

# **Building A Christian World View**

by  
Daniel J. Lewis

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Troy, Michigan  
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## **Building a Christian World View**

For many if not most people, the various pieces of life and reality are just that--pieces. They have never attempted to integrate their beliefs about the universe, themselves, other people, the course of history, their view of God, and so forth. Probably this has caused them no obvious inconvenience, yet at the same time, the decisions they make, the values they choose, the beliefs they uphold, and the morals they consider normal all have roots that are intertwined. The viewpoint of the whole is what is called a world view, a personal philosophy of life. Everyone has a world view, though everyone may not be aware that they have one. For the sake of intellectual consistency and psychological security, if for no other reason, it is worthwhile to explore the various elements of the Christian world view. The world is filled with competing perspectives, and the biblical world view as expressed in Psalm 8:3-4 is quite different than, for instance, the world view of Alexander Pope in the Age of Reason, Stephan Crane in the literature of American Realism, or Jean Paul Sartre in modern existentialism. It is hoped that this exploration will sharpen the believer's awareness of his/her presuppositions, and assist the Christian student of life to clarify and integrate his/her beliefs.

To some, the very word philosophy conjures up strange and frightening images. For others, it is what one individual called, "...man's attempt to befuddle himself scientifically." Nevertheless, philosophy, which is the attempt to understand the world of experience and the endeavor to account for the nature of existence as a whole, is the domain of every human being in at least a simple sense. The world is not divided up into people who are philosophers and people who are not, for every human being sees the world from a certain perspective. Whatever his/her perspective happens to be constitutes his/her philosophy of life or world view.

The Bible is not a book of philosophy, at least in a formal sense. Nevertheless, the Bible definitely entertains philosophical questions, such as, "What is reality and truth?" (Job), "Why are evil people not punished in proportion to their evil?" (Habakkuk), and "Is human experience the measure of all things?" (Ecclesiastes). Even in those areas of the Bible that do not directly address philosophical questions, there is an underlying world view that conditions the

writers' message. Thus, to view philosophy as unnecessary for the Christian is to misunderstand the nature of Scripture.

This series of studies does not pretend to be a course in formal philosophy. It is philosophical in character, however, since it deals with the way a Christian views him/herself and his/her world. In the simple sense of a world view, every one, including the Christian, has a philosophy!

## What is a World View?

Western civilization is becoming more and more pluralistic. There was a time when the western world was predominantly Christian. This is no longer so, for we live in what has been aptly called a post-Christian society. Daily we rub shoulders with people whose perspectives of life are quite different than our own -- people who have different world views.

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**Definition:** *A world view is "what ties everything together, matter and mind, life and death, art and science, faith and learning, and makes this a universe."<sup>1</sup> It is a person's set of presuppositions or the assumptions which he/she holds (whether consciously or unconsciously) about the world.<sup>2</sup> In general, a world view will include assumptions about the following categories:*

METAPHYSICS (*ultimate reality*)  
 ANTHROPOLOGY (*human nature*)  
 EPISTEMOLOGY (*truth and knowledge*)  
 REDEMPTION (*solving the universal human dilemma*)  
 AXIOLOGY (*valuation*)  
 HISTORY/DESTINY (*what's happening and why*)

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## What a World View Should Do

James Sire describes four things that a person's world view should do for him/her.<sup>3</sup> It should:

**Give Coherence:** In a simple way, this means that one's world view should make good sense, or to put it more formally, it should be logically consistent.

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<sup>1</sup>A. Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

<sup>2</sup>J. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976) p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Sire, pp. 209-211.

***Comprehend all Data:*** This means that one's world view should account for all the facts from all the sources.

***Explain What it Claims:*** This means that one's world view should be able to answer the ultimate questions of life, or at least provide a framework within which they can be addressed.

***Satisfy the Holder:*** This means that the one holding the world view should be satisfied that it is the truth based on the previous three points.

## **Pluralism and Common Ground**

Besides the world view of Christian theism (i.e., the Christian belief in God as described in the Bible), there are the world views of deism, naturalism, nihilism, existentialism, eastern mysticism, transcendentalism, humanism, post-modernism and the list goes on. However, just because there are many world views, it does not follow that they never touch each other at various points. In fact, there are many occasions when two quite different world views may agree at a particular point. Because one holds a Christian world view does not mean that he/she always disagrees with everyone who does not.

## **The Christian Perspective of World Views**

Christians believe that humans were deeply affected by sin, or as expressed theologically, the human race fell (Gen. 3-5). Sin affected the race at every level, spiritually, morally and intellectually. Because of the fall, our human tendency is to view the world through the perspective of natural thought, which at its very heart, is alienated from God and tends toward alienation between ourselves and others, between ourselves and nature, and even of ourselves from ourselves. This downward plunge is degenerative, and when we view the world through this natural perspective, which is so heavily fraught with alienation at all levels, our perspective of the world is distorted. We see the world of our experience through the grid of our fallen intellect, our moral shortfall and our spiritual rebellion against God.

When we put our faith in Christ Jesus, however, we begin a regenerative process. Here, we learn to think as a Christian, not as a natural person. As a Christian, we view the world of our experience through another grid -- the grid of new life in Christ, which brings with it different assumptions and values.

## Ultimate Reality

It is no accident that God is the subject of the first sentence in the Bible (Gen. 1:1). The Bible never seeks to prove the existence of God, but everywhere, the fact that God exists is taken for granted. In fact, Paul asserts that the one thing every human being innately knows is that God exists (Ro. 1:18-23). However, what about the person who is not convinced that the Bible is wholly factual—that something is true merely because the Christian Scriptures say so? While the following discussion will not prove the existence of God to the skeptic, it will at least help to sort through the implications of either accepting or rejecting God's existence.

### Something is There!

The most fundamental assumption that can be made is that things do indeed exist. The French philosopher Rene Descartes, often called the father of modern philosophy, made doubt his starting point. Acknowledging the possibility that his senses sometimes deceive him, he adopted the methodology of doubting everything that could possibly be doubted. He could doubt all sense perception, but the one thing he could not doubt was his own existence, for the very fact that he was doubting meant that he existed. Doubt assured him of one absolutely unquestionable premise, that is, that something was there! He was there! He could doubt virtually everything, but he could not doubt his own existence.<sup>1</sup> From this experiment in doubt comes his famous dictum, *Cogito ergo sum* (= I think; therefore, I am.) Then, from his own existence, he could reasonably infer the existence of the world around him.

Given the premise that there is a real world, one still faces the question, "Why?" Why does the universe exist?<sup>4</sup> There are only two reasonable alternatives. First, it is possible that things exist only by blind and unconscious force. This is the answer of atheism. There is no reason, no cause, no universal spirit and no purpose. Existence is merely matter plus time plus chance. It may be helpful to divide atheism into two categories, the theoretical and the practical. The theoretical atheist is the person who formally and openly denies the existence of God. The practical atheist is the person who, although he/she does not openly deny God's existence, nevertheless lives as though God did not exist. Such a person believes that God, if there is a God, will never call one to account. The implications of atheism are staggering, for all meaning is absolutely lost. It is to this horror that the Hebrew poets refer when they assert, "The fool says in his heart

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<sup>4</sup>D. Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), pp. 82-88.

that there is no God" (Psa. 14:1; 53:1). In a positive way, the wisdom literature of the Bible asserts that a sense of the holy (awe of God) is the starting point of wisdom (Pro. 1:7; 9:10).

The opposite answer is that of theism. Here, things exist with cause, reason and purpose. God (even though we have not yet described him) is Ultimate Reality. There is meaning in the universe if and only if there is God.

Besides the question of "Why?", there is also the question of "How?"<sup>5</sup> How does the universe exist? Three answers are possible: the universe exists from nothing (atheism), it exists from the impersonal (atheism/pantheism) or it exists from the personal (theism). To hold to the position that everything has come from nothing, one must be sure not to assume the existence of energy, mass or motion. Nothing, here, means absolutely nothing. That the universe exists from absolutely nothing is an incredible leap of logic. If one opts for the impersonal, assuming the eternal existence of matter, one must affirm that matter plus time plus chance developed into a highly complex universe with personal creatures, such as humans. The remaining dilemma is the question, "If humans are personal, how did they become so?" To deny that humans are personal is to lose all meaning. Can the impersonal give birth to the personal? The answer of theism is that the universe was created by a personal God. Here there is meaning to the universe. The unity and diversity in the world can be accounted for. The personality of humanness can be accounted for. Humans are personal because they were made like God, who is personal. The universe did not start as a void. Rather, it has its origin in the God who is there.

While the Bible does not speculate about how God created the universe, at least in modern scientific terms, it does offer an apologetic to the cosmogonies of the ancient Near East and Egypt, offering a vision not only of the fact that God personally created the universe, but also something of the way in which he did so. The ancient Mesopotamians held that the universe was a product of the gods and goddesses who were sexually procreated by Apsu and Tiamat. Each god or goddess offspring in turn generated the natural element they represented (i.e., sky, water, earth). Some gods were characterized by chaos, others by order. The gods of chaos were subdued by the gods of order, especially Marduk, who used magic and divine warfare to overpower the gods of chaos. Egyptian cosmogonies held that life was generated from the primordial waters when Re brought order out of chaos. Here, the gods and goddesses of the pantheon were created by Re when he

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<sup>5</sup>F. Schaeffer, *He is There and He is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1972), pp. 7-15.

spit, sneezed or masturbated.<sup>6</sup> All these ancient cosmogonies existed prior to the composition of the Torah. In Genesis, the Bible offers a corrective to these ancient theories, asserting that God acted alone in the creation of the world. He had no consort, and he created the universe out of nothing by his verbal command (Gen. 1-2).

