

Secondly, Christian presuppositions about the nature of God allow for an explanation of the unity and diversity of the created order. Given a God who is Himself one and many, the ancient philosophical conundrum finds its solution. Apart from a Christian understanding about God, one either begins with a unified impersonal origin of being, in which case diversity is inexplicable, or else one begins with a diversified origin of being, in which case there is no basis for unity of any kind.

Thirdly, the origin of the creation in an infinite and personal God provides a basis for perceiving purpose in the universe. As the proponents of the Teleological Argument asserted, the universe is not only orderly, but also purposeful - the structure moves toward a designed end and the functions are there for a reason.

These, again, may seem like concepts too obvious to bear mentioning, yet we live in a world where many of these basic ideas are routinely denied. As we will see in the central portion of the course, however, those who deny these fundamental presuppositions of the Christian faith undermine their ability to explain the universe the way it really is. Those who assert underlying chaos live as if the natural world were predictable, while those who assert purposelessness live as if the natural order had discernible functions for observable reasons.

WHAT IS OUR CONNECTION TO THE CREATOR AND HIS CREATION?

The presupposition of a divinely-created order also relates to our understanding of human nature. From a biblical perspective, we understand that God made man in His own image. This implies certain key concepts.

First of all, man is a creature. He is not autonomous, and is like other creatures in being subject to God's sovereign will and accountable to Him for what he does. Like the rest of creation, he is made for a purpose, and the purpose is determined by the Creator, not the creature. The pot does not ask the Potter why He made it the way He did.

Secondly, man is made for relationships with God and with his fellow men. He, like God, possesses an intellect, emotions, and a will. He is a responsible moral agent, able to know God and worship Him and to know his fellow human beings and love them. Because God is a communicating Being, He has made man able to communicate, both with Himself and with other people. Because God is a Creator, He has made man able to create - able to shape what God has made *ex nihilo* into new forms and configurations. Creativity is thus part of what it means for man to be in the image of God, and beauty ultimately is a human expression of what God has made. This implies, of course, that there are real standards of truth and beauty - these are not subject to the changing fashions of human whim and rebellion, but are fixed in the character of God Himself as He has expressed Himself to us through His Word and through His world.

Thirdly, man is intended to exercise dominion over God's created order as God's sub-regent. The Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1:28) is the foundation for human culture, art, science, and technology, as man seeks to rule over the world God has entrusted to him. Thus all human endeavors have as their ultimate goal the glory of God, and when that ultimate goal is forgotten, the sad picture painted by Gerard Manley Hopkins in the poem at the beginning of the lesson prevails. Yet through it all, God's glory will not be denied, and He will make Himself known through the world He has made and will call out for Himself those whom He has chosen to be instruments of that glory in the world.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW III

Foundations of a Christian Worldview - The Fall

A Hymn to God the Father
by John Donne

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which is my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive those sins, through which I run,
And do run still: though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I've won
Others to sin? and, made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two: but wallowed in, a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
Swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son
Shall shine as He shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, Thou hast done,
I fear no more.

God's perfect creation was ruined by man's rebellion. The reality of sin as engendered by the Fall of man is central to any Christian understanding of reality. The central truth here is that, because of sin, man's present condition is an abnormal one, different from the way he was created by God, and therefore there is hope for redemption - the subject of next week's lesson.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ABNORMALITY OF MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

God created man to live in relationship to Him. Man is by nature a worshiper. But that desire to have a relationship with that which is above and beyond him was corrupted by the Fall. The consequence is that, while man still seeks to worship, he now worships the products of his own imagination - in other words, he worships the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). This explains what Pascal called a "God-shaped void in every man," or, as Augustine said near the beginning of his *Confessions*, "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee."

But since the Fall, man has been dead to God. He is without hope in a world of which he can make no real sense, no matter how much he may pretend to the contrary. Thus the Christian should be able to appreciate the truth spoken by writers and artists who portray man's meaninglessness and alienation. In a world without God, they speak the truth.

The presupposition of the reality of the Fall also gives us a foundation for understanding human religion. Religion is not, as many would have us understand, a relic of man's superstitious past beyond which he must move in order to reach true maturity, nor is it a cynical tool devised by

the powerful in order to oppress the powerless, nor is it man's pathetic attempt to find meaning in a meaningless universe. Instead, religion reflects one of the basic characteristics of human nature - a need that can only be met in relationship with the living and true God.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ABNORMALITY OF MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO HIMSELF

Adam and Eve were completely happy in the Garden of Eden. They worked tending the garden, but their work was not burdensome. They had everything they needed, and no cause for worry. When they sinned, however, things changed. Suddenly they felt guilty; a sense of shame that they had never known before filled their minds and emotions. For the first time, man experienced something that is common to us all in a sinful world - a discontinuity between what is and what ought to be. Man's yearnings are thus a powerful indicator of the reality of sin in the world. People are not satisfied with themselves or with their lives. Christians have a basis for understanding the root of man's yearnings.

But we live in an age of psychology. Psychologists attempt to explain man's yearnings, his sense of lacking, alienation, or incompleteness, by blaming such things as childhood traumas, a baneful environment, or inadequate self-knowledge. We are told today to look within ourselves to find satisfaction, or else to blame others for our lack of it. Man is pictured as an autonomous god, the master of his own destiny, as a pathetic victim subject to impersonal forces beyond his control, or as a machine who simply needs to be reprogrammed in order to operate efficiently. We must see, however, that all psychological problems have their root in man's separation from himself because of sin. Man's shame and guilt can never be addressed apart from repentance and forgiveness. Thus an understanding of the reality of the Fall enables us to evaluate man's solutions to his inner struggles and see why those who do not accept the fact of human sinfulness can never provide real hope for those who are facing very real conflicts in this sinful world.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ABNORMALITY OF MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO OTHERS

"It is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). From the very beginning, God designed man for relationships with his fellow man. In the same way that love and communication were fundamental attributes of the Creator God, so He incorporated these same traits into the Man who bore His image. But the Fall marred and warped these God-given characteristics. When Adam and Eve sinned, they displayed anything but love for one another - they used their gift of communication to shift the blame for what had happened (Genesis 3:12-13).

The reality of sin thus provides a foundation for understanding everything that comes under the umbrella of the social sciences. When man seeks to understand human relationships through such disciplines as sociology, economics, political science, or education, he is drawing upon his understanding of human nature. If that understanding does not include the truth of the Fall and the reality of sin, the result will be misguided, unable to provide true solutions for human problems. Only through redeemed relationships can the questions of social interactions, financial exchanges, order and authority, and the equipping of children for the experiences of life be addressed rightly. We should also note that issues of gender and sexuality that are so divisive in today's world also may best be understood in the light of what God has made us to be and the way that divine intention was perverted through sin and its consequences.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ABNORMALITY OF MAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO NATURE

In the Garden of Eden, there were no poisonous plants or dangerous animals. The earth and its living creatures cooperated with man as he exercised dominion over them. Adam named the animals and ruled them wisely and well. When sin entered the world, however, the earth and its inhabitants no longer cooperated with man. Only with great effort could man grow his food in the soil, and animals became fearful and therefore dangerous. Man, on his part, became an abuser of the earth rather than a steward of it. He killed the animals for his pleasure and polluted the beauties of the earth for his gratification. As a result, man has been unable to deal with ecological problems without going to one of two unbiblical extremes - he either worships the earth, its fruits and its inhabitants, or else he sees them as nothing more than meaningless objects to be consumed at his pleasure.

For the Christian, however, the earth and all that is in it are neither gods nor consumer products; they are creations of God over which man is to be a faithful steward. They are neither on the same level as man nor are they to be despised by man. They are there for his use, but not for his abuse. They are to be used for the glory of God, not the gratification of man, and ultimately, they, with mankind, will be redeemed by the grace of God (Romans 8:19-21).

The Christian understanding of the impact of sin also gives a proper perspective on other aspects of man's interaction with nature. For instance, it enables us to explain natural disasters such as a tsunami in South Asia. The fact that nature often acts as man's enemy should not surprise us, nor should it cause us to point the finger of blame toward God, as so many are prone to do. It is because of man's sin that nature is alienated from him, and the only hope for the end of this alienation is the final redemption of the Creation by the mercy of the Creator.

The realm of art is also affected by our understanding of the barrier sin creates between man and the natural world. The tendency of modern artists to perceive ugliness in the natural order, or even to question whether such "order" exists, choosing instead to portray a fundamentally random universe, is an accurate reflection of the consequences of man's sin. The universe indeed has been polluted by sin and its consequences, as has man's ability to perceive the truth revealed in it. It is easy for Christians to dismiss modern art as ugly and pointless, but it often speaks truth about our fallen world, and we should feel some sympathy for those who are honest in their portrayal of the consequences of the Fall, even though they fail to recognize the true cause of what they perceive.

In conclusion, we should note that, because those who are not Christians fail to understand that the world in which we live is abnormal, they find no hope in the future. If man is the way he always was, hope can only come by extrapolating on the present - not an attractive proposition. But, as we will see next week, because man and his world are in an abnormal condition because of sin, and because the sovereign God who created this world and everything in it is a God of mercy and grace, there is hope - but only in the redemption He has provided through His Son.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW IV

Foundations of a Christian Worldview - Redemption and Consummation

Peace

by George Herbert

Sweet Peace, where dost thou dwell? I humbly crave,
 Let me once know.
I sought thee in a secret cave,
 And asked if Peace were there,
A hollow wind did seem to answer, "No,
 Go seek elsewhere."

I did, and going did a rainbow note,
 "Surely," thought I,
 "This is the lace of Peace's coat;
 I will search out the matter."
But while I looked, the clouds immediately
 Did break and scatter.

Then went I to a garden, and did spy
 A gallant flower,
 The Crown Imperial. "Sure," said I,
 "Peace at the root must dwell."
But when I digged, I saw a worm devour
 What showed so well.

At length I met a reverend good old man,
 Whom when for Peace
 I did demand, he thus began:
 "There was a prince of old
At Salem dwelt, who lived with good increase
 Of flock and fold.

"He sweetly lived; yet sweetness did not save
 His life from foes.
But after death out of his grave
 There sprang twelve stalks of wheat;
Which many wondering at, got some of those
 To plant and set.

"It prospered strangely, and did soon disperse
 Through all the earth,
For they that taste it do rehearse
 That virtue lies therein,
A secret virtue, bringing peace and mirth
 By flight of sin.

"Take of this grain, which in my garden grows,
 And grows for you;
 Make bread of it; and that repose
 And peace, which everywhere
With so much earnestness you do pursue,
 Is only there."

Last week we looked at the role played by the concept of the Fall of Man in a Christian worldview. We noted that the Fall emphasizes the fundamental abnormality of human existence, and that without the conviction of such a state of abnormality, there is no hope for change in the future. Today, we will look at the reality of hope and its role in the Christian worldview as we consider the biblical teaching of redemption and its implications.

HEALING THE BREACHES

As we noted last week, sin alienated man on four levels - from God, from himself, from other people, and from nature. But the sovereign God who created us was not willing to leave man in his misery and alienation, so determined of His own initiative to heal the breaches created by man's sin. Redemption is the process by which that healing is accomplished. That work of redemption is one that God promised to undertake almost immediately after the Fall, and one that He has carried out and is carrying out through the work of His Son. When a Christian looks at the world, he therefore is able to do so with a sense of hope rather than despair, and with the assurance that his hope rests, not in his own efforts, but in the sovereign power of God to take what has been spoiled and renew it. This process of renewal is what we call history.

