RECLAIMING THE
CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

A STUDENT'S GUIDE

Philip Graham Ryken

Series Editor: David S. Dockery

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SERIES PREFACE

RECLAIMING THE CHRISTIAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

The Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition series is designed to provide an overview of the distinctive way the church has read the Bible, formulated doctrine, provided education, and engaged the culture. The contributors to this series all agree that personal faith and genuine Christian piety are essential for the life of Christ followers and for the church. These contributors also believe that helping others recognize the importance of serious thinking about God, Scripture, and the world needs a renewed emphasis at this time in order that the truth claims of the Christian faith can be passed along from one generation to the next. The study guides in this series will enable us to see afresh how the Christian faith shapes how we live, how we think, how we write books, how we govern society, and how we relate to one another in our churches and social structures. The richness of the Christian intellectual tradition provides guidance for the complex challenges that believers face in this world.

This series is particularly designed for Christian students and others associated with college and university campuses, including faculty, staff, trustees, and other various constituents. The contributors to the series will explore how the Bible has been interpreted in the history of the church, as well as how theology has been formulated. They will ask: How does the Christian faith influence our understanding of culture, literature, philosophy, government, beauty, art, or work? How does the Christian intellectual tradition help us understand truth? How does the Christian intellectual tradition shape our approach to education? We believe that this series is not only timely but that it meets an important need, because the secular culture in which we now find ourselves is, at

best, indifferent to the Christian faith, and the Christian world—at least in its more popular forms—tends to be confused about the beliefs, heritage, and tradition associated with the Christian faith.

At the heart of this work is the challenge to prepare a generation of Christians to think Christianly, to engage the academy and the culture, and to serve church and society. We believe that both the breadth and the depth of the Christian intellectual tradition need to be reclaimed, revitalized, renewed, and revived for us to carry forward this work. These study guides will seek to provide a framework to help introduce students to the great tradition of Christian thinking, seeking to highlight its importance for understanding the world, its significance for serving both church and society, and its application for Christian thinking and learning. The series is a starting point for exploring important ideas and issues such as truth, meaning, beauty, and justice.

We trust that the series will help introduce readers to the apostles, church fathers, Reformers, philosophers, theologians, historians, and a wide variety of other significant thinkers. In addition to well-known leaders such as Clement, Origen, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Jonathan Edwards, readers will be pointed to William Wilberforce, G. K. Chesterton, T. S. Eliot, Dorothy Sayers, C. S. Lewis, Johann Sebastian Bach, Isaac Newton, Johannes Kepler, George Washington Carver, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Michael Polanyi, Henry Luke Orombi, and many others. In doing so, we hope to introduce those who throughout history have demonstrated that it is indeed possible to be serious about the life of the mind while simultaneously being deeply committed Christians. These efforts to strengthen serious Christian thinking and scholarship will not be limited to the study of theology, scriptural interpretation, or philosophy, even though these areas provide the framework for understanding the Christian faith for all other areas of exploration. In order for us to reclaim and advance the Christian intellectual tradition, we must have some

understanding of the tradition itself. The volumes in this series will seek to explore this tradition and its application for our twenty-first-century world. Each volume contains a glossary, study questions, and a list of resources for further study, which we trust will provide helpful guidance for our readers.

I am deeply grateful to the series editorial committee: Timothy George, John Woodbridge, Michael Wilkins, Niel Nielson, Philip Ryken, and Hunter Baker. Each of these colleagues joins me in thanking our various contributors for their fine work. We all express our appreciation to Justin Taylor, Jill Carter, Allan Fisher, Lane Dennis, and the Crossway team for their enthusiastic support for the project. We offer the project with the hope that students will be helped, faculty and Christian leaders will be encouraged, institutions will be strengthened, churches will be built up, and, ultimately, that God will be glorified.

Soli Deo Gloria
David S. Dockery
Series Editor

✚ 1

WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

Everybody has a worldview. Whether we know it or not, we all have a fundamental perspective on the world that shapes the way we live.

By way of illustration, consider what the following everyday encounters tell us about the various ways that different people look at the world and how they interact with it as a result:

> We are playing baseball at the park, and it's Jack's turn to bat. He's only four, but he knows what he's doing at the plate—better, as it turns out, than he knows what he's doing on the base paths. He hits a sharp grounder back to the mound, which I field and throw to his sister at first for the out. Jack veers sharply away from the baseline and runs haphazardly around the infield before returning to home plate. "I get to choose my own bases," he announces, in what sounds like a basic premise for postmodern ethics. Laughing, I say, "Okay, buddy. You can choose your own bases, but they're not the real bases, so you're still out."
>
> I am out shoveling sixteen inches of snow into huge piles by the street when a neighbor stops by to speculate as to when (or even if) the snow will ever disappear. "Well, God brought it here," I say, "and only God can take it away." Taking clear objection to my reasoning, my neighbor sniffs, "It was a low pressure system, you know." I did know that, of course, yet I also happen to believe that even the weather system is under God's control.
>
> Before I move halfway across the country, a friend invites me to his art studio and generously invites me to choose a painting to take with me as a gift. We walk back and forth, admiring his artwork and discussing each piece—where it was painted, how

> it is composed, what thoughts and feelings it expresses. Finally, I choose a watercolor depicting a street of row houses from a local city neighborhood. Today the painting has a treasured place in my home, as the memory of a familiar place and a symbol of a valued friendship.
>
> It is two minutes before tip-off in the first round of the playoffs for an intramural basketball league. "Where's Eric?" I ask, referring to our star point guard. "He won't be here tonight. He's leading a high school Bible study." When we lose by four points, we all know that missing our best player cost us a shot at the championship. But we also know that some things in life—such as honoring a ministry commitment—are even more important than basketball.