Finally, there is the question of "What?"<sup>7</sup> What is the nature of existence? In history, two concepts of reality have always stood in sharp contrast to that of the Bible. One is dualism, that is, the idea that there are two eternal "stuffs". Here, there are two side-by-side eternal realities, spirit and matter. Spirit is good; matter is evil. This position was held by most of the ancient Greeks. The other concept is that of monism, that is, the idea that there is only one eternal "stuff". This is the position of Hinduism or pantheism. For eastern mystics, there is one, all-inclusive reality. If there is a god(s), he is everything. God is both good and evil. So, as the ancient Hindu *Upanishads* assert, "Truly, the One has become this whole world."<sup>8</sup>

The alternative to Greek dualism and Hindu monism is biblical creationism. This is the position of Christianity. Here, there are two "stuffs" in the universe, one eternal and the other temporal. God, as the ultimate, eternal Being, freely chose to create the material universe and to sustain its functions. Evil had a beginning, and its existence is allowed by God for an ultimately good purpose. Evil shall end, however, when God's purpose has been accomplished.

## **The Necessity of Revelation**

In the final analysis, if theism is not true and if there is no infinite-personal God, then there are no satisfying answers to the universal questions. All categories, whether of personality or impersonality, good or evil, right or wrong, value or no value, beauty or ugliness, as well as any hope for the future, are absurd. Beginning merely from himself, the human creature is unable to answer the question of existence. He knows that something is there but cannot answer "Why?", "How?" or "What?"

On the other hand, if there are answers to be found to the universal questions, they are to be found in an infinite-personal God who reveals himself. Everything in the Bible depends on this idea of a God who speaks and acts so as to reveal himself.

In a limited sense, God reveals himself through the excellence of his creation.

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<sup>6</sup> J. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), pp.33-42.

<sup>7</sup> A. Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 8-10.

<sup>8</sup> *Rg Veda*, 8.58.2.

The world of nature implies God's existence and testifies to his power. In a more specific sense, God reveals himself in word by inspiring Holy Scripture. In the most complete sense, God reveals himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who is the living Word incarnate.

It is quite deliberately, then, that the early Christians formulated their creeds with the following declaration: "We believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary..."

## **Christian Evidences**

Many people wish to believe only those things that they cannot help but believe; they wish the evidence to be overwhelming. On the other hand, there are those who use faith as a device to "avoid the hard labor of straight thinking."<sup>9</sup> They contend that if one has faith, evidence is unnecessary. Neither of these positions are essential to evangelical Christianity, despite the fact that some evangelical Christians may embrace them. Rather, evangelicals affirm both the importance of reasonableness as well as the insufficiency of rationalism. Christian evidences are not some sort of indelible "proof" for the certainty of the Christian belief system. In fact, it is likely that Christian evidences will carry more weight for those who already are Christian rather than for non-Christians. The following discussion of evidences, then, is not offered as some sort of tool for evangelism. Still, some of the issues addressed might very well be helpful for a non-Christian who may be investigating the Christian faith.

### **Reason to Believe**

The nature of faith as described in the Bible involves both revelation and reason, and in that order. Two biblical examples are instructive. When Abraham reasoned that God was able to restore Isaac from the dead (Gen. 22:1-14; Heb. 11:17-19), he did so on the basis of the past evidences of God's faithfulness. God's testing of Abraham occurred only after a long chain of personal interactions between them. Abraham was not compelled to believe God, but he certainly had reason to do so! As another example, the truth of Christianity hinges on the factuality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:13-19).<sup>10</sup>

Concerning faith in Christ's resurrection, God does not confront every

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<sup>9</sup> E. Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), p. 65

<sup>10</sup> For a careful examination of the reasonableness of the resurrection accounts, see G. Ladd, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

believer with the risen Christ nor does he ask for blind faith without evidence (Jn. 20:29; Ac. 10:39-42). Rather, he has given reason to believe. The nature of faith is that while no one is compelled to believe the gospel, people have sufficient reason to do so (Ac. 26:1-26).<sup>11</sup>

It is well to bear in mind that one may have an assurance of faith before that faith is tested, just as one may have an assurance of truth before that truth-claim is tested. This does not make the test of faith superfluous any more than it makes the test of truth-claims superfluous. There are many conflicting faiths in the world, and there are many conflicting truth-claims in the world. They cannot all be right. Faith that is afraid to be examined and that continues to hide in ignorance is not particularly strong. The test for faith has two important aspects. First, there is an internal testimony. This is an assurance that one's faith in God is valid through the inward witness of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 24: 25-32; 1 Jn. 5:9, 10). The internal testimony is the subjective verification of faith. Also, however, there is an external testimony. If a believer's faith is only subjective, he has no way to affirm its validity over against the subjective truth-claims of any number of opposing faiths. Therefore, external testimony can objectively verify or, on the other hand, invalidate one's faith (1 Jn. 4:1). The external testimony which tests faith is coherence. A person's faith must be consistent with the facts of experience. Faith must be united with truth! If a man or woman believes thus and so, yet the facts speak otherwise, one cannot very well go about admiring his/her great faith!

## **Verification**

If the Christian's assertion is that God is Ultimate Reality and that God is the Infinite-Personal Being upon whom the universe depends, then this faith must be open to verification in the world of experience (1 Thess. 5:21). In other words, the question must be addressed, "Does what we believe about God really correspond to what we see in the universe?" Without exploring all the possible lines of evidence, the following are at least important ones. Furthermore, the cumulative effect of these evidences is greater than just the sum of the parts.

One type of verification depends upon moral evidence (Gen. 2:15-17).<sup>12</sup> An old philosophical problem, with which people still wrestle, is the question, "What is justice?" Yet, even though all men and women do not agree on what it is, all have some sense that there are such things as justice and injustice, right and wrong, morality and immorality. Humans are as much concerned with what they *ought* to

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<sup>11</sup>Carnell, pp. 67-70.

<sup>12</sup>C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952); F. Schaeffer, *He is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1972), pp. 21-35

do as they are with what they do. Christians have a reason for the moral motions of humanity, because they believe in an infinite-personal God who created humankind with freedom, an affirmation that becomes the foundation of all morality.

Another type of evidence derives from the aesthetic experience (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).<sup>13</sup> Artistic experience is as old as we can trace the history of humankind. Creativity permeates every level of human existence. Though only some of us may excel in painting, sculpture, music, architecture, poetry or music, all of us can appreciate artistic skill in others, and each of us, in our own way, is truly creative and a lover of beauty. Here again, the Christian has a reason for such aesthetic motions. Christians believe in a Creator-God who made humans in his own image (Gen. 1:26, 27). Beauty is not an arbitrary decision, and it is more than just a subjective value judgment in the eye of the beholder.

Yet a third type of verification is scientific. It is true, of course that some Christians see science as the great enemy of the Bible, just as some scientists see Christianity as the great enemy of science. This polarization and mutual antagonism is unnecessary, for all truth is God's truth, whether religious or scientific.<sup>14</sup> Truth, by its very nature, cannot contradict itself. However, there are certainly such things as "bad" science (science which misinterprets the facts) and "bad" Christianity (Christianity which misinterprets the Bible).<sup>15</sup> Too often, what passes for a conflict between science and Scripture is no more than a conflict involving either an unsound scientific theory or a misunderstanding of the intent of the Bible.

Scientific evidence lends support to theism in that science has demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt the consistency of natural laws. Consider, for instance, Newton's First Law.<sup>16</sup> The laws of motion as defined by Sir Isaac Newton are amazingly consistent. His first law is that "an object at rest tends to stay at rest and an object in motion tends to stay in motion in a straight line at a constant speed." The very consistency of this law (as well as other natural laws) indicates that the universe is not chaotic. It exhibits order. Such evidence cuts directly across the notion that the universe is only matter plus time plus chance.

Similarly, the nature of first and secondary causes suggests that the universe began through something other than chance.<sup>17</sup> A first cause is one that produces a

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<sup>13</sup>D. Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), pp. 106-117.

<sup>14</sup>F. Gaebelien, *The Pattern of God's Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), pp. 19-35.

<sup>15</sup>B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 15-44.

<sup>16</sup>K. Kuhn, *Basic Physics* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1979), p. 8.

<sup>17</sup>Trueblood, pp. 97-98.

purpose. A secondary cause is one that results from a purpose. Secondary causes do not really explain reality, since they are dependent on something prior. A nail goes into a board *because* it is hit with a hammer *because* the hammer is wielded by a man's arm *because* his muscles are directed by nerve impulses *because*.... The universe is full of harmonious secondary causes, which in turn point to the credibility of a first cause. If one believes in a first cause, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the first cause is God.

Yet another scientific factor is the second law of thermodynamics.<sup>18</sup> Within the past two centuries, scientists have increasingly concluded that the energy in the universe is gradually shifting to an unusable state, or put another way, "as useless energy increases, useful energy decreases by the same amount." Some have described the universe like a huge clock that is running down. This entropy is irreversible. Such an observation drives us logically to the conclusion that the physical universe had a beginning, and even if left to itself without intervention by God, it will have an ending. Something which begins and ends suggests purpose. We must say, at the very least, that the universe is not self-explanatory.

In summary, then, the scientific evidence in favor of theism is simply that the universe seems to operate in self-consistent patterns rather than by total chaos. Such consistency points toward design and a designer, not impersonal chance. However, it should be understood that science and reason cannot "prove" the existence of God beyond dispute. Many people, in fact, dispute it heatedly. Still, such scientific factors point to God's existence and give reason to believe. They provide a coherent answer to the nature of existence, even if not in a way that is overwhelming. So, it is still true, as the biblical writer asserts, "Without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11:6).

A further type of evidence comes from history (Gal. 4:4, 5; Eph. 1:9, 10; Heb. 1:1, 2). One of the most significant things about biblical faith is that it is set within a framework of linear time and history. Most religions are primarily concerned with spatial faith, that is, "the Here and the Beyond." They rarely have a concept of history. Christianity, on the other hand, while it certainly embraces such a spatial element, goes beyond it to embrace an historical element in distinguishing between "Formerly," "Now" and "Then."<sup>19</sup> History is not "just happening." It has a goal. While God allows freedom in history, he also intervenes (and shall yet intervene) in history so that there are several basic turning points singled out for special attention by the biblical writers, crucial junctures such as:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Trueblood, pp. 102-104.

<sup>19</sup>O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, trans. F. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), pp. 37ff.

<sup>20</sup>J. Sire, pp. 40-41.

