

2120 Counselling Foundations Week 1

Lecture 2: Worldview and Perceptions of God

Introduction

The Word becoming flesh (John 1:14) in the person of Jesus created a new perspective, God's own direct perspective, on life and meaning. Whilst obviously being fully human, and sharing in many of the common values of the time (synagogue worship, common meals etc.), Jesus offered people "other maps and rules" for relationship with God and others. He called God "Father", touched the unclean, associated freely with women, healed on the Sabbath, challenged the temple system, ministered to Gentiles and so on.

The very reality of Jesus, plus his teaching and mode of life, presented a new way of seeing the world in terms of the kingdom of God. God's rule was central, above family, honour, title, wealth and ethnicity. It did however encompass all these things.

By sharing in the divine nature (Rom 8:29; 2 Pet 1:4) a Christian is enabled (progressively) to see the world as God sees it. A Christ – centred world view, whilst truly human, is also radically God- centred (theocentric).

What Is "World View"

The Christian thinker James W. Sire defines a worldview as "a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world." World views are *total* systems of interpreting reality – life, the universe and everything. This definition of worldview highlights that how we see reality depends on a set of unproveable assumptions from which we reason concerning the validity of our worldview.

Worldviews are influenced by the life- circumstances of individuals in an ongoing manner. This means that classification of worldviews are in practice somewhat abstract at the personal level.

There are many competing worldviews e.g. Christianity, Islam, pantheism, Marxism, humanism, New Age, post- modernism etc.

World View Theory

From a cultural (as compared to a religious or philosophical) perspective, worldviews are unconsciously learned from a previous generation e.g. shaking the fist means welcome in some Nigerian tribes. World view is the deep level of culture. Meaning is conveyed via forms e.g. there are 16 different smiles in Thai culture all with different meanings. As culture changes, world view changes e.g. a comet meant a divine warning or judgement

in the late Middle Ages, by the seventeenth century it was a mere astronomical phenomenon.

Function of World View

A well rounded world view answers the following questions:

1. What is prime reality – the really real?
2. What is the nature of external reality- the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to a person at death?
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history?

These questions offer an adequate paradigm in understanding what people believe about their total outlook on life.

At a more basic level, worldview communicates beliefs, values and behaviours. It is the lens through which we see things, the “central control box” (Kraft) of reality. Worldview provides explanations of how things came to be and why they change. This involves the transmission of stories, myths, folklore etc. Worldview serves as a basis for evaluation, judging and evaluating experience e.g. in Western societies success = visible influence and material affluence. (Biblically, the emphasis is on quality of life, such as faithfulness e.g. Jesus’ letters to the 7 churches in Rev 2- 3.) Worldview provides psychological reinforcement for a society’s way of life. It provides group cohesion.

Without a world view cultures and societies could not conduct their affairs in an orderly fashion e.g. morally, predictably. World view helps us to adapt to external forces – to change or resist e.g. Luddites (distrust of technology). Western society, in contrast, for example, to the ancient world, sees change as positive.

Within a culture, 5 world view universals operate:

1. classification of reality e.g. high God, spirits, humans, nature
2. person and group – orientation and significance e.g. hierarchy or egalitarian, “in” and “out” groups e.g. Samaritans; good and bad people

3. time and event – time oriented cultures (Western) or event oriented (quality)
4. space – e.g. arrangements of persons in a group, personal space e.g. East Asian
5. causality – e.g. scientific or spiritual (AIDS as witchcraft)

In terms of social relationships:

Western	Other
Individual oriented	Group oriented
Freedom	Security
Husband- wife centred family	Mother – child centred family
Competition	Cooperation
Equality as sameness	Role distinction
Effort brings success (effort optimism)	Conformity

In terms of spiritual reality (Charles Kraft/Paul Hiebert/John Wimber):

Biblical	Western	2/3 World
Spirit sphere (especially God)	God	Spiritual sphere (often little concern for God)
Human sphere	undefined	Human
Natural sphere	Human	Nature
	Nature	

In 2/3rds world, power e.g. healing, prosperity is often sought in the “spiritual sphere”. This has major implications for ministry paradigms.

A Christian World View

As Christians we need not seek (nor is it possible) to shed entirely the world view of our culture. We should however be aware of those places where the values of our culture are in contradiction to the Bible.

“To think Christianly is to accept all things with the mind as related, directly or indirectly, to man’s eternal destiny as the redeemed and chosen child of God.” (Blamires). His marks of a Christian world view include:

1. The existence and ultimate authority of God – this is the basic assumption of Christianity.
2. The unconditional value of human persons – this follows from them being created in the image of God.

