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TOWARDS A BIBLICAL WORLD-LIFE VIEW

“Out of the more than a score of great civilizations in human history, modern Western civilization is the very first to have no agreed-on answer to the question of the purpose of life. Thus, more ignorance, confusion - and longing - surround this topic now than at almost any time in history. The trouble is that, as modern people, we have too much to live with and too little to live for.”¹

Understanding a worldview.

A worldview or *conceptual system* to use Ronald H. Nash’s phrase is a mental model of a person’s view of his world. It varies from person to person, culture to culture, nation to nation. James Sire, a respected evangelical author, 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.”² A worldview is “a way of looking at life in terms of origin, purpose, boundaries of proper conduct, ultimate relationships, and destiny.”³ A person’s worldview answers the questions concerning the nature of ultimate reality, the cosmos, the nature of humankind, ethics and morality, death and dying. It raises the very question of the meaning of human history.

“Whether we know it or not – whether we like it or not – each of us has a worldview. These worldviews function as interpretative conceptual schemes to explain why we ‘see’ the world as we do, why we often think and act as we do.”⁴ Worldviews can be problematic and should be integrated into one’s belief system with great care. They can be a double-edged sword. “An inadequate conceptual scheme can, like improper eyeglasses, hinder the efforts to understand God, the world, and ourselves. The right conceptual scheme can suddenly bring everything into focus.”⁵

Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey offer further clarification on worldview. “It is simply the sum total of our belief about the world, the ‘big picture’ that directs our daily decisions and actions.”⁶ “Where did we come from, and who are we (creation)? What has gone wrong with the world (fall)? And what can we do to fix it (redemption)?”⁷

A very important value of a worldview is that “a philosophically sophisticated, God-centered conception of a Christian worldview spares believers from a naïve fideism, a scandalous anti-intellectualism, and a cultural

¹ Os Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 3.

² James Sire, *Discipleship Of The Mind* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 30.

³ Darrell Smith, *Integrative Therapy* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), 37.

⁴ Ronald H. Nash, *World Views in Conflict* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 33.

[Ronald H. Nash gives at least five major elements to a worldview: God, reality, knowledge, morality and humankind. p.26]

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1999), 14.

⁷ Ibid.

obscurantism. In turn, it imparts to them a cognitive confidence, an apologetic strategy, a cultural relevance, and a sound, spiritual basis for life in the coherent picture of God's larger story."⁸ Moreover, a worldview has a "mysterious way of opening up the parameters of the Bible so that believers might be delivered from a fishbowl-sized Christianity into an oceanic perspective on the faith. ... It places the familiar doctrines of the faith. ... Worldview serves as a catalyst to an interpretation of biblical Christianity that focuses on the big picture – unified, coherent, and whole."⁹

The need for a Biblical World-Life view.

"Christian worldview" according to David K. Naugle who has conducted landmark research on this subject, "has risen to considerable prominence in the last one hundred and fifty years."¹⁰ From an evangelical Protestant's perspective, it traces its foundation to the writing of reformers John Calvin but developed by Scottish Presbyterian theologian James Orr and Dutch Reformed statesman Abraham Kuyper.¹¹ Over the last decades other prominent evangelical leaders, notably Gordon Clark, Carl F. Henry and Francis Schaeffer, have taken on the challenge to develop a coherent hermeneutic for churches and Christians to understand the cosmic implications of Biblical revelation. Moreover, there is a need to develop a well articulated alternative to a clash of worldviews that confront Christians today. In this sense, there is a need to give an evangelical apology in the thick of this worldview warfare that has invaded our multi-cultural and pluralistic world today. Evidence of such is the presence of a multitude of alternative worldviews.¹² The traditional acceptance of transcendence and moral truth has been denied since the Enlightenment. Human beings have "rejected any overarching ontic or epistemic authorities and set themselves up autonomously as the *acknowledged* legislator of the world. Now they claim an essentially divine prerogative to conceptualize reality and shape the nature of life as they please."¹³ Man has become his own god and is encouraged to act like one. In a 1992 US Supreme Court case, *Planned Parenthood v Casey*, the Tribunal ruled along this pluralistic mind-set stating that every person has "the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."¹⁴ Frightening!

The issue of Truth

My own quest for this "holy grail" of an evangelical worldview was ignited by James Sire, author of the book *The Universe Next Door*. He challenged me to give an answer to the question, "Why of the many religious options in the world, I chose Christianity and why Christianity is true?" Such a question is still valid today, for indeed, of the competing worldviews or *isms* that demand a commitment from people, which one is true? This question is critical in an age of unmitigating pluralism. To find some truth in each of these worldviews is possible but to ascribe to each and all equal validity or truth is not possible. For then, either there is no objective truth or that the only truth is relativism. Either position is an absurdity. A world or a life without objectivity will plunge humanity into a tragic bedlam of "everyone doing what is right in his own eyes." The message in an epitaph can become a nightmare but states the case well:

*Knowledge is a deadly friend
When no one sets the rules.*

⁸ David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History Of A Concept* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002) 341.

⁹ Ibid, 342.

¹⁰ David K. Naugle, p. 4.

¹¹ David K. Naugle, p. 5.

¹² James W. Sire in the Third Edition of his *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1997) discusses seven (7) worldviews that compete with Christian Theism: Deism, Naturalism, Nihilism, Existentialism, Eastern Pantheistic Monism, The New Age, Postmodernism.

¹³ David K. Naugle, p. xvi.

¹⁴ Ibid, xvi.

*The fate of all mankind I see
Is in the hands of fools.¹⁵*

Every criminal will plea “not guilty” for there is no right or wrong. In the Nuremberg Trial, the accused Nazi generals simply argued that they were only following the orders of their higher authority. The September 11, 2001 bombing of the World Trade Center or the ethnic cleansing in Rwanda or the atrocious crimes of terrorists worldwide resulted in revulsion of anger from millions around the world. Consider the story told by Richard J. Mouw, President of Fuller Theological Seminary, about a Muslim woman who was raped by some soldiers during an “ethnic rampage” in Eastern Europe. Just as the soldiers were finishing raping her, her baby began to cry. She pleaded with them not to kill her, but to leave her alone so that she might nurse her child. One of the soldiers responded by grabbing her baby, cutting its head off, and placing it on her breast.¹⁶ Why do people react with horror to such a bastardy act? The bottom line is however, the people who resort to violence show aspects of their worldviews. These people acted according to their assumptions in life. All these and more raise the corollary question: Is there no law above other laws? Without morality or norm, how can one live with others without turning the world into a jungle where dogs eat dogs? A meaningful relationship is simply not possible. If there is no norm for marriage, then adultery is not wrong and betrayal by a spouse should not hurt; but the world does say its wrong and the betrayed spouses hurt.

The issue of meaning.

Beyond the question of truth is the issue of meaning. Without truth, can anything be meaningful? For meaning assumes a point of reference. Something is wrong because something is right. Meaning is transcendental. Otherwise we go back to the argument of the Cheshire cat to Alice that the meaning of a word depends on who is powerful. But as someone pointed out, man and woman are cosmic theologians for they ask the questions of transcendence and meaning.

Furthermore, without truth and meaning there is no direction or hope. A biblical example would be the Israelites wandering in the desert going nowhere. If one doesn't know where he is, how can he arrive where he wants to go? Take the case of a man who came to a big city and got lost. He called his friend in the middle of the night asking for directions. His friend asked him, “Where are you now?” He answered by saying, “I don't know!” So if one has no direction or if there is nothing out there, why bother to hope? Life is, as an atheistic existentialist would describe it, a rimless zero floating on the sea of nothingness! A world without truth, meaning and hope leads to despair and nihilism.

This is why I am convinced that Christians should be clear about their assumptions in life – their *worldviews*. For in reality, competing socio-political, economic, cultural and religious *isms* will not leave Christians alone. Nor should Christians allow themselves to be left alone! They are part of this world and they are called to transform the world by the word, work and wonders of God. They believe in solidarity with humanity that they are bearers of the *imago dei* but that in union with Christ they should live lives *imitatio dei*. Christ bluntly states: “take up your cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Christians are to be salt and light in this darkened world and to proclaim to all that there is God, Truth and hope for humanity and history. This hope is found only in Christ Jesus who is very God, Redeemer, and Lord of all. Christians are to insist that Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6) and that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9).

¹⁵ From *Epitaph* by Robert Fripp, Michael Giles, Greg Lake, Ian McDonald, Peter Sinfield.

¹⁶ Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines In All That's Fair* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 42.

The tests of a worldview.

In this clash of worldviews or “collision of consciousness” as Peter Berger calls it, are there some guidelines to make a better choice? Ronald H. Nash, an evangelical philosopher-theologian, suggests three tests of a valid worldview.

1. *The test of reason.* Some Christians, unknowingly, tend to be anti-reason. They spiritualize everything. They forget that God commands His people to love Him with all of their minds (Matt. 22:37; Deut. 6:5). But by reason, is meant logic. The worldview must not have contradictions within its belief system. This leads to the affirmation of the law of non-contradiction, i.e., “A, which can be anything whatever, cannot be both B and non-B at the same time in the same sense” or stated another way “a proposition cannot be true and false at the same time in the same sense.”¹⁷ In other words, I cannot be Jun Vencer and not be Jun Vencer at the same time in the same sense. The violation of this law has grave consequences to life.

To illustrate, Nash tells the story of a college graduate who was called into the local office of the Internal Revenue Service for an audit. The graduate failed to file a tax return for years. When asked by the IRS agent why this was so, the graduate replied that in college, the law of noncontradiction was an optional, non-necessary principle. Once he had learned that there is no difference between B and non-B, it was only a matter of time before he realized that no difference exists between filing a tax return and not filing a tax return. To this, the IRS agent replied: “Since you believe that no difference exists between B and non-B, I’m sure you also believe that there is no difference between being in jail and not in jail.”¹⁸

Rightfully so, Nash believes that “worldviews should always be submitted to the test of the law of non-contradiction.”¹⁹ To him the presence of a logical contradiction or inconsistency, though a negative test, is “always a sign of error” but at the same time concedes that “the absence of contradiction does not guarantee the presence of truth.”²⁰ Other criteria are needed to validate a worldview.