THE PURPOSE OF HISTORY

For the Christian, history is the unfolding of God's plan of redemption. Scripture takes three chapters to describe the Creation and the Fall, then occupies the rest of the book with the description of Redemption. History, like any good story, has a beginning (Creation and Fall - the conflict), a middle (the Incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ - the climax), and an end (the consummation of all things in the return of Christ and the Last Judgment - the denouement).

For the Christian, history thus has a linear dimension. It is going somewhere.

- Unlike Eastern philosophers who see history as an ever-repeating circle from which man should seek escape (reincarnation or transmigration of souls ends only when one is reunited with the World Soul and loses one's identity), Christians see history as the vehicle within which God is working out His purposes, and thus the environment within which hope is to be found, so that the events of our daily lives have meaning - indeed, eternal significance.
- Unlike the proponents of the doctrine of progress who optimistically see history as an upward movement into a perfectible future directed by man himself, Christians understand that man's search for autonomy is ultimately rebellion against God and can lead only to disaster and death, while any "progress" observable in history is the result of God carrying out His plan for mankind.
- Unlike contemporary historians who see history as nothing more than a random series of events, fundamentally without meaning but open to whatever meaning we choose to give it, Christians see history as the outworking of the plan of God, and thus intelligible only in the light of His revelation of its purposes and direction.

Thus the Christian worldview affirms that history has a purpose and a direction, and may be understood on the basis of the revelation of the God who has spoken to man. We may learn from history because God is unchanging in His character and purposes, and because the nature of man remains unaltered since the time of the Fall.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

If history has a purpose, so does each individual human being within its scope. That purpose is defined, not by ourselves, but by our Creator. Scripture tells us that, like the potter determines the purpose of each vessel he makes, so God determines the purpose of each of His creatures. As Romans 9 indicates, that purpose may be one of honor or dishonor, yet there is no creature of God who stands outside His ultimate plan for His Creation. All will ultimately bring glory to the One who has created them. How may this purpose be understood?

First of all, man's purpose is to worship God. This purpose will be fulfilled, either in joyful submission around the throne of God in heaven (Revelation 15:3-4) or bowed before One whom they cannot help but acknowledge as their sovereign Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). This is the chief end of man.

Secondly, man's purpose is to live in obedience to God's revelation. Morality is not subject to human whims and cultural variations, but is grounded in the character of God Himself. The choices we make thus are to be governed, not by what we perceive to be the means to find personal fulfillment of our desires, but rather by the unchanging standards God has established for human behavior.

Thirdly, man's purpose is to serve others. We are not only to love God, but also to love our neighbors (Matthew 22:37-40). Our lives on earth are therefore not to be absorbed in selfish concerns, but rather are to be devoted to service for the glory of God.

Fourthly, man's purpose is to exercise dominion over the earth. The Cultural Mandate tells us that our interaction with the created order is for the purpose of glorifying God through our stewardship of what He has made and entrusted to our care. This implies doing all for the glory of God (I Corinthians 10:31), whether working on the job or choosing how to spend leisure time. All is to be invested for His purposes in the world and in our lives.

These ideas may seem painfully obvious to the Christian, but again we must note that other worldviews lead to radically different purposes. As we will see in the weeks to come, various forms of human autonomy either see man's purpose as fundamentally self-oriented, or deny the existence of purpose at all.

THE PURPOSE OF DEATH

The hope of man in this life is inextricably tied to his understanding of the significance of death. For some, death is the end. Man differs little from the possum face-up in the pothole after being run over by a truck. When he dies, he dies, and there is no more. The only discernible purpose for such an existence is the impact it has on others, either through influence or in memory. But what can these ultimately mean if those who are influenced or those who remember also finally die? This "scientific" worldview gives no hope for man because there is finally no purpose for his life and no meaning in his death.

But is Eastern mysticism any better? Death is viewed as a transition to another life, then to another, then to another, until one finally escapes from the dreary round of transmigration, but into what? A loss of identity, the end of individuality? If individuality is itself transient, then again man's life means nothing, and his death only moves him closer to ultimate meaninglessness. Even worse are the nihilist and existentialist philosophies that dominated the twentieth century, which overtly deny any meaning to human existence and thus see death as a positive good in the sense that it is an escape from a meaningless existence that becomes man's only real way of affirming himself.

For the Christian, however, death is the end of the consequences of the Fall and the completion of the work of redemption. No more will man suffer alienation from God, himself, or others. In the presence of God forever, those who are in Christ will experience the joy of seeing Him face to face and the perfect unity of the Body of Christ in the context of an existence that will know no more tears or sorrow. "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:23). A Christian who lives in the hope of heaven will have a ready answer to one who would ask,

“What would you do today if you knew you were going to die tomorrow?” If we are living out a true Christian worldview, the answer would be, “Exactly what I’m doing now.”

For those who don’t know Christ, of course, death is not the fruition of hope, but the end of all hope. As Dante memorably pictured it in his *Inferno*, the gates of hell bear the superscription, “Abandon hope, all ye that enter here.” As G.K. Chesterton noted, hell is a monument to human freedom, and those who choose the path of autonomy rather than submission to the purposes of God will find what they freely chose. We should again note that those who see no meaning in life and no hope in death are honest people if they are living apart from God. It is really those who try to find hope apart from God who are deceiving themselves.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

What does the Church have to do with all of this? Very simply, the Church is God’s chosen instrument to carry out His work of redemption in the world. It is through the Church that God brings people into His kingdom, and it is through the Church that He brings substantial, though partial, healing to the breaches created by the sinfulness of man. The Church is thus God’s display case through which He demonstrates His work of redemption to a world without hope. Christians living in this world are to show by their words and by their lives what it means to know a restored relationship with God, an inner peace that passes understanding, a life in community that demonstrates God’s power to transform human relationships and break down manmade barriers, and a life of stewardship that both cares for the created universe and uses it for God’s glory.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW V

Non-Christian Worldviews - Deism and Naturalism

Watchmaker God
by Robert Lowell

Say life is the one-way trip, the one-way flight,
say this without hysterical undertones -
then you could say you stood in the cold light of science,
seeing as you are seen, espoused to fact.
Strange, life is both the fire and fuel; and we,
the animals and objects, must be here
without striking a spark of evidence
that anything that ever stopped living
ever falls back to living when life stops.
There's a pale romance to the watchmaker God
of Descartes and Paley; He drafted and installed
us in the Apparatus. He loved to tinker;
but having perfected what he had to do,
stood off shrouded in his loneliness.

The Christian worldview dominated Western thought for almost 1500 years, during which almost all serious thinkers in the West agreed on the basic propositions outlined in the preceding three lessons. What happened to undermine this Christian consensus? One might point to a number of factors. The Renaissance, certainly, with its focus on man (without at the same time denying God); the Reformation, which shattered the unity of Christendom and was followed by a century of religious wars and bickering over theological trivia among and within the newly-formed denominations; and the Scientific Revolution, which, while it arose in a Christian context, led men to seek truth in the observations of their senses. In the weeks that follow, we will examine the competitors that arose for the hearts and minds of Western man - those anti-Christian worldviews that continue to be with us today. In today's lesson, we will examine the rise of Naturalism - a worldview grounded in science to the extent that whatever does not fit the definition of "scientific" is not worthy of consideration or belief.

CARTESIAN DUALISM

If we are to search for the beginnings of Naturalism, as good a place to look as any is at the philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650). This French mathematician, in his search for a grand geometric proof that would encompass all of reality, embarked on a process of systematic doubt that led him to the one unassailable "given" with which such a comprehensive proof must begin - *Cogito ergo sum*. Despite attempts to link man's assurance of his own existence to God and the external world, he finally gave up on the possibility of logically connecting man's mind to his environment and spoke instead of two separate realms - that of mind (God, the spiritual, human emotions - the realm of the *noumenal*) and that of matter (the world, the senses - the realm of the *phenomenal*). These two operated independently on the basis of distinct principles, so that in fact something could be true in one realm and false in the other. Needless to say, such a dichotomy is rather uncomfortable. The result has been numerous attempts by thinkers in the centuries after Descartes to eliminate the dichotomy, either by eliminating one of its parts (as we will see today), or by linking the two.

At this point, a short tangent might be useful. The worldviews we will study in this course have in their turn been rejected as inadequate and supplanted by others, yet each has shown a remarkable persistence, so that each continues to appear in the thinking and behavior of contemporary society (despite the fact that they blatantly contradict one another). The same is true of Cartesian dualism. When you hear someone today say that religion is a private matter that each person should decide for himself without coercion by others, so that religion deserves no place in public discourse, and that only that which is susceptible to scientific verification is worthy of universal acceptance, while contradictory religious ideas should all be accepted as long as they are held privately, you will know that the dead hand of Descartes is with us still.

DEISM AND THE GOD OF THE GAPS

Deism is in many ways a transition between Christian Theism and Naturalism. It has its roots in the Scientific Revolution, and in the very biblical idea that the material world reveals its Creator. Deists, however, who were prominent in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France, England, and the American colonies, argued that the natural world was not only an *accurate* revelation of divine truth, but a *sufficient* one as well. Scripture was thus reduced to a republication of nature. Deists argued first that Scripture and science could not conflict (a valid point), but then went on to conclude that Scripture and natural revelation coincided, so that only that which could rightly be discovered from the study of nature (human nature included) could be said to be the central content of Scripture; anything else (i.e., doctrine) was rejected as “priestcraft.”

When the Scientific Revolution first began, people soon realized that things that had long been explained as supernatural really had natural causes (belief in witchcraft, for example, seriously waned in the eighteenth century). As science advanced, fewer things required God to explain them. God thus became the “God of the gaps,” called upon only to provide convenient explanations for what science could not yet expound convincingly. As Isaac Newton and others put science on an increasingly mathematical footing, people came to the conclusion that there was only one thing for which God continued to be needed - the Creation itself; everything else could be understood as the operation of a great, complex machine put in place by the omniscient Creator.

Notice that such thinking eliminates almost every cardinal doctrine of Christianity - verbal revelation, miracles, the Incarnation, the deity of Christ, the resurrection, Providence, and the afterlife - though some deists continued inconsistently to hold to some of these ideas (e.g., the frequent references to “Providence” in the founding documents of the United States). Deism also undermines the concept of sin because it eliminates the distinction between *is* and *ought*. For example, in Alexander Pope’s *Essay on Man*, Pope, a Deist, argues as follows:

All nature is but art, unknown to thee;
All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good;
And, spite of pride, in erring reason’s spite,
One truth is clear, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT.

This preposterous conclusion was mocked by Voltaire, another Deist, in his short novel *Candide*, when his protagonist, constantly insisting that “this is the best of all possible worlds,” encounters calamity after calamity as a result of human cruelty and ignorance.

The search for natural law by giving unhindered reign to human reason destroyed itself from within as all non-Christian worldviews must do. The instrument of destruction in this case was the French Revolution, in which the brutality of the Reign of Terror and the attempts of Napoleon to spread his own brand of Enlightened Despotism throughout Europe demonstrated the natural consequences of a philosophy of life that argued that unaided human reason, under which man was seen as the “Master of his Fate and the Captain of his Soul,” could lead to nothing but suffering and death imposed on men by their “reasonable” fellows.

NINETEENTH- AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY NATURALISM

Eighteenth-century Deism left “the God of the Gaps” with only one gap remaining - the role of Creator, the great Watchmaker who designed the amazing machine that is our universe, then wound it up and let it go. That one remaining gap was closed in the nineteenth century, largely by the work of Charles Darwin. Now, thanks to the Theory of Evolution, God was no longer needed at all; everything could be explained by the Great God Science (not really *everything*, but of course anything that could not be explained in this way either simply did not exist or awaited future scientific insight).

