

The Concept of Worldview

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Introduction:

A worldview is a set of beliefs about the most important issues in life from the perspective of a specific personal or cultural point of view. Worldview answers the question, "What is real?" A worldview is a conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously determine reality; and having once accomplished that task, we then decide how we should then live in light of that reality. Worldview is learned by association from infancy and provides us with assumptions we later take for granted concerning why things are the way they are, and concerning questions we feel do not need to be asked because the answers are provided by our culture.

Every rational human being has a worldview even if they are not able to articulate it, or are not aware of the concept of worldview. People seem to have a need to form some general picture of the total universe in which we live. Thinking intentionally in worldview terms is important because it helps us to understand ourselves more fully, and it enhances insight into the way other people behave. Acquiring this skill is also important because it enables us to relate our own activities, experiences, and relationships in a meaningful way to the world as a whole. Just as having the right lens prescription brings our physical world into clearer focus, a correct worldview brings into focus our understanding of people, events, and ideas.

The correct worldview, which we assert to be a biblical one, is a worldview of wisdom which knows and fears God. The Book of Proverbs is useful for us in this regard as it guides us into correct thinking about ourselves, our world, and other people. The first phrase of Prov.23:7 (q.v.) tells us that as a man thinks within himself, so he is; your mind matters! Cultivating a biblical worldview is part of being transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom.12:2), and absolutely essential if we are to love God with all our mind (Mt.22:37). How do think Phil.4:8 applies in its context to a discussion of worldview?

I. The worldview onion



II. The worldview core

A. A philosophy of life

1. Questions about what exists (metaphysics, ontology, origins).
2. Questions about how we should live (ethics).
3. Questions about how we know what we know (epistemology).

B. Presuppositions

- 1) Like Augustine (354-430) we assert that we must believe *something* before we can know *anything* (we are speaking in general terms, not about saving faith => Rom.10:17).
- 2) Like the axioms of geometry: they are never proved or even provable, yet if they are denied the propositions drawn from the axioms do not follow since there is nothing to follow from.
- 3) Some writers speak of worldview presuppositions as the cultural core of a society acquired through the process of enculturation; hundreds of paradigms (i.e., anchors in reality, or invisible filters) are added from the time we are born which help us sort the relevant from the irrelevant.
- 4) Another author has suggested that new-born children are like a blank hard disk: no data except for the operating system! From day one and with every passing day new files and directories are added until the child becomes sentient, at which time he starts to write his own programs based on the data previously stored, albeit unconsciously.
 - 4.1 Racism/tribalism
 - 4.2 Animism
 - 4.3 Floor is dirty/clean
 - 4.4 Shame/guilt
 - 4.5 Time/event
 - 4.6 Relational/individualistic
- 5) Given the centrality of these core beliefs, is genuine change possible? Yes. Paradigm shifts.
 - 5.1 Ac.2 => the disciples, from fear to faith.
 - 5.2 Ac.9 => Saul of Tarsus, from fanatical opposition to faith.
 - 5.3 Philemon 15f => receive Onesimus as a brother, not a slave.

III. Worldview universals

- A. **Causality** explains to a people how they and their world came into being.
- B. **Human cognition** is concerned with how the mind works.
 1. From a biological point of view there are no differences in how the mind operates from one culture to another or from one historical epoch to another.
 2. Although cognitive structures vary culturally, human cognition (i.e., the intellectual process) is universal.
 3. We are all rational, we all think; but our culture defines for us our presuppositions which form the foundation for our analysis of the world we see as our reality. Any conclusions we might draw must be consistent with that reality (cf. WV onion).
- C. **Meaning** is that worldview universal which motivates us to attempt to explain why we are alive and how we should organize our lives.
 1. It moves us to ask why things happen (illness, blessing, drought, barrenness, death, prosperity, poverty...)
 2. It seeks to satisfy our need to know the meaning of events in life.
- D. **Relationship** places self in perspective with other(s).
 1. We are aware of self, of others, and of our environment and we attempt to explain how each ought to be connected to the other.
 2. The way a culture communicates expectations of conformity to behavioural norms and how it handles, e.g., matters of discipline when individuals refuse to conform, are addressed here.
- E. **Classification** asks how people order and identify experience in the world.
 1. Is it random? Is chaos normal (as postmodernists suggest)?

2. Classifying, ordering is a human activity pursued by people of all cultures regardless of ethnocentric valuation or perceived sophistication, even if varying categories are assigned to similar experience.
 3. The act of classifying reflects a logical capacity that exists within all humans regardless of culture.
- F. **Time** is more abstract because its perception is not linked to objects as directly as space.
1. Western cultures tend to be time-oriented, abstract, and concerned about the future
 2. Non-Western cultures are event-oriented, concrete, and concerned about the past.
 3. The present seems to have significance only in relation to the remembered past or the hoped for future.

IV. The Biblical worldview

A. **Causality** - In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

1. As caused beings our attention needs to focus on the uncaused cause of all things and what His purpose was in bringing us into being.
2. Matter, the world of the material, is not to be feared as evil, neither is it to be ignored. It is to be cared for according to the cultural mandate of Genesis 1-3 as a charge from God to stewards who must give an account.

B. **Human cognition** - We are made in the image of God.

1. Part of that image is the ability to think, reason, decide, and feel.
2. All of this is to be done to the glory of God, not our own.
3. Spiritual discipline (discipleship) makes sense because it is both a rational action and one that is honouring to God in that it reflects obedience to His Word.

C. **Meaning** - we are God's creation and are in His care.

1. We must therefore seek His meaning and purpose for all that happens in our lives individually and collectively.
2. There is no significance to our lives outside of that attached to our existence by our creator.

D. **Relationship** - There is a more basic relationship than ours to other people and our environment: that is our relationship to the Father.

1. Sin has entered the equation and must be dealt with because it keeps us separated from God and in fear of the spirit world, other people, and God Himself.
2. Jesus entered our world to serve the Father's purpose and because of what He has done we can again be in open and free relationship with our creator and act as bearers of the evangelistic mandate to share with all other people this good news of freedom from bondage to fear, shame, and guilt.
3. As people in right relationship with God we have the ability to be rightly related to every other person and to our environment.
4. Only God's moral laws can guide our relationships with other people and with our world. Clearly, we do not always get it right; we both give offense and at times are offended necessitating the exercise of biblically guided discipline with a view to reconciliation and restoration.
5. While all cultures have established acceptable ways of coming to terms with interpersonal and group conflict these ways are not necessarily transferable across cultural boundaries in every case.

6. Spiritual discipline is part of accountability to God and it must be recognized that it is also part of accountability to other people with whom we are in relationship.

E. **Classification** - Our world is ordered by God but because of sin this order is not always clearly seen.

1. We trust God to work in our world and even to do miracles to care for us.
2. He has given His angels the charge to watch over us and He has sent His Holy Spirit to indwell us; why should we even consider dealing with animistic spirits of the age who are living in rebellion against their creator while they await certain judgment?
3. We must forgo any attempt to manipulate the Spirit of God to do our will as if we were Christian animists.
4. Only as we submit our human will to the will of God do we begin to understand God's order in creation and to appreciate the need to obediently apply the Word of God in faithfulness to His design.