2. *The test of experience.* A good worldview is one which is consistent with our knowledge of our external world – the physical universe – and of our inner world – our whole being (body, soul, and spirit) and all its sensory faculties. Nash insists on “taking the common sense view that no worldview deserves respect if it ignores or is inconsistent with human experience ... to include experience of both the outer and the inner worlds.”²¹ This outer world includes those subject to human observations. The inner world can cover concepts such as thoughts, intents, and empathy. Francis Schaeffer would include “desire for significance, love, and meaning, and fear of nonbeing, among others.”²² Then there is the matter of moral consciousness of right and wrong. The standard of moral consciousness in choosing a worldview is illustrated by Oxford scholar C.S. Lewis. He rejects a materialistic view of the universe because they cannot account for moral consciousness. He rejects pantheism because a pantheistic God is beyond good and evil ... dualism (the belief in two coequal and coeternal deities, one good and the other evil) because it cannot explain how we know which of the two “ultimate principles is good.”²³

¹⁷ Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 55.

¹⁸ Ronald H. Nash: 83.

¹⁹ Ronald H. Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 26.

²⁰ Ibid, 26.

²¹ Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews*: 59.

²² Cited by Nash in *Worldviews*: 63.

²³ Ibid: 61.

This test may be referred to as the test of relevance. A worldview must intersect with human experiences both of his outside and inner worlds. Nash gave negative examples of this test: pain and death are illusions; all human beings are innately good; and human beings are making constant progress toward perfection. To him “no worldview deserves respect if it ignores or is inconsistent with human experience.”²⁴

3. *The test of practice.* This test leads to the heart of the matter. Can the person who believes in a particular world view live *consistently* in harmony with the system he professes or is he living a life that in reality embraces other worldviews?” For worldviews should be tested not only in philosophy or theory (reason and experience) but ultimately in the laboratory of life – in the world of blood, sweat, and tears.

Dangers of a worldview.

The evangelical believer must constantly critique his worldview and guard it against dangers that come in subtle forms. There is the danger of the subjectification of the worldview where man becomes the measure of things. The Enlightenment period produced the “de-divinization of the cosmos and the rise of a secular anthropocentrism” may have given humanity, to cite Martin Heidegger, “a position from and by which it can be ‘particular being who gives measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is’ ... to interpret the world and manipulate it as they would, especially scientifically. This leads to the opposite danger of a “radical objectification of reality” where science and technology defines worldview. In this sense, worldview is the product of a technological society that looks at the cosmos as the thing to be viewed. Thus, this dependence upon sight – a predominant western concept – is disconnected from other sensory faculties employed more in non-western settings. A balance is brought into play by Christianity where the “conception of the universe in which human beings as God’s creatures living in his creation conceive of the universe in sacramentalist tones and sustain a more unified, even sacred connection to the nature of things.”²⁵ A distinctive of a Christian worldview is that it maintains that “something better and something beyond must be kept in mind when interpreting the universe and humanity’s relationship to the world.”²⁶

Another danger is to substitute a worldview for a personal Savior. The coherence of worldview propositions should not usurp the primacy of Scriptures and its ultimate end of agapic love in Christ Jesus. The emphasis must not be inverted – exchanging the means for the end. This kind of problem is best expressed in C.S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*, through McDonald: “There have been some who were so occupied in spreading Christianity that they never gave thought to Christ.... Or an organizer of charities that had lost all love for the poor.”²⁷

The basis of a Christian worldview.

In developing a worldview, one raises the issue of source materials out of which one weaves the tapestry of such view. Of course, one cannot ignore science and philosophy but they are not adequate grounds to found a Christian worldview. Science is limited by empiricism and experimentation. Philosophical concepts are postulated by minds that are finite and fallible. Natural law cannot explain everything. Yet, one cannot ignore them.

Other religious systems, to certain degrees, can also illumine a Christian’s worldview. After all, as Philosopher Arthur Holmes puts it, “All truth is God’s truth.” Or as John Calvin wrote, “the Holy Spirit authors all truth.” The

²⁴ Ronald H. Nash: 27.

²⁵ David K. Naugle: 333.

²⁶ Ibid, 333.

²⁷ Ibid, 337.

primary source of a Christian worldview is the Bible. I am aware that such an approach seems to arbitrarily posit a number of irreducibles – that God exists, that there is objective Truth, and that the Bible is the revelation of God and the record of Truth and that Jesus Christ is very God. Every view starts from an assumed something for none can truly start from nothing (except God). The reminder of David K. Naugle is appropriate: “While there will never be a perfect agreement between the Bible and a biblical worldview, every effort must still be made to shape a Christian perspective of the universe by the teachings of the Scriptures. In brief, a genuine Christian (worldview) must always be formed and reformed by the Bible as the Word of God.”²⁸ Albert M. Wolters, a leading advocate of reformational worldview, says that “our worldview must be shaped and tested by Scripture. It can legitimately guide our lives only if it is scriptural.”²⁹

The common formulation of a Christian worldview is divided into three essential parts: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. I believe that this schema is comprehensive. Naugle summarizes this worldview in a concise way in his evaluation of its spiritual benefit.

“It begins with an enlarged understanding of God the Trinity, whose existence, nature, and sovereignty constitutes the explanatory and unifying principle of the universe. It involves the recognition of the overall narrative pattern of the Scriptures, consisting of the unmitigated goodness of creation, God’s original purposes for humanity, the catastrophe of the fall, and the history of redemption culminating in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the agent of the new creation. This larger biblical story connects the Old and New Testaments, unifies biblical theology, furnishes the background for the particulars of Christian doctrine and practice, and provides a narrative context by which believers can establish their own identities, make sense of their lives, and discover their place in the world. It entails a profound Christian humanism based on an understanding of the dignity of men and women created in the image and likeness of God who possess a fundamental spirituality, a unique set of cognitive powers, and a distinctive cultural calling to be the stewards of creation, which is to be developed for human blessings and God’s glory.”³⁰

I have accepted this as the foundation of a Christian worldview. I will attempt to flesh this out by breaking the three-fold schema into eight parts for amplification: God, Revelation, Creation, Fall, Redemption, Church, Calling, and Re-Creation. Obviously, only an outline can be presented recognizing that volumes have been written on each of these categories.

I will begin with God as the fundamental or the first principle of existence and from whom we derive understanding of our world and meaning for our lives. This, obviously, is a particular position against others who may not believe in God at all. I chose the theistic view because I find it more rationale and share the position of perhaps 90% others in the world who believe that there is God or a transcendent Being that governs the world and the affairs of men and women. John Calvin taught that human beings are “incurably religious.” All humans have ultimate concerns in life and “whatever it is, that object of ultimate concern is that person’s God.”³¹ Nash quoted author Henry Zylstra who wrote:

To be human is to be scientific, yes, and practical, and rational, and moral, and social, and artistic, but to be human further is to be religious also. And this religious in man is not just another facet of himself, just another side to his nature, just another part of the whole. It is the condition of all the

²⁸ David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History Of A Concept* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), p. 336.

²⁹ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics For A Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 6.

³⁰ David K. Naugle, 343.

³¹ Ronald H. Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions*: 19.

rest and the justification of all the rest. This is inevitably and inescapably so for all men. No man is religiously neutral in his knowledge of and his appropriation of reality.³²

From a Christian perspective, if nobody can be religiously neutral, the one can agree with the conclusion that “the world is not composed of religious and nonreligious people. It is composed rather of religious people who have different ultimate concerns and different gods and who respond to the living God in different ways.”³³ In this sense, “secular humanism is a religious worldview as certain as are Christianity and Judaism.”³⁴ This observation obliterates any distinction between the sacred and the secular. I remember a conversation with the Minister of Transport in Malaysia some years ago. On the way to see Prime Minister Mahathir, I commented that the secular philosophy of the government has contributed much to the progress of the Nation and the cross-cultural harmony among the people. To this the Minister replied that the word secular is not meaningful because to them everything is religious. This, too, is the Christian faith sadly truncated today into the secular and sacred mostly because of a fallacious worldview. I believe that God is the fitting starting point of a worldview.

1. GOD

“In the beginning God” (Gen. 1:1). The Bible simply declares that God exists but offers no defense for the existence of God. In fact is He with a capital “G” or a small letter “g”? Is God one or many? I take it that God is a transcendent Being – almighty, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, all holy, all love. I posit the proposition that God, capital “G”, exists. Where do we find the footprints of God in the sands of human history? How can the Infinite be known by the finite, the Eternal by the temporal, and the Absolute by the relativities of history? Can he be proven with mathematical certainty?

Our source of God-knowledge, as Christians, is the Bible. It is revelation. But is revelation not a miracle? Others would stumble at the idea of the miraculous in a post-modern age which venerates Science. There are three possibilities in response to the question: Miracles are impossible, are possible or that we don’t know. Obviously, there is a prior question to the question of miracles. Does God as an omnipotent Being exist? Again, the three possibilities exist: God does not exist (*atheism*), exists (*theism*), and we don’t know (*agnosticism or skepticism*). Agnosticism is not helpful because it is an infinite suspension of judgment in that one keeps on investigating if there is a way to know that there is God. Skepticism neutralizes itself because one must doubt his own doubt.



To say that God as an omnipotent Being does not exist is not tenable because as Leo Strauss one of the leading Jewish thinkers of the modern era points out: “How could we know that God as an omnipotent being does not exist? Not from experience. Experience cannot show more than that the conclusion from the world, from its manifest order and from its manifest rhythm, to an omnipotent Creator is not

³² Ibid: 19

³³ Ibid: 19.

³⁴ Ibid: 19.

valid.”³⁵ Science can only make a conclusion after examining all the facts and not all the facts are in or known about our universe and existence. In other words, “human reason cannot prove the nonexistence of God as an omnipotent being, it is, I believe, equally true that human reason cannot establish the existence of God as an omnipotent being.”³⁶ But it is not saying that a state of doubt will not yield to inquiry.