These everyday encounters all reveal the worldviews of the people involved. What I hang on my wall bears witness to the beauty and truth that Jesus Christ has put into the world. The way I shovel snow is a testimony to what I believe about God's creation and providence. Even the way I play sports reflects the purpose of leisure in an ordered universe.

At the same time, the way other people respond reveals *their* worldview—their faithfulness in keeping a commitment, for example, or their unbelief in the existence and providence of God. Ideas have consequences. Even ordinary interactions reflect our commitments and convictions about the basic issues of art and science, work and play, family and society, life and death. Whenever we bump into the world, our worldview has a way of spilling out. It comes out in what we think and love, say and do, praise and choose.

Worldviews also have a way of bumping into one another. Some of the examples above deal with conflicting commitments at the level of daily life, but of course different views of the world also have culture-wide influence. Some of the major conflicts in today's society—between naturalism and supernaturalism, for

example, or between freedom and terrorism, or between purity and promiscuity in popular entertainment, or between abortion and the right to life—come at the intersections where worldviews collide, sometimes violently.

The conflict of worldviews calls Christians to thoughtful cultural engagement. In an increasingly secularized society, the followers of Christ often find their ideas under attack. How can we maintain a Christ-centered perspective on the contested issues of our day? How can we think Christianly in every area of intellectual life? And how can we live out a faithful Christian testimony at home, at school, at church, at work, in government, and in the marketplace of ideas? The answer begins with having a worldview like the one introduced in this book: a consistently Christian worldview that shapes our thoughts, forms our desires, guides our words, and motivates our actions.

DEFINING WORLDVIEW

A worldview—or "world-and-life view," as some people call it—is the structure of understanding that we use to make sense of our world. Our worldview is what we presuppose. It is our way of looking at life, our interpretation of the universe, our orientation to reality. It is the "comprehensive framework of our basic belief about things,"[1] or "the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns."[2] More complexly,

> a worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality,

[1] Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 2.
[2] James Olthuis, "On Worldviews," in *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science*, ed. Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw, Christian Studies Today (Landham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 29.

> and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.[3]

Ideally, a worldview is a well-reasoned framework of beliefs and convictions that helps us see the big picture, giving a true and unified perspective on the meaning of human existence. Alternatively, we could say that our worldview is the story we tell to answer questions like these: Why is there anything at all? How can we know for sure? How did we get here, and what are we here for, anyway? Why have things gone so badly wrong? Is there any hope of fixing them? What should I do with my life? And where will it all end?

Not all worldviews are equally systematic or equally comprehensive. Often there is a difference between the worldview that we think we have and the one we actually live—our functional as opposed to our theoretical worldview. Worldviews can also change according to circumstance. But whether we realize it or not, all of us have basic beliefs about who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. This is unavoidable. Even people who never stop to think about their worldview in any self-reflective way nevertheless live on the basis of their tacit worldview. This is so basic to who we are that usually we hardly even notice our worldview but simply take it for granted. Sometimes a worldview is compared to a pair of spectacles, but, to use another optic metaphor, maybe our eyes themselves would be a better analogy. When was the last time you noticed that you were seeing? We rarely think about seeing; we just see, and we are seeing all the time. Similarly, even if we rarely, if ever, think about our worldview, we still view everything with it. Our worldview is what we think with and ultimately live by.

Many factors contribute to our worldview, not all of them the product of our own thoughtful reflection. In the words of a character from *The Magician's Nephew* by C. S. Lewis, "What

[3] James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 122.

you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: it also depends on what sort of person you are."[4] Our family background, life experience, economic circumstances, educational pedigree, cultural context, national heritage, linguistic community, physiological characteristics, psychological makeup, and historical situation all have an influence on the way we see the world. Some of these factors are public, not private, which helps to explain why worldviews have so much culture-shaping influence. Worldviews are not merely private perspectives but typically are held in common with other people. This leads the missiologist G. Linwood Barney to compare the relationship between worldview and culture to an onion, with its concentric layers. At the core is a culture's prevailing worldview—its normative beliefs about God, the world, and the people in it. Growing out from that core, there are other layers: values, institutions, customs, material artifacts.[5] All of these cultural layers grow out from a society's worldview or worldviews.

Worldviews are inherently religious. Because our worldview is at the core of who we are, it always reveals our fundamental convictions, including what we believe (or don't believe) about God. There is no spiritual neutrality—no view from nowhere. Even atheists and agnostics direct their lives toward some greater purpose. The theologian Langdon Gilkey wrote: "Whether he wishes it or not, man as a free creature must pattern his life according to some chosen ultimate end, must center his life on some chosen ultimate loyalty, and must commit his security to some trusted power. Man . . . inevitably roots his life in something ultimate."[6] People who say they do not believe in God nevertheless have controlling commitments, which are reflected in how they approach their school-

[4] C. S. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* (London: Bodley Head, 1955), 123.
[5] Barney's ideas are discussed helpfully in David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 145.
[6] Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study of the Christian Doctrine of Creation*, Christian Faith Series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 193.

work, spend their money, cast their ballots, use their smartphones, and do everything else they do. Whatever is ultimate for us shapes our total identity. "As [a man] thinks in his heart," the Scripture says, "so is he" (Prov. 23:7 NKJV).