We thus arrive at a full-blown scientific worldview - Naturalism. According to this worldview, matter (or at least matter/energy) is all there is. It is eternal, since something cannot come from nothing. Anything that is beyond the realm of the material, such as God or the afterlife, does not exist, or, if it does exist, is beyond the realm of certain knowledge and has no impact on life in the material world, and thus is only suitable for the superstitious or for effete metaphysicians and their useless speculations. In the *real* world, only what is scientific is worthy of consideration.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF NATURALISM

One would think, when seeking to understand the implications of a naturalistic worldview, that it would lead immediately to a reductionist view of human nature, denying the soul and even the mind, as well as the denial of human freedom and morality. In fact, many twentieth-century naturalists took matters to this extreme, but most nineteenth-century naturalists did not do so. In fact, they argued that what we call *soul* and *mind* are products of evolution that set man apart from the other animals; man’s self-consciousness shows him to be a unique branch of the evolutionary tree, able to alter his environment, and thus superior to all other earlier branches. Ethics, too, has evolved with man’s self-consciousness, and is clearly helpful for the survival of the organism, and thus may be understood as those behaviors that serve to advance both the individual and the common good. Evolution thus produced, at least in the nineteenth century, a continued belief in man’s freedom and uniqueness and a utilitarian approach to ethics.

THE FAILURES OF NATURALISM

Such conclusions, of course, are inconsistent with the basic premises of a naturalistic worldview. If matter is all there is, one would expect that science would soon conclude that mind and soul were mere self-deceptions resulting from as-yet-unknown chemical reactions in the brain. Behavioral psychology arose to make precisely these claims. Furthermore, the same scientists argue that freedom is a myth, that we are controlled by the environments in which we live, and that morality is no more than a means by which others control us or we control others.

As with all non-Christian worldviews, Naturalism turned out to be self-destructive. In the same way that the reliance on human reason led to the horrors of the French Revolution, the belief in the survival of the fittest and utilitarian ethics led to such travesties and blots on human history as European colonialism and the First World War. After all, isn't it logical to conclude that the most advanced are destined to rule those who are less highly-evolved? And isn't the politics of pragmatism justifiable to the extent that war should be used as an instrument of public policy?

Furthermore, Naturalism undermined itself because of the limitations of empirical knowledge. After all, if our conclusions may be based only on what we observe, and we can never observe everything, must not our conclusions therefore always be tentative? Consequently, we can never have certain knowledge of anything - quite a far cry from the purported certainty associated with science in the popular mind, even today. Of course, such uncertainty increased dramatically with the rise of modern physics, with its discovery of indeterminism at the very heart of the material universe, along with the malleability of what were long believed to be immutable laws of the physical universe.

Finally, Naturalism led to irrationalism. While Deism had been succeeded, at least briefly, by Romanticism (the subject of next week's lesson), at least in artistic circles, Naturalism spawned a variety of worldviews grounded in a belief that man and nature were simply not rational (we will look at a number of these in succeeding weeks). In the same way that Romanticism was both a rebellion against and a logical extension of Deism, so the irrationalist philosophies of the twentieth century were both extensions of and acts of rebellion against the prevailing scientism of the age.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW VI

Non-Christian Worldviews - Romanticism

The world is too much with us
by William Wordsworth

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This sea that bares her bosom to the moon,
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers,
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not - Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

We saw last week that the Age of Reason exploded into the irrationality of the violence of the French Revolution. Today we will look at the reaction against Rationalism represented by Romanticism, the dominant trend of the early part of the nineteenth century.

ROMANTICISM AS A LOGICAL OUTGROWTH OF DEISM

Cartesian dualism divided the field of knowledge, insisting that there were different rules for “thinking substance,” or the noumenal, and “extended substance,” or the phenomenal. Much of the rest of intellectual history involves a pendulum swing back and forth between emphases on these two poles of thought. If the Enlightenment stressed the realm of phenomena, Romanticism stressed the realm of the subjective, of emotions, and of the irrational. While, as we will see in the next section, Romanticism represented a reaction against Enlightenment Rationalism, it also was in another sense a logical outgrowth of the Deism of the age. After all, if, as the Deists insisted, God could be known only through his creation, then how is God to be worshiped? Deism thus leads easily into pantheism, which characterized many of the writers of the Romantic era, including the New England Transcendentalists.

THE IRRATIONALIST REACTION IN THE NAPOLEONIC ERA

The rationalist ideal as manifested in the Enlightenment was of a world where all lived by the cool light of reason, following the natural law that was accessible to and the same for all thinking people. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, people had realized that the Enlightenment ideal was a failure, reduced to skepticism by the philosophical writings of David Hume in Scotland and to horror by the mindless bloodshed of the French Revolution. Rationalism had one last gasp, however, in the person of Napoleon. If Leonardo da Vinci was the quintessential Renaissance Man, Napoleon Bonaparte was the last and greatest example of Enlightenment Man. He sought, by the force of his military might and by the imposition of the Napoleonic Code on most of Europe, to make the ideal of the Enlightenment a reality. What was intended to be an expression of the

humanity of man on a large scale, however, turned out to be possible only by large-scale repression, and people rebelled against it.

The reaction began in the political arena with the rise of nationalism in the face of Napoleon's determined internationalist policies. In Germany in particular, popular speakers and writers arose who insisted that a natural law common to all is a myth. They argued instead that each nation, each people, has its own distinctive destiny and its own distinctive spirit. That national spirit is fundamental to what the nation should be and sets it apart from all others. This spirit may not be expressed in rational terms, but is bound up in a people's traditions, myths, and forms of artistic expression. Furthermore, it will find expression in unique political structures that separate each nation from all others, so that a great empire such as Napoleon had tried to build was a violation of the spirit of each people. Thus Germany led the revolt from within against Napoleon's attempt to unify Europe at the same time that Britain was opposing him from across the English Channel. We should note in passing that the emphasis on the unique spirit of Germany eventually took a much uglier form a century later under the leadership of Hitler.

The Romantic Era was thus a time when the emotions took precedence over the mind. What a person feels is more fundamental, closer to the truth, than what he concludes by the use of sterile reason. We should note at this point that, at least early in the Romantic movement, people still believed in the concept of truth; they simply disagreed as to where it was to be found. Having found the mind wanting as the source of truth, they now argued that the seat of truth was the emotions. They still optimistically felt that life could be found to have meaning if only one looked in the right place. The interesting thing about Romanticism, as we shall see, is that, despite the fact that the leaders of the movement undermined the possibility of absolute truth, they continued to hope against hope that it could be found. The inevitable pessimism that resulted from the destruction of truth in the Romantic era would wait for a later generation.

ROMANTIC PHILOSOPHY AND THE DEATH OF ABSOLUTES

It should not surprise us that a movement that emphasized national distinctives and denied that human reason gave all men access to the same truth would ultimately do for people what it had already done for nations, fragmenting them to the point that each individual sought and maintained his own truth. This would happen eventually, but not yet - the Romantics, like the vast majority of unbelievers, could not live with the consequences of their own thinking, and so remained optimistic contrary to the results of their own presuppositions. Two important philosophes from the Romantic era illustrate how absolute truth was undermined by irrationalism.

Immanuel Kant was a philosopher who recognized on a profound level the failures of both rationalism and empiricism to provide a convincing basis for human knowledge. He understood Hume's critique, but was unwilling to accept his skepticism. Instead, he argued that knowledge must be understood as the product of both the mind and human sensory experience. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, he argued that what is outside of ourselves is essentially unknowable; it is raw data, unstructured and without inherent meaning. These data come to us through our senses, but our senses do not, as Locke argued, write on a blank slate. Instead, the mind is more like the sets of mailboxes found in a post office. In the same way that the postmaster sorts the incoming mail by putting it in the proper bins, so the mind sorts the incoming data into predesignated categories inborn

in the brain. The result is what we call knowledge. Thus what we know is the result of our minds acting upon (and thus changing) the information that comes to us through our senses. This, of course, renders absolute knowledge impossible by definition. The search that had culminated in the epistemological debates of the Age of Reason was an exercise in futility, since human knowledge in any absolute sense was impossible.

Kant did not give up on finding meaning in life, however. While he recognized that his philosophy had made God unknowable and reduced the Bible to the product of human minds resulting from an indefinable encounter with God, he nonetheless believed that society could function in a meaningful way with an absolute moral standard. He called this standard the Categorical Imperative, arguing that right actions are those which could, without contradiction, be imagined to become universal laws. While few have tried to apply Kant's ethical standard in any practical way, it is interesting to note that he maintained an optimistic view of man and society even after having undermined the basis for such a view in his own philosophy.

Another exemplar of the Romantic era was Hegel, the author of the famous dialectic. If Kant destroyed the possibility of truth, Hegel destroyed the possibility of purpose in human life. Hegel argued that history proceeded, not in some linear or telic fashion, but by means of the harmonizing of contradictory opposites. The prevailing idea of any given period (the thesis) gives rise to an opposite reaction (the antithesis). The two opposing views would then struggle for supremacy, resulting in a compromise that partakes of facets of each (the synthesis). This synthesis would then become a new thesis, and the process would begin all over again. Hegel's view of history led to the conclusion that history, and thus human life, has no ultimate goal or purpose, nor can there be any ultimate truth, since contradictory opposites combine to form whatever "truth" people may recognize at a given point in history. But Hegel, like Kant, lacked the courage of his own convictions, and argued that there was some sort of Universal Spirit that was at work through the dialectical process. Again, we find optimism unjustified by the system. It should again come as no surprise to us that the destruction resulting from the denial of purpose in human life would wait for a few generations before having its pernicious effect.

THE IMPACT OF ROMANTICISM ON THE CHURCH

While scholars in the Age of Reason had attacked the Scriptures as contrary to human reason and argued for their superfluity on the basis of natural law, these attacks were relatively minor compared to the damage done to people's confidence in the authority of Scripture during the Romantic era. In the same way that Germany gave rise to the Romantic movement, so it gave rise to the theological liberalism that was its consequence. Higher criticism was the spawn of Romanticism. We have already seen how Kant put God in the realm of "data" (thus fundamentally unknowable by definition) and Scripture in the realm of "knowledge" (thus the product of the minds of the authors, processing their own indefinable encounters with God through the grids of their own brains). Clearly such a work could not be said to be inspired in any meaningful sense of the word. How could it carry divine authority when what God had said, if anything, had been so thoroughly altered in the process of passing through the minds of the writers?

Hegel, too, helped to undermine the authority of the Scriptures. Those who followed him (F.C. Baur is a good example) argued that both the Bible and the Christian faith are the result of the

dialectic outlined by Hegel, so that Scripture resulted from a conflict of opposites - Jewish and Gentile Christianity - and Christianity itself has continually evolved through conflict and change over the centuries. Thus what the Church is now can claim no more divine authority than the Bible on which it professes to base its teachings. The Universal Spirit may be at work in the world, but not in any definable or linear fashion. Thus both Kant and Hegel impacted the thinking of the Western world in a way that rendered orthodox Christianity not only something with which people might choose to disagree, but something that was intellectually untenable - a teaching that no reasonable person could be expected to consider. Is it any wonder that what passes for Christianity in so many churches today has so little to do with the teachings of the Scriptures or the life and ministry of Christ? Yet the theologians, like the philosophers, maintained an irrational optimism. Men like Friedrich Schleiermacher argued that Christian faith, though it is undefinable in propositional terms, fundamentally involved a feeling of dependence on something outside of ourselves.