There are a number of classical arguments that are helpful in dealing with this subject. A starting point can be a question: Why does something exist and not nothing? Since it is undeniable that something actually exists, then what caused this existence? After all, it is an elementary axiom as simple as the song of Julie Andrews’ “nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could....” The only logical explanation for the existence of something is that it is caused by something. This approach deals with the *principle of causality*. Can there be an infinite chain of causation? Can anyone really cross infinity? If one starts counting, he will never end. To arrive at the present number, say 10, one must have started from a number, say 1. If one continues counting, he will never end and can go on to forever. But if one counts backward from 1, he is faced with two alternatives. He will never stop counting and goes on to infinity. If one assumes infinity, then, there is no starting number to begin the count and number 10 could not have arrived or be a reality. In this sense, no one can cross infinity. Or there will be another option. As one counts backward, he arrives at a *first number*, a starting point. This fact is the concept of the First Cause. As J. P. Moreland points out: “these amounts but since it has been realized – after all, here we are – there must have been a first event and this event must have been spontaneously generated by a situation that was immutable, unchanging, timeless, and free. So we can conclude that there must be a First Cause that started something. To explain the First Cause is to eventually explain the explanation itself. And when this is done, then there is nothing left. But something exists! The physical universe exists. You and I exist!” The cosmological argument is persuasive.

The other argument is from design. J. P. Moreland in his debate with atheist Kai Nielson (March 24, 1988), stated:

Scientists are discovering that the universe is a finely-tuned and delicately-balanced harmony of fundamental constants, or cosmic singularities ... in the formation of the universe, the balance of matter to antimatter had to be accurate to one part in ten billion for the universe even to arise ... there would also have been no universe capable of sustaining life if the expansion rate of the Big Bang had been one billionth of a percent larger or smaller. Furthermore, the chance possibilities of life arising spontaneously through mere chance has been calculated by Cambridge astronomer Fred Hoyle as being 1×10^{40} , which Hoyle likens to the probabilities of a tornado blowing through a junkyard and forming a Boeing 747.³⁷

The implication of these observations makes design inescapable. Who designed all these? And when we consider man and woman, can being come from nonbeing? The answer to the wonders of creation is that a Grand Designer, a Celestial Architect is responsible.

Then there is the issue of life in our universe. In fact, why should there be intelligent life? During the last few decades, scientists have discovered that the existence of intelligent life depends on a complex and delicate balance of initial conditions given in the big bang itself.³⁸ The two obvious explanations of intelligent life are that it happened by chance (and no responsible mind would accept that) or that it was caused by an intelligent Mind behind the cosmos. The intricacies of creation itself are mind boggling. King David exclaimed: “When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy

³⁵ Leo Strauss, “On The Interpretation Of Genesis” in Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity, ed. Kenneth Hart Green, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 360.

³⁶ Ibid: 361.

³⁷ J. P. Moreland and Kai Nielsen, 1993: 35.

³⁸ William Lane Craig, *Why I Believe God Exists?*, Why I Am A Christian, Norman L. Geisler, Paul K. Hoffman, editors (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2001), 68.

fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained, what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him?" (Ps. 8:3, 4).

From the lens of the astronomers to the microscopes of the biologists, from the stars of far-flung galaxies to the infinitesimal world of electrons, from the engines of science to the DNAs of humans, all these point to design. The recent findings on the function of the DNA only strengthen the argument. The information stored in DNA within the cell, without which life could not exist and development could not occur is a significant finding. The DNA is an information system and functions as a four-symbol code that guides human development from a single cell to adulthood. The DNA can function in an unimaginable degree of complexity. Modern computers operate based on a binary code. The DNA has twice that so that each cell contains information which equals the entire thirty volumes of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* several times over. I am awed and am reminded of God telling Jeremiah "before you were formed in the womb, I already knew you" (Jer. 1:5). The theological argument is very convincing.

We can also consider the issue of moral values. Whatever religion or non-religion one adheres to, some kind of value is being affirmed. Anthropologists and sociologists recognize that people whether in a remote tribe or in a metropolis do believe in some moral code of right and wrong. There may be differences in cultural values but there seems to be a general affirmation of a moral universe. For example, there is the belief that Hitler was evil and Mother Teresa was good. No one in his right mind would say that Hitler and Mother Teresa were of the same moral standing. There is a general condemnation of rape, of child abuse, of murder, lies, betrayals, cowardice. There is also a universal endorsement for respect for women, for caring for children, for helping needy people, for honesty, for loyalty, bravery. Civilization has a circle of values that is common to religions in the world. In fact, this circle of universal values keeps the world from self-destruction. Where is this common morality coming from? Did it come from chance? If moral values exist apart from God, in what sense am I obligated to obey them? The most plausible explanation for the existence of morality is that there is a Moral Law Giver, who gave intelligent life to discern right from wrong, and who caused their existence in our universe.

The argument of philosopher Gordon H. Clark to prove the existence of God from Truth is convincing. He refined this argument espoused by St. Augustine and also recognized by Thomas Aquinas. The argument comes in six propositions.

1. Truth exists.
2. Truth is immutable.
3. Truth is eternal.
4. Truth is mental.
5. Truth is superior to the human mind.
6. Truth is God.³⁹

Truth is undeniable because of the existence of knowledge and the object of knowledge is Truth. It is immutable in that it doesn't change. Truth will always be true regardless of time and circumstance. In this sense, truth is eternal. The next step posits the link of truth and the mind for truth presupposes the existence of minds. Truth then is mental yet superior to the human mind because truth cannot be subjective and individualistic. The human mind is mutable and changing. It does not judge the truth but is judged by the truth. Given all the premises, Truth is God for there must be an ontological ground for truth. This ground cannot be contingent or perishable. Since truth is immutable and eternal, then truth must exist in an eternal and immutable Mind. Since God possesses these attributes, God must be truth.

We can sum up this discussion by asking with reverence the questions:

³⁹ Ronald H. Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions*: 296.

1. Why is there a universe in all its design and grandeur?
2. Why is there life?
3. Why is there intelligent life?
4. Why is there moral life?

All these lead to the answers: There must be a First Cause, a Grand Architect for Creation, an Intelligent Creator, and a Moral Law Giver. But the conclusion that it is God seems to be a leap of faith not warranted by the arguments. They are convincing arguments that point to the existence of God; but ultimately, the proof for the existence of God – in this case of the Biblical God – lies in the fact that He revealed Himself to man. Strauss concludes by saying: “there is no argument in favor of creation except God speaking to Israel.”⁴⁰

The existence of God is deduced from the testimonies of people from the dawn of human life that God spoke to them and have shaped their histories. This is particularly true with a nomadic desert tribe, now the state of Israel, who insists that they exist because God called their forefather Abraham from Mesopotamia. This God also delivered them in a mighty exodus from Egypt through Moses and gave them the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Their stories have been verified by archeologists and their existence and journey to being is nothing less than supernatural. Israel claims then and now that the people and nation is God’s unsolicited testimony to the nations of the World that God exists, that He lives, and that He is the Lord of the nations.

Of course, there is Jesus Christ who says that He and God are one (Jn. 10:30), that He is very God Himself. His life and His messages were nothing less than miraculous and divine. He was an outstanding religious leader causing even Islam to recognize that. But He was more than a prophet, for a prophet does not tell a lie. He was more than a moral man for a moral man will not lie – declaring that He is God if in fact He was not. He was no lunatic for the best of scholars recognize the brilliance of His teachings. Then something that has no parallel in human history took place – the resurrection! And Jesus predicted this event even before He died as the main proof of His claim that He is God. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

Finally, Saul of Tarsus, said that the existence of God is evident in every being (Rom. 1:19). Every person is aware of the existence of God – positively or negatively – or God language is not even possible for those who do not believe. Our instinct, our intellect, our conscience, senses, our universe argue for the existence of God.

2. CREATION

Creation of the visible Physical Universe

Since God exists, and one of the proofs for His existence is the physical universe which could not have come into being from nothing, then God is the supernatural cause and explanation of such existence. Since there was no eyewitness to the event, “the doctrine of creation is based on divine revelation.”⁴¹ The Bible says: “In the beginning God *created* ...” (Gen. 1:1). He created the physical universe as the habitat of humankind and all living things (Isa. 45:18). It has been designed, formed and sustained by the infinite genius of God. In creation, the universe was complete (Gen. 1:31-2:2), yet filled with mysteries and secrets (Job 9:9-10; 38:1-40:2). It exists for a purpose – to express the character of and give pleasure to the Creator. It is designed to bring enjoyment to creatures. The universe declares the glory of God (Ps. 19:1).

⁴⁰ Leo Strauss: *On The Interpretation Of Genesis*: 370.

⁴¹ Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), 1020.

Physicists advance the Big Bang theory as the explanation for the existence of the universe. Stephen Hawking, famous physicist, said: "Almost everyone now believes that the universe, and time itself, had a beginning at the Big Bang."⁴² But even such a theory requires that either there was something to bang with in the first place or creation happened supernaturally. The atheistic option that the universe was just there is not a reasonable and responsible option. The reason is simply that atheists would affirm that if they hear a big bang from within the house, they conclude that something fell or two objects hit each other. But none would believe that nothing caused the bang itself. And yet that is exactly what the big bang points to, i.e., that the theory "requires the creation of the universe from nothing".⁴³ Cambridge Astronomer Fred Hoyle speaking of the Big Bang theory that the universe was "shrunk down to nothing at all."⁴⁴ This led Sir Arthur Eddington, a great scientist to conclude that "The beginning seems to present insuperable difficulties unless we agree to look on it as frankly supernatural."⁴⁵



From the inscripturated record of divine revelation, we find that by original creation is meant an act by which something, which has not previously existed, is brought into being. It refers to "the work of God in bringing into being, without the use of any preexisting materials, everything that is."⁴⁶ The origination qualification is necessary because the successive acts of creation in Genesis do not refer to *creatio ex nihilo* such as the creation of man (from dust) and of woman (from the rib of the man). In the Bible, "creation refers both to the act by which God created the universe and to the product of that process."⁴⁷ The underlying *telos* (design or purpose) of creation "is to serve and glorify God."⁴⁸ The song of the elders in Revelation 4 ascribes glory to God because he has "created all things, and for (his) pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11; cf. Col. 1:16).

The Biblical idea of creation is based on monotheism. It rejects the idea that there are multiple gods who created the world, specifically, that there is a good God and an evil god who co-existed and are equally powerful from eternity. Two beings cannot be co-eternal. There can only be one eternity. Moreover, if God and evil are co-powerful then it would have been an eternal impasse and nothing would have come into being. Essentially, evil is a negative concept and exists only because there is good. God is ante and evil is posterior in existence. Millard says: "To God as the sole Creator belonged the responsibility for the world of nature and of men and though there were facets of His creation which did not reflect His high moral and ethical character, even these were ultimately reconcilable to belief in the activity of one creative deity."⁴⁹ In other words, God is sovereign over all things created and the Lord of the cosmos. God is the ground and source of existence and reality.

