

WORLDVIEW

TRAINING

STUDENT  
MANUAL



# UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

## Preparation

A Summit Ministries Curriculum

## **THE AIM OF THIS CURRICULUM**

Many people think that those in the military, high government offices or important financial positions control the world. In this they are mistaken; our world revolves around *ideas*. Militaries exude power and authority, yet they are prisoners to the ideologies of their representative nations. Politicians and those in positions of governmental authority may think they rule the world, but they are held captive by the ideas they have embraced about government. Executives in large corporations may think they have the world by the tail, but they too are indebted to their ideas/beliefs about business practices/values and economic trends. Ideas lie behind every historical event and social policy. Ideas are the guiding force behind every twist and turn in public opinion; they determine what we accept or reject in the arts, media, business, medicine, education, government, church, family, etc.

We will never fully understand our world unless we understand the ideas that form its structure. Issues like stem-cell research, abortion, the homosexual rights movement, and political correctness will bewilder us if we divorce these issues from the ideas on which they are based. The reasons behind the cruelty of Ted Bundy, Joseph Stalin, or Adolf Hitler will elude us unless we understand their ideas. Without a thorough understanding of ideas, we will watch with feelings of helplessness and uncertainty as our world constantly tries to persuade us of the validity of its beliefs and practices.

*Understanding the Times* is about ideas. This curriculum will help you understand that everyone has a “worldview,” a way of interpreting everything that happens in the world. The Bible has an explanation for the universe, but so does Islam, Secular Humanism, Marxism, Postmodernism, and the New Age movement. Each of these worldviews is founded upon ideas. A worldview will dictate (consciously or unconsciously) how we should interpret and respond to the world around us. If we can understand the prominent worldviews in our world, we will better understand the underlying framework of many issues that Christians face. We will learn how to anticipate the response of a Muslim, Secular Humanist, Marxist, Postmodernist, or New Ager. Where once you saw thousands of confusing issues, you will see a big picture. Moreover, as you journey through the complex yet enlightening information this curriculum contains, you will learn to see ideas from a biblical Christian perspective.

The goal of this curriculum is to help open your eyes to the war of ideas competing for your heart and mind. You will begin to realize that the worldly problems we call “issues” are symptoms, not the disease. The disease is found in Romans when Paul declares, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23). Because all human beings are sinners (the *disease*), we will naturally produce and indulge in sin (the *symptoms*)—“For the wages of sin is death” (6:23a). We must start addressing the disease if we want to be effective in dealing with the symptoms.

Another way to look at this is to say that *ideas have consequences*. Since our world is utterly opposed to God, it produces bad ideas which, in turn, lead to bad consequences. Yet there is hope in the midst of this sinful world. Those who understand the ideas that rule the world will have the opportunity to influence the world of ideas. First Chronicles 12:32 tells the story of one small tribe in Israel that was chosen to lead because it “understood the times, and knew what Israel ought to do.” It is our hope that you too will be understand out times and thus know what God would have you do.

## **THE NEED FOR THIS CURRICULUM**

Our goals for this curriculum are twofold. The first goal is defensive: we want to help protect Christian youth from being deceived by anti-Christian worldviews. The second goal is offensive: we want to train up Christian leaders who can actively champion the truth of Christianity in a culture of relativism, paganism, hedonism, and confusion.

“Nothing short of a great Civil War of Values rages today throughout North America. Two sides with vastly differing and incompatible world-views are locked in a bitter conflict that permeates every level of society...the struggle now is for the hearts and minds of the people. It is a war over ideas. And someday soon, I believe, a winner will emerge and the loser will fade from memory. For now, the outcome is very much in doubt.”<sup>1</sup>

What James Dobson and Gary Bauer describe is the current struggle among worldviews as Christians, Muslims, Secular Humanists, Marxists, New Agers, and Postmodernists vie for the hearts and minds of

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<sup>1</sup> James C. Dobson and Gary L. Bauer, *Children at Risk: The Battle for the Hearts and Minds of Our Kids*, (Dallas: Word, 1990), pp. 19–20.

individuals. Many Christian students, parents, and teachers falsely assume that Christian youth are immune to false ideas simply because they have been raised in a Christian environment. However, even students raised in Christian homes, who attend church regularly, and are enrolled in Christian schools are vulnerable to non-Christian ways of thinking. Christian youth in large numbers are rejecting certain biblical truths or even turning away from Christianity altogether. Without proper worldview training, the trends outlined below will likely continue:

**CHRISTIANS RENOUNCING THEIR FAITH IN COLLEGE:** According to findings published in a UCLA dissertation, Dr. Gary Railsback notes that up to 59% of Christians renounce their faith before graduating from college (this is up from 51% in 1989). Shockingly, there is little statistical difference between Christian students enrolled at secular and Christian institutions.<sup>2</sup>

**CHRISTIANS THINKING MORE LIKE HUMANISTS:** Each year, thousands of Christian school students take the Nehemiah Institute worldview assessment test. Students are presented with a series of relevant questions, and then asked to pick the multiple-choice answer that best expresses their beliefs. Based on their answers, students are scored along a spectrum from “Biblical Christian” (100–70) to “Moderate Christian” (69–30) to “Secular Humanist” (29–0) to “Marxist” (anything below a ‘0’ score). From 1988 until 2000, it was found that students enrolled in Christian schools moved from an average in the low 50s (meaning they scored at the lower end of “Moderate Christian”) to an average of about 20 in the year 2000 (meaning they responded to key social, political, and religious issues like a Secular Humanist).<sup>3</sup>

**REJECTION OF MORAL ABSOLUTES AMONG CHRISTIAN TEENS AND ADULTS:** The well-known Christian statistician George Barna reports that among teenagers, a mere 9% of Christian teens believe in moral absolutes versus 4% of non-Christian teens.<sup>4</sup>

While these trends are alarming, we must remember that God’s truth is more powerful than the false ideas capturing the minds of our culture. For years, the Christian community has drawn a line between the *sacred* and the *secular*. Christians have been encouraged to focus only on “sacred” activities and avoid involvement with “secular” activities such as politics, culture, science, or philosophy. In reality, no such distinction exists. *Understanding the Times* is a call to understand the spiritual nature of the struggle between good and evil, and the way in which it impacts every area of life and culture—the distorted sexual mores, the rewriting of history to exclude God, and the attempt to impose a humanistic utopian vision on the world. This curriculum operates on the premise that *this* generation must be prepared to undertake a *pro-active* Christianity—one that seeks to *redeem* culture and all of God’s creation, rather than *reject* it.

This curriculum does not teach that Christians are victims of some global conspiracy. It holds firmly, however, to the biblical description of evil as persuasive and in direct rebellion against God’s will.

Years ago, Francis Schaeffer astutely noted that Christians were beginning to view the world in “bits and pieces instead of totals.” In the twentieth century, Christians rather abruptly lost sight of their responsibilities in society, and gradually lost the ability to discern good from evil. Christianity entered a downward spiral in which we quickly lost the capacity to stand for righteousness and justice. Before long, complicated “issues” seemed so overwhelming that most Christians numbly retreated from their societal responsibilities into the comfort zone of *self*. Generally speaking, Christianity ceased to reflect God’s love and character to the unbelieving world. Today, many Christians are more concerned with their personal faith, personal growth, and personal church than with the world at large that they are called to love and serve.

<sup>2</sup> This study was done in 1989 by Gary Lyle Railsback, “An Exploratory Study of the Religiosity and Related Outcomes Among College Students,” Doctoral dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1994. A follow up study was done in 2001 but has not yet been published. The greatest losses were at Catholic universities reporting 59% of Christian freshmen renounced their faith by their senior year, Protestant universities showed a 31% loss.

<sup>3</sup> In addition, Christian students in public schools scored considerably lower, with an average of 8.2 in 2004.  
<http://www.nehemiahinstitute.com/index.php>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=106&Reference=C>

However, the current generation of Christians (i.e. you) has started to notice the previous generation’s shirking of cultural responsibilities, though they are perhaps unsure what needs change, how to take action, or even where they should begin. Assuming responsibility used be the mark of adulthood, but this timeless “rite of passage” between childhood and adulthood has become blurry. In its absence, young people often feel compelled to prove their adulthood by engaging in premarital sex, declaring independence from their families, and so on.

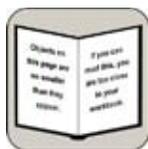
*Understanding the Times* provides a constructive “rite of passage.” Through it, we want to pass the torch to you, the next generation, by explaining the mistakes of the past and endowing you with the responsibility for shaping the future of the world.

### **USING THIS MANUAL**

Before beginning this curriculum, it will helpful to understand its structure and layout.

**ICONS:** The following icons are used throughout this manual in order to indicate the primary purpose and medium of the activity by which they appear.

#### **Reading Assignment**



#### **Video Outline**



#### **Discussion Questions**



#### **Writing Assignment**



#### **Class Activity**



**UNITS:** There are 10 units to this curriculum plus an Introduction and Conclusion section. The following elements are found within each unit:

- 1. Table of contents:** At the beginning of each unit is a table of contents or section outline that lists the components and their corresponding page numbers. All textbook readings will be underlined, essays *italicized*, and videos “quoted.”
- 2. 180-day and 90-day Syllabus:** Also at the beginning of each unit is both a two- and one-semester syllabus outlining your daily classroom and homework assignments.
- 3. Video outlines:** Each unit has corresponding video presentations and outlines. Videos may be divided into multiple parts, and average between 20 to 40 minutes in length. Each presentation has a set of video outlines with fill-in-the-blank notes.
- 4. Video discussion questions:** Each video (with the exception of the first videos shown in each of the ten units) has an accompanying set of discussion questions. These questions should be completed individually after watching each presentation, and then reviewed the following day with the entire class.
- 5. Textbook reading assignments:** Each unit has a corresponding textbook reading assignment. These assignments are found within the book titled *Understanding the Times*.
- 6. Textbook discussion questions:** Each textbook reading assignment has an accompanying set of discussion questions. These questions should be completed individually after reading, and then reviewed the following day with the entire class.
- 7. Essay reading assignments:** Each unit has corresponding essay reading assignments.

- 8. Essay discussion questions:** Each essay reading assignment has an accompanying set of discussion questions. These questions should be completed individually after reading, and then reviewed the following day with the entire class.
- 9. Dear Doug essay assignment:** Each unit (except Psychology and the conclusion) has a corresponding essay assignment. These essays will be 1–2 page written responses to problems addressed in letters from Doug, a friend who has just begun college.
- 10. Unit Test:** At the end of each unit is a corresponding unit test. The questions for these tests may be matching, multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, or short answer. *Each test is based on the video, textbook, and essay discussion questions as well as the Fact Sheets.*
- 11. Worldview Paper:** At the end of unit five there will be a 4–6 page paper defining and comparing the Christian, Islamic, Secular Humanist, Marxist, New Age, and Postmodernist worldviews.
- 12. Comprehensive Exam:** At the end of the “conclusion” unit, there will be a comprehensive multiple-choice exam covering all the materials from the course. *Questions for the comprehensive exam are found in the video, textbook, and essay discussion questions as well as the Fact Sheets.*

**FACT SHEETS:** A number of fact sheets are provided with the manual. They are categorized according to various worldview subjects, and provide helpful resources for college research and writing assignments.

**TRANSLATION:** For this curriculum, we have chosen to use the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

**GRADING:** There are 2000 points possible for this course (1500 for the one-semester):

<u>Assignments</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Total Points</u>	<u>Points Earned</u>
Dear Doug Letters	10	50	500	
Unit Tests	10	100	1000	
Worldview Paper	1	200	200	
Comprehensive Exam	1	300	300	

**COLLEGE CREDIT:** Bryan College (a nationally accredited university in Dayton, Tennessee) has teamed up with Summit Ministries to offer college credit to students taking the *Understanding the Times* course. For those following the 180-day syllabus, three credit hours are offered; for those following the 90-day syllabus, two credit hours are offered. You can begin earning college credit while still in high school!

### Requirements:

1. Submit application and tuition to Summit Ministries by May 1<sup>st</sup>
2. Complete the *Understanding the Times* syllabus requirements (180- or 90-day) with at least a C:
  - a. Read the revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edition textbook and all assigned supplemental essays
  - b. Write the 4–6 page research paper
  - c. Write 10 responsive Essays (3 credit hours only)
  - d. Take 10 unit Tests and the Final Exam
3. Submit copies of your Unit Tests, Worldview Paper, and Final Exam to Bryan College

For more information, please visit [www.summit.org/curriculum/hs/](http://www.summit.org/curriculum/hs/). If you are interested in pursuing this option, ask your teacher for an application.

### ADDITIONAL SUMMIT RESOURCES

**SUMMIT HOMEPAGE:** The online hub for Summit’s conferences, curriculum, and resources.

[www.summit.org](http://www.summit.org)



**SUMMIT TRUTH & CONSEQUENCES:** A free monthly e-news article that reviews current issues from a worldview perspective. To sign up, visit [www.summit.org/resource/tc/](http://www.summit.org/resource/tc/).

**SUMMIT JOURNAL:** A free monthly review of the news and cultural events, edited by Dr. David Noebel. To sign up, visit [www.summit.org/resource/journal/](http://www.summit.org/resource/journal/).

**SUMMIT ALUMNI DATABASE:** A forum to find other Summit graduates at your college or university. Use this database as a springboard to get together and get involved on your campuses and in your communities. <http://alumni.summit.org/>

**SUMMIT WEBSTORE:** For the most up-to-date selection of worldview-oriented books, videos, and CDs covering such topics as apologetics, Darwinism, Relativism, Pluralism, Skepticism, and many others, visit <http://store.summit.org/>.

**SUMMIT JAT (JUST A THOUGHT):** A Summit Ministries community discussion project whose goal is quite simply thinking through issues of faith and worldview: <http://jat.summit.org>.

**SUMMIT CONFERENCES:** To learn more about our intensive two-week educational conferences that analyze the major worldviews of our day and contrast them with the Christian Worldview, please visit [www.summit.org/conference/summer/](http://www.summit.org/conference/summer/).

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Included below is a list of organizations and publications that can provide you with valuable information. To explore some of the topics you will be studying, we've provided you with places to begin your own research. Please note that this list is not intended to be comprehensive, and that the inclusion of an organization on this list does *not* constitute an implicit endorsement of that organization by Summit Ministries.

#### ***PUBLICATIONS:***

*Note:* Many organizations give free subscriptions to students

*Areopagus Journal* | **Apologetics Resource Center** | [www.arcapologetics.org](http://www.arcapologetics.org) | 205.403.0102 |

*Biblical Worldview* | **American Vision** | [www.americanvision.org](http://www.americanvision.org) | 800.628.9460 |

*Christian Research Journal* | **Christian Research Institute** | [www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org) | 888.700.0274 |

*Citizen Magazine* | **Focus on the Family** | [www.family.org](http://www.family.org) | 800.232.6459 |

*First Things* | **Institute of Religion and Public Life** | [www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com) | 877.905.9920 |

*Freeman Journal* | **Foundation for Economic Education** | [www.fee.org](http://www.fee.org) | 800.960.4333 |

*Human Events* | [www.humanevents.org](http://www.humanevents.org) | 888.546.5001 |

*Imprimis* | **Hillsdale College** | [www.hillsdale.edu](http://www.hillsdale.edu) | 800.437.2268 |

*Intercollegiate Review* | **Intercollegiate Studies Institute** | [www.isi.org](http://www.isi.org) | 800.526.7022 |

*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* | **Evangelical Theological Society** | [www.etsjets.org](http://www.etsjets.org) |

*Philosophia Christi* | **Evangelical Philosophical Society** | [www.epsociety.org](http://www.epsociety.org) |

*Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* | **Southern Baptist Theological Seminary** | [www.sbts.edu](http://www.sbts.edu) |

*Summit Journal* | **Summit Ministries** | [www.summit.org](http://www.summit.org) | 719.685.9103 |

*World Magazine* | [www.worldmag.com](http://www.worldmag.com) | 800.951.6397 |

**ONLINE RESOURCES:**

**Access Research Network** | [www.arn.org](http://www.arn.org) |

**American Vision** | [www.americanvision.org](http://www.americanvision.org) |

**Christian Answers** | [www.christiananswers.net](http://www.christiananswers.net) |

**Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry** | [www.carm.org](http://www.carm.org) |

**Christian Research Institute** | [www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org) |

**Discovery Institute** | [www.discovery.org](http://www.discovery.org) |

**Leadership University** | [www.leaderu.com](http://www.leaderu.com) |

**Probe Ministries** | [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org) |

**Stand to Reason** | [www.str.org](http://www.str.org) |

**Summit Ministries** | [www.summit.org](http://www.summit.org) |

**Veritas Forum** | [www.veritias.org](http://www.veritias.org) |

**THINK TANKS:**

**Cato Institute** | [www.cato.org](http://www.cato.org) | 202.842.0200 |

**Concerned Women for America** | [www.cwfa.org](http://www.cwfa.org) | 202.488.7000 |

**Eagle Forum** | [www.eagleforum.org](http://www.eagleforum.org) | 618.462.5415 |

**Family Policy Network** | [www.familypolicy.net](http://www.familypolicy.net) | 434.846.0500 |

**Family Research Council** | [www.frc.org](http://www.frc.org) | 202.393.2100 |

**Federalist Society** | [www.fed-soc.org](http://www.fed-soc.org) | 202.822.8138 |

**Foundation for Thought and Ethics** | [www.fteonline.com](http://www.fteonline.com) | 800.669.3410 |

**Heritage Foundation** | [www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org) | 202.546.4400 |

**CAMPUS MINISTRIES:**

**Campus Crusade for Christ** | [www.campuscrusadeforchrist.com](http://www.campuscrusadeforchrist.com) | 407.826.2000 |

**Intercollegiate Studies Institute** | [www.isi.org](http://www.isi.org) | 800.526.7022 |

**Probe Ministries** | [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org) | 800.899.7762 |

**Ravi Zacharias International Ministries** | [www.rzim.org](http://www.rzim.org) | 770.449.6766 |

**Reformed University Fellowship** | [www.ruf.org](http://www.ruf.org) | 678.825.1070 |



WORLDVIEW

STUDENT  
MANUAL



TRAINING

# UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

## Introduction

Topics:

Apologetics

Hermeneutics

Worldviews

A Summit Ministries Curriculum

## SECTION OUTLINE

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<i>Total Truth</i> essay questions .....	32
Dear Doug Letter assignment .....	33

## 180-DAY SYLLABUS

Day	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1	<i>Read</i> Student Manual ‘Preparation’	<i>Read</i> <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Introduction 0.1’	
2	<i>Watch</i> “Introduction to Worldviews” video		
3	<i>Review</i> “Introduction to Worldviews” video questions	<i>Read</i> <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Introduction 0.2’	
4	<i>Review</i> <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Introduction 0.2’ questions	<i>Read</i> <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Introduction 0.3’	
5	<i>Review</i> <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Introduction 0.3’ questions		
6	<i>Read</i> <i>Playing with Fire</i> essay	<i>Assign</i> Dear Doug Letter	
7	<i>Review</i> <i>Playing with Fire</i> essay questions		
8	<i>Watch</i> “Loving God with Your Mind” video P1		
9	<i>Watch</i> “Loving God with Your Mind” video P2		
10	<i>Review</i> “Loving God with Your Mind” video questions		
11	<i>Watch</i> “Ambassadors for Christ” video		
12	<i>Review</i> “Ambassadors for Christ” video questions		
13	<i>Read</i> <i>Total Truth</i> essay		
14	<i>Review</i> <i>Total Truth</i> essay questions	Dear Doug Letter assignment <i>Due</i>	
15	<i>Take</i> Introduction Test		

## 90-DAY SYLLABUS

Day	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1	<i>Read</i> Student Manual ‘Preparation’	<i>Read</i> <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Introduction 0.1’	
2	<i>Watch</i> “Introduction to Worldviews” video	<i>Read</i> <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Introduction 0.2–0.3’	
3	<i>Review</i> “Introduction to Worldviews” video questions		
4	<i>Review</i> <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Introduction 0.2–0.3’ questions		
5	<i>Take</i> Introduction Test		



# “INTRODUCTION TO WORLDVIEWS”

WITH KEVIN BYWATER

## I. We Are in a \_\_\_\_\_

- A. Two kinds of people: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Colossians 2:8: to not be taken \_\_\_\_\_
- C. 2 Corinthians 10:3–5: to take every thought \_\_\_\_\_
- D. 2 Timothy 2:22–26: to set the \_\_\_\_\_ free

## II. What is a Worldview?

“A world view is a way one views the whole world. And since people have vastly different views of the world, depending on the perspective from which they view the world, it is clear that one’s world view makes a world of difference. A world view is a way of viewing or interpreting all of reality. It is an interpretive framework through which or by which one makes sense out of the data of life and the world.” — Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins, *Worlds Apart*, 11.

“A worldview is the perspective through which you understand and approach life and the world.”

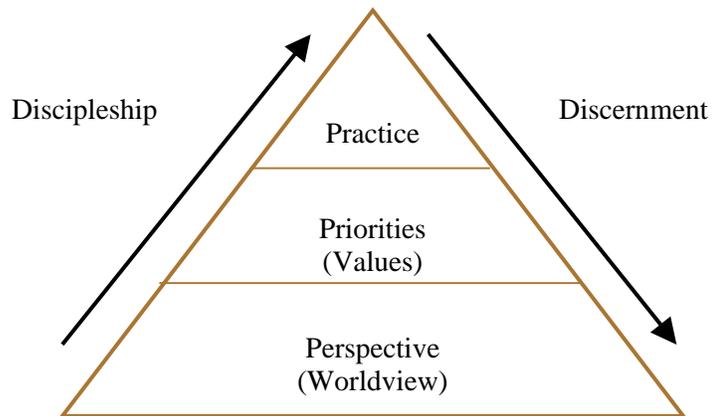
## III. Illustrating Worldviews

- A. \_\_\_\_\_
- B. \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Optical illusions

## IV. Questions Every Worldview Must Answer

- A. What is \_\_\_\_\_?
- B. What is \_\_\_\_\_?

## V. The Worldview Triangle



One key worldview principle: \_\_\_\_\_ have consequences

## VI. Developing Your Own Worldview

- A. Don't \_\_\_\_\_ your Bibles, . . . \_\_\_\_\_ them!
- B. Read other worldview materials
- C. Put yourself in challenging situations
- D. Stretch your intellectual boundaries
- E. Engage in \_\_\_\_\_ analysis
- F. Watch your time closely

## VII. The Goals of Developing a Christian Worldview

- A. To be a faithful disciple of Christ
- B. Know \_\_\_\_\_ we believe \_\_\_\_\_ we believe
- C. Learn to think consistently
- D. Learn to engage our culture without compromise
- E. Be faithful \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ



# “INTRODUCTION TO WORLDVIEWS”

## VIDEO QUESTIONS

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class. Reflection Questions will not be found in the text. These are merely designed to help you start thinking about issues from a worldview perspective.*

1. **What are three key verses used in the discussion of worldviews?**
2. **What is a worldview? What are some illustrations?**
3. **What questions must every worldview answer? Why are these questions relevant?**
4. **What is the purpose of the worldview triangle? Why is it important to develop a Christian worldview?**
5. **Reflection Question:** What does the dictum “ideas have consequences” mean?



# UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

## INTRODUCTION QUESTIONS

Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class. Answers to the Reflection Questions will not be found in the text, but are designed to help you start thinking about issues from a worldview perspective.

### INTRODUCTION 0.2

1. What is a worldview and what are some of the fundamental questions a worldview answers?
2. How do Norman Geisler and William Watkins define a worldview? What are two illustrations that demonstrate how a worldview works?
3. How is the term “worldview” defined in *Understanding the Times*?
4. **Reflection Question:** Does a person’s belief in the existence of God affect his or her life? If yes, give an example of how that belief may affect his or her ideas about life.
5. **Reflection Question:** Francis Schaeffer said, “The basic problem of the Christians in this country in the last eighty years or so, in regard to society and in regard to government, is that they have seen things in bits and pieces instead of totals.” What does Schaeffer mean by “bits and pieces?”

### INTRODUCTION 0.3

6. Which verses from Genesis fit with the worldview disciplines listed in the *Understanding the Times* textbook?
7. In what way does the person of Jesus Christ underline the significance of each discipline?
8. According to 2 Corinthians 10:4–5, once we understand the world, what are we to do?
9. What evidence supports the claim that Secular Humanism is “religious” in nature?
10. What legal and constitutional problem should result from classifying Secular Humanism as a religion? Can humanist teaching be considered *neutral*? Why or why not?



## PLAYING WITH FIRE

BY WALT RUSSELL

### THE HAZARDS OF READING ON A BATTLEFIELD

As she worked her way toward the front of the room, I could tell the young woman was really angry with me. Her eyes were blazing and her jaw was set. This was surprising because the setting was fairly benign: speaking to a large evangelical church's singles group on "How to Interpret the Bible." At the beginning of my two times with them, however, I was already offending the troops! I braced myself.

Twenty-four year-old "Janet" (not her real name) was angry at my emphasis on seeking to discover authors' intentions when we read their texts. She was an evangelical Christian and a second grade teacher in a public school. She prided herself in helping her 20 students learn to love literature. She would read them a story as they gathered around her, and then ask each child, "What does the story mean to you?" She prodded them to come up with their own unique meanings. With such strong encouragement, the class of 20 would eventually have 20 different meanings for the one story. Janet sensed that I was opposed to such "love of literature." Pouring a little emotional gasoline on the fire, I said, "Janet, you're certainly doing your part to insure that these 7 year-olds will never recover from a radically relativistic view of meaning!" Now I had her full attention.

Actually, Janet's and my little story about where a text's meaning resides is really part of a larger, more tangled story that's over a hundred years old. It started with some American literary critics early in the 20th century who shifted the focus from the author to the text. This literary perspective, later called "New Criticism," banished the author and focused instead on a "close reading" or "explication" of the text. When created, a text supposedly becomes an independent creation, like a newborn set free on its own. The autonomous text's meaning is discovered by studying the way it naturally goes together as a whole. New Criticism triumphed in the United States from about 1930 to 1960. As the text moved into the spotlight, authors were shuffled to the periphery.

But to understand Janet's and my little discussion we need to know the story from 1960 to the present. This is because the movement away from authors did not stop at the text. Rather, it continued its movement all the way to us as readers. In the last 40 years, reading and interpreting has been redefined from *seeking the intentions of authors* through reading their texts to *continually recreating the text through the presuppositions of readers*. Since the 1960s the emphasis has shifted to the astonishing assumption that readers not only create the meaning, but also in some sense *create the text itself* through the contouring of their presuppositions! With this view none of us can really share the same text!

The classical view of meaning is that a text is *a window* into an author's intentions. For example, we peer through the window of the biblical text to interpret what the Divine and human authors intend to say. By contrast, the postmodern sense is that a text is *a mirror* by which readers generate meaning. Janet was holding up a mirror to her second graders and encouraging them to generate their own meanings in light of their own images. The irony is that this does not teach a "love of literature," but rather fosters a self-centered fascination with one's own thoughts! If this is how Christians interpret the meaning of the Bible, then we are trapped within our own mirrors—our own set of presuppositions. We are not hearing God's voice, only our own. We are trapped inside our own heads.

The first problem with this view of meaning is that any positive presentation of it is self-refuting. In order to communicate "readers create meaning," relativistic authors have to scab off of the real world and the way meaning actually works to communicate their relativistic ideas. In other words, they expect us to interpret accurately their authorial intention that readers can't get to authorial intention! Or approach it from another perspective: If you're a student, ask your professor who expounds this view of meaning to reread your paper on which she gave you a D until she creates a meaning for it worthy of an A. Say that it's unfair that she graded *you* harshly for *her* poor reader-generated meaning! No one can live in a world where readers generate meaning because it doesn't exist.

Another problem with the present relativism in meaning in the West is the very fact that it is *in the West*. The 30 percent of the world that lives in the West has reaped the bitter fruit of a 500-year march toward extreme individualism. Those of us born right after World War II have reached the lunatic fringe in living out a radical and narcissistic self-absorption. It has destroyed our marriages, families, churches, national cohesion, and meaningful sense of community.

The good news is that our children have sensed the futility of this radical perspective and are saying, “We can’t take it anymore! We don’t want to deny the group dimension of ourselves anymore. We want to have meaningful connections with one another. We want to have stable community and long-lasting relationships.”

Good move. Now simply stop denying the universal dimension of language too! Recognize that words, ideas, and genres are public, sharable things that we use in order to communicate with one another. While an individual intersects with them, the components of language are essentially group-oriented things. They make individual communication possible. While we complicate the interpretive process with our individual presuppositions, they are not an insurmountable barrier. We simply recognize the “fuzzing” that our presuppositions can cause and seek to use good interpretive methods to transcend any clouding they may bring.

The Church in the West has been deeply impacted by this misunderstanding of meaning. We need go no further than the main question we ask when interpreting the Bible: “What does this verse mean to you?” The trickle-down of a century of bad interpretive theories has led to our widespread relativistic interpretation of the Bible. We have been profoundly wounded in the midst of the spiritual warfare that has surrounded the issue of meaning. Our anti-intellectualism has actually increased the casualty list. Another culprit is our naiveté about the setting in which we read. We read right in the middle of a remarkable spiritual battlefield. While the casualties are initially subtler, they are ultimately more obvious. The spiritual warfare is blazing around us. It has effectively neutralized the greatest wealth of Bible study resources available in the history of the Church. Not by preventing their publication, but by undercutting their usefulness with a relativistic view of meaning! Why do I need a Bible dictionary to help determine Paul’s meaning in Philippians 1:6 if the ultimate trump card is what it means *to me*? How brilliantly diabolical and strategic such a view of meaning is. It effectively cuts us off from God’s voice and imprisons us within our own voice. It is Satan’s ancient question, “Indeed, has God said? . . . “ in postmodern dress.

Perhaps it is no overstatement to imagine that when you pick up your Bible and start reading it, you are instantly transported to the field of spiritual battle. Perhaps that funny odor is not burning pizza but flaming arrows; perhaps you need to avoid being a casualty! Probably not a bad idea also to be fighting for the right army! These are just some of the hazards of reading on a battlefield.

### **‘INDIANS SLAY TIGERS’ AND BRAKING FOR GENRES**

“INDIANS SLAY TIGERS!”—the newspaper headline virtually screams out at you. The thought of something being slain is repulsive. You’re gripped by a mental image of southern India’s Bengal tiger. You imagine its beautiful face, its stripes and piercing eyes. Then your image is shattered by the sudden blast of a high-powered rifle. You see the exquisite creature writhe in pain, fall gracelessly in its tracks and die. Having read no further than the headline, you feel sick, as if you’ve witnessed something tragic.

But *should* you feel this way? The slaughter of an endangered species—especially one as magnificent as the Bengal tiger—is horrifying, no doubt. But suppose you failed to notice that the headline “INDIANS SLAY TIGERS!” appeared in the *sports page* of the morning paper. Clearly enough, it now refers to different Indians, different Tigers, and a different manner of slaying than you originally thought. And is it really that tragic that the Cleveland Indians badly beat the Detroit Tigers in a major league baseball game last night? Not unless you’re a long-suffering Detroit Tigers’ baseball fan. But how do you now know that the headline is about baseball and not tiger-slaying in India? You look at the words “INDIANS SLAY TIGERS” and you know exactly what each word means. When you combine these words, how can they not mean exactly what you first thought they did—that *Indians slay tigers*? Answer: because their meanings are communicated (as the meanings of *all* words are) through *genres*!

Whether we recognize that we are doing so or not, we interpret all things in life, from casual conversations to scholarly articles, in terms of their perceived genres or types of communication. When we develop an ability to discern cues within a text that indicate what kind of literature we’re working with and what to expect (or not to expect) from it, we have achieved what some call “literary competence.” We develop literary competence by growing up in a culture and learning its various genres—its various styles of communication. If we have literary competence, after reading “INDIANS SLAY TIGERS!” in the sports page, we would never picture tigers in India because we would instantly know that correct interpretation within *this* genre requires assuming that “TIGERS” and “INDIANS” refer to *teams* rather

than people from India and large striped cats. Our interpretation of any section in the newspaper begins instantaneously when we recognize the genre and adjust our expectations accordingly. The beauty of genres is that they are public, sharable forms of communication that immediately enable the understanding of meaning. Genres are one of God's enduring gifts of common grace that help us communicate to one another with accurate understanding.

The *words* of the Bible are God-breathed, by the Holy Spirit, into the human-crafted *genres* exhibited in the Bible. We find every God-breathed word of Scripture within a genre. Because genres set limits on our possible interpretations of words, if God had *not* placed the words of Scripture within genres, we wouldn't understand one word of the Bible. So God has spoken to us "in many portions and many ways" (Hebrews 1:1) through particular biblical genres such as historical narrative, law, poetry, wisdom literature, apocalyptic literature, prophecy, gospels, letters, parables, and on and on. If our literary competence with the Bible approaches the literary competence we have with the morning newspaper, we should be able to jump into any part of the Scriptures and interpret its words accurately. But sadly, much of our Bible-reading parallels our weeping for Bengal tigers after reading a headline in the sports section of the newspaper!

In front of a large adult fellowship in an evangelical church, I recently spoke on the topic of being genre-sensitive in reading the Bible. To illustrate, I turned to Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." I asked, "Can we claim this as a promise for parents?" Not wanting to appear a fool, no one ventured an answer. Most assumed that we could claim it as a promise and had, in fact, done so many times! To provoke them a bit further, I shared a proverb from American history—*early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise*. "Anyone want to claim that as a promise?" I asked, rhetorically. "No. Why not? ... Because it's a proverb," I said, answering my own question. "Then why do you think that you can change a *biblical* proverb into a promise?" I anticipated the answer that eventually emerged from the fog: "Because this proverb about child-raising is *in the Bible!*" I deadpanned, "So what?" Their response: "God can supernaturally do whatever He wants in the Bible."

True, God *can* do whatever He wants, in the Bible and elsewhere. If He *wants*, God can tell us how to make lasagna through the gospel of John, tell us that Christ died for our sins through a cookbook and, of course, promise the salvation of our kids through Proverbs 22:6. But how is this relevant? If their answer is correct and *we* can change *God's* proverbs into promises, then we really have no idea what God is saying in Proverbs, do we? If Proverbs 22:6 isn't a proverb (or *is* a proverb, but doesn't need to be *interpreted* as a proverb), then we don't know *what* it is or *how* to interpret it. Having no limit for its possible interpretation, it can morph into whatever *we* want it to be. It really has no genre except what we choose to give it, based on our present needs. One person can make it a promise, another can make it a riddle, and the cynical, burnt out parent can make it an ironic joke. Without genre, it is vague and meaningless, and we really don't know what God intended to say. What it does provide, however, is an occasion for us to craft God's words into whatever words we want to hear!

Hopefully, those of you familiar with such methods of interpretation get the idea of how foolish and dangerous much of our Bible reading has become. It is another example of the tragic shift in interpretive focus from seeking authors' intentions to unpacking readers' presuppositions. When we ignore genres in the interpretive process, we are ignoring one of the most important aids to understanding. Why? Because genres are one of those *community things* that authors and readers must share if they want to communicate clearly and efficiently with one another. When I ignore the chosen genre of a biblical passage, I effectively *individualize and privatize* the interpretive process and jerk the Bible out of everybody else's hands. Whether I'm teaching the passage or reading it, I have taken it out of the public arena where we can share and discuss its meaning.

The personal cost of ignoring biblical genres may also be great. I can still picture a distinguished, older gentleman I conversed with two decades ago. We were studying Proverbs that Saturday and I had just claimed that proverbs are not promises but instances of wisdom literature that emphasize wise choices. I used the example of Proverbs 22:6 and the earnest but erroneous claiming of that proverb by parents as a promise in child-rearing. The dear fellow literally stood up from his chair, red-faced and flustered. He and his wife had two boys who appeared to trust Christ as children but wandered from the faith as teenagers and had not returned as adults. As faithful parents, he and his wife had gotten on their knees and prayed for their wayward sons several times each week, claiming the "promise" of their return

in Proverbs 22:6 for over 20 years! In the midst of their parental pain over the eternal well-being of their sons, they took comfort in the “promise” of Proverbs 22:6. Imagine the disillusionment in God and His “promises” that would inevitably accompany their years of false hope if their sons never returned to the Lord. What’s worse, the pain and disillusionment were due to some well-intentioned but genre-ignoring saint who made a proverb into a promise—somewhere in the process of interpreting Proverbs 22:6, God’s words became his words and God’s intended meaning was distorted.

Such, however, does not have to be the case if we will brake for the genres of the Bible. As the diversity of biblical literature testifies, God seems to.

### OVERCOMING VERSE-BITE CHRISTIAN CULTURE

“Never Read a Bible Verse!” That’s the title of a little booklet my friend and Christian radio personality, Gregory Koukl, has written to help people read the Bible well. What great advice. “That’s right, never read a Bible verse. Instead, always read a paragraph—at least.” But the current is flowing the other way in our popular sound-bite culture. Not to be left out (or left behind!), the Church has its own version of sound-bite culture: *verse-bite culture*. In verse-bite culture we take a sentence or sentence-fragment from a biblical paragraph, memorize it out of context, write it on a little card, put it on a billboard, a plaque, a rock, etc. Somehow we think that just because this little chunk of Scripture has a verse number in front of it, it was meant to be a freestanding unit of thought. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Apart from the fact that chapter and verse divisions weren’t added to the New Testament text until 1560—long after the New Testament’s inspired authorship—there is a more important reason for never reading just a Bible verse, and instead reading at least the paragraph that contains it.

By nature, meaning comes from the top down, from a text’s larger units to its smaller ones. The paragraph is there because of the *whole text’s* thesis. The sentence (or “verse”) is there because of the *paragraph’s* thesis. The word is there because of the *sentence’s* thesis. You get the idea. The contours of the larger units of a text determine the meaning of its smaller units. This is also the way our minds work—from the big idea down to its smaller parts. The same is true of the Bible. A biblical sentence (verse) is simply a part of a paragraph and develops some aspect of the *paragraph’s* big idea. Therefore, the *minimal* unit of thought to read is the paragraph. A wise Bible reader will learn to think in terms of paragraphs and will regularly ask, “What’s the big idea of this paragraph?”

Let’s test this approach to reading the Bible by looking at a well-known verse of Scripture, 1 Thessalonians 5:22—“Abstain from all appearance of evil.” I confess that whenever I encounter this verse, I picture old, withered saints shaking their bony fingers in younger believers’ faces and exhorting them about some questionable behavior. In this recurring scenario, the godly, mature Christians find it necessary to exhort the younger saints not because they have done something that *actually is* evil, but simply because they behaved in a manner that could have the *appearance* of being evil.

This understanding of the teaching of 1 Thessalonians 5:22 can be traced back to the King James Version of 1611. The KJV chose the word “appearance” for the Greek word *eidos*, which means *visible form, outward appearance, kind* or *sort*. Since this translation emerged, well-intentioned Christians have focused only on the “outward appearance” aspect and concluded that we are not only to avoid evil, but we are also to avoid anything that could *outwardly appear* to be evil. Hence, the genesis of the widely used ethical dictum, “Avoid every appearance of evil.” However, there are multiple problems with this interpretation.

One is that it doesn’t fit into the big idea of the paragraph containing it. In fact, this understanding is totally secondary to the paragraph’s big idea. Let me briefly explain.

1 Thessalonians is the Apostle Paul’s letter to a group of new Christians being persecuted by their fellow citizens in northern Greece. It’s an adversarial context for the church, so Paul spends much of his time defending his church-planting team’s integrity and actions in chapters 1–3. In chapters 4–5 (“the moral exhortation” section), he addresses five successive threats to the life of this church body. 1 Thessalonians 5:12–22 addresses the fifth and final significant issue facing this new band of Christians.

Verses 12–22 deal broadly with the concerns that arise when the church gathers for her weekly assembly. Paul gives instructions about fostering healthy church body life in this context by rightly esteeming leaders (verses 12–13), dealing sensitively with the saints’ varying needs (verses 14–15), establishing a joyful assembly (verses 16–18), and not squelching the ministry of the Holy Spirit in prophetic utterances in the assembly (verses 19–22). Note that verse 22 helps develop the exhortation about prophecy in the church. While the paragraph covers a broad range of issues, these issues coherently develop the big idea of “what our body life should look like when the church gathers.”

By briefly working our way down from the broader context of the whole letter to the paragraph (5:12–22), we’re now ready to look at the immediate context for verse 22. Notice the logical flow of the argument about prophetic utterances in verses 19–22:

“<sup>19</sup> **Do not quench the Spirit;**”—*This is the general exhortation of the argument.*

“<sup>20</sup> **do not despise prophetic utterances.**”—*A specific NEGATIVE aspect of the exhortation.*

“<sup>21</sup> **BUT examine everything carefully;**”—*A contrasting POSITIVE aspect of the exhortation.*

“**hold fast to that which is good;**”—*What we should do with GOOD prophecies after examining them.*

“<sup>22</sup> **abstain from every form of evil.**”—*Or “abstain from every evil form of utterance.”—This is what we should do with EVIL prophetic utterances.*

Note that the topic is *very specific*. It is about the specific topic of prophetic utterances when the church officially gathers. As is generally the case with Scripture, God and the human authors are very specific in their discussions. They seldom sprinkle broad moral sayings like “avoid every appearance of evil” in free-standing fashion. Rather, they usually speak in a closely argued style developing a big idea, especially in the New Testament letters. Such is the case with 1 Thessalonians 5:22. Paul is exhorting the young Christians at Thessalonica to stay away from every evil prophetic utterance. However, by removing verse 22 from its very specific paragraph development, we abstract the language from its anchor and create a much more general, vague concept—a *verse-bite*. (Yes, in a nice tone, I’ve just said that *we distort God’s words and thoughts!*) This seems to be an enormous price to pay for not taking a few extra seconds to read the unit of thought—at least the paragraph—containing the verse in question. The Bible’s big ideas are expressed in the big ideas of its paragraphs and we should attend to them.

Moreover, if 1 Thessalonians 5:22 is a broad, moral dictum, did Jesus avoid every appearance of evil? I think not! One of His constant criticisms at the hands of religious people was that He spent time with “defiling people” like tax gatherers, swindlers, irreligious people (“sinners”), and probably even prostitutes. Though He was perfect, sinless—though He never did anything that was *actually* evil—by the standards of the religious, Jesus seemed regularly to have the *appearance* of evil. But perhaps this is the accusation we must bear along with Jesus rather than inappropriately withdrawing from the sin-scarred people in our lives. Perhaps this is also part of our rebuke at the hands of those who don’t read 1 Thessalonians 5:22 in context. Perhaps this is part of the bitter fruit of a verse-bite Christian culture.

### **GRAVE LESSONS ABOUT APPLICATION**

I was staring into the open grave of my son Christopher. It was an unspeakably painful moment. The nightmare all parents dread had become my life. Had I been physically able to muster more tears, I would have been weeping uncontrollably. As I watched four men struggle to lower a steel lid over the grave vault holding Christopher’s miniature white casket, I realized I would see his little smiling face no more, and run my fingers through his beautiful blond hair never again. We would never snuggle together or touch one another again. Our time together was *over*. As I stood there, looking into what felt like an abyss, I realized that I was in the most despairing, skeptical, and faithless state I had ever been in. I felt like cursing God for the rest of my life. I was on the edge of the dark, bottomless pit of hell.

The excruciating pain of my son's death was a defining moment for me, profoundly shaping my view of God's Word. Previous to that moment, while God's Word had been central to my life, I thought its primary purpose was to give me guidance and doctrinal stability. While I knew His Word was about real human experiences (like suffering and death), it had seemed flat, two-dimensional, like a blueprint or a map. To me, it had been little more than a divinely inspired collection of *information*. I had experienced no great loss or defeat in life up to that point, and I even thought that 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 (which deals with the death of loved ones) was about nothing more than the timing of Christ's return. Sure, a few Christians in Thessalonica died, but that was simply an occasion for Paul to teach about the end-times.

Over the years, I had logged quite a bit of time studying 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, trying to understand it. I sought to comprehend the Apostle Paul's teaching about the relationship between death and Christ's coming for His church. I struggled to know the *facts* about Jesus' raising the dead at the rapture of the church, and once I knew these facts, I even meditated upon them. In other words, I laid a *basis of knowledge* about this part of God's Word. And part of my knowledge was the correct application of the passage: "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (verse 18).

In a culture that is rapidly moving into emotivism, the above paragraph is terribly out of step. How dare I use words like "study," "understand," "comprehend," "facts" and "knowledge" when talking about death?

I used these strong, cognitive words intentionally, because one of the purposes of the Word of God is to give us *knowledge*; we are instructed to *learn* about the things Scripture recounts. While this isn't the ultimate end of God's Word, it is certainly the essential beginning. The Bible has a very real cognitive dimension; *knowledge* of certain things is absolutely necessary for meaningful living on planet earth. Quite simply, we must know what biblical passages mean before we can apply their meaning to our lives.

As I pondered the fact that my son's little body was being covered by a steel lid and several feet of dirt, I wondered how God could possibly resurrect his body through such obstacles. It was at this curious, yet horrifying moment that God graciously reminded me of my study of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. I began to ponder with new tear-clouded eyes Paul's graveside theology for the grieving Thessalonians:

<sup>13</sup>But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup>For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage one another with these words. (ESV)

While these verses contained rich truths about the end times, this passage suddenly seemed far more oriented toward families and friends grieving the death of loved ones. It was theology wrapped in real, gritty, painful, emotion-filled experience. It was shaped to address not an abstract and mechanical interest in the end-times, but the tear-stained eyes of believers who had lost their friends and family members, even their children. It was addressed, at that moment, *to me*. It was God's Word to me, pulling me back from the abyss of despair and unbelief. It was God's Word to me, giving me emotional comfort and a hope that could overcome unspeakable tragedy. It was God's Word to me in my grief, so that I could grieve my heart out, yet "not grieve as others do who have no hope." In that graveside realization, I learned to apply God's Word in a very different way. Perhaps I began to apply it in the way God intended, with *both* my mind and heart, with both my intellect and my emotions. At that moment I learned how desperately I needed to apply God's Word to my life.