The Creation  
 The Fall  
 The Call of Abraham  
 The Exodus  
 The Exile  
 The Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus  
 Pentecost  
 The Return of Christ

This historical emphasis immediately puts certain aspects of the Christian faith into reasonably verifiable categories, something that cannot be done within most other religions. To be sure, no one can historically verify biblical explanations of history, such as, the belief that it was Yahweh who led Israel out of Egypt or that Christ died *for our sins*. However, it can be verified that there was a considerable destruction of many Palestinian cities in about the 13th century B.C.,<sup>21</sup> and that Christ did indeed die upon a Roman cross. Such historical information can be checked by sources outside the Bible, and while they do not "prove" the existence of God, they give credibility to the biblical testimony.<sup>22</sup>

A final type of verification is the reliability of Scripture. What has just been suggested regarding history is especially applicable to the Bible as an historical document. Evangelical Christians affirm that the Bible not only tells us the truth about God, it tells us the truth about history, a great deal of which can be corroborated by sources other than Scripture. Two important areas of verification come from the testimony of archaeology and the testimony of fulfilled prophecy.

Archaeology has provided significant verification of places, events, cultures, customs, ethnic groups, empires and so forth that are found in the pages of the Bible.<sup>23</sup> Massive lists of examples could be produced,<sup>24</sup> but here we shall only give three suggestive samples. In Acts 21:27-32 is described the riot in Jerusalem when Paul was accused of taking Gentiles into the temple. In 1871, an ancient inscription was found in Jerusalem which once adorned the barricade dividing the temple's outer and inner courts.<sup>25</sup> It reads: *No foreigner may enter the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to thank for his ensuing death.* In Ac. 19:23 there is described the

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<sup>21</sup>J. Thompson, *The Bible and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Paternoster, 1962), p. 74.

<sup>22</sup>B. Ramm, *Protestant Christians Evidences* (Chicago: Moody, 1953), pp. 16-18.

<sup>23</sup>A. Bowman, *Is the Bible True?* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1965), pp. 149-182.

<sup>24</sup>See especially Thompson cited earlier and W. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

<sup>25</sup>F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), pp. 93-94.

Ephesian riot in which Paul was accused of undermining the worship of Artemis. Various details in Luke's account have been verified as agreeing with Roman customs and laws.<sup>26</sup> The pressure of Demetrius on civic authorities against Paul has similar parallels in other cities (19:23-26). The accusation that Paul and his company were attacking the prestige of the city can be clearly correlated to parallel accusations of the time (19:27). The prestige of the office of the town clerk is accurately described (19:35ff.). The threat of the report to the Proconsul, who incidentally could have refused the Ephesians the right to a town assembly, is accurate (19:40). In a third example, the Old Testament describes Sennacherib's invasion of Judah (2 Kg. 18:13; Isa. 36:1), and specifically, his siege of Lachish (2 Chr. 32:9). Both the archaeological excavations of Tel-Lachish and the excavations of Sennacherib's palace in ancient Nineveh substantiate this record.<sup>27</sup>

The reliability of Scripture is also supported by the testimony of fulfilled prophecy.<sup>28</sup> Although the prophets in the Old Testament were not primarily predictors as much as preachers, it is still clear that their preaching included substantial predictions. God himself invites historical verification of prophetic prediction, so it is quite proper to look at fulfilled prophecy as an evidence for the Bible's veracity (Deut. 18:20-22). As in the case of archaeological evidence, many prophetic fulfillments can be listed, though here we shall cite just three suggestive examples. First, the prophet Micah, in about 732 B. C., predicted the fall of Samaria, the capital of the northern Israelite nation (Mic. 1:6). This prophecy was fulfilled in 721 B. C. when Sargon of Assyria devastated the city. In fact, stones may still be seen today which were thrown down the side of the hill on which Samaria was built. Second, in about A. D. 30, Jesus predicted the leveling of the temple in Jerusalem (Mk. 13:2). In A. D. 70, as is well known, the Roman army quite literally fulfilled this prediction. Finally, in the Book of Isaiah there is a prediction that the Jews exiled in Babylon would soon be allowed to return home and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem. The name of the ruler who would allow them this privilege is named, even though he had not yet come to power over the Babylonians (Isa. 44:24-28).

## The Problem of Evil

One of the oldest philosophical questions in human history revolves around

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<sup>26</sup>A. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), pp. 83-93.

<sup>27</sup>D. Ussishkin, "Destruction of Judean Fortress Portrayed in Dramatic Eighth-Century B.C. Pictures" and "Defensive Judean Counter-Ramp Found at Lachish in 1983 Season," *BAR* (March/April 1984), pp. 48-73.

<sup>28</sup>Ramm, *Protestant*, pp. 81-124.

the existence of evil. This problem may be stated in more than one way, though usually it is given in the form of questions, such as:

*How could evil originate from good (i.e., how could God allow evil to arise without in some way impinging on his own essential goodness)?*

*If God is truly good, why does he not eliminate evil (i.e., since God does not eliminate evil, doesn't it imply either that God is not all-powerful or that he is not all-good)?*

The problem of evil is one that is particularly acute for a person who believes in God. The unbeliever may simply escape to the position that everything is meaningless anyway or that evil is only an illusion, a convenient definition for the things we fear. For the Christian, however, there must be an answer that satisfies—an answer that gives an explanation for moral evil, natural disaster, animal pain, human suffering in general and the inequality of human suffering in particular.

## **The Book of Job**

Any defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil is called theodicy. The first theodicy in the Bible is the Book of Job. The setting for the story begins with a description of Job's impeccable character (1:1). Not only was he rich (1:2-4), he was utterly devout (1:5). Even in the midst of overwhelming personal tragedy (1:13-19), he responded toward God with worship and integrity (1:20-22). This setting is absolutely essential, since the problem of the book is not to describe the suffering that Job deserved, but rather, to address the question of why there is suffering for people who do not deserve it (2:3, 7-10).

The arguments of Job's friends (chapters 4-37) are generally the least studied portion of the Book of Job by the average Christian. This neglect is unfortunate since these chapters expose one of the most common and yet wholly naive solutions to the problem of evil. Essentially, Job's friends argued that all evil is punitive. Job's suffering, as far as they were concerned, was a direct result of his own sin (4:7-9; 5:17, 27; 8:1-7, 20; 11:13-15; etc.). Job, for his part, stoutly maintained his innocence (13:4, 5; 16:1-4; 21:34; 27:1-6; 31:5-34).

At the end, God speaks to Job from the whirlwind (chapters 38-41). His answer is as profound as it is unexpected. At no place does God explain Job's dilemma. In fact, when all is said, Job is left with only two firm conclusions. The first is that the solution to the problem of evil is bigger than his capacity to understand (38:1, 2; 42:1-6). The second is that the solution offered by his friends

is wrong (42:7-8).

The Book of Job, then, leaves a certain amount of ambiguity with which we must live as we face the problem of evil.<sup>29</sup> The message of Job calls us toward childlike faith in God precisely because as creatures we see only a small segment of reality. At the same time, it warns us away from superficial solutions, such as, the naive judgments of Job's friends. Any world view which adopts the position: "This would not have happened if..." (fill in the blank any way you choose) is seriously deficient. Even apart from the Book of Job, it falters on two grounds:<sup>30</sup>

1. While it attempts to see evil as punishment, it has no way to account for sin, which is a greater evil than the suffering it allegedly causes.
2. It does not accord with reality. Disaster happens to righteous people and prosperity comes to those who are depraved (Psa. 10:1-6). The suffering of innocent children cannot be explained. As a theory, it has no place for Lazarus and the rich man (Lk. 16:19-23).

## Other Solutions

Apart from the solution of Job's friends, other inadequate attempts to answer the problem of evil have been made. One is that evil is only an illusion. This position is inevitably the one to which the atheist and naturalist will be driven. If there is no infinite-personal God who gives moral significance to the universe, evil is only in the eye of the beholder. There is no such thing as objective evil; there are only subjective ideas about evil which change with the whims of culture and personal experience. Such a solution is also the one offered by the Christian Science movement with its denial of the reality of sickness, sin, evil and death.<sup>31</sup> The inadequacy of this view especially is to be seen in that, if taken seriously, it "cuts the nerve of moral effort."<sup>32</sup> It is far preferable to understand evil as objectively real than to account for the stupidity of a human race that only thinks it is.

A second alternative is that God is not omnipotent. A variety of religions see evil as an eternal force co-existent with God (or the gods). This is called dualism. In dualism, the cosmos is viewed as the result of two opposing forces, neither of which are omnipotent. A good example is to be found in the *yin* and *yang* of

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<sup>29</sup> M. Inch, *My Servant Job* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 39ff.

<sup>30</sup> D. Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), pp. 235-236.

<sup>31</sup> W. Martin, *Christian Science* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1957), pp. 15-18.

<sup>32</sup> Trueblood, p. 237.

Confucianism.<sup>33</sup> Here, God does not eliminate evil, because he cannot. He only participates in the struggle against evil. Among western theistic philosophers, a similar line is taken by process theologians, where God is conceived as being finite. While they may not argue for the eternal existence of evil, they urge that God struggles with the force of evil and that he is bound within the continuum of time in the same way as humans. Therefore, though the outcome is hopeful, it is not certain. If they are forced to choose between God's power and God's goodness, they prefer to sacrifice his power.<sup>34</sup>

A third alternative is that God is both good and evil. This answer, expressed by Hindu thinkers, is essentially monistic or pantheistic. Evil is necessary because it is part of the all-pervasive Reality. As such, while people may resent or even avoid evil, it cannot be dismissed as a moral aberration, since it derives from the divine.

Of course, none of the above solutions are compatible with the historic Christian faith. The Bible everywhere affirms the objective reality of evil, the omnipotence of God and the perfect goodness of his character. The Christian must seek a solution for the problem of evil on other grounds.

## **The Christian View of Evil**

It will first of all be helpful to distinguish between two kinds of evil and to note that the one predates the other. There is moral evil, that is, evil that arises from a rational creature who is sensitive to moral values and is free to make decisions in light of those moral values. There is also natural evil, that is, bad consequences that arise from sources where self-consciousness is not a factor (i.e., natural disasters, animal predation, and so forth).<sup>35</sup>

If we accept the paradox that God is all-good (expressed in the Bible as holiness, righteousness, justice, mercy and love), yet at the same time he is not limited by conditions beyond himself, then we are logically driven to the conclusion that if God tolerates evil it must be in order to achieve a greater good than could be gained otherwise. In short, this is the Christian view of evil.