F. **Time** - It is linear.

1. It had a beginning and it will have an end in the plan and purposes of God.
2. In right relationship to God we are able to live presently in both the past and future as a foretaste of eternity.
3. Eternity is not something anyone can claim to fully understand because we are currently locked in time, but God has provided us with some clues. If we think of any easily definable block of time in our life (four years in school, several years in the military, etc.) and apply the faculty of memory to the events on the continuum of time we can simultaneously be everywhere present. We can focus on the remembered events at the start of the time block and then, as quick as thought, move to the end. In this sense we cause the years of the past to be compressed into a form useable in the present. The capacity of memory is of course the variable here and we often forget or even alter past events in our minds, so the illustration is far from perfect. Also, this illustration can only be applied to the past; for our thoughts on the future we must depend on the revelation of the Word of God as we wait for the events to unfold.
4. The acts of God to redeem us happened in the past yet we are continually challenged in the Scriptures to remember them in the present and to keep them always in our minds.
5. The final acts of God to completely deliver us from sin will happen in the *eschaton*. We are to look forward to those things with such expectancy that our present life is shaped by the reality of those promises; we want to live now as if we were already at that future point.

Sources:

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Introduction:

When the foundations are destroyed, what shall the righteous do? So asked those who sought to distress David the King with threats and mocking. David knew that his foundation could never be destroyed because it was nothing less than his relationship with God Himself. How about us? Do we

have the confidence David had that our foundation is firm, unshakeable? Do we lose our spiritual or theological balance when events in the world, or opposition, or the results of an election cause us distress? Our culture lives by a worldview that is not consistent with Scripture; we are shaped by our culture to a certain extent, it is true, but we have the ability to critique our culture according to the Word of God. We do not have to accept uncritically what world around is telling us to believe, or expecting us to do. Let's read Psalm 11 together.

I. The context of Ps.11:3

- A. The psalmist was being taunted because of His trust in God
- B. The nature of the taunt
 - 1. v.3 part of the mocking
 - 2. David's response begins in the next section
- C. The response of 11:4-11
 - 1. Is.5:18-23
 - 2. Ps.12:8

II. Understand the times

- A. Rom.13:11 =>
- B. Eph.5:15f =>

III. In times such as these, what foundation should we build on, and what should we avoid?

- A. Instructions from Scripture
 - 1. 1 Cor.3:10f =>
 - 2. Eph.2:20 =>
- B. Biblical bedrock
 - 1. Jesus' words in Mt.7:24-27 =>
 - 2. Reflected in Abraham: Gen.12:1-3; 15:6; 18:25 =>
 - 3. Reflected in David: 2 Sam.7:12-17 =>
 - 4. Joshua => obey, enter, conquer
 - 5. Ezra, Neh. => post-exilic rebuilders
 - 6. Esther => faithfulness, even in exile
 - 7. Job => God is just; trust Him
 - 8. Psalms => worship
 - 9. Proverbs and Ecc. => wisdom
 - 10. Mt.1:1 => the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham, the son of David.
- C. Examples of sandy places in Scripture
 - 1. Gen.3 => scepticism and doubt
 - 2. Gen.11 => let's all be the same!
 - 3. Gen.12-50 => God is real, but I still want my way (e.g., Jacob; Gen.47:9 => 'few and unpleasant have been the years of my life'..., in contrast to Joseph)
 - 4. Ex. - Dt.; Judges, Ruth => submission, rebellion, judgment, restoration
 - 5. 1,2 Samuel => Samuel, Saul, and David
 - 6. 1,2 Kings (1,2 Chron.) => Solomon to the exile
 - 7. Isaiah => Judah admonished re: its mission as a servant of God, before he exile
 - 8. Jer. - Daniel => during the exile
 - 9. Hosea - Haggai => pre-exilic exhortations to Israel and Judah
 - 10. Zechariah and Malachi => post-exilic quick sand.

D. Examples of sandy places in the world

1. Idolatry throughout the history of the OT, the whole world
2. Classical Greek pantheism
 - 2.1 Socrates => questions about how to live, based on his conviction that people were basically good: if someone is taught the right thing to do he will always do it; no one knowingly does wrong
 - 2.2 Plato => learning is remembering what you already know; the one and the many, form and appearance; truth, beauty, justice, good
 - 2.3 Aristotle => forget Plato; empiricism is the answer
 - a) Roman emperor worship, etc.
 - b) Constantine at least stopped the persecution of the early church, but we must wonder if that was the right thing to do; why? After Constantine the church (i.e., the RCC) gets going, gets big, gets corrupt, and eventually gets reformed
 - c) Since the Reformation of the 16th century:
 - d) 18th century => Enlightenment rationalism
 - e) 19th century => Romanticism and emotionalism
 - f) 20th century => Existentialism and the human will
 - g) 21st century => Postmodernism: no absolute truth, no objective morality, no ultimate reality

IV. When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

A. Individually

1. Think biblically (Mt.22:37; Rom.12:1-3; Eph.4:23; Phil.4:8; Col.3:16)
2. Cultivate moral, intellectual, spiritual discipline (1 Tim.4:7f)
3. We are in the world, but we are not of the world (Jn.17:11, 14-18)
4. We do not accommodate the world, we counter it
5. The Lord is in His holy temple: trust Him; His sovereignty is intact (Ps.11:4)
6. He is also with us on earth through His Spirit
7. He is in control, no matter what culture does, no matter how hardened the world becomes (cf. Dan. 7:13f)
8. Absolutes are real: judgment is waiting for the wicked who reject God's just laws
9. As God's people, we can expect to be targeted by the god of this world and his disciples, but our foundation will never be shaken.

B. In the church

1. Sin has fundamentally corrupted the way we think; Rom.1:18-32. People know, yet suppress the truth in unrighteousness
2. Therefore, we must deal with the reality of sin; Rom.7:21
3. SW; Satan is alive, but not well
4. *Semper reformanda*
5. 1 Tim.3:15f; 2 Tim.2:15

V. Conclusion

A. Solzhenitsyn at Harvard's 1978 graduation:

1. Your world is 'free' in the legal sense...
2. ...but it is hemmed in by fads, trends (and we might add, the winds of doctrine)
3. Needed: a spiritual blaze

B. 1 Pt.1:24f

C. Heb.13:8

1. It moves us to ask why things happen (illness, blessing, drought, barrenness, death, prosperity, poverty...)
2. It seeks to satisfy our need to know the meaning of events in life.

D. Relationship places self in perspective with other(s).

1. We are aware of self, of others, and of our environment and we attempt to explain how each ought to be connected to the other.
2. The way a culture communicates expectations of conformity to behavioural norms and how it handles, e.g., matters of discipline when individuals refuse to conform, are addressed here.

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Introduction:

Worldview colours the way we all interpret life and triggers the decisions and responses we make. Worldview comprises one's collection of presuppositions, convictions, and values from which we make sense of our world and life. It is a conceptual scheme by which we interpret and judge reality. Worldview is an explanation and interpretation of the world, and it is an application of this view to life.

Worldview begins with presuppositions, beliefs we simply accept as true without supporting evidence from other sources. As Christians our worldview ought to be grounded in Scripture. Two presuppositions rise above all others: 1) the creator God is living, personal, transcendent, and triune; and 2) the character of our creator God, His purposes and His will, are known in His inerrant revelation, the Bible. We cannot claim to have embraced a Christian worldview unless we are convinced that God has spoken in Scripture and that it is the inerrant and authoritative Word of God. Scripture is the standard by which we test all other truth-claims because it is both the foundation and final authority for everything we hold true; it shapes what we believe from start to finish, governs our behaviour, and frames our entire perspective on life. The Bible is therefore the crucial starting point in developing a Christian worldview. While our theological systems are fallible, God's

revelation is infallible. The answers to the questions we ask are conditioned on the understanding that God is the source of all truth, and that all truth therefore relates back to an understanding of God and His purposes for this life and the next. Absolute truth depends on the absolute fidelity of God, who can be trusted in all he does and says. Reflect on Amos 7:7.