Although it has been almost 22 years since my graveside pondering of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, I continue to unpack the significance of this experience. It was pivotal in helping me wed the *informing* dimension of the Bible with its *transforming* one. My scales had been tipped toward the information/knowledge end and needed to be balanced with the corresponding transformational intention of the Scriptures. It is always a both/and. While my generation has emphasized the Bible's informing dimension, younger generations are hungering for its transforming dimension. Perhaps my generation's imbalanced emphasis on knowledge has fueled your generation's imbalanced emphasis on experience.

Neither is complete by itself. We must know the Bible's *information* before we can experience the Bible's *transformation*. I could never have been comforted by the remarkable truths of Christ's uniting of loved ones at the "catching-up" of the church without first *knowing* those truths. More bluntly, I could never have experienced this timely application of God's Word in the midst of the darkest moment of my life if I hadn't first mastered the information about it. It was a grave lesson, but a life-changing one, about application.

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\*This essay originally appeared as a four part series on the *Boundless* website:

Walter Russell, "The Hazards of Reading on a Battlefield," [article online] <http://www.boundless.org/features/a0000825.html>

Walter Russell, "Indians Slay Tigers," [article online] <http://www.boundless.org/features/a0000842.html>

Walter Russell, "Overcoming Verse Bite-culture," [article online] <http://www.boundless.org/features/a0000853.html>

Walter Russell, "Grave Lessons about Application," [article online] <http://www.boundless.org/features/a0000864.html>

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## ***PLAYING WITH FIRE***

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class.*

- 1. Based on the context of 1 Corinthians 8:1, what does Paul mean when he states “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up?”**

*Using the principles that you have learned from this essay answer the following questions regarding Matthew 18:19–20.*

- 2. How are these verses typically understood?**
- 3. To which paragraph do verses 19–20 belong?**
- 4. What theme is presented in the verses 21–35?**
- 5. What phrase is repeated in verses 15 and 21?**
- 6. The first reference to “two or three witnesses” occurs in Deuteronomy 19:15. How is this phrase understood in the context of verses 15-21?**
- 7. In what three places in the New Testament do we find the phrase “two or three witnesses?”**
- 8. Because of the way this phrase is typically understood in the rest of the Bible, how should we understand it in the context of Matthew 18?**
- 9. How do verses 19–20 contribute to our understanding of the rest of the paragraph?**
- 10. How then should this passage be applied today?**



# “LOVING GOD WITH YOUR MIND”

WITH J.P. MORELAND

## PART ONE

### I. Being a Teenager Today

- A. There were no “\_\_\_\_\_” until after World War II

“Teenagers today have their own values and their own heroes—and many times those heroes and values are communicated through television commercials and through pop culture like music and movies. And they really end up being contrary—not all the time, but sometimes—to the cause of Jesus Christ.”

- B. Teenagers often don’t have good adult role models

### II. How Did We Get Here?

- A. The church

“Up until about the time of the Civil War...Christians worked really hard at thinking and learning how to understand what they believed and why.”

“Around the middle to the late 1800s Christians became anti-intellectual. They began to emphasize feelings and private devotions. They began to devalue and lose their interest in knowing how to study and think and read the Bible, and to learn to really be learned about one’s faith. The Church became kind of illiterate about its own faith.”

1. The awakenings in the middle 1800s

“The problem was that the evangelistic preaching that took place in these awakenings tended to be very, very anti-intellectual and tended to address people’s emotions and feelings *only*.”

2. Secular attacks

“Right when the church had a whole bunch of new converts that didn’t know very much about the Christian faith, a tremendous assault was launched against Christianity in the centers of higher learning.”

“The Christian community was not prepared to address those assaults by argument against argument, and instead, they withdrew and retreated from culture.”

- B. Philosophy and science

1. Immanuel Kant and David Hume (late 1700s)

“Their ideas were, largely, that we can only know things if we can sense them with our five senses. And if you can see it, touch it, taste it, smell it, or hear it, you can know it’s real. If you can’t, you can’t know it, even though you might believe in it.”

“The great truths of God, the soul, immortality, and right and wrong were banished from the realm of knowledge. That means that they are only matters of private faith and blind belief.”

2. Charles Darwin’s *On The Origin of Species* (1859)

3. The Scopes Trial (1926)

- i. Christians were unprepared in their thinking and were made to look ignorant
- ii. Winning the trial, but losing the battle

“We lost the battle in that trial because we communicated to the people watching the trial that the only reason we won was that we were still popular. We did not win because our arguments were better than our opponents’ arguments.”

### III. Anti-intellectualism in the Church

A. The separation of \_\_\_\_\_ and reason

“In order to cope with a culture that was beginning to turn secular, the church began to separate faith and reason . . . Many people said that faith is one thing and reason is another thing . . . that evidence is a bad thing.”

“The Bible teaches that faith is trusting what we have evidence to believe is true.”

“If faith and reason aren’t relevant to one another, then youth directors and pastors who preach and teach will try to address people’s feelings, and will not argue their case before their people. The result is that we don’t learn anything over a long period of time.”

B. The separation of the \_\_\_\_\_ and the secular

“Centuries ago, when a person fell in love with Jesus Christ, he or she thought that to be a disciple meant that ‘everything in my life should be dedicated to Christ.’ That meant that if I am a lawyer or a businessman or an educator, I should think as a Christian in what I do for a living. I had better learn about what Christ thinks about that subject matter.”

“Today, there is a separation of the sacred and the secular. What I mean is that 95% of the church’s teaching is directed to private, personal morality and holiness, and to my personal feelings of warmth and tenderness toward Jesus Christ . . . But we almost never hear of a Sunday school class that studies business or environmentalism or economic theory from a Christian point of view.”

#### IV. The Gospel and Our Culture

“Because Christians have stopped emphasizing what we believe and why, we have changed how we present the gospel to non-Christians . . . We used to emphasize that the gospel is really true and makes sense, and you should believe it because it is true and makes sense.”

“When you present Christ to people today, if people don’t want to accept it, they don’t reject it because they think it is false. Today, people don’t view the gospel as relevant to their lives . . . They respond that way because we present the gospel as something to meet their personal needs rather than that it is simply true and real and makes sense.”

#### V. What about World Missions?

“Missions have been hurt because we have spent all of our money in evangelism (which is important), but we haven’t spent enough money in training thoughtful leadership for the churches in these cultures we have evangelized.”

“There is sometimes a confusion in thinking that the Great Commission is fulfilled simply in evangelism, yet we lose sight of full-fledged discipleship [i.e. learning].”

#### VI. The Lack of Courage

“We have courage to speak about things we know something about . . . Now if a person doesn’t really understand a whole lot about their own Christian faith . . . and they don’t know how to defend their faith, they are not going to be really courageous about speaking out on behalf of their faith and when they do speak out they will come across as defensive and uninformed.”

“We have not valued an informed commitment to Jesus Christ. We have not produced enough Christians who really have thought through the issues carefully and have a real intelligent view of the subject.”

“What we need is for Christians to not only care about these issues, but to have more courage to speak about them . . . to be calm and confident because they have paid the price to study these issues and to know why they believe what they believe.”

#### VII. The Empty Self

- A. \_\_\_\_\_: a person who thinks about himself or herself, and not about his or her role in the community
- B. \_\_\_\_\_: a person who believes everything exists to make him or her happy

My wife, my husband, my parents, my parents’ car, my coach, my youth pastor, and even Jesus Christ himself exists to make me happy. If they don’t make me happy, then I will turn to something else.

- C. \_\_\_\_\_: a person that is very preoccupied with his or her body and/or appearance and with pleasure
- D. \_\_\_\_\_: a person who is a consumer of entertainment and incapable of creating

“Teenagers fight being individualistic, being self-centered, being infantile, and being passive. And if they don’t overcome that, they’re never going to grow up and become functional, healthy adults—and they will never be disciples of Jesus Christ who will change the world and fulfill the Great Commission.”

## PART TWO

### VIII. Overcoming the Empty Self

- A. Denying ourselves for Jesus’ sake
1. Learn to \_\_\_\_\_ other people
  2. It takes \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Learn to understand why we believe what we believe

“It is only if we really know what and why we believe what we believe that we will have a standpoint to step back from our culture and be able to separate what is good and bad, and not get sucked into our culture. If they can do that, then people can resist the messages in their culture that encourage the empty self, and have the strength to resist those messages.”

- C. Knowledge is not bad

“Childlike faith is a heart that is ready to trust. But when Jesus is talking about a childlike faith, he is not talking about a faith that doesn’t mature and become informed and learned.”

1. It is the abuse of knowledge that is bad, not knowledge itself
2. The solution to knowledge “puffing up” is not ignorance, but humility

### IX. The Biblical View of the Mind

- A. The God of the Bible is pictured as a rational, intelligent, thoughtful God
- B. In certain Eastern religions you have to abandon your mind

The God of the Bible does not say ‘empty your mind and get rid of it’ . . . He tells us, through the apostle Paul, that we are changed and transformed by having our minds renewed. — Romans 12:2

- C. If you want to learn how to share your faith, read the book of Acts

“When the apostles went to unbelievers, they reasoned and argued and gave evidence for the Christian religion. They learned and read non-Christian literature [see Acts 17].”

**D.** A specific command regarding our minds

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And you shall love your neighbor as yourself. — Matthew 22:37–39

“Our love for others grows deeper as we gain a greater knowledge and understanding of them . . . It’s important, if we are going to have a real and full love for God, that we learn to think the way he thinks.”

**X. Developing a Christian Mind**

**A.** Ask questions

1. Don’t act as if you understand something that you do not
2. Don’t be obnoxious in asking your questions
3. Unbelief is sin, but doubt and questions are not sin

**B.** \_\_\_\_\_ the Bible

“The Bible for many people has become a rabbit’s foot; we rub it for a short period of time in the morning and then hope that it will give us good luck throughout our day.”

“Stop asking the question, ‘What does this passage mean to you?’ Start asking, ‘What does this passage mean?’ And ‘Why do you think it means that?’”

“Get into the habit of reading entire books of the Bible in one sitting. . . Learn how to study a book rather than just read it.”

**C.** Take your studies seriously

**D.** Learn to think logically

**XI. As You Prepare for College**

“Be prepared for the fact that there are going to be professors that are dead set on undermining your faith in Jesus Christ . . . Now when that happens you need to relax. You need to realize that you are eighteen and nineteen years old and if you can’t answer your professors questions that it doesn’t mean that there aren’t Christians who can.”

**A.** Ask questions, but be respectful

**B.** Ask your professor if he or she has read contrary Christian opinions

- C. Find Christian resources relevant to your major area of study

## **XII. Stretching Your Intellectual Boundaries**

- A. Band together in small study groups (apart from church)
  - 1. Pick a hot-button issue, not a self-help book
  - 2. Act on your study (e.g. letters to the editor)
- B. We need to change Sunday school in our churches

## **XIII. Concluding Remarks**

“Many of the important world-changing movements in history were started by teenagers and young people . . . and that is because they’re still fresh enough and idealistic enough to believe the world can be changed.”

“If you’re going to change the world, you had better be informed about the issues before you change it . . . and have an informed commitment to changing the world, and not just a youthful zeal that is without knowledge.”



## **“LOVING GOD WITH YOUR MIND”**

### **VIDEO QUESTIONS**

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class.*

- 1. What is it like being a teenager today?**
- 2. What is the intellectual state of the church today? How did we get here?**
- 3. How is the gospel often presented in our culture today? How have world missions been affected by the dumbing down of Christianity?**
- 4. What are some characteristics of the empty self? How do we overcome the empty self?**
- 5. What is the Biblical view of the mind? How does one develop a Christian mind?**



# “AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST”

WITH GREG KOUKL

## I. An Ambassador

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were speaking through us; we beg of you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. — 2 Corinthians 5:20

- A. As believers, we are already ambassadors
- B. People draw conclusions about the Sovereign based on \_\_\_\_\_

“People are drawing conclusions about your God and about your gospel and about your Savior and about your Bible and about your way of life based on you.”

“As a Christian, you may be the only ‘living Bible’ that some people ever read.”

- C. We can be good ambassadors or bad ambassadors

## II. \_\_\_\_\_: An accurately informed mind

- A. We are to be offensive and defensive

Do not be taken captive by philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, and not according to Christ. — Colossians 2:8 (paraphrased)

We have weapons that are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are tearing down speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. — 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 (paraphrased)

- 1. Truth is our spiritual weapon
- 2. We are in a battle for minds
- 3. Jesus and Paul addressed ideas with \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. We are not to be taken captive; we are to defend the truth against false philosophies

- B. We need knowledge of the \_\_\_\_\_

- 1. The answers come from the Bible, but...

“Evangelicals have developed a dangerous habit: reading a passage looking for private messages from the Spirit instead of learning what the Spirit is teaching through the inspired writers.”

2. We practice relativism (a false philosophy of our time)

“There is no Biblical justification for receiving private messages from text originally intended by God to teach something else. This is not Christianity...this is superstition. Bible verses do not change meaning. A text can never mean what it never meant.”

3. Never read a Bible verse; always read a paragraph or more
4. You can only get the answers by reading the Bible in \_\_\_\_\_

C. We need knowledge of the \_\_\_\_\_

1. Questions are in the context of culture
2. Two mistakes Christians often make
  - i. Ridicule
  - ii. Throwing Bible verses
3. We need to know definitions
4. We need to know the reasons for people’s beliefs

**III. \_\_\_\_\_: An artful method**

**A. Tactics:** Maneuvering in conversation—ask questions

**B. Clarity**

1. Present the truth in a compelling way, i.e. get rid of Christian lingo
2. Adapt your message to the specific person or circumstances

**IV. \_\_\_\_\_: An attractive manner**

**A. Two extremes**

1. So nice we would never offend \_\_\_\_\_
2. We don’t care what anybody thinks, so we offend \_\_\_\_\_

**B. We are not to be bullies**

1. Gentle and reverent (1 Peter 3:15)
2. Patient and not quarrelsome (2 Timothy 2:24–25)

**C.** Be ordinary

1. Get rid of tired, worn-out words and phrases that have ceased to communicate something specific
2. Be a genuine, healthy, balanced, winsome, attractive, likeable human being

**D.** Learn to say, “I could be wrong”

**E.** Learn to say, “That is a good point”

“Christianity is offensive enough. Don’t add any more offense to it. But we dare not remove the offense inherent to the Gospel.”



## “AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST”

### VIDEO QUESTIONS

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class.*

1. What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ?
2. What does it mean to reconcile and be reconciled? What can we learn from 2 Corinthians 5:20? What are three key elements for being an effective ambassador for Christ?
3. What does it mean to have *knowledge* while being an ambassador for Christ? Is the purpose offensive or defensive? How do we get knowledge of the answers?
4. What does it mean to have *wisdom* while being an ambassador for Christ?
5. What does it mean to have *character* while being an ambassador for Christ?



# TOTAL TRUTH

BY NANCY PEARCEY

## INTRODUCTION

“Your earlier book says Christians are called to redeem entire cultures, not just individuals,” a schoolteacher commented, joining me for lunch at a conference where I had just spoken. Then he added thoughtfully, “I’d never heard that before.”

The teacher was talking about *How Now Shall We Live?*<sup>1</sup> and at his words I looked up from my plate in surprise. Was he really saying he’d never even heard the idea of being a redemptive force in every area of culture? He shook his head: “No, I’ve always thought of salvation strictly in terms of individual souls.”

That conversation helped confirm my decision to write a follow-up book dealing with the worldview themes in *How Now Shall We Live?* Just a few years ago, when I began my work on that earlier volume, using the term *worldview* was not on anyone’s list of good conversation openers. To tell people that you were writing a book on *worldview* was to risk glazed stares and a quick change in subject. But today as I travel around the country, I sense an eagerness among evangelicals to move beyond a purely privatized faith, applying biblical principles to areas like work, business, and politics. Flip open any number of Christian publications and you’re likely to find half a dozen advertisements for *worldview* conferences, *worldview* institutes, and *worldview* programs. Clearly the term itself has strong marketing cachet these days, which signals a deep hunger among Christians for an overarching framework to bring unity to their lives.

This book addresses that hunger and offers new direction for advancing the worldview movement. It will help you identify the secular/sacred divide that keeps your faith locked into the private sphere of “religious truth.” It will walk you through practical, workable steps for crafting a Christian worldview in your own life and work. And it will teach you how to apply a worldview grid to cut through the bewildering maze of ideas and ideologies we encounter in a postmodern world. The purpose of worldview studies is nothing less than to liberate Christianity from its cultural captivity, unleashing its power to transform the world.

“The gospel is like a caged lion,” said the great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon. “It does not need to be defended, it just needs to be let out of its cage.” Today the cage is our accommodation to the secular/sacred split that reduces Christianity to a matter of private personal belief. To unlock the cage, we need to become utterly convinced that, as Francis Schaeffer said, Christianity is not merely religious truth, it is total truth—truth about the whole of reality.

## POLITICS IS NOT ENOUGH

The reason a worldview message is so compelling today is that we are still emerging from the fundamentalist era of the early twentieth century. Up until that time, evangelicals had enjoyed a position of cultural dominance in America. But after the Scopes trial and the rise of theological modernism, religious conservatives turned in on themselves: They circled the wagons, developed a fortress mentality, and championed “separatism” as a positive strategy. Then, in the 1940s and 50s, a movement began that aimed at breaking out of the fortress. Calling themselves *neo-evangelicals*, this group argued that we are called not to escape the surrounding culture but to engage it. They sought to construct a redemptive vision that would embrace not only individuals but also social structures and institutions.

Yet many evangelicals lacked the conceptual tools needed for the task, which has seriously limited their success. For example, in recent decades many Christians have responded to the moral and social decline in American society by embracing political activism. Believers are running for office in growing numbers; churches are organizing voter registration; public policy groups are proliferating; scores of Christian publications and radio programs offer commentary on public affairs. This heightened activism has yielded good results in many areas of public life, yet the impact remains far less than most had hoped.

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<sup>1</sup> *How Now Shall We Live?* was coauthored by Charles Colson and published by Tyndale (Wheaton, Ill., 1991), and hereafter cited as *How Now?* I would also like to recognize the contribution of Harold Fickett, an outstanding writer and storyteller, who wrote the chapter in *How Now?* consisting of extended stories. In offering the current book in part as an advance on themes developed in *How Now?* I’d like to clarify that all citations of that earlier volume refer solely to chapters that I authored.

Why? Because evangelicals often put all their eggs in one basket: They leaped into political activism as the quickest, surest way to make a difference in the public arena—failing to realize that politics tends to reflect culture, not the other way around.

Nothing illustrates evangelicals' infatuation with politics more clearly than a story related by a Christian lawyer. Considering whether to take a job in the nation's capital, he consulted with the leader of a Washington-area ministry, who told him, "You can either stay where you are and keep practicing law, or you can come to Washington and *change the culture*." The implication was that the only way to effect cultural change was through national politics. Today, battle-weary political warriors have grown more realistic about the limits of that strategy. We have learned that "politics is downstream from culture, not the other way around," says Bill Wichterman, policy advisor to Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist. "Real change has to start with the culture. All we can do on Capitol Hill is try to find ways government can nurture healthy cultural trends."<sup>2</sup>

On a similar note, a member of Congress once told me, "I got involved in politics after the 1973 abortion decision because I thought that was the fastest route to moral reform. Well, we've won some legislative victories, but *we've lost the culture*." The most effective work, he had come to realize, is done by ordinary Christians fulfilling God's calling to reform culture within their local spheres of influence—their families, churches, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, professional organizations, and civic institutions. In order to effect lasting change, the congressman concluded, "we need to develop a Christian worldview."

### **LOSING OUR CHILDREN**

Not only have we "lost the culture," but we continue losing even our own children. It's a familiar but tragic story that devout young people, raised in Christian homes, head off to college and abandon their faith. Why is this pattern so common? Largely because young believers have not been taught how to develop a biblical worldview. Instead, Christianity has been restricted to a specialized area of religious belief and personal devotion.

I recently read a striking example. At a Christian high school, a theology teacher strode to the front of the classroom, where he drew a heart on one side of the blackboard and a brain on the other. The two are as divided as the two sides of the blackboard, he told the class: The heart is what we use for religion, while the brain is what we use for science.

An apocryphal story? A caricature of Christian anti-intellectualism? No, the story was told by a young woman who was in the class that day. Worse, out of some two hundred students, she was the only one who objected. The rest apparently found nothing unusual about restricting religion to the domain of the "heart."<sup>3</sup>

As Christian parents, pastors, teachers, and youth group leaders, we constantly see young people pulled down by the undertow of powerful cultural trends. If all we give them is a "heart" religion, it will not be strong enough to counter the lure of attractive but dangerous ideas. Young believers also need a "brain" religion—training in worldview and apologetics—to equip them to analyze and critique the competing worldviews they will encounter when they leave home. If forewarned and forearmed, young people at least have a fighting chance when they find themselves a minority of one among their classmates or work colleagues. Training young people to develop a Christian mind is no longer an option; it is part of their necessary survival equipment.

### **HEART VERSUS BRAIN**

The first step in forming a Christian worldview is to overcome this sharp divide between "heart" and "brain." We have to reject the division of life into a sacred realm, limited to things like worship and personal morality, over against a secular realm that includes science, politics, economics, and the rest of

<sup>2</sup> Bill Wichterman, in discussion with the author. Wichterman develops his thesis in greater detail in "The Culture: Upstream from Politics," in *Building a Healthy Culture: Strategies for an American Renaissance*, ed. Don Eberly (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 76–101. "While cultural conservatives bemoan judicial activism that reinterprets the plain meaning of the written Constitution, they forget that the courts are only finishing on parchment a job already begun in the hearts of the American people . . . Politics is largely an expression of culture."

<sup>3</sup> Cited in Mary Passantino, "The Little Engine That Can," a review of Phillip Johnson's *The Right Questions* (foreword by Nancy Pearcey), in *Christian Research Journal*, April 2003.

the public arena. This dichotomy in our own minds is the greatest barrier to liberating the power of the gospel across the whole of culture today.

Moreover, it is reinforced by a much broader division rending the entire fabric of modern society—what sociologists call the public/private split. “Modernization brings about a novel dichotomization of social life,” writes Peter Berger. “The dichotomy is between the huge and immensely powerful institutions of the public sphere [by this he means the state, academia, large corporations] . . . and the private sphere”—the realm of family, church, and personal relationships.