⁴² William Lane Craig, *Why I Believe God Exists?* 66.

⁴³ Ibid, 63.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1999), 392.

⁴⁷ *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), 179.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1998), 1023.

Creation ex nihilo

The Bible states, “In the beginning God created (*bara*) the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). The Hebrew *bara* is used in Scriptures primarily with God as its referent or subject. In other words, man can make something out of something but only God can create something out of nothing. Implicit in Genesis 1 is the philosophical postulate of *creatio ex nihilo*. It means, “The worlds were not fashioned from any pre-existing material, but out of nothing, and that this proceeded from the activity of the divine Word. Prior to the creative fiat there was thus no other kind of phenomenological existence.”⁵⁰ The very idea of “in the beginning” of creation suggests that the cosmos was not side-by-side with its Creator. This has great implication to our understanding of God for He is distinguished from the things He created and that the things created did not emanate from Him (cf. Rom. 1:25). God is extremely jealous that He is not confused or identified with anything in creation (Ex. 32:1-29; 1 Kgs. 12:25-33; 2 Kgs. 17:23; Isa. 44:13-20). The second commandment against graven images (Ex. 20:4-6) “reflects the language of Genesis 1.”⁵¹ “The biblical image of creation as the product of a divine Creator in one sense empties nature of divinity, in contrast to the tendency of polytheism (which populates the land with local deities) and pantheism (which equates the visible creation with deity).”⁵² “Yahweh,” writes Carl F. Henry, “is transcendent Creator; he cannot be likened to creaturely things (Isa. 40:15-28), least of all to man-made idols that would materialize and spatio-temporalize the infinite and invisible deity.”⁵³ Yet at the same time, creation “makes (nature) a revelation of God and leaves it filled with pointers to God.”⁵⁴ It may well be said that creation is a “divine messenger” (cf. Ps. 104:3-4). Creation declares knowledge (Ps. 19:2; Job 38:2) and wisdom (Ps. 104:24). The created cosmos is “the splendid design of an infinitely intelligent and powerful Creator.”⁵⁵

Creation of man and woman

Man and woman were not created *ex nihilo* but from previously prepared material, the ‘dust from the ground’ (Gen. 2:7), as were also the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air (Gen. 2:10). This is referred to as secondary creation “to denote an activity which makes use of material already in existence but which is nevertheless integral to the concept of primary creation.”

Homo sapiens is dignified by the “divine breath” of God that made him and her a “living soul.” The interpretation of the text can lead to a problem of dualism in that man is made of matter and spirit. While it is true that man was fashioned from dust and to dust he will return, the intent of God is for man to become a complete personality – “living being”. The Hebrew thought consistently viewed man as a personality. He is “a unified being in which all aspects of existence are designed to function in an integrated manner to the glory of God”⁵⁶ This concern for the integration of the personality of a kind is being emphasized by modern psychosomatic medicine.

Because man was created in the image of God, he is tasked to image God in creation, to serve as “the divine representative” and to order “the ways of those aspects of creation which are put under his control” (Gen. 1:28).⁵⁷ Present emphasis on holistic and transformational ministries is grounded on this creation mandate because man is also made to enjoy fellowship with the Creator. His prime vocation is to serve God in the world of nature. He is unique in being the only creature which can respond to God in disobedience as well as in faith and trust. The

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 181.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Carl F. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority: Vol. II, God Who Speaks and Shows* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1976), 93.

⁵⁴ *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 181.

⁵⁵ Carl F. Henry, 38.

⁵⁶ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (1980) 1024.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

covenant community, the church, “was by itself a special creation, intended as a witness in pagan society to the nature and power of the one true God and a means of His expression in the world.”⁵⁸

The New Testament authors “in the light of the fuller revelation of God in Christ ... viewed the process of creation Christologically. In Jesus all things cohered (Col. 1:17), and the unity of creation in Him was demonstrated further as part of the divine purpose in history (Eph. 1:9, 10). It is he who upholds the universe by His powerful word (Heb. 1:3), and brings meaning to the historical process as the Savior and Redeemer of the world.”⁵⁹

Judeo-Christian teaching reminds us that man and woman are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), and are capable of knowing Truth (Ps. 8). “The human being, as a creature of God, exists and functions as a holistic organism.”⁶⁰ In 1 Thessalonians 5:23, this whole person is identified as a unity of *soma* (body), *psyche* (soul), and *pneuma* (spirit).⁶¹ He has *nous* (reason or objective mind – Deut. 6:5; Eph. 4:23; Matt. 23:37). Scholars debate on the exact meaning of man as body, soul and spirit. Firstly, as a psychological statement and “understood Paul in terms of trichotomy; spirit, soul, and body are three separable parts of man. Secondly, it was seen as a dichotomy of soul and body after the Greek dualism. Thirdly, the terms as body, soul, and spirit are not different, separable faculties of man but different ways of viewing the whole man.”⁶² While the different parts are affirmed (body, soul, and spirit), still they are components of a unified and whole body. “Humans,” says David G. Benner, “are living and vital whole.”⁶³ He continues: “The Bible suggests that body and soul are separated by death and remain so until the resurrection of the body. However, this separation is temporary and is an artificial state of humanity. In eternity, we will once again be embodied and inspirited bodies. This is the normal state of human persons.”⁶⁴

“The work of redemption does not mean merely the salvation of the soul or spirit; it includes the redemption of the body.”⁶⁵ Evangelical concern is for the soul and spirit and consider the body as secondary (cf. Matt. 16:25). But as Bultmann insisted, man must be viewed as an “indivisible entity; and that *soma*, *pneuma*, and *psyche* constitute merely different ways of looking upon man in his entirety.”⁶⁶ Thus, it cannot be said of man as having a *soma*; he is *soma*.⁶⁷ Benner echoes: “We do not have a soul, we are soul. Similarly, we do not have a spirit, we are spirit. Nor do we have a body, we are body.”⁶⁸ The point being that the three components may well be represented by the term “body.” This is crucial because the body to Bultmann means “man in respect to his being able to make himself the object of his own action, or to experience himself as the subject to whom something happens,”⁶⁹ as *soma* can be the object of his own control. [cf. Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 13:3; 1 Cor. 9:27; 1 Cor. 7:4; Phil. 1:20]. This means, as Ladd points out, that *soma* can stand as an equivalent for “I.” Our experiences are felt and known in bodily form. “I,” “self” must always be expressed in bodily terms and, therefore, the control of my body is the control of myself. The important truth that emerges is this: “somatic existence is conceived as being the normal and proper mode of existence. *Soma* is an essential, not an unimportant element in human existence.”⁷⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid, 45.

⁶² George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 457.

⁶³ David G. Benner, *Care of Souls* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998), 22.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 465.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ David G. Benner, *Care of Souls*, 22.

⁶⁹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 465.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 22-23.

Physically and somatically, the human being is essentially animal and functions like much of the animal kingdom. But distinction exists between human and animal flesh (1 Cor. 15:39). To borrow Berkouwer's term, human is "microtheos," a child of a Father who created him or her in his very likeness.⁷¹ "When God created man and woman, he endowed them, in finite proportions, with his attributes of intelligence, power, volition, creativeness, nobility, dignity, freedom, immortality, capacity for transcendence, moral goodness, capacity for community and fellowship, and personhood. The human personhood is derived directly and exclusively from the personhood of God."⁷²

"Human beings are focal to both the design and the purpose of the universe. The universe, the earth in particular, was fashioned for people to use, rule and enjoy.... When God demonstrated his creative power in forming a universe *ex nihilo*, he included in the overall design ample provision for people to be self-actualizing."⁷³ In creation, man and woman were the crowns of divine creation (Ps. 8).

God desires that they be related to Him. They are to submit to His sovereignty in love and obedience. They are to exercise stewardship over God's creation – to enjoy its bounty through work and to ensure continuity of fruitfulness through sound conservation programs especially of irreplaceable resources.

Creation of the invisible beings.

Paul says: 'For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created by Him and for Him' (Col. 1:16).

Angels

Biblical teaching affirms the existence of angels, Satan and demons (Ps. 8:5; Matt. 12:27-28; Mk. 1:23-28). Baker and Macchia cited Tim Unsworth on angels: "Angels, it seems, are hard to pin down."⁷⁴ They are incidental and not the primary focus of Scripture.⁷⁵ Karl Barth described the topic of angels as "the most remarkable and difficult of all." Part of this difficulty is, as Millard points out, that "when they are mentioned, it is always in order to inform us further about God, what he does, and how he does it."⁷⁶ The TV series *Touched By An Angel* is probably creating more awareness about angels today than any other teaching.

Angels may be defined as "those spiritual beings which God created higher than humans, some of whom have remained obedient to God and carry out his will, and others of whom disobeyed, lost their holy condition, and now oppose and hinder his work."⁷⁷ Angels "neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Matt. 22:30). There is no indication that they are an incremental company. They "were created at one time; that is, the Bible gives no indication of a schedule of incremental creation of angels (or anything else). They were formed by and for Christ when "He commanded and they were created" (Ps. 148:5).⁷⁸ Angels are everlasting but not eternal. "Angels had a beginning but will know no end, for they are present in the eternal age and in the New Jerusalem" (Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:9,12).⁷⁹

⁷¹ Ibid, 46.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Darrell Smith, *Integrative Therapy*, 45.

⁷⁴ Carolyn Denise Baker, Frank D. Macchia, *Created Spirit Beings*, Systematic Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective, Stanley M. Horton, Ed. (Springfield, Missouri: Logion Press, 1994), 179.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 459.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Baker, Macchia, *Created Spirit Beings*, 187.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

The purpose of angels can be deduced from the Hebrew word (*mal'akh*) and Greek word (*angelos*) which mean "messenger", i.e., to carry the message of divine words and works (Jud.2:1-5; Matt. 1:20-24; Lk. 11:38). They are servants of God, to serve but not to be served, they worship but are not to be worshiped, and their power is superior but not supreme. They are agents to help people, especially God's own (Ex. 14:19; 23:23; 1 Kgs. 19:5-8; Isa. 63:9; Dan. 3:28) and to carry out God's judgment (Gen. 19:22; Acts 12:23). They are not always visible (Heb. 12:22) although God occasionally gives them visible human form (Gen. 19:1-22). They are spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7, 14). They may be seen but not recognized as angels (Heb. 13:2). Their service (Gk. *Diakonian*) "is primarily spiritual help, relief, and support ... it may include tangible acts of love as well" (Matt. 4:11; 28:2-7; Acts 15:18-20; 12:7-10).