ROMANTICISM AND THE ARTS

The consequence of the Romantic movement that people tend to think of first is its impact on the arts. Some of the greatest works of art and literature in the history of Western culture came out of the Romantic era, but it is important for us to understand how they relate to the fundamental philosophy of the era.

In the realm of music, the emphasis on emotions rather than reason can be most easily seen by comparing the leading composers of the eras we have been discussing. If Bach is the best example of the Reformation or Baroque era, Mozart is the clear leader in the Enlightenment. The former signed all his scores SDG (*Soli Deo Gloria*) and openly acknowledged his desire to please God with his talents. The latter, with his brilliant, intricate structures, put to music the philosophy of the Enlightenment, hoping to find in the patterns of the natural world an abiding truth that spoke to all men (it is also worth noting that Mozart's patron, Joseph II, was one of the most advanced of the Enlightened Despots, who sought to put the philosophy of the Enlightenment into practice in the political realm). In contrast to these two, the emotional breadth and depth of the compositions of Beethoven exemplify the Romantic era. His departure from the tight structures of eighteenth-century music illustrates for the ear the philosophy of the Romantics.

In painting, Romanticism signaled a departure from the desire to paint things as they are. The careful realism of the Age of Reason communicated man's ability to see nature as it is and to reduce that understanding intelligibly to the canvas of the skilled painter. For the Romantic, however, what is real is not what comes through the senses. Romantic painters believed that someone who just painted what he saw was only touching the surface, and not in any way approaching the truth of what is. Painters such as J.M.W. Turner in England and Eugene Delacroix in France sought to portray the emotion under the surface, whether in Turner's seascapes or in Delacroix' portrayals of the barricades of French revolutionaries. As the nineteenth century progressed, emotion came even more to the forefront in the works of the Impressionists, who sought to paint what their own minds perceived rather than "what was really there," since such a task was by definition impossible.

Again, a contrast here might be useful. If the novels of Jane Austen, with their neat, orderly English country villages, typify the Age of Reason (at least the remnants of it that lasted into the beginning of the nineteenth century), the works of the Bronte sisters present a good picture of

Romanticism. The sweeping emotions of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* demonstrate the spirit of the age, including, especially in *Jane Eyre*, a Romantic-era approach to Christianity that values its sentiment without any need for its doctrines (*Wuthering Heights*, on the other hand, is a bit more advanced in its open rejection of Christianity in favor of a mystical sensibility). In either case, truth is to be sought in emotional integrity rather than in rational thought or, perish the thought, in divine authority.

An illustrative contrast here is between the tightly-structured verses of Alexander Pope, who displays all the arrogance characteristic of the Enlightenment, and the exalted emotional flights of fancy of poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Keats, and Shelley. The authenticity of the response of human emotions to the beauty of nature may be seen in the writings of all these men, as well as in American writers like Emerson and Thoreau.

THE FAILURE OF ROMANTICISM

In the end, Romanticism failed because its optimism was insupportable. Without truth, there could be no meaning, either for human life or for man as an individual. The loss of absolutes led to unbounded relativism, and ultimately to the death of man, as we will see next week. It did leave its legacy, however. How many today continue to view their emotions as the only legitimate determiner of the authentic in their lives? In conclusion, we must also note that, since the Age of Reason and the Romantic era continue to influence the modern world even after they have been discredited, and since they contradict one another completely, that the modern world lives with serious internal contradictions, which people tend to ignore, and yet without which they could not function.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW VII

Non-Christian Worldviews - Nihilism

from *The Black Riders and Other Lines*
by Stephen Crane

VI

God fashioned the ship of the world carefully.
With the infinite skill of an All-Master
Made He the hull and the sails,
Held He the rudder
Ready for adjustment.
Erect stood He, scanning His work proudly.
Then - at fateful time - a wrong called,
And God turned, heeding,
Lo, the ship, at this opportunity, slipped slyly,
Making cunning noiseless travel down the ways.
So that, forever rudderless, it went upon the seas
Going ridiculous voyages,
Making quaint progress,
Turning as with serious purpose
Before stupid winds.
And there were many in the sky
Who laughed at this thing.

XX

A learned man came to me once.
He said, "I know the way - come."
And I was overjoyed at this.
Together we hastened.
Soon, too soon, were we
Where my eyes were useless,
And I knew not the ways of my feet.
I clung to the hand of my friend;
But at last he cried, "I am lost."

XXIV

I saw a man pursuing the horizon;
Round and round they sped.
I was disturbed at this;
I accosted the man.
"It is futile," I said,
"You can never -"

"You lie," he cried,
And ran on.

LVIII

The sage lectured brilliantly.
Before him, two images:
"Now this one is a devil,
And this one is me."
He turned away.
Then a cunning pupil
Changed the positions.

Turned the sage again:
"Now this one is a devil,
And this one is me."
The pupils sat, all grinning,
And rejoiced in the game.
But the sage was a sage.

LXVI

If I should cast off this tattered coat,
And go free into the mighty sky;
If I should find nothing there
But a vast blue,
Echoless, ignorant -
What then?

“‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless’” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Anyone who wishes to understand twentieth-century man must comprehend the cry of the Nihilists - that all is meaningless, and that nothing remains but despair and alienation. We will see in today’s lesson that the rejection of a Christian worldview in favor of a Naturalistic one led not only to the reactions represented by Romanticism and other irrationally-oriented worldviews, but also to the recognition that man alone in the universe could have no significance at all.

NATURALISM AND DETERMINISM

We saw two weeks ago that Naturalism presupposed a closed system - matter (and energy) is all that exists, there is no God, and we are part of the system. There is nothing else. Such a view of the world, despite its early optimism about man's ability to drive the system forward to greater and greater heights of progress and perfection, had within itself the roots of its own destruction. After all, if all is matter and energy, isn't the same true of our thoughts, feelings, and ambitions? Can't they all be understood as the interactions of chemicals and the firing of synapses? Aren't concepts like consciousness, soul, mind, thought, and freedom merely myths that, like everything else, are the product of a deterministic universe that moves on the basis of inexorable scientific laws? Naturalism is thus self-defeating because the very means by which man sought to glorify his own endeavors must be viewed as inevitable, the product of environmental forces beyond man's effective control. Out of this conviction arose the discipline of Behavioral Psychology (think names like Ivan Pavlov and B.F. Skinner), in which the Naturalistic worldview led to the ultimate death of man in favor of a machine that runs according to fixed laws that cannot be changed by him or anyone else, since he is part of the system and there is no one outside the system able to introduce change. [Note that even the Behaviorists were inconsistent, arguing that man must manipulate the environment for the good of his fellow man - but isn't the manipulator himself being manipulated by the impersonal forces of *his* environment?]

NATURALISM AND CHANCE

Another way that Naturalism undermined itself is that, through the interpretations of the natural world as viewed in a way that excluded God, science wound up destroying science because it led to the conclusion that the universe was based on random chance and that man was fundamentally an irrational being. Darwin, of course, postulated a natural world driven by nothing more than time and chance, and modern physics came to the same conclusion in the inanimate world of subatomic particles. Fixed scientific laws thus lead us to a world where nothing is fixed or ultimately predictable and where man is no more than an animal. Freud, of course, picks up on this in his discourses on the id, and agrees that man is radically irrational in the very essence of his being.

NATURALISM AND THE DEATH OF KNOWLEDGE

Naturalism, with its great confidence in the possibility of man knowing all things eventually, thus winds up undermining the possibility of human knowledge. If our minds are nothing more than chemical interactions, and if these chemical interactions are no more than chance events, how can we be sure that what we perceive or conclude about the world corresponds to what is really there? Why should we not instead conclude that we are doing nothing more than sustaining a consistent illusion? Is there really any difference? This is one of the reasons why the thinkers at the end of the nineteenth century concerned themselves so much with the issue of communication (these men were called Logical Positivists or Linguistic Analysts). If there was no such thing as real knowledge, how can there be communication? Is there any way of being confident that, when I speak to you, what arrives in your mind has any real connection with what is going on in mine? The result of this dilemma was a profound sense of alienation - that I am alone in the world, unable to influence what is going on around me and unable to connect with others, if they really exist (or if I really exist). Even Descartes' starting point comes to be questioned by some.

NATURALISM AND THE DEATH OF MORALITY

Perhaps the philosopher who most clearly understood the implications of Darwinism was Friedrich Nietzsche. He realized not only that the theory of evolution undermined a biblical view of man by concluding that he was no more than a highly-developed animal, but that it also undermined any concept of morality. For Nietzsche, there could be no *ought*; there was only *is*. Furthermore, Christian morality was a detriment to society, a weak man's religion that sought to love the weak rather than allowing them to be destroyed by their own weakness. The only possible justification for man's actions could be his own survival, thus power was all that mattered. Notice that Nietzsche's conclusion about the death of morality (he also proclaimed the death of God) flows logically from either determinism or indeterminism. In the former, whatever happens must happen, while in the latter, what happens has no ultimate design or purpose; in both cases, man has no real control over what he does, thus is not responsible. Without personal responsibility, there can be no morality.

NATURALISM AND THE DEATH OF MEANING

Naturalism thus ended with the impossibility of any meaning to the world or to man. Thinkers were arriving at these conclusions at the beginning of the twentieth century, but the horrors of World War I threw a much larger segment of society into a morass of despair. Whether one thinks of the hopelessness of Hemingway's characters in *The Sun Also Rises* or the frivolous revelers of the Roaring Twenties in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, one sees nothing but disillusionment and meaninglessness. This is the essence of Nihilism.

Nihilism is not therefore a worldview in the full sense of the word. Instead, it is the denial of the possibility of a worldview - the assertion that no possible grid can be placed over our lives that could give them meaning. This is why so much of the literature of the twentieth century is so unattractive. Despair is not fun to read, but one must admit that, for the honest child of a failed Naturalism, it is a true reading of the resulting world.

One of the more interesting attempts to address seriously the Nihilism of the era between the wars is a novel by Evelyn Waugh called *Brideshead Revisited*. Waugh, who converted to Catholicism in middle age, presents his characters in a way that is reminiscent of the secular authors of his era mentioned previously. Yet the main figures in his book cannot remain in a state of despair. They ultimately find meaning in what had before been a meaningless universe for them, and they find it in the certain knowledge of God. Christianity is thus presented as the only answer to the prevailing Nihilism of the age, and presented by one who knew both sides from personal experience.

THE FAILURE OF NIHILISM

Nihilism could not last because it is self-defeating. Everyone who lives in this world must act as if knowledge is real, there is a difference between right and wrong, and his decisions have meaning. Even those who espoused Nihilism most vociferously still contradicted it every time they tried to communicate their convictions. Even talking about lack of meaning presupposes that there exists the possibility of meaning, or else all would be silence. The arts and communication of the era thus contradict Nihilism even while they preach it.