The large public institutions claim to be “scientific” and “value-free,” which means that values are relegated to the private sphere of personal choice. As Berger explains: “The individual is left to his own devices in a wide range of activities that are crucial to the formation of a meaningful identity, from expressing his religious preference to settling on a sexual life style.”<sup>4</sup> We might diagram the dichotomy like this:

*Modern societies are sharply divided:*

**PRIVATE SPHERE**

Personal Preferences

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**PUBLIC SPHERE**

Scientific Knowledge

In short, the private sphere is awash in moral relativism. Notice Berger’s telling phrase “religious preference.” Religion is not considered an objective truth to which we *submit*, but only a matter of personal taste which we *choose*. Because of this, the dichotomy is sometimes called the fact/value split.

*Values have been reduced to arbitrary, existential decisions:*

**VALUES**

Individual Choice

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**FACTS**

Binding on Everyone

As Schaeffer explains, the concept of truth itself has been divided—a process he illustrates with the imagery of a two-story building: In the lower story are science and reason, which are considered public truth, binding on everyone. Over against it is an upper story of noncognitive experience, which is the locus of personal meaning. This is the realm of private truth, where we hear people say, “That may be true for you but it’s not true for me.”<sup>5</sup>

*The two-realm theory of truth:*

**UPPER STORY**

Nonrational, Noncognitive

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**LOWER STORY**

Rational, Verifiable

When Schaeffer was writing, the term *postmodernism* had not yet been coined, but clearly that is what he was talking about. Today we might say that in the lower story is modernism, which still claims to have universal, objective truth—while in the upper story is postmodernism.

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Berger, *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 133.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Schaeffer deals with the divided concept of truth in *Escape from Reason* and *The God Who Is There* (in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1982]).

Today's two-story truth:

### POSTMODERNISM

Subjective, Relative to Particular Groups

### MODERNISM

Objective, Universally Valid

The reason it's so important for us to learn how to recognize this division is that it is the single most potent weapon for delegitimizing the biblical perspective in the public square today. Here's how it works: Most secularists are too politically savvy to attack religion directly or to debunk it as false. So what do they do? They consign religion to the *value* sphere—which takes it out of the realm of true and false altogether. Secularists can then assure us that of course they “respect” religion, while at the same time denying that it has any relevance to the public realm.

As Phillip Johnson puts it, the fact/value split “allows the metaphysical naturalists to mollify the potentially troublesome religious people by assuring them that science does not rule out ‘religious *belief*’ (so long as it does not pretend to be *knowledge*).”<sup>6</sup> In other words, so long as everyone understands that it is merely a matter of private feelings. The two-story grid functions as a gatekeeper that defines what is to be taken seriously as genuine knowledge, and what can be dismissed as mere wish-fulfillment.

### JUST A POWER GRAB?

This same division also explains why Christians have such difficulty communicating in the public arena. It's crucial for us to realize that nonbelievers are constantly filtering what we say through a mental fact/value grid. For example, when we state a position on an issue like abortion or bioethics or homosexuality, *we* intend to assert an objective moral truth important to the health of society—but *they* think we're merely expressing our subjective bias. When we say there's scientific evidence for design in the universe, *we* intend to stake out a testable truth claim—but *they* say, “Uh oh, the Religious Right is making a political power grab.” The fact/value grid instantly dissolves away the objective content of anything we say, and we will not be successful in introducing the *content* of our belief into the public discussion unless we first find ways to get past this gatekeeper.

That's why Lesslie Newbigin warned that the divided concept of truth is the primary factor in “the cultural captivity of the gospel.” It traps Christianity in the upper story of privatized values, and prevents it from having any effect on public culture.<sup>7</sup> Having worked as a missionary in India for forty years, Newbigin was able to discern what is distinctive about Western thought more clearly than most of us, who have been immersed in it all our lives. On his return to the West, Newbigin was struck by the way Christian truth has been marginalized. He saw that any position labeled *religion* is placed in the upper story of values, where it is no longer regarded as objective knowledge.

To give just one recent example, in the debate over embryonic stem cell research, actor Christopher Reeve told a student group at Yale University, “When matters of public policy are debated, *no religions should have a seat at the table*.”<sup>8</sup>

To recover a place at the table of public debate, then, Christians must find a way to overcome the dichotomy between public and private, fact and value, secular and sacred. We need to liberate the gospel from its cultural captivity, restoring it to the status of public truth. “The barred cage that forms the prison for the gospel in contemporary western culture is [the church's] accommodation . . . to the fact-value dichotomy,” says Michael Goheen, a professor of worldview studies.<sup>9</sup> Only by recovering a holistic view of total truth can we set the gospel free to become a redemptive force across all of life.

<sup>6</sup> Phillip E. Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 148, emphasis added. See also my review of the book: “A New Foundation for Positive Cultural Change: Science and God in the Public Square,” *Human Events* (September 15, 2000, at <http://www.arn.org>).

<sup>7</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *A Word in Season: Perspectives on Christian World Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), see especially the chapter titled, “The Cultural Captivity of Western Christianity as a Challenge to a Missionary Church.”

<sup>8</sup> “Reeve: Keep Religious Groups Out of Public Policy,” *The Associated Press*, April 3, 2003, emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Goheen, “*As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You*”: *J.E. Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2000), 377.

## MENTAL MAPS

To say that Christianity is the truth about total reality means that it is a full-orbed worldview. The term means literally a *view* of the *world*, a biblically informed perspective on all reality. A worldview is like a mental map that tells us how to navigate the world effectively. It is the imprint of God's objective truth on our inner life.

We might say that each of us carries a model of the universe inside our heads that tells us what the world is like and how we should live in it. A classic book on worldviews is titled *The Universe Next Door*, suggesting that we all have a mental or conceptual universe in which we “live”—a network of principles that answer the fundamental questions of life: Who are we? Where did we come from? What is the purpose of life? The author of the book, James Sire, invites readers to examine a variety of worldviews in order to understand the mental universe held by other people—those living “next door.”

A worldview is not the same thing as a formal philosophy; otherwise, it would be only for professional philosophers. Even ordinary people have a set of convictions about how reality functions and how they should live. Because we are made in God's image, we all seek to make sense of life. Some convictions are conscious, while others are unconscious, but together they form a more or less consistent picture of reality. Human beings “are incapable of holding purely arbitrary opinions or making entirely unprincipled decisions,” writes Al Wolters in a book on worldview. Because we are by nature rational and responsible beings, we sense that “we need some creed to live by, some map by which to chart our course.”<sup>10</sup>

The notion that we need such a “map” in the first place grows out of the biblical view of human nature. The Marxist may claim that human behavior is ultimately shaped by economic circumstances; the Freudian attributes everything to repressed sexual instincts; and the behavioral psychologist regards humans as stimulus-response mechanisms. But the Bible teaches that the overriding factor in the choices we make is our ultimate belief or religious commitment. Our lives are shaped by the “god” we worship—whether the God of the Bible or some substitute deity.

The term *worldview* is a translation of the German word *Weltanschauung*, which means a way of looking at the world (*Welt* = world; *schauen* = to look). German Romanticism developed the idea that cultures are complex wholes, where a certain outlook on life, or spirit of the age, is expressed across the board—in art, literature, and social institutions as well as in formal philosophy. The best way to understand the products of any culture, then, is to grasp the underlying worldview being expressed. But, of course, cultures change over the course of history, and thus the original use of the term *worldview* conveyed relativism.

The word was later introduced into Christian circles through Dutch neo-Calvinist thinkers such as Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd. They argued that Christians cannot counter the spirit of the age in which they live unless they develop an equally comprehensive biblical worldview—an outlook on life that gives rise to distinctively Christian forms of culture—with the important qualification that it is not merely the relativistic belief of a particular culture but is based on the very Word of God, true for all times and places.<sup>11</sup>

## NOT JUST ACADEMIC

As the concept of *worldview* becomes common currency, it can all too easily be misunderstood. Some treat it as merely another academic subject to master—a mental exercise or “how to” strategy. Others handle worldview as if it were a weapon in the culture war, a tool for more effective activism. Still others,

<sup>10</sup> Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1985), 4.

<sup>11</sup> For a brief history of the term *worldview* from a Christian perspective, see Albert M. Wolters, “On the Idea of Worldview and Its Relation to Philosophy,” in *Stained Glass*, ed. Paul Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1989), 65–80. For a more detailed account, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002). For a brief history from a non-Christian perspective, see the first two sections of Eugene F. Miller, “Positivism, Historicism, and Political Inquiry,” *American Political Science Review* 66, no. 3 (September 1972): 796–817; at <http://members.shaw.ca/compilerpress1/Anno%20Miller.htm>. Miller writes: “All human expressions point beyond themselves to the characteristic worldview (*Weltanschauung*) of the epoch or culture to which they belong. This underlying impulse or spirit makes the culture a whole and determines the shape of all thought and evaluation within it. We grasp the documentary meaning of human objectifications by seeing them as unconscious expressions of worldview. Even theoretical philosophy is but a channel through which the spirit of the age finds expression.”

alas, treat it as little more than a new buzzword or marketing gimmick to dazzle the public and attract donors.

Genuine worldview thinking is far more than a mental strategy or a new spin on current events. At the core, it is a deepening of our spiritual character and the character of our lives. It begins with the submission of our minds to the Lord of the universe—a willingness to be taught by Him. The driving force in worldview studies should be a commitment to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind” (see Luke 10:27).

That’s why the crucial condition for intellectual growth is *spiritual* growth, asking God for the grace to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). God is not just the Savior of souls, He is also the Lord of creation. One way we acknowledge His Lordship is by interpreting every aspect of creation in the light of His truth. God’s Word becomes a set of glasses offering a new perspective on all our thoughts and actions.

As with every aspect of sanctification, the renewal of the mind may be painful and difficult. It requires hard work and discipline, inspired by a sacrificial love for Christ and a burning desire to build up His Body, the Church. In order to have the mind of Christ, we must be willing to be crucified with Christ, following wherever He might lead—whatever the cost. “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). As we undergo refining in the fires of suffering, our desires are purified and we find ourselves wanting nothing more than to bend every fiber of our being, including our mental powers, to fulfill the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy Kingdom come.” We yearn to lay all our talents and gifts at His feet in order to advance His purposes in the world. Developing a Christian worldview means submitting our entire self to God, in an act of devotion and service to Him.

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\*This essay originally appeared as a chapter in the book *Total Truth*:

Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (2004), pp. 17–25.

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## ***TOTAL TRUTH*** **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class.*

- 1. What is meant by the assertion that “politics tend to reflect culture, not the other way around?”**
- 2. How has the concept of truth been divided in modern society?**
- 3. According to our modern society, what are some examples of public and private truths?**
- 4. Why is using the word “values” to describe religious claims a useful strategy for those who endorse the fact/value split?**
- 5. How might the fact/value split affect the way modern culture understands the nature of marriage and the abortion debate?**



## DEAR DOUG

### WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Hey there!

Well, I'm finally settled into my dorm room. You wouldn't think that it would take so long to move into a room the size of a closet, but when you're sharing that space with a roommate you have to be creative.

My roommate's name is Nathan and we hit it off pretty early. I can't say we have a lot in common, but we both like to talk. After the first day of class we talked until four in the morning! At one point he noticed my Bible and asked if I was a Christian. When I said that I was, he asked my *why*. I've never really thought about it that deeply until that moment. Well, it wasn't that I've never shared my faith with anyone before—it was just that he was asking me for deeper reasons. I told him that I believe in the God of the Bible and that I asked Jesus into my heart when I was young. I said that I believe God has a plan for my life and that the purpose of my life is to glorify him. Nathan got very confused. He said he didn't understand what I meant by “asking Jesus into my heart” and “God having a plan for my life” and that “the purpose of my life is to glorify God.” When I really thought about it, I wasn't sure myself what all those phrases mean. I was just repeating what I'd heard in church.

Nathan is a really nice and intelligent guy. I'd like to be able to discuss my faith with him, but the questions he asks make me wonder if I've thought through my faith for myself. Nathan told me he holds to a non-Christian worldview, that he's “searching for truth.” He's open to talking about Christianity, but says he has a hard time understanding my “Christianese.” The problem is that I don't know how else to communicate with him. I've never thought about what some of the words and phrases we use at church mean. How can I talk about my beliefs with non-Christians without using those terms?

Also, I didn't want to look ignorant, so I didn't tell Nathan that I'm not sure what he meant by “worldview.” What is a worldview? He's interested in learning about my beliefs, but what does it mean to have a Christian worldview?

Well, it's already past midnight, so I'd better get some sleep. I have a class at eight tomorrow morning and can't skip breakfast if I want to have my brain awake that early!

Oh, one last thing...do you know why you are a Christian? I *know* that I am, but after my conversations with Nathan, I am not sure I know *why* I am. Just curious.

Tell everyone hi,  
Doug



WORLDVIEW

STUDENT  
MANUAL



TRAINING

# UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

## Unit One

Topics:

Cults

Proof of God

Religious Pluralism

Theology

A Summit Ministries Curriculum

## SECTION OUTLINE

<b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.1–1.6’ questions .....	37
<i>Are All Religions One?</i> essay .....	39
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“Existence and Nature of God” video outline.....	48
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“Marks of the Cults” video questions .....	57
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## 180-DAY SYLLABUS

Day	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1	Watch “Theology” video		
2	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.1’	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.2’	
3	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.1–1.2’ questions	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.3’	
4	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.4’		
5	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.3–1.4’ questions	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.5’	
6	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.6’		
7	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.5–1.6’ questions	Assign Dear Doug Letter	
8	Read <i>Are All Religions One?</i> essay		
9	Review <i>Are All Religions One?</i> essay questions		
10	Watch “Existence and Nature of God” video		
11	Review “Existence and Nature of God” video questions		
12	Watch “Marks of the Cults” video P1		
13	Watch “Marks of the Cults” video P2		
14	Review “Marks of the Cults” video questions	Dear Doug Letter assignment <small>Duc</small>	
15	Take Unit One Test		

## 90-DAY SYLLABUS

Day	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1	Watch “Theology” video	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.1–1.2’	
2	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.1–1.2’ questions	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.3–1.4’	
3	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.3–1.4’ questions	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.5–1.6’	
4	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Theology 1.5–1.6’ questions		
5	Watch “Marks of the Cults” video P1		
6	Watch “Marks of the Cults” video P2		
7	Review “Marks of the Cults” video questions		
8	Take Unit One Test		



## UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

### THEOLOGY QUESTIONS

Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class. Reflection Questions will not be found in the text. These are merely designed to help you start thinking about issues from a worldview perspective.

#### THEOLOGY 1.1

1. What are the two “foundations” upon which Christian theism rests?
2. What is the difference between general and special revelation? What does it mean that general revelation is “a necessary but insufficient” means of revelation? What is God’s most direct form of special revelation?
3. What is a linchpin? How is special revelation “the linchpin of Christianity?” How does general revelation function as a “prod?”
4. When C.S. Lewis says, “Unless I believe in God, I can’t believe in thought,” what does he mean?
5. What are some of the characteristics of the personal God? From which biblical references do we learn about these characteristics?

#### THEOLOGY 1.2

6. What are the key beliefs of Islam? According to Islam, who is Muhammad? What roles do Jesus, Moses, and other biblical figures play in Islam?
7. What are the key practices (or pillars) of Islam?
8. What are the Qur’an and the Hadith?
9. What do Muslims believe regarding the doctrine of the Trinity? Why do they hold this view?
10. Muslims claim that Islam fulfills Christianity. What are the main problems with this view?

#### THEOLOGY 1.3

11. What term best describes Secular Humanist theology? How do Humanists view the supernatural?
12. According to Corliss Lamont, from where did the idea of God or gods come?
13. What is the premise of the humanistic children’s book *What About God?*
14. Why did life-long atheist Antony Flew abandon atheism and accept theism?
15. **Reflection Question:** According to Paul Kurtz, since there is no God, man must save himself. What does Kurtz mean by “save” himself?

## THEOLOGY 1.4

16. What term best describes Marxist-Leninist theology?
17. How did Karl Marx view humanity and its role in history?
18. What well-known quote by Karl Marx best summarizes his sentiment toward religion?
19. Fyodor Dostoevsky said the problem with Communism is not economic, but what?
20. **Reflection Question:** Why did Marx and Lenin both desire to wipe “even the flirting of the idea of God” out of existence?

## THEOLOGY 1.5

21. Why is the life of Christ important to Cosmic Humanists?
22. According to Cosmic Humanism, who is God?
23. According to Cosmic Humanism, what happens when a person dies?
24. What is the theological view of Cosmic Humanism?
25. **Reflection Question:** How have you seen pantheism portrayed in popular culture?

## THEOLOGY 1.6

26. What is the theological view of classical Postmodernism?
27. Why are Postmodernists such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault unwilling to clearly state their theological beliefs?
28. What is deconstruction? How might this theory be applied to texts such as the Bible?
29. How has Postmodernism influenced the notion of religious pluralism?
30. **Reflection Question:** What do you think Friedrich Nietzsche is saying in his poem *The Madman*?



# ARE ALL RELIGIONS ONE?

BY DOUGLAS GROOTHUIS

We live in a culture of increasing religious diversity. Just walk around and look at bulletin boards on any university campus, and you will find advertisements for Hindu yoga, Buddhist meditation, Islamic societies, Christian fellowships, and a mind-numbing collection of assorted spiritual teachings and practices. A survey of the phone book yields the same result. There we find not only Christian churches and Jewish synagogues, but Buddhist and Hindu temples, as well as Muslim mosques. This fact is not altered by any amount of talk about America being, or having been, a “Christian nation.”

Despite this increasing diversity, adherents of these different religions routinely declare that their beliefs are both objectively true and essential for spiritual liberation. The dizzying plethora of religious options has led many to argue that religious claims to an exclusive and saving truth are persistent evidence of an unenlightened and outmoded dogmatism. Religions, therefore, must succumb to a saner and more humble estimation of themselves, in order to avert religious controversy and strife.

## THE ELEPHANT AND THE BLIND MAN

According to many, a popular parable about an elephant and several blind men illustrates a vital truth about the relationship among the world’s religions. The story promises that religious intolerance and even violence can be overcome through mutual understanding and humility. Can a mythical elephant and some blind men deliver the elixir for our religious struggles and confusions?

As the story goes, several blind men were feeling an elephant. (Just how the elephant became placid enough to endure this inspection is never explained.) The man who felt the tusk said the beast was smooth and hard. The one feeling the tail described the elephant as thin and wiry. The man who touched the ear believed the animal to be a soft and flexible creature. The man rubbing his hand over the hide said the elephant was hard and rough like clay. Each man had but a limited exposure and understanding of the entity he was assessing. Because of his ignorance of the whole truth, each man assumed the entire elephant matched his very limited description. Of course, the elephant is made of all the things the blind men described. The tusk is smooth, the ear is soft, the hide is rough, and the tail is wiry.

The moral of the story is that each religion has only partial knowledge, but each mistakenly thinks it has captured the essence of religious truth. From an enlightened vantage point, one sees that all religions are part of the one divine reality (the same elephant). Therefore, the squabbles, struggles and even wars that are fought over religious disagreements are pointless. All religions capture some important religious truths, and they should honor each other accordingly. Those who invoke this parable advise their audience to remember this story the next time they are tempted to make exclusive claims about their part of the religious elephant.

## WHAT IS RELIGION?

We will return to our elephant and his friends in due time. First we need to consider the nature and function of religion in order to evaluate the claim that all religions are, in some significant sense, one.

Defining religion is notoriously difficult. We know that Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism are religions. What essential attribute do they share that makes them religions and not something else?

Some have argued that a sense of ultimate commitment is the defining feature of all religions. In that case, one could label Marxism a religion, although it is atheistic and advocates no methods for spiritual enlightenment, apart from understanding Marxist philosophy and fomenting revolution.

On the other hand, we know that Buddhism is a religion, yet Theravada Buddhists are either agnostic or atheistic. Theism, therefore, is not an essential aspect of religion. Furthermore, many who believe in God but adhere to no religious tradition would be called irreligious.

A loose but workable understanding of religion is that religions claim to explain the nature of the sacred and how humans can come to terms with it. All the major world religions make truth-claims about ultimate reality, the human condition, and how humans can find spiritual liberation.

A “truth-claim “ is an assertion that claims to accurately represent or correspond with reality. This is the doctrinal dimension of religion, which is indispensable to its identity.<sup>1</sup> Religions founders, whether Buddha or Jesus or Muhammad, purport to have received knowledge of objective truth—truth that all need to know. The various truth-claims of religions have a strong experiential focus. A philosopher may speculate about the Absolute, but she will not gather a religious sect to follow her conjectures even to the death. Religions, on the other hand, pronounce truths that are viewed as momentous and life-changing.

For instance, after Siddhartha Gautama found enlightenment and became the Buddha ( “enlightened one “), he preached the way to enlightenment (nirvana)—a teaching that could not be found in the Hindu systems of his time. The Buddha claimed that if one wanted release from the wheel of birth and rebirth (reincarnation), one must follow his teaching on the eightfold path to freedom from craving and suffering. In another context, Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed that he himself was “the way the truth and the life, “ and that peace with God the Father could come only through him (Jn. 14:6). These claims were not offered as idle speculations or religious opinions, but as transformational truths. Neither Buddha nor Christ were religious relativists who went around mumbling, “This is true for me, but it may not be true for you. “ They were far more sober than that.

Religions are embedded in cultures and serve a number of social and psychological functions. They serve to unite a community, to give hope, or to challenge or sanction secular powers. As William James pointed out in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, despite the vast differences between religions “there is a certain uniform deliverance in which religions all appear to meet. This common element has two parts: (1) an uneasiness; and (2) its solution. (1) The uneasiness, reduced to its simplest terms, is a sense that there is *something wrong about us* as we naturally stand. (2) The solution is a sense that *we are saved from the wrongness* by making proper connection with the higher powers. “<sup>2</sup>

However, the nature of the problem and the manner of the solution proposed have been defined in widely differing ways. Religions may be similar in form and function, but they claim contradictory things about ultimate reality, the human condition and spiritual liberation. G. K. Chesterton made this point in his classic work *Orthodoxy* when he countered the idea that “the religions of the earth differ in rites and forms, but they are the same in what they teach. “ This idea, he maintained,

is false; it is the opposite of the fact. The religions of the earth do *not* greatly differ in rites and forms; they do greatly differ in what they teach. . . . The truth is that the difficulty of all the creeds of the earth is not as alleged in this cheap maxim: that they agree in meaning, but disagree in machinery. It is exactly the opposite. They agree in machinery; almost every great religion on earth works with the same external methods, with priests, scriptures, altars, sworn brotherhoods, special feasts. They agree in the mode of teaching; what they differ about is the thing to be taught. . . . Creeds that exist to destroy each other both have scriptures, just as armies that exist to destroy each other both have guns.<sup>3</sup>

Chesterton emphasizes that the use of certain cultural forms does not imply any agreement on the actual religious teachings propounded through those forms. For instance, both socialists and capitalists have strongly held worldviews that they express in magazines and books. However, the common use of literature to promote beliefs does nothing to harmonize conflicting beliefs. When Chesterton says that creeds exist to destroy each other, he is not arguing that religions should take up arms against each other. He means that every religion issues truth-claims about essential elements of its worldview that cannot be squared with the essential truth-claims of other religions. For instance, Hindus, Christians and Muslims all pray; yet they differ in their idea of the God to whom they pray.

