

BIBLICAL ESSENTIALS

THE
TRUTH
ABOUT
WORLDVIEWS

A Biblical Understanding of
Worldview Alternatives

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The Truth About Worldviews

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Postmodernism and the Need for Worldview Analysis

THE NATION THAT IS often hailed as the wealthiest, most powerful, and best-educated nation on earth is still one of the most religious—but in intriguing new ways. Nearly two-thirds of Americans say religion is very important in their lives, and close to half say they attend worship services at least once a week—the highest percentages since at least the 1960s. Other surveys indicate that belief in God and devotion to prayer are at historic highs. Further, voluntary giving to religious institutions—estimated to exceed \$55 billion annually—surpasses the gross national product of many countries. From Los Angeles to New York City, there are more churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques per capita than in any other nation on earth (one for every 865 people).¹

Additionally, more than four of every five Americans say they have “experienced God’s presence or a spiritual force” close to them, and 46 percent say it has happened many times.² There appears to be a deep spiritual hunger in America. The modern world has failed many Americans who are reaching beyond themselves to find meaning and purpose in life.

But being religious today in America looks entirely different than it did only one hundred years ago when Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism dominated the religious landscape. America is now becoming the most religiously diverse nation on earth. Since the Immigration Act of 1965 eliminated quotas linked to national origin, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Zoroastrians, and others have arrived in increasing numbers. Added to this reality is the fact that three in four Americans believe all religions have at least some elements of truth, even though few say they know much about any religions other than

their own. Further, nearly 70 percent think spiritual experiences are the most important aspect of religion, not a written text or set of dogmas.³

With increased religious diversity has come increased emphasis on toleration. In a 2002 *US News & World Report*/PBS poll, 71 percent, including 70 percent of Christians, said Christians should be tolerant of people of other faiths and leave them alone. Only 22 percent (24 percent of them Christians) thought it was a Christian's duty to convert members of other faiths.⁴ The point is that American culture, with its pluralistic nature and its diverse faiths, is changing—radically so.

A recent issue of *Time* magazine (October 13, 1997) focused on the growing appeal of Buddhism in America. In the words of one of its adherents, Buddhism is “a path of enlightenment into a lay culture without priests and temples and structures. . . . [It is a] daily practice of everyday life. . . . It's beneficial to all of us. It will go down in history as one of the best things that happened to civilization.”⁵ How can this be? Buddhism advocates the abandonment of logic and reason, glorifies emptiness and the illusion of selfhood, and looks toward the end of desire and liberation from rebirth. How could multitudes of Americans, including media gods like Steven Segal, Richard Gere, Tina Turner, and Phil Jackson, now embrace a system considered irrational not all that long ago? The answer is that America is now a postmodern, post-Christian civilization.

THE POSTMODERN WORLDVIEW

The whole Western world is in the midst of a paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism. It is imperative that the church and its leaders understand this shift, for it impacts how we both relate to the culture in which we live and how we represent the Lord Jesus Christ in that culture. Postmodernism is not a generation of people; it is a way people view reality, a worldview. As a worldview it seeks to redefine truth and the place of the individual in the scheme of things.

Postmodernism is a reaction against modernism (or modernity). The modern period in Western history began with the Renaissance in northern Italy and northern Europe but exploded with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. According to Millard Erickson⁶ modernity abandoned the transcendent concept of reality, replaced supernaturalism with naturalism, championed humanism and individualism, and saw human knowledge as certain, objective, good, and attainable through the scientific method.

Theologian Stanley Grenz⁷ poignantly sees modernism's human archetype in Mr. Spock, key hero in early versions of the popular TV series, *Star Trek*. The assumptions of the modern mind were that knowledge is certain and reasonable, objective and dispassionate, good and, therefore, optimistic. "Spock was the ideal Enlightenment man, completely rational and without emotions (or his emotions were in check). . . . According to the creators of *Star Trek*, in the end our problems are rational, and therefore, they require rational expertise." As with Spock, the Enlightenment saw human reason as the path to universal truth and universal morality. By contrast, postmodernism rejects the cold rationality of Mr. Spock and embraces a fuzzy tolerance of all truths.

Postmodernism as a worldview is complex and not easy to define; however, its ideas are pervasive and all-encompassing. What follows is an attempt to define the five specific characteristics of this emerging worldview now dominating Western civilization.

