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PRESBYTERIAN TRACTS

TOWARD A  
CHRISTIAN  
WORLDVIEW

By W. Gary Crampton, Th.D. &  
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First Presbyterian Church of Rowlett, Texas

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# Toward a Christian Worldview

## Publisher's Foreword

An ancient Greek myth tells the story of King Sisyphus. The king was sentenced by “the gods” to roll a stone up a hill forever. Each time he got near the top of the hill, the stone rolled back down to the bottom and he was required to start over again rolling the stone back to the top of the hill. No matter how long or how hard he worked at the project, he was doomed to failure.

Albert Camus, the French existentialist, claimed that all of life is just like that: futile and pointless. We work and think that we have goals, but we are doomed to lives of futility. About one hundred twenty-five years before Camus, the American Henry David Thoreau said that most men live lives of quiet desperation. Even William Shakespeare, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, claimed that life was a “tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

Is there a Christian response to this pessimistic world view? Can the Christian supply a positive answer to those who seek purpose and meaning in life? The answer should be a wholehearted “yes!” But, sadly, many Christians act and think as though life were governed by chance or luck rather than by the sovereign Creator-God of the universe. It is not simply that we

make excuses for our lack of action; more often than not we don't know with certainty what the right action is.

The first thing many Christians lack is a coherent world view. The question is not so much whether we have a philosophy of life (some have referred to this world view or practical philosophy as a "*weltanschauung*" from a German word that means a way of looking on the world), but what that philosophy will be. Most Americans are pragmatists by default. They have been raised in public schools and taught that the real test of any action is whether it brings about desired results.

The key or fundamental purpose of the series of tracts that begins with this one by Drs. Crampton and Bacon is to challenge that pragmatist world view. Jesus said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church. The church should take stock of its position and realize how far it has come in the past 2000 years. From a handful of fearful believers in a single room, the church has grown to become a globe-encircling body. But Christians must also realize how far they have yet to go.

Knowing and acknowledging that our task of taking the message of Jesus Christ to every area of the globe and to every aspect of life is not yet finished, Christians must have a plan of action for reaching the rest of the world with the message of the God that created it. This plan cannot be restricted to geography alone, but must be both intensive and extensive in its reach. Graduates of Christian schools must go forth into every endeavor of life with a fervor to subdue their sundry callings to the Lordship of King Jesus. There must be a Christian view of medicine, law, politics, education, engineering, history, science, etc.

It will be the task of this present generation of Christians to supply a world view that speaks to these endeavors.

Christians must wake up to the demand that the world is making of them. The next generation of Christians, with a coherent world view, a plan of action, and the passion to put it into effect could very well turn the world upside down. The world was lost in darkness when the gospel first shone 2000 years ago, but a dedicated band of Christians reached the known world in one generation. When darkness had again engulfed the world in the middle ages, God used a relatively small band of Reformers to carry the torch of Christianity to the world again, such that there was light out of darkness (*ex tenebris lux*).

Pessimism and futility have once more gripped the world in what appears to be a struggle to the death. Where are the men and women who will meet the challenge of this generation? Could it be that this is the very reason God has raised up the Christian school movement in our generation? The choice is not today so much between Christ and Baal. The choice is now between Christ and Sisyphus; between hope and futility; between purpose and meaninglessness.

The series beginning with *Toward a Christian Worldview* is designed to present a coherent Christian worldview so that Christian students and graduates can prophetically take the word of God and its implications into every sphere of life. The days of retreat are over and the days of light have begun. We do not desire a knowledge that puffs up, but neither will a zeal apart from knowledge accomplish the will of God. Let us take Christ, hope, and purpose into every area of life; and let us do it with zeal and knowledge together.



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## Preface

Why this monograph? It is written, as the title suggests, not to exhaustively study the subject of worldviews, but to introduce it. Everyone has a worldview. A worldview is a set of beliefs, a system of thoughts, about the most important issues of life. One's worldview is his philosophy. "Worldview" and "philosophy" are virtually synonymous words. Great thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas, each had a system of belief regarding philosophy, that was written out in a systematic fashion. Each system expressed the worldview of the particular philosopher. But even though they may not realize it, all (mature) persons necessarily and inescapably have a worldview, a philosophical system of thought, as well. Their worldview may not be written out, or as well systematized as the four thinkers mentioned above, but they have a worldview nonetheless.

This little book intends to raise the reader's self-consciousness about his worldview, and to gain a clearer understanding of a Christian worldview, which, in the opinion of the present writers, is the only viable worldview or philosophy. Scripture teaches us, as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q 1) aptly states, that "man's chief end is to glorify God [*1 Corinthians* 10:31; *Romans* 11:36], and to enjoy Him forever [*Psalms* 73:25-28]." This being so, we are enjoined to adopt a philosophy that honors God. We need, as the apostle Paul states, a philosophy that is "according to Christ" (*Colossians* 2:8). Herein we have a Christian philosophy, which is based on the axiom of divine revelation: the Word of God. And the best summary of this system of belief is found in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms*.





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## Chapter 1: The Nature of a Christian Worldview

### *True Versus False Philosophy*

In *Colossians* 2:8, the apostle Paul writes: “Beware lest anyone capture you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.” In this verse the apostle warns his readers against being taken captive by false philosophies. Rather, he says that they should adopt a philosophy “according to Christ.” This verse does not teach, as some have said, that philosophy itself is unworthy of Christian study. In fact, the verse teaches precisely the opposite. It is an imperative for the pursuit of the discipline. To guard against being captivated by a philosophy “according to the tradition of men,” one must have an awareness of such errant philosophy. And more importantly, he must have a knowledge of that which is true. Too many Christians are not aware of this fact. Therefore, they have neglected the study of philosophy in general. Sadly, these are the ones most likely to be captivated by the false philosophies of this world.

R.C. Sproul writes that “no society can survive, no civilization can function, without some unifying system of thought....What makes a society a unified system? Some kind of glue is found in a unifying system of thought, what we call a worldview.”<sup>(1)</sup> The fact of the matter is that thoughts shape societies. Worldviews, or philosophies, are important. Chris-

tians, then, need to study philosophy. Stressing this point, Ronald Nash writes:<sup>{2}</sup>

Because so many elements of a worldview are philosophical in nature, Christians need to become more conscious of the importance of philosophy. Though philosophy and religion [i.e., theology] often use different language and often [wrongly] arrive at different conclusions, they deal with the same questions, which include questions about what exists (metaphysics), how humans should live (ethics), and how human beings know (epistemology). Philosophy matters. It matters because the Christian worldview has an intrinsic connection to philosophy and the world of ideas. It matters because philosophy is related in a critically important way to life, culture, and religion. And it matters because the systems opposing Christianity use philosophical methods and arguments.

*Colossians* 2:8 teaches us that there are two radically different philosophical worldviews: Christian and non-Christian. There is no neutral ground. The non-Christian philosopher is committed to total independence from the God of Scripture. Thus, he views God, man, and the world from a non-biblical standpoint.

The Christian philosopher, on the other hand, is committed to absolute dependence on God and His Word. He philosophizes about God and His creation from a wholly different perspective. He sees Christ, the Word of God incarnate, as central to all truth. In Him,

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1. R.C. Sproul, *Lifeways* (Old Tappan: Fleming H. Revell, 1986), 29.
  2. Ronald H. Nash, *Faith & Reason* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 26.

writes Paul, “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (*Colossians* 2:3). A Biblical philosophy, therefore, must be “rooted and built up” in Christ (*Colossians* 2:7). The Christian philosopher is to analyze all things by means of God’s infallible revelation, seeking to “bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 *Corinthians* 10:5).

The Bible is replete with philosophical teachings. The book of *Ecclesiastes* is a prime example. The preacher (1:1), the author of the book, presents us with two distinct and opposing worldviews. He can do so because he has personally been involved with both of them. He writes as an old man looking back on life, and admonishes his readers to pay heed to his instruction (12:1ff.). On the one hand, he views the issues of life from the standpoint of the man who is under the sun (1:3,9; 2:11). This is unregenerate man, who only has an awareness of God and His creation by means of general revelation, a revelation which he suppresses (more will be said on this below).

On the other hand, the preacher presents the proper worldview of regenerate man, who makes use of special revelation. This man knows God as Savior, and is capable of true wisdom (*Proverbs* 1:7; 9:10). Without this wisdom, says the preacher, all things in life are folly (2:25-26). His conclusion is given in 12:13-14: a proper worldview must begin with the fear of God: “Let us hear the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil.” Devoid of this, man is destined to philosophical vanity, a “chasing after the wind.”

The preacher's message is clear: sound philosophy is sound Christianity. Without a Biblically based philosophy, philosophical endeavor is inane. As taught by Francis Schaeffer, the Christian worldview, based on the Word of God alone, is not just a good philosophy, "it is the best philosophy...it is the only philosophy that is consistent to itself and answers the questions of [life]...it deals with [life's] problems and gives us answers."<sup>{3}</sup>

What, then, is the nature of Christian philosophy? It is a philosophy that is "according to Christ." It seeks to study the entire philosophical arena by means of Christ's Word. It recognizes that only the triune God of Scripture is wise: Father (*Romans* 16:27), Son (*1 Corinthians* 1:24,30), and Holy Spirit (*Isaiah* 11:2). And genuine Christian philosophy understands that only the Word of God can make one wise (*Psalms* 19:7).

Gregg Singer writes that the true Christian philosopher, using Scripture as his starting point, "believes in Jesus Christ [and] commits himself to much else besides, to a view of God, creation, man, sin, history, and all the cultural activities of the human race, and in this view he finds the correct interpretation and the motivating power to think God's thoughts and to do His will after Him."<sup>{4}</sup>

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3. Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer* (Westchester; Crossway Books, 1982), III:259.

4. C. Gregg Singer, *From Rationalism to Irrationality* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 37.

### *Biblical Presuppositions*

All worldviews or philosophies (as seen, these words are used as virtual synonyms) have presuppositions, which are foundational. These presuppositions are axioms, which, by definition, cannot be proved. Without such axioms, as first principles or starting points, a worldview could not get started, because there would be no foundation upon which to base its beliefs. In a logically consistent Christian worldview, the first and absolutely essential presupposition, is that the Bible alone is the Word of God, and it has a systematic monopoly on truth. This is the axiomatic starting point. From the teachings of the axiom of Scripture, however, we find that there are several other doctrines which are “presuppositional” to a Christian worldview.

First, then, is the presupposition that the Bible is the Word of God. In the words of the apostle Paul: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 *Timothy* 3:16-17). And in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1:6): we read: “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.”

Notice the universal terms in these two statements: “all,” “complete,” “thoroughly,” “every,” “whole,” “all,” “nothing,” “at any time.” The Bible, infallibly, and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, in compliance with the Bible, both teach the all sufficiency of Scripture.