One straightforward way to test the idea that all religions are one is to compare the essential teachings of three major religious traditions. If all the major world religions were ultimately expressions of the same reality, we would expect them to agree on matters of *ultimate reality, the human condition, and spiritual*

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<sup>1</sup> On truth-claims and religion, see Mortimer Adler, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth* (New York: Macmillan, 1990); and Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Quest for Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: The Works of William James*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 400; emphasis in the original.

<sup>3</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), pp. 128–29.

*liberation*. At the very least we would expect to find some strategy by which to unify their apparently contradictory teachings, as with the elephant story.

A chief temptation in the study of comparative religion is to alter religious teachings in order to squeeze them into a common system. In a recent popular book, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*, the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh describes the Christian ceremony of Communion as a way in which Christians reflect on their interconnections with the earth, as represented by the wine and the bread. He says:

If we allow ourselves to touch the bread deeply, we become reborn, because our bread is life itself. Eating it deeply, we touch the sun, the clouds, the earth, and everything in the cosmos. We touch life, and we touch the Kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup>

Hanh straps Christian Communion onto the Procrustean bed of Buddhism so as to describe it in a manner that denies the Christ-centered practice of remembering Jesus' broken body (the bread) and shed blood (the wine) which were offered through his death on the cross. This maneuver does nothing to bring greater understanding to religious discussion, because it does not honor the intrinsic meaning of the religion being described. The kingdom of God, biblically understood, is not a matter of oneness with the cosmos, but of God's personal reign and redeeming presence.

To test the idea that all religions are one, we will compare the teachings of Christianity, Islam and non-dualistic Hinduism in these three basic areas; ultimate reality, the nature of humanity, and spiritual liberation. We will be careful to describe each system of belief in a way that is faithful to the different traditions—and leave the Procrustean bed to Procrustes and his erring followers.

### **ULTIMATE REALITY: TRINITY, ALLAH, OR BRAHMAN?**

**WHAT CHRISTIANITY SAYS:** Both the Old and the New Testaments reveal God to be the unique and supreme Creator of the universe. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth “ (Gen. 1:1). God is the eternal Creator; he cannot be identified with the cosmos because he is transcendent, separate from creation in his essential being. Paul preached that God is a self-existent being upon whom the universe depends (Acts 17:25). God announced himself to Moses in the burning bush as “I AM WHO I AM “ (Ex 3:14). God is a self-reflective, personal being—a center of consciousness in relation to his creation. The prophet Isaiah repeatedly describes God's unmatched power and excellence in personal and sovereign terms: “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other “ (Is 45:22). When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he said they should address God as their “Father “ (Mt. 6:9). The personal language the Bible uses to describe God refers to God's very character; it is not a poetic accommodation used to describe a being beyond personality, as in some forms of Hinduism.

Beyond being merely monotheistic, Christianity is Trinitarian, which distinguishes it from other forms of theism. There is one God (Deut 6:4), who eternally exists in three equal persons: the Father (Eph 1:3), the Son (Jn 1:1) and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1–5). The doctrine of the Trinity does not imply that one equals three, which would be a logical contradiction. Instead it teaches that there is one divine essence or substance that exists in three persons. So God is one in one sense and three in a different sense. This doctrine is not explicit in the Old Testament, but it is intimated and certainly not precluded.<sup>5</sup> The New Testament writings teach that Jesus is God Incarnate, the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Jesus said, “I and the Father are one, “ which his audience identified as a claim to deity (Jn 10:30). The apostle Paul affirmed that Jesus suspended some of his divine prerogatives by becoming a human servant for the purpose of redeeming his erring creatures (2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:6–11).

**WHAT ISLAM SAYS:** Islam claims to be a fulfillment of Christianity, yet it denies many essential Christian teachings. The Qur'an, Islam's holy book, teaches that God (Allah) is an absolute unity that allows for no

<sup>4</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), p. 31. Hanh often redefines Christianity in Buddhist terms.

<sup>5</sup> On this see Millard Erickson, *God in Three Persons: A Contemporary Interpretation of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), pp. 159–74.

distinctions of persons. Islam insists that Allah is the Creator and sovereign Lord of the universe and is the ultimate Judge of all people. In his passionate condemnation of idolatry, Muhammad, the prophet of Allah, rejected the idea that Jesus, a human being, could in any sense be God. Jesus was hailed as a great prophet of Allah and even as the Messiah, but not God Incarnate. Islam rejects the worship of Jesus as *shirk* (the sinful worship of the creature instead of the creator). The Qur'an affirms that

Allah is One, the Eternal God.  
He begat none, nor was He begotten.  
None is equal to Him. (Surah 112:1–4)

In claiming that “He begat none, “ these verses deny the biblical claim that Jesus is the “only begotten Son “ (Jn 3:16 KJV). It is very likely that Muhammad never understood the orthodox view of the Trinity and instead rejected several heretical views common during his time, including Adoptionism, the teaching that Jesus became God after first existing as a human.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Islam continues to reject the idea that the divine unity can include three coeternal and equal persons.

Islam and Christianity are both monotheistic: there is but one God, and he cannot be identified with his creation. God alone is worthy of worship and honor. They agree on this doctrine. However, Islam contradicts the New Testament witness that God is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ and that Jewish monotheism anticipated the fuller revelation of God as triune. When Muslims worship God without Christ, Christians remember the apostle John's statement “No one who denies the Son has the Father “ (I Jn 2:23). When Christians worship God in three persons and Christ as the incarnation of God, Muslims pronounce them guilty of *shirk* and cite a passage in the Qur'an where Jesus is said to deny his deity (Sura 5:115–118). This is a titanic divide between the two faiths.

**WHAT NONDUALISTIC HINDUISM SAYS:** Outside the monotheistic traditions lies the worldview of nondualistic (or Advaita Vedanta) Hinduism. Hinduism is a religion of great variety, with six major schools and plenty of theological disagreements. I have chosen one school as representative of pantheistic monism, a worldviews that has recently influenced the West largely through Transcendental Meditation and the New Age movement.<sup>7</sup> In its classic form as taught by Sankara (A.D. 788–820), nondualistic Hinduism claims that reality is ultimately one (monism). All apparent distinctions, dualities and diversities are not real but illusory (*maya*) and due to ignorance (*avidya*) of the ultimate reality. This great oneness or nonduality is Brahman, the supreme deity of Hindu scripture. Brahman is the totality of reality (pantheism); there is nothing but Brahman.

Monism cannot become a partner with monotheism. Nondualism denies the duality of the Creator-creature distinction that is affirmed by both Islam and Christianity. While Islam and Christianity teach that the creation must not be worshiped, nondualistic Hinduism teaches that there is nothing but the divine. The dualistic idea of separating Creator from creation must be dropped. The self itself is divine in essence. In one famous Hindu scripture, the Chandogya Upanishad, a son asks his father about the nature of God. He is told, “That art thou.”<sup>8</sup> The self is identical with God.

Furthermore, the God of nondualistic Hinduism is not a personal being but an impersonal principle or essence which is beyond personality. Although nondualists may accommodate popular sentiments by allowing worship of a personal God (*saguna Brahman*), this is deemed a lower and inadequate understanding from which one should graduate to a higher knowledge of God as impersonal (*nirguna Brahman*).<sup>9</sup> Brahman is not a personal agent who enters into relationship with his creatures. There are no agents, no creatures, no relationships. All is one.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (New York: Oxford Press, 1977), p. 137.

<sup>7</sup> On the relationship between pantheistic monism and New Age perspectives, see Douglas Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), and *Confronting the New Age* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal* (New York: Mentor, 1957), p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> For an insightful discussion and critique of this distinction, see Stuart Hackett, *Oriental Philosophy: A Westerner's Guide to Eastern Thought* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), pp. 145–67.

<sup>10</sup> For a good general treatment of pantheistic monism see James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), pp. 135–55.

The notion that the teachings of all religions are essentially the same has not fared well so far in our analysis of differing views of ultimate reality. As we look at the different views of human nature and spiritual liberation, we will discover more fundamental disagreements.

### **THE HUMAN CONDITION: SINFUL, DEFECTIVE OR DIVINE?**

**WHAT CHRISTIANITY SAYS:** To borrow a phrase from Blaise Pascal, Christianity sees humans as deposed royalty.<sup>11</sup> Man and woman were made in the image and likeness of God for the purpose of having fellowship with God and each other, and in order to cultivate and develop God’s good creation (Gen 1–2). Scripture roots humanity not in an impersonal deity but in the creative activity of God. We share a God-given dignity as persons created by a personal God. However, humans disobeyed the wise will of God and fell into disobedience and sin (Gen 3). Ever since, all people have suffered both by nature and by choice from the effects of this Fall from grace (Rom 3). We were divinely created, but we bear the marks of rebellion. According to Paul, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God “ (Rom 3:23). The Bible views sin as a force that has corrupted every aspect of human nature and affects all areas of life. It is primarily a moral offense against a morally perfect God, and it severs the divine-human relationship (Ps 51:4).

**WHAT ISLAM SAYS:** Islam also teaches that humans are creations of God but have lost their original innocence before God (Surah 20:116–22). Yet, as Harold Netland notes:

Although Islam does acknowledge Adam’s sin and expulsion from the Garden, it does not have anything corresponding to the Christian doctrine of original sin and the total depravity of human nature. There is, of course, a sense of sin in Islam, but it seems to signify more a weakness, defect, or flaw in human character rather than the radical corruption of human nature.<sup>12</sup>

Men and women are not enslaved to sin, according to Islam. With resolution of will, they are able to obey Allah and resist human and demonic temptations. This teaching opposes the Christian understanding of sin as entrenched and pervasive. As Bishop Stephen Neill put it, “At the heart of the Muslim-Christian disagreement, we shall find a deep difference in the understanding of the nature of sin.”<sup>13</sup>

**WHAT NONDUALISTIC HINDUISM SAYS:** According to nondualistic Hinduism, human beings are inherently one with Brahman. The individual self (sometimes referred to as Atman) is not a creature of Brahman or distinct from Brahman in being. The sense of separation comes only from ignorance of one’s ultimate identity. Since God is impersonal and all-encompassing, there is not notion of sin as a moral offense against a holy God. There is a breach in the divine-human relationship through immortality. The core problem is a lack of awareness of one’s true essence as divine. As Sankara taught, “The difference between the individual self and the highest Lord is owing to wrong knowledge only, not to any reality.”<sup>14</sup>

### **SPIRITUAL LIBERATION: FAITH, WORKS OR ENLIGHTENMENT?**

Lastly, we come to the vital matter of spiritual liberation. As William James observed, all religions offer purported solutions to the human condition. Just what is wrong? How can it be corrected? Again we find three entirely different sets of answers.

**WHAT CHRISTIANITY SAYS:** Christians hail Jesus as the Lord and Savior of humanity. Contrary to Islam, Christians esteem Jesus and God Incarnate, who lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death on the cross so that people could be reconciled to a holy God, and rose from the dead to vindicate his mission (Rom 1:4). Jesus proclaimed that “God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son, that whosoever believes

<sup>11</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* 116/398 (New York: Penguin, 1966), p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, p. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Neill, *Crises of Belief: The Christian Dialogue with Faith and No Faith* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1984), p. 88; quoted in Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, p. 89.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 515.

him shall not perish but have eternal life “ (Jn 3:16). Paul taught that there is one mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people (I Tim 2:5–6). In Christianity, spiritual liberation bestows on the believer the complete forgiveness of sins and a righteous standing before God. This is received by faith alone in Christ alone through God’s grace alone (Eph 2:8).<sup>15</sup> The sincere believer can be assured that he or she has received eternal life because “the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children “ (Rom 8:16).

**WHAT ISLAM SAYS:** In Islam there is no mediator between Allah and his creatures. Muhammad is a bearer of information about Allah, but not a savior.<sup>16</sup> He may be emulated as an example, but he is never looked to for salvation. One must stand or fall on one’s merit, according to one’s obedience to the commands of Allah: “no soul shall bear another’s burden and . . . each man shall be judged by his own labours “ (Surah 53:38). The Qur’an breathes the last judgment in its every chapter (*surah*). Judgment hangs heavily in the air: “On that day no soul shall suffer the least injustice. You shall be rewarded according to your deeds “ (Surah 36:45; compare 82:19). Deeds will determine paradise or hell. Salvation comes through works, not by faith alone. Yet no Muslim is assured of his or her eternal fate at the judgment.<sup>17</sup>

**WHAT NONDUALISTIC HINDUISM SAYS:** Spiritual liberation (*moksha*) for nondualistic Hindus is attained through the proper yoga (spiritual practice). Sankara taught that *jnana* yoga (the yoga of knowledge) was the means to realize the self’s identity as Brahman. Sankara said that “the man who has once comprehended Brahman to be the Self does not belong to this transmigratory [reincarnational] world as he did before. He, on the other hand, who still belongs to this transmigratory world as before has not comprehended Brahman to be the Self. “<sup>18</sup> One who experiences *moksha* is released from the wheel of reincarnation and rests in the divine identity. Faith in an external being (a personal God) is excluded because there is no external being. All is one. Good works done to earn salvation are also eliminated, since salvation is not given by another being. Everyone is Brahman (whether one knows it or not). The knowledge of one’s divine essence is what brings salvation.

### **ASSESSING THE DIFFERENCES**

Let us return to the proverb of the elephant and the blind men. What can this story do to harmonize the conflicting accounts of spiritual reality? We should first realize that the elephant story puts the world’s religions in the position of blind men! No world religion would accept this assessment, because they each claim to reveal ultimate and universal truths, not partial insights needing elaboration from other religions. The religious interpreter who employs the elephant story is claiming to look down on all the religions from an elevated vantage point that none of them have attained. In essence, the interpreter is creating a new supra-religion that denies the particular claims of the actual religions he or she is assessing.<sup>19</sup> But can the supposedly elevated view really reconcile the divergent claims we have discovered?

Although an elephant can be rough in one spot and smooth in another, it cannot be smooth all over and rough all over simultaneously. When Islam claims that God is absolutely unitary with no allowance for three persons or the Incarnation, it excludes the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. It cannot be harmonized with this doctrine by saying that part of God is absolutely unitary and part is a Trinity. God cannot possess contradictory attributes (nor can anything else). Neither can we align the nondualistic views of impersonal Brahman with the thoroughly personal notions of deity found in Islam and Christianity. God’s nature cannot be both personal and impersonal because personality cancels out impersonality and vice versa. One either has personality or does not. An elephant may be partially smooth and partially rough at the same time. Neither can God be both personal and impersonal.

The same difficulties are encountered with the different religious teachings on human nature and spiritual liberation, concepts closely tied to the varying doctrines of ultimate reality. Humans cannot be

<sup>16</sup> See Josef van Ess, “The Image of God and Islamic Mysticism, the Image of Man and Society, “ in *Christianity and the World’s Religions*, ed. Hans Kung, Heinrich von Stietencron and Heinze Bechert (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986), p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> See Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, pp. 90–91.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Radhkrishnan and Moore, ed., *Sourcebook*, p. 513.

<sup>19</sup> On this see Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 9–10.

both one with Brahman and distinct from their Creator. Sankara's assessment of our ignorance of our divinity is at odds with monotheism.

Neither can the disagreement between Islam and Christianity be solved through recourse to the elephant story. If we are morally incapacitated by sin (Christianity), we are not merely wounded by sin (Islam) and vice versa. It follows that if we can be saved by works (Islam), it is false to say we are saved by faith alone through the grace of God totally apart from works (Christianity). Differing descriptions of ultimate reality lead to differing descriptions of the human problem and to differing prescriptions for its solution. It seems that the elephant and its benighted observers have let us down.

Nevertheless, several modern thinkers—of whom John Hick is the most prominent—have tried to harmonize the world's religions.<sup>20</sup> Hick's theory of religions pluralism is too involved to be adequately criticized here.<sup>21</sup> However, we can inspect some important elements of his approach in order to highlight its problems.

### **JOHN HICK'S RELIGIOUS PLURALISM**

Hick believes that all the major religions produce saintly people; therefore, salvation cannot be restricted to one religion. His strategy for reconciling conflicting truth-claims involves creating an all-encompassing category called the Real, which signifies the ultimate reality that is the source of the diverse manifestations of the major world religions. Hick knows that religions disagree on the nature of ultimate reality, humanity and spiritual liberation. Rather than siding with one religion against the others, he claims that all express "the Real" in different but equal ways.

However, this removes from the Real any meaningful intellectual content. We cannot say it is personal, because this would oppose pantheism; neither can we say it is impersonal, because this would oppose theism. We cannot even say it is divine, since Theravada Buddhism does not equate nirvana with a deity. The upshot is that Hick's idea of the Real becomes itself unreal. How can something be neither personal nor impersonal?

Furthermore, why would the Real manifest itself in one religion by offering salvation only through Christ and in another religion by offering it through a mystical intuition of Brahman? The Real would be perjuring itself.

Hick tries to handle these disagreements by claiming that whenever a religion makes exclusive claims about reality (as they all do in one way or another), the religion overextends itself. The enlightened vantage point sees all religions as partial expressions of the Real—even if the religions themselves allow no such category. Again, Hick creates a suprarreligious (and ultimately irreligious) category in order to harmonize religions. In so doing, he hauls out the old Procrustean bed, this time fitted with more modern sheets.

Another problem haunts Hick's efforts. In his system, the Real is really unknowable or ineffable. He claims that it is beyond the reach of concepts. Hick is forced into this position if he is to defend the equality of mutually contradictory religious claims. This appeal to the unknowable really solves nothing and triggers an avalanche of problems. If all Hick can say of the Real is that it exists and is the source of the world's religions, he can say nothing specific about its actual nature. Hick admits that we cannot refer to the Real as having knowledge or as being powerful, good or loving. The blind men knew more about the elephant than Hick says religions know about the Real! If the Real is unknowable, it cannot adequately explain the nature of the world's religions. If our concepts about the Real never capture its essential nature, why should we trust the concept that the Real is the source of religious manifestations, especially when these traditions explicitly contradict each other on fundamental doctrines? The real becomes mute—and meaningless.

### **ACCOUNTING FOR JESUS CHRIST**

The ideas of Hick and other religious pluralists finally collapse when they meet the person of Jesus Christ. They cannot accept him as he is presented in the New Testament and still claim that all religions are one.

<sup>20</sup> The most developed statement of Hick's position is *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> For more thorough critiques, see Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, especially chaps. 5–7, and Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), chaps. 1–6.

Although many religions claim that God intervenes in or influences the world, Christianity is unique in claiming that God became a human being in history, once and for all, for the purpose of our redemption. Hinduism teaches that the impersonal Brahman sometimes takes a personal form as an avatar to help enlighten the ignorant. Avatars are often historically shadowy figures and have little in common with Christ.<sup>22</sup> Although the Buddha and Christ are often compared, the historical Buddha made no claims of divinity or even of being an oracle of God. Rather, he taught of way of liberation based on meditation and right action, irrespective of any deity.<sup>23</sup> And Islam insists that although Muhammad is Allah's prophet, Allah himself cannot be embodied.

The historical narratives of the New Testament all affirm that Jesus of Nazareth was a man—but more than a man. We find Jesus announcing that he came to seek and to save what was lost and “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28). He claimed the divine “authority on earth to forgive sins” (Mk 2:10). When debating religious leaders of his day he said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:58), a clear assertion of being identified with the divine “I AM WHO I AM” of the Old Testament (Ex 3:14).

Jesus backed up these claims with impeccable and unrepeatable credentials. He healed the sick, raised the dead, taught with unparalleled authority, associated with the lowly, and fulfilled a score of Old Testament prophecies concerning the promised Messiah, the suffering servant who was to be wounded for our transgressions but vindicated by God (Is 53).<sup>24</sup> The apostle Paul proclaimed that this vindication burst forth in Jesus' resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4), a verifiable fact of history (I Cor 15:1–9).<sup>25</sup>

Are all religions one? Given their contradictory claims and the nature of truth, they cannot all be one with the truth. They offer vastly different views of spiritual reality and salvation. Yet in Christ, we are offered spiritual reality in the flesh, a reality that welcomes *all* to partake of his grace. As Jesus said:

Come to me, all you who are weary, and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Mt 11:28–29)

Jesus himself welcomes into his family needy people from every race and religious background. All who know Christ as Lord are brothers and sisters in God's adopted family. By turning away from our sinful patterns of life and by turning toward Jesus as Savior, we also embrace a rich variety of God's multicolored and multiethnic people worldwide. The spiritual unity found in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:26–28) is a tonic to the ethnocentrism and racism that plague the planet.

The apostle Paul taught that Jesus' death on the cross reconciles us to God and allows us to be reconciled to each other in order to create a new humanity (Eph 2:15). All religions are not one, but all people can find oneness at the foot of Christ's cross.

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<sup>22</sup> On the avatar doctrine in relation to the Incarnation, see Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation* (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1970).

<sup>23</sup> For an insightful comparison between Buddha and Jesus, see Russell Aldwinkle, *More Than a Man: A Study in Christology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 211–46.

<sup>25</sup> See William Lane Craig, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 141–76.



## ***ARE ALL RELIGIONS ONE?***

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class.*

- 1. What is the moral of the elephant illustration?**
- 2. How is religion defined?**
- 3. Why weren't Buddha, Christ, or Muhammad religious relativists?**
- 4. According to Christianity, why can God not be identified with the cosmos?**
- 5. How is non-dualism incompatible with both Christianity and Islam?**
- 6. What happens when a religious pluralist tries to harmonize contrary religious beliefs?**
- 7. How do Christianity, Islam, and non-dualistic Hinduism view the human condition?**
- 8. How does one find spiritual liberation according to Christianity? Islam? Non-Dualistic Hinduism?**
- 9. In the elephant illustration, who are the blind men and who is the interpreter? Why wouldn't world religions accept the elephant illustration?**
- 10. What is a truth-claim? Why does religious pluralism ultimately fail when applied to religions that are making truth-claims?**



# “EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD”

WITH FRANK BECKWITH

“Your faith does not rest on the latest argument by the best philosopher that came out yesterday . . . your faith rests on what you know to be true by your commitment to Christ. The arguments and reasons are part of the puzzle; they give you reinforcement as to why you believe.”

## I. Attributes of God

“One of the great paradoxes of believing that everyone is part of God is that most people don’t realize it . . . if you were God, wouldn’t you know it? Being omniscient and not knowing it is a really big problem.”

### A. Creator and sustainer (of all *else* that exists)

1. “Who made God?” misses the point
2. Acts 17:25; Colossians 1:16; Romans 11:36

### B. \_\_\_\_\_: All-powerful

1. Nonsense question: “Can God make a rock so big that he cannot lift it?”

“Omnipotence does not mean that God can do anything that you can string together in words. Stringing together things in words may not be anything that is actually even possible . . . For example, God cannot make a married bachelor . . . but that doesn’t count against God. If it is not a thing that is conceptually possible, then God cannot do it.”

