

The Pilgrim's Pathway

**The Bible, the Church, and the World:
A Third Way (21)**

Essential Features of Worldview Christianity

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The “third way” of relating the Bible, the church, and the world—what we are calling “worldview Christianity”—harvests the best of the “first way” of Theonomy/Christian Reconstruction and the best of the “second way” of religious secularism, while seeking to avoid the flaws of these positions. Let’s look at several essential features of this third way, the way of worldview Christianity.

The first principles of worldview Christianity

At this point we need to introduce a bit of Latin. The Latin noun *principium* (plural: *principia*) refers to principle, source, beginning. In terms of our discussion, a *principium* is that from which all genuine and true understanding flows. The term comes from Aristotle, who noted that in order for a principle to be a *first* principle, it must be certain, immediately evident, and never a hypothesis. A *principium* is not the conclusion of an argument or syllogism, but is their foundation and source. To be a *principium*, such a truth cannot be proven by external argument, but contains within itself the evidence of its own veracity.

According to biblical teaching, Scripture is a principium, a source and foundation, of all knowing. Scripture and its truth are prior to all argument, all proof, all experience. This claim belongs to the heart of a distinctively Christian worldview. Not Scripture *plus* tradition (though tradition has its place), not Scripture *plus* the church (yes, the church is important), not even Scripture *plus* experience (though experience is essential). No, it is Scripture alone. Period.

A second principium undergirding the Christian worldview is the God of Scripture, who reveals himself preeminently and fully in the person of Jesus Christ. People cannot reason their way to this God of the Bible, but rather he must reveal and disclose himself to people. This principle was true before sin, and apart from humanity’s fall into sin. From the very beginning

human beings required, and received, verbal divine revelation by which to interpret and understand all of reality. The God of the Bible is not discoverable, but rather he manifests himself, and makes himself known, to human beings. The true God of the Bible is genuinely knowable only through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom God relates to the creation, to history, and to humanity. This God is the ground of all being, the source of all life and existence, the beginning of all reality.

Thus, the Christian worldview arises from these two principles or source-premises, namely, Scripture as the ground of all knowing, and God as the ground of all being.

Naturally, these two *principia* are closely related. The authority of Scripture is the authority of God himself. Nothing else, and no one else, other than God can establish the authority of his own Word. Scripture's authority depends on God alone, and Scripture is to be received because it is his Word. Scripture is self-attesting, and God is self-existing. The Bible's truthfulness rests on nothing but God, and God depends on none other than himself.

The Christ-centered heart of worldview Christianity

This Bible and the God who reveals himself in this Bible teach a worldview that begins with creation and ends with glory. The Bible's fourfold theme is familiar: creation—fall—redemption—consummation.

For our discussion, it is very important to understand and confess the centrality to this fourfold theme of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will go wrong—and many do go wrong—at the very start of worldview thinking if we “save” our talk about Jesus until we “get to salvation.” It is very common to hear people say that salvation, grace, eternal life, the work of Jesus Christ, etc. cannot be learned from creation, from general revelation, or from nature—from which the deadly conclusion is drawn which claims that the Lord (sovereign) Jesus (savior) Christ (anointed) has no essential, inherent, abiding, primordial relationship to creation, general revelation, and nature. It is suggested that at best the Second Person of the Trinity is related to creation as the Logos (John 1.1ff.), as divine speech through whom creation came into being.

Indeed, the Second Person of the Trinity is the Logos, the Word through whom and by whom all things were made, as John 1 clearly teaches. Other equally clear and important Bible passages teach, however, that this beloved Son “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of

sins” (Col. 1.14) is the firstborn of creation (Col. 1.15) by whom all things were created (Col. 1.16) and in whom all things hold together (Col. 1.17). Though we may well distinguish between creation and redemption, we may never separate or isolate them. In fact, it is precisely the heart of the Bible’s gospel message that in the Lord (sovereign) Jesus (savior) Christ (anointed), the redemption of creation has been, is being, and will be accomplished!