Another way to say this is that everybody worships. Human beings are not merely *homo sapiens*—people who think—but also *homo adorans*—people who praise. In an extraordinary address given to the 2005 graduating class of Kenyon College, the novelist David Foster Wallace spoke with astonishing clarity about the centrality of worship (and its consequences):

> There is no such thing as not worshiping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is *what* to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship . . . is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. . . . Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you. . . . Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is . . . they're unconscious. They are default settings.[7]

The novelist's words carry special force when we read them in the context of his death by suicide just a few years later. What we choose to worship matters desperately and is always bound up with our entire perspective on the world. This is why a worldview can never be reduced to a set of rational propositions. It is a matter of the heart as well as the head—of what we love as well as what

[7]Emily Bobrow, "David Foster Wallace, in His Own Words," http://moreintelligentlife.com/story/david-foster-wallace-in-his-own-words (accessed January 4, 2012).

we think. And in the final analysis, the only life-giving worldview is one that leads to the everlasting worship of God.

THE HISTORY OF AN IDEA

The concept of worldview is a fairly recent development in Christian thought. In one sense, of course, the people of God have always had a worldview—a perspective on life that was guided by the Word of God. For Old Testament Israel, that worldview began with a daily confession of faith: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut. 6:4). The coming of Christ opened up new dimensions of a biblical worldview. The teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, was not so much a code of ethics as it was a new way of looking at the world and living in it. "Christianity is more than a set of devotional practices," writes Robert Louis Wilken in his analysis of the early church. "It is also a way of thinking about God, about human beings, about the world, and history. For Christians, thinking is part of believing."[8] For as long as God has been revealing his truth to his people, he has been shaping their view of the world.

What is relatively new, however, is for Christians to use *worldview* as a central category for thought and life. Briefly outlining the intellectual history of the concept will help us understand what is meant (and not meant) by the *Christian* worldview.

The story begins in Germany.[9] *Worldview* is simply the English translation for the German word *Weltanschauung*, which first appeared in the philosophical writings of Immanuel Kant. Kant used the term as early as 1790, in his *Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*). At first, *Weltanschauung* referred to

[8] Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), *xiii*.

[9] For the history that follows, I am relying heavily on the work of Al Wolters. In addition to his article "World-View" in the *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics* (edited by W. C. Campbell-Jack, et al. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006]), he has written a useful (though unpublished and incomplete) essay entitled "*Weltanschauung* in the History of Ideas: Preliminary Notes." See also David K. Naugle's definitive work, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

people's sensory perception of the world around them. However, Kant's disciples—the young philosophers Johann Fichte and Friedrich Schelling—adopted the word and began employing it for other purposes. By the first decade of the nineteenth century, *Weltanschauung* was used widely by intellectual giants of German Romanticism and idealism: novelists (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe), poets (Jean Paul), and philosophers (Friedrich Schleiermacher and Georg Hegel). Gradually the term shifted from its literal meaning of sense perception to refer metaphorically to intellectual perception.

In the decades that followed, *Weltanschauung* passed from the poets and philosophers to other cultured communities in Germany. By the 1840s the term had become commonplace among influential musicians (Richard Wagner), theologians (Ludwig Feuerbach), and physicists (Alexander von Humboldt). In a letter to a friend, one historian of the time complained, "Formerly everyone was an ass in private and left the world in peace; now, however, people consider themselves 'educated,' cobble together a 'world-view' (*Welt-anschauung*), and preach away at their fellowmen."[10]

By the end of the nineteenth century, the concept of worldview had taken hold among leading thinkers in other countries. The term appeared so frequently in the titles of books and scholarly articles that the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck referred to worldview (*wereldbeschouwing*) as "the slogan of the day."[11] The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard was perhaps the first thinker to give this slogan a technical meaning in his system of thought. For Kierkegaard, a "life-view" (*livskanskuelse* in Danish) or "world-view" (*verdensanskuelse*) was the fundamental perspective that undergirded a person's self-understanding and gave unity to thought and action.

Kierkegaard was not the only philosopher to seek a definition

[10] Jacob Burckhardt, quoted in Wolters, "*Weltanschauung* in the History of Ideas."
[11] Herman Bavinck, *Christlijke wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: Kok, 1904), 8.

for *worldview*. Wilhelm Dilthey, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and others sought to distinguish philosophy from worldview. Typically the former was identified as an ancient and rational discipline that explored what was true for human thought generally, whereas the latter was more personal and depended partly on one's place in history and situation in life. Of the two concepts, worldview was more perspectival, philosophy more universal. The difference may be illustrated from the thought of two men whose ideas exercised massive influence on the twentieth century: Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Their theories of economics and psychology, respectively, self-consciously represented entirely new ways of looking at the world—what the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein termed "a world picture" (*Weltbild*).