Why, then, is Nihilism important? First of all, Nihilism is important because it shows the logical consequences of a Naturalistic worldview. The only way in which those who say that science is all can avoid the conclusions of the Nihilists is by being inconsistent, stopping short of the logical conclusions of their own presuppositions. Secondly, Nihilism is important because every other significant philosophical movement of the twentieth century is an attempt to respond to it. If man cannot live with the conclusions of his own philosophy, he must try to find a way around those conclusions. Beginning with Existentialism, next week's topic, we will find how each prevailing mode of thought in the twentieth century was an attempt to answer the question of how meaning can exist in a universe closed to God and man by the scientific worldview, and in which man is seen to be nothing more than an animal. The answers are both unsatisfying and contradictory, but in examining them, we will learn much about the roots of the society in which we live.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW VIII

Non-Christian Worldviews - Existentialism

Actually, I was sure of myself, sure about everything, far surer than he; sure of my present life and of the death that was coming. That, no doubt, was all I had; but at least that certainty was something I could get my teeth into - just as it had got its teeth into me. I'd been right, I was still right, I was always right. I'd passed my life in a certain way, and I might have passed it in a different way, if I'd felt like it. I'd acted thus, and I hadn't acted otherwise; I hadn't done x, whereas I had done y or z. And what did that mean? That, all the time, I'd been waiting for this present moment, for that dawn, tomorrow's or another day's, which was to justify me. Nothing, nothing had the least importance, and I knew quite well why. He, too, knew why. From the dark horizon of my future a sort of slow, persistent breeze had been blowing toward me, all my life long, from the years that were to come. And on its way that breeze had leveled out all the ideas that people tried to foist on me in the equally unreal years I was then living through. What difference could they make to me, the deaths of others, or a mother's love, or his God; or the way a man decides to live, the fate he thinks he chooses, since one and the same fate was bound to "choose" not only me but thousands of millions of privileged people who, like him, called themselves my brothers. - Albert Camus, *The Stranger*

We saw last week that Nihilism is the logical consequence of Naturalism - that if mass/energy is all there is, then there can be no God, no thought, no choice, no morality, no communication; in short, no meaning for man at all. Such a worldview is both untenable and unthinkable, and none but the hardiest of souls dared to think it, and even they were unable to follow it through to its logical conclusions. Thus the twentieth century became one in which unbelieving man attempted to flee from the logical implications of his denial of God. The first of these efforts to seek to draw meaning from a meaningless universe was Existentialism.

THE ESSENCE OF EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism is a broad term that is used in many ways. Those who wear the label often disagree with one another in many particulars, both of philosophy and of application (Sartre and Camus, for instance, who were probably the greatest mid-century popularizers of the movement, had a falling out over details of their shared philosophy). In general, however, Existentialism asserts that, while Nihilism is right in concluding that a naturalistic worldview leads to a dead end, the solution is not to remain on that dead-end street, but to seek meaning in the purely subjective - in other words, to move into Descartes' realm of the noumenal, the realm of thinking substance, because the phenomenal leads to nothing but meaninglessness and despair. The realm of the objective is the realm of mindless determinism, where man has no meaning, while the realm of the subjective is that of will and consciousness, where man is completely free to shape himself as he pleases.

Complete freedom is thus the essence of Existentialism. Jean-Paul Sartre argued that "existence precedes essence" - in other words, man exists in the realm of matter, but in the realm of consciousness determines exactly what he will be and become. Man only becomes an authentic person when the decision to define himself is made in radical isolation from others, influenced by no one outside himself. Thus a choice is authentic only if it is made freely, apart from the constraints of society or any other authorities.

Such freedom has its price, however. The truly authentic man must acknowledge that he is profoundly alienated from other people. In fact, the rejection of society's standards is the true mark

of authenticity. The authentic man not only bravely accepts his alienation from others, but also recognizes the absurdity of the material world, the world of science and the senses. He also acknowledges that death is the end, so that even his creation of meaning and value has no ultimate purpose. In fact, some Existentialists argued that the only truly free choice a man can make in this meaningless life is to choose to end it.

For the Existentialist, religion is the refuge of the weak - those who are not brave enough to stand up to the absurdity of the universe and the meaninglessness of life and define themselves by rebellion against authority. The religious seek shelter in illusions, and thus by definition lack authenticity.

EXISTENTIALISM IN LITERATURE

Sartre's play *No Exit* is a prime example of Existentialism in literature. The play tells the story of three people in Hell - pictured as a Second Empire drawing room. The three characters at first wonder when the torture starts, but as they converse, they realize that each of them is the torturer of the others. Because they must forever see themselves through the eyes of the others, they can never define themselves. In fact, their conversations reveal their self-definitions to be pathetic illusions. In the end, Sartre's characters conclude that "Hell is other people." Relationships are ultimately destructive. Sartre, of course, did not really believe in Hell, but was commenting on the reality of human experience in this life.

If Jean-Paul Sartre was the most prominent philosopher among the popularizers of Existentialism, Albert Camus was the leading novelist. Camus was an Algerian descended from French stock and wrote a number of novels that communicated Existentialist ideas. In *The Plague*, Camus presents a town quarantined after the arrival of an epidemic. The protagonist, a doctor, faces a dilemma - if he fights the plague, he opposes the will of God, but if he does not, he denies who he is. Can one do good without belief in God? Camus attempts to show that one can, by affirming life rather than death.

In *The Stranger*, Camus shows the alienation of the honest man. The protagonist, Meursault, goes through life with no connections to the people around him (his mother dies on the first page and he feels nothing) and with no real motives for what he does. As the story progresses, he shoots an Arab on the beach for no apparent reason (he said the sun was in his eyes). Finally, he comes to understand that his life is authentic only because he has freely chosen it; it doesn't matter what he chooses to do, the important thing is that *he* chooses to do it. His final affirmation comes as he is led to the executioner, where the vicious catcalls and hatred of the crowd gathered to witness the execution assure him that his decision has been truly free.

The Theater of the Absurd also has its roots in Existentialism. Works by men such as Edward Albee and Samuel Beckett display on the stage the meaninglessness of life. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a play about two men waiting for a character who never arrives. They engage in meaningless conversation, always expecting the mysterious Godot (i.e., God) to show up, but he never comes. Thus the lives of those who depend on something outside of themselves are shown to be nothing but emptiness and futility.

EXISTENTIALISM AND POPULAR CULTURE

Existentialism may not at first glance appear to be a good candidate to influence popular culture, but in reality it has. From the beatniks to the hippies, the rebels of the fifties and sixties were consciously influenced by the teachings of Existentialism. It provided a justification for rebellion against authority, for “free love” (after all, authentic behavior is that which is freely chosen), and for drug experimentation (higher states of consciousness enable one to transcend the absurdity of this material world). On another level, Existentialism fueled the anti-materialistic and anti-technological lifestyles of the era. While the children of the fifties and sixties now are the Establishment rather than being in a position to rebel against it, the anti-authoritarian views of the postwar generation, and their openness to sex and drugs, are with us still.

WHAT ABOUT “CHRISTIAN EXISTENTIALISM”?

The phrase “Christian Existentialism” sounds like an oxymoron - how can a philosophy that asserts the utter absurdity of life, the alienation of man, and the need for each man to define himself possibly be compatible with Christianity? In fact, Christian Existentialism appeared on the scene a century before its atheistic counterpart. In the early 1800s, a Danish philosopher named Søren Kierkegaard became the pioneer of Existentialist thought. Disgusted with the dead formalism of the Danish Lutheran Church, he sought God in the realm of the subjective. God could not be known through reason, he argued, because God was beyond the comprehension of the human mind. Meditating on the experience of Abraham in Genesis 22, he concluded that the command to sacrifice Isaac was the height of absurdity, and that God demanded, not reasoned obedience, but a leap of faith that carried a man into the unknown and unknowable. Only by embracing the absurdity of existence and trusting God with blind faith could a man find what the religious sought in vain.

Kierkegaard’s successors were the Neo-Orthodox theologians of the twentieth century. Rejecting the rationalism of the nineteenth-century liberals (while still affirming their conclusions about the essential unreliability of the Scriptures), they sought an experience of God in the realm beyond the rational. According to Karl Barth, the leading spokesman for Neo-Orthodoxy, the Bible, while not inerrant in any propositional sense, *becomes* the Word of God to us as we read it. It thus becomes a vehicle through which encounters with God may be sought and found. Later exponents of these views, such as Bultmann and Tillich, moved farther away from the Scriptures, insisting that they must be “demythologized” (Bultmann) in order to get to the existential truth hidden there, where one would discover that God was “the Ground of All Being” and faith was defined as one’s “Ultimate Concern” (Tillich). In presenting Christianity as fundamentally relational rather than propositional, the Christian Existentialists proved to be effective counterparts to their secular cousins in the search for meaning in an absurd universe. To see how much the Church has been influenced by the subjectivism of the Existentialists, both in its approach to the Scriptures and its moral laxity, is to define much of the character of the Church in our age.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW IX

Non-Christian Worldviews - New Age Mysticism

Ford, we are twelve; oh, make us one,
Like drops within the Social River;
Oh, make us now together run
As swiftly as thy shining Flivver.

Come, Greater Being, Social Friend,
Annihilating Twelve-in-One!
We long to die, for when we end,
Our larger life has but begun.

Feel how the Greater Being comes!
Rejoice and, in rejoicings, die!
Melt in the music of the drums!
For I am you and you are I.

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

Aldous Huxley's 1932 novel was prophetic in more ways than one - he anticipated such trends as genetic engineering and recreational drug use - but he also pictured an age where people sought alternative realities. In the revolutionary era of the sixties, the world passed from existential subjectivism to an even more radical rejection of the Naturalistic worldview - a teaching that questioned the very existence of the external world. As was true with Existentialism, New Age thought takes many forms. Thus the generalizations at which we will look today will not be true of all New Age proponents, but will give us a flavor of a movement that, like the others we have examined, has left its mark on the contemporary world despite its obvious inadequacies.

NEW AGE THOUGHT AND NATURALISM

We have already seen that much of the twentieth century was occupied with the attempts to escape the nihilistic conclusions of philosophical Naturalism. Existentialists tried to do this by seeking refuge in the subjective while asserting that objective reality was meaningless and absurd. New Age thinkers go even farther, denying the existence of objective reality altogether while maintaining that only the subjective, only the self, really exists. Thus, in a sense, New Age thought is the antithesis of Naturalism - while one denies the reality of the subjective and asserts that only the objective exists, the other denies the objective in favor of the subjective. Like Descartes, New Agers find themselves alone in the universe with nowhere to go.

FORERUNNERS OF NEW AGE THOUGHT

By rejecting Naturalism in its entirety, New Age thought entails a total repudiation of the Judeo-Christian worldview that has dominated Western culture for almost two millennia in favor of the monistic pantheism of the East (note that Naturalism, though a rejection of Christian thought, retained certain key elements of it, including the concept of the reality and intelligibility of the physical world). It thus follows in the path of such Eastern systems as Vedanta Hinduism, Taoism, and Zen Buddhism. This should not surprise us. C.S. Lewis, in his book *Miracles*, observed that pantheism "is the attitude into which the human mind automatically falls when left to itself." The

sinful mind of man, in rejecting the Creator, worships the creature, and creature-worship, in its most highly reductionist form, leads one to the worship of oneself, even to the extent of arguing that the self is not only God, but the only true reality.

Various perversions within the context of a Christian worldview have throughout time indicated such tendencies. Whether one looks at the Gnostics of the second and third centuries, certain medieval mystics like John Scotus Erigena, or nineteenth-century groups like Transcendentalism, Christian Science, Spiritism, the Theosophical Society, or the Swedenborgians, one finds in the heart of man the tendency toward self-worship.

In its modern manifestation, New Age thought emerges from the trends of the sixties. The rebels of the era looked at the world their fathers had left them and saw nothing but war, racism, and materialism. Even Existentialism did not go far enough for some of them, since it viewed the material world as absurd but did not deny its reality. Lumping Christianity and Naturalism into one deplorable category, they jettisoned the whole package in favor of a lifestyle of being rather than doing, of oneness rather than distinction, of making love rather than making war, and of searching for alternative modes of consciousness.