1. *A radical hermeneutic*. Rooted in the deconstructionist movement of post-World-War-II Europe, the postmodern hermeneutic (the science of interpretation; how humans interpret and understand the written word) sees words as power; words manipulate and control. This new hermeneutic argues that in communication, there is no final or true meaning to words. Therefore, the reader is sovereign. The reader determines the meaning of the text while the author's intent is nearly irrelevant. According to Alister McGrath,⁸ "All interpretations are thus equally valid, or equally meaningless (depending on your point of view)."

For biblical Christianity, such a position is troublesome. Because authorial intent (i.e., God's verbal revelation in the Bible) is unknowable and irrelevant for the postmodernist, it is senseless to discuss the Bible as the Word of God. The postmodernist considers such a statement offensive and an attempt to control and manipulate. It is insensitive to those who see other sources of "truth," since in postmodernism, all claims to truth are equally valid; there is no universal vantage point for viewing truth. With this mind-set, a postmodernist will argue that it is arrogant and unacceptable for a Christian to claim the Bible as God's Word, as truth or as a source for truth. To accept the postmodern view of the written word is to destroy the foundation of genuine, biblical Christianity.

2. *A radical relativism*. Here is the focal point of postmodernism: the

doctrine of the autonomous self living in community. In postmodernism, the self defines reality. There are virtually no boundaries for behavior, and there are few authority figures that matter anymore. For example, the entire May 7, 2000, issue of *The New York Times Magazine* was devoted to this concept of autonomy. Autonomy impacts all aspects of culture—entertainment, business, law, leisure, and religion. I, the self, define all aspects of reality. There really is nothing transcendent that defines it for me; I am autonomous. This claim has a haunting ring of familiarity to it; in the book of Judges is the refrain, “Every man did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25).

When individual autonomy is mixed with America’s deep-seated commitment to rights and liberties, one sees how lethal this thinking becomes in the areas of sexuality, ethics, and morality. There are no boundaries or absolutes. Instead, the right of the individual is absolute. This belief frames discussion on the key cultural issues of our day—abortion, homosexuality, cohabitation before marriage, the use of genetic and reproductive technologies, and the right to “die with dignity.” When “every man does what is right in his own eyes,” the limits to freedom and rights are boundless.

A 2002 Zogby International poll of college seniors demonstrates the impact of this radical relativism. Nearly 73 percent of students surveyed said that when their professors taught ethics, the consistent message was that uniform standards of right and wrong do not exist.⁹ Instead, what is right or wrong depends on differences in each individual and in the individual’s culture. So, if all beliefs are equally valid, there is nothing to debate. Nothing separates personal “truth” from self-delusion. If students currently enrolled in college are convinced that ethical standards are simply a matter of individual choice, what hopes can we have that they will be reliably ethical in their future careers? This is the end result of a radical relativism.

3. *A radical pluralism.* The first two characteristics naturally lead to the third: a culture with a smorgasbord of religious choice where no worldview has a corner on truth. There are many “truths” and, since there is no certainty anyway, it does not matter which worldview you choose. Postmodernism stands for radical pluralism and universalism. In the postmodernist’s mind, all religions are social constructs, and none is inherently superior to another. All religions are equally valid, and all paths lead to God. Religion, says the postmodernist, is not based on something external but stems from internal needs and subjective

personal experience. Religious people are therefore not discerning truth but rather are the source of their own truths, says the postmodernist. Something is true if it is true for me!

Such a tenet explains why postmodern jargon is so pervasive in our culture. People often use terms with positive connotations—“diversity,” “inclusion,” and “multiculturalism”—to reinforce the claim that there is no truth and that no one can claim truth. Everyone’s opinion is equally valid and worthy. Hence, increasingly Christians are bombarded with charges of being bigots and hatemongers because of the claim that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6) and that Jesus is the only name under heaven by which men are saved (Acts 4:12). This is exclusive truth penetrating an inclusive world. It is exclusive truth, embodied in Jesus and proclaimed as such by His followers.

4. *A radical morality.* Postmodernism argues that moral and ethical behavior is not the result of any final reality such as God. Rather, morality comes from the needs of society. Every culture develops its own morals, and no other culture has the right to judge another’s value system. True ethics are based on the needs of the moment, not final truth.