The Christian worldview will intersect with other worldviews at various points, but it will be unique in revealing the character of God, the importance of Scripture, and the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. While the Bible contains all we need to know about life and godliness (2 Pt. 1:2-4), it does not address all we need to know about every field of study; when it speaks in any subject area, however, it speaks authoritatively. The Christian worldview is profitable in the world of scholarship as it shows the one true source of life and reality in God; in evangelism it answers the questions and objections of the unbeliever as God draws people to Himself; and in discipleship it informs and matures us as we learn to see the world from God's perspective and order our lives according to God's will. The goal: Jer. 9:23f.

I. The attack on Biblical sufficiency

A. What does it mean to say that Scripture is sufficient?

1. The Bible is an adequate guide for all matters of faith and conduct
2. It gives us the tools we need to deduce from Scripture principles for life and godliness not expressly stated.

B. What is the problem?

1. Many Christians not believe this anymore and assume that something more is needed to help cope with life in the contemporary world
2. Even some pastors and church leaders doubt the sufficiency of Scripture; preaching and teaching are being replaced with entertainment, music, drama
3. Those who teach the Bible carefully, thoroughly, accurately, deeply are rare
4. Evangelical mysticism => hearing God speak directly through a strong impression or voice in one's head
5. Obsession with Satan and demonic powers; talking with and commanding them.
6. Looking elsewhere for more 'revelation' and new mystical experiences.
7. Actually, this is one of the primary marks of cults which pretend to be Christian.

C. Marriage and the family

1. Christians seem not to believe that the Word of God and its principles will lead to a God-honouring marriage
2. Divorce among 'born-again' Christians is as common as among unbelievers
3. No marriage ever fails unless one or both of the partners is disobedient to clear biblical teaching (e.g., 1 Pt. 3:1-7)
4. Such failures are not proof of the insufficiency of Scripture, but of biblical illiteracy among those who say they believe

II. Does Scripture claim to be sufficient?

A. What does the Bible have to say?

1. 2 Pt. 1:2-4 => "...all things pertaining to life and godliness"
2. 2 Cor. 9:8 => "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times..."
3. John 17:17 => "...Your Word is truth"
4. 1 Cor. 2:13ff => "...words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit..."
5. Mk. 12:24 => "...you neither know the Scriptures nor the power of God..."

B. How did Jesus handle Satan (Mt. 4:1-11)?

1. No major exorcism formula; just speaking the Word of God
2. Jesus exercised the power of God through the Word of God, not mysticism, not signs and wonders, not ecstatic utterances, not psychological insights
3. When we read, study, obey, and apply Scripture, we have sufficient power to deal with any situation in life
4. Lk. 11:28 => blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it
5. Lk. 16:19-31 => the parable of the rich man and Lazarus
 - 5.1 rich guy, like many today, demanded supernatural affirmation of truth
 - 5.2 Jesus revealed that even His resurrection from the dead, that miracle in and of itself, would convince no one
 - 5.3 Scripture, illuminated by the Spirit, is all-sufficient in teaching about salvation
6. Heb. 4:12 => "the Word of God is living and active..."
 - 6.1 Scripture is unique: there is no weapon superior to it
 - 6.2 there is nothing that penetrates the inner being more effectively
 - 6.3 the Bible does what no psychoanalyst can ever do: lay bare the deepest part of a person's soul
7. James 1:25 => "the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts..."
 - 7.1 perfect law of liberty: the complete and sufficient Word of God
 - 7.2 satisfaction and fulfilment are bound up in obedience to the Word of God
 1. 1 Pt. 2:2 => "...long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow"
 2. Ac. 20:20, 27, 32 => "I declared to you the whole counsel of God...and I commend you to God and to the word of His grace which is able to build you up"
8. Dt. 6:4-9 => basic doctrine for Israel: "...the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ...these words shall be on your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children...you shall bind them on your hand, ...between your eyes...on the doorposts of your house..." Point: logocentricity, i.e., the centrality of the Word of God

III. A Psalm about the sufficiency of Scripture

A. Ps. 19:1-6

1. General revelation.
2. Rom. 1:20 => God is revealed in His creation.
3. Yet, nature alone does not reveal saving truth.

B. Ps. 19:7-14

1. A summary of special revelation, the absolute and utter sufficiency of Scripture as our one true and infallible guide in life
2. 19:7-9 reveal the infinite intelligence of God's mind in six lines of thought, each with three elements: a title for the Word of God, a characteristic of the Word, and a benefit of the Word
 - 2.1 the law; perfect; revives the soul
 - 2.2 the testimony; is sure; makes wise the simple
 - 2.3 the precepts; are right; rejoice the heart
 - 2.4 the commandments; are pure; enlighten the eyes
 - 2.5 the fear of the Lord; is clean; endures forever

- 2.6 the rules of the Lord; are true; righteous altogether => Scripture is the complete, sufficient, error-free source of all truth.
- 3. 19:10-13 reveal the supreme value of Scripture
 - 3.1 Scripture is more valuable than fine gold
 - 3.2 it is the source of life's greatest pleasure
 - 3.3 it is the greatest source of spiritual protection
 - 3.4 it is the source of our greatest profit
 - 3.5 it is the supplier of the greatest purification
- 4. 19:14 => conclusion
 - 4.1 David wanted his words and thoughts to be biblical.
 - 4.2 people today who abandon this perspective have lost their commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture and therefore lack genuine discernment and understanding; they have embraced a non-biblical worldview.
 - 4.3 Ac. 17:11 => the Bereans are an excellent model for a Christian worldview; they applied their minds to the study of Scripture.

IV. In the world generally however, the mind has already been wasted

- A. It happened a long time ago as a result of the fall as people began to make life decisions without consulting the truth of their creator
 - 1. Result? 2 Tim. 3:7 => always learning and never arriving at the truth
 - 2. Note: this does not mean that there are not highly intelligent people in our world or that people are able to perform any number of good deeds; only that without re-creation and transformation of our minds in Christ we remain enemies of God focused on self-interest.
- B. How was the mind wasted?
 - 1. Gen. 3:1-7 => Satan waged war against God; the battlefield was Eve's mind
 - 2. The empirical method initiated
 - 2.1 Satan planted seeds of doubt in Eve's mind about God's truthfulness
 - 2.2 she concluded that the only way to decide whether God was right or wrong was to test Him with her mind and her senses
 - 2.3 Rom. 1:25 => she (and Adam) exchanged the truth of God for a lie; the command of God was no longer authoritative in her mind
 - 2.4 when Satan presented alternatives, God's Word became optional
 - 2.5 Gen. 3:6 => in this first act of human rebellion Eve conducted three tests to see who was right: God or Satan
 - 2.5.1 first, she observed the tree and saw that its fruit had nutritional value; it made good physical sense to eat it.
 - 2.5.2 next, she noted that the fruit was aesthetically pleasing; she felt good about it.
 - 2.5.3 finally, she saw that the fruit had intellectual value; she would be like God.
 - 2.6 her conclusion: either God was wrong or He had lied; Adam shared her view without apparent question (Gen. 3:6) and the human mind was wasted by sin; fellowship with God was no longer humanly possible because they lost the ability to understand life from God's perspective (Rom. 5:12)
 - 3. 2 Cor. 11:3 => the serpent deceived Eve, and similarly he tries to lead us away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.
- C. Thus the human mind was wasted by sin
 - 1. Result: judgment, alienation from the Creator (Rom. 1:24,26,28)
 - 2. All of their offspring are effected