Paul provides a glimpse into the mind of God before the creation by describing God's grand scheme (Eph. 1:3-6). God predetermined that he would make creatures who would be holy and blameless, creatures who would be adopted

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<sup>33</sup>N. Anderson, ed., *The World's Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), pp. 224-225.

<sup>34</sup>Trueblood, p. 242; for a more extensive discussion of this position, see S. Grenz and S. Olson, *20<sup>th</sup> Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1992), pp. 130-144.

<sup>35</sup> Trueblood, p. 248

as sons. It is quite clear that this good was one that involved a process. God intended for his creatures to become good, not with the goodness of a machine, which has no alternative, but with a goodness that involved choice. It is futile to talk about the words "holy" and "blameless" if one is compelled to be such.

An essential element in God's plan was freedom. If the goal of goodness and sonship involved choice, it also involved the possibility of evil. It is no good to ask why God could not have done it otherwise, for even God cannot do things that are intrinsically impossible.<sup>36</sup> *Moral evil, then, became possible because God created creatures with freedom.* It cannot be said that God wills moral evil, since creatures who are truly free need not sin. But we must say that God saw the possibility of evil (we might even say the inevitability of evil), and deemed it worth the risk in order to achieve a higher good than could be gained in any other way. It is in this sense that God, who did not cause moral evil, nevertheless planned to forgive it and overcome it before it ever originated (1 Pet. 1:18-20; Re. 13:8).

The possibility of evil became an actuality with the fall of Satan. Satan is first of all a creature, not an eternal force (Col. 1:16). What allegorical glimpses we have of his origin and fall show that he was created with freedom but chose to use his freedom in rebellion against God (Eze. 28:11-19; Isa. 14:12-20).<sup>37</sup> In the poetry of the Old Testament, Satan is figuratively depicted as the sea monster Leviathan [= twisted] or Rahab [= arrogance] (Job 7:12; 9:13; 26:12; Psa. 74:13-14; Isa. 27:1; 51:9). Associated with Satan are other fallen spirit beings (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Mt. 25:41).

The second stage in the actualization of evil is the human abuse of freedom. This abuse begins with Adam (Gen. 3:1ff.) and spreads to every living human. The story of Adam is at once the story of the primeval human and of every human (Rom. 5:12). Humans were not created as sinners, but they became sinners by misusing their freedom.<sup>38</sup> The human abuse of freedom is to be seen collectively in racism, sexism, classism and nationalism. It is to be seen individually in lovelessness, hostility, envy, alienation, exploitation, the will to power, and most significantly, unbelief. No human being is without sin (Rom. 3:23).

Given God's ultimate design to have humans who are holy and blameless, moral evil is a necessary corollary. A world in which there existed no moral evil

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<sup>36</sup>C. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 26-28.

<sup>37</sup>To be sure, in both Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14, the primary figures in view are the historical rulers in Tyre and Babylon. However, in both cases there are primeval comparisons which suggest the fall of the original creature against God.

<sup>38</sup>D. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) I.107.

would be a world in which there was no possibility for moral decisions or the means for developing moral strength. If there were no such thing as moral evil, then there could be no such thing as righteousness, for the value and meaning of the one thing depends upon its contrast with the other. If God's intent to make children holy and blameless is to have any meaning at all, there must exist the possibility for that which is unholy and that which is to be blamed. Thus, God gives freedom and tolerates moral evil so that there can be such things as goodness and personality. It is hard to imagine the world to be a better place without goodness and personality!

God's toleration of natural evil must be explained somewhat differently than his toleration of moral evil. It is one thing to talk of sin and quite another to speak of tidal waves. The following suggestions may be helpful.<sup>39</sup> First, a stable environment is necessary for the development of persons as ourselves. The dependability of natural laws in the universe is indispensable to our own freedom of will. Knives that are sharp enough to do good work will also cut fingers. The rain which is one man's boon is another man's disaster. Trueblood has cogently argued: "We might try to imagine a world in which God would hold back the volcano every time people were so foolish as to live near it, but free choice would be thereby harmed because choice requires stability."

Second, natural evil has a redemptive effect. It must be remembered that God's goal for humans is not simply their comfort or happiness, but rather, he intends that they become holy and blameless children. Human pain, disease, tragedy, suffering and the like jar us out of our self-sufficiency. If we never experienced suffering and death, it is quite unlikely that we would ever seriously value life or God. C. S. Lewis has succinctly said: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."<sup>40</sup> Natural evil, more than any other one thing, reminds us that we are not gods: we are dependent creatures.

Finally, natural evils in this life must never be seen apart from the balancing factor of eternal life. What might seem to be unfair from the perspective of the present moment will be balanced by perfect justice in the life to come (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

In the final analysis, God's sovereignty is such that everything ultimately bends toward his divine purpose—even to the extent of including those wills that are consciously opposed to his own (Pro. 16:4; Eph. 1:11). Satan's attack on Job

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<sup>39</sup>Trueblood, pp. 253-256.

<sup>40</sup>Lewis, p. 93.

was with divine permission so that, in the end, Job was the better man despite Satan's intention to destroy him (1:12-19; 2:6-8; 42:1-6). When Satan incited David to take a national census (1 Chr. 21:1), he in some inscrutable way accomplished Yahweh's purpose as well (2 Sam. 24:1). Possibly the greatest example is the crucifixion of Christ. The putting to death of Jesus was an outright attack by both Satan and unbelievers (Jn. 14:30; 16:20; Acts 2:23-24; 4:10-11). At the same time, Jesus' death was by "God's set purpose and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23).

The entire creation has been radically affected by evil. Some evil consequences are to be seen as active divine judgments (Gen. 3:16-19; Ro. 8:20-22; Jer. 4:6). Other consequences arise as the inevitable results that accompany human sin (Rom. 1:24-32; Jam. 4:1-3). Evil begets evil! Finally, yet other evil consequences may be attributed to demonic forces outside the human race (Lk. 10:9, 17-19; 13:16).

The end of evil is associated with the coming of Christ at the end of the ages (1 Co. 15:24-26; 53-57; Rom. 8:19-21; Eph. 1:9-10). Not only will moral evil end, but natural evil will end as well (Isa. 11:6-9). Martin Luther's famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," is one of the magnificent Christian expressions heralding the triumph of God over evil! Thus, God tolerates evil so that we might be surprised by joy! Without the divine toleration of evil, we could never know the love, grace and forgiveness of God. Only the presence of evil makes it possible for us to understand and nurture the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

## **Human Nature**

Who am I? Anthropology, humankind's study of itself, universally recognizes the grandeur and misery of the human creature. Humans are free, yet their freedom is limited. They are finite, yet they seek to transcend their finitude. They are mortal, yet they wish to live forever. They are equally capable of nobility and beastliness. What is the Christian view of human nature, and how does this compare to the contemporary perspectives in the non-Christian world? This is what we wish to explore.

## **Humans in Contemporary Thought**

The anthropology of the western world is dominated by the perspective of humanism, that is, the belief first clearly articulated by the ancient Greeks that

"human experience is the measure of all things."<sup>41</sup> Of course, humanism should not be confused with some other closely related terms, such as:<sup>42</sup>

*Humanitarianism* (being kind and helpful to people)

*Humanities* (the study of literature, art, music, etc.)

*Humanness* (the state or quality of belonging to the human race)

Humanism, as distinct from these other categories, is the placing of the human at the center of all things so as to define him/herself and his/her world. For humanism, the chief concern is the human himself, and this concern has spawned a multiplicity of expressions in both the ancient and the modern world:

- *Biologism* (humans are unplanned biological accidents resulting in highly sophisticated animals)
- *Narcissism* (excessive admiration and/or love of the self and one's creature comforts)
- *Anarchy* (absence of outside authority)
- *Behaviorism* (humans are a bundle of chemical responses; existence is entirely determined by stimuli)
- *Situationalism* (ethical absolutes do not exist; all ethical responses are relative to a given situation)
- *Agnosticism* (doubt and/or unconcern about the existence of God)
- *Existentialism* (due to an unknown cause, humans are self-conscious matter; they must create meaning for themselves by their choices)
- *Nihilism* (humans are matter in motion; they have no meaning at all)
- *Cultural Trendiness* (tendency to draw meaning from the styles and affectations of a changing society)
- *Atheism* (denial of the existence of God)

## **Is Human Experience the Measure of All Things?**

It would be too optimistic to expect that the Bible should address all of the modern "isms" in a direct way. However, the idea that human experience is the measure of all things is a very old philosophy, and the Book of Ecclesiastes addresses the general posture of humanism. *Qoheleth*, the Hebrew title of the book as well as the title of the main character,<sup>43</sup> was one who explored a variety of

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<sup>41</sup> Or, "Man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras).

<sup>42</sup>F. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1981), pp. 22-23.

<sup>43</sup>There is no English equivalent for *Qoheleth*. It has been rendered as the Preacher, the Speaker, the President, the

philosophical options in the effort to explain the meaning of life. In the end, he planned to bring his readers to the conclusion that only God can give meaning to life (12:9-14). However, he did not start there. Rather, he began, as it were, "in the shoes of the humanist or secularist."<sup>44</sup> He began exploring the varieties of human experience so as to examine their rewards and satisfactions. He decided, as the modern street philosopher would say, to "go for it!"