Angels work in people's lives. In a number of cases, angels protected the believers from harm especially when such aid is necessary for the continued proclamation of the gospel (Acts 5:19-20; 12:7-17; 27:23-24). They "can help the believer's outward, physical necessities, while the Holy Spirit aids inward spiritual illumination."⁸⁰ While angels assist, they don't replace the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation and in the believer's proclamation of Christ (Acts 8:26; 10:44-48). When sinners repent, there is joy among the angels (Lk. 15:10). They will both mediate God's final judgments upon humans refusing Christ (Matt. 13:39-43; Rev. 8:6-13) and escort the righteous to a place of reward (Lk. 16:22). Christians, not angels, will share Christ's rule in the world to come (Heb. 2:5).

Satan and demons

The people of ancient societies and cultures "believed that spirits and demigods, some more evil than others, were able to intrude at will into a person's everyday life. Elaborate incantations, spiritistic forms of communication, and magical rituals developed in various cultic settings to grant the common person an element of control in this threatening world of spirit activity."⁸¹ In contrast to such religious orientations is the unique witness of the Old Testament of Jehovah. The God and Creator of all is not only Lord of Israel, but also the Lord of hosts, who reigns supreme over the entire universe. God alone is to be worshipped (Ps. 139; Isa. 43). Spiritistic forms of communication or magical incantations or rituals were not to have any place in the faith of Israel (Isa. 8:19-22). This is the same teaching in the New Testament. The pagan notion of a world invaded chaotically by multiple spirits, some worse than others, is clearly set aside by the revelation of evil spirits as all diametrically opposed to God under one head, Satan the adversary. The evil forces behind Satan in the Gospels have no roots in the human race."⁸²

With the coming of Jesus as Immanuel, came the unprecedented emergence of conflict with, and the defeat of, the forces of darkness. Jesus said: "If I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). He cast out demons (Mk. 1:23-28; 9:14-29) as evidence that He had publicly defeated demons by the Spirit of God. In fact, public ministry of Jesus started only after He defeated the adversary in an initial conflict in the wilderness temptation (Matt. 4:1-11). Unlike Adam, the first man, Jesus the Second Adam was faithful to God in the face of Satan's seductions and lies (Rom. 5:12-19). The Gospels "imply that Satan's defeat devastates the entire kingdom of darkness, for binding 'the strong man' (Satan) allowed Jesus to 'rob his house' (Matt. 12:29). God's people can resist Satan because He is a vanquished enemy. This victory over Satan was to be decisively fulfilled in Jesus' death and resurrection."⁸³ The cross, where Satan did his worst, turned out to be his defeat (Col. 2:15). When Jesus said, "It is finished," He was pronouncing the completion of His work of redemption for His people and declaring His comprehensive victory over death and the forces of darkness headed by Satan. This explains Jesus' declaration to His disciples: "I will build My Church and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18).

⁸⁰ Ibid, 193.

⁸¹ Ibid, 196.

⁸² Ibid, 199.

⁸³ Ibid.

3. REVELATION

Humanly speaking, this is an impossibility. The only way that the Unknown God can be known is for God to disclose Himself to man – as Paul preached in Athens, i.e., through revelation. And the Living God of Biblical faith did exactly that. He “communicated knowledge through the ebb and flow of historical experiences.”⁸⁴ He is knowable in His creation, revelation and witness (see Jn. 14:6; 8:32; Heb. 11:1). He also revealed Himself as the God who is self-existing and without cause (Ps. 90:2).

The attributes and character of God.

He revealed His attributes, among which are: self-existent, self-sufficient and self-sustaining (Acts 17:23-25). This is “his *deity*, the quality of having life in and from himself.”⁸⁵ God is simple (that is totally integrated), perfect and immutable, cf. Ps. 18:24-27; infinite, bodiless (a spirit), omnipresent, omniscient, and eternal; purposeful; all-powerful; and sovereign in relation to his world. God is both transcendent over, and immanent in his world. He is impassable, not that God is impassive and unfeeling... but that no created beings can inflict pain, suffering and distress on him at their own will.



He also revealed His character. God is holy love (*agape*) – 1 Jn. 4:8. The word is used to mean “love that gives even to the unlovely and the undeserving.” God is also ‘the holy one’ (some 50 references in the Bible). He is moral perfection. He is not only awesome but adorable by reason of his truthfulness, faithfulness, grace, mercy, loving-kindness, patience, constancy, wisdom, justice, goodness and generosity. Given His character, God declared that He is “the Truth” (Jn. 7:14). He is the ground of meaning and the objective source of ethics. His Truth is knowable and ennobling. He is to be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth (Jn. 4:24).

The Being and Personality of God.

God is Creator of all things, visible and invisible. He created the world according to His good pleasure and for His glory. God is sovereign and is provident in human history. He is the Lord of the nations (Ps. 22:28; 47:8). He has a plan (Jer. 9:11) that cannot be thwarted and all events are leading to the climactic end when He judges individuals and nations, sentences unbelieving angels and people to exist forever in tormented alienation from Him (Rev. 19-20).

“The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4). This is the claim of Judeo-Christianity. Yet, the Holy One also exists in three co-equal but distinct personalities. The Genesis record intimates God who is plurality-in-unity – “let us make man in *our* image” (Gen. 1:26). Within the Trinity, there is an arrangement of work in effecting creation and redemption: *to* the Father *through* the Son *by* the Spirit (Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19). Inasmuch as God generates all that there is, then all things will find their origin and definition from God. In this sense, God is the ground of our being. Moreover, the Trinity is also the grounds for community. In fact, if oneness in the Trinity existed prior to the creation

⁸⁴ George E. Ladd, *The Knowledge Of God: The Saving Acts Of God*, Basic Christian Doctrines (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1986), 8.

⁸⁵ *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 276.

of humans, then community “finds its essence and definition deep within the being of God.”⁸⁶ All human communities derive their life and meaning from the oneness of the Tri-unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The disclosure of what was previously unknown is the intrinsic meaning of revelation. “In Judeo-Christian Theology, the term is used primarily of God’s communication to man of divine Truth, that is, his manifestation of himself or his will.”⁸⁷ In effect, “God has made known to men truths and realities which men could not discover for themselves.”⁸⁸ Revelation has two focal points: (1) On one hand, “God tells men about himself – who he is, what he has done, is doing and will do, and what he requires them to do;” and (2) on the other hand, “when God sends men his word, he also confronts them with himself... to make himself known to them.”⁸⁹

Revelation has two premises. Firstly, God is transcendent. He must take the initiative because “he is so far from man in mode of being that man cannot see him (Jn. 1:18; 1 Tim. 1:16; cf. Ex. 33:20), or find him out by searching (cf. Job. 11:7; 23:3-9), nor read his thoughts by shrewd guesswork (Isa. 55:8f). Secondly, man and woman are sinful. Their powers of perception in the realm of divine things have been so dulled by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4) and sin (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14), and their minds are so prepossessed by their own fancied ‘wisdom’, which runs contrary to the true knowledge of God (Rom. 1:21ff; 1 Cor. 1:21), that it is beyond their natural powers to apprehend God, however presented to them.”⁹⁰ In fact, the pressure of this self-disclosure on God’s part produces idolatry, as the fallen mind in its perversity seeks to quench the light by turning it into darkness (Rom. 1:23ff; Jn. 1:5).

The general proposition is that the Creator is self-revealed in his work (Rom. 1:20). This revelation is usually understood in terms of general revelation (revelation in nature, history and conscience – Rom. 1:18ff; Acts 14:15-17; 17:22; Ps. 19, 104) and special revelation (redemptive revelation through miraculous works and words).

The main purpose of general revelation is the information of his eternity, power and glory (Rom. 1:20; cf. Ps. 191:1), his kindness to men (Acts 14:17), his moral law (Rom. 2:12 ff), his demand for worship and obedience (Rom. 1:21) and his wrath against sin (Rom. 1:18,32), thus serve only to render men ‘without excuse’ for their ‘ungodliness and wickedness’ (Rom. 1:18-20).⁹¹

God’s special self-disclosure was through miraculous events in the call of Abraham (Gen. 12), in the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21), in the Passover (Ex. 12), in the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14). God spoke directly and audibly to Adam (Gen. 2:16; 3:9 ff), to Samuel (1 Sam. 3:4), to Daniel and Joseph in dreams, to Ezekiel, Zechariah and John through visions. God also made visible manifestations before the incarnation of Christ in the form of theophanies (Gen. 16:7-14), appearing as a man to Jacob (Gen. 32), and in His Shekinah glory (Ex. 3:2-4; 24:15-18; 40:34-35). The center of special revelation is Christ Jesus – His birth, pain and death (Jn. 1:1-14; 14:9; Heb. 1:1-2).

General and special revelation is a unity. The correlation between general and special revelation is very critical in that the historical acts of God are also to be interpreted by Scriptures. The two are not to be separated. Where the two are separated, serious error takes place. For example, when Thomas Aquinas declared that God is knowable by reason (via general or natural revelation) apart from special revelation in Christ – Christ was also set aside in the process of salvation. Such an understanding paved the way for a philosophical revolt against special revelation as expressed in variant forms: materialistic communism, atheistic existentialism, logical positivism, and some forms of humanism. Through this deduction, salvation is possible without the need for Christ. The Logos is Creator and

⁸⁶ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 16.

⁸⁷ Carl F. Henry, “*Creation*,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1975), 457.

⁸⁸ Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 922.

⁸⁹ *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Hodder and Stoughton: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 1334.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1335.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Redeemer (Jn. 1) and the Logos is Jesus Christ our Lord. Faith in God is not a decapitating of the head. Saving faith is grounded on the sufficiency of the evidence. If general revelation draws out the alienation of every person from God then special revelation manifests the grace of God in Christ as His love offer to every person to bring forgiveness of sins and to restore communion.

