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Towards a Biblical Worldview

Originating in German, the concept of worldview was first called *Weltanschauung*, which means, “a way of viewing the world” (Palmer 9). Another definition is, “a set of beliefs one holds” (23). But is worldview just an assortment of beliefs, like our favorite books on a shelf? Palmer expands the definition further, “A worldview is a set of beliefs and practices that shape a person's approach to the most important issues in life” (24). Our worldview, then is reflected in the way we act each day, the way we respond to others and build relationships, the way we invest our time and set our priorities, the activities that capture our attention. All of these flow out of our worldview.

Some use eyeglasses as a metaphor for worldview, as the lens through which we view our world. Edith Piaf coined the phrase, “looking at life through rose-colored glasses” (Bertrand 27). Bertrand refines this metaphor to think of worldview as a pair of prescription lenses, seeing the world as it really is, correcting our otherwise imperfect vision. He says, “the test of a good worldview will be whether it brings reality into sharp focus or leaves things blurry” (27).

Taking this metaphor farther, Bertrand acknowledges that people do not always realize that they do not have poor vision, having settled for 20/80 vision without knowing 20/20 vision even existed (29). Or like the color blind person going through life in black and white, not knowing color even exists because it is outside their personal experience.

Bertrand suggests that prescription eyeglasses typically are not transferable to another person, as their vision is enough different that they just won't fit right or work correctly. So it is with discussion of worldviews, as two people who are generally in agreement may not have the same "worldview prescription" (Bertrand 29).

Our worldview can be like a map with which we explore life. But this "map" is not a finished document, but rather one that changes as we advance in our journey. New discoveries will arise along the path that will become part of this "map" as we experience life. Like the drawings on some maps, or the printed warning on the rear view mirror of a car ("objects may be nearer than they appear"), some things in life may appear or smaller than they actually are, and our perspective on them may change, just as our eyeglass prescription may change (Bertrand 32).

Does everyone have a worldview? Many have not considered their own worldview, and may not even understand the definition of the term. Palmer identifies that, "some people possess a worldview only in the sense that they have inherited a set of beliefs and practices from their family and immediate community" (Palmer 25). As if by osmosis, many have simply absorbed the belief systems from the environment around them.

Herein lies a danger present in our culture today, that across various facets of society, there are vast numbers of people who don't know exactly what they believe, and certainly don't know why they believe what they believe. Their beliefs and practices have not been well-developed through study research, rather they have just soaked up beliefs around them, like a sponge soaks up liquids in its midst. In computer programming, there is a saying, "garbage in, garbage out." Sadly, this can be the situation many people fall into in the absence of considering and forming their own worldview.

This is not to say that there are not many people who have considered their belief system and developed their own worldview. Philosophers, theologians, astronomers, scientists, and others have written countless volumes presenting their personal worldview. This can create many worthy discussions regarding the foundations of what we believe. As these foundations are revealed, we are then better able to understand the perspectives portrayed in the lives of people: their worldview shows through. As Christians today, this is important to grasp, for worldview effects all that one does and says. To expose the foundations behind popular worldviews will help us “see through” what people do and say, to weigh its value. Psalm 40:9-11 admonishes us, “I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly.” (New International Version).

A person's worldview is often revealed in the stories one tells, and this is certainly true of television programs produced by the major television networks. Palmer points out that the elements of a worldview form an intricate pattern of beliefs (Palmer 29). These beliefs directly and indirectly effect the perspective presented in television journalism, and not only recently. Nearly twenty years ago, Thomas Cooper was one concerned with the beliefs of television journalists and the effects it was having on their reporting, and he became the founding director of the Association for Responsible Communication. Cooper noted that while ethics teaching was well-represented in print journalism, it was only “skeletal and sketchy,” and “depth of knowledge [of ethics] is sketchy” (Cooper 455).

Laura Sky recognized the general lack of ethics in filmmakers, describing this as “Yuppie ethical angst” syndrome. She contends that many feel their behavior is ethical as long as they think about what is right before a project, and worry about doing the right thing. But in the end,

they do what they want, having satisfied an ethical obligation simply by “considering” what is right (Sky 306). I see her perspective (expressed in the late 80's as a precursor to the “political correctness” epidemic that plagues our culture today. Public figures know the right words to say, which they feel vindicates them, though their words do not reflect a true intent to carry through with what they say.

