

How do you think? Shaping a Christian worldview

Matthew 22:34-40; Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 1:18-27; 2 Cor. 10:5; Phil. 2:5

INTRODUCTION

Not what, not why, but how!

Where do you begin, what are the processes, where do you end?

Illustrations

- John Douglas Hall, *Thinking the Faith*
- Rubel Shelly, "he gets there differently than others"
- Haitian priest, who lost his brother in the earthquake, Christianity changes how you think, because you are so self-giving, you don't have time to think about self

GOALS FOR THIS CONVERSATION

- Understand what a worldview is
- Be able to analyze how you think
- Recommit to the process of moving from thought to action

TWO INTRODUCTORY CONCEPTS

Take the last of these first, introduce it and suggest where we want to end up.

I-PRAXIS

The challenge of thinking the faith, loving God with our minds, is that we are tempted to let it stay there--in our minds. Kierkegaard wrote in his journal, "The moment I take Christianity as a doctrine and so indulge my cleverness or profundity or my eloquence or my imaginative powers in depicting it, people are very pleased. I am looked upon as a serious Christian. The moment I...bring Christianity into reality...the scandal is there at once." The wonder of our little Christian enterprise, as many of us have experienced it, is that we have for so long been able to evade the call both to think and to do.

Second, an illustration; want to understand the illustration in order to define a world view, analyze it, and commit to it

II-PERSONALIZED FAITH [in the KEY OF C]

My purpose is to call us, individually, and then collectively, to an indigenous, personalized thinking that will issue forth into real living for Jesus. This may be thinking about God, and certainly will be thinking about self, but will ultimately find us thinking about the cross, and about the Christ, as the single event in history that integrates history and integrates our lives. Jurgen Moltmann said it aptly, "Theologia crucis is not a single chapter in theology, but is the key-signature for all Christian theology (thinking)."

Illustration

- Music, instruments have different keys, get all of the instruments in tune, play in certain key
- If play in another key, will still be the same song, but won't be quite right, and won't work in a band, symphony, or orchestra
- Now to untrained ear, when someone is playing solo in the wrong key, the untrained ear won't notice it. It sounds the same.

I am challenging you to an investigation of the key signature in which you are singing the song of your life. I am not investigating musical theory, point and counterpoint, harmonies, antiphonal debating, instrumentation, musical themes, or any such thing in the musical metaphor. I am asking, you are in the major key of C, for Christ, for cross, for church, for community, for commitment, for Christ-likeness, for Christianity.

Where do you get your key signature? What philosophers, values, goals, Bible verses....

I-WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

The ability of the church to communicate in our world demands that we understand the nature of thinking and communication. Thus I want to reflect a few moments on the idea of shaping a Christian worldview.

Understanding Culture

Culture provides a coherent set of answers to the situations that confront humans. Culture provides a set of shared meanings. A cultural shift makes a decisive break with the shared meanings of the past by discarding them, blurring them, or replacing them.

What is always at stake is how we understand the world we live in.

A Christian world view is not regular world view dressed up in piety, or a few Scriptures to prove the points. That might have worked in the generally Christian western world that has generally been the history of our nation, but no more.

→Romans 12:1-2

→2 Cor. 10:5, wholehearted devotion to Christian thinking, or thinking in Christian categories

→Phil. 2:5, thinking the mind of Christ

A worldview seeks to understand where we came from (how we got here), who we are, what has gone wrong and can go wrong, what the solution is, and where we are going (if anywhere). Christian world view suggests that the appropriate categories for asking and answering these questions are....God, humans, knowledge, sin, salvation, Christ, the spiritual world, the ideal human community, and the future.

The question is what is at the center of our worldview. The Christian answers God.

Thus I say, thinking the faith will require you to think about self and to think about your world and to think about God simultaneously. Such is essential, yea unavoidable, in a time of crisis. German theologian, Carl Friedrich von Weizsacker, "Humankind is currently in a state of manifold crisis, the catastrophic climax of which probably still lies ahead." The underlying crisis of our culture is the breakdown of the modern worldview. We have come to the end of an age, and it is especially painful to find that we have been deprived of the categories through which to comprehend our crisis and failure. The contemporary Christian crisis is nothing so reductionist as capitalism, religious pluralism, humanism, technology, democracy or the lack of democracy. The problem is not big government, educational system, lack of prayer in schools, ACLU, corruption in high places, pornography, or organized crime. We must clearly see the problem. I make two observations. First from the comics, in a now famous line, when Pogo said, "I have met the enemy and it is us." Second, we face nothing less than the bankruptcy of the worldview which brought us into being and sustained us for some centuries. The fundamental

failure is internal, and we will not begin to recover until we fix what has gone wrong inside us as a result of existing in a world that rejects a former way of thinking and replaces it with no thinking at all.