The primary role of General revelation, alongside special revelation, is “to emphasize man’s guilt – to display man’s predicament; he is a finite creature with an eternal destiny, made for spiritual fellowship with God, but now separated from his Maker by sin.”⁹² On the other hand, the “dramatic news is that God has acted in saving history, climaxed by the incarnate person and work of Christ (Heb. 1:2), for the salvation of lost mankind.”⁹³ This special revelation in sacred history is crowned by “the incarnation of the living word and the inscripturation of the spoken word.”⁹⁴ Salvation is not only through personal faith in Christ but reality itself finds its ultimate explanation in the Logos (John 1:3).

The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is in “an active sense (the action of the Spirit), a passive sense (the effect of the Spirit’s action on the human author), and a terminal sense (the biblical writings as the deposit of the Spirit’s influence).⁹⁵ The Bible is *Spirit-inspired* (superintending work of the Spirit in the lives of prophets, apostles and other authors so what they came to write is Scripture⁹⁶ – Jer. 36:1-2; Ezek. 11:5; Mic. 3:8; 2 Pet. 1:21); *Spirit-illuminated* (the Spirit’s continuing act speaking to people through the Bible – Job 32:8; 1 Jn. 5:7,11; 1 Cor. 2:6-16; 2 Cor. 3:14-17; Jn. 14:26); and *Spirit-approved* (the quality of Biblical writings themselves or the Bible as product – CH Dodd – 2 Tim. 3:16). The Bible is *plenary inspired* – *in its entirety, infallible* (cannot deceive), and *inerrant* (without error whenever it speaks on a subject). The Bible functions as “the Constitution of an ongoing community.”⁹⁷ *It is the foundation of our faith and the source of guidance for our lives. It is utterly reliable and trustworthy as the authority and the norm of faith and life.* The Bible speaks of revelation with the intended thought of “God the Creator actively disclosing to men his power and glory, his nature and character, his will, ways and plans – in short, himself – in order that men may know him.”⁹⁸ Accordingly, “God’s revelation comes to man, not as information without obligation, but as a mandatory rule of faith and conduct.”⁹⁹

An issue on revelation is its relationship with reason. Two schools represent the two sides of the issue: revelation precedes reason (Augustine: “I believe in order to understand”) versus reason precedes revelation (Aquinas: “I understand in order to believe”). This leads to the accusation by some that evangelical Christianity is so focused on faith and less on reason. Of course, this is furthest from the truth. The insistence of Scriptures is that God desires mankind to reason with Him (Isa. 1:18) and to love Him with all of their minds (Matt. 22:37). Carl F. Henry, argues this point:

The Christian asserts that the laws of logic and morality belong to the *imago Dei* in man. Christian theology has always been under biblical compulsion to affirm the identity of the *Logos* with the Godhead, and to find a connection between God as rational and moral and the form and content of the divine image in man. That Jesus Christ is himself the Truth; that man bears the divine image on the basis of creation and that this image while distorted by sin is not destroyed; that the Holy Bible is a rational revelation of the nature of God and his will for fallen man; that the Holy Spirit uses truth as a means of conviction and conversion – all these facts indicate in some measure the undeniable premium assigned to rationality by the Christian religion.... Christian experience involves both

⁹² Carl F. Henry, “Creation,” 457.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Stanley Grenz, 498.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 947.

⁹⁷ Francis Fiorenza, “The Crisis of Scriptural Authority,” p. 363, (cited by S. Grenz, p. 508).

⁹⁸ The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 1334.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

assensus (assent to revealed doctrines) and *fiducia* (personal trust in Christ). Moreover saving trust is impossible without some authentic knowledge of God (Heb. 11:6; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Rom. 10:9).¹⁰⁰

The nature and significance of the human mind is a crucial problem of philosophy in its bearing on Christianity and other philosophies. One cannot just take a view against reason anchored by the notion of the hidden God and on the basis of the limitation of human knowledge about the spiritual world and move into a leap of faith without facts. Of course though divine revelation may not include all that should be known about God, what is known is cognitively valid and adequate for God's redemptive purposes. The Christian position "is concerned for spiritual decision between Jesus Christ and false gods and not merely for an acceptance of certain revealed truths, yet the Christian movement does not on that account demean the importance of divinely revealed doctrines."¹⁰¹ We are to love God with our mind (Matt. 22:37). We are to reason together (Isa. 1:18).

God reveals Himself as Creator and Redeemer.

4. FALL

Sin and death entered the World.

When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them instructions in the garden on how to enjoy His bounty and live with life eternal (Gen. 2:16-17). Adam and Eve exercised freedom and disobeyed God knowing that their choice would result in either life or death. The disobedience (sin) of this first couple, federally representing humanity, resulted in [1] personal spiritual death (alienation from God), pain and suffering, physical death (death entered the world); [2] social alienation, Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness and experienced shame; and [3] in cursing of the ground (world) – cf. Gen. 3:14-19. The basic arrangements between God and man and creation were broken.



The Christian doctrine of the fall refers to the sin of Adam and its tragic consequences for humanity and the cosmos (Gen. 2:16-17; cf. 3). Yet, "while the narrative of Genesis 3 relates the event of Adam's fall and its consequences, there is no biblical account of a *doctrine* of the fall¹⁰² of mankind (in the sense of a clear statement of the relationship between the sin and guilt of Adam and the sin and guilt of all mankind) apart from Rom. 5:12-21 (and by implication 1 Cor. 15:21-22)."¹⁰³ In the Old Testament, we have hints such as Psalms 51:5 but by and large, sin and life are personal responsibilities and "attributed to Satan (or demonic beings) or a 'spirit of evil' within man (as distinct from 'spirit of good').... Even in the gospels, there is no explicit reference to either the origin or the transmission of sin."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, 458.

¹⁰² The word fall, from the Greek *aphistemi* and its Hebrew equivalents, means "removal in a spatial sense (Gen. 12:8), separation of persons (1 Sam. 18:13; Ps. 6:8), withdrawal from a relationship (Num. 8:25) or from a state (Prov. 23:18; Isa. 59:9); political revolt (Gen. 14:4; 2 Chr. 21:8, 10; Ezek. 17:15)."

¹⁰³ *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 606.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 249.

The Fall includes all of mankind.

The Christian understanding of the relationship of the sin and guilt of Adam, and the sin and guilt of all humanity, could be traced back to Augustine. “He thought of original sin as inherited sin, the fallen nature of Adam transmitted biologically through sexual procreation from fathers to their children. Moreover, since we all were germinally present in Adam, all actually participated in Adam’s sin.”¹⁰⁵ This means “all men and women were themselves included in the particular sin of Adam, and therefore, were included in his guilt and subject to the condemnation of death.”¹⁰⁶ Calvin, though reaffirming Augustine, differs in the notion of hereditary transmission of sin and believes that “original sin is the outcome of a judgment of God upon mankind, imputing Adam’s sin to all believers.”¹⁰⁷ The arguments of Augustine move from Adam to Christ, while Calvin is from Christ to Adam. The latter position says, “It is only from the perspective of our inclusion in the righteousness of Christ and its consequences in terms of justification and sanctification that we can comprehend the reality of our inclusion in the sin of Adam with its consequences of guilt, death and total depravity.”¹⁰⁸ Scholars have not settled the issue for two millennia and it is most likely that the debate will continue but it is consistent with the narrative and human experiences that the fall is determinative of all mankind. As sacred Scriptures say: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned... so then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men” (Rom. 5:12,18). This justification is by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:8). As believers are *in* Christ – the second Adam – so are all men *in* the first Adam. The fall did not just take place in Adam or Eve, but it affected the whole of humankind. But beyond that, the Fall also vitiated human freedom to choose good rather than evil, to choose God rather than Satan.

Therefore, after the heavenly image was obliterated in him, he was not the only one to suffer this punishment – that in place of wisdom, virtue, holiness, truth, and justice, with which adornments he had been clad, there came forth the most filthy plagues, blindness, impotence, impurity, vanity and injustice – but he also entangled and immersed his offspring in the same miseries. This is the inherited corruption, which the church fathers termed “original sin,” meaning by the word “sin” the depravation of a nature previously good and pure.¹⁰⁹

“... That we are corrupted not by derived wickedness, but that we bear inborn defect from our mother’s womb.”¹¹⁰ David said: “begotten in iniquities, and conceived by his mother in sin.” (Ps. 51:5). “By nature all are children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). “... whatever is born of flesh is flesh” (Jn. 3:6), and therefore the door of life is closed to all until they have been reborn (Jn. 3:5). “Original sin, therefore, seems to be a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God’s wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls ‘works of the flesh’¹¹¹ (Gal. 5:10). Vitiating will or propensity to do evil, does not make the acts of fallen humanity all evil. Origen says that man still has “a faculty of reason to distinguish between good and evil, a faculty of the will to choose one or the other. Augustine does not disagree with this when he teaches that it is a faculty of the reason and the will to choose good with the assistance of grace; even, when grace is absent.”¹¹² The possibility of man doing good as aided by grace will not suffice to merit salvation.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 250.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1, 250.

¹⁰⁹ John Calvin, 1960: 246.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 247.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 251.

¹¹² Ibid, 261.

The Fall has cosmic dimensions.

The fall also has cosmic implications – “the cursing of the ground” (Gen. 3:17). Paul speaks of “creation itself will be set free from corruption into the freedom of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (Rom. 8:21-22). The fall, moreover, did not invalidate the creation mandate for man and woman to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Though the creation mandate in terms of responsibility remains, “man himself has now become so corrupted by sin that he could no longer rule the earth properly.”¹¹³ I cannot agree with the assessment that “when man sinned, his dominion over the earth was not taken away.”¹¹⁴ The fall was the operative act when Adam turned over dominion of this world to Satan (cf. Matt. 4:8-9; 1 Jn. 5:19; Jn. 14:30) and where humanity is in bondage to this domain of darkness (Col. 1:13; Eph. 2:2).

The Fall and Satan.