Let me illustrate: Two recent articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reveal that college students are often unwilling to oppose large moral horrors, including human sacrifice, ethnic cleansing, and slavery, because they believe no one has the right to criticize the moral views of another group or culture. Professor Robert Simon, who has taught philosophy for twenty years at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, indicates that his students acknowledge that the Holocaust occurred but cannot bring themselves to say that killing millions of people is wrong. Between 10 and 20 percent deplore what the Nazis did, but their disapproval is expressed as a matter of taste or personal preference. One student responded, “Of course I dislike the Nazis, but who is to say they are morally wrong?” Another professor, Kay Haugaard of Pasadena College in California, wrote of a student in a recent literature class who said of human sacrifice, “I really don’t know. If it was a religion of long standing. . . .” Haugaard was stunned that her student could not make a moral judgment: “This was a woman who wrote passionately of saving the whales, of concern for the rain forests, of her rescue and care for a stray dog.”¹⁰

The result of postmodern pluralism and relativism is tolerance. You must respect the beliefs and distinctives of others. The only wrong belief is saying that someone else’s beliefs are wrong. Postmodernism has

replaced the ethic of truth with the ethic of tolerance. Toleration extends to lifestyle questions and practices. No wonder criticizing the homosexual lifestyle is labeled as bigoted and hate-filled. No wonder condemning abortion is labeled as threatening a woman's rights. No wonder challenging doctor-assisted suicide as dangerous is labeled naive.

But the Bible repudiates this type of thinking. It contains transcultural principles that form the ethical foundation for all civilizations. It is always wrong to murder, to lie, to commit adultery—no matter what culture one belongs to.

5. *A radical pragmatism.* Since there are no absolutes and every decision is based upon the needs of the moment, whatever works becomes “the new truth.” The triumph of pragmatism therefore marks postmodernism. It does not matter if the United States president is immoral as long as he keeps the economy growing. If state-sponsored gambling causes destructive and addictive behavior, so be it; the profits are going to education and care for the elderly. Same-sex marriages are between consenting adults; if it works for them, fine. No one is being harmed by such practices.

Pragmatism is not a valid test for truth, for it can produce an end-justifies-the-means ethic. Following the tenets of postmodern pragmatism, the culture can justify the destruction of human embryos as a source for stem cells or gender selection of children in order to prevent hemophilia. Such practices will eventually empower parents to select their children as they select a car or a house. Give the specifications, and it is yours. God's revelation to the human race, recorded in the Bible, is the beginning point for truth's pursuit, not a pragmatic, end-justifies-the-means ethic.

THE NEED FOR WORLDVIEW ANALYSIS

The apostle Paul, in Colossians 2:8, issued a penetrating exhortation: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” The relevance of this admonition is clear. We live in a world where “the tradition of men” and “empty deception” are pervasive. Wading through the current sea of worldly philosophies and traditions can be both perplexing and overwhelming—not to mention dangerous! How can a Christian keep from being deceived by worldviews that are

opposed to the knowledge of Christ and His Word? How does one discern the differences between the competing worldviews of our postmodern age?

First, it is important to understand what a worldview actually is. A worldview is the core of what we believe. It answers the basic questions of life: How did we get here (creation and the universe)? Where are we going (the meaning of history)? What is the nature of reality (physical or spiritual or both)? What is the nature of God, or transcendent reality? What is the nature of truth (objective or subjective)? What is the nature of human beings? What happens to human beings when they die? What guidelines determine human behavior (ethics)? This book analyzes each of the major world religions, cults, and philosophical systems as a worldview. The history, major teachings, and ethical implications of each worldview will be considered. The ultimate thesis of this book is that only genuine biblical Christianity provides consistent answers to worldview questions. Only Christianity presents the truth.

Additionally, this book will suggest connection points, or bridges, for sharing the gospel within each worldview. The overall goal is to inform and equip Christians to live and witness the truth of the gospel in this postmodern world where all worldviews are tolerated.

BUILDING BRIDGES

Because Christianity proclaims exclusive truth, Christians must know how to build bridges to the postmodern world. Christians must understand this world and know how to make connections to it, while at the same time maintaining their distinctiveness as Christians. As Jesus counseled, we must “be in the world but not of the world” (see John 17:13-18).

The task of “building bridges” to the larger culture with its postmodern pluralism is very much a New Testament idea. Alister McGrath writes that the New Testament church is really a “colony of heaven. . . an outpost of heaven in a foreign land.”¹¹ It speaks the language of that homeland and is governed by its laws. Yet, as Paul demonstrated in Acts 17:22-31, we are to seek common ground with citizens of earth, to be all things to all people that we might win some. For example, though the dangers of postmodernism are clear, this worldview is not all negative. Postmodernism allows an openness to supernatural realities and spiritual experiences that modernism would have scoffed at. The value post-

modernists usually place on authentic relationships and community, an acceptance of diversity, personal experience, and practical living are not necessarily contrary to Christian values. The Christian must seize the opportunity and find this common ground with postmodernists.