- 2.1 no longer concern for the thoughts of God (Ps. 53:1; Rom. 1:25)
- 2.2 minds were blinded by Satan to the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:4)
- 2.3 no longer wise, but foolish (Ps. 14:1; Titus 3:3)
- 2.4 no spiritual life; only death in sin (Rom. 8:5-11; 2 Thess. 1:9)
- 2.5 desires now set on the things of earth (Col. 3:2)
- 2.6 all walk in darkness (Jn. 12:35f, 46)
- 2.7 life in the flesh (Rom. 8: 1-5)

V. Can the mind be reclaimed?

A. A mind fallen

- 1. Adam's mind still functioned, but not at the same superior level as before the fall
- 2. Previously, he and Eve had only potential to sin; now they possessed an inclination to sin continually; they were cursed rather than blessed because of their rejection of God's revealed truth
- 3. But God... (Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7; 1 Pt. 2:24)

B. A mind reclaimed (42)

- 1. The redeemed mind knows and comprehends the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:4-6; 5:17-21; 1 Jn. 5:18ff), it possesses the helmet of salvation (Eph. 6:11, 17), symbolic of our regenerated mental ability to discern spiritual truth
- 2. The renewed mind is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), but challenges remain which require us to continually readjust our thinking using Scripture as our guide lest we return to foolish and unbiblical thought patterns due to lingering sin
 - 2.1 Rom. 12:2 => do not be conformed, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind
 - 2.2 Eph. 4:23 => be renewed in the spirit of your mind
 - 2.3 Col. 3:10 => ...having put on the new self which is being renewed...
 - 2.4 Col. 3:2 => set your minds on things that are above, not on earth
 - 2.5 2 Cor. 10:5 => ...take every thought captive to obey Christ
 - 2.6 Col. 3:16 => Scripture is the mind of God (at least, all that He chose to reveal to us!); to think like God we must think like Scripture
- 3. The illuminated mind is not enslaved to church dogma or led astray by false teachers because the Holy Spirit within us guides us into the truth individually and as a body of believers (Ps. 119:18, 130; Lk. 24:45; Jn. 16:13; Eph. 4: 11f; 2 Tim. 2:15; 4:2)
- 4. The Christ like mind (44), unlike the mind of Descartes, is not full of doubt (James 1:5-8)
 - 4.1 ultimate idolatry: rejection of the mind of God in order to worship at the altar of human reason, one's own independent thinking
 - 4.2 ultimate worship: to embrace the certain and true mind of God the Father (Rom. 11:34), God the Son (1 Cor. 2:16), and God the Spirit (Rom. 8:27); to love the Lord our God with all our mind
 - 4.3 Rom. 11:33-36 => Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God...; as Paul was in awe of God, so should we be
 - 4.4 Is. 55:8f => ...My thoughts are not your thoughts
 - 4.5 Phil. 2:5 => have this mind in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus...
 - 4.6 John Owen (1616-1683) => are your spiritual thoughts like guests visiting a hotel, or like children living at home?

VI. Truth, Satan, and the Christian mind

A. God is true; He communicates only truth; He defines the standard of rational thought

- 1. The Christian mind should be a repository of God's revealed truth, unbending in the face of opposing ideas or seemingly superior arguments (2 Tim.1:7f)

2. God invites us to reason together with Him, just as He invited Israel (Is.1:18); Satan would have us reject reason in favour of rebellion (2 Cor. 4:4)
 - 2.1 even after salvation temptations remain (2 Cor. 11:3)
 - 2.2 flaming missiles are aimed at the minds of believers (Eph. 6:16); this is the nature of spiritual warfare
 - 2.3 the Accuser is armed with schemes (Eph. 6:11) and designs (2 Cor. 2:11)
 - 2.4 solution: prepare you minds for action (1 Pt. 1:13; 3:15)
 - 2.5 take the offensive by disciplining your thought life (2 Cor. 10:4f); use the Word of God to do battle against philosophies, worldviews, teachings that minimize, contradict, or try to eliminate the Christian worldview
3. 1 Thess. 5:21 => examine everything carefully...

B. Using the Christian mind (49)

1. Ps. 119
 - 1.1 love the Scriptures (119:47f)
 - 1.2 desire to know God's Word as the best way to know God (119:16, 93, 176)
 - 1.3 knowing God leads to obedience (119:44f)
2. Meditation => lingering long over the words of Scripture with a view to renewal of the mind
 - 2.1 prolonged thought, pondering
 - 2.2 to ruminate
 - 2.3 to percolate
3. Three areas for meditation
 - 3.1 God (Ps. 27:4; 63:6)
 - 3.2 Scripture (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2)
 - 3.3 God's works (Ps. 143:5; 145:5)
4. Think on these things; soul food in Phil. 4:8

VII. Balancing revelation and reason

- A. Do they never mix?
 1. Anti-intellectualism would suggest this, rejecting all matters not mentioned in the Bible; result => intellectual withdrawal
 2. So would hyper-intellectualism, favouring naturalism and dismissing the credibility of revelation; result => Scriptural withdrawal
- B. Correct approach: both/and
 1. Scripture is inerrant; when it speaks to a certain discipline its truth is superior.
 2. When the Bible does not address an area, there is the whole of God's creation to explore for knowledge, albeit with the caveat that our conclusions are fallible.
- C. Other voices
 1. J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) => "...every Christian is to some degree a theologian"
 2. Harry Blamires => "to think Christianly is to think in terms of Revelation".
 3. Arthur F. Holmes => concerning the recovery of truth, the Christian worldview cannot possibly be left out if we are to think Christianly.
- D. As believers we are to engage our minds with the minds of others as we live out our Christian worldview.
 1. The key to embracing the Christian worldview and cultivating a biblical mindset is to bring the Biblical conceptions of nature, man, and history in relation to God into our thinking about everything else.
 2. In this effort, special revelation has first priority over natural revelation.

3. The beginning of wisdom is still the fear of the Lord (Prov. 1:7; 9:10; 1 Cor. 1:20f).
4. The alpha and omega of the Christian worldview is a knowledge of God and a knowledge of the truth in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:3).

THE CHURCH

By David Kornfield

With the emphasis on body life and spiritual gifts these days the bookstores are flooded with books on the church. And, compared to other nations, the United States is flooded with churches. So it would seem that the church ought to be rather self-explanatory. However, different books say different things and churches represent different concepts of what the church should be. Christians are under the obligation to develop at least a basic theology of the church, especially since most of us are a part of one.

Developing theology is something that every Christian should know how to do. Every Christian ought to be able to take any subject from sex to sacraments, death to drinking, and develop from the Bible what it is that he believes about that subject. This is what I want to do here about the church, for every Christian is a part of the church and cannot afford to drift unthinkingly with any current of churchianity into which he might happen to fall.

If you would like to work through some basic passages relating to the church and develop some of your own theology before reading on, you might include Acts 2:37-47; 4:32-37; Romans 12; Ephesians 4; and 1 Corinthians 12-14. These passages focus on the way the church functions and the purpose of the church. It would be very helpful at this point if you would write down a definition of the church. In this way you will not just be receiving information like a cup being filled, but rather will have some basis from which to compare and contrast the definition and theology to be developed below. Once you have done that, continue on.

We will begin with a definition of the church and then look at that definition more carefully and explore some of the theology behind it: "The church is Christ's holy, indwelt people redeemed to be worshippers in community in the world."

THE CHURCH IS CHRIST'S

First and foremost, the church is Christ's. Does that seem overly obvious? How obvious is it in the church(es) with which you are familiar? If you are not sure, you might ask some of the following questions:

- Who is the most prominent in the church? Christ? (Acts 4:13; 1 Cor. 14:23-25)
- Why do people come to church? To meet with Christ? (Mt. 18:20)
- How are church decisions made? With Christ? (Heb. 13:17)
- What is done at church? Is Christ exalted in it? (Eph. 5:19,20; Col. 3:16,17)
- Where does the church meet? Is there more emphasis on coming to a certain place or on coming to (and with) a certain Person? (John 4:20-24).