Meanwhile, some Christian thinkers were adopting the concept of worldview for their own purposes—most notably, the Scottish theologian James Orr and the Dutch statesman Abraham Kuyper. Orr's 1893 book *The Christian View of God and the World* and Kuyper's public addresses at Princeton Theological Seminary (published in 1899 as *Calvinism: Six Stone Lectures*) exercised wide influence on Christian thought. Both thinkers presented the Christian faith as a total view of reality (what Kuyper called a "world-and-life-view") with implications for society as well as the church. Their vision for seeing the world from a Christian point of view has since been carried forward in the United States by theologian Carl F. H. Henry, apologist Francis Schaeffer, prison evangelist Charles Colson, and many others. By the end of the twentieth century, worldview thinking was pervasive in evangelical churches and schools, as Christians sought to integrate learning with faith in every academic discipline and apply it to the central issues of public life.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the concept of worldview has found particular resonance in the church. After all, Christians have a distinctive perspective on the world, and *worldview* serves

as a useful construct for explaining why we look at things differently than other people do. Since Christians hold their worldview in common with other believers, it serves as a point of spiritual and intellectual unity. Originally, *Weltanschauung* referred to a person's unique perspective on the world. But for Christians, worldview is less individualistic and more communal. Because it is grounded in divine revelation, the Christian worldview has a fixed reference point in the mind of God, and thus it stands as something that connects all believers everywhere.

This is not to say that Christians agree about everything. Within the general framework of the Christian worldview, the followers of Christ hold a wide variety of perspectives on politics, economics, aesthetics, and many other areas of life and thought. Christians also disagree about doctrine, with different denominations holding distinctive views in theology. Nevertheless, they find substantial unity in the worldview they share. At the same time, there are areas where the Christian worldview overlaps with non-Christian thought. For example, like Christianity, Hinduism holds to the sanctity of human life. Similarly, both Christianity and Judaism teach that God created everything out of nothing. These complexities—both the variety of views that Christians hold and the areas of commonality between Christianity and other religions—prevent us from thinking too simplistically or one-dimensionally about worldviews. But they should not obscure the coherence of the Christian worldview in its basic principles.

Worldview thinking helps Christians engage in the marketplace of ideas. It does this by showing how Christianity relates to everything in life—not just the private life of personal piety but also the public life of art, music, science, business, politics, sports, and popular culture. In addition to providing intellectual perspective for every academic discipline, worldview thinking is useful for apologetics and evangelism. The way people live is always rooted in their religious perspective, even if they claim not to be religious

at all. When conflicts arise, as they always do, understanding worldviews helps us identify the deepest source of the conflict and to explain what difference it makes in any situation to follow Jesus Christ.

Admittedly, worldview thinking also has its critics. The German theologian Karl Barth warned that when Christians articulate a *Weltanschauung*, inevitably they reduce the Christian faith to the definite "world-picture" of their own time and place, which is always inadequate.[12] Furthermore, there is always the risk that Christians will use the right worldview for the wrong reasons, exploiting good ideas for ungodly purposes, hijacking the Christian faith for their social, political, or ecclesiastical agenda. There are many examples of this from history, where everything from the medieval Crusades to chattel slavery has been defended on the basis of biblical principles.

More recently, philosopher James K. A. Smith has called for a temporary moratorium on the term *worldview*.[13] His concern is that the worldview approach tends to reduce human beings to disembodied thinkers, when in fact we are embodied lovers. Smith argues that what causes us to act is not only what we know but mainly what we adore. "Before we articulate a worldview," he says, "we worship."[14] In effect, worship is "the matrix from which a Christian worldview is born." So instead of "focusing on what Christians *think*, distilling Christian faith into an intellectual summary formula (a 'worldview')," we should pay more attention to the practices of Christian worship.[15] What will transform us is not information for the mind but formation of the heart through the liturgy of the church.

We can learn from these and other criticisms without

[12] Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM, 1949), 59.
[13] See James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009). Another notable critic is James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
[14] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 33.
[15] Ibid., 11.

jettisoning the vital project of articulating a Christian view of the world. Worldview thinking should be rejuvenated, not rejected.[16] Even if our present grasp of the truth is a work in progress, it is still necessary to defend that truth and live it out as well as we can. We can acknowledge the formative influence of liturgical and other practices without devaluing the intellect. We are rational creatures. While it is true that what we love often shapes what we think, it is also true that the biblical remedy for disordered affections is for God to speak his truth to the mind. "Do not be conformed to this world," writes the apostle Paul. In other words, do not be shaped by the things that this world loves—its patterns and practices. Instead, the apostle goes on to say, "be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). There is an intrinsic, ordered relationship between the thoughts and the affections that guide our actions. The formation of the heart comes through the transformation of the mind. Therefore, one of the primary ways the Holy Spirit changes the things we love and worship is by changing the way we think.

This brings us back to the value of having a Christian worldview—of seeing the world the way that God sees it. But it brings us back with the recognition that people are whole persons. We are lovers as well as thinkers, and therefore a properly Christian view of the world engages the whole person—body, heart, mind, and soul. In developing a properly Christian worldview through the discipleship of the Christian mind, we are growing our capacity for sacred worship and holy love. We cannot be said truly to have a Christian view of the world unless what we love as well as what we think is directed to the glory of God, and unless this is readily apparent in the way we live in the world. The apostle Paul was

[16] Smith seems to agree when he responds to his critics by writing, "The argument of *Desiring the Kingdom* is not that we need *less* worldview, but *more*: that Christian education will only be fully an education to the extent that it is also a formation of our habits." See his "Worldview, Sphere Sovereignty, and *Desiring the Kingdom*: A Guide for (Perplexed) Reformed Folk," *Pro Rege*, vol. 39 (June 2011): 15–24.

thinking holistically in his prayer for the mind as well as the heart of the Philippians, which is also a prayer for us in forming and living out a Christian worldview: "That your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:9–10).