Although Scripture is not clear when Satan and his minions fell because of their pride and rebellion against God, it is a necessary postulate that this happened before the fall of Adam and Eve. The presence of the serpent (Satan or simply a personifier) in the garden (Gen. 3; cf. Isa. 14:12; Rev. 20:2f; 12:7-9) seems to suggest that. The fall of Adam and Eve was due to the seduction of this malevolent serpent and the choice of the couple “to be like God” (Gen.3:5). In addition to what was already said, Satan is “the power of opposition whose principle was hatred against God, the Almighty Sovereign of heaven and earth. The power revealed itself first in heaven, when mighty Satan rebelled against God and apostatized with his angels. That same power was introduced into the world of men when Adam committed the principal sin, and, accepting the word of the devil, rose in rebellion against God. The development and action of that power of opposition had been pictured to us in the Book of Revelation.”¹¹⁵ Moreover, “politically this power develops into a tremendous confederacy called ‘the beast of the sea,’ aiming at the establishment of an antichristian kingdom... scientifically and ideologically this power develops as the power of the false prophet, ‘the best out of the earth,’ deceiving the minds of the masses. In the picture of the great whore and of Babylon we have been shown the ecclesiastical development of this power of opposition into the false church, the bride of the Antichrist.” But the power of the opposition is completely vanquished. All the judgments implied in the seals and the trumpets and the vials were occasioned by the presence of this power of opposition. At this point (up to Chapter 20) in the Book of Revelation the judgment and destruction of this power of opposition is complete.”¹¹⁶

5. REDEMPTION

The fall of man is not the final condition of humanity and Satan will not have the last word. God in grace continues to work out His plan for man and creation. He chose a people, Israel, to be His witness to a rebellious world calling them to acknowledge His sovereignty and enjoy His blessings. When Israel failed, in the fullness of time, He sent His only begotten Son Jesus to save His people from their sin (Matt. 1:21) and to establish His kingdom that will have no end (Lk. 1:33; Isa. 9:6). It is also important to note that God’s salvation is not a backup plan after the fall. Paul is clear on this stating that the mystery of the Church was “in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11).

¹¹³ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible And The Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 277.

¹¹⁴ Ibid: 277.

¹¹⁵ Herman Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1974), 669.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 670.

The offer of salvation is universal – for all mankind. John expresses it clearly: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that *whoever* believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16). Paul explains this to the Galatians saying “But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son ... in order that He might redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4; cf. Eph. 2:8; Gen. 3:15; Rom 7:19). The sending of the Son points to His death at the cross as the only way to salvation. This may not come so easy for *man cannot be saved by his work* nor will he believe in the Son of God – Christ Jesus – as His Savior. There are many barriers that hinder sinful man and woman to come to God through Jesus Christ. There is the natural and irresistible impulse to oppose God (1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:1). There is also the work of Satan causing sinners to unbelief and disobedience (Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1). A sinner cannot be saved by divine fairness or justice for the law will condemn and declare him guilty. He can only be saved by God’s grace and mercy. If man and woman are to be saved, this salvation will be both the result of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. This is a mystery that is difficult to humanly fathom yet a biblical teaching that cannot be set aside.



The sovereignty of God in salvation is evident in many verses of Scriptures. He draws men and women to Jesus (2 Cor. 4:6); He gives repentance (Acts 5:3; 11:18); He gives faith (Eph. 2:8); He sends workers to proclaim the Gospel (Jn. 6:44); He delivers men and women from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of the Son (Col. 2:13). Then there is the effectual calling of God. He called, justified and glorified (Rom. 8:9); called by the gospel to glory (1 Thes. 2:13); and the word will not return to God void (Isa. 55:11). The responsibility of man and woman is very clear. Each has to respond to the invitation of God (Matt. 22:1f); to believe in the Lord Jesus (Jn. 4:6; Acts 16:31); to hear and believe the Gospel (Rom. 10:12-14); to repent and to submit to baptism (Acts 2:38; Matt. 28:19f); to come to God (Matt. 11:28).

Alienated human beings need to respond to the redemptive love of God through a personal faith with Christ (2 Cor. 5:14-21). This faith is cognitive (mind and the content of the Gospel), emotive (heart and repentance or remorse), and volitional (the will – the faith decision to receive Christ as Savior). “Christ’s work of redemption is described as restoring those aspects of the creation that were lost or damaged as a consequence of the Fall.”¹¹⁷ Consequently, he who is in Christ is “a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Cosmic redemption.

The Bible says that with the fall, the ground is cursed (Gen. 3:14-19) and creation groans for its liberation (Rom. 8:18-22). In the end, however, the earth will be blanketed by a new heaven (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1). God will take up residence in the new creation (Rev. 21:3). Humanity will live in harmony with his restored environment (Rev. 22:1-3a) and free from disease, decay and death (Rom. 8:21, Rev. 21:4). God clearly intends to redeem His creatures and the whole creation. Such intent is expressed in the terms used for salvation.

¹¹⁷ Dictionary of Bible Imagery, 181.

Salvation and redemption are closely related terms. “Redemption,” says E. F. Harrison, “is more specific, for it denotes the means by which salvation is achieved, namely, the payment of a ransom. As in the case of salvation it may denote temporal, physical deliverance.”¹¹⁸ The kidnapping-for-ransom of Martin and Gracia Burnham in May 2001 by the Abu Sayaf terrorist group with ties to Usama bin Laden illustrates the concept of redemption as payment for ransom. Christ Himself by His death at Calvary paid a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6).

Salvation in the Bible implies “a *return* to an originally good state or situation.” Again, in the *Burnham* case, the payment of ransom resulted in the freeing of the prisoners or hostages from bondage and to give back the freedom they once enjoyed (though Gracia was rescued, Martin was shot dead in the process of rescue). The idea of a return is also implied in the word *reconciliation* where the prefix *re-* indicates going back to an original state. This is true of the word *renewal* (cf. Rom. 12:2) which means ‘making new again.’ The word salvation means health after sickness or security after danger. The key biblical concept of *regeneration* connotes “a return to life after the entrance of death.”¹¹⁹ Taking together these ideas, Albert M. Wolters wrote:

“Acknowledging this scriptural emphasis, theologians have sometimes spoken of salvation as ‘re-creation’ – not to imply that God scraps his earlier creation and in Jesus Christ makes a new one, but rather to suggest that he hangs on to his fallen original creation and *salvages* it. He refuses to abandon the work of his hands – in fact he sacrifices his own Son to save his original project. Humankind, which has botched its original mandate and the whole creation along with it, is given another chance in Christ; we are reinstated as God’s managers on earth. The original good creation is to be restored.”¹²⁰

Salvation is restoration or as the Calvinists would say “grace restores nature.”¹²¹ As Paul puts it, God in Christ, is determined “to reconcile to himself all things” (Col. 1:20). “Creation is a spectator of human redemption, inasmuch as its own liberation is vested in the liberation of the sons of God. One day, when God begins his final reign, the trees of the forest sing for joy, the sea resounds and the fields are jubilant (Ps. 96:12; 98:7-8). While the original creation was marred by sin, Christ’s work of redemption and restoration will bring about a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (Rev. 21:1).”¹²²

Lasting peace will come.

Enmity will be replaced by fellowship, peace, harmony, and righteousness. (see also: Isa. 65:25 – animosity within the animal world will cease). The people of God will enjoy the community of love and no longer of law. The tree of life in the middle of the city – fruit and healing. Creation is cursed no more (Rev. 22:2-3). The broken arrangements in creation will be restored. The kingdom of the world will become the *kingdom* of the Lord (Rev. 11:15). Redemption is both for the here and beyond and will be fully enjoyed in the life hereafter. Tears, death and Satan will be no more (1 Cor. 15:55; Rev. 7:17). The eternal community and creation will participate through the Spirit in the glory, even in the life of the Triune God Himself (2 Pet. 1:4). This is our hope and future. We cannot be satisfied with anything less.

¹¹⁸ Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 918.

¹¹⁹ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics For A Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), p. 58.

¹²⁰ Ibid: 58.

¹²¹ Ibid: 59.

¹²² Ibid, 182.

6. CHURCH

The Apostles Creed defines the church as “the communion of saints.” “Christian theology generally says that the church originated in the Garden of Eden immediately after the fall of man, when God promised a Savior and man accepted the promise in faith.”¹²³ In this sense, two people, Adam and Eve were the first church members since they believed in the promise of God for a Savior (Gen. 3:15). “Ever since the fall of man there has been but one Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and but one way of being saved; namely, through faith in Him. As New Testament saints are saved through faith in the Christ of history, so Old Testament saints were saved through faith in the Christ of prophecy. The Christ of prophecy and the Christ of history are, of course, identical.”¹²⁴ “The Christian church,” says John R. W. Stott, “enjoys a direct continuity with God’s people in the Old Testament. Those who are in Christ today are ‘the true circumcision’ (Phil. 3:3), ‘Abraham’s offspring’ (Gal. 3:29) and ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16).”¹²⁵



Jesus Christ gave an unconditional promise: “I will build My Church....” (Matt. 16:18). This is the charter of the church although the “Church” referred to here means “the *ekklesia* in the general, ideal sense of the word.”¹²⁶ Its historical manifestation or local expression was anticipated in Jesus’ teaching on discipline in Matthew 18. “There (Matt. 16:18) the church was meant in the general ideal sense; but (in Matt. 18:18) it is a church with a definite “address,” i.e., the church formed in a particular place which can assert itself in a particular case and which can be represented.”¹²⁷ Though in the passages, the church has yet to be formed, the phrase “two or three are gathered together in my name” points to a future situation in which that which was anticipated would find organization and “formation in the time following his death.”¹²⁸ This took place at Pentecost (Acts 2:41ff). This text continues to provide the irreducible minimum for church planting and the basic systematic strategy for discipling a whole nation. Isaiah 11:9 declares, “For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (cf. Hab. 2:14 says “knowledge of the glory” and though His presence fills the earth, there is also a particularity in which His presence is promised and experienced when “two or three are gathered in His name”).

The Church is One Church.

There is only one Church because there is only one body and one Spirit ... one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 3:28). The idea of the Church as one community is derived from the Tri-unity of God. “Whatever community exists,” says Gilbert Bilezikian, “exists as a result of God’s creation, it is only a reflection of an eternal reality that is intrinsic to the being of God.”¹²⁹ This unity existed before creation itself. Moreover, the idea of solitude is “not good” (Gen.2:18). “The unity of the church,” says John Stott, “is as indestructible as the unity of God himself. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the

¹²³ R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 21.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 22.

¹²⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 180.

¹²⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *The Coming Of The Kingdom* (The Presbyterian Reformed and Publishing Company, 1962), 367.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 361.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 369.

¹²⁹ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 16.