Qoheleth, under the figure of Solomon, plumbed the depths of humanism. In the beginning, he warns his readers that they shall be disappointed in the search (1:12-15). Nevertheless, they are free to join vicariously the series of experiments in which he engaged, including the pursuit of intellectualism (1:16-18), irrationality (1:17), hedonism (2:1-2), decadence (2:3), creativity (2:4-6), materialism (2:7-8), success (2:9) and gratification (2:10). Perhaps the most shattering part of his search was that even though Qoheleth discovered the truth of relative values (i.e., wisdom is better than folly), in the end death stripped even these values of any permanence (2:12-16). Nothing was left but utter despair. Ironically, almost 3000 years later in the vocabulary of existentialism, one meets the same conclusion in the buzz words of the great existentialists: *angst*, anguish, forlornness and despair. "When we speak of forlornness, a term Heidegger was fond of, we mean only that God does not exist and that we have to face all the consequences of this."<sup>45</sup>

## The Christian View of Humankind

After briefly exploring the contemporary stance of humanism and its tendency toward futility, it is appropriate to look at the biblical alternative. This must be done in two stages, for at the heart of the biblical understanding of humanity is the assertion that humans are not what they once were. Therefore, one must first look at humans the way they once were, and then, one must look at humans the way they are now.

### *Imago Dei*

(Latin for "image of God") is the earliest biblical description of the human creature (Gen. 1:26-27; cf. 5:3; 9:6). In some wonderful way, God patterned the original woman and man after himself. This puts the primacy on God—God is first and humans were created like him. There are many ways in which humans are like God, and following are some of the most important ones.<sup>46</sup> Humans are

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Spokesman, the Philosopher, the Officer, the Professor, etc.

<sup>44</sup>D. Kidner, *A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1976), p. 14.

<sup>45</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism," *Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972) 619.

<sup>46</sup>J. Sire, 29-32; A. Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 107-126.

endowed with *personality* and *uniqueness*, *volition* and *freedom*, *transcendence* over the environment, *intelligence*, that is, the capacity for reason and knowledge, *morality* as the ability to recognize good and evil, *gregariousness*, that is, the capacity for communication, fellowship and social interaction, *creativity*, *sensibility* as the experience of emotions, the capacity for *sacrificial love*, and *self-awareness* or the ability for self-contemplation.

In this original state, humans maintained several important perfect relationships to God (Gen. 3:8), to each other (Gen. 2:23-24), to work and duty (Gen. 2:8, 15-17, 19), to nature (Gen. 1:26) and to authority (Gen. 2:16-17).<sup>47</sup> This is the biblical picture of humans the way they once were—crowned with glory and true lords over paradise (Pss. 8:4-8). From this exalted position, humans actively chose against God, and in so doing, fell from their position of privilege.

No Christian doctrine is so opposed today as that of the Fall. Yet this is precisely how the Bible accounts for the strange paradox of human nobility and repugnance. The fall of humans was not so much a stumble as a headlong plunge. In Genesis 3-6 what is described as beginning in disobedience proliferated into jealousy, murder, polygamy, exploitation, vengeance and rampant depravity (3:1-7; 4:4-8, 19, 23-24; 6:5). In the New Testament, Paul describes it as "sin entering the world" and spreading so completely that "all sinned" (Ro. 5:12). The shirt-sleeve philosopher, Will Rogers, quipped, "God made man a little lower than the angels, and he has been getting a little lower ever since."

Evangelical Protestantism has been known for its emphasis on the total depravity of the human creature, but often this has been misunderstood to mean that all people are as bad as they can possibly be.<sup>48</sup> Such a conclusion, of course, is incorrect. However, what evangelicals do mean by total depravity can be subsumed under four points (cf. Psa. 14:1-3; 53:1-3; 36:1-4; Isa. 53:6; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:9-10, 23; 7:18; Eph. 2:1-3; 4:18; etc.).

Humans are corrupt at the very center of their being. This does not mean that the image of God has been lost, but it does mean that it was seriously marred.

- ❑ Every facet of human personality has been affected by this rebellion against God, including the human intellect, will and sensibilities. This does not mean that humans are incapable of good, but that their goodness can never be sustained.
- ❑ Humans are unable to please God or to come toward him unless moved by

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<sup>47</sup> I am indebted in this section to the lectures of Dr. Robert Woodburn, formerly of William Tyndale College, Farmington Hills, Michigan, and presently serving as the Academic Dean at Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>48</sup>D. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 190-92.

grace. This does not mean they are without freedom, but that their freedom is limited.

- The entire human race is infected with corruption. This does not mean that every human culture is equally corrupt, but that every culture manifests to some degree human fallenness.

Human depravity produces devastating consequences. Humans are alienated from God, others, their environment and even themselves (Col. 1:21; Gen. 3:17-19; cf. 5:29; Rom. 8:20, 22; 7:15-24). Their personalities and self-transcendence are impaired. Their intelligence is awry. Morally, they are deviant. Socially, they are exploitative. Creatively, they tend toward distortion. G. K. Chesterton well said, "What's wrong with the world? I'm wrong with the world!" Paul describes this human distortion as false wisdom, false worship, sexual depravity and social disruption (Rom. 1:21-32).

In spite of human depravity, humans can never be thought of as a zero. Francis Schaeffer has correctly stated, "Man is lost...but he will never be nothing."<sup>49</sup> In spite of human perversity, men and women are infinitely precious in the sight of God (Isa. 49:5-6; Jn. 3:16-17; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:8-10). Their condition causes us to weep for them, but never to devalue them. They are not animals, for even in their depravity they still retain the characteristics of personhood.

Perhaps the greatest difference between the Christian world view and the various "isms" of modernity is their respective understanding of human value and responsibility. For the Christian, humans, even though depraved, have intrinsic value as well as intrinsic responsibility. They are valuable whether or not they or anyone else recognize it. Modernism, by contrast, sees human value and responsibility as being only relative. Humans do not intrinsically have meaning, so they must create their own value and responsibility. If they so choose, they may even decide that they are utterly without value and responsibility. Modernism tends to sacrifice human value and responsibility so as to become free from guilt. Christianity affirms human responsibility and human value, but it also affirms human culpability.

## Truth and Knowledge

One of the most profound questions ever asked by a character in the Bible is that of Pontius Pilate to Christ when he queried, "What is truth?" (Jn. 18:38). Even

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<sup>49</sup>F. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1968), p. 90.

a tough Roman administrator was not ignorant of the universal questions, "What do I know?", and "How do I know what I know?" Philosophically, such questions fall under the category of epistemology, that is, the study of the presuppositions, sources, nature, limits, validity and verification of knowledge.<sup>50</sup>

## The Historical Dichotomy

Tertullian, the ante-Nicene father, posed the question, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" that is, what does secular knowledge have to do with spiritual knowledge? This question has been raised in many and varied forms in the effort to describe the relationship between faith and learning, Christ and culture, Christianity and the world of experience. It cannot be denied that believers live in both worlds. Unfortunately, instead of integration and synthesis, Christians often have espoused an antithesis between them. Especially arising out of the Medieval Period was a division of truth into sacred and secular categories. Each category was pursued independently of the other, and inevitably, serious conflicts arose. One such conflict was the famous trial of the Italian astronomer Galileo (1564-1642), who was indicted by the Roman Church because his ideas were thought to contradict the Bible.<sup>51</sup> The church believed Scripture taught the earth to be the stationary center of the solar system. Galileo's astronomical observations, based in large degree on the work of Copernicus, indicated otherwise.

## The Integration of Truth<sup>52</sup>

Truth is that which accords with reality, and by definition it cannot contradict itself. To be sure, postmodernists as well as most forms of eastern thought deny the non-contradictory nature of truth. Rather, they affirm that opposites may co-exist simultaneously without excluding each other. For them, truth is relative and subjective, not absolute and objective. Consequently, Hindus affirm a profundity of reality that embraces contradiction, an affirmation based in turn on their pantheistic cosmology. Postmodernists, similarly, reject the traditional assumptions of historiography (i.e., that the past is objectively recoverable) as well as the traditional assumptions about language (i.e., that language is adequate to convey meaning).<sup>53</sup> Christians, on the other hand, affirm both the possibility of history and the adequacy of language. They also affirm the non-contradictory nature of truth. If this is so, then *all truth is God's truth* (Col. 2:3)! The uniformity of truth forbids

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<sup>50</sup> W. Young, *A Christian Approach to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> C. Hummel, *The Galileo Connection* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), pp. 9ff.

<sup>52</sup> F. Gaebelain, *The Pattern of God's Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), pp. 3-27.

<sup>53</sup> J. Koller, *The Indian Way* (New York: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 6-8; D. McCallum, *The Death of Truth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996), pp. 31-44.

that we divide knowledge into sacred and secular categories as though they were opposed to each other. Rather, as Cervantes said in his tale of Don Quixote, "Where the truth is, in so far as it is truth, there God is."

It is well for Christians to remind themselves that while they hold the Bible to be truthful, not all truth is in the Bible. There is also truth in literature, history, science, mathematics, art and music. Even Paul knew this, for he had no compunctions about drawing truth from sources other than biblical ones. His words, "...in him we live and move and have our being...", are from Epimenides, while the statement, "We are his offspring," is a quotation from the poet Aratus (Ac. 17:28).<sup>54</sup> On another occasion Paul quotes again from Epimenides (Tit. 1:12),<sup>55</sup> and on still another occasion he quotes from a comedy by Menander (I Co. 15:33).<sup>56</sup> The real tension for Christians must not be between sacred truth and secular truth but between truth and error.

## **Revelation and Human Experience**

For the Christian, truth may be known in fundamentally two ways, by revelation and by human experience. "Revelation" is the word with which Christians describe how God makes himself known to the human family. He does this by his mighty acts in history and by the divine interpretation of these acts, that is, the Bible. Orthodox Christianity holds the Bible to be infallible. At the same time, orthodox Christianity is careful not to assume that the reader of the Bible is infallible.

Obviously, all truth is not given by revelation. The Bible does not pretend to be a textbook on biology, mathematics and the like. Rather, God created humans so that they have the capacity to explore their world through instinct, customs, feelings, sense perception, observation, experimentation, contemplation and so forth. However, while the study of the liberal arts is appropriate for all believers, such study must be approached with an incisive intellect that is capable of making critical judgements. One must not fall into the deceptive bliss of common sense realism, that is, the assumption that things are so merely because they seem so. There are tensions to be felt between universals and particulars. Much of what we ordinarily think of as absolute certainties may be no more than high probabilities. There are limits to knowledge. Some apparent sources of knowledge may be deceptive. Our human capacity for logic is not perfect. Thus, we must remember

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<sup>54</sup>J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) 171.

