



The Importance of our Worldview

In the preceding articles, I have stressed the issue of “worldview” – that everyone has some kind of an assumed, imaginary mental picture of the larger reality around us from which they work. I don’t hesitate to say that EVERYONE “lives by faith” – we all function on the basis of things we believe, assume, think, hope, and imagine (with a good bit of what we think we “know” being revised from time to time). While humans are able to create countless “variations” in our individual belief systems, it might help to identify some major categories. A good starting place to begin this kind of thinking is with James Sire’s “The Universe Next Door” (InterVarsity Press).

Sire defined seven major worldview options – Christian Theism, Deism, Naturalism, Nihilism, Existentialism, Eastern Pantheistic Monism, and New Age. Each of these worldview categories assumes some different things about the ultimate reality, human beings, death & beyond, knowledge, right & wrong, and history. When you begin to recognize and understand the different assumptions that people can start their thinking from, it is easier to see why our conclusions (over which we argue) can be so different.

For example, the abortion issue has arisen because Americans no longer generally start with the same assumptions about humans and life (life is a gift from God, life begins at conception, thou shall not kill, etc.). Prior to the 1960’s, most Americans and those in government functioned within the circle of what the Judeo-Christian consensus brought forth and these general ideas were reflected in our early public documents (like the Declaration of Independence). However, since the early 1960’s, the Supreme Court has helped to endorse a “secular” viewpoint, with a growing number of Americans assuming that humans are just “evolved animals,” that “rights” are not bestowed by God but by society/courts, that prior to birth “its just tissue” (like a malignant growth), and that we have a “right” to unlimited sex without any “unwanted” consequences (pregnancy or disease) – mix that with “the government ought to do something” and you have legalized abortion, sex-ed and condom hand-outs to school kids, etc. At the foundational level, the “Pro-Choice” and “Pro-Life” positions begin with very different worldview assumptions and goals. Until those foundational assumptions (about “life/personhood”) are dealt with, this divide will continue and our common cultural confusion will continue – why are the unborn legally “non-persons” if Mom wants to do away with them, but legally “persons” if anyone else does it? Why can Moms legally *kill* their own unborn, but after birth nobody can even *spank* them when they rebel? It has to do with our differing definitions and concerns and, as a culture, we are very confused.

Our foundational beliefs about the universe and history vary with our worldview assumptions also. *Christian Theism* believes in a Creator who initially produced the natural universe and continues to interact with it (even intervening at chosen times). *Deism* holds that an Intelligent Designer exists and initially created the natural universe, but then took a “hands

off” approach, lets it function by purely natural processes alone, and does not intervene. *Naturalists* believe that “nature/natural processes” are all there is and that a “creator” is no longer even necessary to get it started – given enough time, self-existing chemicals will turn into people. *Nihilism* no longer finds meaning in anything – existence itself is absurd. These first four views not only summarize four present options, but also represent stages in the historical/philosophical flow that has occurred in Western civilization during the last 400 years. *Existentialists* tend to begin with the absurdity answer and then optimistically (and individualistically) create their own functional “meanings.” *Eastern Pantheism* assumes that the material “realities” around us, as well as our own individual identities, are “an illusion” that needs to be abandoned so that we can “become one with the One.” *New Agers* tend to create their own combinations of old options - materialism, spiritualism, paganism, shamanism, etc. – and think that they have come up with something “new.”

Now, I do not expect everyone (even in the church) “to agree totally all of the time on everything” - my Dad used to say that such a situation indicates that “somebody is probably not doing any thinking”! However, most of our cultural and social “issues” are rooted in how we think (and we are not all on the same page any more).

Within the church, the issue of “unity” has to do with thinking alike to an extent that we are “together on the basics.” To bring this about, we need to all be in agreement on what the “basics” are and to make sure that all Christians are informed – its called “teaching/making disciples” and the church needs more of that and fewer gimmicky, low-content “programs.” Sunday morning can be a good place to identify and encourage these things, but sermons and Sunday school can’t compare with the time and energy that is spent indoctrinating people with the current secular agenda “outside” the church building. My experience has been that home Bible studies and small groups tend to be the most fertile environment for helping the healthy to grow (yes, I am saying that Hebrews 5:11-12 still applies too well - but the healthy, if fed, will become teachers, leaders, and reproducing saints). I use a simple “Journey through the Bible” outline to paint the overview of the Biblical story from Genesis to Revelation and, along the way, we get to deal with various doctrinal and apologetics issues as they arise out of the Biblical material. A “one hour” group often goes two as the discussion develops – you don’t have to worry about “attendance” - hungry people and good food are hard to keep apart.

Next, we will take a look at the basics of Christian Theism, as we begin to put together a summary of what we believe and what we will defend.