Jesus told Peter that he had found a rock upon which He would build His church and not even death would not overpower it. What was that rock, that foundation? It was Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Mt. 16:15-20). It seems this should be each Christian's daily confession, and as it is made corporately we have the promise of Christ that the Church will grow irresistibly. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the church (Eph. 2:20; 1 Peter 2:4-10), but our lives, particularly our corporate lives as the church, are not always clearly built on this cornerstone, this confession that Christ is the Son of the living God and the recognition that *He* is the Head of the Church. . . not us!

Every glimpse of heaven given in the Scriptures shows Christ in the spotlight being exalted. To the degree that churches are colonies of the Kingdom of God, Christ should be first and foremost in our gatherings. In fact it is only because of Christ that the Church even exists. This is obvious in the definition of the Church given above. Because we are Christ's and only because we are Christ's can we ever think of ourselves as *holy*. Were it not for Christ's miraculous work, to consider ourselves as *indwelt* by God would be literally insane. We can only be truly human, fully the people God intended us to be, because of Christ's work past and present. That we are *redeemed* can be credited to no other than our Saviour. To be *worshippers* in spirit and in truth can only be experienced by those who are Christ's. The world's understanding of living *in community* is of necessity shallow without Him who provides an eternal and infallible foundation. Truly Christ as our Head has achieved the impossible, calling us to live *in this world* as His holy indwelt people redeemed to be worshippers in community. How can the church be anything other than an expression of the fact that "Christ is before all things and in Him all things hold together; He is also head of the body, the church . . . so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything" (Col. 1:17,18).

THE CHURCH IS HOLY

The Church is Christ's holy ones. Christ's holy ones are those who are His saints. The word "saints" is literally "holy ones" and in certain languages like Spanish the term for holy, "santo," is the same word as "saint." The term was common in the Old Testament for speaking of the people of God, particularly in the Psalms and Daniel. Paul uses the term constantly in addressing or referring to the people of God, specifically the churches to whom he was writing.

"Saint" or "holy one" means one who is *set apart to*. Specifically in the Christian context, this means to be set apart from a self-centred life to the Kingship of Jesus the Christ. The church should be different; it should offer an alternative lifestyle and an alternative set of values from that of the world. The Church's purpose is to become the perfect, blameless, radiant bride of Christ. Christians are specially called ones whose lives both individually and corporately will shine in healthy, love and life-filled contrast to non-Christians as they fall more and more in love with Christ. We are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9).

THE CHURCH IS INDWELT

The Church is Christ's holy indwelt ones. God with us, Immanuel, was prophesied in the Old Testament (Is.7:14), became a part of history in the person of Jesus Christ (Mt.1:23), and continues in the present in the Body of Jesus Christ. The recent emphasis on Body Life is a necessary emphasis on what we can and should be doing because of who we are. We are the Body of Christ because we are indwelt by Him. Christ has not just visited planet earth. He has come and gone and returned to us again in the Person of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-19; 16:7,13-16).

In the Old Testament, Jehovah repeatedly promised His people something very unusual: He whom the heavens cannot contain would dwell among them (Ex. 29:45,46; Lev.26:12; Ezek. 37:27,38). When Solomon dedicated the temple to the Lord, "the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" and the temple became a meeting place between the people and Jehovah God (1 Kings 8:11,27-30). So in Jesus' time people came from far and wide to the temple in Jerusalem to worship Yahweh. They could not actually come into His presence in the Holy of Holies, but they could gather around the place where He was. However, the Church as God's people has a different promise from Yahweh, an even more amazing commitment made by the Creator to His creatures. He says, "I will dwell in them;" no longer among His people, but in them (2 Cor. 6:16; John 14:23).

Now, instead of the temple or sanctuary in Jerusalem, the living Church has become the dwelling place of God: "Don't you know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16). We tend to apply such verses to ourselves as individuals, but Paul is writing to Christians as a body, the Body of Christ. It seems that while we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit individually, there is a special sense of God's presence when we are gathered together (Mt.

18:18,20; Eph. 2:19-22). In fact, Ephesians 4:12-16 suggests that there is no such thing as growing into the fulness of Jesus Christ as "lone ranger" Christians. The whole thrust of growing into maturity in Jesus Christ is corporate.

Jesus is saying "Here I am: I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20 NIV). This verse is written not to non-Christians but to Christians, and not just to individual Christians, but to a church. Is it possible that this applies to the churches of America?

You say, "I am rich; I have acquired wealth, and do not need a thing. But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked . . . Here I am: I stand at the door and knock" (Rev. 3:17,20 NIV).

"But," you ask yourself, "what does all this have to do with being indwelt?" The relationship between this Revelation passage and being indwelt is that Christ is outside the church, knocking on the door, when He *ought to be inside* the church, "as supreme head to the Church. For the Church is his body, and in that body lives fully the One who fills the whole wide universe" (Eph. 1:22, 23; Phillips). Just as the individual indwelt Christian can grieve or quench the Holy Spirit, so too the gathered people of God can hurt Him can shut Him out. The Holy Spirit longs to be at home in His Church.

THE CHURCH IS PEOPLE

The Church is Christ's holy indwelt *people*. In all the glory and power of being Christ's, being holy, being indwelt, we must remember that the Church is made up of human beings. To be human means to struggle with faults, with weaknesses, with sins, and with the fear of being vulnerable. God's people are a people who confess their faults and needs, not just to God but to each other and thereby bear each other's burdens, intercede for one another, and are the means of healing for each other through Christ (Gal. 6:1,2; 1 Cor.12:20-27; James 5:16).

There is another facet to the Church being human: we humans are the ones the angels and demons are watching to verify whether God's Kingdom really is all He claims it to be. Paul clarifies this in speaking of the great secret hidden through the ages of God's plan of salvation. And God's reason for this plan?

To show to all the rulers in heaven how perfectly wise he is when all of his family, Jews and Gentiles, alike are seen to be joined together in his church, in just the way he had always planned it through Jesus Christ our Lord (Eph.3:10,11 Living Bible).

When Christ comes in His glory, every creature above, on, and below the earth will have to confess His Lordship and how great His wisdom truly is (Phil.2:9-11). The Church, however, has the great privilege of showing everyone, including all the angelic powers, in advance, that God does "have it together" in this confused and spoiled world. We humans, weak and limited as we are, are transformed into a testimony of Christ's love at work. Those listed in the Bible's hall of fame are cheering the church on toward the goal of sharing in Christ's holiness (Heb.11,12:1,10).

THE CHURCH IS REDEEMED

The Church is Christ's holy indwelt *redeemed* people. In creative tension with the grandeur of proving God's wisdom to all the rulers of heaven is the humbling knowledge that we as the Church were once under God's curse, doomed forever for our sins. We went along with the crowd and were just like all the others, full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air, who is at work right now in the hearts of those who are against the Lord. All of us used to be just as they are, our lives expressing the evil within us, doing every wicked thing that our passions or our evil thoughts might lead us into. We started out bad, being born with

evil natures, and were under God's anger just like everyone else (Eph.2:1-3; Living Bible). The next two words stir my blood. They are the words which mark every change in us as individuals, as a local church, and as the Church Universal throughout history. BUT GOD...!

We were doomed forever, BUT GOD stepped in.

We were full of sin, BUT GOD stepped in.

We were obeying Satan, BUT GOD stepped in.

We were doing every wicked thing we could think of, BUT GOD stepped in.