Ultimately, we must speak and live the truth of the gospel in the world and into the worldviews of others. Using 1 Peter 3:15, Ken Boa¹² suggests a pattern for building bridges that will be helpful as you form relationships with those from different worldviews:

- “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” In other words, be certain Jesus is Lord of your life and affirm your utter dependence upon Him. Remember that when you are talking with someone embracing another worldview, this is a spiritual battle. Your task is to be faithful in proclaiming the truth. It is God’s business to change the person.

- “Always be ready.” Know God’s Word and know how and when to use it. In doing so, you will be prepared to correct misconceptions about biblical Christianity.

- “To make a defense.” Always keep the discussion focused on Jesus and His finished work on the cross. Stay away from minor issues and do your best to prevent the other person from focusing on his or her misconceptions. Stay focused in a friendly, God-honoring manner, and do not be sidetracked by the other person’s unique claims or errors.

- “To every one who asks you.” Pray that God will give you opportunities to share your faith in this pluralistic culture. Above all, be a good listener and ask for permission to express your view in the discussion. Do not be pushy or arrogant.

- “To give an account for the hope that is in you.” It is your personal relationship with the living God that is the source of your power and strength. Do not be afraid to recount your personal experiences of all that God has done for you. He is your hope and strength.

- “Yet with gentleness and reverence.” Show patience, respect, and love as you talk. Always look for common ground and seek to develop a relationship of trust and confidence that God can use to bring that person to Himself.

Never forget that Christians have the truth! Only genuine biblical Christianity provides consistent answers to worldview questions. This should give us confidence as we seek to gain understanding about different worldviews, build relationships, and make a stand for the truth in an age of many truths.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. Summarize the cultural and ethnic changes that have occurred in America since the 1960s. What do you see as positives and negatives about these changes?
2. Cite real-life examples of each of the following five aspects of post-modernism from current news headlines, your own community, or past experiences.
 - Its radical hermeneutic
 - Its radical relativism
 - Its radical pluralism
 - Its radical morality
 - Its radical pragmatism
3. What is a worldview? Name some reasons why you think it is important to have a Christian worldview.
4. What are some “empty deceptions” the world gives as answers to the basic worldview questions?
5. In examining Ken Boa’s pattern for building bridges, which points do you think would be the most challenging for you to practice? Why?

Naturalism (or Secular Humanism)

IN HIS BOOK *Culture Wars*,¹ sociologist James Davison Hunter argues that American culture is experiencing a crisis of moral authority. One side of the cultural cleavage, “the progressive,” claims that the individual self is the source of moral authority, while the other side, “the orthodox,” claims that something transcendent is the source of moral authority. This struggle to define America’s cultural center informs the debate over abortion, euthanasia, sexuality issues, education, law, and the role of government in our lives. It is a battle for the future.

The progressive side of this cleavage argues from a naturalistic perspective. There is an inherent antisupernaturalism in this position. For most people committed to modern thinking, physical matter is all there is. God does not exist, and religion is irrelevant. As religion fades, the progressive hopes, peace and harmony will reign. This sentiment is perhaps best captured in John Lennon’s song “Imagine.” In the lyrics, Lennon calls upon us to envision a time when there is “no heaven,” “no hell,” “no religion,” and “nothing to kill or die for.” What he calls the “brotherhood of man” will bring in an age of “no possessions,” wealth, or greed; a time when the world “will be as one.”

When did this worldview originate? What is its origin? One must go back to the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century for the answers.

THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENLIGHTENMENT: MODERN HUMANISM’S ORIGIN

The Enlightenment was a movement of ideas that saw its task as the release of humanity from error and prejudice, toward the achievement of truth, which in turn would produce freedom. Many Enlightenment

thinkers targeted religion, for they believed it embodied the error and prejudice they loathed. They regarded Christianity and all other religions as irrational and inappropriate in a scientific age. The Enlightenment sought rational explanations for all of reality. They especially desired to examine human institutions to discover rational laws that governed society. Some of the principal thinkers of this age were Voltaire (1694-1778), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), Denis Diderot (1713-1784), and David Hume (1711-1776).