Public media leaders have not always been so callous in their attitude towards responsibility for their powerful position. After the assassination of John F. Kennedy, a recognized television director of the time, Jerry Paris, felt a sense of remorse for the attitudes of a nation where such a tragedy could occur. In a moving full-page advertisement in the *Hollywood Reporter*, Paris printed a statement, including, “In the name of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Robert F. Kennedy, and my family, I make this solemn pledge. I will no longer lend my talents in any way to add to the creation of a climate for murder. I call upon all who read this to join me in refusing to write, direct, produce, act or participate in any way in the shaping of "entertainment" that celebrates senseless brutality, aimless cruelty, pointless and violent death” (Tobin 53). Paris called for his cohorts to respond with ways that the “climate” could be changed, and more than 300 television professionals, 119 writers, actors, producers and directors responded in signing a “pledge of conscience,” recognizing that “motion pictures and television are undeniably significant influences on American society” (Watson 146).

In an unusual example of accepting the responsibility for the misguidance that might have been given, screenwriter Joe Eszterhaus admitted, “because I was a militant smoker... My hands are bloody, so are Hollywood's.” Eszterhaus was stricken with throat cancer and lost most of his larynx in 2002, and confessed that smoking was integral to many of his screenplays. His

own suffering brought him to write, “I don't wish my fate upon anyone in Hollywood, but I beg that Hollywood stop imposing it upon millions of others” (146).

Other far-reaching moral issues are effected by the worldview of television and film makers. Kathryn C. Montgomery chronicles how the National Gay Task Force began to lobby TV networks with their “education” about “realistic homosexual characters” in the 1970's. By June, 2003, the Supreme Court struck down state laws that criminalized homosexual acts, and Montgomery cites Americans' fears of homosexuals as predators assuaged, from the positive images portrayed in television and film. Mary Ann Watson comments on the societal influence of this programming, “It would be shortsighted to discount the contribution of television to this enormous social shift, because many of those new acquaintances were television characters. Men and women who hoped for a full integration of gay people into American life could find no more effective vehicle than entertainment television in redefining the spectrum of acceptable loving partnerships” (147).

So do film and television programming contribute only to the demise of the culture? Watson also points out that positive effects have resulted from content, such as the “designated driver” concept propagated by the 1988 Harvard Alcohol Project (Watson 147). The 2000 novel and movie, *Pay It Forward*, continues to inspire heroic acts and random acts of kindness, shown with stories from schools, communities, and individuals in the Pay It Forward Movement (Hyde) and countless other responses where its story has been told (Averill).

The narrative element of worldview “recounts certain past or future events having to do with those who hold the worldview” (Palmer 39). The stories one chooses to tell reveal the teller's worldview. For example, the “Freedom From Religion Foundation” promotes the telling

of stories of famous persons of history who were atheists and agnostics (Berkman). This group hopes to legitimize their worldview through their stories of Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Edison, Susan B. Anthony, Johannes Brahms, and other “freethinkers”, promoting their belief that atheism and agnosticism are the proper way of thinking (acknowledging that there is no God). They go so far as quoting Thomas Jefferson, saying, “reason and free inquiry are the only effectual agents against error” (Gaylor).

In a Christian worldview, the narrative element is vitally important. The attributes of God are revealed in His Word, and recorded history in biblical narratives “provide models—for character development, for how and how not to behave, for what are and are not acceptable social arrangements” (Palmer 40). So may we Christians create stories with character development and godly social order, revealing the character of God to a searching world.

So it is established that worldview effects the stories we tell. It is vital for Christians to establish a worldview based upon our relationship with God, and His teaching as absolute truth. Unfortunately this is not happening for many, as a recent George Barna poll found that “only nine percent of evangelical students believe in anything called absolute truth” (Colson 80). How does this effect the lives of these students, and of our personal lives? Barna insists,

People's views on morally acceptable behavior are deeply impacted by their worldview. Upon comparing the perspectives of those who have a biblical worldview with those who do not, the former group were 31 times less likely to accept cohabitation (2% versus 62%, respectively); 18 times less likely to endorse drunkenness (2% versus 36%); 15 times less likely to condone gay sex (2% versus 31%); 12 times less likely to accept profanity 3% versus 37%); and 11 times less

likely to describe adultery as morally acceptable (4% versus 44%). In addition, less than one-half of one percent of those with a biblical worldview said voluntary exposure to pornography was morally acceptable (compared to 39% of other adults), and a similarly minuscule proportion endorsed abortion (compared to 46% of adults who lack a biblical worldview) (Barna).