By word derivation, “philosophy” (*philosophia*) means “the love of wisdom.” Scripture teaches us that only God is wise (*Romans* 16:27; *1 Timothy* 1:17). The Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of wisdom” (*Isaiah* 11:2). And Jesus Christ, the Master Philosopher, is Wisdom itself (*Proverbs* 8:22-36; *John* 1:1-3,14; *1 Corinthians* 1:24,30). In Him “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (*Colossians* 2:3). And Christ has given us these treasures in His Word, which is a part of His mind (*1 Corinthians* 2:16). Therefore, if one is to be a Christian philosopher (a lover of wisdom), he must go to God’s Word. Therein is where one learns “the fear of the Lord [which] is the beginning of wisdom” (*Proverbs* 9:10).

The Bible claims to be the infallible, inerrant Word of God (*2 Timothy* 3:16-17; *2 Peter* 1:20-21), and the Holy Spirit produces this belief in the minds of the elect (*1 Corinthians* 2:6-16). As stated in the *Confession* (1:4-5): “the authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, depends ...wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.” Further, “our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.” There simply is no higher authority than the Word of God. As the author of *Hebrews* claims: “because He [God] could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself” (6:13).

Second, from the axiom of Scripture, we learn, as the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q 5-6) teaches, that “there is one only living and true God...[and that] there are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance [essence], equal in power and glory” (see *Deuter-*

onomy 6:4; *Matthew* 28:19). We also learn that this triune God is self-existent and independent, possessing all perfections. As stated in the *Catechism* (Q 4): “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.” Further, God is both transcendent (distinct from His creation) and immanent (omnipresent in His creation) (*Isaiah* 57:15; *Jeremiah* 23:23-24). In Him all things “live and move and have [their] being” (*Acts* 17:28).

Third, the Scriptures teach us that God, in His eternal decree has sovereignly foreordained all things which will ever come to pass (*Ephesians* 1:11). Furthermore, He executes His sovereign purposes through the works of creation (*Revelation* 4:11) and providence (*Daniel* 4:35). Not only does God create all things *ex nihilo* (out of no pre-existing substance), including man, but He sovereignly preserves, sustains, and governs all of His creation, bringing all things to their appointed end. Hence, J.I. Packer rightly states that Christian theism is to be viewed as “a unified philosophy of history which sees the whole diversity of processes and events that take place in God’s world as no more, and no less, than the outworking of His great preordained plan for His creatures and His church.”<sup>{5}</sup>

Fourth, God created man in His own image, both metaphysically and ethically (*Genesis* 1:26-28). Man is a “living soul” consisting of a physical (body) and a non-physical (spirit, soul, or mind) element (*Genesis* 2:7). But, as Calvin properly teaches, man is God’s image bearer in a spiritual or mental sense. Writes Calvin: “The mind of man

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5. J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 129.

is His [God's] true image.”<sup>{6}</sup> That is, man *is* a spirit; man *has* a body. The body is the instrument of the soul or spirit.<sup>{7}</sup>

According to Biblical Christianity, as taught by the *Westminster Confession*, man is a spiritual, rational, moral, immortal being, created with innate, propositional knowledge, including knowledge of God, to have a spiritual relationship with his Creator. Herein he differs from the rest of creation. Says the *Confession* (4:2): “After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; having the law of God written in their hearts.” Calvin referred to this innate knowledge as the *sensus divinitatis*, or the sense of divinity, which is engraved upon the soul of all men. It is propositional and ineradicable truth, and it leaves all men without excuse.<sup>{8}</sup>

Theologians refer to this innate knowledge as “general revelation.” It is general in both audience (the whole world) and content (broad theology), whereas special revelation (the verbal communications of Scripture), on the other hand, is specific in audience (those who read the Bible) and detailed in content. General revelation, as noted, reveals God as Creator, thus leaving men without excuse (*Romans* 1:18-21; 2:14-15). But it does not reveal Christ as the only

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6. John Calvin, *Commentaries*, Vols. I-XXII (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), *Commentary on Acts* 17:22.

7. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.22; *On the Soul and Its Origin* 4.20.

8. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vols. I & II, Library of the Christian Classics, John T. McNeill, editor, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I:3:1-3.



Redeemer. This latter knowledge is found only in Scripture (*Romans* 1:16-17; 10:17).

The *Confession* (1:1) reads:

Although the light of nature [naturally innate in man], and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of His will, which is necessary unto salvation. Therefore, it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will unto His church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing: which makes the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing His will unto his people being now ceased.

When properly studied, general and special revelation are in perfect harmony. But creation is always to be studied in light of special revelation. The Bible alone has a monopoly on truth. As clearly taught in *Proverbs* 8, a proper understanding of creation may only be derived from a study of Scripture. This does not mean that we should avoid a study of creation. Rather, we are compelled by special revelation to interact with it (e.g., scientific and historical investigation), as seen in the dominion mandate of *Genesis* 1:26-28. But Scripture alone, not the study of science or history, gives us truth.

This brings us to our fifth consideration. Due to the Fall of man, sin has affected the entire cosmos (*Genesis* 3; *Romans* 8:18-23). Man

and the universe are in a state of abnormality. The effects of the Fall have greatly hindered man's ability to philosophize. Metaphysically speaking, man is still in the image of God, even though the image is defaced. He is still a spiritual, rational, moral, immortal being (*Genesis* 9:6; *James* 3:9). But ethically speaking, the image of God is effaced. Fallen man is in a state of "total depravity," incapable of doing anything to please God (*Romans* 3:9-18; 8:7-8). As taught in the *Confession* (6:4), fallen man is "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil." The ethical image is only restored through the salvific cross work of Jesus Christ (*Ephesians* 4:24; *Colossians* 3:10). To properly philosophize, man must be regenerated (*John* 3:3-8). In the words of Robert Reymond: "Until he is born again, man cannot see the kingdom of God, or, for that matter, anything else truly."<sup>9</sup>

### ***Philosophy and Wisdom***

As noted, the Bible teaches that true wisdom begins with "the fear of the Lord" (*Proverbs* 9:10). Thus, one who does not savingly know the "Lord" Jesus Christ, who is wisdom incarnate (*1 Corinthians* 1:24,30; *Colossians* 2:3), cannot be "wise" (confirm *John* 14:6). The Bible describes such an individual as a "fool." The "fool" is one who hates knowledge (*Proverbs* 1:22), is naïve in his thinking, ready to believe anything (*Proverbs* 14:15), and trusts in himself (*Proverbs* 28:26), rather than in God (*Psalms* 14:1). He has "said in his heart there is no God" (*Psalms* 14:1). The fool may be a highly educated individ-

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9. Robert L. Reymond, *A Christian View of Modern Science* (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977), 10.

ual, one who is well versed in the discipline of philosophy; nevertheless, he is a fool, because he rejects the God of Scripture, and the Bible as the sole source of wisdom (*Matthew 7:26-27*). Hence, he “seeks wisdom and does not find it,” because he is always looking in the wrong place (*Proverbs 14:6*).

The apostle Paul describes the nature of this foolish, secular philosophy in *Romans 1:18-25*. The non-Christian suppresses the knowledge of God which he possesses, he rejects God’s Word as the only standard of truth, and ascribes all of creation to that which is other than the God of Scripture (verses 18-21). Says the apostle, such fools have become “futile in their thoughts,” “their foolish hearts [are] darkened” (verse 21); “professing to be wise, they became fools” (verse 22). And as false philosophers, they have chosen to “worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator” (verse 25).

The Christian philosopher, on the other hand, is a wise man. He builds his philosophical system upon the Rock of Christ and His Word (*Matthew 7:24-25*). He views all things (i.e., philosophizes) by means of the “spectacles” of Scripture.<sup>{10}</sup> In this way, the Christian philosopher is not only *homo spiritualis* (“spiritual man”), he is also *homo sapiens* (“man having wisdom”).

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10. Calvin, *Institutes* I:6:1.



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## **Chapter 2:** **Christianity and the Basic Elements of Philosophy**

### *The Basic Elements of a Worldview*

As we have seen, a worldview or philosophy is a set of beliefs concerning the most important issues of life. Therefore, any well rounded worldview must be able to deal adequately with the four most basic elements or tenets of philosophy: epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and politics.

First, epistemology is that branch of philosophy which is concerned with the theory of knowledge. How do we know what we know? What is the standard of truth? Is truth relative? Is knowledge about God possible? Can God reveal things to human beings?; if so, how?

Second, metaphysics has to do with the theory of reality. Why are things what they are? Why is there something, rather than nothing? How can there be unity amidst diversity in the universe? Is the world a creation? Is it a brute fact? Is there purpose in the universe?

Third, ethics concerns itself with how one should live. It is the study of right and wrong thoughts, words, and deeds. What is the standard for ethics? Is there an absolute law to which every man must conform? Is there a logical reason for us to ask why someone “ought” to do this or that? Is morality relative to individuals, cultures, or historical periods? Or does morality transcend these boundaries?

Fourth, politics is that branch of philosophy which has to do with the theory of government. What kind of government is the correct one? Should government be limited? Do citizens have a right to private property? What is the function of the civil magistrate?

### *Epistemology*

Epistemology is the key component to any theological or philosophical system. Metaphysics, ethics, and political theory can only be established on an epistemological basis. Without a standard, a basis for belief (epistemology), one cannot know what a true theory of reality is; nor can he know how we must determine what is right and wrong; nor can he know what the proper political theory is. An epistemic base is always primary.

The primacy of epistemology is the reason the *Westminster Confession of Faith* begins with epistemology, the doctrine of revelation. Chapter 1 is “Of the Holy Scripture.” Only after the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments have been established as the starting point of Christian theology, does the *Confession* go on to consider the doctrine of God (metaphysics) in chapters 2-5, the doctrine of the law (ethics) in chapter 19, and the doctrine of the civil magistrate in chapter 23.

Gordon Clark says it this way:<sup>(1)</sup>

While the question of how we can know God is the fundamental question in the philosophy of religion, there lies behind it in general philosophy the ultimate question, How can we

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1. Gordon H. Clark, “How Does Man Know God?” *The Trinity Review* (July/August, 1989), edited by John W. Robbins, 1.

know anything at all? If we cannot talk intelligently about God, can we talk intelligently about morality, about our own ideas, about art, politics – can we even talk about science? How can we know anything? The answer to this question, technically called the theory of epistemology, controls all subject matter claiming to be intelligible or cognitive.

In the history of philosophy, there have been three major non-Christian theories of knowledge: (pure) rationalism, empiricism, and irrationalism.

**FIRST**, *pure rationalism* avers that reason, apart from revelation or sensory experience, provides the primary, or the only, source of truth. The senses are untrustworthy, and our *apriori* knowledge (the knowledge we have before any observation or experience) must be applied to our experience in order for our experience to be made intelligible.

In a Biblical epistemology (which may be called Christian rationalism, or Scripturalism), knowledge comes *through* reason, as one studies the revealed propositions of Scripture. In pure rationalism, on the other hand, knowledge comes *from* reason alone. Unaided human reason becomes the ultimate standard by which all beliefs are judged. Even revelation must be judged by reason. One false assumption made here by the rationalist is that man, apart from revelation, is capable of coming to a true knowledge of at least some things, including the knowledge of God.

There are several errors fundamental to the rationalist system of thought. *First*, fallen men can and do err in their reasoning. The possibility of formal errors in logic is one example. *Second*, there is the issue of a starting point. Where does one start in pure rationalism?