Enlightenment thinkers were critical and skeptical of everything. Nothing in society escaped their analysis, including the church, the law, and the government. One French philosopher said, “all things must be examined, debated, investigated, without exception and without regard for anyone’s feelings.”²

Many of them also doubted the certainty of knowing absolute, universal truths that stemmed from religion. David Hume, the Scottish philosopher, epitomized this skeptical commitment by denying the rational certainty of experience, attacking arguments for God’s existence, and authoring a blistering attack on a belief in miracles. Near the end of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) also disputed traditional proofs for God’s existence, claiming that one could not know God through reason, for there was no way to empirically verify His existence.

Finally, John Locke (1632-1704) embodied the devotion to empiricism, a decisive characteristic of the Enlightenment. For Locke, humans were born with no sense of right or wrong or any innate truths. Instead, the mind is like a blank slate that, through life, is filled with data coming from the senses. Following Locke, many Enlightenment thinkers repudiated all religion, including Christianity, as superstitious. It needed to be replaced with a rational system of ethics.³

THE INTELLECTUAL GODFATHERS OF HUMANISM

Three key historical figures have provided the underpinnings of this modern humanism that focuses strongly on the human mind to reason and solve problems. Each has solidified the modern conviction that religion, especially Christianity, has no place in a scientific age. Each has regarded religion as the enemy to progress and the higher achievements of the human race. Each has detested genuine biblical Christianity.

1. *The scientific attack.* Charles Darwin (1809-1882) undermined the authority of Scripture in the minds of many people, especially in

terms of its account of Creation. Before Darwin, most people in the Western world believed the design they observed in the physical world proved the existence of God and that everything had a fixed order or place. Each species was separately created by God, and each had a specific purpose in God's mind. Darwin's 1859 publication of *Origin of Species* shattered these assumptions. He argued that a struggle for existence characterized the natural world, resulting in organic beings adapting to the changing dynamics of their environment. Thus, by natural selection, unfavorable variations and those possessing them are eliminated. This process of natural selection over vast periods of time explains how different species evolve, he thought.

Darwin's theory of evolution had catastrophic effects for Christianity. First, it questioned the literal interpretations of the Bible, especially Genesis 1. Does "day" mean a twenty-four-hour day? Natural selection also argued against a special Creation of God as recorded in Genesis. As a result many doubted the Bible's authority. Second, natural selection sought to replace the idea of divine purpose and design in nature. Chance was offered as the powerful force controlling natural selection. Third, Darwin questioned the idea of order and fixity. For him nature was in a state of flux and change via natural selection; the word was *change*, not *permanence*. Fourth, Darwin's hypothesis was destructive to the idea of the uniqueness of man, so central to Christian theology. For Darwin, man was a product of time and chance. Key doctrines such as the image of God, the entrance of sin into the race through the Fall, and the need for a Savior were all questioned. Darwin shook Christianity at its foundation and made atheism respectable. Without Darwin, it is doubtful humanism would have been a viable option.⁴

2. *The political and economic attack.* Karl Marx (1818-1883), the founder of ideological communism, detested religion of all forms. He led one of the fiercest political and economic attacks on religion, specifically Christianity, in the modern world. He regarded religion as similar to opium; it drugged people. Because religion focused so much on heaven, it kept the working class down and, in Marx's view, was the excuse for their exploitation by the rich. For Marx, only the revolution energized by the working classes (the proletariat) would produce the perfect, communal society that he expected to emerge at the end of history. He believed the revolution would purge society of the evils of capitalism and produce the classless society that would bring history to its end.

3. *The psychological attack.* Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) led an unrelenting psychological attack on religion. An avowed atheist, Freud argued that religion was merely a psychological projection. Like a child runs to its father for protection in times of trouble, so humans project their earthly father into the heavens and run to him when things get tough. Freud believed that religious teaching had no basis in truth and that religion was really a sign of neurosis. Only his method of psychoanalysis, which probed beneath the subconscious, could help the person enslaved to religious dogma achieve the freedom Freud believed possible. His books, *The Future of an Illusion* and *Moses and Monotheism* provide his scathing attack on religious teachings.⁵

The scientific, political, economic, and psychological attack leveled by Darwin, Marx, and Freud have provided the intellectual basis for the ongoing revulsion most humanists have for religion, and especially for biblical Christianity. In some ways, the Christian church of North America is still reeling from these blistering attacks.

MODERN HUMANISM AS A WORLDVIEW: ITS THEOLOGY

What exactly does modern humanism or naturalism mean? At least historically, “a humanist” can be an “academic humanist” who studies the humanities—history, art, philosophy, or the classical languages. Such a scholar can be a Christian. Modern humanists should not be confused with “humanitarians,” people who do good things for others. The humanists (naturalists) that this chapter addresses are those represented in the American Humanist Association, an organization created during the Enlightenment.