To redeem, Webster says, is to repurchase or to ransom. God's people were once owned by Satan, BUT GOD has ransomed us with a terrible price. We are no longer our own, but Christ's who ransomed us (1Cor.6:19f). Accepting Christ's payment must be accompanied by a comprehension of the depth from which He has saved us, the depth to which He went to save us, and the heights to which He has raised us (Eph.2:1-6). We, the redeemed, are the dead called to life; there should be nobody so much ALIVE as the gathered people of God. Humble because the work is God's, yet confident for that very reason, it is our privilege to show the dead around us that life and the way to it.

THE CHURCH IS WORSHIPPERS

The Church is Christ's holy indwelt people redeemed to be *worshippers*. We are to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, in the words of the Westminster Catechism. Jesus' life and His prayer in John 17 are good examples of three priorities for the church which appear in many parts of Scripture: 1) His relationship with His Father: worship, 2) His relationship with others committed to God: fellowship, and 3) His relationship with those not yet committed to God: witness.

We worship Him who is our Head, in whom and through whom all things consist and have their being (Col.1:17,19). J. I. Packer has put it well in his book *Knowing God*:

What were we made for? To know God. What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God. What is the 'eternal life' that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. 'This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent' (John 17:3). What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment than anything else? Knowledge of God. 'Thus said the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me' (Jer. 9:23f). What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives Him most pleasure? Knowledge of Himself. 'I desire the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings, says God' (Hos.6:6) (1973:29).

Watchman Nee insists in his book *Sit, Walk, Stand* that the Christian life has an order of priority and until we have sat in the presence of God, we cannot walk in the Christian life or stand in spiritual warfare (Eph.2:6; 4:1; 6:10-12). A. W. Tozer says that:

We're here to be worshipers first and workers only second. We take a convert and immediately make a worker out of him. God never meant it to be so. God meant that a convert should learn to be a worshipper, and after that he can learn to be a worker. Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel." Peter wanted to go at once, but Christ said, "Don't go yet. Wait until you are endued with power." Power for service? Yes, but that's only half of it; maybe that's only one-tenth of it. The other nine-tenths are that the Holy Ghost may restore to us again the spirit of worship. Out of enraptured, admiring, adoring, worshipping souls, then, God does His work. The work done by a worshipper will have eternity in it." (*Worship: The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church*, 1961:14)

It is worth noting that “to be worshippers” speaks not of something we do so much as something we are. The Church of Jesus Christ is not people who occasionally worship, say, at 11:00 on Sunday mornings, but rather people who are worshippers. Everything they say and do therefore, is an act of worship; it is done for God, with God, and in exaltation of Him. Brother Lawrence in *Practicing the Presence of God* puts it quite well in saying that “we should establish ourselves in a sense of God’s presence by continually conversing with Him” (1959:12). In worshipping we begin to know God, and the more we learn of Him the more we are compelled to be worshippers.

THE CHURCH IS COMMUNITY

The Church is Christ’s holy indwelt people redeemed to be worshipers in *community*. That theme has flowed throughout this paper even as it flows through the New Testament. The three sections of Scripture that speak of our diversity through the variety of spiritual gifts that we have been given all emphasize strongly our unity in that diversity (Romans 12:4f; 1 Cor.12:4-7, 11-13, 20-27; Eph.4:1-6). Christ’s high priestly prayer that we may all be one, just as His Father and He are one, is repeated four times, more often than any other petition Christ makes (John 17:11, 21-23).

Community (having all things in “common-unity”) was one of the distinctives of the New Testament Church (Acts 2:44f; 4:32-37). John writes that because we have communion with God, we have communion with each other (1 John 1:3,6,7); in fact, the one who does not love his brother is not of God (1 John 2:9; 3:10). That is to say, it is impossible for us to be true worshippers of God, to be one with Him, and not have communion with each other.

It is possible to feel that there is communion with others during brief encounters as on Sunday mornings. It is not possible, however, to have communion with *only* brief encounters on Sunday mornings. Webster defines communion as “an act or instance of sharing,” whereas community is a “unified body of individuals” characterized by: a) joint ownership or condition; b) common character; c) social activity; and, d) a social state or condition. The emphasis on Body Life, small groups, and spiritual gifts all flow out of the need for community. Community seems to require commitment to a small group of believers in order for people to share their lives in depth. In Jerusalem where thousands were added to the church at one time, there was considerable small group activity in the homes, centred on eating together and partaking of the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:46). As the Church spread, community apparently was fostered through house churches such as those in Rome (Romans 16:5), several in Corinth (Romans 16:23; 1 Cor.16:19), one in the home of Nympha in either Colossae or Laodicea (Col. 4:15), and one in the home of Philemon in Colossae (Philemon 1:2).

The importance of community in the sense of responsible care for all aspects of believers’ lives is reflected in the many “one another” injunctions in the Bible. Caring for one another in the church will touch each individual’s time, money, energy and possessions. Howard Snyder’s *The Problem with Wineskins* and his *The Community of the King* challenge the church in this area.

THE CHURCH IS IN THE WORLD

The Church is Christ’s holy indwelt people redeemed to be worshipers in community *in the world*. Jesus’ prayer for unity among the believers was explicitly “that the world may know (and believe) that Thou didst send Me” (John 17:21,23). The Church is to be highly visible and highly involved in the lives of those outside the Kingdom. Jesus challenges His followers to be salt and light: to be the world’s flavouring to make it palatable, and to direct the praise of men to God (Mt.5:13-16). The believers in Jerusalem were known for “praising God, and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47 NIV). Their unity in worship and community was highly visible to the unsaved and resulted in many being added to the church. It is this example of unity that Christ said would convince the world of who He is (Jn.17) and, indeed (as mentioned earlier), convince all the rulers in heaven (Eph.3:9f). While there are certain times such as in the intimacy of the Lord’s Supper, when the church needs some family-like

privacy, we also need to actively seek ways in which to demonstrate our love, both individually and corporately, among those who do not yet know Christ.

Effective in-the-world community requires that Christians committed to each other live close enough to each other to interact regularly between households, both with those which are part of the committed community and with those which are not yet part of it. Only in this way will unbelievers be able to see believers' love and unity on a daily basis, as happened in Jerusalem. And when the believers not only meet each other's needs, but also reach out to meet unbelievers' needs in a natural way because they are neighbours, Christ is made visible through His Body. A church in this setting will be a dynamic, healthy body -- if the priorities are straight: worshippers first, in community second, and in the world third. The three are inseparable in daily living, but the priorities will shape the distinctives for which the church will be known, the format and type of meetings, and whether the work will be God's or man's.

The definition which has been developed of the church has entirely inseparable parts: "The Church is Christ's holy indwelt people redeemed to be worshipers in community in the world." It quickly becomes obvious that we cannot really be or do any part of the definition unless every one of the other parts is also true. For instance, we cannot be worshipers unless we are Christ's, unless we are holy, unless we are indwelt, unless we are fully human, unless we are redeemed, unless we are worshipping with others, and unless we are reaching out to the world as a result of who our God is.