In response to this lack of biblical worldview, Focus on the Family has established a significant new media project they have called, “The Truth Project.” Using a DVD-based curriculum, the organization provides teaching beginning with veritology, continuing through philosophy and ethics, anthropology, theology, science, history, and sociology, developing components to build an understanding of “the ethical law and meaning of the Christian life.” Tackett concludes the teaching series with a summary that “the commandment to love God and to love one's neighbor is the source of the believer's motivation for self-sacrificial service to the needy and their personal involvement in our culture” (Tackett).

This concurs with Schaeffer's admonition, “we must not forget the final apologetic. The world has a right to look upon us as we, as true Christians, come to practical differences and it should be able to observe that we do love each other. Our love must have a form that the world may observe; it must be seeable.” (Schaeffer 34).

David Naugle identifies the distinction of a Christian worldview, from the work of 19th Century theologian, James Orr, “He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of human destiny, found only in Christianity. This forms a 'Weltanschauung' or 'Christian view of the world,' which stands in

marked contrast with theories wrought out from a purely philosophical or scientific standpoint” (Naugle 8).

Philosopher Arthur Holmes aspired to construct a worldview faithful to Christian faith, while acknowledging discoveries of empirical science, the arts, and philosophy:

An overall world view, then, will have the following characteristics: 1. It has a wholistic goal, trying to see every area of life and thought in an integrated fashion. 2. It is a perspectival approach, coming at things from a previously adopted point of view which now provides an integrative framework. 3. It is an exploratory process, probing the relationship of one area after another to the unifying perspective. 4. It is pluralistic in that the same basic perspective can be articulated in somewhat different ways. It has action outcomes, for what we think and what we value guide what we will do (Holmes 17).

In developing my own Christian worldview, I find “The Truth Project” very valuable as a model. (Tackett). This instruction builds on a solid foundation of three components. The lower level of this foundation is theology: the understanding of “Who is God?”. I believe in the eternal existence of God, revealed to us in Deuteronomy 33:27 (“The eternal God is your refuge...”) and Isaiah 26:4 (“Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal.”) (NIV).

While many believe in God, many deny that Jesus also has existed eternally, with His father and the Holy Spirit. My worldview acknowledge God at work in my life in all things, with the trinity of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) actively involved in our personal lives if we invite Him.

The second level of Tackett's foundation is anthropology, asking, “Who is man?” The

world questions the meaning and purpose of his existence (Tackett). The world will deny the heart-shaped void of the life without Christ, while they “deny a transcendent being who reveals ethical right and wrong immanently in space and time. Then the source and meaning of morality must lie elsewhere” (Hoffecker).

The third foundational level has its own name created by Dell Tackett, called “veritology”, in which he identifies as the quest to discover, “what is truth”. The world is often caught up in limited thinking, limited to a belief system based on differing perspectives,” such as Cosmic Box idea of Carl Sagan.(Tackett).

Once the foundation is established with Philosophy, science, history, and ethics are built upon these elements of theology, anthropology, and truth, Carefully considering each of these components will help me to develop a worldview that can stand up against the highly-secularized perspectives around us today.

Unfortunately in our culture today, there is a disagreement over the definition of truth, as our secular culture has forsaken the traditional foundation in America of a biblical basis for truth. Dell Tackett points out in *The Truth Project* that even the dictionary definition has changed (Tackett). Noah Webster defined truth in biblical terms in his original 1828 dictionary edition, “Conformity to fact or reality; exact accordance with that which is, or has been, or shall be. The truth of history constitutes its whole value. We rely on the truth of the scriptural prophecies” (Webster). This is in contrast to the current Merriam-Webster definition: “sincerity in action, character, and utterance,” with the glaring omission of any objective standard (Merriam-Webster). What a dangerous position, defining truth based on the sincerity of the individual!