II-ANALYZING YOUR WORLDVIEW

Now this question of worldview is ultimately a question of authority.

What are the authority structures of your worldview? What authority structures make it possible for you to make sense of the world, assuming you can? Authority structures are a given in any kind of volitional activity. They are what you use to make decisions.

What clothes to wear, what to eat for lunch, when to call someone...

Why do we think about things the way we do? What drives us? Our authorities do. Even a person who claims there is no authority in their world has gone with the authority of their own anti-authoritarian perspectives.

Everything we have learned/heard/thought become a part of the authority that guides us, worldview. What you learned in psychology class your freshman year at university, cultural guidelines, television commercials with catchy jingles that run through your mind as you wander the aisles of the grocery store—all constitute a form of authority.

We all have presuppositions in place and that has an impact on how we think.

Thomas Kuhn, of paradigm shift fame, suggests we are never completely objective because we bring pre-understandings, paradigms, to whatever subject.

This is true of us, our friends, our neighbors, etc. in virtually every area of life.

Now the purpose of a Christian worldview is not to mold or guard the data, but to acknowledge the presuppositions in play as authoritative in terms of a general view of the world, and to use that worldview in our investigations.

Cannot deal with every aspect of a Christian worldview in a single lesson, but can begin by thinking about why and how God, humanity, and knowledge are foundational concepts.

IIA-SEEING SELF THROUGH CROSS

We have for much of our lives if we are indeed Christian, been attempting to think about God. While I applaud all such efforts, such may have become in our day a Christian crutch that keeps us from a critical self-awareness that would provide much mental discomfort. Was it not Burns who wrote, "O would some gift the giftee gie us, to see ourselves as others see us"? To think the faith is difficult, because when I really begin to think about God and me, it means that I must allow dark thoughts to enter my consciousness. The first vocation, calling, to which every Christian is called, despite the fact that such is not a popular theme in our day, is cruciformity, forming the cross in our lives. That theme has just about disappeared from modern life, even church life, but not from Scripture. Church and world alike today say touch me, hold me, help me, encourage me, do what I want, my rights, my desires, my hopes. I am reminded of the rich fool in Luke 12. Scripture resounds with another theme for those who would think clearly and Christianly, a theme that grates against the preferred personalized priorities of our day. It is characteristically upside down--lose life to find it, give and you will receive, be humble and God will exalt.

IIB-CENTERING IN GOD/CHRIST

Paul said that the message is "Christ and him crucified", that the center of the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection. These are declarations of God's commitment to the world, to you. Abraham Heshel wrote, "God is concerned about the world and shares its fate. Indeed, this is the essence of God's moral nature: His willingness to be intimately involved in the history of man." This is the God who has intersected the human dilemma with his own presence, life, and passion. When we think about the cross separated from the love of God, we distort reality.

III-RECOMMITTING TO A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

IIIA-PRAXIS

The challenge of thinking the faith, loving God with mind, is that we are tempted to let it stay there--in our minds. Kierkegaard wrote in his journal, "The moment I take Christianity as a doctrine and so indulge my cleverness or profundity or my eloquence or my imaginative powers in depicting it, people are very pleased. I am looked upon as a serious Christian. The moment I...bring Christianity into reality...the scandal is there at once." The wonder of our little Christian enterprise, as many of us have experienced it, is that we have for so long been able to evade the call both to think and to do.

IIIB-INTEGRATED THINKING

If you and I cannot come to think clearly enough to address the rudiments of this predicament, if we cannot address the basic realities with clear analysis and workable cure, our Christian education will be a failure and we will remain doomed to squirrel caging away our lives in the humdrum sameness of a revolving cage, getting nowhere no matter how fast we go. Our cross-formed thinking the faith must do more than identify the symptoms of our malaise. Our thinking must never treat the symptoms as if they were the disease. Our thinking must explode on the horizons of life into fresh, vibrant forms that free us from self-imposed boundaries through critical self-awareness. Despite the obnoxious scandal of the challenge that we must never conform to the world around us, we must seek praxis which makes a difference because it is different, and because we are different, despite the disintegration of the Rock of Ages in the minds of modern mankind. Our faith must be our faith, enabling us to abundant living in the key signature of Great Musician of life, the key signature of the Cross and of Caring, the very nature of God. We are the problem, not because there are too few of us, but because there are too few of us thinking, and living. To love God with all our mind is to do the hard work of thinking faith. For all of these reasons, lack of selfhood, lack of unselfish service, lack of God, lack of thinking, the uncentered culture, the contemporary crisis, the vicious internal vacuum--I call us to a thinking that will issue forth into authentic living for Jesus.