WHY WORLDVIEWS MATTER

Our worldview is one of the most important things about us. The English journalist and lay theologian G. K. Chesterton proved this point by using an everyday example: "For a landlady considering a lodger, it is important to know his income, but still more important to know his philosophy."[17]

My own experience confirms the truth of Chesterton's claim. When my wife, Lisa, and I first moved to Philadelphia right after college, we had no money, no jobs, and no income. The day we looked at the beautiful attic apartment that eventually became our home, three other couples were walking through it at the same time. Yet the landlord gave us the lease, almost against his better judgment. I believe his exact words were, "I can't believe I'm doing this, but I'm going to let you have the apartment." Why did he make this decision? Because we had told him that I would be attending a nearby seminary in the fall, and thus he knew our philosophy, as Chesterton called it—our worldview. Even though he was not a devout Christian himself, he rightly concluded from our faith commitment that we would find employment, work hard, and pay our rent on time.

It is desperately important for Christians to have a truly and fully Christian worldview—not just when we go apartment hunting but all the time. Living wisely in the world requires proper perspective. Do we see ourselves and the world around us the way that God sees them, or are we viewing things from

[17] G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics*, quoted in Naugle, *Worldview*, *xi*.

some other perspective? This question is crucial to ask about any worldview. Does our way of looking at the world correspond to the world as it actually is? Do we see the world as it is according to God?

In these post- or hyper-modern times, some people claim that reality itself is plastic, that the universe will adjust to our way of looking at things, that there are as many worlds as there are worldviews. This is not really the case, however, as we discover the moment we try to impose our opinions on other people, or when the difficulties of daily life knock the rough edges off our own particular worldview. The person who says that everyone should have totally unrestrained freedom and the person who says we need to have moral and social restraints cannot both be correct; something has to give. One of my schoolteachers used to say, "Your freedom to swing your fist stops at the end of my nose." Unfortunately, some people believe instead that "might makes right." These two worldviews are incompatible. Sooner or later they will collide, and when they do, it will become painfully obvious that they cannot both be correct.

The English music critic Steve Turner uses delicious irony to criticize the claim that all worldviews are equally valid. His critique comes in the form of a poem—a confession of faith for a postmodern worldview:

> We believe that all religions are basically the same
> At least the one that we read was.
> They all believe in love and goodness.
> They only differ on matters of
> Creation, sin, heaven, hell, God and salvation. . . .
> We believe that each man must find the truth
> That is right for him.
> Reality will adapt accordingly
> The universe will readjust.
> History will alter.
> We believe that there is no absolute truth

> Excepting the truth that there is no absolute truth.
> We believe in the rejection of creeds.[18]

Turner's poem bears the ironic title "Creed." His point is that people who reject all creeds nevertheless have a creed all their own. The question is: Which creed is correct? Who has the right worldview?

The premise of this book is that the only worldview that fully corresponds to the world as God knows it is a completely and consistently Christian worldview. Unfortunately, it is somewhat doubtful whether most Christians have any very clear understanding of the worldview that belongs to them by the grace of God. One way to demonstrate this is to consider what popular surveys reveal about the way we live. Time and again we are told, to our dismay, that Christians live basically the same way that everyone else lives. We have roughly the same incidence of domestic violence, the same rate of divorce, the same selfish patterns of spending, and the same addictive behaviors as the general population. How can this be true?

When we probe a little deeper, we discover that Christians who are in full agreement with the main principles that undergird the Christian worldview actually *do* live in a distinctively Christian way. To that extent, what the surveys say about the way Christians think and behave is somewhat misleading. But here is the problem: according to one influential survey, only 9 percent of all born-again adults and only 2 percent of born-again teenagers truly espouse the basic principles of a biblical worldview.[19] If people in the church do not think Christianly, it is hardly surprising that they do not live Christianly, either.

The disconnect between what Christians say they believe and the way they actually behave may be illustrated from a provocative comment in a ministry newsletter for Christian men. The newsletter reported, "For every ten men in your church, nine will have kids

[18] Steve Turner, "Creed," in *Up to Date* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1985), 138–39.
[19] George Barna, *Think Like Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Integrity, 2003), 23.

who leave the church, eight will not find their jobs satisfying, six pay the monthly minimum on their credit card balances, five have a major problem with pornography, four will get divorced, and only one has a biblical worldview."[20]

The last statistic in this series is the one that explains all the others: only a fraction of Christian men have a truly and fully Christian worldview. If these figures are correct, then the reason so many men fail to provide good leadership for their families, find joy in their daily work, manage their finances well, or resist sexual temptation is that their lives are not totally shaped by the story of salvation, as they would be if they embraced a completely Christian view of the world—not just knowing the Christian worldview but also living it out.

Christian men are not the only ones who have this problem, of course. There are ways in which all of us see the world our own way rather than God's way, regardless of our age, gender, or situation in life. Nor are we the only people who are affected by our failure to live in a consistently Christian way. Generally speaking, the reason the church fails to have a more positive, transforming influence on our culture is that we do not fully grasp the Bible-based, Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, God-glorifying perspective that belongs to us by grace—which is why we need to learn how to live the right worldview.

[20] Pat Morley documents these statistics in "The Case for a Men's Discipleship Program," *A Look in the Mirror* (no. 120), 1–2.

✚ 2

THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING

The purpose of this book is to help college students and others live wisely by thinking Christianly about daily life. To that end, we will trace the broad contours of the Christian worldview and sketch a few of its practical implications. To learn more about how the Christian worldview works itself out in various academic disciplines, the reader is encouraged to consult the other study guides published in this series. The present volume is written explicitly for Christians; however, it may also help non-Christians understand the way that Christians look at the world—not primarily by defending Christianity (which would require a much longer book) but simply by explaining it. One final qualification before we proceed: although the book's theology is largely shaped by the Protestant Reformation, much of what it says can also be affirmed by Christians from other traditions.