3. An eternal perspective – the ultimate state of humanity (heaven and hell) is brought to bear on earthly considerations.
4. An open universe – God freely speaks and acts in the world.
5. An acute and sensitive awareness of the power and spread of evil upon humanity – sin, Satan and demons are real and we are engaged in an ongoing spiritual struggle.
6. Truth is supernaturally grounded – it is not manufactured within nature but comes by revelation. Truth, including moral standards, is objective.

The implication is that a Christian world view touches every area of life. Not simply one's internal belief system plus some rules to do with moral (especially sexual) conduct. A Christians participation in the spheres of work, leisure, family, relationships, finance (not just "tithing"), law, education etc. are all to reflect the revelation of God in Christ.

Varieties of Christian World View

In a simplified fashion, this may be summarised in terms of three models.

1. World – denying: the world is evil and the task of the Christian is to withdraw from it to preserve purity e.g. Amish, Exclusive Brethren. The focus of ministry is inward, the maintenance of the group. Personal morality is primary, "we don't smoke, drink or sleep around". In this model the church is distinctive, but largely irrelevant to the wider culture.
2. World – engaging: many of the evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal churches. The world is still seen as evil but needs to be evangelised. In practice, many in these groups engage the world for the sake of personal gain, rather than the advancement of the kingdom of God. Spirituality is often in terms of blessing and personal morality under the favour of God. Ministry is church – centred.

This model preserves the importance of evangelism, but limits this to verbal witness and does not adequately express God's interest and presence in all of life.

(David Naugle has offered a critique of the *Purpose Driven Church* model of Rick Warren. Warren reduces the purpose of life to the spiritual and eternal, focussing on worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and evangelism. Other pursuits in life e.g. marriage, work, family, leisure, education are temporal and "secondary". "The closer you live to God, the smaller everything else appears.")

This is a dualistic worldview ("Platonism for the people" Nietzsche.) that fails to understand the cosmic implications of the biblical story of creation, incarnation and resurrection. (Warren's overlooks the Old Testament teaching on the life of people of God.) All Christians are in fact called to be ambassadors for Christ in the totality of life's activities. We are all in "full time Christian work".)

3. World – formative: the world is essentially good but fallen. The task of the Christian is not only to evangelise but to influence and redeem the structures and institutions of society. This is the historical position of the Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches, and in Australia the Uniting Church.

There is an emphasis on the providence of God and divine justice working beyond the individual level. Spirituality is seen in life style terms, faith is to be outworked in all areas of existence. This involves care for the earth, work as a sacred calling, ministry in all the spheres of culture. Christians are to be salt and light in the world.

The danger in this model is that social concern excludes evangelism.

Historical Shifts in World View (Conversion)

The biblical story clashes with alternative world views, this brings either rejection or world view conversion.

Examples:

The resurrection and Greek culture. Acts 17, Paul in Athens, the message of resurrection and judgement is foolishness to Greeks (the body is viewed negatively, no personal God etc.)

The creation story and eastern religions – God and the universe are one and eternal.

‘Modern European man’

“It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles” (Rudolph Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, 5).

What is needed for the message of the gospel to be received is a complete paradigm shift in the way the individual sees reality.

Western Europe a forerunner?

Polytheism/animism > Christian theism > humanism > polytheism/ mysticism/pantheism

Premodern societies e.g. indigenous, African tribal are very open to cultural shift in worldview. More ancient and highly developed societies built around sophisticated philosophical and religious worldviews, such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, are much more resistant to change. These religions (plus Marxism etc.) have themselves converted the worldviews of many cultures e.g. Indonesia.

The secular (non – religious) worldview of contemporary Western cultures (more on this later in the course) is easily penetrated by the presence of alternative worldviews but highly resistant to change. This is part of the phenomenon of “multiculturalism”. When alternative worldviews are assimilated into Western nations they tend to be moderated in their vitality and ability to transform society e.g. minority compared to majority Islam.

Some Implications for Counselling Ministry

The counsellor needs to be aware of the all pervasive nature of worldview and take into account that the person seeking counsel, even if a professing Christian, does not necessarily have a consistent Christian worldview. The counsellor needs to have a functional world view that answers the following questions:

Who am I? - what it means to be human

Where am I? – the nature of the world

What happened? – how did things get to be like this

What can be done about it? – the message of salvation

This requires a complete theological framework i.e all you will learn at Tabor (and more).