Plato, Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza, all of whom were classified rationalists, had different starting points. Plato began with his eternal Ideas, Descartes with the impossibility of doubting all things (his *cogito ergo sum*), Leibniz with his system of monads, and Spinoza, who was a pantheist, with his *Deus sive Natura* (“God, that is, nature”). It seems that rationalists do not agree on a starting point, an axiom on which their system is to be based.

*Third*, reasoning apart from revelation cannot determine if the world is controlled by an omnipotent, good God, or by an omnipotent demon. *Fourth*, rationalism seems to commit the fallacy of asserting the consequent. A rationalist argument may proceed as follows: If we begin with proposition A, we can justify the claim that we do indeed have knowledge. Now, it is certain that we do have knowledge; therefore proposition A is true. This form of argumentation commits the logical fallacy of asserting the consequent.

*Finally*, it is difficult in pure rationalism to avoid solipsism, which is the belief that the self is all that exists or is capable of being known. Without a divine, universal mind in which all persons and objects participate (such as in Christian theism), it is not possible for the individual to escape his own mind. This is at least one of the reasons that the rationalists have adopted the ontological argument for the existence of God. The nineteenth century German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel attempted to solve this problem by positing an Absolute Mind, but a Mind from which one could not rationally deduce individuals. In Hegel’s view, we have the disappearance of the self into the Absolute Mind (or World Spirit). This is another form of pantheism, which is also a failure, as we shall see below.



**SECOND**, *empiricism* maintains that all knowledge originates in the senses. According to the empiricist, ordinary experience from our physical senses yields knowledge. In empiricism, the scientific method of investigation is stressed. Surely, it is alleged, the numerous triumphs of science in the modern age demonstrate the truth of the empirical method. Science, of course, is based on observation, and repetitive and supposedly independent observation is emphasized. The idea being, that with repetitive observation, knowledge and certainty are increased.

In a consistent empirical epistemology, the mind is considered to be a *tabula rasa* (“blank tablet”) at birth. It has no innate structure, form, or ideas. Therefore, all knowledge must come through the senses.

While rationalists proceed by deduction, empiricists use inductive reasoning as well. One collects his experiences and observations and draws inferences and conclusions from them. This empirical knowledge is *aposteriori*, i.e., it comes after and through experience. One must be able to smell, taste, feel, hear, or see something in order to know it. Once something is experienced (or “sensed”), then the mind, which is a blank tablet prior to experience, somehow remembers, imagines, combines, transposes, categorizes, and formulates the sensory experience into knowledge.

The philosophical problems with empiricism are legion, some of which will be exposed here. First, all inductive arguments are formal logical fallacies. In inductive study, each argument begins with particular premises and ends with a universal conclusion. The difficulty is that it is not possible to collect enough experiences on any subject to reach a universal conclusion. Simply because the system depends on

the collection of experiences for its conclusions, it can never be certain that some new experience or observation will not change its previous conclusions. Thus, it can never be absolutely conclusive. For example, one may observe 1000 crows and find them all to be black. But when crow number 1001 turns out to be an albino, the previous conclusion about crows being black must be revised.

Then too, along this line of thought, keep in mind how often scientists revise and overturn earlier conclusions. The fact is that science can never give us truth; it deals only with theories, not absolutes. It was Einstein who said: “We [scientists] know nothing about it [nature] at all. Our knowledge is but the knowledge of school children.... We shall know a little more than we do now. But the real nature of things – that we shall never know.”<sup>{2}</sup> And philosopher of science Karl Popper wrote: “In science there is no knowledge in the sense that Plato and Aristotle used the word, in the sense which implies finality; in science we never have sufficient reason for belief that we have attained the truth.”<sup>{3}</sup>

*Second*, the senses can and frequently (perhaps always) do deceive us. No one can ever have the same experience twice. The ancient philosopher Heraclitus spoke to this in his well known dictum: “No one ever stands in the same river twice.” Finite things continually change, even as the water in a river continues to flow. In such a system, verification, that is the inferring of a conclusion by good and necessary consequence, is not possible. In fact, the basic axiom of

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2. Cited in Gordon H. Clark, *First Corinthians* (Trinity Foundation, 1991), 128.

3. Cited in John W. Robbins, “An Introduction to Gordon H. Clark,” Part 2, *The Trinity Review* (August, 1993), 3.

empiricism – that theories, ideas, and propositions must be either verified or falsified by sense observation – cannot itself be verified or falsified by sense observation. Thus, empiricism rests on a self-contradictory and therefore false starting point.

*Third*, as we have seen, empiricists maintain that all men are born with a blank mind. But this is not possible. A consciousness which is conscious of nothing is a contradiction in terms. Here too empiricism is self-contradictory.<sup>(4)</sup>

*Fourth*, the truths of mathematics cannot be derived from the senses; the laws of logic cannot be abstracted or obtained from sensation; nor can the senses give us ideas such as “equal,” “parallel,” or “justification.” These are never found in sense experience. No two things we experience are ever perfectly equal, parallel, or just. Rather, these are abstractions that have nothing at all to do with our senses.

These categorical difficulties with empiricism are insuperable. Empiricism cannot tell us how the senses alone give us conceptions. If the “knower” is not already equipped with conceptual elements or ideas (i.e., innate knowledge), how can he ever conceptualize the object sensed? Whereas rationalism, with its concept of universal ideas, gives us an explanation for categories and similarities, empiricism has no explanation for them. Without these, rational discourse is not possible.

*Fifth*, as with pure rationalism, solipsism is inescapable in an empiricist epistemology. One’s sensations are just that: one’s sensa-

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4. John W. Robbins, “An Introduction to Gordon H. Clark,” Part 1, *The Trinity Review* (July, 1993), 4

tions. No one else can experience them. But if this is the case, one cannot be certain that there is an external world. Any evidence that might be offered is just subjective experience.

*Finally*, in ethics, even if we were to assume that empiricism (at best) could tell us what *is*, it can never tell us what *ought to be*. “Ought-ness” can never be derived from “is-ness.” Empirical observations can never give us moral principles. As Gordon Clark states: “A moral principle can only be a divinely revealed prohibition or command.”<sup>(5)</sup> Even in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall, man was dependent on propositional revelation from God for knowledge. By observation alone he could not have determined his duty before God. After the Fall, of course, the problem is worsened by sin and corruption.

In *1 Corinthians* 2:9-10, the apostle Paul distinguished between philosophies built on pure rationalism and empiricism, and propositional revelation from God: “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard [empiricism], nor have entered into the heart [mind] of man [pure rationalism] the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit.” What was Paul’s conclusion? Simply this: neither pure rationalism nor empiricism can yield knowledge. Rather, maintained the apostle, propositional revelation is the *sine qua non* of knowledge.

**THIRD**, *irrationalism*, fostered by such men as Søren Kierkegaard, (to a lesser extent) Immanuel Kant, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and neo-orthodox theologians, is a form of skepticism. It is anti-rational and anti-intellectual. Actual truth, say the skeptics, can never be

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5. Clark, *First Corinthians*, 78.

attained. Rational attempts to explain the world leave us in despair. Reality cannot be communicated propositionally, it must be grasped “personally and passionately” (Kierkegaard). Truth is subjective. Even though man may never know if there is a god who gives purpose and meaning to life, he must nevertheless take a “leap of faith” (Kierkegaard). He must live life as if there is a god, a higher being, a meaningful universe, because not to do so would be worse (Kant).

Irrationalism manifests itself in theological circles in the neo-orthodoxy of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. For these men, logic is disdained. Logic must be curbed to allow for faith. After all, it is alleged, God’s logic is different from “mere human logic,” so we can only find truth in the midst of paradox and contradiction. In this “theology of paradox,” God can even teach us through false statements.

Sadly, irrationality has also affected the orthodox church. Far too many of those within Christian circles have fallen prey to the anti-reason, anti-intellectual, anti-logic movement. The present authors agree with John Robbins who writes: “There is no greater threat facing the true church of Christ at this moment than the irrationalism that controls our entire culture.” We are living, says Robbins, “in the age of irrationalism.” As many philosophical foes as the Christian church has to face, as many false ideas that would vie for supremacy, there is no idea as dangerous “as the idea that we do not and cannot know the truth.”<sup>{6}</sup>

The problem with irrationalism is that when one divorces logic from epistemology, he is left with nothing. Skepticism is self-contradictory.

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6. John W. Robbins, *Scripture Twisting in the Seminaries* (Trinity Foundation, 1985), 110.

dictory, for it asserts with certainty that nothing can be known for certain. Christian theism, on the other hand, maintains, as stated by the *Confession* (1:4) that God “is truth itself”: Father (*Psalms* 31:5), Son (*John* 14:6), and Holy Spirit (*1 John* 5:6), and that truth is propositional and logical. The law of contradiction<sup>7</sup> is a negative test for truth. The reason being that a contradiction is always a sign of error. Contradictory statements cannot both be true (*1 Corinthians* 14:33; *1 Timothy* 6:20).

*In fact, the Bible teaches us that Jesus Christ is the Logic (Logos) of God (John 1:1). He is Reason, Wisdom, and Truth incarnate (1 Corinthians 1:24,30; Colossians 2:3; John 14:6). The laws of logic are not created by God or man; they are the way God thinks. And since the Scriptures are an expression of the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:16), they are God’s logical thoughts. The Bible expresses the mind of God in a logically coherent fashion to mankind.*

Man, as the image bearer of God (*Genesis* 1:26-28), possesses logic inherently as part of the image. Man is “God’s breath” (*Genesis* 2:7; *Job* 33:4), for the Spirit of God breathed into man his spirit or mind, which is the image. Contrary, then, to the seemingly pious nonsense of the irrationalists, Scripture teaches us that there is no such thing as “mere human logic.” We read in *John* 1:9 that Christ, as the *Logos* (Logic) of God is “the true Light which gives light to every man.” This being the case, it is evident that God’s logic and man’s logic are the same logic.

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7. The law of contradiction (or non-contradiction) states that A (which could be any proposition or object) cannot be both B and non-B at the same time and in the same sense.

We should understand, then, that to reason logically is to reason according to Scripture (*Romans* 12:2), which is itself a revelation of God's logical thoughts. Redeemed man must learn progressively to think God's thoughts (*2 Corinthians* 10:5). To quote Clark: "Logic is fixed, universal, necessary, and irreplaceable. Irrationality contradicts the Biblical teaching from beginning to end. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not insane. God is a rational being, the architecture of whose mind is logic."<sup>{8}</sup>

### *Christian Epistemology*

As already studied, the starting point of Christian epistemology is the propositional revelation of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. If we are to avoid the fallacies of pure rationalism, the pitfalls of empiricism, and the skepticism of irrationality, we need an authoritative source of truth. And this source is propositional revelation from the God of Scripture, who "is truth itself." Scripture passages such as *Job* 11:7-9, *Proverbs* 20:24, *Ecclesiastes* 3:11; 7:27-28; 8:10,17, *Matthew* 16:17, *1 Corinthians* 2:9-10, just to list a few, make it clear that apart from Biblical revelation, man cannot truly know God or His creation. Gregg Singer aptly states:<sup>{9}</sup>

It may not be amiss to note that epistemology has become the most profoundly disturbing issue confronting the modern mind, simply because contemporary philosophy has rejected [the] Biblical solution and has sought answers from various

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8. Gordon H. Clark, "God and Logic," *The Trinity Review* (November/December, 1980), edited by John W. Robbins, 4.