So far we have defined worldview as "a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it."[1] Now we can begin to articulate the basic principles of any Christian worldview. In brief—and all of this will be explained in due course—such a worldview gives us four categories that theologians commonly use to understand human experience:

[1] James H. Olthuis, "On Worldviews," in Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw, eds., *Stained Glass: Worldviews and Social Science* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 29.

1) *Creation*: the way God created the world and everything in it, including the people he made in his own image, with the ultimate goal of displaying his glory;
2) *The Fall*: the way we turned away from our creator, choosing to live for ourselves rather than for our Father's glory, and thus came under the condemnation of a righteous God in a sin-cursed world;
3) *Grace*: the way God is working to save his people from sin and death through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his Son, and then transforming our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit; and
4) *Glory*: the way God is fulfilling all his purposes for his people through the present and future preeminence of Jesus Christ over the everlasting kingdom of God.

Once we understand this four-part explanation of human experience—learning how to do what the poet T. S. Eliot called "thinking in Christian categories"[2]—we can apply it to every area of life. In doing so, we gain God's perspective on why any particular thing was made in the first place (*creation*), what has gone wrong with it (*the fall*), how we find its recovery in Jesus Christ (*grace*), and what it will become in the end, when everything is made new (*glory*).

These four stages of human history tell a complete and unified story that stretches back to before the very beginning and leans forward into eternity. God has always intended to make a beautiful place for the people he loves and to live with us there. I say "always," because the Bible describes eternal life as something that God "promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word" (Titus 1:2–3). Although that purpose seemingly has been frustrated by human sin, God is still working his plan—the eternal plan of redemption.

The story that the Bible tells about salvation is not simply one story among many stories or a tale that is part of some larger

[2] T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940), 26.

narrative. It is the story of all stories: the love story that begins and ends with the glory of God. It is also the story we live. We find our story within God's story and our narrative within his master narrative. In doing so, we find our purpose within his purpose and our mission in pursuing his mission.

THE GOD WHO IS THERE

Before we tell the story of the Christian worldview, we need to meet its Author. In doing so, we learn the answer to a couple of crucial questions that every worldview must answer: First, what is the fundamental reality? Second, how can we know that fundamental reality (or anything else, for that matter)? The place to begin answering these questions is where the Bible begins: "In the beginning, God . . ." (Gen. 1:1).

Every worldview has an integrating idea. The basic idea behind deism—which may be one of the most common worldviews in America today—is that a transcendent God made the universe but then more or less left it to run on its own. God is a creator but not a provider, and we are left to make our own way through life. Marxists and other materialists believe that there is no God at all, only the natural universe. People are merely bodies, not souls, so there is no transcendent basis for ethics. Buddhists believe that human beings must endure their earthly fate as they wait patiently to enter the state of nirvana. And so forth. These are only examples; readers will need to look elsewhere for a catalog of other worldviews or a full explanation of what they teach.[3] But suffice it to say that every worldview is animated by its central idea or driven by its main story line.

What unifies the Christian worldview, by contrast, is not merely an idea, but the being and character of Almighty God. The Bible does not present God as the conclusion to some logical

[3] James Sire provides a useful introduction to the main ideas of the most popular worldviews in *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

proof, or as a mystery beyond our comprehension, but treats his existence as the basic premise upon which everything else in the entire universe is built. God is always our ultimate frame of reference, the supreme reality at the center of all reality—the be-all and end-all of everything. Therefore, whatever else we include in our worldview will need to be understood with reference to God.

Christians believe that by denying the existence of God, atheism gets things wrong from the beginning. So does secular humanism, or any other worldview that puts the self at the center of the universe. We should not begin with ourselves at all, but with God, whose existence and nature are "the independent source and the transcendent standard for everything."[4] We start with God and work from there on up. Otherwise, the consequences are devastating, morally as well as intellectually. The Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky was right when he said, "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted"[5]—including many things that are evil or cruel.

So we begin with the existence of God. However, mere belief in God is not enough. If there is a God, then we must believe in the God who is really there and not in some other deity. Most world religions believe in God (or gods, as the case may be), but their definition of deity may or may not stand within biblical boundaries. Furthermore, many people who say they are religious do not have a coherent definition of God at all, and thus their lives are prone to superstition. Or if they do have a clear definition of God, it springs more from their own desires than from divine revelation. According to the sociologist Christian Smith, today a majority of young Americans are adopting a "creed in which an undemanding God exists mostly to solve problems and make people feel good, a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic

[4]David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 260.
[5]Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, Everyman's Library (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 589.

Therapist, on call as needed."[6] Such a god is always available to meet needs and satisfy desires but never presumes to make demands or require sacrifices.

A notable example of a self-made deity for post-Christian times comes from an interview with the actor Chad Allen, who described how his own view of God reinforced his personal lifestyle:

> I judge all my actions by my relationship with god of my understanding. It's very powerful, and it's taken its own shape and form. And I am very much at peace in the knowledge that in my heart God created this beautiful expression of my love. . . . It is a deep-founded, faith-based belief in god based upon the work that I've done growing up as a Catholic boy and then reaching out to Buddhist philosophy, to Hindu philosophy, to Native American beliefs and finally as I got through my course with addiction and alcoholism and finding a higher power that worked for me.[7]

By contrast, the Christian worldview does not begin with God as we would like him to be—the "god of my understanding." Instead, Christianity begins with the God who is really there. It's not about us; it's about him.