In New Testament times, to be committed to Christ implied being committed to His people in a local church. Some will surely ask, "Why can't we be part of the Church Universal without being committed to a local church?" It seems that just as Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the Godhead, the local church is the incarnation of the Church Universal. The Godhead and the Church Universal are both invisible spiritual entities which are a great mystery and in some sense incomprehensible to us. Because Jesus lived as a man among us we can understand that God really is all He says He is, and know that His promises to us are really true. The witnesses of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension persuade us that we too will be raised with Him to eternal life. Because Jesus suffered and died for us we know that God's love is real. Similarly, the local church is the incarnate revelation of the Church Universal, proving its nature and reality in the everyday lives of those Christ came to save. If Jesus Christ is not who He says He is, then we must give up our belief concerning the Godhead (1 Cor.15:12-32). Similarly, if the local church is not becoming what it should be, then any biblical claims concerning the church in general are open to doubt. Here we must recognize that Jesus Christ was infallible and so accurately represents the Godhead, whereas we are very fallible and do not yet wholly represent what the Church will be. God has given the church time on this earth, however, to grow into the maturity He desires of His Son's glorious Bride. The Scriptural guidelines for development of Christian maturity are written to and about specific bodies of believers, not just to individual Christians nor to an abstract, invisible Church. It is in our life together that we prove God's grace. The basic passages on the church mentioned at the beginning include the following: Acts 2:37-47; 4:32-37; Romans 12, Eph.4, and 1 Cor. 12-14. Below is the definition of the church which has been developed in this paper, with the texts that speak to each part of the definition. Perhaps this will be of some help for those who wish to study it further.

THE CHURCH IS:

CHRIST'S	Acts 2:38,47; 4:33; Rom.12:1,5,11; 1 Cor. 12:3-6,18; Eph.4:1, 7-11,15-16,30.
HOLY	Acts 2:38; Rom. 12:1,9,21; 1 Cor.12:3; Eph.4:12,30.
INDWELT	Acts 2:38; 4:33; 1 Cor.12:3-11,13; Eph.4:3-6,30.
PEOPLE	Acts 2:39; Rom.12:3; Eph 4:8.
REDEEMED	Acts 2:38; Eph. 4:22-24,30.
TO BE WORSHIPERS	Acts 2:42,43,47,11; Rom.12:1,11; Eph.4:13,15.
IN COMMUNITY	Acts 2:42-46; 4:32-37; Rom.12:4-10, 13-16; 1 Cor.12-14; Eph.4:11-16.
IN THE WORLD	Acts 2:47; Rom.12:2,14,17f; 1 Cor. 4:22-25; Eph.4:17f.

The above definition of the church calls Christians to radical discipleship together. Being the church as defined here requires taking specific steps to see what changes we need to make together, and the first of those steps may be coming to Christ in confession that we have failed to be who He has called us to be. Only through thoughtful meditation and prayer can a definition be taken from paper and worked into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Christ's Church will not grow by might, nor by strength, but by God's Spirit and His leading in ways we never imagined. It may take many different forms, but everywhere it will have a deep impact on those who are a part of it and those who are around it. For the church is not just a religious club; it is:

CHRIST'S HOLY, INDWELT PEOPLE, REDEEMED TO WORSHIPPERS IN COMMUNITY IN THE WORLD, that God might be exalted, the people of God perfected, and the dead called to life!

J. Allen Thompson. *Lord, Make us Your Church*. Coral Gables, FL: International Center for Church Planting, 1982. (reprinted with permission from the author)

Editorial note:

The foregoing definition might be expanded slightly so as to read as follows:

The church is Christ's holy, indwelt, people, redeemed to be worshippers in community and witness in the world, to the glory of God.

Introduction:

The Sermon on the Mount describes a new ethical culture peopled by citizens of that Kingdom of Heaven which was proclaimed by John the Baptist in Mt.3:2, and by Jesus in 4:17. Citizens of that Kingdom are blessed because they respond to the present world as disciples of Christ, not according to their own desires or according to legalistic formulae. Many non-Christian philosophers who have refused to worship Jesus as God have nevertheless admired His ethics, Mahatma Gandhi among them. Among the many Christian views, an *inaugurated eschatology* seems nearest the truth: this view sees Jesus presenting an 'already/not yet' tension as the goal for Christians in any age, one which we are expected to be guided by as we cultivate our biblical worldview, but this goal will not be fully realized until Jesus returns. While the Holy Spirit enables us to live more consistently within the biblical worldview, still we see that our sinfulness prevents us from perfectly attaining God's standards (Rom.7:21; Luther's comment => *simul justus et peccator*). Still, as we grow as individual disciples of Jesus we are better able to strengthen one another in the body of Christ and to permeate society persuasively with the Christian worldview as people blessed by God.

For this reason Jesus begins this discourse with a description of these blessed people. They are:

the poor in spirit (5:3) => meek, unworldly, humbly trusting in and depending on God

those who mourn (5:4) => seeing their own sin realistically; happiness transcends their worldly condition

the gentle (5:5) => throwing one's weight around is not an option

those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (5:6) => a desire for God's standards to be established both personally and socially

the merciful (5:7) => extending grace freely; reciprocal nature

the pure in heart (5:8) => loving God with undivided loyalty (Mt.22:37ff)

the peacemakers (5:9) => Rom.12:18 so far as it depends on us

the persecuted (5:10-12) => because of an orientation of life which seeks to be controlled by God and His will (1 Pt.2:21-25; 4:12-19)

salt and light (5:13-16) => giving flavour, purifying, doing good works to glorify God.

This is a process which takes a lifetime, but also a process that gives encouragement along the way (2 Cor. 3:18). It is not about law-keeping, at least in the Pharisaical sense; it is about God's desire that people be like Him morally, bearing His image. Our first parents began well, but soon decided (with an assist from Satan) to neglect this aspect of God's image and to seek likeness to God in knowledge and power. God's design for us however remains unchanged: that we be like Him, holy and separated from sin. The Law was given for this purpose (Law as the Mosaic legal system, as the whole Old Testament, as specific laws, and as an operating principle): as light, as a tutor to lead people to Christ. For us as Christians the moral Law of God continues to show us the way to be like Jesus (1 Jn.1:5-7); for that reason Jesus did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. He came to fulfil them by His perfect obedience (Mt.5:17; Lk.23:41; 2 Cor.5:21), to model for us the perfect likeness of God (Jn.14:9ff; Heb.1:1-4), and to bring the Law to its intended goal as a standard of life, not a means of salvation.

Grace allows God to see us as pure, innocent, right, and strong in Jesus Christ. The law is no longer scowling over us in judgment, but it is still holy, just, and good. Faith is the only way to respond to this grace of God; life in the Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit against which there is no law. In reality law and grace are two sides of a single coin of God's salvation which is accessed by faith: without grace, law is a terrifying destroyer; without law, grace is meaningless; without faith, we will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Our Christian discipleship requires a righteousness greater than that of mere legalism, but this discipleship cannot be rightly understood until we see how it has been made possible in Christ and the New Covenant in His blood. We must remind ourselves of why we are acceptable to God: because of Jesus' work, not our own.

The Sermon on the Mount also describes the ethical behaviour and greater righteousness which Jesus prescribes in His own authority as God with us. "You have heard...but I say to you," concerning murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and enemies. True righteousness is manifested not in hypocritically seeking to be seen by others, but by giving, praying, fasting, etc., in the presence of God for the benefit of others. It is also important that we demonstrate our faith by challenging anxiety that normally arises as we think of our need for food, clothing, health, and length of life. Insurance isn't wrong, but there is limit to how much we should attempt to guard our own future at the expense of trusting God for His loving care. We must work, but we must also understand that our work does not secure our lives, either in this world or before God; do not be in bondage to personal ability or problems. The solution is to seek God's kingdom (Mt.4:17, 23; 9:35; 24:14) by faith, not self-effort (Mt.5:6, 20; 6:1). Salvation blessings result, such as contentment in grace and faith. Tomorrow? Anticipate it, but don't be anxious about it; we can't control the future any more efficiently than we can control today. These truths are foundational to our biblical worldview.

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the mount with a focus on our treatment of and relationships with various individuals and groups: other disciples, unbelievers, those who behave like wild animals, our Father to whom we come in prayer, people generally, those whose walk the narrow way, false prophets, and finally with Jesus Himself whose authoritative teaching we are to obey. Don't judge, but cultivate discernment in dealing with other believers who may be in need of correction and unbelievers who need to be evangelized. God will give wisdom and grace.