9. Singer, *From Rationalism to Irrationality*, 33.

other sources, all of which have led to the despairing conclusion that man simply cannot know reality and that there is no ultimate truth that can be known.

We have seen that every philosophical system must have a starting point which is axiomatic, that is, which cannot be proved. The starting point for Christian philosophy is the Word of God. This is the axiom: *the Bible alone is the Word of God, and it has a systematic monopoly on truth*. The Bible claims to be the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit produces this belief in the minds of God's elect. Therein, the elect acquiesce to the self-authenticating Scriptures. As stated in the *Confession* (1:4-5), the Bible "is to be received [simply] because it is the Word of God," and even though it abundantly manifests itself to be God's Word, "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts." Sometimes this is referred to as "dogmatism," "Biblical presuppositionalism," "Christian rationalism," or "Scripturalism."

All too frequently critics say that such presuppositionalism is nothing more than question begging (*petitio principii*); it is circular reasoning; it assumes what ought to be proved. One cannot assume that the Bible is the Word of God, just because the Bible claims to be the Word of God. First, it is alleged, one must prove that the Bible is indeed the Word of God.

It is the case, of course, that not every axiom is true. There are many false claims and claimants. But it cannot be rationally denied that the Bible claims to be the infallible, inerrant Word of God (*2 Timothy* 3:16-17; *2 Peter* 1:20-21). And this is significant. It is a claim that few writings make. Therefore, since the Bible makes such a



claim, explicitly and pervasively, it is reasonable to believe the witness of the Bible itself.

Second, the *ad hominem* (“to the man”) reply to the critic is that all systems must begin with an indemonstrable starting point. Otherwise, the system could never get started. “Question begging,” in this broad sense of the phrase, is not a characteristic unique to Christianity. It is a necessity for all philosophical systems.

If one could prove that the Bible is the Word of God, then the Bible would not be the starting point. There would be something even before the starting point, which would *then* be the actual starting point. Simply stated, according to Scripture, there is no higher authority than God’s self-authenticating Word. Again, to cite the author of *Hebrews*: “because He [God] could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself” (6:13). One must accept the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments as axiomatic, or there is no knowledge possible at all.

Further, in Christian epistemology, there is no dichotomy between faith (revelation) and reason (logic). The two go hand in hand, because it is Christ the *Logos* who reveals the truth. Christianity is rational. In fact, the Christian faith is fully dependent on the cogency of reason (coherent thinking) for its proclamation and understanding. God communicates to us in a coherent fashion in His Word by means of rational, propositional statements. Revelation can only come to a rational person.

In explaining the relationship between faith (revelation) and reason (logic), Augustine wrote:<sup>{10}</sup>

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10. Augustine, *Letters* 143.7.

For if reason be found contradicting the authority of Divine Scriptures, it only deceives by a semblance of truth, however acute it be, for its deductions cannot in that case be true. On the other hand, if, against the most manifest and reliable testimony of reason, anything be set up claiming to have the authority of the Holy Scriptures, he who does this does it through a misapprehension of what he has read, and is setting up against the truth not the real meaning of Scripture, which he has failed to discover, but an opinion of his own; he alleges not what he has found in the Scriptures, but what he has found in himself as their interpreter.

There is an important philosophical distinction between “knowledge” and “opinion.” There is a difference between that which we “know” and that which we “opine.” Knowledge is not only possessing ideas or thoughts; it is possessing true ideas or thoughts. Knowledge is knowledge of the truth. It is justified true belief. Only the Word of God gives us such knowledge.

Opinions, on the other hand, may be true or false. Natural science is opinion; archaeology is opinion; history (with the exception of Biblical history) is opinion. In these disciplines one does not deal with facts. Here there is no justified true belief. To opine something is not to know it, even though the opinion *may* be true. A schoolboy may guess the correct answer to an arithmetic question, but unless he can show how he got the answer, he cannot be said to *know* it. To cite the *Confession* (1:6), only that which “is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture,” gives us “knowledge.” Truth is found only in the Word of God. Paul speaks to this in *1 Timothy* 6:3-5. According to the

apostle, those who do not agree with the “wholesome” words of Jesus Christ, “the doctrine which is according to godliness,” are those who “know nothing” and are “destitute of the truth.”

Finally, Christian philosophy holds to the coherence theory of truth, rather than the correspondence theory of truth. That is, the Christian statement of the coherence theory of truth avers that whenever a person knows the truth, he knows that which exists in the mind of God; he does not have a mere representation of the truth (as in the correspondence theory of truth); a representation of the truth is not the truth.

In the Biblical view, a proposition is true because God thinks it to be true. And since God is omniscient (knowing all things), if man is going to know the truth, he must know that which is in the mind of God. The same truth that exists in the mind of man exists first in the mind of God. In the coherence theory of truth, the mind and the object known are both part of one system, a system in which all parts are in perfect accord, because they are found in the mind of God.

### *Metaphysics*

The word “metaphysics” is derived from the Greek *meta phusika*, meaning “beyond physics.” As seen, metaphysics has to do with the theory of reality; not just the physical, but also that which transcends the physical. Physical objects may appear to the senses in various ways, but the metaphysician is concerned with what the object truly is. Metaphysics is a study of ultimates.

In the history of non-Christian thought, metaphysicians have usually fallen into one of two camps: monists and pluralists (or atomists). The former aver that all things are forms of one substance or essence,

whereas the latter maintain that all things are forms of several substances or essences. Some monists are materialists (Thales, Heraclitus), and others are idealists or spiritualists (Parmenides). Then too, some pluralists are materialists (Democritus, Epicurus, Empedocles), while others are idealists (Leibniz). But by and large, all metaphysicians are concerned about “the one and the many” problem.

That is, the major issue in the study of metaphysics is the question of “the one and the many.” How can there be so many diverse things in the world, while there also seems to be a basic unity? Amidst much complexity, how is there still simplicity? Which is the basic fact of life, unity or plurality, the one or the many? If the answer to this latter question is “the one,” then unity must have priority over plurality. If, on the other hand, the answer is “the many,” then the individual and particulars have priority. If “the one” is ultimate, then the particulars are degraded. If “the many” is ultimate, then the reverse is true.<sup>[11]</sup>

According to Francis Schaeffer, this question has plagued non-Christian thinkers throughout the history of philosophy. Plato emphasized the universals and Aristotle the particulars. Aquinas (at least implicitly) separated the two in his errant theory of nature (particulars) and grace (universals). Kant and Hegel both attempted to synthesize the one and the many problem by means of reason apart from revelation. Kierkegaard concluded that the answer can only be found in a leap of faith into the realm of universals. Linguistic Analysis philosophers assert that only a perfect language can bring about the desired unity. But all non-Christian philosophy comes short of the solution to the problem. Only Christian philosophy can adequately answer “the

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11. R.J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many* (Fairfax: Thoburn Press, 1978), 2n.

one and the many” question. And the answer lies in the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity. Says Schaeffer, “without the high order of personal unity and diversity as given in the Trinity, there are no answers.”<sup>{12}</sup>

God is “one” in essence, yet three (“many”) distinct persons. He is the eternal “One and Many.” As sovereign God, He created all of the many things in the universe, and He gives them a unified structure. The universe, then, is the temporal “one and many.” Thus, the particular things of the universe act in accordance with the universal dictates of the triune God (*Psalm 147:15-18*). There is order in the universe because there is a sovereign God who created and providentially controls it.

Augustine asserted that the one and the many problem finds its solution in that the particulars of this world have their archetypes in the mind of God. Augustine called these archetypes the “eternal reasons.” God’s eternal reasons are the architectural plans from which He created the world. The world is patterned after the divine propositions of the triune God. Therefore, there is unity amongst diversity.<sup>{13}</sup>

Augustine went on to teach that Jesus Christ, the eternal *Logos* of God, is the one who gives us a coherence between the infinite and the finite, the Creator and the creation. In other words, it is Christ who reveals the solution to the one and the many problem. Apart from a proper understanding of *Logos* theology (i.e., Christ as the eternal

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12. Francis A. Schaeffer, *He is There and He is Not Silent* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1972), 31-67, 14.

13. See Richard E. Bacon, “Two Essays,” a review of *Lord God of Truth*, by Gordon H. Clark, and *Concerning the Teacher*, by Aurelius Augustine (Trinity Foundation, 1994), in *The Blue Banner* (March & April, 1995), 13-15.

Word who came to reveal the truth of God to man), there is no real solution.<sup>{14}</sup>

Differing drastically with the non-Christian views of metaphysics, Scripture teaches that all things exist as they do because the triune God of Scripture is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. As taught in the *Westminster Confession* (5:1):

God the great Creator of all things does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.

Because God is Creator there is something, rather than nothing. And because God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the world is neither a brute fact, nor a purposeless machine. There is order, meaning, and purpose in the universe because it is the purposeful work of the Master Craftsman. And this order, meaning, and purpose is found in the covenant that God has entered into with His creation (*Genesis* 1; 2:15-17; 3:15; 9:9-17; *Jeremiah* 33:19-26). It is “in Him [that] we live and move and have our being” (*Acts* 17:28).

### *Ethics*

Even though persons sometimes consider “ethics” and “morals” to be virtual synonyms, technically, there is a difference between the

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14. See Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), chapters 6 and 8.

two. Ethics is a normative discipline, which seeks to prescribe obligations on mankind. It has to do with what one “ought” to do. Ethics is a matter of authority. Morals, on the other hand, describe the behavior patterns of individuals and societies, i.e., what people do. One’s ethics should determine his morals.

Christian ethics depends on revelation. Christianity maintains that there is only one ethical standard for mankind, and that is the law of God. As stated in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (19:5): God’s “moral law does for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof.” And sin is properly defined, as per the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q 14), as “any want of conformity unto, or transgression of the law of God.” If there were no law of God, then there would be no sin. Our moral conduct, then, is to be guided by the ethical standard of the Word of God. Again to cite the *Confession* (16:1): “Good works are only such as God has commanded in His Holy Word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intention.”

Behind the validity of the moral law of God, is, of course, the authority of the God who gives us the law. The prologue of the Ten Commandments is: “I am the Lord.” Theology and not ethics is primary. The distinction between right or wrong is entirely dependent upon the commandments of God, because He is “the Lord.” The Christian system of ethics is based on the very nature of God Himself. “You shall be holy for I [God] am holy” (*Leviticus* 11:44; *1 Peter* 1:16).

All non-Christian ethics (and morals) are perversions of the only true standard. As Paul points out in the first two chapters of his epistle to the *Romans*, man has suppressed the innate knowledge of God and

His Word, which he knows to be true, and supplanted it with his own false systems.