When we say "God," we mean the God of the Bible, in all his perfections, and not the god of the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, or any other religious text. While other religions may portray certain aspects of his divine nature, only the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments give us the full picture of God. The God of the Bible is all-knowing, all-present, all-powerful, and all-sufficient. He alone is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his wisdom, power, holiness, goodness, justice, truth, and love. He has revealed himself

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[6] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, as quoted in Kevan Breitinger, "The kids have faith, so should the adults," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (March 12, 2005). See also Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[7] Chad Allen, in an interview televised on CNN's *Larry King Live!* (January, 2006).

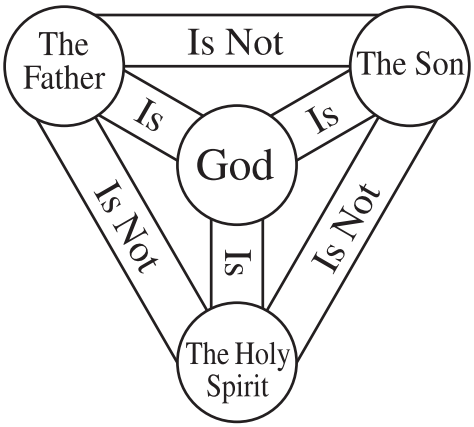
as "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:6–7). The biblical God is utterly and absolutely sovereign. He controls all things at all times and in all places, freely ordaining whatever comes to pass (Eph. 1:11). He is a God of pristine holiness, who punishes sin with righteous justice. He is also the God of crucified love, who has a plan for redeeming his people in Christ—the God who is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

What else can we say about the one true God? He is "the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God" (1 Tim. 1:17), who deserves all worship and eternal praise. He rules all nations and loves all the peoples of the earth. He is a deity of such powerful affection that nothing will ever be able to separate us from his love (Rom. 8:35–39). His highest end is the manifestation of his glory—the greatness and majesty of who he is, as revealed in what he does.

This one true and living God is triune. As the story of salvation unfolds, we discover that he is one God in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here we encounter a profound mystery, which distinguishes Christianity from other monotheistic worldviews such as Judaism and Islam. The Bible everywhere insists that there is one and only one God. Yet the Bible also reveals this God as a holy fellowship of three unique, distinct, and eternal persons. The true God is a tri-unity.

Even if the Christian doctrine of the Trinity can never be fully understood, it can be stated in seven simple propositions: (1) God the Father is God; (2) God the Son is God; (3) God the Holy Spirit is God; (4) the Father is not the Son; (5) the Son is not the Spirit; (6) the Spirit is not the Father; (7) nevertheless, there is only one God. These propositions may be illustrated in visual form (see Illustration 2.1).

Illustration 2.1



In his treatise *On Christian Doctrine*, the great North African theologian Augustine used somewhat different language to express the same eternal truths:

> The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and each of these by Himself, is God, and at the same time they are all one God. The Father is not the Son nor the Holy Spirit; the Son is not the Father nor the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is not the Father nor the Son: but the Father is only Father, the Son is only Son, and the Holy Spirit is only Holy Spirit.[8]

Although the doctrine of the Trinity can be stated in propositional form, the Trinity itself is no abstraction. On the contrary, the triune God is the lover at the heart of the universe. From everlasting to everlasting, there is one true God who exists as an intimate fellowship of three coequal and eternal persons—a God who finds infinite delight in the glory of his own being. The sovereign creator is also the eternal lover, who enjoys community as well as unity within the Godhead.

[8] Augustine, *Christian Doctrine*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, ed. Philip Schaff (1887; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 1.5.

This triune God—the God of eternally loving relationships, who created us for community—is the one in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). This is the God, said the apologist Francis Schaeffer, *who is there*.[9] And because he is there, he must be at the center of our worldview, as he is the center of everything else. The Christian worldview steadfastly maintains that God is the "ultimate reality whose trinitarian nature, personal character, moral excellence, wonderful works and sovereign rule constitute the objective reference point for all reality."[10] Nothing can be understood apart from God, writes John Piper, "and all understandings of all things that leave him out are superficial understandings, since they leave out the most important reality in the universe."[11]

HE IS NOT SILENT

The triune God of the Bible has spoken. As Francis Schaeffer went on to say, *He is there and he is not silent*.[12] God has revealed himself to us, so that we can know who he is. Just as importantly, he has revealed his purpose for us. If God had not spoken, how could we ever know the meaning of our existence? Because he has spoken to us, we have a vantage point that transcends our own perspective and enables us to see things as they truly are.