<sup>55</sup>A. Hanson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 176.

<sup>56</sup>F. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians [NICNT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 377-378.

that not only our wills and sensibilities were affected by the fall, but our minds were marred as well. Thus, human experience, while an important vehicle for ascertaining truth, must not be elevated to infallibility or comprehensiveness.

### **The Decline of the Fallen Intellect**

There are strong biblical indications that the human intellect was seriously affected by the fall (Ro. 8:7; 2 Co. 4:4). Because humans are fallen, their minds are distorted. The exclusive use of the mind apart from God, a form of humanism, results in decline (Ro. 1:28). The decline of natural thought progresses through three steps. The first is the intellectualism that worships the mind and reason. If the 17th Century Reformation can be called the "Age of Faith," the 18th Century Enlightenment can be called the "Age of Reason." Intellectualism was so exalted in the Enlightenment that attempts were made by some intellectuals, such as Diderot (1713-1784) and d'Alembert (1717-1783), to catalogue all human knowledge.<sup>57</sup> Post-Enlightenment modernism is an expression of the worship of the intellect.

Authoritarianism, a second step, is the subjection and slavery of the mind. Pure intellectualism usually leads to skepticism and eventually non-rationalism.<sup>58</sup> Such a condition opens the door to intellectual slavery, which can appear in a variety of forms, such as, brainwashing, psychoanalytical advertising, selective media reporting, state controlled education, and the cults. The Marxist regimes, the Nazi party, and capitalism in the West all have contributed to intellectual slavery in one form or another.

Finally, mysticism is disregard for the mind. The emptiness of intellectualism apart from God drives many to escapism and emotive ethics ("if it feels good, do it" or "how can anything that feels so good be so bad?"). This escape can be seen in the rapid growth of eastern religions, the drug culture, the total abstraction of art and music and the tendency toward suicide. Beyond that, the popularity of postmodernism in western universities is a rejection of the traditional categories of western thought, such as, logic, history, the adequacy of language, and the possibility of absolute truth.

### **The Relative Value of Truths**

There are no first-class truths versus second-class truths in terms of being true. However, some truths are certainly more important than others. For

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<sup>57</sup> E. Burns et al., *World Civilizations: Their History and Their Culture*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Norton, 1982), II.705.

<sup>58</sup> This is the argument of Francis Schaeffer in *Escape from Reason* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1968).

Christians, the most valuable of all truths is in knowing Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6; 17:3). Knowledge gained by human experience is also valuable to the Christian. These two sources of truth must be integrated so that one's knowledge of the world through experience is shaped by one's knowledge of Christ through faith. However, the believer should beware of either exalting reason unduly or denigrating intellectual pursuits as worthless. Rather, the Christian considers his/her mind as a gift from God to be used for the glory of God and to be redemptively renewed in the image of God (Col. 3:10).

*Our age is characterized by non-meaning. All psycho-sociologists agree ultimately that the work we do is marked by this fault. It makes no sense. It has no obvious value on its own. It is simply a way of making a living. Now we may allow that this is not bad in itself. Nevertheless, man needs some additional justification for something on which he spends most of his time and his creative powers. Hence he suffers from this lack of meaning. He feels that he has become a machine which performs meaningless acts whose relation to other acts and the rest of life is not perceived.<sup>59</sup>*

Jacques Ellul

## Values

Axiology, the study of values and value judgments, fills the woof and warp of the entire human fabric. Moral, aesthetic, psychological, political, intellectual, economic, and religious values shape our lives individually and corporately. At the same time, our society is clearly pluralistic in that there is no single set of values that prevails. Most of us agree on some values (peace, tolerance, liberty), and this enables us to live together. However, there is sharp disagreement in other areas.

### The Values Base<sup>60</sup>

Any discussion of values must address the underlying question of the values base, that is, "Why do people value certain things?" At the heart of it, this is what separates Christian and non-Christian value systems.

Most non-Christian value systems are autonomous, that is, their values base is human-centered. Three common non-Christian value approaches are hedonism, social contract and utilitarianism. In hedonism, values are based on personal

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<sup>59</sup> J. Ellul, *The Ethics of Freedom*, trans. G. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 461.

<sup>60</sup> W. Young, pp. 122ff.; A. Holmes, pp. 155ff.

pleasure. What an individual likes is valuable; what he/she dislikes is not. Here, values are not controlled by an outside standard. In a social contract, personal values are based on what humans at large deem valuable. Values are derived by consensus. All values are transitory, because they exist in a state of social flux. In utilitarianism, values are determined on the basis of their estimated usefulness to achieve goals, either personal or corporate. In short, the autonomous foundation for values is that humankind, either individually or corporately, is the highest end (Mt. 6:25-33). Like Protagoras of the ancient Greeks, “Man is the measure of all things.”

In contrast to humanistic value systems, the Christian approach is that the highest good is glorifying, enjoying and serving God. For the Christian, there is an objective standard for valuation outside him/herself, both individually and corporately. This standard is the person of God and his self-revelation (Phil. 4:8-9; 2 Pet. 1:3-9).

A very significant aspect of Christian valuation is the belief that humans are not the same as they were in the beginning. Their natural inclinations have become distorted so that their abilities to discern proper values within themselves are seriously marred (Rom. 1:28-32; 2:9b-18). Humankind's distorted system of values must be redeemed, and this redemption comes through the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and the Christian teaching that follows (Eph. 4:17-24; Col. 3:5-14). The recovery of godly valuation skills is a process that is acquired as one progresses toward Christian maturity (Phil. 1:9-11; Heb. 5:11-14; Rom. 12:1-2).

In addition to the ethical foundation for values, several ethical sub-systems have developed over the centuries, and all of them have proponents in the modern world. These include antinomianism, generalism, situationism, absolutism and hierarchicalism.

- **Antinomianism (nothing is right or wrong):** Ethical indifference is usually a by-product of atheism (though all atheists are not necessarily antinomians). Rightness or wrongness is strictly a personal, subjective choice. It is not an issue of morals, but rather, of advantage, personal perspective and emotion. To say, “One should not lie” means only “I do not like anyone to lie to me.” Christians, of course, reject antinomianism categorically.
- **Generalism (what is generally wrong is sometimes right and vice-versa):** In this view, there are no universal rules. Nothing is always right or always wrong. Such a position is a milder sort of relativism than the previous system, and it asserts that moral norms can only be said to be usually applicable, and then only within a given time frame. Often, the

- morality of an action is dependent upon the majority of public opinion at a particular period of human history. Morality is considered to be evolutionary, and moral values change in time. As with the previous system, Christians are compelled to reject generalism if they take seriously the existence of God and his revelation of moral values.
- **Situationism (one moral principle covers every situation):** This system, which is typical of hedonism, pragmatism and utilitarianism, gained widespread acceptance due to the writings of Joseph Fletcher, whose ethic of “love” was the one moral principle by which to decide all issues. It should be noted, however, that adherents to this system may not be identical. People may define the one moral rule differently. It might be “the greatest good for the greatest number” or “whatever promotes happiness in an individual or a community” or “whatever love demands.” Individual actions are not right or wrong in themselves, but they are to be chosen only as they express the single universal moral principle, whatever that principle might be. At first glance, this system might seem compatible with Christianity, but the Achilles heel is in the imprecise definitions of the one moral principle. How is “love” to be defined, for instance? How does one measure “the greatest good” without lapsing into a morality simply established by popular vote?
  - **Absolutism (wrong is wrong, right is right, and they do not conflict):** Many Christians embrace non-conflicting absolutism. All moral principles are absolute, since they are revealed by God. However, in spite of the assumption that these principles never conflict in a fallen world, reality demonstrates that sometimes they seem to conflict in particular situations. One may face a moral dilemma when the principle of truth-telling conflicts with the principle of life-saving, for instance, and in fact, some examples of such conflict appear in the stories of the Bible (cf. Ex. 1:15-21; Gen. 22:1ff.). Because of the difficulty of the assumption that absolute values never conflict, many Christians opt for hierarchicalism.
  - **Hierarchicalism (the lesser of two evils):** Conceding both the absolute nature of divinely revealed values and the reality of ethical conflict in a fallen world, many Christians accept values on an ascending scale. In other words, all values derive from God, but some values are more important than others, and some wrongs are more evil than others. Murder is worse than lying, or inversely, truth-telling is right, but not at the expense of a human life. Persons are more valuable than things. Many persons are more valuable than few persons. Acts that promote human worth are more valuable than acts that promotes things. Some go a step further and suggest that in some circumstances, violation of a moral principle may be

unavoidable in a fallen world, even though it might be excusable or pardonable. Still, even if one is compelled to choose between the lesser of two evils, he/she should do so with an uneasy conscience, calling upon God for grace and forgiveness. When values come into conflict, the more important of the values must be upheld, since “it is better to obey God rather than men” (Ac. 4:19).

## Aesthetics

Artistic experience—the love and experience of beauty—is truly universal. Such things as rock paintings are as old as 15,000--10,000 B.C.<sup>61</sup> Even small children are spontaneous in making up poems, songs and drawings. The aesthetic experience combines intellectual, emotional and sensuous elements to produce the impression of beauty. In this study we shall concentrate on two main types of aesthetics, the visual arts and music. However, it should be kept in mind that in every person, whether or not they can paint or play an instrument, there is the spark of creativity that is derived from God, the Creator *par excellence*.

The arts have always been an issue in the church. Some Christians have rejected the visual arts as idolatry, at least in the religious dimension, while others have deemed the church to be the highest patron of the arts. The Roman Catholic Church has been the single greatest supporter of the visual arts, both in painting, sculpture and architecture. The Eastern Orthodox Church, by contrast, allows only two-dimensional religious art in the form of icons. Protestants have bridged the full range, from opposing religious art altogether to encouraging and supporting it fully. It is probably fair to say that Protestants have been more supportive of the musical arts than the visual arts, though they usually support both. Apart from the expression of religious faith, the arts are important for all human experience. One thing is certain: aesthetic experience cannot be left out of any well-rounded world view.