FORMS OF NEW AGE THOUGHT

But where are these alternate realities to be found? For some, reality is to be found in the spiritual world - thus many forms of New Age thought are blatantly occult. Those who have sought higher levels of consciousness have often encountered spiritual beings in their quest - guides who lead them into deeper levels of understanding, though such understanding seems to be ineffable, thus incommunicable, having value only for one who experiences it. Some seek to channel these spirit guides, thus bringing the benefits of their knowledge to others. Scripture makes it clear what is really going on here - contact with demonic powers - but it should not surprise us that those who turn away from God eventually wind up worshiping demons, as the primitive animists of generations past have done. New Age thought thus has clear links with paganism and manifests itself in groups such as the Wiccans, Druids, and various Native American religions.

For others, alternative levels of consciousness are to be found through drugs. The psychedelia of Timothy Leary and others of his ilk differed from the occult form of New Age thinking in that the beings encountered in the context of the higher reality were thought to be emanations of one's own mind. This is really a much more consistent form of monistic pantheism, since it need not postulate any reality outside of the individual mind. It is totally individualistic, though, unless one argues that a group of people sitting around a dormitory room taking LSD are reaching higher levels of consciousness together. In the long run, such exercises failed to heal the alienation so strongly felt by the flower children, and too many "bad trips" led them to abandon the experiment. Today, we hear little of this brand of New Age thinking.

A third version of New Age thought has been much more influential, however, and that is the philosophical version of it. According to this approach, there is a radical difference between reality, with which I am one, and my perception of that reality, which is shaped by the system of linguistic symbols that I have been taught to use. This leads to two conclusions. First of all, though I am one with reality, it is in and of itself unknowable to me; I am always constrained by my

perceptions, which are shaped by my symbol sets - the language I use to describe it. Secondly, I may freely choose the symbol set I wish to use. Thus, in effect, I shape my own reality (we will speak more about this when we discuss Postmodernism next week). Note that I need not use the same symbol set all the time - I can use one when functioning in the normal, everyday world and another when thinking about larger questions. It matters not at all that these symbol sets may contradict one another, since none represents reality as it is in any meaningful sense. Is it any wonder that we live in a world where the concept of truth has lost all meaning apart from the pragmatic issues of daily life, and that people are not disturbed by the discontinuity between what they do every day and what they think about the big questions of life?

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF NEW AGE THOUGHT

Drawn from its foundation in Eastern philosophy and religion, New Age thought is fundamentally monistic and pantheistic - all reality is one and that One is God. Thus I am God and God is within, and I am united to all that really is. This means that all opposites - matter/spirit, body/mind, male/female, good/evil, man/god, and man/universe - are ultimately one and may be reconciled through the proper techniques (New Agers are much more concerned with technique than they are with truth or even reality).

Note that this leads us to the height of self-worship. Not only is self-fulfillment good, but self-absorption is imperative. Thus various spiritual exercises - meditation, yoga, martial arts disciplines - allow one to look within oneself and thus transcend oneself, ultimately reaching union with the One (Nirvana, Brahma, the Omega Point, or whatever else it may be called by devotees).

New Age thinkers thus argue for the oneness of all religions. All human religions embody the search for higher consciousness, and thus constitute many paths to the same end. In order to support such beliefs, of course, one must ignore much that has been taught by the world's religions, but that is easily explained away as the failures of those whose consciousness has never been raised. Often, New Agers seek affirmation of their oneness doctrine in groups on the fringes of major religious bodies - Kabbalism, Gnosticism, and Sufism, among others. Christ is viewed as one among many spiritual guides who have attained higher levels of consciousness and show us the way to do the same.

One must note, however, that the monistic pantheism of New Age thought, like that of the religions of the East, is ultimately impersonal. Personality distinguishes rather than uniting, thus it must be part of the illusion that must be discarded if higher states of consciousness are to be achieved. Thus the worship of man in its highest form turns, in the end, into a repudiation of who man is - a denial of man in the image of God. It also involves a repudiation of ethics; after all, if good and evil are ultimately one, what does it matter which one chooses?

CULTURAL IMPACT OF NEW AGE THOUGHT

If we look around us, we can see the influence of New Age thought in many ways. One of the more obvious is in the realm of health and medicine, where holistic health and alternative medicines seek to tap into the spiritual energies that transcend the merely material realm. Thus we see herbalism, biofeedback, shamanism, acupuncture, and even witchcraft masquerading as medicine

(I am not implying that the interactions between the material and the spiritual are not far more complex than we are able to understand; this truth explains why some measure of success may be claimed by even the wackiest forms of alternative medicine).

In the realm of science, New Age thought has picked up on the popularity of evolution to argue that altered states of consciousness are signs of human evolution - that as man evolves ever upward, he will achieve final union with the Omega Point (the term used by French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to describe the union of man with God in final oneness). Some New Agers also look to the discoveries and theories of modern physics to support their contention that space and time are infinitely malleable and that all things are interconnected (mass/energy); we have, in the last few decades, been treated to the unusual sight of physicists who have turned to mysticism to explain the failure of science to understand the physical world.

In the social sciences, especially in psychology, New Age thought has had an impact in the form of the emphasis on self-fulfillment and self-actualization (Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, among others). This, in turn, has influenced the realm of education, where self-esteem has become more important than actually knowing or mastering anything and where meditation exercises have become commonplace in public school classrooms. The self-improvement field has also produced its share of cranks and charlatans, including Werner Erhard's *est* and L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology cult.

In the realm of politics, the most notable influence is in the environmentalist movement, which has often advocated radical forms of pantheism (despite India's poor record in environmental matters), and in the animal rights movement, both of which are strongly anti-development and anti-technology, to say nothing of anti-Christian. It should not surprise us that the repudiation of the Christian worldview also leads to a rejection of the Cultural Mandate. New Agers also tend to favor one-world government and are generally supporters of things like the United Nations and the European Union.

In the realm of spirituality, New Age thought has led to the growth of various forms of paganism, including Eastern religions, gurus, avatars, Druidism, Native American religions, Wicca, astrology, and Earth Goddess worship (feminists tend to like this one).

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW X

Non-Christian Worldviews - Postmodernism

The Second Coming
by William Butler Yeats

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?

The closing decades of the twentieth century saw the rise of Postmodernism which, as the name implies, involves a rejection of the “modern” worldview that was the logical conclusion of the Enlightenment. While modernism wound up rejecting absolute truth and absolute morality in favor of relativism, concluding with the emptiness of existentialism with its denial of all meaning, Postmodernism takes things a step further. According to Postmodernists, each person creates his own truth, his own meaning, and, of course, his own morality - and these things are not illusions, but are real, because they are real *for the individual*.

THE INFLUENCE OF EASTERN THOUGHT

The youth rebellion of the sixties, in addition to the influence of existentialism, witnessed the large-scale influx of Eastern thought into American life for the first time. The hippies and flower children were attracted to Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna, the Unification Church, and other assorted gurus and swamis. Eastern thought, of course, ultimately denies the reality of the material world, and thus is the polar opposite of materialism and scientism (this is why the countries of the East made little progress in science and technology until their young people came to be educated in the West, and in the process rejected the traditional religions of their homelands except in a nominal sense). For the rebels of the sixties, anything that was the polar opposite of what their parents believed looked good. The consequence of this, however, was a radical individualism (ironic, since Eastern thought in the end denies the existence of the individual) that allowed a person

to create his own reality, often through meditation or experimentation with drugs, especially hallucinogens. At this point, what the philosophical druggies were seeking was universal reality beyond the realm of the senses, but the radical subjectivism of their approach set the stage for Postmodernism.

POSTMODERNISM AND LANGUAGE

As we saw last week, the link between New Age thought and Postmodernism is the role of language. Since there is no way of knowing reality as it is, we perceive reality through the use of symbol sets - languages - that may be taken up and cast aside as they prove to be useful in daily living. We thus create, use, and discard meaning as it suits us. Each individual creates his own meaning, and no symbol set is superior or inferior to any other as long as it meets our pragmatic needs. "Knowing" thus is a *passé* concept; the issue is not truth, but usefulness. Reality is what I say it is. Or, as Humpty Dumpty said in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, "When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."

Thus, for the Postmodernist, the story is everything. Everyone has his own story, and for him that story is reality. There is no *metanarrative* - an overarching story that is true for everyone, like the Christian story of Creation, Fall, and Redemption with which we began the course. Instead, the "strong poet" is one who can get others to use his language - not only religious leaders like Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, but also modern thinkers like Freud, who devise language that many now use to explain reality (think of terms like *id*, *ego*, *superego*, *Oedipus complex*, and *oral fixation*).

Note that the central role of language also implies that language is power. The purpose of creating a story is not only to get one through life satisfactorily, but also to get others to do what you want them to do. One need only look at the role of language in the entire Political Correctness movement to see the extent to which language is viewed as a tool of coercion. On the other hand, because language is related to one's personal story, to impose that language on another is an act of oppression. The extent to which the media reflexively view Christian assertions of truth or morality as acts of aggression against others shows the degree to which Postmodern thought has penetrated our psyches.

POSTMODERNISM AND HISTORY

The end of the twentieth century was a period of revisionism in the study of history. Heroes became objects of scorn - religious figures, presidents, the Founding Fathers, and dead white males in general. On the other side of the coin, obscure figures suddenly took on great importance in the development of Western culture, especially if they were women or represented a racial minority. All of this is part of the basic Postmodern tenet that each of us creates his own reality. Unlike the materialists, who insisted that the study of history involved "Just the facts, ma'am," with no unnecessary interpretation to cloud the issue (unrealistic, of course, but these people *were* materialists), Postmoderns approached history with the idea that there was no timeless truth, so that each interpreter was free to construct his own historical reality. Who can know what really happened? After all, the tales of history are told by the winners, and usually by the despised DWM sector of the population, so how can we know what really happened anyway? The true meaning of history is what it means to me, and if I choose to view it in the light of feminism, Marxism, or gay

rights, that, for me, becomes the reality of the situation, and no one has the right to say otherwise (Have you noticed, by the way, that the list of people from the past who were obviously homosexual is growing longer with every new biography or historical monograph?). Thus we have history as propaganda. This has always been done, of course, but now it is being justified as the only way to do history, since reality is completely subjective anyway. We are to understand that, not only are today's historians constructing their own reality, but that the same thing was going on with the writers of history in the past - they only *thought* they were describing what really happened. In our age, the malleability of history implemented in the Ministry of Truth in George Orwell's *1984* is no longer a cautionary tale of what might be, but a reality that students face daily on our college campuses.

POSTMODERNISM AND LITERATURE

The same radical subjectivism has gained ascendancy in the realm of literature and literary criticism. The text of a poem, story, or novel has no meaning in itself. It is the reader who creates meaning for it when he reads it. Thus, no one can say in definitive fashion what a novel or poem means, nor can anyone legitimately disagree with the interpretation of another. This, again, leads to radical revisionism in the treatment of the classics. The principle that the author's intent should play a significant role in any responsible interpretation of a work of literature has been completely rejected. After all, the author was simply creating his or her own reality, and when I read the work, I must do the same, since I can't possibly share the subjective reality of the writer or poet (note the application of this to constitutional law, where the original intent of the Founding Fathers in drafting the Constitution is blithely ignored by modern jurists, who create their own reality in giving the words of court decisions whatever meaning they consider appropriate).