We have already noted that man was created in the image of God. The Fall, however, left man ethically in a state of total depravity. Unregenerate man is now unable to do anything that pleases God (*Romans* 3:9-18; 8:7-8). His ethical standard is autonomous; it has no eternal reference point. Non-Christian man is on the horns of a dilemma: he is seeking to build an ethical system without a divine, eternal authority behind it. In the words of Christ, fallen man is on sinking sand (*Matthew* 7:26-27).

The Scriptures are clear on this matter. There is a Biblical link between non-Christian worldviews and the practice of those who adhere to them. *Psalms* 14 states the matter plainly. It is “the fool who has said in his heart [that] there is no God” (verse 1a) And, as the Psalmist goes on to say, it is because of this denial of God that “they are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none who does good” (verse 1b). Paul teaches the same thing in *Romans* 3. In verses 10-17, he gives us a catalogue of the sins which infect the unregenerate. Then in verse 18, he sums up the indictment by saying that “there is no fear of God before their eyes.” That is, when man rejects the God of Scripture, it leads to “abominable works.”

There are many non-Christian ethical systems. R.C. Sproul notes that there are presently at least eighty different theories of ethics which are competing for acceptance. Perhaps the two that have had the most (negative) impact on Christianity are legalism and antinomianism, both of which are on what Jesus referred to as “the broad way that leads to destruction” (*Matthew* 7:13-14).<sup>[15]</sup>



Legalism, in its most consistent form, claims that law keeping, by itself, is the savior of both man and society. It concerns itself with external conformity to a standard of law, a standard which is always, in one way or another, a man-made law. As Paul writes, men, “seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (*Romans* 10:3). This form of legalism was adopted by the Pharisees of Jesus’ day (*Matthew* 15:1-9; 23:1-39). It is also the error of Pelagianism.<sup>16</sup> Equally false and dangerous is the semi-Pelagian teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, that justification is a co-mixture of grace and works.

Sometimes, in a less consistent fashion, legalism comes in the form of non-biblical lists of “do’s” and “don’ts.” Other times it is found in mere tradition. But it is always humanistic in origin. Man’s law is set in opposition to the law of God.

Legalism implies, along with Protagoras’ assertion, that “man is the measure” of all things. But if man is the measure of all things, then what one man believes is as true as what any other man believes. Both would be able to claim to be correct. So if one of them believes that the other is wrong, then the second man is necessarily wrong. And if the second man believes that the first is wrong, then the first man is necessarily wrong. Hence, both are right and wrong at the same time, which is a contradiction. And, as we have seen, that which is contradictory must have an inescapably erroneous axiom. Jesus speaks

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15. R.C. Sproul, *Following Christ* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1983), Part Four.

16. Pelagius was a fourth century British monk who propagated this system of legalism. His teachings were staunchly opposed by Augustine.

against legalism in *Matthew* 15 and *Mark* 7. And Paul condemns it in the book of *Galatians*.

Antinomianism (“anti-lawism”) takes several forms: libertinism, gnostic spiritualism, and situation ethics. Libertinism, in one way or another, denies that the moral law of God is binding on mankind today. Sadly, it has found its way into the (pseudo) church. This view is prevalent in Dispensational circles, where Paul’s statement in *Romans* 6:14 is frequently referenced to make the point that in the New Testament age Christians are no longer under law, but under grace: “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

This, however, is a wrong statement and a wrong understanding of the verse. As chapter 19 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* correctly teaches, although the ceremonial laws given to the nation of Israel, “as a church under age,” “are now abrogated,” nevertheless, the Ten Commandments, and “the general equity” of Israel’s judicial laws, do continue “for ever to bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof,” and “neither does Christ in the Gospel [New Testament age] any way dissolve, but much strengthens this obligation.”

As the *Confession* goes on to say (even citing *Romans* 6:14 as a proof text), “although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs, and binds them to walk accordingly.” That is to say, in *Romans* 6:14, the apostle Paul did not deny that Christians, or “the justified,” are obligated to obey the law of God; rather, he taught that they are not under the law as a curse

(confirm *Galatians* 3:10-13). Further, he makes this clear in an earlier passage in the same epistle, where he writes: “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law” (*Romans* 3:31).

Gnostic spiritualism, often found in Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, as well as some monastic orders, elevates feelings and mystical experiences above the law of God. Those who are “in the know” claim a superior source of knowledge or form of knowledge. The mandates of Scripture should be set aside, it is alleged, when such an experience occurs. The Spirit of God, say the Gnostics, guides them apart from (without the need of) Biblical revelation.

According to Scripture, however, the Holy Spirit is not antinomian. He is “the Spirit of truth,” who guides the church “into all the truth” (*John* 16:13). But He does so by means of Scripture, not apart from it (*John* 16:13-15; *1 Corinthians* 2:10-16). It is the Scripture, writes Paul, not mystical experiences, that thoroughly equips the church “for every good work” (*2 Timothy* 3:16-17). Further, writes Solomon: “He who trusts in his own heart [feelings] is a fool” (*Proverbs* 28:26).

Situation ethics, or the “new morality,” is a construct which denies that there are any absolute truths. Rather, “the law of love” is to dictate one’s ethics in each specific situation. That is, love always “trumps” law, and makes the action correct. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Emil Brunner, the Marquis de Sade, and Bishop J.A.T. Robinson, to name just a few, are notable proponents of this system. Joseph Fletcher, however, is perhaps the major popularizer of situation ethics.

As noted, in situation ethics, the only absolute, if it may be called that, is “the law of love.” But it is a “law” defined by Fletcher, not by

the Word of God. Whereas “love,” from a Biblical standpoint, is objective in nature – defined by Jesus as “keep[ing] My commandments” (*John* 14:15), and by Paul as “the fulfillment of the law [of God]” (*Romans* 13:10) – to Fletcher and the situation ethicists, it is merely personal and subjective. The “situation” dictates; there is no norm, no absolute standard by which all is to be judged. Situation ethics has more in common with vague altruism in contradistinction to Christian ethics, where love is manifested in living life in obedience to the law of God: “This is love, that we walk according to His [God’s] commandments” (2 *John* 6).

All non-Christian ethical systems are bankrupt. They have no eternal standard upon which to stand. They have no basis from which to make assertions. Having rejected divine revelation, these systems provide no certain ground for any moral laws (*Matthew* 7:26-27). The preacher of *Ecclesiastes* summarizes man’s ethical obligation when he writes: “Let us hear the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil” (12:13-14).

### *Politics*

The Christian worldview maintains that there are three main Biblical institutions ordained by God: the family, the church, and the civil magistracy (or state). The institutions exist, as with all things, to glorify God (*1 Corinthians* 10:31). They are separate as to function, but not as to authority. All three are governed by Scripture. The family is the primary Biblical institution. It was the first one established (*Gene-*

sis 1-2), and, in a sense, the other two institutions are founded upon the family.<sup>{17}</sup>

The second Biblical institution is the church.<sup>{18}</sup> Theologians distinguish between the visible and the invisible church. The former, according to the *Confession* (25:1), “consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, and of their children.” The invisible church, on the other hand, comprises the true saints (the elect) of all time, even those not yet born. Teaches the *Confession* (25:1): “The catholic or universal church which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all.”

The third Biblical institution, which is our present focus, is the civil magistracy. The difference between this institution and the other two is that it is, in the words of Augustine, a “necessary evil.”<sup>{19}</sup> That is, the civil magistracy is itself made necessary due to the Fall of man and the major purpose of the state is to punish evil doers (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). And for this purpose the state is “God’s minister” (Romans 13:4,6). As taught in the *Confession* (23:1): “God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates, to be, under Him, over the people, for His own glory, and the

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17. For a detailed study of the family and the various duties associated with that institution, consult the audio tape series, *A Directory of Domestic Duties* by Richard Bacon (Rowlett, TX: Blue Banner Publications, 1995).

18. For a further study of the doctrine of the church, see W. Gary Crampton and Richard E. Bacon, *Built Upon The Rock* (Dallas: Blue Banner Ministries, 1999).

19. Augustine, *City of God* 19.13-15.

public good: and, to this end, has armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers.”

Two major errors have developed in the history of the church-state relationship: Papalism and Erastianism. The former avers that the church (namely, the pope) is to rule both church and state. The latter maintains that both institutions are to be under the headship of the civil magistrate.

The Biblical view avoids both errors, and teaches that the church and the state are separate God ordained institutions, under the law of God. Again, they are separate as to function, but not as to their authority. Further, it is certainly a fair statement that any attempt to base a theory of the civil magistrate on secular axioms, rather than on Scripture, will logically result in either anarchy or totalitarianism.

In *Proverbs* 14:34, we read: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” What constitutes the righteousness that exalts a nation? How is righteousness defined? First, the triune God of Scripture is righteous: “Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His [God’s] throne” (*Psalms* 97:2). And, writes the Psalmist, so is God’s Word: “The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting....For all Your commandments are righteous” (*Psalms* 119:144,172). The apostle Paul, in agreement with the Old Testament, writes: God’s law is “holy and just and good” (*Romans* 7:12).

It would seem, then, that according to the Bible, a nation is considered righteous when it seeks to honor the God of Scripture by applying His righteous standard (i.e., His Word) to every facet of the nation’s interests. This is the teaching of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (19:2,5), which states that God’s law is a “perfect rule of righ-

teousness,” which does “for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others [to include nations], to the obedience thereof.”

Turning away from God’s law as the infallible standard of the nation, on the other hand, constitutes the “sin [which] is a reproach to any people.” This is confirmed in *Proverbs* 29:18, where we read: “Where there is no vision [Biblical revelation], the people perish, but happy is he who keeps the law.”

The present writers agree with John Robbins, that according to the Scriptures, there are at least seven basic values which are essential for a nation to be considered righteous:<sup>{20}</sup>

First: A Recognition of the Sovereignty of God. God’s sovereignty is universal: “The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all” (*Psalms* 103:19); “Our God is in heaven, He does whatever He pleases” (*Psalms* 115:3). As stated in the *Confession* (5:1): “God, the great Creator of all things, does uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will.”

Regarding national matters, writes Dr. Robbins, the recognition of the sovereignty of God “means that God, not the state, society, race,

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20. John W. Robbins, “The Ethics and Economics of Health Care,” *Journal of Biblical Ethics in Medicine* (Florence, SC: Biblical Medical Ethics, Inc.), edited by Hilton P. Terrell, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1994, 23-24. Dr. Robbins lists ten basic values in his article. The present authors have grouped some of them with others to come up with a total of seven. All of the quotes attributed to Dr. Robbins in this book come from the pages listed.

or church is the source of security.” Says the Psalmist: “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes [magistrates]” (118:8-9); “Vain is the help of man. Through God we will do valiantly, for it is He who will tread down our enemies” (60:11-12). When the people of a nation look to the civil magistrate, or to the church (as in Roman Catholicism), rather than to God, to meet their needs, they have denied the sovereignty of God.

Second: Limited Government. The fact that God is sovereign necessitates limiting the power and authority of all human institutions. In a Biblical society, the civil government would not have the authority to regulate banking practices, to impose taxes over ten percent, to establish professional armies, to run the postal department, to redistribute property, to make zoning laws, to buy and sell real estate, to borrow money, and so forth. In *Romans* 13 and *I Peter* 2, we read that the authority of the magistrate is limited to that of defense and justice. In the words of the *Confession* (23:1): “God, the supreme Lord and King of all the world, has ordained civil magistrates to be under Him over the people, for His own glory, and the public good; and, to this end, has armed them with the power of the sword, for the defense and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil doers.”