## The Christian and the Arts

Art truly begins with an infinite-personal Creator who fashioned a physical world and pronounced it good (Gen. 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). While God was concerned that art not become an object of worship (Exod. 20:4-5; Lev. 26:1), he was equally concerned that art be respected as a legitimate enterprise, and he demonstrated his concern in the construction of the tent in the wilderness (Exod. 25:8-9; 31:1-11; 35:30--36:2). Gene Veith has pointed out three important

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<sup>61</sup> N. Knobler, *The Visual Dialogue*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), p. 3.

principles to be drawn from the above passages:<sup>62</sup>

Art is within God's will  
 Artistic ability is God's gift  
 Artistry can be a vocation or calling from God

It may also be pointed out that music, as well as visual arts, were God-ordained (2 Chr. 29:23).

Because art is a "God-given possibility," it needs no justification.<sup>63</sup> It is the proper domain of every believer, because it is part of the image of the Creator indelibly stamped upon the human creature. However, because art is a God-given possibility does not mean that it cannot be misused (even as sexuality, though God-given, can be abused). Artistic distortion in both visual and musical categories is also possible (Ex. 32:1-4, 17-19). With regard to the arts, most would agree that art is a reflection of culture. Ideas that begin in philosophy spread through the visual arts and music, and finally, throughout the general culture in a "trickle-down" effect.<sup>64</sup> The pessimism and fragmentation of modern thought that resulted from the Enlightenment began to infiltrate the visual arts, until gradually, they, too, reflected the world view of absurdity and fragmentation. Above all, it is important to understand that modern art is the serious expression of a world view. It deliberately "puts a question-mark against all values and principles."<sup>65</sup>

Music, also, became a medium in which to express western civilization's *angst* and fragmentation. Musical resolution (the changing of discord to concord) was increasingly abandoned so as to emphasize randomness, chance and anti-rationality. John Cage, in his musical composition *Imaginary Landscape*, for instance, set twelve radios going simultaneously while tuned to different stations. In his own words, "My purpose is to eliminate purpose," and "I like to think that I'm outside the circle of a known universe, and dealing with things that I don't know anything about."<sup>66</sup>

Francis Schaeffer has pointed out four categories of artists with respect to world views<sup>67</sup>

- The Christian who expresses him/herself within a Christian world-view

<sup>62</sup> G. Veith, Jr., *The Gift of Art* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1983), pp. 18-21.

<sup>63</sup> H. R. Rookmaaker, *Art Needs No Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1978), pp. 37-40.

<sup>64</sup> F. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1976), pp. 182-183.

<sup>65</sup> H. Rookmaaker, *Modern Art & the Death of a Culture*, 2nd. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), pp. 160-161.

<sup>66</sup> J. Machlis, *The Enjoyment of Music*, 4th ed. (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 653-657.

<sup>67</sup> F. Schaeffer, *Art & the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), pp. 46.

- The non-Christian who expresses him/herself within a non-Christian world-view
- The non-Christian who expresses him/herself on the basis of Christian influence or in a way that is compatible with a Christian world view
- The Christian who expresses him/herself on the basis of non-Christian influence or in a way that is incompatible with a Christian world view

While this may be somewhat of an oversimplification, it nevertheless points up the significance of world views and how they affect any given piece of art, whether visual or otherwise.

### **Appreciating and Evaluating the Visual and Musical Arts**

No attempt will be made here to address the deeply debatable issues of art or music criticism in any technical way. Nevertheless, it will be valuable to at least point to some basic principles for a more general appreciation and evaluation of these aesthetic categories.

Visual and audio arts may be produced for a variety of reasons. They may be an exercise in skill and manual dexterity, a comment on society and morality, the reciting of a story, the effort to create a symbol or the desire to decorate. Whatever their reason for existence, the arts are essentially a communication of human experience, and as such, they use artistic language. This is as true for music as it is for painting. To truly appreciate a painting or a composition, one must have some knowledge of the artistic language involved.

#### *The Artistic Language of Music*

*Melody (single tones)*

*Tempo (pace)*

*Harmony (combined tones)*

*Dynamics (volume, timbre)*

*Rhythm (regularity)*

## *The Artistic Language of Visual Art*

*Line*

*Color and gradation*

*Form*

*Texture*

Appreciation of art, then, is related to how well one understands the artistic language, and/or how well he/she can fit the artistic language into his/her previous experience.<sup>68</sup> Without too much complexity, we can point to four criteria that will aid us in making sound value judgments about the arts. These are:<sup>69</sup>

*Technical excellence*, that is, how well has the artist mastered the artistic language of his/her discipline?

*Validity*, that is, is the artist honest in expressing a world view? (Is the artist truly expressing him/herself, or is he/she expressing only what the audience wants?)

*Content*, that is, what is the message that the artist is expressing, what is his/her world view, and finally, is the message and world view compatible with Christianity? (For Christians, all art is to be judged by the Word of God.<sup>70</sup> This does not mean, of course, that all art must have a Christian theme. Rather, it means that all art should reflect the biblical evaluation of the experiences of life. Evil should be portrayed as evil, for instance, not as something desirable or good.)

*Integration of content and vehicle*, that is, how well has the artist suited the artistic language to the message? (i.e., There is a relationship between style and content.)

## **Work and Play**

"One of the tragic questions which parents with children in their upper teens confront today is the question: 'Why do we have to work? What is the point of it?'"<sup>71</sup> Modern humans often see work as primarily a means to productivity and profit. The Bible, while not dismissing the necessary concerns of productivity and

<sup>68</sup> Knobler, pp. 4-66; Machlis, pp. 3-30.

<sup>69</sup> Schaeffer, *Art*, pp. 41-48.

<sup>70</sup> D. Kidner, *The Christian and the Arts* (rpt. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1961), pp. 5-31.

<sup>71</sup> Ellul, p. 461.

profit, views work as a means of serving God and one's fellow-human creatures.

## **A Biblical Ethic of Work**

Work figures significantly in human origins. In the beginning, God worked, and subsequently, he commanded that humans also should work (Gen. 1:1, 28; 2:2-3, 15, 18, 21-24). Work was not a curse placed upon humans after the fall. It was ordained as a human creative activity patterned after God's own creative activity. Even Jesus conceived of his ministry as "his Father's work" (Jn. 4:34; 5:36; 17:4). Human work is set alongside nature itself as part of God's creative wisdom (Psa. 104:19-24; Isa. 28:23-29). Humankind does not exist for heedless enjoyment but to develop aptitudes in purposeful labor.<sup>72</sup>

When humans fell, their work also was affected. What once was a joy now became toil (Gen. 3:16-19). The curse of humankind was not that men and women had to work, but that trials and vexations now intruded themselves upon their work.<sup>73</sup> Much later in biblical history, work became an important theme in Hebrew Wisdom Literature. One of the great concerns of the Wisdom Literature is with industry as opposed to laziness.<sup>74</sup> It is a distortion to think that work is to be avoided, and this distortion is countered with strong warnings. Laziness most often leads to poverty (Pro. 6:6-11; 10:4; 24:30-34). It is characterized by feeble evasions (Pro. 22:13; 26:13), excessive sleep (Pro. 19:15; 26:14), rationalization for slothfulness (Pro. 26:16) and procrastination (Pro. 20:4). A lazy person is much like a destructive person (Pro. 18:9).

Industry, on the other hand, is a mark of wisdom (Pro. 10:5). It leads to self-fulfillment (Pro. 13:4) and profit (Pro. 14:23). Thus, work is to be done diligently (Pro. 24:27). However, one should note that the Wisdom Literature suggests no ideal of the "self-made man." The Lord himself is to be credited with a person's increase (Pro. 10:22), and work that does not glorify God is pronounced as being "in vain" (Ps. 127:1-2). Especially in Ecclesiastes, the emptiness of work that is self-aggrandizing is emphasized (Eccl. 2:4-11, 17, 22-23; 4:4). Work only has ultimate value when it is received as the gift of God (Eccl. 2:24-26; 3:9-13). Ultimately, success that ignores God is not success at all (Pro. 15:16; 11:4). Peace, charity and integrity are things more valuable than wealth (Pro. 15:17; 17:1; 19:1). One who trusts in wealth rather than righteousness lives in false confidence.

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<sup>72</sup> W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), II.127-128.

<sup>73</sup> H. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. M. Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), p. 129.

<sup>74</sup> D. Kidner, *Proverbs* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1964), pp. 42-43; Wolff, pp. 129-133.

## Christians and Work

In the New Testament it is presupposed that one's Christian faith will affect one's working relationships. Vocational work should be done as unto the Lord (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-24), for the worker is a representative of Christ and the Christian faith (1 Tim. 6:1-2; Tit. 2:9-10). As in the Old Testament, it is expected for Christians to earn their keep (2 Thess. 3:12). It must be conceded that most of the above statements are in the context of slaves and masters, but undoubtedly the principles involved have a modern relevancy. Modern employers can hardly be excused for being less fair to their employees than ancient masters to slaves (Eph. 6:8-9; Col. 4:1)! Ultimately, all work is to be seen as a stewardship of God's riches (Mt. 25:14-30). Work is not just a serving of self, but also a serving of others (Mt. 25:40; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

It may also be noted that the New Testament does not suggest a hierarchy of different sorts of vocations. There is no contempt for manual labor.<sup>75</sup> Both Jesus and Paul worked at trades (Mk. 6:3; Acts 18:2-3; 20:34).

If Christians are to find fulfillment in work, they must do so through the perspective of a Christian world view, that is, with the understanding that all of life is valuable to our Creator-God (Psa. 24:1).<sup>76</sup>

## A Biblical Ethic of Play

The words of Qoheleth ring true, "...there is a time to laugh, to dance, to embrace" (Eccl. 3:1, 4-5). God has created "everything beautiful in its time," and the potential for recreation, leisure and play are gifts from God (Eccl. 3:11-12, 8:15). It is instructive that the imagery of playing children is used by God to describe the blessedness of his kingdom (Isa. 11:8-9; Zec. 8:4-5). Without doubt the affirmation is true that the chief end of humans is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever (Westminster Confession; cf. Ps. 16:11). At the same time, we live in a pleasure-mad world, and the biblical writers were not timid in warning us against pleasure as an end in itself (Lk. 8:14; 1 Tim. 5:6; 2 Tim. 3:4; Jam. 4:3). There are moral choices to be made, even in the arena of play (Heb. 11:25)!