We should also note that the radical subjectivism of Postmodernism has influenced those who are writing poems and books (and painting pictures and taking photographs) today. While the task of the artist in the past was thought to be the communication of truth and beauty through the use of his gifts, the modern artist claims no responsibility to communicate anything. He simply creates his own reality, and it is the responsibility of the observer to form an alternate reality as he looks at the picture or reads the poem. It would therefore be viewed as wrong by a Postmodern artist to ask him, "What does this mean?", or even, "What does this mean to you?" For him to express a meaning for the work would be a violation of his worldview, since it would *interfere* with the creation of a subjective reality by the observer.

POSTMODERNISM AND THEOLOGY

It is not difficult to imagine the impact of Postmodernism in the realm of theology. Though this has been happening ever since the advent of liberalism at the time of the Romantic movement, we find ourselves in a situation where Jesus and His teachings mean anything the interpreter wants them to mean, and the Scriptures are open to any kind of subjective (and selective) interpretation imaginable. Again, political correctness factors in here, as we find clear teachings of Scripture being reinterpreted to mean exactly the opposite of what they say in order to advance a gay or feminist agenda. Furthermore, even children raised in our churches are impacted by this subjectivism in their approach to Scripture. I don't know how many times over the years I had students tell me that I can't say that a particular interpretation of a passage of Scripture is wrong; what I tell them the passage

means is “just my opinion.” This is Postmodernism on the teenage level; every person is free to create his own reality, giving his own meaning to what he reads, and no one has the right to say otherwise.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE CHURCH

Postmodernism, with its radical subjectivism and individualism, has great respect for spirituality (what could be more representative of one’s own reality than this?), but has little use for the Church. After all, if my reality is my own and cannot be shared by or with anyone else, what good is a corporate body? The answer, of course, is that Postmodernism, like every other non-Christian philosophy, exists in God’s world, and people cannot in the long run deny who they are. Radical subjectivism leads ultimately to alienation - one is cut off from other people, unable to communicate on more than a surface level. But the fact of the matter is that people were not created by God to function in this way. They were made to live in relationship to others and to Him, and they will suffer profound unease unless this happens. The Postmodern world thus presents the Christian Church with a golden opportunity, as long as it is faithful to the Scriptures and does not conform itself to the emptiness of the surrounding world. People, in their innermost hearts, crave what the Church has. The true reality that is to be found in Christ and His Church is what all men seek by virtue of who they are, and consequently the Church, if it truly believes the Bible and truly lives in community as God intended, will stand as a light in the dark world and be in a position to answer the questions that the Postmodern world is desperately asking.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW XI

From Theory to Practice - American Society

A Noiseless Patient Spider
by Walt Whitman

A noiseless patient spider,
I marked where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Marked how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launched forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be formed, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

Like Walt Whitman in this poem, the people of our age are casting about for a worldview that satisfies the longings of their souls without any certain assurance that such a thing exists. We therefore exist in the midst of a smorgasbord of worldviews, all of which impact our age, all of which conflict in fundamental ways, and all of which deny the reality of the biblical worldview. How should this fact lead us to interact with the society around us? How should we interpret it? Of what dangers should we be cognizant? This is the subject of today's lesson, and we will pursue it by looking at different aspects of American culture.

THE REALM OF POLITICS

What worldviews do we see present in the politics of modern America? Certainly we see Naturalism, with the attitudes taken toward issues like stem-cell research, abortion, and euthanasia. Existentialism with its emphasis on creating personal values is certainly there, as is postmodernism with its connection with political correctness and the acceptance of all viewpoints as equally valid. We also see postmodernism influencing pragmatism in the political realm. Politics has always been pragmatic, but in our age we see, perhaps even more than in the past, people willing to use sets of symbols in order to exercise power over others. Language that in the past may have been referred to as "civil religion" now has become a blatant form of manipulation, as politicians wonder how they can play the "religion card" more effectively in order to gain votes that are going to other candidates. Postmodernism also influences the courts, as words, whether in the Constitution or in past legal decisions, mean what the jurists want them to mean.

From a Christian standpoint, perhaps the greatest danger in this area is not that of falling into a mindset of political correctness, though that is a problem, especially for young people who are surrounded by it in their schools, but instead that of looking to the government as a source of secular salvation. Throughout much of the twentieth century, evangelical Christians abdicated their role of being salt and light in the surrounding culture, tending instead toward isolation and a fortress mentality. Today, many Christian organizations are so deeply involved in the political realm that one would think that the only salvation for our nation is the election of different people to office, or the placing of different people on the federal court benches. A Christian worldview requires that we

view our nation from a broader perspective - that of God's plan for history, which doesn't center on the prosperity of the United States of America. Salvation comes from the Lord, not from the Republican Party. An understanding of the sinfulness of man will keep us from placing our hope in any human movements or power structures.

THE EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT

The entire smorgasbord of worldviews that we have studied may be seen in the educational establishment in our country. Whether one thinks of Naturalism, Nihilism, Existentialism, New Age thought, or Postmodernism, our colleges and universities seem to press it into the minds of our young people as the height of intellectual sophistication. In the lower levels of the educational system, Naturalism, New Age thought, and Postmodernism seem to be most prevalent, while the more radical ideas of the Nihilists and Existentialists are also present in higher education. Whatever the favored worldview, however, there is clearly no room for a Christian view of reality in our public educational system.

For a Christian, the issue of worldviews cannot be ignored. Students who go to school ill-equipped to think in terms of the big questions are unable to defend themselves against the tacit assumptions that underlie the things they are being taught in the classroom. The most dangerous of these is the myth of neutrality - the idea that, while religiously-informed thought is biased and therefore to be kept in the privacy of one's home, secular thought is neutral and objective and therefore the only thing fit for public consumption. The recent struggle over the teaching of Intelligent Design in the public schools (or even in many universities, some of them with Christian roots) shows clearly the kind of thinking to which I refer. Christians must understand that there is no such thing as presuppositionless thought, and therefore must be equipped to examine the assumptions underlying anything taught in the classroom and evaluate it on the basis of Scripture.

THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

The social sciences are rooted in Naturalism (e.g., the origins of Sociology and Psychology), but also show influences of Existentialism and Postmodernism. Because these worldviews assess the source of man's problems inaccurately, they have no chance of providing real solutions to those problems. Is it any wonder that social scientists, who have great power in both government and the media, seem to make things worse rather than better when they try to deal with the seemingly intractable problems of a society far from God?

Christians, too, have a tendency to view the social sciences as secular saviors. The Church is useful for dealing with small problems, but if a problem is really serious, one clearly must consult the experts, which means the psychologists and sociologists who know how to deal with matters that are beyond the reach of God's anointed leaders. With the influence of Postmodernism, we see that even our vocabularies are influenced and shaped by the social sciences and their non-Christian mindset concerning the nature of man and the solutions for his problems. As the Party recognized in George Orwell's *1984*, our language shapes our thought; they developed Newspeak in order to limit people's vocabularies, so that they could only think the ideas that the Party wanted them to think, lacking words to think anything different. Christians, therefore, must be consciously skeptical

of the social sciences, evaluating every pronouncement on the basis of Scripture, asking questions about the view of human nature that undergirds the conclusions being promoted.

THE ARTS

Because the arts tend to be on the cutting edge, it should surprise us not at all that the most prominent worldviews on display are Nihilism, Existentialism, New Age thought, and Postmodernism. The question of real meaning has long ago been lost and replaced by personal meaning, no meaning at all, or raw power, particularly the power to destroy. Is it any wonder that those who have been given by God the sensitivity to perceive beauty in the world around them are angry when they find that such beauty has no meaning, and in fact there can be no meaning for anything except the cynical drive for power over others? We thus live in an age of ugliness and rage in the arts; as one painter put it, “I don’t paint; I hit.”

The main issue here for Christians involves those who are artistically gifted. They face the perpetual dilemma of speaking a Christian message into a world where the vocabulary itself is radically opposed to Christianity. The result is such abominable hybrids as “Christian heavy metal.” How can a medium that is built on everything opposed to God be used by Christians to convey God’s truth? If, as Marshall McLuhan suggested, “the medium is the message,” such a thing is impossible. Using the world’s means to convey God’s Word is a fatal compromise that, rather than reaching those who are drawn to such styles of communication, communicates only that there is no fundamental difference between Christians and the world.

THE MASS MEDIA

The mass media, whether one thinks of television or newspapers, is notoriously liberal in its outlook, which generally means Naturalism and Postmodernism in worldview terms. Science is glorified, seen as the ultimate determiner, though each new scientific discovery, whether in the field of paleontology, genetics, or health care, is trumpeted as accepted truth despite the fact that it wildly contradicts the “accepted truth” of last week’s editions. The media also become the mouthpieces for the views of politicians and academics. Did you ever notice, when the media outlets are attempting to be balanced in their reporting, who they choose to represent the Christian viewpoint? Almost inevitably, it is a professing “Christian” who shares their underlying assumptions rather than one who would be acknowledged as a reputable spokesperson by the Christian community itself. Many of the conservative media voices are little better. They try to argue Christian virtues and Christian conclusions without the necessary Christian foundation, resulting in bombast that is little more than the opinion to which I have a Constitutional right. Most conservatives who have a public voice demonstrate the truth that living on “borrowed capital” makes for shallow arguments in support of biblically-compatible ideas.

What is a Christian to do? Be discerning, obviously, whenever watching, listening to, or reading the products of the mass media. But it is also important to realize that, in a free society, Christians should seek to speak into the environment that is so strongly dominated by non-Christian views of reality. Perhaps the best example of this today is the work being done by *World* magazine, which attempts to interpret the events of the world around us from a biblical perspective, and has done so very successfully.

POPULAR CULTURE

In modern American society, popular culture largely means entertainment - things like television, movies, sports, and computer games. We will deal more with these next week when we talk about the implications of a Christian worldview for daily living, but let us note this week that the popular culture in America has become a means for communicating unbiblical worldviews to those who are passive receptors, often failing to analyze what they are receiving, but absorbing by osmosis whatever the gurus of pop culture present to us for their own profit. As is the case with education, popular culture strikes hardest at our children, who are unable to assess what they imbibe. Christians must take seriously the injunction of Deuteronomy 6:6-9 if we are to prevent our children from adopting non-Christian worldviews by default.

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW XII

From Theory to Practice - Daily Living

Pathedy of Manners

by Ellen Kay

At twenty she was brilliant and adored,
Phi Beta Kappa, sought for every dance;
Captured symbolic logic and the glance
Of men whose interest was their sole reward.

She learned the cultured jargon of those bred
To antique crystal and authentic pearls,
Scorned Wagner, praised the Degas dancing girls,
And when she might have thought, conversed instead.

She hung up her diploma, went abroad,
Saw catalogues of domes and tapestry
Rejected an impoverished marquis,
And learned to tell real Wedgwood from a fraud.

Back home her breeding led her to espouse
A bright young man whose pearl cufflinks were real.
They had an ideal marriage, and ideal
But lonely children in an ideal house.

I saw her yesterday at forty-three,
Her children gone, her husband one year dead,
Toying with plots to kill time and re-wed
Illusions of lost opportunity.

But afraid to wonder what she might have known
With all that wealth and mind had offered her,
She shuns conviction, choosing to infer
Tenets of every mind except her own.

A hundred people call, though not one friend,
To parry a hundred doubts with nimble talk.
Her meanings lost in manners, she will walk
Alone in brilliant circles to the end.