I have been teaching a Web Design class for a nearby college. This college has departed

from their religious foundations and heritage, which was clearly communicated to me and other new adjunct faculty in an orientation session. Because this college is now secular instead of Christian, they have no moral basis for the campus. Consequently, we adjunct faculty were instructed that we must not make any expectations of our students unless they are clearly spelled out in our course syllabus. If we expect students to not use certain language in class, we must state so in the syllabus. Even policies on cheating and plagiarism must be clearly stated, or we cannot hold students responsible. With the lack of moral compass in the school, the standard for what is moral depends upon the contract (in the form of the course syllabus) between the teacher and the student.

I applaud Tackett in coining a new word for this worldview-development process, as he combines the Latin word for truth, “veritas,” with the suffix, “-ology” in forming the term, “veritology” (Tackett). And so I wish to present my own quest of “veritology” in the shaping of my personal worldview and discussion of how it should impact my work as a Christian committed to God's truth, revealed in His Word, the Holy Bible, and the ways that His Word is affirmed in His creation. Timothy is encouraged to, “study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). So I believe that I must study God's Word, and apply what I learn from other disciplines with the light of His Word shining upon the other knowledge.

Applying a Christian worldview to electronic communications can be challenging. Palmer acknowledges, “the transformation from an oral, word-centered culture to an electronic, image-centered culture presents a special challenge to Christian scholars and students, especially in light of the now-recognized power of images” (Palmer 380). He goes on to contrast the

egotism, hedonism, covetousness, revenge, lust, pride, and other vices with the fruits of the Spirit, of love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).” With this, we need to search for these scriptural values in the media around us, exposing that which is false, and celebrating portrayals of “veritas” truth.

In my own life and production of media (whether the content is Christian teaching or secular content), I believe I need to portray truth, using the biblical model. This means that I must stand firm in my convictions, and this will possibly effect some of the projects that I undertake, and will influence the perspective I take in performing my work. This must also pervade the attitude I have towards my work, working with all my heart, “as working for the Lord, not for men” (Col. 3:23 NIV).

Another component of my worldview is my philosophy towards life. R. C. Sproul defines philosophy as, “a scientific quest to discover ultimate reality” (Tackett). Philosophy is a controversial component today, with regular PBS broadcasts of Carl Sagan and his “cosmic cube” theories. Sagan reveals his godless worldview, in an opening statement of the “Cosmos” television series, “the Cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be” (Sagan). This type of philosophical statement is very dangerous, for as Tackett says, “assumptions are the most dangerous form of knowledge. Assumptions are caught and bought without an open, conscious dialog. If you buy a statement, you buy its assumptions, as well” (Tackett). I believe this strategy (exemplified by Sagan) is used at times as an agenda of atheism and agnosticism, as a form of syncretism. This is a method of appealing to the mind with either familiar terms or concepts, with a purpose of steal the heart away to a differing belief system, often without the person's

knowledge that they have been (mis)lead to a differing idea.

At times I have observed Christians employing this strategy or variations in an attempt to attract the lost to Christ. While we certainly can use fun activities to invite people into our fellowship, I believe we must be careful in how much we adapt our teaching content or style of worship to the “wants” of the “market.” Many wish to apply business marketing models to the outreach of the church, which creates a mentality of giving people what they want, often at the expense of what they need. Some evangelical leaders are outspoken in their criticism of the Willow Creek model of evangelism.

John MacArthur rebukes “Market-driven Ministry” trends in the church today. He purports that, “marketing principles are becoming the arbiter of truth. Elements of the message that don't fit the promotional plan are simply omitted. Marketing savvy demands that the offense of the cross must be down-played. Consumer satisfaction means that the standard of righteousness cannot be raised too high. The seeds of a watered-down gospel are thus sown in the very philosophy that drives many ministries today” (MacArthur 24).

Throughout the books of First and Second Timothy, Paul writes teachings that would challenge the ministry philosophies becoming prevalent today. Things like correcting false doctrines with a call to a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith (1 Tim. 1:3-5); standing for God's truth and purposes (1:18-19); teaching discernment between godliness and hypocrisy (5:24-6:6); and suffering difficulty and persecution willingly without compromising our witness for Christ (2 Tim 2:3-7).