The faith-fueled activity of worldview Christianity

How tragic it would be if, in our ceaseless defense of justification-by-receptive-faith, we surrendered to the error of sanctification-by-passive-faith.

The “third way” of worldview Christianity aims to integrate faith-activity with real-life consequences. Put bluntly: *faith has consequences*. It is impossible to separate religion and faith from the conduct of individual and societal activity. “Doing” always depends on “thinking,” and “thinking” gives form to “believing.” To the extent that it is faithful to its own *principia* of Scripture and the God of Scripture, Christianity is the only religion whose answers *really work*. But these answers belong to real questions that real people are asking about real living in the real world. The Christian faith-life (doctrine *and* practice) has consequences for both individuals and for societies, for persons and for cultures. The Christian worldview generates a unique understanding and practice of science, art, economics, politics, education, homemaking, child-rearing, friendship, etiquette, marriage, work, manufacturing, and more. False ideas—wrong ideas—have bad consequences. True ideas have good consequences. That is simply the way God has made the world and created reality.

Rather than quarantine faith and the Bible and the lordship of Jesus Christ to the church and its parking lot, Christians are redeemed (bought back and delivered from sin and its power) in order to express and apply faith and the Bible and the lordship of Jesus Christ in all of their living. Theonomy/Christian Reconstruction has this right: all the Bible, the whole Bible, every part of the Bible, is profitable for all of living. Religious secularism has this right: the church is called to declare the Bible’s truth and its principles, which then Christians are called to express and apply personally in every endeavor. Worldview Christianity seeks to equip Christians-in-community in applying biblical truth-principles in all human activity.

The world-blessing impact of worldview Christianity

The year was 1816. Boston journalist Nathaniel Willis applied his Christian faith to public journalism, with great blessing and impact on many lives.

Later, in 1845, Kentuckian former slaveholder Cassius Clay appealed to reason within revelation—holding aloft the Bible and the US Constitution—as he sought to overturn the evil institution of slavery.

These and similar stories are narrated in the opening chapter of *Turning Point: A Christian Worldview Declaration*, written in 1987 by Herbert Schlossberg and Marvin Olasky. Their point is clear: God’s people are the light *of the world* and the salt *of the earth*. They are God’s people for the sake of their surroundings—in this case, to illuminate and to flavor the world. When God’s people live biblically and faithfully, this light and salt cannot be contained, enclosed, imprisoned, or neutralized. The Bible teaches this. History illustrates it. And God’s people know it.

And there, dear reader, we have the necessary coupling: the impact of individuals might be quite limited, but groups living their faith-fueled vision impact everything. By the laws of divine grace, Christians-in-community necessarily impact living all over the place. As Christians we are members of numerous communities—educational communities, economic communities, political communities, etc. In many of these communities we share life with people whose worldviews compete with our own. In some of these communities, we have the privilege of cultivating and developing activity unique to these spheres in ways consistent with our worldview—Christian schools, Christian journalism (think of *World* magazine), even Christian political groups. Where freedom permits consistent faith-activity, Christian communities are privileged to exert a witness-filled impact, often prompting non-Christians to ask the most wonderful (or challenging) question that Christians will ever hear, the 1 Peter 3.15 question: Why are you the way you are? Why do you do what you do?

Sadly, Christians whose life-application of biblical principles is locked up in the church building rarely get to hear that question.

So there is an evangelistic, missional quality to worldview Christianity, a feature that goes far beyond words of invitation, to include deeds of demonstration!

More books

The ideas explained above rely on the writings of others. I recommend the following for your instruction and enjoyment, ordered somewhat in terms of preference:

(Re)Thinking Worldview: Learning to Think, Live, and Speak in This World, by J. Mark Bertrand (Crossway, 2007)

Turning Point: A Christian Worldview Declaration, by Herbert Schlossberg and Marvin Olasky (Crossway, 1987)

A Christian Worldview: Essays from a Reformed Perspective, ed. by C. N. Willborn (Presbyterian Press, 2008)

What Is the Christian Worldview?, by Philip Graham Ryken (P & R, 2006)