



THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

I offer this summary of the Christian worldview in the understanding that our outfit, the Stone-Scott-Campbell Restoration Movement, has always been a bit squeamish about written summaries of “what we believe” – a creed (from the Latin term *credo* – “I believe”). So this is not an “official creed” that anyone needs to recite, just MY summary of what I believe the Christian worldview believes and offers to the world.

IN the Beginning, God!

The first “worldview” issue concerns the “ultimate reality” – what is “really real”? If you strip away everything temporary or “dependent on something else,” what is the ultimate and permanent reality that exists? The possible answers are, surprisingly, few in numbers. I would guess that most of humanity believes in something that is “eternal” – either “matter” or “Spirit.” Most systems of thought will come down to either an eternal “something” or an eternal “someone.” I prefer the “eternal God” presupposition, because an intelligent and powerful “Someone” is philosophically preferable for explaining the origin, formation, and organization of natural systems and much better able to account for life, intelligence, and personality.

Hebrews 11:6 – We must believe that God exists and rewards seekers. It is not that we “must” (no choice, forced to, etc.) believe in God, for atheists show us that humans are capable of “not” believing in a supernatural God (some who claim to believe in Him do not act like they do). Rather, the Hebrews writer is saying that “living by faith in God” (illustrated in Hebrews 11) must begin with the conviction that God exists and rewards seekers. Only those who truly believe in His existence will “seek the rewards” He offers by obeying Him. James offers another angle on this same issue – seeking wisdom requires faith in God’s existence and willingness to give it, for doubters will receive nothing (James 1:5-8). Such a starting point, believing in God’s existence and involvement will put us at odds with the philosophical materialism and naturalism that pervades post-Enlightenment Western civilization. Why? Because our belief system is built on the proposition that physical matter and natural processes are real, but NOT ultimate – before and behind matter and the natural universe is God the Creator – a living spiritual being, of great power and intelligence who created matter and the natural processes by which the universe operates in a *semi-autonomous* manner. The issue of whether or not God exists is not a trivial issue – it is the first and most basic question that each of us must answer! “Faith” is rooted in a decided “assurance/conviction” of God’s existence - a “suspicion” won’t get you off of the starting line. But who is this “God” we are to believe in?

“Which God is God?” – Today, Western society seems to be locked on two questions concerning the supernatural – “Does God exist?” and “which God should I worship?” It appears from the evidence available that widespread “atheism” is something of a modern invention. Theoretical atheism (Psalm 14:1) – intellectually disbelieving in the supernatural - was around in the ancient world, as was “practical atheism” (Genesis 20:11) – living and acting as though there is no God. However, for the vast bulk of humanity, the central question was “which God(s)” should be recognized and feared? From the time of the wandering of the Patriarchs from their Babylonian homeland, certain deities had retained a place in the thinking of their descendants (Joshua 24:14,15). Egyptian religion honored many gods associated with different things and these were the targets of the plagues (Exodus 12:12) – YHWH showing that He alone was truly “God” (Exodus 9:12-16). As they moved on towards Canaan, God warned Israel not to participate in or imitate Egyptian or Canaanite religion (Leviticus 18:1-4; Deuteronomy 7:1-6). The Phoenician gods were worshipped in Canaan (El, Asherah, Baal, and Anat). Surrounding nations each had their own specific “national deities” (Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, Molech – 1Kings 11:5-7), with human sacrifice and ritual prostitution central elements in their worship. Homer provided the Greeks with a collection of gods, believed to reside on Mt. Olympus (Zeus, Hermes, Poseidon, etc.), but these were simply imaginary “exalted men/women,” believed to manipulate mankind like puppets and doing the same sins to each other that humans did. Later, Rome added to their traditional beliefs the Greek gods, giving them Latin names (Zeus->Jupiter, Hermes->Mercury, etc.). Greek and Roman concepts of deity emphasized “absolute use of power” – actual; control and manipulation of everything.

Since Rome honored (for political purposes) the pre-existing gods of conquered territories, Judaism was given legal status, but Christianity lost its place as a “sect of Judaism” in the mid-60’s A.D. and the exclusive claims it made did not contribute to the “harmony” of the political order Rome desired to create through “tolerance, pluralism, and multi-culturalism,” so persecution was brought to bear. Judaism had struggled with the same problem, for Jews faithful to Moses were not to accept as valid the claims of other gods and were to keep themselves strictly separated from them (Exodus 23:13,24; 34:12-17; Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:2,3). Christians, building on this same base, followed Jesus’ words (John 14:6) – Jesus was the Way, truth, and life and there was no other path to the Father. Peter proclaimed the same thing – there is salvation in no one else but Jesus (Acts 4:12). Paul got into trouble in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-28) for declaring the earlier prophetic message (Isaiah 44:9-20) - that idolatry is false and foolish. The Judeo-Christian system is not built upon a mutual toleration for all of the competing claims, but upon the conviction that the Creator God has revealed His purpose and worked through the Jewish people to bring Jesus as Savior of all into the world. So, what do we make of other world religions? (to be continued)