In 1933 a group of thirty-four liberal U.S. humanists drafted *The Humanist Manifesto I*, a document considered radical for its time. Committed to reason, science, and democracy, the document rejected orthodox religious dogma and argued for a “new statement of the means and purposes of religion.”⁶ This document was followed in 1973 by *The Humanist Manifesto II*, which not only reaffirmed the tenets of the 1933 document, but also raised the issues of civil liberties, equality, human survival, world economic growth, population and the environment, war and peace, and the building of a world community.

These two documents encapsulate the worldview of modernism. In short, modern humanism despises conventional religion and traditional morality. It rejects any belief in God and, instead, affirms a dog-

matic and optimistic belief in humankind. Modern humanists see the problems of the world—racism, oppression, militarism, war, and poverty—as resolvable by humans working together for the maximum fulfillment of all. Traditional religion, whatever its form, they argue, has not made progress in solving these human problems. The modern humanist claims that we must put faith in ourselves and aggressively attack the problems of the human race. Such a spirit is evident in organizations such as the Americans for Democratic Action, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the National Organization for Women.

Despite the antisupernaturalism of modern humanism, this worldview still has a “theology.” Here are its salient themes:

1. *Creation and the universe.* Humanists contend that the physical world was formed from chaos and that only man’s reason has brought some order to this chaos. There is no divine plan or purpose. For the humanist, the only thing eternal is matter. Carl Sagan, who popularized the humanist approach to science and cosmic evolution, argued, “The Cosmos is all that is or ever will be.”⁷ Humanists say that all the matter of the universe has always existed in some form. In addition, this matter has no relationship to any transcendent creator.

The universe as we know it is a closed system, maintains Sagan.⁸ It cannot be reordered from anything or anyone from outside itself. Of course, there is no transcendent God; humans are unable to reorder matter either. Sagan argues that because humans are matter and because there is no such thing as a soul (or anything supernatural), the laws of the universe apply to humans as well. Humans do not transcend the universe in any manner whatsoever. The universe is a closed system based on a uniform set of cause-effect relationships; humans are a part of that system.

2. *God.* Humanists insist that there is no personal God who created the universe or who gives any kind of meaning to it. They also reject the idea of God as sovereign, as one who organizes and oversees the course of history. As *The Humanist Manifesto II* asserts, “We find insufficient evidence for belief in the existence of the supernatural; it is either meaningless or irrelevant to the question of the survival and fulfillment of the human race. As nontheists, we begin with humans and not God, nature and not deity.”⁹ Thus, humans make their own history without any master plan. There is no accountability to God and no fear of judgment from Him.

3. *Humanity.* The human race is a cosmic accident, say the human-

ists. Humans come from nothing and, when they die, go to nothing. But that does not mean man is insignificant; indeed, humans are the key to a better world. Born with basic goodness, their intellects and attitudes only need to be positively shaped through their environment and education. *The Humanist Manifesto II* contends that “reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that mankind possesses.”¹⁰ That is why modern humanism believes that compassion, cooperation, and community will bring about a better world. For that reason, economic well-being is possible in a world of “shared human values.” There is no such thing as eternity; so modern humanism affirms that happiness is the only core value for the human race.

Humanism as a philosophy contends that “man is the measure of all things.” In themselves, humans are the ultimate norm by which values are determined. They are the ultimate beings and the ultimate authority; all reality and all of life centers on human beings.

Curiously, although humans emerge from nothing and move toward nothing at death, somehow humans acquire supreme dignity. Yet, despite the humanist’s belief in human progress, what is the real reason for hope? Why should we affirm human dignity? Why should I fight to solve the problems of racism, war, or poverty? If nothingness is my ultimate destiny, then human dignity is an illusion. Although emotionally satisfactory, humanism is intellectually dishonest and untenable.

4. *Ethics.* Modern humanism maintains that there are no absolutes to guide humans ethically. *The Humanist Manifesto II* demands that “. . . moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is *autonomous* and *situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stem from human need and intent. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures. . . . We strive for the good life, here and now.”¹¹ For that reason, all human acts are ethically neutral, except for their influence on others for good or ill. But human standards are constantly changing, fluid, and vary from culture to culture. Hence, humans must create their own standards and then live consistently with them. Humanism rejects any dependence on absolute ethics; instead, sexual freedom, personal autonomy, and the unbridled pursuit of personal peace and happiness are the vital center of the humanist’s ethical standard.