2. Things that God cannot do:
  - i. Make square circles or married bachelors (nonsensical things)
  - ii. Sin, lie, cease to exist (goes against his perfection)

“Neither do we lessen God’s power when we say that he cannot die or be deceived. This is the kind of inability, which, if removed, would make God less powerful than he is. It is precisely because he is omnipotent that some things are impossible.” — Saint Augustine

### C. \_\_\_\_\_: All-knowing

1. Knows past, present, and future
2. Psalm 139:17–18; Isaiah 46:10, 41:21–24

### D. \_\_\_\_\_: Spirit

1. **Everywhere:** Aware of everything and sustains everything

2. **Nowhere:** Transcends time and space

3. John 4:24

E. \_\_\_\_\_: Cannot *not* exist

F. \_\_\_\_\_: A person or being

## II. The Existence of God

A. God's existence is not dependent upon us

1. Our belief in him does not make God real

2. He exists independently of our minds

B. We cannot observe God in his fullness

## III. Arguments for the Existence of God

“To present an argument to those who do not believe . . . is not saying that in order for you to believe you must have an argument. There are numerous people on this planet who are perfectly rational for believing in God who are not philosophers.”

A. \_\_\_\_\_ Argument

1. Atheistic/naturalistic worldview

i. Only physical things exist—no soul, mind, or morality

ii. Human beings are the result of blind chance and evolution

2. Theistic Christian worldview

i. Physical and non-physical things exist—morality, minds, souls, numbers

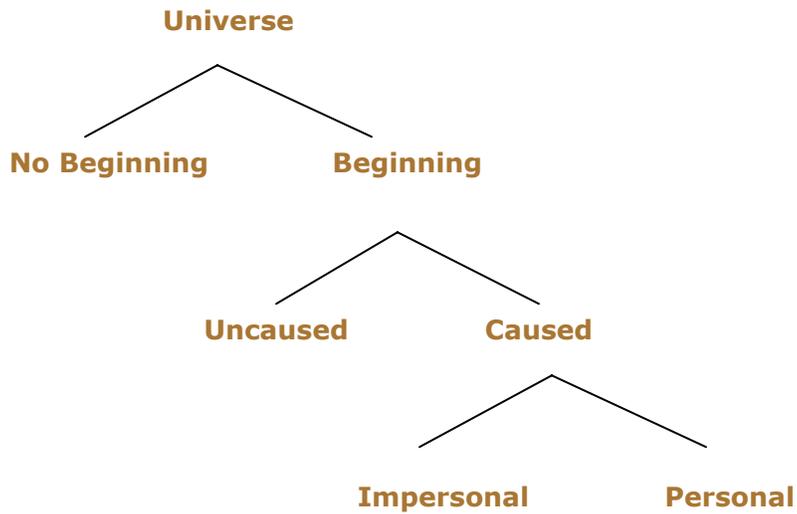
ii. While physical things change, non-physical things do not—e.g. logic

3. If your mind is the result of blind chance, how can you trust your own mind?

“If you knew that a computer had software downloaded at random, would you buy that computer? No . . . because you know it wouldn't give you true information. Your mind according to the naturalistic worldview is not only physical, but the result of chance and survival of the fittest . . . it may be that we've survived as the result of us not knowing the truth about the world. Maybe our minds lie to us and that helps us survive. How do you know that you know anything? In an atheistic worldview, you have no assurance of even knowledge itself.”

4. Evil only makes sense if there is an objective good

B. \_\_\_\_\_ Argument



1. No beginning vs. beginning

- i. **Big Bang Theory:** Something came from nothing
- ii. **Second Law of Thermodynamics:** Universe is moving toward heat death
- iii. **Actual infinite:** unlimited set
  - Logically impossible
  - If the past were infinite, we couldn't be here today

2. Uncaused vs. caused

- i. If the universe were uncaused, then it would have always existed
- ii. An actual infinite is logically impossible

3. Impersonal vs. personal

#### IV. Conceptually Possible vs. Logically Impossible

A. Miracles are both conceptually and logically possible

1. E.g. Virgin birth
2. E.g. Prior to the 1900s, flying in an airplane

B. Nonsense is neither conceptually nor logically possible



## **“EXISTENCE AND NATURE OF GOD”**

### **VIDEO QUESTIONS**

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class.*

- 1. Who made God?**
- 2. How is God omnipotent? Are there things God cannot do? How is God omniscient? How is God omnipresent?**
- 3. What is the Transcendental Argument for the existence of God?**
- 4. What is the Kalam Cosmological Argument for the existence of God?**
- 5. What is the difference between conceptually possible concepts and logically impossible concepts?**



# “MARKS OF THE CULTS”

WITH KEVIN BYWATER

## PART ONE

“Idolatry is idolatry, whether it is metal or mental.”

“We human beings are perpetual idol factories and if we will not worship the true God who made us, then we will make gods to worship.” — John Calvin

### I. What is a Cult?

- A. \_\_\_\_\_ **definition:** mind-control, brain-washing
- B. \_\_\_\_\_ **definition:** a sub-group that deviates from the norm
- C. \_\_\_\_\_ **definition:** from *cultus* (Latin); a group of people having common beliefs and practices; a religion
- D. A cult *is* a religion
- E. Pseudo-Christian religion

“A pseudo-Christian religion is a group of people gathered around an individual (a group of individuals or an organization), who, while claiming to be the true Christian Church and teach true Christianity, actually distorts and denies the foundational and distinctive doctrines of the Christian faith.”

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different gospel from the one you accepted, or a different Spirit from the one you received, you put up with it easily enough. — 2 Corinthians 11:3–4

#### 1. They use our vocabulary, but not our dictionary

For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as apostles of Christ. Their end will be what their actions deserve. — 2 Corinthians 11:13–15

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned. — Galatians 1:6–9

#### 2. How can we discern true teachers from false teachers?

- i. We must study what is true  
and
- ii. We must study what is false

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. We [apostles] are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. — 1 John 4:1–6

### 3. We need to know the Word of God

## P A R T T W O

### II. Cults Add to the Word of God (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:15–17; 2 Peter 1:3)

They may deny . . .

#### A. The reliability of the Bible

“The Bible is the word of God, written by men. It is basic in Mormon teaching. But the Latter-day Saints recognize that errors have crept into this sacred work because of the manner in which the book has come to us. Moreover, they regard it as not being complete as a guide . . . Supplementing the Bible, the Latter-day Saints have three other books: the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. These with the Bible constitute the standard works of the church.” — *What of the Mormons?*, 9,11

#### 1. Missing Books

- i. Which books are missing?
- ii. How do you know these books were supposed to be Scripture?
- iii. Do we really need these books?
- iv. Do you have those books? (Isaiah 40:8)

#### 2. Did Jesus and the Apostles criticize the Old Testament?

#### B. The clarity of the Bible (2 Peter 3:15–16, Psalm 119:105)

“Is [the Bible] too puzzling and complex to be understood? Can the average person understand it? What help is needed for one to grasp the meaning of the Scriptures? . . . It is obvious that we need help if we are to understand the Bible . . . [T]he fact is that we cannot understand the Bible on our own. We need help . . . Jehovah, through his organization, however, has allowed his loyal servants to understand its meaning today . . . You too can gain this understanding with the assistance of those who are experienced in ‘handling the word of the truth aright’ . . . All who

want to understand the Bible should appreciate that the ‘greatly diversified wisdom of God’ can become known only through Jehovah’s channel of communication, the faithful and discreet slave [The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society].” — *The Watchtower* (1 October 1994), 4,6,8

C. The sufficiency of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:15–17, Proverbs 30:5–6)

### III. Cults Subtract from the Trinity

They may teach . . .

A. \_\_\_\_\_: The Father is God, the Son is merely a creature, and the Holy Spirit is an impersonal force (Hebrews 1–2)

“Jesus Christ further deserves honor because He is Jehovah’s chief angel, or archangel.” Footnote 9: “Why do we conclude that Jesus is the archangel Michael . . . ?” — *The Watchtower* (1 February 1991), 17

In [the] beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god. — John 1:1 *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*

1. Don’t argue from John 1:1, 8:58, 20:28

2. Use Isaiah 45:22–23 = Philippians 2:9–11

B. \_\_\_\_\_: Only one person in the godhead who appears as three persons: the Father in the Old Testament, the Son in the New Testament, and the Holy Spirit today (Matthew 3:16–17, Matthew 26)

C. \_\_\_\_\_: Three separate gods (Isaiah 40–46)

“Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God. I say that is a strange God anyhow—three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization . . . All are to be crammed into one God, according to sectarianism. It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—he would be a giant or a monster.” — *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 372

“I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit; and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods.” — *Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 370

“ . . . for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so you may see. . . he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did; and I will show it from the Bible . . . Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God, and you have got to learn to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you . . . ” — *Teaching of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 345–46

#### IV. Cults Multiply the Terms of Salvation (Ephesians 2:8–10, Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–8)

They may have . . .

**A.** A high view of human nature (Ephesians 2:1ff, Romans 5:12ff)

“The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints discounts the notion of Original Sin and its ascribed negative impact on humanity . . . [W]e believe that we are not *born* sinners . . . In other words, we’re born good; we learn to sin as we grow older.” — M. Russell Ballard, *Our Search for Happiness*, 87

“Indeed, we honor and respect Adam and Eve for their wisdom and foresight. Their lives in the Garden of Eden were blissful and pleasant; choosing to leave that behind so they and the entire human family could experience both the triumphs and travails of mortality must not have been easy. But we believe they *did* choose mortality, and in so doing made it possible for all of us to participate in the Heavenly Father’s great, eternal plan.” — M. Russell Ballard, *Our Search for Happiness*, 87

“The decision of Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit was not a sin, as it is sometimes considered by other Christian churches. It was a transgression—an act that was formally prohibited but not inherently wrong.” — *Preparing for Exaltation*, Lesson 3

**B.** A low view of the atonement of Christ (Colossians 2:13, Galatians 2:21)

**C.** An unbiblical view of heaven

**1.** Too restrictive

or

**2.** Too inclusive

**D.** No assurance of salvation

#### V. Cults Divide Their Followers’ Loyalties

They may . . .

**A.** Divide families

**1.** Separatistic

**2.** Exclusivistic

**B.** Be authoritarian

**1.** Demanding

**2.** Controlling

C. Become the mediator (1 Timothy 2:5)

## VI. Witnessing Essentials

A. Be prayerful

B. Be prepared

1. Know what you believe

2. Know what others believe

3. Ask what others believe

C. Be patient

D. Be persistent



## “MARKS OF THE CULTS”

### VIDEO QUESTIONS

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class.*

1. **What are the different ways of defining a cult? Ultimately, what is a cult? What is a pseudo-Christian religion? How do we discern false teaching?**
2. **In what ways do cults add to the Word of God?**
3. **In what ways do cults subtract from the Trinity?**
4. **In what ways do cults multiply the terms of salvation?**
5. **In what ways do cults divide their followers' loyalties?**



## DEAR DOUG

### WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Hey!

Okay, first off . . . our football team is number one! Game days are crazy around here. Just wait until you're a freshman. I made it through orientation and figured out my schedule. My major classes for this semester are psychology, biology, ethics, and philosophy—which hits right after lunch, so I'm always falling asleep!

I think I'm getting the hang of college life. Now if only I had someone to do my laundry, everything would be perfect. My roommate Nathan and I are getting along great. We have even started hanging out regularly with a few other people from the dorm—Muhammad, Sarah, Paige, and Mark. Last night we went to a coffee shop off University Ave. to listen to this guitarist Sarah likes. I think it was the first time he'd ever played in front of a live audience!

Anyway, afterwards we all started talking about theology and religion. It was a very interesting conversation. You should have heard the questions they all were asking each other.

Nathan had a question for me—if God created all of nature wouldn't that make everything divine? I wasn't sure what he meant, so I couldn't really respond to him. And Muhammad wanted to know more about the Trinity, but I didn't really know much about that either. I hope you can help me understand this: how can God be three and one at the same time?

Sarah believes there isn't a God at all, that we just invented the idea of him and an afterlife to make ourselves feel better, and Mark completely agreed. He said that we would never find peace until we could evolve past our need for God. He sees the idea of religion as a human invention, with God as a father figure to help us all feel safer. I guess anything's possible. Do you think God is a human invention? At the end, Paige said that since we can't know for sure which religion is true, we should just be tolerant of everyone's beliefs.

I wasn't really sure how to respond to them. I mostly just listened to what everyone else had to say. They had some good questions and I hadn't actually thought much about all this. Everyone expected me to represent the Christian side of the conversation. What is the Christian view of God?

Well, I should go. I have a date tonight . . . that's right, a real date! I'll tell you about it some other time. Thanks for all your help. I want you to know that I really appreciate your friendship.

I'll keep in touch,  
Doug

WORLDVIEW

STUDENT  
MANUAL



TRAINING

# UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

## Unit Two

Topics:

Critical Thinking

Philosophy

Postmodernism

Theodicy

A Summit Ministries Curriculum

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## 180-DAY SYLLABUS

Day	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1	Watch “Philosophy” video		
2	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.1’	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.2’	
3	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.1–2.2’ questions	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.3’	
4	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.4’		
5	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.3–2.4’ questions	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.5’	
6	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.6’		
7	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.5–2.6’ questions	Assign Dear Doug Letter	
8	Watch “Understanding Postmodernism” video		
9	Review “Understanding Postmodernism” video questions		
10	Watch “Evil and Suffering” video P1		
11	Watch “Evil and Suffering” video P2		
12	Review “Evil and Suffering” video questions	Read <i>Critical Thinking</i> essay P1	
13	Review <i>Critical Thinking</i> essay questions P1	Read <i>Critical Thinking</i> essay P2	
14	Review <i>Critical Thinking</i> essay questions P2	Dear Doug Letter assignment <small>Due</small>	
15	Take Unit Two Test		

## 90-DAY SYLLABUS

Day	IN CLASS	HOMEWORK	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1	Watch “Philosophy” video	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.1–2.2’	
2	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.1–2.2’ questions	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.3–2.4’	
3	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.3–2.4’ questions	Read <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.5–2.6’	
4	Review <b>UTT</b> Textbook ‘Philosophy 2.5–2.6’ questions		
5	Watch “Understanding Postmodernism” video		
6	Review “Understanding Postmodernism” video questions	Read <i>Critical Thinking</i> essay P1	
7	Review <i>Critical Thinking</i> essay questions P1		
8	Take Unit Two Test		



## **UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES**

### **PHILOSOPHY QUESTIONS**

Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class.

#### **P H I L O S O P H Y 2 . 1**

1. How do some Christians use Colossians 2:8 to support their belief that faith does not need to be defended on philosophical grounds? What is wrong with this interpretation?
2. What led former atheist C.E.M. Joad to embrace the Christian view of the universe?
3. What does “faith precedes reason” mean? How does Edward T. Ramsdell explain this idea?
4. What is Christianity’s basis for special revelation?
5. What is the Christian view of the relationship between the natural and the supernatural? How does this view differ from that of the naturalist?

#### **P H I L O S O P H Y 2 . 2**

6. Which system of philosophy influenced Islamic philosophers? What kind of problem does this create for the Islamic view of God?
7. Which argument did Muslims develop for the existence of God?
8. Are Muslims naturalists or supernaturalists? Why? Do Muslims believe in life after death?
9. Do Muslims believe in miracles? Does the fact that Muhammad did not perform any miracles cause a problem for Muslims?
10. How do Muslims interpret Deuteronomy 18:15–18 and John 14:16? How do Christians usually interpret these verses?

#### **P H I L O S O P H Y 2 . 3**

11. What is the essence of naturalism?
12. How did Roy Wood Sellars regard the Christian worldview? In his opinion, what has rendered Christianity obsolete?
13. What is the cosmology of the Secular Humanist?
14. For the naturalist, what is the ultimate means of perception?
15. How does the naturalist’s *monistic* view of the mind and body differ from the Christian’s *dualistic* view? What are two troubling implications of a naturalistic answer to the “mind-body” question?

## PHILOSOPHY 2.4

16. How does Lenin describe matter?
17. What is the Marxist view of truth and knowledge (epistemology)?
18. What is the Marxist dialectic and how does it work?
19. What is the Marxist metaphysical belief?
20. How does Marxism address the mind-body question? What is the problem with their explanation?

## PHILOSOPHY 2.5

21. Are Cosmic Humanists in agreement with the tenets of naturalism?
22. What is the Cosmic Humanist view of philosophy?
23. How do Cosmic Humanists understand truth? Where does the Cosmic Humanist look to find truth?
24. Why do different Cosmic Humanist thinkers express different interpretations of reality?
25. According to Cosmic Humanism, what is the only substance that actually exists?

## PHILOSOPHY 2.6

26. Why is the statement “God so loved the world” nonsensical to a Postmodernist?
27. What is literary deconstruction? What does this theory mean for the Bible?
28. What is the “correspondence theory” of truth? Why do Postmodernists reject this theory?
29. What is the primary idea behind “word play?”
30. What four points does Kevin J. Vanhoozer use to summarize Postmodern philosophy?



# “UNDERSTANDING POSTMODERNISM”

WITH JOHN STONESTREET

“... the men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do—200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command.” — 1 Chronicles 12:23,32

## I. Understanding Postmodernism

- A. Both a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ that describes “our times”
- B. We are all, in a sense, postmodern

## II. Historical Perspective

### A. Pre-modern Period: < to 1600

- 1. Strong belief in the \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Authority of oral and written traditions to give the “Big Story”
- 3. Truth is objective, corresponds to reality, and may be known via:
  - i. Revelation
  - ii. Faculties (reason and senses)
  - iii. Experience

### B. Modern Period: 1600 to 1960

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_ of the supernatural
- 2. Authority of observation, human reason, and science to give the “Big Story”
  - i. Belief in progress
- 3. Truth is objective, corresponds to reality, and may be known via:
  - i. Revelation
  - ii. Faculties (reason and senses)
  - iii. Experience

### C. Postmodern Period: 1960 to ?

- 1. Skeptical of all claims to knowledge
- 2. Rejects all authorities claiming to give a “Big Story”

- i. Disbelief in progress
- 3. Truth and reality are only \_\_\_\_\_ constructs attained via:
  - i. Revelation
  - ii. Faculties (reason and senses)
  - iii. Experience

### III. Key Thinkers

#### A. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

- 1. *Beyond Good and Evil* (1891)
- 2. “God is dead”
- 3. “Truth is an illusion”

#### B. Jacques Derrida (1930–2004)

- 1. *Of Grammatology* (1976)
- 2. Deconstruction: no real meaning to any text

#### C. Michel Foucault (1926–1984)

- 1. *Madness and Civilization* (1960)
- 2. Critique of the discourses of power (language is used to oppress others)

#### D. Richard Rorty (1931– ?)

- 1. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979)
- 2. Anti-foundationalism
- 3. Anti-essentialism
- 4. Truth is a social construct

### IV. Postmodernism: The Philosophy

#### A. Rejection of “\_\_\_\_\_”

- 1. Things do not have real qualities independent of our knowing them

“In the naming, the things named are called into their thinging; thinging they unfold world, and thus are abiding ones.” — Martin Heidegger

2. There are only interpretations in different ways by different people
3. What is “normal” (i.e. knowledge) is really determined by power
4. What one believes to be true is only the product of his/her cultural situation
5. Truth is nothing more than interpretation

“Truth is . . . a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, a sum, in short, of human relationships which, rhetorically and poetically intensified, ornamented and transformed, come to be thought of, after long usage by a people, as fixed, binding, and canonical. Truths are illusions, worn-out metaphors now impotent to stir the senses, coins which have lost their faces and are considered metal rather than currency.” — Friedrich Nietzsche

**B.** Rejection of \_\_\_\_\_

1. There are no legitimate metanarratives
2. Any universal theory rejects and suppresses something or someone
3. All metanarratives are tools of oppression

**C.** Role of the “interpretive” community

1. Meaning can only be derived from one’s cultural context (“history is bunk”)
2. Words create (not reflect) reality and have no normative meanings
3. Meaning is created by one’s interpretive community

**D.** Rejection of \_\_\_\_\_

1. Everything is interpretation
2. All interpretations are valid
3. Coherence and consistency are illusions

**V. Where You Will Find It**

- A. Literature:** Deconstructionism
- B. Philosophy:** Relativism, pragmatism
- C. Art:** Dada, surrealism, pop-nihilism
- D. History:** Revisionist (anti-metanarrative)
- E. Sociology:** Multiculturalism

## VI. The Contradictions

- A. Proposing that “there is no truth,” which is a truth statement
- B. Asking that we agree with the postmodern interpretation that there is nothing but interpretation
- C. Announcing authoritatively that authoritative announcements are invalid
- D. Offering the metanarrative that there are no metanarratives
- E. Claiming it is immoral to oppress people with morality

## VII. The Culture

- A. Truth is not objective, but based on personal feelings
- B. There are no universal values that apply everywhere to everyone
- C. Basis for moral action is not universal rights and morals, but relationship with the other person
- D. We are the product of our culture; nothing more
- E. No one has the right to tell others that they are wrong in their interpretation

## VIII. Postmodernism and Christianity

- A. Christianity IS a \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Christianity IS \_\_\_\_\_
- C. Christianity DOES propose moral norms, authority, and objective truth
- D. What becomes of Scripture and interpretation of Scripture?
- E. There are points of agreement:
  - 1. \_\_\_\_\_ is flawed
  - 2. Community is vitally important
  - 3. Without God, knowledge is impossible

“I came to realize that the search of the philosophers for a grand scheme that would encompass everything was illusory. Only a theism that combined a God with equal measures of truth, love, and justice could do the trick. But since I could not imagine myself being religious, and had indeed become more raucously secular, I did not consider that an option for me.” — Richard Rorty, *Trotsky and the Wild Orchids*

# “UNDERSTANDING POSTMODERNISM”

## VIDEO QUESTIONS

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class.*

1. **How can we historically divide the pre-modern, modern, and postmodern periods? How did each period view truth?**
2. **What four elements define the philosophy of Postmodernism?**
3. **In what five ways is Postmodernism a contradiction?**
4. **On what areas do Christianity and Postmodernism disagree?**
5. **What do Christianity and Postmodernism have in common?**



# “EVIL AND SUFFERING”

WITH JOHN STONESTREET

## PART ONE

### I. Defining Evil

- A. \_\_\_\_\_: Evil that is the result of human choices (Sept. 11, murder, etc.)
- B. \_\_\_\_\_: Evil where there is no human will involved (tsunami, natural disasters, etc.)
- C. \_\_\_\_\_: Gratuitous evil, innocent suffering

### II. Approaching the Problem of Evil

- A. Logical side (Focus—the existence of evil)
  - 1. How could an omniscient, omni-benevolent, omnipotent God allow evil?
  - 2. Logical syllogism

Proposition 1: If God were all-*good*, he *would* destroy evil

Proposition 2: If God were all-*powerful*, he *could* destroy evil

Proposition 3: Evil has not been destroyed

Conclusion: There is no all-*good*, all *powerful*-God

- B. Personal side (Focus—the existence of pain and suffering)
  - 1. Why did God allow that evil to happen to me?
  - 2. We struggle with this side most
- C. Other worldviews and the problem of evil
  - 1. **Naturalism**
    - i. Physical world is all there is
    - ii. There is no real evil, only bad luck
    - iii. Evil has no meaning
  - 2. **Transcendentalism** [Non-naturalism]
    - i. Physical world is an illusion

- ii. Evil is an illusion
- iii. Evil is the result of karmic debt (and is deserved)

### 3. Theism

- i. God allowed evil in the world for his own purposes
- ii. Islamic position

“The gist is that good and evil are foreordained. What is foreordained comes necessarily to be after a prior act of divine volition. No one can rebel against God’s judgment; no one can appeal His decree and command. Rather, everything small and large is written and comes to be in a known and expected measure.” — Al-Ghazali, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*

### III. Bad Solutions

- A. \_\_\_\_\_: the problem should be ignored

Redefines man’s ability to know God

- B. \_\_\_\_\_: evil does not exist

Redefines evil *or* the world

- C. \_\_\_\_\_: God cannot control all evil

Redefines God’s power

~~Proposition 2: If God were all-powerful, he *could* destroy evil~~

- D. \_\_\_\_\_: God is beyond moral categories

Redefines God’s goodness

~~Proposition 1: If God were all-good, he *would* destroy evil~~

## PART TWO

### IV. Biblical Resolution

- A. A view of the past
  - 1. God’s creation was *very* good (Genesis 1)
  - 2. Free will is an essential component of true humanity (Genesis 2)

3. *We* are not good (Genesis 3)

B. A view of the future

Proposition 1: If God were all-good, he *would* destroy evil

Proposition 2: If God were all-*powerful*, he *could* destroy evil

Proposition 3: Evil has not ***YET*** been destroyed

Conclusion: Evil will one day be destroyed by an all-good, all-powerful God

These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve Him . . . He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them. Never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd; He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. — Revelation 7:14–17

1. All evil will be destroyed one day
2. The end will be better than the beginning
  - i. Revelation 4 and 5
  - ii. A world redeemed is better than a world that never fell
  - iii. God doesn't just forgive sins, he redeems

C. A view of the present

1. What is the answer for personal suffering?

But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. — Isaiah 53:5

Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows . . . — Isaiah 53:4

“It is the woman who has been raped that understands what rape is, not the rapist. It is the person who has been slandered who understands what slander is, not the slanderer. It is the one who died for our sins who understands what evil is, not the skeptics . . .” — Ravi Zacharias

2. Our God suffers with us

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin. — Hebrews 4:15



## “EVIL AND SUFFERING”

### VIDEO QUESTIONS

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class.*

1. **What are three types of evil? What are some examples? Which is the hardest type to deal with and why?**
2. **What are two different sides to the problem of evil and suffering? Which side do we struggle with the most?**
3. **How do differing worldviews view the existence of evil?**
4. **What are some bad solutions to the problem of evil? Why are these solutions problematic?**
5. **What is the biblical resolution to the problem of evil and suffering?**



# CRITICAL THINKING

BY THE SUMMIT STAFF

## PART ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In the following essay, we will briefly discuss the nature of an argument, the law of non-contradiction, and a selection of informal fallacies. We will also present a helpful cache of tough questions, which can be used when engaging various worldviews. Finally, we will look at how to discern the assumptions behind the information presented in the media. This survey is designed to provide you with an introduction to the art of critical thinking.