There are only two choices: biblical exclusivism, or the pluralism of the world. Our goal is to live as those who not only say the right words but whose heart/attitude is in submission to God, who through true discipleship serve God according to their gifts and build on solid rock. Jesus teaches with the authority of God as He sets before us the Law of God. He expects us to confidently build

the houses of our lives on the foundation of His words. He says that He has come to fulfil the Law and the prophets. He is the Lord to be obeyed, not just a dispenser of blessings and salvation. He is the judge before whom all will one day stand. He says that God is uniquely His father. Our response must not stop with marvelling at His authority; as we grow as His disciples in the countercultural community of faith of which He is the head we must willingly break from the masses of people rejecting Him and accept suffering with those who are the sheep of His pasture and who live as salt and light. We do this without anxiety and with growing faith in Him who said, "I will never leave you or forsake you (Jn. 14:1-4, 18; Heb. 13:5)."

I. An outline of the Sermon on the Mount: the Ethics of Citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt.5:1-7:29) (source: Craig L. Blomberg):

- A. Introduction (5:1-16)
 - 1. Setting (5:1f)
 - 2. Kingdom blessings (5:3-12)
 - 3. Salt and light (5:13-16)
- B. Greater righteousness (5:17-48)
 - 1. Thesis statement (5:17-20)
 - 2. Illustrations (5:21-48)
 - 2.1 on murder (5:21-26)
 - 2.2 on adultery (5:27-30)
 - 2.3 on divorce (5:31-32)
 - 2.4 on oaths (5:33-37)
 - 2.5 on retaliation (5:38-42)
 - 2.6 on enemies (5:43-48)
- C. True versus hypocritical piety (6:1-18)
 - 1. Introduction (6:1)
 - 2. Almsgiving (6:2-4)
 - 3. Prayer (6:5-15)
 - 4. Fasting (6:16-18)
- D. Money versus real riches (6:19-34)
 - 1. Two masters (6:19-24)
 - 2. The futility of worry (6:25-34)
- E. How to treat others (7:1-12)
 - 1. On judging others (7:1-6)
 - 2. God's generosity (7:7-11)
 - 3. The 'golden rule' (7:12)
- F. Conclusion (7:13-27)
 - 1. The narrow versus the wide (7:13f)
 - 2. Good fruit versus bad (7:15-23)
 - 3. Wise builders versus foolish (7:24-27)
- G. Response (7:28f)

Conclusion:

Where are the people who meet these criteria for blessedness, and whose ethical character identifies them as citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven? They are found wherever Christ is named and obeyed in faith. Luke 6:40 => "Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." Commitment to Christ as His disciples is not possible without a changed life (Lk.6:46). Let these changes be seen in our lives as we grow from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor.3:18).

Worldview is a comprehensive idea of reality from a specific point of view. Everyone has unique worldview, but it is generally related to the worldview of the surrounding culture. To assume that there is a single 'Western' worldview, or a single 'African worldview' is an oversimplification because worldviews will vary from region to region in the US, for example, or from province to province in Canada, or from country to country in Europe, or from tribe to tribe on the continent of Africa. So when we talk about a basic worldview as applied to people in Tanzania, or some people group within Tanzania, it is intended only as a starting point. Our specific goal here is to discern our own worldview presuppositions, to examine a Biblical worldview, to see how different the two are, and then to attempt to bring our personal worldview under the authority of Scripture so that our thinking, and therefore our behaviour, will over time come more into line with what the Bible actually teaches. This is what I believe it means to be continually transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom.12:2), to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor.10:5), to be set free in Christ (Jn.8:31f). This cannot happen until we are re-created through faith in Christ (2 Cor.5:17; Titus 3:5); only then can we be ready like Paul in Phil.3:2-11 to see our received worldview for what it actually is, a humanly devised attempt to make sense of the world without regard for the truth of Scripture. We have to learn to say with Paul that our personally constructed worldview is garbage compare to what God reveals to us in Christ, viz., a complete new way of thinking and living.

Categories within the worldview core are paradigms of reality which 'everyone in our group knows to be true, and which all other people ought to want to know.' Good/bad, right/wrong, things permitted/taboo; demonic activity in day-to-day life.

The following core categories were provided by Duncan Olumbe, a friend in Kenya, a Luo. He identified these as being descriptive of the various traditional people groups he is familiar with in Kenya. The six categories are: the supreme being, origins, human beings, community, knowledge, and governance.

First, the supreme being. Ngai, Mlungu, Allah, et al. There are lesser gods, to be sure: mikoma, mizuka, aphepho, mashetani, jinn, etc. Ac.17 provides us with further insights into the importance various people place on such lesser being.

Second, origins. Seen (material) and unseen (spiritual, angelic, demonic) creation are both considered here because it is understood that both are of equal importance in how we live our lives. If, for example, a sacrifice is given yet the expected response from the spirit world is not seen, there must be a reason. There is fear of the unknown and fatalism.

Third, human beings. We are really no different than other created beings, therefore a person could, with the proper assistance and ceremony, transform into another being. Still, a hierarchy of humanity exists: man => sons => wealth => daughters => wives. Deformity disqualifies a child from being worthy of life.

Community. 'I am because we are.' Not, '*cogito ergo sum.*' There is a primary obligation to family, clan, and tribe which include rites of passage such as birth, circumcision, marriage, death. This obligation is not always welcomed, therefore there is jealousy which can result in physical fighting and cursing. Greeting and socializing are very important; no appointment is necessary or even expected. Anything that increases the flow of communication is considered to be of value, hence the explosion of cell phone usage. Community events such as weddings and funerals are also important. The community tells you that you existed before you were born physically, and that you will continue to exist after you physically die.

Knowledge and knowing. Magic and witchcraft are important here because no one remembers all the rules all the time; when we fail we need the help of spiritual professionals. Ethics belongs in this category as well as in all three others: is/ought; right/wrong; good/bad. Everything here is defined by the traditions of the group as information is passed from one generation to the next through myths, oral literature, legends, rituals. Cause and effect also belong here: for every phenomenon there is a spiritual cause, therefore control of the unseen spiritual world is critical. Dreams and visions are powerful; they must be interpreted.

Governance. Traditionally, even when we factor in the middle level of spirits (cf., Hiebert) leaders are next to the supreme god. They are therefore not to be questioned, and everyone understands that government exists first to serve the leader.

What do you think? How accurate is this assessment of local worldview thinking presented by our Luo brother?

The goal for each of us is to identify our own worldview and to submit it to biblical analysis as we did in the previous exercise. It is difficult, but we must edit out all that is opposed to Scripture and construct a worldview that is thoroughly biblical within our cultural context. Until we do this as individuals the quality our Christian life will always be less than it should be; and until we do this as a gathered body of believers the church will always be less than it should be. Paul Hiebert called for the creation of a hermeneutical community made up of mature believers from within a given church, culture, or worldview setting. These individuals would be tasked with first identifying the worldview core, beliefs, values, and resultant behaviour of the group, and then with analysing each element in light of biblical truth. They would then present their conclusions to their church and describe why change should be implemented, and how they intend to lead the group in the process. One can only wonder, given that 90% of all who were involved in the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 were said to be church members, what would have been different if churches had done this kind of exercise before the bloodshed.

Consider the case study of Pastor Trombo and address the following four categories:

- 1) Identify the cultural practice(s) in question.
- 2) What biblical principles apply?
- 3) Allow Scripture to judge the cultural practice.
- 4) Either affirm the cultural practice as being consistent with the Word of God, or develop a new practice which would draw culture nearer to God's design.