The author of this poem has captured the emptiness of modern values, but she has not really plumbed the depths of the despair of those who seek only what this world has to offer. If you examine the values the poet does espouse, you will find them equally empty. This is the challenge of a Christian in the modern world - to live a genuinely Christian lifestyle through a series of daily choices and priorities that flow from a worldview that is not influenced by what others would describe as meaningful or important. What are some of these choices?

ENTERTAINMENT AS A WORLDVIEW COMMUNICATOR

What is conscious on the level of serious art becomes unconscious on the level of popular culture, not in the sense that the creators of popular culture lack understanding of its philosophical

roots, but in the sense that the consumers of popular culture tend to be oblivious to the philosophies that they are imbibing with their music videos and sitcoms. In our era, we need to consider the extent to which the entertainment media communicate, not only unbiblical standards of morality, but, more crucially, a worldview that is the antithesis of biblical Christianity.

Anyone with half a brain knows that much of today's television programming is immoral. Casual sex and casual violence for the entertainment of the masses is the order of the day. One might say that, from a Freudian perspective, TV panders to the id - man's animal nature. This, of course, conveys the message that man is no more than an animal, and thus reinforces Darwinism in ways that consumers rarely notice.

Television programming is also postmodern in the sense that it glorifies style over substance. In other words, there is no such thing as truth, so programmers seek to motivate people to action, whether in terms of buying a product or voting for a candidate, by the careful construction of a particular image through the use of sound bites and fragmentary visual stimuli. Relationship to truth is of no consequence, since truth and meaning are in the eye of the beholder, so the goal is to lead the observer to derive the desired message from the proffered sounds and pictures, most of which contain little or no informational content of any kind.

Movies go farther than television in communicating the philosophy of the age, largely because those who make movies have bigger budgets, more time in which to communicate their ideas, and are less tied to the tyranny of ratings. Art films have always portrayed contemporary philosophy, especially the European films of the sixties and seventies (Ingmar Bergman, for instance, succeeded very well in putting existentialism on the big screen for all to see). Popular theater, however, has tended more to entertainment for the sake of entertainment in order to attract the consumer dollar. In recent years, however, we have seen more examples of the infiltration of serious philosophy into popular films, whether through the advent of the anti-hero (see Sam Spade, Dirty Harry), the fear or glorification of a scientific worldview (*Jurassic Park*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*), Eastern mysticism (the *Star Wars* series), or postmodernism (*The Matrix* trilogy).

Popular music is a vehicle in which the animalistic view of man is conveyed strongly by the sex-and-violence themes, whether one likes pop, country, or "gansta rap." The modern era has raised the ante, however, with the advent of MTV and music videos. Now the imagination of the consumer is stimulated, not just by the words, but by visual images that underscore the hedonistic or nihilistic philosophies of the performers, and again, we must note the persistent presence of the theme of alternate reality, extending the reach of postmodernism to the children who spend hours absorbing ideas that they don't understand, but come to accept nonetheless.

In the area of computer games and the Internet the death of morality appears most clearly because interactive computer games allow the player to become a participant in the deviant behavior of which he could previously be only a passive viewer. Video games also expand the avenues by which the concept of malleable reality may be communicated. The Internet, while it may seem to be a vast source of information, and thus a counterweight to the prevailing postmodernism, actually underscores postmodern philosophy because, on the Internet, especially for the unwary, all points of view carry equal weight. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* website and *Joe Bfispk's Home Page* both

become sources of “information,” with the web surfer able to construct his own “truth” from the myriad of opinions available.

THE IMPACT OF PASSIVE RECEPTION

In the era of books, when people actually read, the mind was an active participant in the information-gathering process, since the imagination had to supply the images described by the writer of the book. The reader was required to be a participant in the process. With television and movies, however, no such active involvement is essential - the watcher can just sit on his couch or recliner and soak in the message conveyed by the artist or performer with no effort on his part at all. For any participant in contemporary culture, this means that the mandate to cultivate the transformation of the mind by the Spirit of God is doubly important, since the entertainment media make it so easy to absorb ideas without engaging the mind at all. We must be critical observers and cautious consumers of the surrounding culture, so that we do not fall, while we think we stand, through the failure to exercise God-given discernment.

BIBLICAL STEWARDSHIP AND THE LEISURE ETHIC

The passivity of modern entertainment also raises another issue, and that is the question of the stewardship of time. Today’s world conveys very clearly the idea that leisure is the ultimate good toward which all efforts should be directed. We work so we can have the time and money to play, and once the work is done, no one can rightly deprive us of the leisure we have earned and for which we have been working so hard. The marketing of leisure, though obviously done for the benefit of those who are doing the marketing, conveys a strongly unbiblical view of the purpose of life. Behind the hedonism and self-centeredness of the leisure culture is the basic idea that, because life has no ultimate purpose, one should “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

For the Christian engaged in the service of Christ, the leisure ethic must be vigorously shunned. We are stewards of all we possess. Not only our bodies, our goods, and our money, but also our time, are gifts of God to be used for His glory. One who hopes to minister to others must first allow God to work in his own life in the areas in which he seeks to minister. Do we communicate to others that we live for the weekend? Do our priorities in use of time and money show that we value the kingdom of God above all else? Unless we are able to demonstrate godly priorities in our own lives, we will not be able to communicate those priorities to others - after all, it is all too easy to justify the sins in others that we wish to protect in our own patterns of living. If we are to convince others to live for eternity rather than for the present, we must clearly incorporate these same principles into our own lives in a way that makes a difference.

While on this subject, it is also necessary to mention the topic of sports. Our culture is obsessed with sports, whether as participants or viewers, and as Christians we need to ask what such obsession implies about the culture’s values and priorities, and, to the extent to which we partake of the culture’s approach, about ours. There can be no question that sports has positive aspects, but we also must consider the nature of the cost to be paid. Are we giving time to sports endeavors that would better be spent elsewhere? Are we encouraging unbiblical priorities in our children by allowing or even pushing them to place sports above academic or even spiritual endeavors? What do we communicate to our children through our own choices and through the choices we allow them

to make about the value of the Church as opposed to that of the baseball diamond or basketball court? Sports in this sense becomes a powerful worldview communicator.

RECAPTURING TIME FOR THE GLORY OF GOD

During his thirty-five year evangelistic career, George Whitefield preached as many as twenty times per week. As he got older and his health began to fail, friends begged him to slow down, but he responded that he would rather burn out than rust out in the service of Christ. While few people in history can hope to manifest the level of dedication seen in Whitefield's ministry, all Christians can certainly put Matthew 6:33 into practice. When the subject of time comes up, everyone professes to be ridiculously busy, and most people in today's world truly are. The question, however, is not one of busyness, but of priorities. We always have time for what we truly consider important. What does our use of time tell us about our values? Entertainment is not wrong in moderation, but how often do we hear ourselves saying that we don't have time for some aspect of God's work, while we always manage to find time for the great god leisure?

The key here involves restructuring one's life according to God's priorities rather than those promoted by the surrounding culture. Job choices, family commitments, leisure activities - all should be designed with kingdom priorities in mind. The one who desires to minister for Christ in the world must approach the area of leisure in a way that shows that he is a twenty-four/seven Christian. Service for Christ and the life and ministry of the Church as the people of God should be clearly first in the way we allocate our time if we are to have any hope of reaching others with the Gospel and building up the Body of Christ.

EDUCATION - PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COMMUNICATION OF VALUES

One of the key passages in Scripture dealing with the communication of values within the family structure is Deuteronomy 6:6-9. In this passage, we find, first of all, that the communication of values is a responsibility given to parents by God. While delegation of this responsibility is at times necessary, abdication of it cannot be permitted.

Secondly, we should note the variety of means that are to be used for the communication of values. Parents are to deal formally with their children ("impress upon them"), while also taking advantage of the variety of opportunities offered by everyday life. They are to teach them by example ("[they] are to be upon your hearts"), and symbolically as well as verbally (*not* by phylacteries and mezuzahs).

What is required in order to accomplish this? Formal instruction takes planning, life examples grow from personal godliness and maturity, and spontaneous instruction implies shared time and activities. What about symbolic instruction? What does that mean in modern culture? While choice of home decor may be a part of such instruction, lifestyle choices speak much more loudly.

It is also worth noting that discipline is an important means of communicating values to children. What parents encourage, what they tolerate, and what they punish in their children goes a long way in teaching those children values that they will carry with them into adulthood.

DELEGATING PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

It is always necessary for parents to delegate their responsibility to communicate values to some extent. Such responsibility is delegated, not only by the choice of a church and a school, but also by what children are permitted to be exposed to in the media.

The major question that must be asked in delegating responsibility for education is whether those to whom responsibility is delegated will present reinforcing or competing values to the child. There is, of course, no other possibility - value-free education does not exist, nor can it, though it is certainly possible for an institution to reinforce some values and contradict others. While both kinds of choices carry their baggage of strengths and weaknesses, the choices made should be *deliberate* rather than by *default*.

The greatest danger in choosing a source of supporting values, such as a Christian school, is that the parent will then abdicate his own responsibility to oversee the education of the child. Even godly teachers need oversight. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that a child educated in a godly environment will adopt for himself the values he is taught; the Word of God has the power to harden as well as soften the unregenerate heart.

The greatest danger in choosing a competing source of values, of course, is that the parent will lose the competition. Younger children tend to hold their teachers in very high esteem, readily believing whatever they say, while older children, normally tending to seek their own direction away from parental influence, will conduct their search among the available resources, whether educational or peer-generated. A parent who chooses to immerse his children in a world where all the competing influences are ungodly runs a serious risk of seeing his children turn to the values of the world in which they are immersed.

PREPARING CHILDREN TO DEAL WITH COMPETING VALUES

Children cannot be sheltered from the world forever. It is the parent's responsibility to prepare his children to deal with the world in a godly way. The key to accomplishing this is through *planned, gradual exposure in a controlled environment*. Television and movie choices should be monitored, controlled, and discussed, so that children learn to evaluate the legitimacy of what they see and hear. Interaction with and evaluation of media input should become an automatic reflex for parent and child alike. Such a practice will prepare the child to make wise choices when the parent is no longer present to monitor or even advise.

What is true of interaction with media outlets is even more true with educational alternatives. Some parents teach their children to swim by throwing them into the deep end, while others use more gradual methods. At whatever age parents may choose to expose their children to negative educational influences, they must be sure their children are prepared to handle what they will encounter. When children are younger, this requires parental knowledge of what is going on at school. At any age, it requires regular interaction with children. Considerations of this kind arise even when making college choices, where the spiritual maturity of the student becomes a major factor.

The principle of planned, gradual exposure is also true in connection with the peer group with which a child becomes involved. Because peers play such an important role in the development of children, parents must be involved in choosing those with whom their children associate, so that later their children will be equipped to choose their own friends wisely. One who is in a position to be influenced should avoid the ungodly, while one who is in a position to exert influence should seek to do so. The same principle applies to dating relationships when children reach adolescence, as well.

Finally, communication of values means seeing the truths of God's Word written on the hearts of our children. This we cannot accomplish, but we can be faithful in carrying out our responsibilities, and trust God to honor our obedience in the lives of those He has entrusted to our care.

THE CHURCH

The bottom line here is that a Christian who is living out a biblical worldview through daily choices will "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Since the Church is God's ordained instrument for doing His work in the world, a Christian worldview will be lived out in the community of believers, demonstrating the kinds of activities and priorities on display in the life of the Early Church at the end of Acts 2. In personal and family decisions, the centrality of Christ will be evident, so that spouses, children, neighbors, and friends will have no doubt about the ability of the worldview we profess to be lived.