God has spoken to us both in the general revelation of creation and in the special revelation of his Word. The Protestant Reformers liked to say that God has given us two books. One book is creation; we know God by what he has made: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge" (Ps. 19:1–2). "Every fact in nature is a revelation of God," wrote

[9] Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968).
[10] Naugle, *Worldview,* 261.
[11] John Piper, *A God-Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 24.
[12] Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1972).

the Scottish novelist and theologian George MacDonald, and each fact "is there such as it is because God is such as He is."[13] Even the bright blue flash of the kingfisher and the soaring flight of the eagle testify to the beauty and the majesty of God. Yet creation is not the only place where God has revealed himself. In order to help us know the way of salvation, he has also given us the book of his Word. As the psalmist went on to say: "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple" (Ps. 19:7). God is revealed in the words of Scripture as well as in the works of creation. The righteous law and saving gospel of the Old and New Testaments are part of his divine revelation—the true and trustworthy words of God. Galileo had both the Bible and the book of creation in view when he stated that "the Holy Scripture and nature derive equally from the godhead. . . . God reveals himself no less excellently in the effects of nature than in the sacred words of Scripture."[14]

The main theme of Scripture is the saving work of Jesus Christ, God the Son, who is the Word of God *incarnate* (John 20:31). This claim is unique to biblical Christianity. Christianity is the only religion or worldview to claim that God himself has become a man by taking on the flesh of humanity in the person of a single individual. Through the mystery of the virgin birth, at one and the same time Jesus of Nazareth is fully divine and fully human. This is essential to the whole story of salvation, as we shall see. For now, it is enough to say that God is revealed to us in the person of his Son. "In these last days," the Scripture says, God "has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:2). Indeed, to see the Son is to see the Father (John 6:46). Therefore, in Jesus Christ we have true knowledge of the living God.

It is only because God has revealed himself that it is possible

[13] George MacDonald, *Creation in Christ*, ed. Rolland Hein (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1976), 145.
[14] Galileo Galilei, "Galileo's Letter to the Grand Duchess" (1615), in *The Galileo Affair: A Documentary History*, ed. Maurice A. Finocchiaro (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 92–94.

for us to have a Christian view of the world. How can we know anything true about anything? Most importantly, how can we know the truth about our own purpose for life and place in the universe? We know these truths because God has revealed himself in what he does and what he says, in his works and in his Word, both written and incarnate. Furthermore, in coming to know Christ we gain access to an explicitly Christ-centered view of the world. He is the starting point for all of our thought. If we believe that Jesus Christ is the true Son of God—the one who *is* the truth (John 14:6)—then we will accept his view of God and of ourselves in sin and salvation.

Unless God had revealed himself to us, we would be limited to our own merely human perspectives. This is precisely what many non-Christians believe: that God has not spoken. The film critic Roger Ebert explained it like this: "Let me rule out at once any God who has personally spoken to anyone or issued any instructions to men. That some men believe they have been spoken to by God, I am certain. I do not believe Moses came down from the mountain with any tablets he did not go up with."[15] Some postmodern thinkers press their rejection of divine revelation to its logical extreme by denying that we have any transcendent perspective on reality at all. According to the philosopher Richard Rorty, there is "nothing deep down inside us except what we have put there ourselves," and "no standard of rationality . . . that is not obedient to our own conventions."[16] Truth itself is socially constructed. It is subjective, not objective, so all worldviews have an equal claim to the truth. There is no single, objective, overarching perspective that gives us a true and comprehensive explanation of the world. "Your worldview is just your opinion," people say. "You have your story, and I have my story, but there is no story that holds everything together."

[15] Roger Ebert, http://blogs.suntimes.com/ebert/2009/04/how_i_believe_in_g.html.
[16] Richard Rorty, quoted in Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 228.

Christianity rejects such relativism because God has revealed himself, telling us one grand story of salvation and teaching us what is true, in distinction from what is false. Christianity is true to the way things are. It is "not a series of truths in the plural," said Francis Schaeffer, "but rather truth spelled with a capital 'T.' Truth about total reality, not just about religious things. Biblical Christianity is Truth concerning total reality—and the intellectual holding of that total Truth and then living in the light of that Truth."[17] Another way to say this is that the Christian faith is a unity of thought—truth that is interconnected. Christianity "is not just a lot of bits and pieces—there is a beginning and an end, a whole system of truth, and this system is the only system that will stand up to all the questions that are presented to us as we face the reality of existence."[18]

This does not mean, of course, that we have a perfect grasp of the truth or that we always do a very good job of living it out. We are culturally and historically situated, and thus we bear many of the limitations of our own time and place. Our finitude limits our knowledge, just as our fallenness distorts our understanding. This is as true for Christians as it is for anyone. We have only a partial grasp of the total truth.

God himself does not have the same limitation, however. He does not have a point of view; he has the complete view. And because he has revealed himself, we can see things from his vantage point—not perfectly yet truly. All truth is God's truth. That is to say, whatever things are true are things that God knows to be true, wherever we find them. Therefore, as Jonathan Edwards rightly said, all knowledge lies in the "agreement of our ideas with the ideas of God."[19] We are able to come to a true understanding of the

[17] Francis A. Schaeffer, quoted in Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 15.
[18] Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, 5 vols. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1982), 1:178.
[19] Jonathan Edwards, quoted in Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 91.

world by thinking God's thoughts after him—however imperfectly or incompletely—and knowing the truth as he knows it to be.

"Once we grasp this principle"—namely, that all truth is God's truth, wherever it may be found—"then the worlds of literature, philosophy, history, science and art become the Christian's rightful domain."[20] Indeed, everything in the world becomes the Christian's rightful domain. Christianity is a God-given, Bible-based, Christ-centered worldview that gives us a coherent and comprehensive view of reality. This worldview begins with the infinite, personal, triune God who is there and is not silent, who was living in love before anyone or anything else ever existed. This loving God has revealed himself in the world that he made, in the inspired Word of the Bible, and in the incarnate Word of his Son. All meaning and purpose—including our own meaning and purpose—are defined in relationship to him. Thus the Christian worldview is not merely a set of propositions but a perspective on life that flows out of our friendship with a personal God, whose love writes our story.

[20] Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 25.

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