George Barna recognizes similar impact in outreach to outreaches to Hispanic populations utilizing modern marketing strategies, “either the incoming Hispanics will

experience life transforming insights that reshape their theology and lifestyle, or the congregations will experience marketing success bought at the price of theological compromise” (Barna).

I have observed a change in one Christian radio station in my hometown area, that has adopted success patterns of “top 40” popular radio to create a type of “top 40 Christian middle-of-the-road” praise and worship songs. Growing up with this station, I learned much in my growing-up years from numerous teaching ministries aired throughout the day. In the last three years, the station has discontinued a large number of their teaching broadcasts, filling the time with their own mixture of “hits.” These top 40 selections are chosen “by the listeners,” through a well-developed “listener advisory panel,” which most anyone can join by visiting their radio website. Periodically the listeners receive an e-mail invitation to survey their favorite songs. The station then responds, giving people what they want. I suggest that this radio station management consider these criticisms of MacArthur and others. Are they watering down the message (giving people what they want, which may garner new listeners and build a certain demographic audience, which may also significantly bolster listener support revenues), rather than providing biblically-based teaching that builds their faith? The “listeners' choice” format is a type of media “baby food,” encouraging a form of spiritual infancy rather than providing sustained teaching to foster growth. Though this is harsh, I see this is a type of conforming to the pattern of this world warned against in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This is not just a restriction, but an admonition with a promise of God's transforming power at work within us, as we renew our minds in Him. Without the renewing of our minds by the power of the Holy Spirit, our belief system may have a capricious

nature.

Renewing our minds is encouraged by Paul, when he challenges the Corinthians to a deeper understanding of the truths of God (1 Corinthians 3:1-5). This is related to our attitudes and affections, which bear fruit in the ways that we act. “Our actions reflect what we believe to be really real” (Tackett). This will show through in our work, as well, and this reinforces the need for Christians in positions of leadership (in media, or in any field) to have a strong worldview as a foundation.

God reveals Himself to us and to all people through His creation, as illustrated in Romans 1:19-20, “since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (NIV).

Bertrand points out that in spite of our best efforts in study and learning, we are not capable of forming a truly biblical worldview without the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (36). We are influenced by the creation of God bearing witness to our hearts, with rightful attention to our study and intellectual focus. We should seek apologetics to help us understand what we believe and why we believe. But as we learn from John 3:8, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (NIV).

In my future work setting, I hope to teach college-level Video Production, Graphic Design, and other digital media applications. In this role, I feel it is vital to establish a secure biblical worldview, as this position brings an important responsibility of instruction, and a type

of character modeling that takes place in the teacher-student relationship.

Earlier in this paper, I have identified that story and storytelling is an important aspect of worldview and worldview formation. Worldview effects the stories that we tell, the words we use, and the ways we tell them (which includes choice of media for those of us in this age of blossoming digital media applications). Worldview also effects the listener, as they hear and interpret our stories. Being aware of these effects on both sides of the communication process prepares us to be better communicators, better storytellers, and better Christians. With the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, we become better equipped to fulfill a personal goal of exemplifying Philippians 4:8 in my life, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (NIV).

College students are at an important stage in their lives, where they are making crucial decisions effecting the rest of their lives. Choosing or redirecting their area of study, developing new interpersonal relationships, perhaps meeting a life mate, all kinds of vital events take place during the college years. Campus for Christ emphasizes this in stating that:

The university campus is a confusing pool of worldviews that leaves many students actively searching for some absolute truth. A generation raised where situational ethics and relative morality have softened the spiritual foundation that was secure for past generations, students are eagerly seeking genuine spiritual Truth. In an environment that is tearing away at their moral and spiritual stability, students often feel trapped by the pressures of academic life and the deep need to be accepted by their peers. All of this can add up to a university career filled with anxiety, superficial relationships and fear of the

future. (Campus for Christ)

I need to acknowledge in my own life that I will stand for the truth of Christ, which may not always be popular, or may not always be understood by those around me. I must know who God is (knowing about God), but I must also know Him personally, in daily fellowship with God through His Word (knowing God). This is an important balance for the Christian, where many claim to know about God, but do not take the time for their personal relationship with God.

It is my prayer that I might be an example for Christ in His love, compassion, humility, and the earnestness of the gospel that he showed for us in His life among us.

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