For decades humanism was the dominant worldview in most col-

leges and universities. It pervaded the discipline of science and underscored the humanities throughout Western civilization. It gives the impression of being objective, unbiased, and modern. Because modern scholarship has been so closely associated with humanism's tenets, to disagree with it is to appear backward and naive.

Today, however, in the typical college or university, postmodernism is competing with humanism. Where humanism has generally argued that truth is knowable, certain, and obtainable through the scientific method, postmodernism steps away from humanism's claim and argues that truth in any absolute or certain sense is not attainable. For that reason tolerance of all beliefs, worldviews, and systems is the reigning tenet of postmodernism. Both postmodernism and humanism seek human autonomy with no accountability. The relativism and pluralism of postmodernism mesh perfectly with the antisupernaturalism of humanism. The difference between the two is how each views the possibility of attaining absolute truth.

UNITARIANISM: HUMANISM AS AN ETHICAL SYSTEM

In many ways, the religious institutionalization of humanism (or naturalism) is the Unitarian worldview. The Unitarian worldview has its origins deep in early church history when many denied the triune nature of God. However, its modern form has its origin in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century New England. The theological descendants of the Puritans (the Congregationalists) denied the doctrine of the Trinity. The official movement was founded in 1825 as the American Unitarian Association, which merged with the Universalists in 1961. The movement acknowledges that it is no longer a part of the Christian worldview.

The Unitarian worldview has beliefs that make it the religious embodiment of naturalism (or humanism):

1. Unitarians deny that the Bible is God's Word. At best, it is a great piece of literature.

2. God is not triune. In fact, He is not a person. At best, Unitarians regard Him as a Force, or some Prime Mover. Unitarians often embrace atheism comfortably.

3. For the Unitarian, Jesus is a mere man. He is often thought of as a great teacher or ethicist but never as deity.

4. Unitarians argue that humans must look to themselves for their

“salvation,” which means nothing more than the development of good character and living a good life. They reject the doctrine of hell and of God as a judge.

5. In short, Unitarians regard human reason as the sole authority for guidance and purpose in life. This worldview is naturalistic humanism dressed up as a religion with buildings, pastors, and teaching centered on the power of human reason.¹²

BUILDING BRIDGES TO HUMANISM

Bridge #1

Humanism affirms the value of human life and sees human happiness as its core value. This meshes with biblical Christianity, which also affirms the value of human life. However, humanism has no basis for its claim for the value of human life, for helping people, or for showing compassion. Why engage in such things if humans are simply the product of chance? Christianity affirms the value of life because humans bear God’s image (Gen. 1:26ff). It provides the reason for compassion, care, and concern that is missing in humanism. Humanism is most vulnerable on this point and we must lovingly press it.

Bridge #2

Humanism claims that in terms of religious beliefs and ethical standards, it is impossible to have absolutes. In other words, there are absolutely no absolutes. In making such a claim, humanism affirms something absolute. That is a glaring inconsistency, and Christians can point this out. Christians can press humanists to seriously reflect on the inadequacy of a lack of standards for truth and ethics. Are humanists willing to bank everything on the belief that there is no God? What if there is? What if there is accountability? The Holy Spirit can use this inconsistency within humanism to bring conviction.

Bridge #3

Humanism teaches that at death there is extinction. The only “immortality” for the human, says *The Humanist Manifesto II*, is to “continue to exist in our progeny and in the way our lives have influenced others in our culture.”¹³ There is no hope of seeing loved ones, of life after death, or of an eternal destiny. Humanism provides no real incentives for living or for dying. This physical world is all there is, they argue, and we

must live for the moment. If there is no God, then there is no accountability and no motivation for virtue or goodness. Most people cannot live with this kind of teaching.

Here Christianity's message is compelling. It offers hope because there is life after death; there is hope of seeing loved ones and friends. Christianity also offers the certainty of salvation, which guarantees heaven, eternal life with God. Humanism offers no counsel to a family who has lost an infant in death, to someone with a terminal illness, or to a wife who has lost her husband in an automobile accident. The humanist can offer nothing; Christianity offers everything. It is in the real world that humanism's bankruptcy becomes evident.