Customary definitions of play often describe it as a non-productive activity or as a free and voluntary activity in contrast to the necessity of required work. While these definitions certainly contain truth, Arthur Holmes is also correct in saying that play is an attitude and a state of mind as well as an activity. What may be one

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<sup>75</sup> D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981). pp. 940-941.

<sup>76</sup> A. Holmes, *Contours*, pp. 215-221.

person's work can be another person's play.<sup>77</sup> It may be helpful to differentiate between different kinds of play, such as, games, aesthetics and festivities as well as to observe that these categories often overlap.

### **The Concept of Rest**

The concept of rest is significant in the Old Testament in that of all the commandments, the decree for a day of rest receives the most space. The first rest is that of God when he concluded creation (Gen. 2:2-3). Literally, he "took breath" or "recovered himself" (Exod. 31:17).<sup>78</sup> On the basis of God's rest weekly sabbath was instituted (Exod. 20:8-11). Furthermore, ancient Israel was to observe a sabbatical year (Lev. 25:1-7) as well as a Jubilee (Lev. 25:8ff.). These decrees for rest were meant to provide a time of refreshing to humans, the land and the animals (Exod. 23:10-12).

Old Testament Israel had difficulty finding a balanced approach to the sabbath. Either they ignored God's injunctions to rest (Amos 8:4-6; Jer. 17:19-27; Eze. 20:12-26) or, as in the time of Jesus, they so over-regulated the sabbath that it became impossible to do even good or necessary things on it (Mt. 12:1-2; Mk. 3:1-2; Lk. 13:10-14; 14:1-4; Jn. 5:8-13; 9:13-16). In his disagreements with the Jewish sects, Jesus declared that the sabbath was:

- ... made for human benefit, not as a burden (Mk. 2:27)
- ... justifiably broken in special cases (Mt. 12:3-5, 11-12; Lk. 13:15-16; 14:5; Jn. 7:21-24)

In the New Testament one finds that the Old Testament sabbath was a symbol of the reality of true rest in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 4:1ff.). Inasmuch as the Old Testament symbolism has been fulfilled, a ritual observance of the sabbath is no longer appropriate (Gal. 4:10-11; Rom. 14:5). At the same time, to say that the Old Testament sabbath no longer carries ritual force is not the same thing as saying that a time of rest is superfluous. The principle of periodic rest (i.e., for the Christian it has become the Lord's Day) still has its proper place, not as a legalistic institution but as God's wise provision.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Holmes, pp. 224-225

<sup>78</sup> Wolff, p. 138.

<sup>79</sup> J. Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), pp. 409-410.

## Responsibility in Rest, Leisure, Recreation and Play

Paul is quite clear that whatever believers do they should do in such a way as to bring glory to God, and this must include play, also (1 Cor. 10:31). That Paul and others in the New Testament did not hold play in contempt seems evident from their frequent references to the Greek athletic contests.

- ... an athlete's vigorous training (1 Cor. 9:24-27)
- ... the importance of competing according to the rules (2 Tim. 2:5)
- ... the thrill of victory (2 Tim. 4:7-8)
- ... the agony of defeat (Gal. 2:2; Phil. 2:16)
- ... the danger of being cut in on (Gal. 5:7)
- ... the marathon runner who strips off all excess weight (Heb. 12:1-2)
- ... the goal of a chariot racer (Phil. 3:13-14)<sup>80</sup>

It is well known that Jesus had no compunctions about attending banquet parties (Lk. 5:29-31; 14:8, 13; 15:23). However, there are Christian principles that should guide the believer in his/her involvement in games, aesthetics and celebrations.<sup>81</sup> Play must be conducted responsibly toward:

- ❖ Natural Resources: Play that defaces nature or upsets its ecological balance must be questioned.
- ❖ Animal Life: Contests that are primarily destructive (cock-fighting, dog-fighting, etc.) and hunting for sport alone (i.e., without intent for eating or other responsible purposes) must be questioned.
- ❖ Image of God in Humans: Play that derives its value from God will avoid dehumanizing activity. This will include certain kinds of humor as well as sadistic sports. The early Christians were right in their objections to the Roman circus. Pornography, censored theater or any other kind of entertainment that glorifies injustice, unfairness, needless violence, promiscuity, and so forth, are rightly to be rejected. Humans are made in God's image, and any sort of play that distorts, belittles, or destroys this image is to be shunned by Christians.

Finally, play must bear a relationship to work. God's rest only followed his work; the sabbath followed six days of labor. Similarly, play of whatever sort should contribute to one's health, well-being and work. Play can be an incubator for creativity, an arena for personal and social development, and a means toward physical and intellectual well-being. It must never degenerate into a lack of

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<sup>80</sup> E. Blaiklock, "Games: In the New Testament," *NBD*, 2nd, ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1982), p. 405.

<sup>81</sup> Holmes, pp. 233ff.

seriousness about God and life!

## History and Destiny

Christianity is essentially a historical religion. God's revelation of himself comes not merely in doctrinal statements but in historical events as well. Whereas many world faiths see history as cyclical—an endless repetition without a conclusion—Christianity sees history as linear. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. Thus, Moses instructed the Israelites to be ready to tell the story of their salvation to their children (Deut. 6:20-23). Stephen's great discourse to the Sanhedrin is a summary example of historical faith (Ac. 7:2-53). In the same way, for the New Testament believer, the content of the gospel cannot be confined within mere propositions. The good news is that God acted in history for the salvation of men and women (Ac. 3:13-26).

### History is Linear

For many of in the western world, a linear concept of history is the only one known. The eastern pantheistic ideals that time is unreal and that history is cyclical seem strange and unfamiliar. At the same time, even in a western world which generally views history as linear, there are commonly held attitudes that history is uncertain, without purpose or unimportant. History is a product of chance.

For the Christian, the opposite is true. History is not reversible, repeatable or meaningless. Rather, it is going somewhere and is controlled by Someone.<sup>82</sup> For the Christian, history not only proceeds from an initial point, it stretches both forward and backward from a midpoint. That midpoint is the historical death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>83</sup> The Christian cannot fix the end, but he/she can fix the midpoint very closely.

The New Testament has two concepts for time which are especially important.<sup>84</sup> The first is the *kairos* = (a point in time). This New Testament word refers to the time of specific events, such as, the death of Jesus (Mt. 26:18). Notice the NIV translation of *kairos* as "dates" (Ac. 1:7, 1 Thess. 5:1). Other words with this same connotation are "hour" and "day" and "now" (Mk. 13:32; Col. 1:26).

The second concept is the *aion* = (a duration of time). This word refers to a period of extended time (Mt. 28:20; Lk. 20:34-35; Eph. 1:21). Often the Bible

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<sup>82</sup> J. Sire, p. 40

<sup>83</sup> O. Cullmann, p. 17.

<sup>84</sup> Cullmann, pp. 33ff.

offers a contrast between the present age and the age to come. As such, time is conceptualized in the Bible as a series of ages (sometimes overlapping) within which there are particular points or events.

History, then, is not a series of uncertainties: it is under the control of God (Ac. 17:26; Eph. 1:11). This does not mean that God manipulates humans and events as though they were puppets, but that any and every event in history can be made to serve God's purposes (Gen. 50:18-21; Ac. 4:27-28). Many Christians, failing to appreciate this fact, live in fear of the historical events surrounding them. They need not despair (Rev. 1:4-6)!

## **The Historical Nature of Israel's Faith**

The crowning events of Israel's history were the points in time in which God intervened. These events include:

- ❖ Call of Abraham
- ❖ Descent into Egypt
- ❖ Exodus and Conquest of Canaan
- ❖ Establishment of David's Family
- ❖ Exile
- ❖ Return of the Remnant

Because of the historical nature of her faith, Israel always has a past and a future as well as a present. However, God's choice of Israel was larger than just a national or ethnic concern. His bigger goal was universal (Gen. 12:1-3). God was concerned not only with an individual's salvation and a nation's salvation, he also was concerned with salvation for the entire human race (Isa. 49:5-6). The accomplishment of this purpose is the goal of human history. This end is the kingdom of God, that is, the redemptive rule of God extended throughout the whole earth (Isa. 11:1-9). The picture of redemptive history for Israel concerns not an escape from the earth to a shadowy existence beyond the skies, but it concerns the redemption of human's, individually and socially, within a redeemed earth (Isa. 65:17-25.)<sup>85</sup>

## **The Beginning of the End**

For the New Testament believer, the new age promised in the Old Testament has been inaugurated. The powers of the old age were defeated (Jn. 12:31; Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:13; 2:15) when Christ died in the end of the ages (Heb. 9:26). The believer already has tasted of the powers of the coming age (Heb. 6:5). Already he

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<sup>85</sup> G. Ladd, *Jesus Christ & History* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1964), p. 20.

is raised with Christ in the heavenly realms (Eph. 1:3; Col. 3:1-4). The final hours have now arrived (1 Jn. 2:8). The kingdom of God has been inaugurated (Lk. 17:20-21). The reign of Christ has begun (1 Cor. 15:25).

Nevertheless, the New Testament points toward a consummation which will be realized only at the second coming of Christ (Ac. 1:10-11; Rev. 1:7; 19:11-16; 22:7, 12-13, 20). At that time, the earth itself will be liberated from decay (Rom. 8:19-21), and believers will be changed from mortal to immortal creatures (1 Cor. 15:51-54). The triumph of Christ's kingdom will be complete (Rev. 11:15-18).

## **The Christian Church**

The Christian, then, claims that all history is God's history and that in every generation God has maintained a witness to himself and his purpose. The history of the Christianity is important. The notion that the history of the Christian church between the end of the apostolic era and the present can be discarded like so much unnecessary baggage cuts directly across the biblical idea of history. It would be similar to saying that periods of Israel's history were unimportant. Instead, Jesus calls upon his followers to understand history like a field growing with both wheat and weeds. Only at the end can there be a separation into what is of eternal value and what is nonessential (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43).