Third: The Primacy of the Individual. The Reformation stressed this principle. It is likewise rooted in the teaching of the *Westminster Confession*’s doctrine of individual election (chapter 3), individual calling or regeneration (chapter 10), individual justification (chapter 11), individual adoption (chapter 12), individual sanctification (chapter 13), and individual glorification (chapters 32-33).



The primacy of the individual in no way denies that God has from all eternity entered into a covenant with His elect people (chapter 7), which is the church of Jesus Christ (chapter 25), and is a communion of saints (chapter 26). But God fulfills His covenant historically through the salvation of individual saints. Every man, woman, and child is individually responsible to God. Neither one's bloodline nor national citizenship saves him: "But as many as received Him [Christ], to them He gave the authority to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (*John* 1:12-13).

The numerous individual freedoms and protections that citizens of a nation should enjoy, are derived from this doctrine: freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and so forth. Also derived from this doctrine is individual responsibility within society. No able-bodied person should be "on the government dole." The Christian state should not be directly involved in welfare. In the words of Paul: "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (*2 Thessalonians* 3:10). Further, God has revealed specific non-governmental approaches to poverty relief (i.e., the family, the church). Government opposes God when it opposes His revelation.

Fourth: The Right to Private Property. Two of the Ten Commandments, at least implicitly, teach the right to private property: "You shall not steal; [and] you shall not covet" (*Exodus* 20:15,17). If all property were held in common, stealing and coveting would not be possible. Too, in *Matthew* 20 Jesus teaches the parable of the workers in the vineyard, in which He concludes that it is lawful for a man to do what he wishes with his own possessions (verse 15). Then there is the

Biblical teaching on Naboth's vineyard in *1 Kings 21*, where we are taught that the civil magistrate is forbidden to expropriate private property. This consideration makes "eminent domain" laws for "public projects" nothing other than ungodly intrusions.

Included in the right to private property is the Biblical right to bear arms. In *Exodus 22:1-2* and *1 Samuel 13:19-22*, for example, we read that individual citizens have the Biblical right to defend themselves, implicitly teaching that they have a right "to keep and bear arms."<sup>(21)</sup> And in *Luke 22:36*, Jesus explicitly tells His disciples to go out and "buy a sword." In fact, teaches Jesus, it is so important that a man be able to defend himself, that, if necessary, he should "sell his garment" to secure the weapon.

Fifth: The Protestant Work Ethic. This principle is rooted in the Fourth Commandment: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (*Exodus 20:9*). Hard work is not a curse of the Fall. Even prior to the Fall, Adam was commanded "to tend and keep" the Garden of Eden (*Genesis 2:15*). In *Proverbs 14:23* we read that "in all labor there is profit." Man is to work for a living. As Robbins says: "What Max Weber called the Protestant work ethic is itself a bundle of economic virtues: Honesty, punctuality, diligence, obedience to the Fourth Commandment – 'six days you shall labor,' obedience to the Eighth Commandment – 'you shall not steal,' and obedience to the Tenth Commandment – 'you shall not covet.' A recognition of the significance of productive work grew out of the Bible and the Reformation."

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21. Interestingly, the Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America (the "right of the people to keep and bear arms") is based on *1 Samuel 13:19-22*.

The Protestant work ethic also includes a proper understanding of the Sabbath principle. Man is to work six days a week, but he is to realize that “the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (*Exodus* 20:10-11).

Sixth: The Rule of Law. According to chapter 19 of the *Confession*, a righteous nation must establish legal principles which are founded upon the Ten Commandments and the “general equity” of the Judicial laws which God gave to Israel. All substantive law is to be founded on the teaching of Scripture. It is also mandatory that the settled laws of the nation be applicable to all persons, including leaders. No one within the nation is above the law. This is the Puritan principle of *lex rex* (“the law is king”), rather than *rex lex* (“the king is law”).

William Symington sums up the obligation of the nations to adopt the law of God as their national standard as follows:<sup>[22]</sup>

It is the duty of nations, as the subjects of Christ, to take His law as their rule. They are apt to think it enough that they take, as their standard of legislation and administration, human reason, natural conscience, public opinion, or political expediency. None of these, however, nor indeed all of them together, can supply a sufficient guide in affairs of state. Of course, hea-

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22. William Symington, *Messiah the Prince* (Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1990), 234-235.

then nations, who are not in possession of the revealed will of God [special revelation], must be regulated by the law of nature [general revelation]: but this is no good reason why those who have a revelation of the divine will should be restricted to the use of a more imperfect rule. It is absurd to contend that, because civil society is founded in nature, men are to be guided, in directing its affairs and consulting its interests, solely by the light of nature....The truth is, that revelation is given to man to supply the imperfections of the law of nature; and to restrict ourselves to the latter, and renounce to former, in any case in which it is competent to guide us, is at once to condemn God's gift and to defeat the end for which it was given. We contend, then, that the Bible is to be our rule, not only in matters of a purely religious nature, in matters connected with conscience and the worship of God, but in matters of a civil or political nature. To say that in such matters we have nothing to do with the Bible, is to maintain what is manifestly untenable. To require the nations, who possess the sacred volume, to confine themselves, in their political affairs, to the dim light of nature, is not more absurd than it would be to require men, with the sun in the heavens, to shut out its full blaze and go about their ordinary duties by the feeble rays of a taper [candle]. Indeed, if nations are moral subjects [and they are], they are bound to regulate their conduct by whatever law their moral Governor has been pleased to give them; and as they are subjects of the Mediator, they must be under the law of the Mediator as contained in the Scriptures.....In the Holy Scriptures of truth, He has given them a fairer and more complete exhibition of the principles of immutable and eternal justice, than that which is to be found in

the law of nature. We have only to look into the volume of revelation itself, to have the reasonings confirmed.

Seventh: Republicanism. Modeled on the Presbyterian form of church government, a Biblical nation is to be a republic, not a monarchy or democracy. God warned Israel against a monarchy in *1 Samuel* 8. Among other things, said the Lord, the monarch would use compulsory labor, establish bureaucracies, impose excessive taxes, and nationalize the means of production. In a monarchy, the voice of the king is as the voice of God.

A democratic society, on the other hand, is one based on majority rule. It is law by majority opinion, what Schaeffer refers to as “the dictatorship of 51%, with no controls and nothing with which to challenge the majority.”<sup>[23]</sup> When a nation is governed by the majority, the voice of the people becomes as the voice of God.

Neither a monarchy nor a democracy is Biblical. The Biblical form of government is a republic, wherein the nation is governed by established laws. A Christian republic is to be governed by constitutional and Biblical law, and administered by just and godly representatives (*2 Samuel* 23:3) elected by the people. There is to be a division of powers and separation of powers, so that no government or branch of government has a monopoly of jurisdiction. As Dr. Robbins writes, a republican form of government “is designed to fragment political power so that it cannot threaten the lives, liberties, and property” of the citizens. Interestingly, *Isaiah* 33:22 was an important verse in the founding of the United States of America. Outlined in this verse are the three branches of government: judicial, legislative, and executive:

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23. Schaeffer, *Works*, IV:27.

“For the Lord is our Judge [judicial], the Lord is our Lawgiver [legislative], the Lord is our King [executive]; He will save us.”

These seven values are foundational to any society that would be righteous. They are foundational because they are based upon the infallible, inerrant Word of God. If these are abandoned or subverted, the moral power and authority of a nation will be lost. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (*Proverbs* 14:34) and “if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do” (*Psalms* 11:3)?

### *Conclusion*

Christianity is a complete philosophical system that is founded upon the axiomatic starting point of the Bible as the Word of God. As the *Westminster Confession* (1:6) teaches: “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” Hence, the whole Christian system proceeds from the single axiom, that the Bible alone is the Word of God, and therefore authoritative, to thousands of theorems.

In this system, each of the parts we have studied – epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and politics – is important. And the ideas found therein are all arranged in a logical system, with each part mutually reinforcing the others. If the reader is concerned about following the dictates of Scripture, by having his mind transformed by the teachings of Scripture (*Romans* 12:1-2), and bringing all thoughts into captivity to the obedience of Christ (*2 Corinthians* 10:5), then he must learn to

think as the *Logos* of God Himself thinks: logically and systematically. This accomplished, the reader will have learned the only viable philosophy, a philosophy “according to Christ” (*Colossians* 2:8), which is founded upon the Word of God.<sup>{24}</sup>

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24. John W. Robbins, *What is Christian Philosophy?* (Trinity Foundation, 1994), 7.





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## Chapter 3: A Biblical Theodicy

According to *1 Peter* 3:15, it is the responsibility of the Christian theist to defend the Christian worldview against the many challenges brought against it. Writes Peter: “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.” Certainly, one of the most serious challenges to Christian theism is the problem of evil. Thomas Warren, for example, writes that “it is likely the case that no charge has been made with a greater frequency or with more telling force against theism of Judeo-Christian (Biblical) Christian tradition” than the complication of the existence of evil.<sup>[1]</sup> Ronald Nash agrees; he states that “the most serious challenge to theism was, is, and will continue to be the problem of evil.”<sup>[2]</sup>

Even the Biblical writers themselves address the topic of God and evil. The prophet Habakkuk complained: “You [God] are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do You look on those who deal treacherously, and hold Your tongue when the wicked devours one more righteous than he?” (*Habakkuk* 1:13). And Gideon contemplated: “O my Lord, if the Lord is with us, why then has all this [hardship] befallen us?” (*Judges* 6:13).

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1. Thomas B. Warren, *Have Atheists Proved There is No God?* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1972), vii.

2. Nash, *Faith & Reason*, 177.

If, according to the Bible, God, who is omnipotent and omnibenevolent, has eternally decreed all that ever comes to pass, and if He sovereignly and providentially controls all things in His created universe (including evil), how is He not the author of evil? How can evil exist in the world? How do we justify the actions of God in the midst of evil, suffering, and pain? These are the questions of “theodicy.” The word, which was supposedly coined by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, is derived from two Greek words (*theos* “God” and *dike* “justice”), and has to do with the justification of the goodness and righteousness of God in light of the evil in the world.

As we will see, the problem of evil is not nearly the problem it is made out to be. In fact, as Gordon Clark says, “whereas various other views [philosophies] disintegrate at this point, the system known as Calvinism and expressed in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* offers a satisfactory and completely logical answer.”<sup>[3]</sup> The answer, as we will see, lies in our epistemological starting point: the Word of God.

Throughout the centuries, there have been numerous non-Christian attempts to deal with this issue. Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Christian Scientist Church, for one, simply denies that evil exists, i.e., it is illusory. Others, such as E.S. Brightman and Rabbi Harold Kushner, opt for a finite god, who is limited in power. Hence, he cannot be blamed for the existence of evil in the world.

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3. Gordon H. Clark, *God and Evil: The Problem Solved* (Trinity Foundation, 1996), 7. In the opinions of the present authors, this is the best book ever written on the subject of theodicy.

Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, on the other hand, posit some form of ultimate dualism. Good and evil co-exist independently, thus accounting for the mixture of good and evil in the world. Aristotle conceived of god as the Unmoved Mover, who was not really concerned about the things of this world. This being so, the relation of Aristotle's god to evil and the moral endeavors of men is inconsequential. Leibniz rationalistically contended that God was morally bound to create "the best of all possible worlds." Since there is evil in the world, God must have seen that it was the best of all worlds to create.

These theories, of course, fall far short of a Biblical theodicy. Scripture clearly teaches that sin is not illusory (*Genesis* 3). Further, the God of Scripture is no finite deity. He is the Creator *ex nihilo* and Sustainer of heaven and earth (*Genesis* 1:1; *Hebrews* 1:1-3), who is very much concerned with His universe (*Psalms* 104) and the moral affairs of men (*Exodus* 20:1-17). Moreover, the God of Scripture brooks no competition (*Job* 33:13; *Psalms* 115:3), so that there can be no form of ultimate dualism.

Leibniz is also in error. He speaks of God's moral responsibility to create the best out of a number of possible worlds, each of which is more or less good. Leibniz has things in reverse. God did not choose this world because it was the best. It was the best because He chose it. Calvin clearly understood this principle. He wrote:<sup>(4)</sup>

For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever He wills, by the very fact that He wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so willed you are seeking something greater and higher than

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4. Calvin, *Institutes* III:23:2.

God's will, which cannot be found.

Likewise, Leibniz's view tends to eliminate man's responsibility for sin by representing sin as little more than a misfortune that has befallen him. Again, the Bible is very clear that man is responsible for his sin. In David's prayer of repentance in *Psalms* 51, for example, he puts the blame, not on God, nor on his mother, nor on Adam, all of which are second causes in the chain leading to his sinful actions. David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, places the blame squarely upon the immediate cause: himself.

The great Christian philosopher, Augustine, also pondered the theodicy issue. He taught that since God created all things good, evil cannot have a separate or independent existence. Evil is the absence of good, as darkness is the absence of light. Evil is parasitic, in that it cannot exist apart from good.

This being so, said Augustine, evil cannot be the efficient cause of sin; rather, it is a deficient cause in man. Evil is the result of man's turning away from the good commands of God, to seek a lesser good: the will of the creature, man. It is man, not God, who is the author of sin. This, though, is no solution to the problem. As Clark states: "deficient causes, if there are such things, do not explain why a good God does not abolish sin and guarantee that men always choose the highest good."<sup>(5)</sup>

Arminianism, an ostensible Christian system, also fails to give us a satisfactory Biblical theodicy. Arminian theologians attribute the problem of evil to the free will of man. In his freedom, Adam chose to

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5. Clark, *God and Evil*, 9.

sin, apart from God's will. Adam had a "liberty of indifference" to the will of God. God merely permitted man to sin.

The idea of God's merely permitting man to sin, however, is wholly unbiblical, and does not give us a solution. God permitted Satan to afflict Job (*Job* 1-2). But because this permission was necessary prior to the affliction, God is hardly exonerated. If He could have prevented Job's trial, and yet willingly approved it, how can God be considered as less reprehensible than if He decreed it. This notion of permission and free will cannot exist with the omnipotence of God.

Neither is the Arminian view of free will compatible with God's omniscience, because omniscience renders the future certain. If God foreknows all things, then of necessity they will come to pass; otherwise, they could not have been "foreknown." God foreknew, even foreordained, the crucifixion of His Son by the hands of sinful men. Yet, Scripture tells us that the godless men who carried out the crucifixion are held responsible for their wicked actions (*Acts* 2:22-23; 4:27-28). Could they have done differently? Could Judas Iscariot have not betrayed Jesus Christ? To ask these questions is to answer them; of course not! The Bible teaches us that God decrees all things that will ever come to pass: "Known to God from eternity are all His works" (*Acts* 15:18). Hence, Arminianism's attempted refuge in free will is both futile and false; for the Bible consistently denies the Arminians' view of free will.

Reformed theology does not disavow the fact that Adam (and all men after him) had a "free will" in the sense of "free moral agency." All men have freedom of choice in this sense of the term. Men of necessity choose to do what they want to do; in fact, they could not do otherwise. What Reformed theology does deny is that man has the

“freedom of indifference.” His freedom to choose is always governed by factors: his own intellections, habits, and so forth. Of course, all choices are subject to the eternal decrees of God.

As mentioned, this is not only true of man after the Fall. It was also true of Adam prior to *Genesis* 3. The major difference is that post-fall man, who still maintains his free moral agency, has lost that which Adam originally possessed: the ability to choose what God requires. Fallen man, in his state of “total depravity,” always chooses to do that which he desires, but his sin nature dictates that he always chooses evil (*Romans* 3:9-18; 8:7-8; *Ephesians* 4:17-19). The “ability” to choose good is only restored through regeneration (*John* 3:3-8; *2 Corinthians* 3:17).

Man, then, is never indifferent in his willing to do anything. God has determined all things that will ever come to pass. Yet, this does not undermine the responsibility of man. There is no disjunction here. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (3:1; 5:2,4) correctly states that:

God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, He orders them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extends itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men, and that not by a bare permission, but such as has joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; yet so as the sinfulness thereof proceeds only from the creature, and not from God; who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.

God, says the *Confession*, is the sovereign first cause of all things, many of which occur through the free acts of men, which are second causes. The end which is decreed by God must never be separated from the means which He has also decreed, as second causes. And this is the reason, according to the *Confession*, that God is not to be considered “the author or approver of sin.” God is the sovereign first cause of sin, but He is not the author of sin. Only second causes sin, and therefore they alone can be authors of sin.

This view taught by the Westminster divines is the Calvinistic concept of “determinism.” The word determinism often carries with it an evil connotation, but this should not be the case. In actuality, determinism expresses a very Biblical and high view of God, and it gives us the only plausible theodicy. God determines or decrees every event of history and every action of man.

Moreover, whatever God decrees is right simply because He decrees it. God can never err. God, says the Scripture, answers to no one: “He does not give an accounting of any of His words” (*Job* 33:13). He is the lawgiver (*Isaiah* 33:22); man is under the law (*sub*

*lego*). God is accountable to no one. He is *ex lex* (“above the law”). The Ten Commandments are binding on man, not God. Additionally, the only precondition for moral responsibility is a lawgiver – in this case God. Thus man is necessarily responsible for his sin, and God is completely absolved of being the author of sin.

The determinism taught in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is not the same thing as fatalism. In fatalism, god, or the gods, or the Fates, determine all things, while man remains completely passive or even opposed to his fate. In such a system, man could not logically be held responsible for his sinful actions. In Biblical determinism, on the other hand, God sovereignly determines all things, but He also holds man responsible, because man and his “freely chosen” sinful actions are the second causes through which things are determined to occur.

But someone may ask: “Is not murder sin and contrary to the will of God? How can it be that God wills it? The answer is found in *Deuteronomy* 29:29: “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.” In this verse, Moses distinguishes between the decretive will of God (“secret things”) and the preceptive will of God (“those things which are revealed”). God’s preceptive will is found in Scripture. Therein we learn what God requires of man. God’s decretive will, on the other hand, is the cause of every event. Man is responsible to obey the preceptive will, not the decretive will. In the example used above, God from all eternity decreed Christ’s crucifixion (*Revelation* 13:8), yet when it was carried out by the hands of sinful men (*Acts* 2:22-23; 4:27-28), it was contrary to the moral law of God, i.e., God’s preceptive will. Thus we can argue from the greater to the lesser (*a majore ad minore*) that if the



most evil act every performed by men was both free *and* determined, then so too are all less evil acts.

Standing on the “rock foundation” of the Word of God as his axiomatic starting point (*Matthew* 7:24-25), the Christian theist has an answer to the theodicy issue. God, who is altogether holy and who can do no wrong, sovereignly decrees evil things to take place for His own good purposes (see *Isaiah* 45:7; *Amos* 3:6). And just because He has decreed it, it is right. As Reformer Jerome Zanchius taught:<sup>(6)</sup>

The will of God is so the cause of all things, as to be itself without cause, for nothing can be the cause of that which is the cause of everything....Hence we find every matter resolved ultimately into the mere sovereign pleasure of God....God has no other motive for what He does than *ipsa voluntas*, His mere will, which will itself is so far from being unrighteous that it is justice itself.

It is good, then, that sin exists. God has decreed it and it is working for the ultimate: His glory.

With these Biblical premises in mind, it is easy to answer anti-theists, such as David Hume, who argue that the pervasiveness of evil in the world militates against the existence of the Christian God. Hume argues as follows:<sup>(7)</sup> First, an omnibenevolent deity will prevent evil from occurring. Second, an omniscient, omnipotent deity is able to prevent evil. Third, evil exists in the world. Fourth, therefore,

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6. Cited in Gordon H. Clark, *An Introduction to Christian Philosophy* (Trinity Foundation, 1993), 113-114.

7. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, part 10.

either God is not omnibenevolent, or He is not omniscient or omnipotent.

The problem with Hume's argument is his starting point. His first premise is false, therefore, his conclusion is invalid. The Christian theist would counter with the following argument: First, the omnibenevolent God of Scripture will prevent all evil, unless He, as all wise, has a purpose for its existence (*Psalms* 76:10). Second, the omniscient and omnipotent God of Scripture is able to prevent all evil (*Daniel* 4:35). Third, Scripture teaches us that evil exists in the world (*Romans* 8:19-25). Fourth, therefore, the omnibenevolent, omniscient, omnipotent God of Scripture, in His wise plan for His creation, does have a purpose for the existence of evil (*Genesis* 50:20). And ultimately it will accomplish His good purpose.

It is all a matter of one's starting point, his epistemic base. With the Bible as the axiom, the existence of evil is not really the problem it is made out to be. In fact, the existence of evil is far more problematic in a non-Christian worldview. Without an eternal reference point to tell us what is right and wrong, good and bad, one cannot define evil. What makes evil, evil? How do we know? The Christian has an answer to these questions, whereas the non-believer does not.

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## Chapter 4: False Philosophical Systems

From a Biblical standpoint, a false philosophical system is one that teaches anything contrary to the Word of God (*Colossians 2:8 – apate*). In *Genesis 3* we learn why false philosophical systems exist. It is due to sin and the Fall of man. And in *Romans 1*, the apostle Paul elaborates on this. The full-orbed Gospel of Jesus Christ, says the apostle “is the power of God unto salvation.” It alone provides solutions to the problems of life; it alone answers life’s questions; it is the “salvation” of every area, every aspect, of life. For in it is revealed “the righteousness of God...from faith to faith” (verses 16-17).

But, writes Paul, fallen man has turned aside from God’s revelation. He inescapably knows the God of Scripture from general revelation, yet he suppresses, or holds in unrighteousness, the knowledge which he possesses (verses 18-21). Man’s “reasoning” has become faulty (verse 21). Man’s philosophical problem stems from his “knowing” rebellion against the true God. And, having rejected God, he has chosen to serve the creation, rather than the Creator (verses 22-25). The noetic effects of sin have corrupted fallen man’s ability to philosophize in a godly manner. This being the case, false philosophical systems, in one way or another, deny or misinterpret God as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Too, they often elevate one aspect of the creation above all others.