Naturalism (or humanism) pervades Western civilization and is still currently institutionalized in many of the academic centers. It remains powerful, influential, and informs much of contemporary education. It will retain its position of importance only as long as Westerners seek their purpose and meaning from technology, science, and reason. Its antisupernaturalism is difficult for most people, however, because the average person cannot live without some sense of a transcendent realm, belief that there is something beyond death, that the physical is not all there is. Only genuine biblical Christianity answers that quest for meaning and purpose.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. What were some of the goals and characteristics of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment?
2. Why was it difficult for the Enlightenment person to embrace religion, especially biblical Christianity? What evidence do you see of this same tendency in people you know today?
3. Crystallize the essence of *The Humanist Manifesto I* and *The Humanist Manifesto II* into one or two sentences. What would you say as a possible rebuttal to these documents?
4. How is the humanist's view of humanity similar to and different from the Christian view? Use Scripture to support your observations.
5. Which humanist views or humanist figures (Freud, Marx, Darwin, etc.) do you see as most influential today?
6. What bridge (from the book or your own ideas) might you use to build a connection with a Unitarian friend?

NOTES

CHAPTER 1—POSTMODERNISM

1. Jeffrey L. Sheler, "Faith in America," *US News and World Report* (May 6, 2002), 40.
2. *Ibid.*, 42.
3. *Ibid.*, 42-43.
4. *Ibid.*, 43.
5. *Time* (October 13, 1997), 81.
6. Millard Erickson, *Postmodernizing the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 16-17.
7. Stanley Grenz, "Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology: *Star Trek* and the Next Generation," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 18:2 (October 1994), 325.
8. Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), 186.
9. Cited by John Leo, "Professors Who See No Evil," *US News and World Report* (July 22, 2002), 14.
10. *Ibid.*, 14.
11. Alister McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God and Other Modern Myths* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 28.
12. Ken Boa, *Cults, World Religions and You* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1981), 10-14.

CHAPTER 2—NATURALISM

1. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).
2. Cited by James P. Eckman in *Exploring Church History* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books/ETA, 2002), 72.
3. This survey of the Enlightenment is taken from *ibid.*, 71-74.
4. *Ibid.*, 93-94.
5. Ian S. Markham, ed., *A World Religions Reader*, 2nd ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2000), 240.
6. Paul Kurtz, ed., *The Humanist Manifesto I and II* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1973), 8.
7. Quoted in James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 63.
8. *Ibid.*, 65-66.
9. Paul Kurtz, ed., *The Humanist Manifesto I and II* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1973), 16.
10. *Ibid.*, 17.

11. Ibid.
12. See Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* (Glendale, Calif.: Regal Books, 1967), 118-29.
13. Kurtz, *Humanist Manifesto I and II*, 17.

CHAPTER 3—HINDUISM

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2. This summary of the Hindu texts is taken from Arthur J. Dalavai, "A Critical Appraisal of and Christian Approach to Philosophical Hinduism," Th.D. dissertation (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1977), 85-103.
3. This survey of Hindu history is taken from Geoffrey Parrinder, ed., *World Religions: From Ancient History to the Present* (Bicester, England: Hamlyn, 1971), 192-238 and John B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, 6th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 72-94, 177-219.
4. Upanishads, I, 34.
5. Taken from Michael J. Longden, "Some Prominent Doctrines of Divinity, Man, and Salvation in Hinduism," Unpublished Master's thesis (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974), 46.
6. Malcolm Pitt, *Introducing Hinduism* (New York: Friendship Press, 1955), 21.
7. These definitions were drawn from Noss's book, *Man's Religions*, 88-92.
8. Sir Norman Anderson, ed., *The World's Religions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 148.
9. This explanation of reincarnation is based on Robert A. Morey, *Reincarnation and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1980), 11-21.
10. This review of the bridges and barriers to Hinduism comes from Dalavai, "A Critical Appraisal of and Christian Approach to Philosophical Hinduism," 125-37.

CHAPTER 4—BUDDHISM

1. Richard A. Gard, *Buddhism* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961), 13.
2. David Bentley Taylor, "Buddhism," in *The World's Religions*, ed. Sir Norman Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 178.
3. Richard Robinson and Willard Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion* (Belmont, Calif.: Dickinson), 14.
4. John B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, 6th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 106-09.
5. Ibid., 109-10.
6. W. St. Clair-Tisdall, *The Noble Eightfold Path* (London: Elliot Stock, 1903), 181.
7. Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* (Glendale, Calif.: Regal, 1967), 106-09; Noss, *Man's Religions*, 175.
8. Noss, *Man's Religions*, 113; Subhadra Bhikshu, *A Buddhist Catechism* (London: George Redway, 1890), 43-45.
9. Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* 109-10.