CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW VS. INDIVIDUALISM WORLDVIEW

GENE 100
MAKING OF A CHRISTIAN MIND

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Three wise men were travelling across the country, going from town to town to teach wisdom. At one town in particular, they were welcomed warmly by the townspeople, and offered gifts of the town's produce. One of the gifts was a large pot of vinegar. The first of the wise men dipped his finger into the vinegar, tasted it, and a sour expression came across his face. "This vinegar is too sour," he said, "take it away." The second of the wise men dipped his finger into the vinegar, tasted it, and a scowl came across his face. "This vinegar tastes terrible. It is far too bitter, take it away." Then the third man dipped his finger into the vinegar, tasted it, and smiled. "Mmm!" The other two looked at him confused. "Now this tastes like vinegar!"

The parable above is based on a Chinese painting called The Vinegar Tasters. Each of the wise men’s reactions is based upon the individual’s view of the world. The first sees the vinegar as needing improving, the second thinks the vinegar is too extreme, and the third takes it for what it is. Each man tastes the same vat of vinegar however their reactions are completely different. This speaks to how an individual’s perception of the world affects their reaction to the world and various situations that may occur.

A worldview shapes how an individual is affected by the world around them. Although there are many different types of worldviews the two that seem most at odds are the individualistic worldview and Christian worldview. While the individualistic worldview focuses solely on the individual self, the Christian worldview is focused on God as expressed through the Bible. Both worldviews are focused on the subject matter they promote; individualism promotes freethinking and interpretation, while a Christian worldview promotes reliance on the Word of God. However, a Christian worldview provides a more complete worldview than individualism.

To fully understand an individualistic worldview and Christian worldview we must first know what a worldview is. According to Michael Palmer, “a worldview is a set of beliefs that one holds,” and “is consistent with each other and forms a unified point of view.” Although everyone can have consistent beliefs in biology, government, English, or math, none are considered worldviews. In order to constitute a worldview the set of beliefs needs to be centered on the meaning of life, and shape the things we believe in (ethics, morals, and religious outlooks).

A worldview is unique to each individual person. Although Christians may all share in the same fundamental beliefs they will still have their own worldview. A worldview is more than a set of beliefs. It is also how the individual interprets the world through those beliefs. “The material used to construct a worldview comes from our inner experience and our practical dealings with things, as well as from the interpretation of history and of scientific knowledge about the world.” A person who grew up going to a Christian church will have a different worldview than someone who converted to Christianity in their twenties. The person who converted to Christianity in their twenties will have different life experiences and moral background that would shape their perception of the world around them.

Our worldview is the foundation upon which we base our priorities, certain practices, social arrangements, and even our day-to-day actions and speech. What forms a


A worldview is a set of beliefs that shape how an individual interprets events in their life, and how they act or react based on those beliefs. There are several different types of worldviews that a person can follow. Some have heavy roots in religion, and some don’t. Some worldviews are made up of different sources like family and culture and some are entirely inclusive. One specific type of worldview is individualism.

An individualistic worldview is one that places the individual at the center of his or her own universe. It stems from a general distrust in various organizations and often

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sees them as corrupt. Governments, religious institutions, and to some extent family units are often seen as evil and not trust worthy. In the documentary Child of Rage, Beth Thomas is a four-year-old girl who due to extensive sexual and mental abuse by her biological father developed a reactive attachment disorder. Her distrust of the family unit resulted in mental disorder that prevented her from building emotional and social bonds with other people, she depended entirely on herself. Her therapy consisted of teaching her that she was not the center of the world and slowly building up her confidence so that she could start trusting people again. Not everyone who holds an individualistic worldview has been abused. Some people don’t trust government because of policies that have been put in place, and some people don’t trust religions because church leaders may interpret religious doctrine differently than the individual does.

Beth Thomas is an extreme case of an individualistic worldview, but it does express the thought process behind why someone would follow this worldview. People with and individualistic worldview not only believes that they are the center of the universe but they also believe their personal success is linked with their self-esteem.

Wilkens and Sanford in Hidden Worldviews states, “Individualism’s assentation that the end justifies the means leads inevitably to the question of how we determine what our ends are. If each person is the center of his or her universe, the value of one’s universe then depends on one’s individual value…What we do and what we accomplish is equated with who we are.”

This link between their personal success and self-esteem ultimately gives them a sense of personal control over their lives. The abuse Beth Thomas endured left her as a

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victim. She lost control of her body and it resulted in a need to control the world around her in order to have control over her own self-worth.

Since people who have an individualistic worldview base their personal value on their success, their decision process tends to revolve around how they can accomplish their goals. Wilkens and Sanford describe this as, “my ends justify my means\textsuperscript{11}.” It is natural that when a person’s self-worth is wrapped up in their actions that the individual will do whatever is necessary to ensure their own fulfillment. This decision making process of a person with an individualistic worldview is further endorsed through the individual’s culture.

“In American individualism, the ideal is for all people to be able to freely make their own decisions. The options of family elders may be respected, but as youth enter adulthood, they expect and are expected to make decisions about their own lives\textsuperscript{12}.”

As an American culture we expect our countrymen to make their own decisions as it is their right per the Declaration of Independence, “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness\textsuperscript{13}.”

With the individual being the sole decision maker propelled by a need for self-fulfillment, it is also important to remember the individual’s decision also result in the individual taking personal responsibility for their actions. From an early age we are taught, through rewards and discipline, what is right and what is wrong\textsuperscript{14}. Despite knowing right from wrong, people who follow an individualistic worldview often base

\textsuperscript{11} Wilkens, S., & Sanford, M. L. (2009). Hidden Worldviews. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.), 30-31


\textsuperscript{13} The Declaration of Independence. (n.d.). Retrieved from National Archives and Records

their choices on what is best for the individual\textsuperscript{15}. Consequences may seem incidental when the decision process revolves around the actions are used to justify the end result.