### LOGIC

Why are so many people in today's society swayed by mere emotionalism, or trapped by the most recent propaganda disseminated across our airwaves, television, or in the classroom? While there are several factors involved in answering this question, one primary reason is that people do not think critically.

**WHAT IS AN ARGUMENT?** Most people think an argument occurs when people get together, raise their voices, and call each other names. Properly speaking, this is not an argument, but an altercation. An argument, understood in a philosophical or logical context, is where we draw conclusions from various premises. There are several words that we use to indicate when we are presenting a premise and when we are presenting a conclusion. When indicating a premise, we use such words as: *because, for, for this reason, as, if, based on the fact that, etc.* When demonstrating a conclusion, we typically use: *therefore, thus, consequently, hence, it follows that, etc.* It's good to keep these indicators in mind so that you can detect an argument.

It is common for arguments to be confused with assertions. Assertions are the expressions of opinions without supporting premises. For example, it is common to hear someone assert that there are contradictions in the Bible, but just *saying* so doesn't *make* it so. When you hear assertions like this, the proper response is to ask questions, such as, "Can you give me some examples?"<sup>1</sup>

**THE LAW OF NON-CONTRADICTION:** This law is the foundation for all logical thinking. It may be defined as follows: a statement (a proposition) cannot be true and not true at the same time and in the same respect. For example: It cannot be both raining and not raining at the same time and in the same respect.

Humans did not invent the laws of logic any more than they invented the laws of nature—such as the law of gravity. In fact, throughout the Bible, the law of non-contradiction is implied. Without this law, nothing could be interpreted as true or false. Right thinking imitates God's thinking; and because God does not contradict himself (his Word cannot be broken—John 10:35; he cannot lie—Hebrews 6:18), Christians should seek to avoid contradiction. Without the law of non-contradiction we would never be able to detect a lie.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, if someone wants to deny the law of non-contradiction, that person immediately runs back into it, because they would have to presuppose that it's true in order to prove that it's false. Imagine the following conversation:

"Hey, I don't think the law of non-contradiction is really that important. In fact, I believe that we don't need to follow it at all."

"Really? So you think we need to follow the law of non-contradiction. You really believe it's that important?"

"Didn't you hear me? I said just the opposite from what you said I said."

"If the law of non-contradiction really *isn't* important, then we are both correct."

<sup>1</sup> Of course, there are "hard passages" in the Bible (cf. 1 Peter 3:15ff. to see that even Peter could acknowledge that). If you have questions about such difficult passages, we recommend Gleason Archer's book, *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*.

<sup>2</sup> A lie is a contradiction of the truth. It is a denial of reality.

When expressing a denial or affirmation of any claim, proposition, belief, or idea, one must presuppose the law of non-contradiction. It is fundamental to any kind of distinctions: right and wrong, good and bad, true and false.<sup>3</sup>

## **LOGICAL FALLACIES**

A fallacy is simply a faulty argument. In the process of reasoning, there are two types of fallacies that occur: formal and informal. Formal fallacies deal with the actual *form* of the argument. When an argument is structured incorrectly it is fallacious. Even when an argument is *formally* correct, it may still be *informally* fallacious. The conclusion may not actually follow from the premises due to a faulty gathering of information, circular reasoning, or some other mistake. Informal fallacies are the more common of the two types of fallacies, and will be covered in this paper.

Below we provide a list of some common informal fallacies, a brief explanation of each, and an illustration or two. We have not provided an exhaustive catalogue because there seem to be an endless number of ways that people can make mistakes in their thinking, and we do not have the space to explain them all.

**FALLACIES OF AMBIGUITY:** Communication can be difficult. Difficulties arise from differing cultures, age groups, races, prejudices, and especially from differing worldviews. One of the most important ground rules for clear communication is clear definitions. We may be unnecessarily frustrated if others misunderstand what we say because they either don't know what a word means, or we simply have not supplied clear definitions for the words we use.

### **EQUIVOCATION**

The fallacy of equivocation occurs when we use different definitions for the same word, or when a word is taken in a different way than intended (a different definition). Many words have different meanings depending on their context. Consider the following examples:

“All men are created equal? If that were so, then there wouldn't be so many rich people.”  
 “If all men are created equal, then why am I so short?”

The difficulty that arises in these examples is that the statement “all men are created equal” means that all men should be equally valued as human beings. It was never intended to mean that we are all clones of one another, or that we would have equal incomes.

There is a special type of equivocation that can occur with relative terms like *tall* or *short*. These types of words must be understood in relation to something else. To claim that something or someone is tall assumes a relation to other people or things. The vagueness of these types of terms can only be clarified by context.

It should be noted that much of our humor rests in equivocations. In a humorous context, we call it a “play on words.” Also, sometimes an equivocation can be intentional and witty, such as when Ben Franklin declared, “We must all hang together, or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.” The word *hang* is intended to be understood quite differently in each usage.

When Christians are witnessing to people who are involved in pseudo-Christian religions (i.e. cults), they need to be very careful to define their words so as not to be misunderstood. For example, while Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses both use the name of Jesus Christ, they have completely different meanings. The Jehovah's Witness believes that Jesus was the first *created* being and was, in fact, the Archangel Michael before he became the man Jesus. The Mormons, on the other hand, believe that Jesus is literally our older brother from a pre-existence. Jesus is believed to be the firstborn of the Father and one of many gods. Given these differences, we need to make sure that we dig deeper into the meanings of what people say and not stay at a superficial level of communication.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Of course, there are some people who still insist that such dichotomous thinking is incorrect. If it is not correct, however, then that means there is such a state as being correct. That then poses a dichotomy. They can't escape the nature of reality.

<sup>4</sup> The Apostle Paul warned the early Church about those who would teach a different Jesus and a different gospel (see 2 Corinthians 11:2–4, 13–15; Galatians 1:6–9; see also 1 John 4:1–6). For a good survey and theological refutation of various pseudo-Christian religions, see *Defending the Faith* by Richard Abanes (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997).

**FALLACIES OF RELEVANCE:** This section will deal with fallacies that occur when something irrelevant to the question of truth is added to an argument in the attempt to persuade.

#### APPEAL TO PITY

This fallacy occurs when one tries to persuade by invoking the listener to feel sorry for the individual or group for whom one is arguing. Many times, pity is an appropriate reaction, but it is not always a valid means of persuasion.

For example, sometimes abortion advocates will argue that if you make poor women carry their babies to term, they may not be cared for properly, or that if you outlaw abortion, then women will have to return to the “back alley butchers” to get abortions. While these arguments may be emotionally persuasive, they are not relevant to the issue at hand. One is never justified in killing a child just because life becomes harder for the mother.

#### AD HOMINEM

*Ad hominem* means “argument to the person.” This fallacy is committed when, instead of dealing with what a person is arguing, someone attacks his or her character. This is fallacious because a person’s character typically has no bearing on the truth or falsehood of his or her claims. Here are some examples:

“You are wrong because you are an intolerant, closed-minded, right-wing fundamentalist.”  
“You can’t trust anything he says. He is a liberal pagan atheist and has no basis for morality.”

#### APPEAL TO IGNORANCE

This fallacy can occur in two ways. 1) To argue that something is true because it hasn’t been proven to be false; or 2) to argue that something is false because it hasn’t been proven to be true. Just because there is no proof against your position does not prove your position true. Likewise, just because a position has not been proven does not mean that it is false. Here are a couple examples:

“You cannot prove God does not exist, therefore God exists.”  
“You cannot prove God does exist, therefore God does not exist.”

#### RED HERRING

A herring is a fish that can be used to distract and confuse bloodhounds on the scent of game. Similarly, this fallacy is the introduction of an irrelevant side issue into an argument which ultimately distracts and confuses the case being presented. Often positive (or even negative) reasons offered for a conclusion have nothing to do with conclusion. Here are a couple of examples:

“Of course she’s a good doctor. She drives a great car and is really funny.”  
“You believe abortion is murder, yet you are in support of capital punishment?”

**FALLACIES OF PRESUMPTION:** Fallacies of presumption are those fallacies where someone holds to an unjustified conclusion. This is usually caused by overlooking, denying, evading, or distorting the facts.

#### HASTY GENERALIZATION

When you wish to make an argument for a certain position, you need to gather information for support. In doing this, you must be very careful to gather sufficient evidence to support your conclusion. The fallacy of hasty generalization is committed when a person gathers too little information to support the conclusion being argued.

Just because one or two taxi drivers are rude and obnoxious does not mean that you can generalize that all (or even most) taxi drivers behave this way. All that can legitimately be drawn from such a sampling is that the particular taxi drivers you have encountered were rude and obnoxious. In the same way, just because a person may encounter a couple of Christian TV evangelists who have questionable character does not mean one can conclude that all Christians have questionable character.

These examples get at the heart of the most common way this fallacy is manifest: prejudices. Our prejudices are typically built on a very small sampling, and then are generalized and applied to an entire group (or sub-group) of people or things.

### SWEEPING GENERALIZATION

The fallacy of sweeping generalization is committed when one takes a general rule and applies it absolutely to all instances, not recognizing that there are exceptions. The generalization might be a very fair one, but the application in particular, uncommon, or unique instances may not be valid.

For example, exercise is generally a good thing. Yet what if you have a heart condition? One could say, “Aerobics is the best way to exercise, and Jenny really needs exercise for her heart condition.” The problem is that while aerobics might be “the best way to exercise,” it would obviously not be the right way for Jenny. Instead of it helping her, it might kill her. Here are a couple more examples:

“I haven’t met a single moral atheist. Therefore, no atheists are moral.”

“All Christians hate homosexuals. At least, all the ones I know do.”

### BEGGING THE QUESTION

This fallacy occurs when one simply assumes what he or she is trying to prove. This situation can be demonstrated in the following conversation between two thieves who just stole three bars of gold:

Thief A: “So how are we going to divide the gold?”

Thief B: “I should get two bars and you can have one.”

Thief A: “Why should you get two bars?”

Thief B: “Because I am the leader.”

Thief A: “How did you get to be the leader?”

Thief B: “Because I have two bars.”

### FAULTY DILEMMA

This fallacy occurs when a person states that there are only a certain number of options, and you must choose between them, when in fact there are more options available.

In John 9:2–3 the disciples posed a faulty dilemma when, concerning a man who had been blind from birth, they asked, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

This is an either/or type of question. Instead of answering the question with one of the suggested responses, Jesus denies both and supplies a third. Jesus said, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”

### COMPLEX QUESTION

One common attempt by unbelievers to stump believers is to ask the age-old question: “Can God create a rock so big that he can’t lift it?” If you answer yes, then God’s omnipotence (all-powerfulness) is denied due to the fact that he can’t lift the rock. If you answer no, however, then God’s omnipotence is denied because he can’t create such a rock. Neither of these answers is satisfying to a Bible-believing Christian. How does one reason out of this dilemma?

This example can be classified as the fallacy of a complex question, or loaded question. What if I asked you, “Have you stopped beating your wife yet?” If you answer yes, that implies that you have been beating her. If you answer no, then you are still beating her. The problem lies in the question; it is one of those that is simply not fair to ask. You would have to respond that you have never beaten your wife, and that the question presupposes that you have. You can’t answer with a simple yes or a no.

Now back to God and the big rock. You cannot answer this question with a simple yes or no. What you have to do is show that the question is not fair. (It might be good to provide the question about beating one’s wife as an illustration of this.) You see, by definition, since God is omnipotent (and that is what the Bible teaches), he could create the largest rock possible. Also, because God is omnipotent, he could lift the largest possible rock. The problem with the question is that it is faulty; the question was loaded. You cannot set the creative expression of an omnipotent being against the abilities of an omnipotent being. That would be just as illogical as asking whether or not God could create a square

circle or if God could count higher than infinity. It is not within the realm of reality to speak of such illusions, and they do not in any way illustrate any limitation in God's power and abilities.

### FALSE ANALOGY

An analogy is said to be fallacious or false if it compares two objects that are actually relevantly dissimilar or if the points of comparison are used to draw a conclusion that simply does not follow.<sup>5</sup> Consider the following example:

“You Christians claim to have miracles to support your religion, but so do other religious traditions, such as Mormonism. Thus there is no reason to believe that Christianity is true.”

The two objects being compared are Christians and Mormons. Their status as religions and their claim that miracles occur and support their validity are the points of commonalities. However, the conclusion that Christianity is false because another religion claims miracles does not follow. For example, it is possible that miracles occur within both religions traditions. It is also possible that either Christianity or Mormonism have lied or believed falsely regarding the miracles claimed by their religion.

### FALSE CAUSE

This fallacy is committed when a person believes that just because one thing followed another there must be a causal connection.

In many ancient cultures, people believed that the gods caused all sickness. These cultures would therefore attempt to placate the wrath of their gods by means of various sacrifices. At times, the sickness would go away after the sacrifices. Because of this, their beliefs were reinforced. They believed that the gods had been placated, and the sickness was removed because of the sacrifice. Mere chronological sequence does not prove causation.

### STRAW MAN

The straw man fallacy occurs when a person misrepresents another's view so as to easily discredit it. This can happen intentionally or unintentionally. The image this fallacy conjures up is that of a person building a straw man simply to knock it over.

One might say, “You say that the New Testament teaches that we are not under law, and that we are saved by grace through faith alone. Therefore, what you teach is that we can sin all we want after we are saved.” This is a straw man according to Paul in Romans 6:15ff. The person making such an argument simplified the New Testament's stance on the law, sin, and salvation in order to easily defeat a teaching they either didn't understand or with which they didn't agree.

### APPEAL TO MAJORITY

We see this fallacy when we appeal to a group of people to prove that something is true or false, right or wrong. Many times Americans fall into this trap. For example, some people think that certain sexual practices are justified because over 50% of the American public believes that they are permissible. We cannot determine right and wrong by majority vote.

In the past, many people believed that the Earth was flat. But just because they believed this, does it mean that the Earth was indeed flat? Does majority vote make things true or right today? Just because a great number of Americans think that abortion is acceptable, does that make it so?

In the end, we cannot determine right/wrong or true/false by majority vote. Such a thing can be decided only by legitimate reasons and evidence.

### APPEAL TO TRADITION

This fallacy occurs when one appeals either to what is old, or to what is new in the attempt to establish the truth.

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that the objects being compared do not share points of commonality; rather it is to say that points being compared to support the conclusion are not supported by the analogy.

Someone may appeal to what is traditional. “We have always done it this way, it must be right.” However, there may be a better way. More often today, we hear an appeal to the *modern*. “We moderns don’t believe in the existence of God. That was for ages past when people believed in mythology.” Merely because something is old or new does not make it right or true.

## PART TWO

### ASKING QUESTIONS<sup>6</sup>

Francis Scott Key, the man who penned the words of the *Star-Spangled Banner*, was also a great Christian apologist. He once wrote, “I do not believe there are any new objections to be raised to the truth of Christianity. Men may argue ingeniously against our faith, but what can they say in defense of their own?”

Mr. Key understood a profound, yet little known principle of defending the Christian faith: the best defense is a good offense. Both sides of an issue should be able to defend their position. We need to practice making our opponents<sup>7</sup> stand up for what they believe, and the best way to make them defend their position is by asking strategic questions.

The strategy of asking questions is a powerful one, but it must be done with the correct demeanor. We must always question the ideas presented, although we should be careful not to challenge the authority of the professor.

In addition, we must keep in mind that if we ask questions of others, they will likely ask questions of us. That means that while we want to challenge other people to defend their beliefs, they will challenge us as well. We need to know why we believe what we believe.

By asking questions we engage in worldview apologetics. We are able to go beyond someone’s appearance or behavior in order reveal and engage their worldview.

How you ask questions—the attitude revealed in your style of inquiry—will reveal whether you want to persuade someone of the truth or just win arguments. We hope that you will desire the former so that you can graciously demonstrate Christian living to unbelievers.

Asking questions is an excellent strategy for three reasons. First, it is low risk. If your opponent becomes angry or defensive at your questions, then you can simply stop asking questions, or change the subject.

Second, asking questions helps you to understand your opponent’s train of thought—where they began their thinking, how their thinking progressed, and the exact conclusion for which they are trying to argue. In other words, asking questions helps you to understand them. And understanding is a primary step in seeking to persuade people of the truth.

Third, asking questions can help someone to have a better understanding of where *they* stand on an issue. In other words, instead of giving them an explanation, you can cause them to think through their position more clearly.

What sort of questions should we be asking? Start with questions that strike at the heart of your opponent’s worldview. Such questions force them to back up and defend their assumptions. Along this line, we suggest a series of *tough questions*.

**QUESTION 1: WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT?** Always begin by asking your opponents to define their terms. If they say something like, “There is no such thing as a traditional family left in the United States today,” then ask, “What do you mean by traditional family?” If they say “God cannot exist because there is too much evil,” then ask, “What do you mean by *evil*?”<sup>8</sup>

**QUESTION 2: HOW DID YOU COME TO THAT CONCLUSION?** This question is especially helpful in coming to understand how people think. You can find out where their thoughts began, how they progressed, and

<sup>6</sup> Special thanks to Bill Jack and Jeff Myers for help on earlier editions of this material. Both Bill and Jeff are great examples of how to live inquisitively.

<sup>7</sup> By opponent, we mean the person of whom you are asking questions. It does not mean your enemy.

<sup>8</sup> To combat this particular argument, you can ask by which standard do they judge between good and evil. Keep in mind that atheists have no final universal standards by which to judge between good and evil. The existence of evil is actually a good argument for the existence of God. In the end, if God does not exist, then there is no such thing as evil either.

how they arrived at their conclusion. Along the way, you can ask further questions about any of their points of reasoning.

**QUESTION 3: HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT TO BE TRUE?** Here we are seeking an understanding of why they believe what they believe. Ask them to supply some good support for what they are claiming to be true.

**QUESTION 4: WHY DO YOU BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE RIGHT?** We should be ready to ask, “Why do you believe as you do?” This question forces one’s opponent to admit when they are simply assuming their beliefs and when they have actually reasoned through their beliefs. It also helps to reveal any evidence they might offer for their arguments. Christians should, in turn, always be ready to give rudimentary reasons for their beliefs on any given subject.

**QUESTION 5: WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR INFORMATION?** Students should be trained to ask, “Where do you get the information to prove that what you are saying is true?” This question can help distinguish between mere hearsay and documented data.

**QUESTION 6: WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU ARE WRONG?** Nobody likes to think about the consequences if what they believe is wrong. Yet there have been some outstanding examples of people who were willing to do just that. One such person was Blaise Pascal, a brilliant mathematician, known for his famous wager. It goes something like this: “If I become a Christian and live my life in the service of mankind, and then die only to find out that Christianity is not true, I will have lost nothing. But if I do not become a Christian and live my life selfishly, and then die only to discover that Christianity is true, I will have lost everything.” Pascal’s wager is a direct way of asking, “What do I have to lose if I am wrong?”<sup>9</sup>

**QUESTION 7: CAN YOU GIVE ME TWO SOURCES THAT DISAGREE WITH YOU AND EXPLAIN WHY THEY DISAGREE?**<sup>10</sup> College professors often hold to one position very strongly against all others. In class, they may assert, either implicitly or explicitly, that what they believe to be true is the objective truth. Therefore, they may give little or no merit to any disagreements, or they may even ridicule their opponents. The astute Christian student will ask such professors to explain clearly the opposing viewpoints, along with good documentation, and then explain why they disagree. In this way, you can see if your professors have weighed different sides of the issues and made informed decisions. The professor has two options: give the merits of the opposing side (thus demonstrating to the class that his is not the only way to think about the issue), or, admit that he has not studied the opposing viewpoints, and has thus made an uninformed decision without weighing all the available information.

**QUESTION 8: WHY IS THIS SIGNIFICANT?** Many professors will fail, unless challenged by students, to provide the connection between their worldview and the point they are making. For example, if they claim “people are basically good, not sinful, by nature,” you might ask why this point is significant. This might prompt them to explain that this justifies another view, maybe a socialistic view of the world, or elimination of the need for a savior.