Worldviews are recognizable by the suffix “ism.” This suffix makes that to which it is affixed a worldview. John Calvin,

for example, was a sixteenth century Reformer, and a master theologian. “Calvinism,” on the other hand, is that system of thought (or worldview) adopted by those who adhere to the basic teachings of John Calvin, and which is best summarized in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms*. This system is frequently referred to as Reformed theology.

Another example of an “ism” is “secular humanism.” According to Scripture, “humans” (human beings) are persons created in the image of God (*Genesis* 1:26-28). “Secular humanism,” however, is a worldview which makes man the measure of all things. It basically elevates man to the level of deity. It is a false worldview.

The number of false worldviews (“isms”) is legion. Some of these are overviewed below.

### ***False Theism***

Theism is that worldview that maintains that there is a god who transcends the universe which He created and sustains. Christianity, traditional Judaism, and Islam are all theistic worldviews.

Christianity is both monotheistic and trinitarian. As taught in the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Q 5-6): “There is but one only, the living and true God....[Further] there are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance [essence], equal in power and glory.” Herein lies one of the major differences between Christianity and these other two theistic systems. Whereas both traditional Judaism and Islam are monotheistic, neither is trinitarian.

Two other major heresies within theistic systems are subordinationism (Arianism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism) and modalism (Sabellianism). Subordinationists teach that there is only one God: the Father. The Son and the Holy Spirit are lesser deities, if divine at all. They are not eternal beings; thus they are subordinated to the Father.

Modalism, on the other hand, avers that God is one in essence and one in person. "Son" and "Holy Spirit" are names used with "Father" to describe the different roles, or "modes," of God. When we speak of God as Creator we call Him Father; when we speak of Him as Redeemer we call Him Son; and when we refer to God as Illuminator and Regenerator we use the name Holy Spirit. But, according to this false theory, these are merely names for the various roles or modes of the divine being.

### *Atheism*

Atheism expresses itself in different ways. But in general, atheists, in one way or another, deny the existence of an infinite and eternal God, such as the God of Christian theism. As taught by atheist Carl Sagan, all there is and ever will be is the universe in which we live.

On one end of the spectrum we have agnostics (such as David Hume). Agnosticism is one form of atheism, which does not openly deny the existence of God, but which questions His knowability. An agnostic is skeptical, and as we have seen, skepticism as a worldview is contradictory. When one asserts that we cannot know if God exists, he has made a certain statement about that which he says we cannot be certain. And such a statement is self-referentially absurd.

On the other end of the spectrum of atheism we have humanism or naturalism (Karl Marx, Ludwig Feuerbach). This system of thought is purely anthropocentric, wherein man, as the measure of all things, is virtually deified. Man is the *summum bonum* of creation; he is ultimate. Feuerbach, for example, claimed that “man is the god of man.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Atheism is naturally materialistic. This is recognizable in the classic statement of Feuerbach that “a man is what he eats.” It is also noticeable in the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin. Evolutionism is a form of humanism which absolutizes the origin of the biotic aspect of the universe. Man is purely a material being. Man does not have a mind (he thinks with his brain), and belief in life beyond the grave is pure superstition.

In summarizing some of humanism’s central teachings, R.C. Sproul points out its irrational nature:

Man is a cosmic accident. He emerges from the slime by chance. He is a grown up germ. He is moving inexorably toward annihilation. Yet man is a creature [sic]<sup>[2]</sup> of supreme dignity. He lives his life between two poles of meaninglessness. He comes from nothing; he goes to nothing. His origin is meaningless, his destiny is meaningless. Yet, somehow, between his origin and his destination, he acquires supreme dignity. Where

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1. Confirm Ludwig Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 17; where Feuerbach writes: “This doctrine of mine is briefly as follows: Theology is anthropology.”

2. A consistent Darwinist would not call man a “creature,” because that would imply that man was created by a creator God.

does he get it? Out of thin air.<sup>{3}</sup>

Another form of atheism is (atheistic)<sup>{4}</sup> existentialism. Existentialism teaches, as per the dictum of Jean-Paul Sartre, that “existence precedes essence.” Here particulars are important, not universals. There are men, but there is no “man.” And whatever men may become (their essence), they make of themselves, because there is no divine essence who creates or produces the essence of man.

Existentialism is closely related to pragmatism (where the end justifies the means), relativism (where truth is relative), and secularism (with its accent on the temporal, the here and now). In elevating existence above essence, men become their own masters; freedom reigns supreme. When Sartre describes man as a “useless passion,” we are to understand that in existentialism, men are not to be viewed so much in terms of their minds or thoughts, but of their feelings, their passions. And ultimately their passions are “useless.” Life is little more than the “theater of the absurd.” The only genuinely free act, then, is suicide.

Existentialism places a strong emphasis on the experience of the present at the cost of the past and future. There are no ethical absolutes; truth is individualistic and subjective (there are “truths,” but no “truth”). As Fedor Dostoevsky said it: “If there is no God, all things are permissible.” Existentialism logically leads to either nihilism and

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3. Sproul, *Lifeviews*, 71.

4. The word atheistic is added in parentheses before existentialism because there is a form of existentialism referred to as “Christian existentialism,” which is a contradiction of terms.

utter despair (Friedrich Nietzsche) or to irrationalism (Søren Kierkegaard<sup>5</sup>).

### *Deism*

Deists (Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin), recognizing that there is a need for a creator of the existing universe, maintain that there is a god who creates the world. But this god remains transcendent; he does not enter into the affairs of his creation. This god is not the immanent God of Biblical Christianity. The god of Deism is similar to the “watchmaker,” who, after having made his watch, sits back and lets it run itself. And the universe runs according to “natural law.”

The god of Deism is usually “one” in essence and “one” in person; he is an absolute unity. It is not surprising, then, to learn that Unitarianism grew out of Deism. A consistent Deist might praise his god, but he would not pray to him. Because this god does not enter into the everyday affairs of men. In Deism, there is no special revelation, there is only general revelation. Any system of ethics in Deism, then, must come from “natural law,” or that which is common in human nature. In a Deistic worldview, reason and science are the primary “tools” of life.

### *Finite Theism*

Finite theism, espoused by such men as E.S. Brightman, William James, and Rabbi Harold Kushner, posits the existence of a finite god. He is limited in his perfections or attributes. He may be omnibenevo-

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5. Soren Kierkegaard is considered by some to be a “Christian existentialist.” There are some scholars who consider him to be the father of existentialism.



lent, but he is certainly not omnipotent. Evil is one thing that limits god. We cannot, then, blame god for the existence of evil in the world, because even though this god would like to expunge evil from the world, he is simply not able to do so. Kushner goes so far as to say that we must forgive god for his limitations.

Since the world operates under the rubric of natural law, say the finite theists, ethical absolutes must not be posited. Neither are we to believe in miracles. Further, because there is no special revelation, we cannot be certain about the destiny of mankind. All we can say for certain is that “perhaps” there is life beyond the grave.

One form of finite theism is henotheism, which teaches that there are many finite gods, one of whom is supreme. Sometimes henotheism has one god per nation or ethnic group, such as Baal of the Canaanites, or Dagon of the Philistines. Henotheism is a transitional stage between monotheism and polytheism.

### ***Pantheism***

The word pantheism is derived from two Greek words *pan* (all) and *theos* (God) – all is God. In a pantheistic worldview (Hinduism, the “new age” movement), the world is god and god is the world; god is all and all is god. Pantheism stresses the immanence of god, while denying his transcendence. In this sense it is the opposite of Deism.

In general, pantheists are not so crass as to assert that everything is actually god. This would render the word “god” virtually meaningless; it would be the same as saying “everything is everything.” What pantheists normally mean when they claim that “all is god,” is that god is manifested in everything. The transcendentalist Ralph Waldo

Emerson, for example, said it this way: “When one is in touch with a flower, he is in touch with god.”

Some pantheists teach that god is impersonal, and the world emanates from him. And due to the fact that there is no special revelation, there are no ethical absolutes. It is alleged that man’s need is to be united with god (which is self-contradictory since man is already, in some sense, identical with god). History is considered to be cyclical, and reincarnation is therefore frequently posited, based on one’s *karma*. The one thing that Pantheism and materialism have in common is that in neither worldview is there anything or anyone “outside of” or “beyond” the universe.

### *Panentheism*

Panentheism is an attempt to blend Christian theism with Pantheism; it is clearly distinct from both. The word panentheist means “all in god.” Thus, panentheists maintain that all of the world is somehow “in god.” Or, perhaps it is better to say, as some do, that god is in the world, just as a soul is in a body; that is, god indwells the world. In this system god is not identical with the world (as in Pantheism). He is more than the world and has an identity of his own, albeit, he is not transcendent. In fact, in Panentheism, god (who is personal) and the world (which is impersonal) are co-eternal and interdependent. God needs the world and the world needs god.

Panentheists, such as Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and Schubert M. Ogden, teach that god is bipolar. There is a concrete or consequent pole, in which god is spoken of as finite, dependent, and contingent. But there is also an abstract pole, in which god is said to be infinite, independent, and immutable. God is con-

stantly in the “process of becoming,” or moving from the former pole to the latter. And since god and the world are co-eternal and interdependent, all things are in this same process of becoming. History has no beginning and no end. Hence, the name “process philosophy,” or “process theology” is applied to this worldview.

In Panentheism, man is a completely free moral agent. Thus, there are no ethical absolutes. Man has no personal immortality; he merely lives in the memory of a constantly “becoming” god.

### *Polytheism*

Polytheism, sometimes found among the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, and Persians, teaches that there are two or more finite gods which exist in the universe, each with his own sphere of authority and activity. The gods often have a direct influence on the affairs of human events (unlike Deism). They may even appear to man in revelations, dreams, and visions. Some polytheists, such as the Mormons, teach that the various gods are in the process of changing; that is, there are degrees of perfection which they may be undergoing.

Unlike the Polytheism of the Mormons (which posits ethical standards), in most polytheistic systems, there are usually no strict ethical standards. Normally, ethics are relative and localized to the authority level of the gods. Yet, paradoxically, man may someday answer to the gods for how he has lived his life on this earth. In Mormonism, for example, an exemplary man may even ascend to the level of deity and rule his own universe.

### *Conclusion*

Christian theism is the only true worldview, or philosophy. Jesus Christ, the Master Philosopher, makes it clear that He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (*John* 14:6). There is no neutrality. One is either with Christ or against Him (*Luke* 11:23). There is no *tertium quid*, no third alternative. Christianity, then, is not a species, it is a genus. As taught in *Genesis* 3, all false worldviews are a result of the Fall. Due to the Fall man is estranged from the God of Scripture, giving rise to the many false worldviews that have arisen throughout history. It is the job of the Christian theist to defend the truth of Christian theism against all false worldviews. Hopefully, this brief overview of some of the false “isms” that exist, will be of some aid in this task.

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