Since individualism worldview puts the individual at the center of this worldview, nothing is done that doesn’t benefit the individual. Although this worldview seems self-fulfilling it does demonstrate downfalls. Wilkens and Sanford describe three different problems with individualism; flawed views of reality, the human race, and achievement\textsuperscript{16}.

In an individualistic worldview, the individual is the center of the universe. The fact is that that a single individual on a plant of over six billion people is rather insignificant. Despite the fact that an individual claims to be the center of the universe they are still controlled by outside forces and will always need other’s to survive. In an individualistic worldview other people are seen as a potential to bring pain and suffering. People with an individualistic worldview want to control themselves and their feelings, to include love. To control love you need to control the other person, who would not result in genuine love, resulting in the individual building a fortress around their emotions to keep others from causing them pain. Wilkens and Sanford state, “Since individualism fears the lack of control required by love, it presents a huge obstacle to our essential need for real love and relationships…the need for love embedded in human nature cannot be satisfied by this worldview\textsuperscript{17}.” Finally an individualistic worldview view of freedom and


\textsuperscript{17} Wilkens, S., & Sanford, M. L. (2009). Hidden Worldviews. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.), 37-40
achievement is flawed because it is based on an action and reward structure, the standards of which are created and judged by others. Others have set a standard and the individual must meet that standard to be praised and increase their self-worth. The whole idea of which is contradictory to itself because you cannot be self-fulfilling if you’ve self-worth is dependent on others.

An individualistic worldview is ultimately flawed because it needs other people to justify itself. Other worldviews also have similar downfalls. They can create tension between various ethnic groups, they may not display a true purpose for human existence, or it can reduce value in a given item or person. A Christian worldview is quite different from other worldviews. It is transnational, encourages fellowship, gives purpose for human existence, and it gives value to others.

A Christian worldview is based on the Bible. People who follow it believe that the Bible is entirely true and that it should be the foundation of everything you say and do. The Bible tells a person how to act, react as well as how to think. According to Chris Gousmett the Bible, “provides us with insight into the norms for human life guidance into obedient living in the light of those norms.” Everything in a Christian worldview is defined by faith in the Bible and not through man. Man has a propensity to corrupt teachings in order to suite their own needs. Martin Luther witnessed this corruption in the Catholic Church and as a result authored 95 Theses. Luther sparked the Protestant

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Reformation through two central beliefs; the Bible is the central religious authority and salvation is through faith and not by works\textsuperscript{21}.

The thought process behind people who have a Christian worldview follows the word of God. If the Bible is the word of God then it is therefore true, and the keystone of all thought. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness\textsuperscript{22}.” According to a Christian worldview the Bible should be used in the thought process and it should reflect the teachings of Christ. Colossians 3:1-2, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things\textsuperscript{23}.”

The Bible reveals God to His followers as well as displays His will for human beings\textsuperscript{24}. Deuteronomy 28:1 states, “If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth\textsuperscript{25}.” Scripture says to be obedient and those with a Christian worldview should strive to mirror scripture in action. Although scripture tells Christians to be obedient, it also describes God’s gift of free will to humanity as well as temptation. When it comes to decision making the Bible describes both the good that can come from following scripture as well as punishment that can occur from deviating from the Word of

\textsuperscript{21} Martin Luther and the 95 Theses. (n.d.). Retrieved from History

\textsuperscript{22} Biblegateway. (n.d.). Retrieved 2013, from Biblegateway, 2 Timothy 3:16


\textsuperscript{25} Biblegateway. (n.d.). Retrieved 2013, from Biblegateway, Deuteronomy 28:1
God. Scripture does not leave the believer without a guide on how to live and celebrate life.

Given that the Bible describes both positive and negative aspects of following the Word of God, it also gives numerous accounts of the results of individual’s choices. The fall of man, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the flood are all accounts of God punishing man for the choices man made. Along with the consequences of the individual’s choices, the Bible also describes rewards of following God’s will. John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” According to the Bible each individual has the free will to make their own choices, but those who follow a Christian worldview make their decisions based on the teachings of the Bible.

Although there are many positive aspects to following a Christian worldview there are downfalls. Michael Palmer in his book *Elements of a Christian Worldview* states, “In lifting up the Bible’s claims for divine authority, however, we must never lose sight of the fact that it is also a humand book with the distinctive personalities of it’s human writers apparent on almost every page.” The Bible has been a subject questioned by not only the modern world but the ancient one as well. The question stands, how can a book written by so many people and translated hundreds of times not be corrupted? In his article *What evidence is there that the Bible is in fact God’s Word?*, Adrian Rogers gives five reason’s to affirm the Bible is the Word of God. One of the reasons he points out the Bible reads as one book. “The Bible forms one beautiful temple of truth that does not

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contradict itself theologically, morally, ethically, doctrinally, scientifically, historically, or in any other way."

A worldview is a system of beliefs that a person basis their view of the world on. There are several different types of worldviews and each one is unique to each individual. It influences the thoughts and actions of that individual, as well as how that person interprets the world. In an individualistic worldview the focus is on the individual and individualism promotes freethinking as well as individual interpretation. The individual is the center of the universe and it is up to the individual to find and control their own happiness. As much as the individualistic worldview relies on independence it is contradictory because it is fundamentally based on the approval of others. In a Christian worldview everything is based on the Bible which is the infallable word of God. From how to think to the consequences of one’s actions, the Bible gives clear answers to believers. Both worldviews have positives and negatives. When individualism and Christianity are compared with each other, the Christian worldview is the only one that offers a purpose to life. It is a more complete worldview than individualism.

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