**QUESTION 9: HOW DO I KNOW YOU ARE TELLING ME THE TRUTH?**<sup>11</sup> If the opponent has any hidden agenda, it will surface at this point. We should not trust someone simply because he has a *Ph.D.* after his name. People are fallible, and we all make mistakes. Remember, the Bereans were *nobler* because they checked the Apostle Paul against the Old Testament (Acts 17:11). A poor professor will respond simply by listing his or her qualifications. A good professor will say “Don’t take my word for it. Go check it out for yourself.”

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<sup>9</sup> Be careful with this question because it can always be thrown back at you.

<sup>10</sup> Another way of asking this question is, “Can you give us some sources who disagree with your opinion, explain their positions, and tell us what is wrong with their views?”

<sup>11</sup> Another way of asking this question is, “Why should I believe you?” But you really need to be careful here. It is difficult to ask this question in a way that doesn’t seem snobbish.

**QUESTION 10: CAN YOU GIVE ME AN ALTERNATE EXPLANATION FOR THIS PHENOMENON?** This is a good way to move a discussion back onto logical ground. Many individuals will emotionally assert things like, “His budget cuts are responsible for all of the economic ills in this nation.” This is an absurd generalization, something that will become evident when asking this question.

### **ANALYZING MEDIA REPORTS**

People need to recognize that most of their information about the world comes to them through the media. Yet, the media isn't some massive channel that simply dumps unbiased facts into our laps. As we have seen, everyone has a worldview: the *actors* in a news story, the *experts* who comment on it, the *reporters* of the story, even the *editors/executives* who decide which story to cover. Each of their worldviews has an impact on the information that eventually reaches you.

At times, the influence of a particular worldview may be subtle. However, it wouldn't take very long to discover that many of them don't just have a job; they have a mission. Their mission is to make a difference in the world through what they do. In fact, for many people, this is not an unusual goal. Students need to be aware that we all approach information and life with a bias. It is simply unavoidable.

In the vast majority of cases, the editors and reporters are making an effort to be balanced. Yet what does *balanced* mean? It means reporting both sides of the issue with no indication that either side of the story has more merit. Is that true? As Christians, we believe that some things are right and other things are wrong.

As one learns to analyze media reports, he or she should apply the rules on logical thinking that are presented in this section. They should also keep the following factors in mind:

**1. WHAT IS REPORTED?** It is easy to think that by reading your daily newspaper and watching the evening news you have received a thorough representation of anything relevant in your community. Students should realize that each media outlet has a limited amount of space and ability to deal with everything that is important. Think of a media outlet as a spotlight on a dark night. The spotlight will illuminate things that you would never see otherwise, but there is no way it can shine on everything at once.

Recognize also that each individual news form has restrictions and limitations. In order to make a story acceptable for television, it must have pictures. This may seem inconsequential until you realize that there are some things—like the arrival of a new bear at the local zoo—which are reported because they make great pictures and can be reported in two minutes. Yet perhaps the same day the bear arrived, the city council made a change in the zoning laws that will affect your school. City council meetings make horrible pictures, and zoning laws don't fit well into concise sound bites. Which story is truly important?

What makes an event newsworthy? Most events that are truly life-changing are not considered newsworthy: marriages, deaths, and births. Rarely do these events appear on the front page. Conversely, many events that make the front page are life changing for only a few people, or intriguing for the moment.

**2. WHICH SIDES ARE PRESENTED?** Is a response from each side presented? Does the news story even indicate that someone might think differently? For instance, in an article in the *Chicago Tribune*, “Life Gets Earlier Date of Origin,”<sup>12</sup> an Australian scientist is reported as having found that life evolved much earlier than was previously thought—going from chemical soup to living cells in just 500 million years, rather than 1 1/2 billion years. The article is well written, and acknowledges disagreement within the scientific community. However, it does not acknowledge that anyone might disagree with evolution altogether.

There are many reasons for this type of omission. Sometimes it is deliberate. At other times, a reporter may not be aware that another viewpoint exists or know a credible contact to represent a position. Also, there may not be time to consider another opinion due to deadlines.

Another reason for omitting a position on an issue is based on worldviews. How we think will affect what we believe to be credible, or even possible. For example, we know that the world is round, but some people still believe it to be flat. If you were going to write an article examining a change in a major ocean current and its effect on weather, would you contact the Flat Earth Society for comment?

In the same way, a reporter who firmly believes that the material world is all that exists may do a human-interest piece on a *miraculous* recovery from cancer. Although they might mention the chance that there might be a supernatural element involved, a *natural* cause of recovery will be sought and favored.

<sup>12</sup>“Life Gets Earlier Date of Origin,” *Chicago Tribune*, Sunday, May 2, 1993, Section 1, Page 28.

The reporter *knows* that there is no way God could have healed the patient, so this possibility is as absurd as the idea of a flat Earth.

**3. WHAT IS THE TONE OF THE REPORT?** Does the tone of the writing or speaking carry meaning in itself? Does the tone match the issue being reported? Consider the following example from an article concerning the ethical discussions raised by the movie *Indecent Proposal* (where a billionaire offers another man 1 million dollars for one night with his wife). The reporter spoke with a woman who is shocked by the number of women who would agree to take the money and sleep with the man. The reporter is writing in the first person.

“I was really shocked,” she said. “I think these people are telling the truth. Kidding is one thing, but this was a serious discussion. I love my husband. This would never even be cause for five minutes of deliberation. I would never do it. I can’t believe they would.”

She talks as if this is going to go on record as the final rip in modern morality.

“And what do you think?” she wanted to know.

The woman is 53 years old, the grandmother of three. And by her own admission, she is 35 pounds overweight.

I told her I could see how this would be a great moral challenge. But I thought she had the strength to get through it.

“I think you can go back to worrying about Somalia, the economy and whether Donald will marry Marla,” I said. “I just don’t think this is going to come up.”

“That’s not the point,” she said.

“Yes, it is,” I replied.<sup>13</sup>

**4. WHAT UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS DOES THE NEWS STORY HOLD?** Students should become skilled in seeking *underlying assumptions* held in the report of a story.

The *Twin Cities Star Tribune* ran an article entitled, “If every kid cared, the world would change,”<sup>14</sup> describing the impact of a few sixth graders concerned about the environment. The piece is inspiring, but the assumption is that it is permissible to do whatever is necessary to make your point (the children disobeyed school officials in holding a protest, and were suspended from school). This disobedience was presented in a positive light.

**5. WHO ARE THE SOURCES AND HOW ARE THEY CHARACTERIZED?** Does an article on environmentalism only quote extremist groups, or do they use more moderate sources? If the article quotes Christians, which groups or spokespersons are quoted? Are these the best sources? Why were these sources used? Consider also how the sources are characterized or described. Are they seen in a positive or negative light? The following quote is from an Associated Press article reporting on several Italian towns that banned bikinis on city streets.

ROME (AP)— . . . Limits on topless bathing or skimpy suits on city streets are not new. But this time the prudery illuminates attitudes about a political force that has arrived like an awkward adolescent shouldering his way onto the school bus.

The prudish officials belong to the Northern League, a regionally based anti-corruption party backed by small businessmen and the middle class, with upright morals to match.

The bans reflect the culture clash between the League and its rivals from traditional parties, particularly on the left, which regard the League as part of a conservative backlash.<sup>15</sup>

**6. HOW ARE WORDS USED TO DESCRIBE PEOPLE OR ORGANIZATIONS?**

- To describe the incident: Was someone *taken to jail* or *thrown into jail*?
- To describe the people involved: A *local church* or a *fundamentalist religious group*?<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> “Premise of ‘Indecent Proposal’ Disturbing,” MaryIn Schwartz, Dallas Morning News in Colorado Springs, CO Gazette Telegraph, 4/26/93, p. D2.

<sup>14</sup> “If every kid cared, the world would change,” Twin Cities Star Tribune, 4/22/93, p. 1B.

<sup>15</sup> “Bikini ban in 2 Italian cities underlines new cultural clash,” Standard Examiner, Ogden, UT, 7/20/93, p. 5A.

- To describe a position: Is someone *pro-life* or *anti-abortion*?
- To convey emotion: One article described citations by the Thomas Jefferson Center for the Protection of Free Expression. The organization cited the Federal Communications Commission for censorship for “. . . trying to gag controversial radio personality Howard Stern . . .”<sup>17</sup> *Censorship* and *gag* are emotional words, and convey meaning.
- To give positive or negative connotations: “Focus on the Family, the Christian media conglomerate, should be upfront about its ‘extreme and un-American’ political agenda, a national civil liberties watchdog group said Wednesday.”<sup>18</sup> Think of the words with generally positive connotations: *civil liberties* and *watchdog*. Negative connotations come from the words *agenda* and *conglomerate*.
- To simply describe a thing: A fascinating example of this comes from an article titled “Drs. try to save brain-dead mom’s fetus.” The baby is referred to as a fetus throughout the article, except when a hospital spokesman is quoted as saying, “The odds are very slim, but the baby’s heart is beating.”<sup>19</sup>

Or, consider Colorado’s Amendment Two, which would prevent laws giving gays protected civil rights status such as those that protect minority groups. Contrast that description with, “the amendment would ban laws that prevent discrimination against homosexuals,”<sup>20</sup> as it was described by the Associated Press.

Even punctuation can be used to convey meaning. In the following examples, a prayer rally is presented as something a bit odd, if not downright unsavory.

- Abortion clinics brace for Operation Rescue
- Saturday ‘prayer rally’ set for Robbinsdale
- Operation Rescue officials confirmed Wednesday that their national director, the Rev. Keith Tucci, will be in the Twin Cities this weekend and will lead a “prayer rally” in front of a Robbinsdale abortion clinic on Saturday.<sup>21</sup>

**7. HOW ARE ACTIONS DESCRIBED?** What are the outcomes or results of the event being reported? Are these accurate? Consider an article entitled, “Teaching multicultural history instills pride, sense of place, educators find.”<sup>22</sup> The results of implementing presenting a multicultural curriculum are presented as overwhelmingly positive. However, the writer does not examine the results of this curriculum on the students’ standardized test scores. The program has raised self-esteem, but is that the only crucial criteria for evaluation?

**8. WHAT STATISTICS ARE USED?** Statistics can prove just about anything—and they can be misleading. A prime example is the *accepted* statistic that homosexuals comprise 10% of the population.<sup>23</sup> Recent studies indicate that 2–3% is more appropriate,<sup>24</sup> yet the 10% figure continues to be used.

**9. WHAT IS LEFT OUT OF THE NEWS STORY?** This can include background sources, supporting materials or studies, and opposing viewpoints. Sometimes this omission is deliberate. However, in many cases it is simply irresponsible reporting. For example, consider the following news brief that was sent on the United Press International newswire:

<sup>16</sup> Be aware of the use of the word “fundamentalist.” It is being applied indiscriminately to any religious group, whether a local church is protesting the location of an adult bookstore or David Koresh’s Branch Davidian cult near Waco, Texas.

<sup>17</sup> “Official’s ban of fairy tale earns ‘citation’ for censorship,” The Clarion-Ledger, Jacksonville, MS 4/14/93, p 12A.

<sup>18</sup> “Watchdog says Focus hides aims,” D’Arcy Fallon, Gazette Telegraph, Colorado Springs, 4/29/93, p B1.

<sup>19</sup> “Drs. try to save brain-dead mom’s fetus,” The Commercial Appeal, Memphis, TN, 4/24/93, p A4.

<sup>20</sup> “Amendment 2 Boycott,” Associated Press newswire, 5/7/93.

<sup>21</sup> “Abortion clinics brace for Operation Rescue,” Tim Nelson, Pioneer Press, St. Paul, MN, 4/22/93, p 1A.

<sup>22</sup> “Teaching multicultural history instills pride, sense of place, educators find,” Sandy Kleffman, San Francisco Chronicle, in Colorado Springs, CO Gazette Telegraph, 4/19/93, p. D2.

<sup>23</sup> Kinsey, Alfred C., et al., *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: Saunders Company, 1948).

<sup>24</sup> Reinisch, June M., dir., *The Kinsey Institute New Report on Sex* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), p. 147. See also Abraham Maslow and James M. Sakoda, “Volunteer Error in the Kinsey Study,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 47 (April 1952), pp. 259–62.

(TRENTON, N.J.)— Some 15 million people could be getting parched if there is more global warming without an increase in rainfall. The U.S. Geological Survey says the Delaware River Basin which feeds Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York could be facing a serious drought if the overall temperature rises by just four degrees. That would cause stream flow to drop 27 percent and allow saltwater to back up in the Delaware into freshwater aquifers.<sup>25</sup>

That is the entire story! Almost every possible detail was left out—why the U.S. Geological Survey said what it did, any supporting statistics or studies, or support for the controversial idea of global warming in general. This example also begins with the faulty assumption that global warming is already occurring, and points out the inherent difficulties in reporting news. This news clip was intended for a radio broadcast which leaves very little time for in-depth information. Also, notice all the conditional words, *could*, *if*, etc . . .

**10. WHERE IS THE READER OR LISTENER LED INTO FAULTY REASONING?** Consider the following example from United Press International:

MALDEN, Mass. (UPI) - The state Board of Education Tuesday approved a policy that encourages local school officials to implement programs to protect gay students from harassment and educate faculty members about gay issues.

The policy believed to be first [*sic*] of its kind in the nation, was approved as part of an overall strategy intended to curb an increasing level of violence in schools, which in recent months has included the fatal shootings of a student and a librarian.

The board, however, stopped short of recommending a gay studies curriculum to be offered in the public schools.<sup>26</sup>

Unless the reader is thinking critically, he might assume the shootings cited in paragraph 2 were gay related—not so. The reader is led to assume that with increasing violence, gays will need protection.

### **TAKING ACTION**

One of the difficulties with analyzing media reports is that the more you think critically, the more critical you become. It will become much harder to simply *absorb* the news. There are some positive actions you and your class can take to promote a more balanced approach to the news in your area. One key action is to make sure your local media outlets have access to credible sources. Gary Bauer, of the Family Research Council, is quoted often in secular media simply because he is one of the few people they know to contact for the “conservative Christian” viewpoint.

One of the best ways to do this is to distribute a media guide to all your local news sources. Find spokespeople on a variety of topics: women’s issues, the family, religion, education (private schools, Christian education, home school), abortion, etc. Make sure your spokespeople are reasonable and articulate—choose carefully. Be sure to include teens from your school who are willing to be interviewed. List the topics and spokespersons—including addresses; day and evening phone numbers; and a short biography to lend credibility.

Send the media guide with a cover letter to all newspapers, and radio and television stations in your area. They may or may not use it, but it will be kept on file. A reporter always appreciates a source who can be reached when a deadline is looming, and is willing to speak up in a manner that is easily quotable.

Also, begin to think of good stories for your local media. Some of the community service projects your class is doing could make a great “warm fuzzy” story. Let them know.

If your local newspaper or television station doesn’t have a “teen council” composed of students from area high schools—find a couple of interested students who would be willing to make the suggestion and serve on the council. Council members could serve as a sounding board on community issues affecting youth, be reporters, and take turns writing a weekly or daily “teen editorial.”

<sup>25</sup> First-Pennsylvania News in Brief, UPI newswire, 5/18/93, 3:19 am, EDT.

<sup>26</sup> “Mass. Board of Education approves policy on gay students,” UPI newswire, 5/18/93 3:23 pm EDT.



## **CRITICAL THINKING**

### **ESSAY QUESTIONS**

*Answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to review your answers in class. The following are a list of statements/arguments that are fallacious in some way. Your teacher will guide you through this exercise.*

#### **PART ONE**

1. **The end of a thing is its perfection; death is the end of life; therefore, death is the perfection of life.**
2. **Marijuana can't be all that bad. Everyone knows about barroom brawls, but marijuana makes people peaceful.**
3. **Women are so sentimental. My mother and sisters always cry at the movies; my father and I never do.**
4. **The Senator is incorruptibly honest; no one has ever uncovered a scandal involving him.**
5. **The so-called theories of Einstein are merely the ravings of a mind polluted with liberal, democratic nonsense, which is utterly unacceptable to German men of science.**
6. **Exercise keeps everyone healthy. Therefore, if Tim would just run more, it might help his heart condition.**
7. **Those who favor gun control also favor disarming the police and disbanding the National Guard.**
8. **Death should be held of no account, for it brings but two alternatives: either it utterly annihilates the person and his soul, or it transports the spirit or soul to some place where it will live forever. What then should a good man fear if death would bring only nothingness or eternal life. — Cicero**
9. **I'm on probation, sir. If I don't get a good grade in this course, I won't be able to stay in school. Please, could you let me have at least a C?**
10. **I join 2 presidents, 27 senators, and 83 representatives in describing this woman as a liar.**
11. **Of course the Bible is true. It says that it is true.**
12. **It's the old time religion and it's good enough for me.**
13. **In defense of suicide, David Hume said, "It would be no crime in me to divert the Nile or Danube from its course, were I able to effect such purposes. Where is then the crime of turning a few ounces of blood from their natural channel?"**
14. **Why do you want to throw your money away like that?**
15. **I think his daughter's marriage must have worried him dreadfully, because his hair began to turn white after the wedding.**

16. I fail to see why hunting should be considered cruel when it gives me tremendous pleasure.
17. You are either a conservative or a liberal.
18. Pro-lifers believe that a fetus should be protected because it is a “potential” human. Today I will prove that a “potential” human is not a human and therefore should not be protected.
19. There must be intelligent life in outer space, because no one has been able to prove that there isn’t.
20. All Christians hate homosexuals—at least all the ones I know do.
21. You’re wrong because you are an intolerant, closed-minded, right-wing fundamentalist.
22. The Golden Rule is basic to every system of ethics ever devised. Everyone accepts it in some form or other. It is, therefore, an undeniably sound moral principle.
23. The sign stated, “Fine for parking here.” Since it said “fine,” I parked here.
24. These rules were written 100 years ago and we have always followed them. Therefore, there is no need to change them.
25. Of course I am right. I am always right.
26. Everyone has a right to own property. Just because Jon has been declared insane doesn’t mean that you can take his weapon away.
27. If we outlaw abortion, countless women will die during back alley abortions.
28. Are you still a heavy drinker?
29. Employees are like nails. Just as nails must be hit in the head in order to make them work, so must employees.
30. Immediately after walking under a ladder, my leg fell off. I haven’t hobbled under a ladder since.

## P A R T T W O

*Read the following fictitious news story and answer the corresponding questions on another sheet of paper:*

### **P.A.G.A.N. Invades Christian Town**

Long time anti-Christian activist organization removes pro-God public display from government arena.

SHELBYVILLE — In a little-known, mid-sized, mid-western town, there was great outrage over the events of this past weekend. With little more than a court order, the lawsuit-happy organization known as P.A.G.A.N. (People Against God And Normalcy) arrived at the steps of Shelbyville’s City Hall late Friday afternoon with a crane. Local judge Rod Snider, a staunch liberal, had signed an order that morning giving P.A.G.A.N. the authority to steal the town’s symbol of religious freedom and moral guidance—a 50-foot statue of the Virgin Mary. I watched in disbelief as the statue honoring Christianity as the town’s established religion was removed from the city steps and strapped to a run-down flatbed truck. Judge Snider sat idly by as a number of citizens protested the forced removal of the

town's glorious icon. P.A.G.A.N. and its motley crew, seemingly unmoved by the demonstrations, pressed on with their desecration.

The statue has been taken to a nearby state-owned warehouse and veiled in retired green army blankets where it will be held hostage while the judge's decision is being appealed to a higher court.

The statue was generously donated to the town around six months ago after being commissioned by the respected religious leader Reverend Timothy Love. He noted that the statue was a token of the church's appreciation "to the good folks of Shelbyville."

The honorable reverend's wife, Helen Love, insists that P.A.G.A.N. is in her town largely because of the complaints of one irreligious man, Joe Sylack. Mr. Sylack, a local bar owner, rarely attends church and has apparently never appreciated the community's sacred stone image. Mrs. Love asserts that this is simply an example of a few atheists trying to make everyone else respect their religious beliefs. But Mrs. Love wants to know, "What about the town's religious beliefs?"

I interviewed one of Love's knowledgeable parishioners, Ned Landers, about the situation. He insists, "This is just another example of how our town is going to hell in a hand basket." Mr. Landers blames the situation on rock music, daytime television, and foreigners. After witnessing this contemptible event, I believe the majority of Shelbyville's citizens would agree with Mr. Lander's assessment. It seems clear that P.A.G.A.N. and Judge Snider have no respect for property, the will of the people, or God Himself.

Kent Beckman  
*The Shelbyville County Times*

- 1. What incident is being reported?**
- 2. Which sides are presented?**
- 3. What is the tone of the report?**
- 4. On what underlying assumption is the news story based?**
- 5. Who are the article's sources and how are they characterized?**
- 6. What words are used to describe people or organizations?**
- 7. How are the parties' actions described throughout the article?**
- 8. What statistics are used?**
- 9. What is left out of the news story?**
- 10. What logical fallacies are used to lead the reader or listener into faulty reasoning?**



## DEAR DOUG

### WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Hey, it's me again!

I love college! There's always something going on—games, intramurals, parties, concerts, late nights with friends—it's awesome! In fact, college life would be perfect if all those annoying classes didn't get in the way. With all the stuff to do here on campus, I can barely make time for class. Don't worry, though. So far my grades have been pretty good . . . well, all except for Philosophy 101. Half the time I don't have a clue what the prof is saying. She might as well be speaking Chinese!

That class is the worst. I keep waiting for her to just give us the answers, but she only asks a lot of questions. Sometimes it seems like we just focus on what a lot of dead guys thought about reality, knowledge, morality, whatever. I have an essay due next week about my own take on the stuff we've been learning, but I've got no idea where to start. Science tells us that evolution is a fact, so I guess reality is composed of things I can see and touch. Do you think reality, truth, and knowledge can be explained by naturalism? But then some people (like the guy down the hall) believe that nothing is natural at all—that the world is only a spiritual illusion. I'm just really confused. I believe that there is a God who created everything. So does that mean reality, truth, etc. can be explained by non-naturalism? It doesn't seem like both views can be right.

And if that's not enough, I'm supposed to be able to explain the differences between Karl Marx's philosophy and plain old atheistic materialism. What's the difference between naturalism and Marx's "dialectical materialism" anyway?

I've got so many questions and no one here seems able to answer them. Here's an important one we're not even dealing with in class. All this philosophy stuff is explained by other worldviews, like Marxism. But what does the Christian worldview say about philosophy? Is it even covered in the Bible? I'm sorry to keep bugging you with all these questions, but I really want to know.

Enough thinking for now. I'm dying to tell you about my date a couple of weeks ago. It was great! We caught an Indie flick and then headed over to the coffee shop to talk. Her name is Amber and she's lots of fun and very smart. When I made some comment about faith, she said she was an agnostic and changed the subject. It didn't bother me too much—I mean, we have such a good time together. Besides, it isn't serious . . . yet.

Hope to hear from ya soon,  
Doug