Godhead.”¹³⁰ This unity, however, is also in diversity. Firstly, believers come from “every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues” (Rev. 7:9). Secondly, to every believer “grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:8). These gifts of service come from the Father (Rom. 12), the Son (Eph. 4:11), and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12). This variety of gifts in the Church enriches believers and enables the church to function effectively in the world. Paul says, “the whole body being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16). Again, Bilezikian notes, “since God is Trinity, he is plurality in oneness.”¹³¹ The church then, regardless of its expression, is not an option.

Since there is only one Church, then it includes those who believed God in the OT and in the NT. In the OT, it was faith in the promised Messiah (Gen. 3:15) and in the NT in the revealed Messiah – Jesus Christ. All believers constitute the new Israel of God. People are saved as part and not apart from the church. Salvation and the church are inseparable yet the church cannot save. The Church is constituted by faith in Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord (Jn. 1:13; Acts 12). A sinner is justified by faith (Rom. 5:2) and saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8). Ethics does not save although salvation has ethical implications “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called....” (Eph. 4:1).

The church is Christ's Body.

The church is a spiritual organism made up of all believers who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) and commanded to “glorify God” (1 Cor. 6:20). It is also a community with a structure organized to carry out the functions of the organism in a particular locality (cf. Acts 6:1-6; Ti. 1:5ff; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). The church is also the *Bride of Christ* (Rev. 21:9). The metaphor of the bride refers to the purity and holiness of life of all believers. It is to live by the statutes and commandments of God. It also points to the fact that the church is God’s new covenant community of love.

The church is God's sign.

The kingdom of God has already come and yet still coming. The church then as *ekklesia* (assembly) must not be dissociated from the church as *basileia* (kingdom). The church is not the kingdom of God but it should not be dissociated from the Kingdom. It is the most concrete expression of the kingdom and God’s primary partner in His redemptive agenda for the world. For this reason, the church must model the life of the kingdom and gratefully enjoy the partial blessings of the kingdom *already* although the fullness of blessings is *not yet*. The church is also God’s eschatological community – the future in the present, the *avant garde* of what is coming. It is our hope.

The church as God's agent for transformation.

The Church is God’s instrument for Christian growth and maturity (Eph. 4:11-16). It is the center for Christian nurture and inspiration in daily life and vocation. It is also God’s instrument of effective socialization of values for effective witness. It is also an organization that allows the church as a spiritual organism to serve members and community.

¹³⁰ John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1979), 151.

¹³¹ Bilezikian, 19.

7. CALLING

Some years ago, I wrote a booklet entitled *Help! I've been Born Again*. I raised the question of Christian "lostness" after the euphoria of being born again. Christians are not satisfied to be merely church-ians. They ask: Is there more to the Christian life besides attending church, giving offerings, partaking of sacraments, and fellowshiping with other church members? Dallas Willard would refer to this as "bar-code" Christianity. The metaphor of course is that of a supermarket where goods are bar-coded and can tell a register the name of the commodity and its price but not the quality of the goods. Today, there is evidence of disconnection between knowledge and character. This is referred to by Willard as "the gospel of sin management."¹³² There is the danger of right wing theology to be preoccupied only with forgiveness of individual sins and on the left wing, the removal of social or structural sin. Both knowledge and character are essential just as much as evangelism and social action. But what is tragic is the disconnection of our faith from character and, worst, the disconnection of faith from daily life, hence a faith and life that are no longer capable of salting and lighting the decaying world.



Christians should realize that God is calling His people to radical discipleship. A disciple is one who is a follower of Jesus. He believes in Jesus as Savior and Lord and is taught "all things" that Jesus preached and practiced. Such discipleship is to be revolutionary. It was not a matter of the head but of the heart. The Christian faith is transformational and redemptive. The call to discipleship, as earlier discussed, embraces both transformation and redemption of self and creation.

This subject of *calling* is now a buzzword in many churches. Every Christian is called by God and is tasked with a gift-based calling to serve Him and to carry out His mission in the world. The Christian's calling is a very vital concept that needs actualization. The idea is found both in the Old and New Testaments. To appreciate this Biblical concept, it is best to explore the richness associated with the word 'call' or 'calling'. In Scriptures, the term can mean a number of ideas:

- (1) to invite or summon (Adam – Gen. 3:9; elders – Ex. 19:7; an assembly – Joel 1:14; great banquet – Lk. 14:16-25; marriage feast – Matt. 22:2-10);
- (2) to pray or call on the Lord (Gen. 4:26; Ps. 79:6; 105:1; Isa. 64:7; Jer. 10:25 cf. Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:13);
- (3) to name (things – Gen. 1:5-30; animals – 2:19; persons – Gen. 25:26; 30:6-24; city – 2 Sam. 5:9; qualities – Isa. 35:8; Matt. 1:21; Lk. 1:60; 2:21);
- (4) to serve (the call of Moses – Ex. 3:4-22; the call of Samuel – 1 Sam. 3; apostles – Mk. 1:20);
- (5) to claim for one's possession or appoint for a particular destiny (Israel – Isa. 43:1; 45:4; Christ's people – Rom. 8:28; Gal. 1:6; 1 Thess. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:15).

The New Testament word chiefly used by Paul (*kaleo* – call; *klesis* – calling) has a technical sense to the invitation given to men and women by God to accept salvation in his Kingdom through Jesus Christ. This is done through the

¹³² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 41.

preaching of the Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), a divine initiative of grace from God (Gal. 1:6) and by the inward work of the Holy Spirit in a person. The goal of the Christian calling is to salvation, holiness, and faith (2 Thess. 2:13-15), to the kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2:12), to an eternal inheritance (Heb. 9:15; cf. Phil. 3:14; Heb. 3:1; 2 Tim. 1:9), to fellowship (1 Cor. 1:9), and to service (Gal. 1). The “called ones” are also referred to as the children of God (1 Jn. 3:1). The starting point of the call is not works but the purpose and grace of God in Christ Jesus. We can sum up the Christian call by saying that it issues from God, to Christ, and for Christ by the Spirit.

The calling of service or vocation.

In this section, the emphasis is the *for Christ* aspect of the call, hence, the believer’s life characterized as a “living and holy sacrifice ... which is your spiritual service” (Rom. 12:1). Sacrifice before service. Being precedes doing. In this sense, every Christian is called and has a calling from the One who called. Understanding this calling will define how a Christian should behave and live in our world today. It will point him or her to his or her destiny.

The New Testament refers to the Christian life as a calling (Eph. 1:18; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:9; Heb. 3:1; 2 Pet. 1:10). Christians are to live lives worthy of their calling (Eph. 4:1; 2 Thess. 1:11). “Having in his eternal counsel called this people, He entrusted them with great gifts, and because He did, thus, enrich them. He also, in the course of time, summoned them to fulfill the task of initiating the world into the way of salvation, and of preparing salvation for the world.”¹³³ The calling then is to Christlikeness in character and zealously in witness. There are further callings to special ministries (Bezalel – Ex. 31:2; judges, prophets, etc. – Acts 13:2) but if every believer is gifted for service, then every one is called to serve God full time. A housewife who cares for her home and family is in His service full time just as much as her husband who may be a church Pastor or a corporate executive. God’s call, when understood and practiced, will challenge the farcicality of a false dichotomy between so-called spiritual and secular occupations. To live for Christ is our continuing vocation. Our occupations do not suspend our faith nor are our office hour’s interruptions of our communion with God. There are no part time Christians. To be a Christian is to constantly declare His excellencies in word, work and wonders every time, in everything, everywhere.

The Reformation of the 16th Century recovered the priesthood of all believers. But is the 21st Century the providential time for the Church to recover the ministry of all believers? There is a clear need to distinguish the church gathered for worship on a Sunday, or any chosen day, for corporate worship from the church “scattered” during the week-days where the people of God serve as His “sacred” agents of change to leaven the secular realm in which they work and live. This results in transformation. Sadly, the church today is still bound by the fetters of clericalism on one hand and the abdication of the laity on the other hand. Spiritual gifts and ecclesiastical offices were never meant to create a dichotomy between clergy and laity – for all are ministers of Christ. Christianity has no caste system. Paul is unequivocal about this uniqueness of Christianity: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). Any dichotomy between the clergy and laity is false. The church is one people. There is no higher class Christian. As C.S. Lewis said, there are no ordinary people. Our evangelical emphasis on “full time” ministry is impressed with the Roman Catholic view of the Church.

The notion of calling, or vocation, is vital to each of us because it touches on the modern search for a basis for individual identity and an understanding of humanness itself. Many of the categories people offer to explain or heal us today are too general. The Marxists interpret us by categories of class, Freudians by childhood neurosis, feminists by gender, and pop-commentators by all sorts of generational profiles – such as the “silent generation,”

¹³³ George Henry Trever, from International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c) 1996 by BibleSoft.

the “baby boomers,” the “generation X-er’s.” ... At best our individuality is lost in the generality. At worst, it is contradicted and denied.... They trim the picture of our personalities to fit their mass-produced frames.¹³⁴

The secret of seeking is not in our human ascent to God, but in God’s descent to man. We start out searching, but we end up being discovered. We think we are looking for something; we realize we are found by Someone. There is no calling unless there is a caller. If there is no Caller, there are no callings – only work.¹³⁵

The Church, as the people of God are ministers gifted by the Triune God to serve Him in all spheres of life and society. An example of this is the parable of the sower – seeds scattered in the world. The Gospel should work like a leaven in the world (Matt. 13:31-33). “God normally calls us along the lines of our giftedness, but the purpose of giftedness is stewardship, service, and not selfishness.”¹³⁶ Gifts are never ours for ourselves but ours for others.

“The recovery of a holistic view of calling,” Christian apologist Os Guinness reminds us, “was powerful in culture as well as in the church, and calling was a vital element in the transition from the traditional to the modern world. It demanded and inspired the transforming vision of the lordship of Christ expressed in the famous saying of the great Dutch Prime Minister, Abraham Kyper: ‘There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, ‘This is mine! This belongs to me!’”¹³⁷

We are called to freedom and to dream. “... the aesthetic act, the conceiving and bringing into being of that which has no being, to be an imitation, a replication on its own scale, of the inaccessible *fiat* of divine creation.” He concludes, “It is theology, explicit or suppressed, masked or avowed, substantive or imaged, which underwrites the presumption of creativity, of signification in our encounter with text, with music, with art. The meaning of meaning is a transcendent postulate.”¹³⁸

Life is not karma or something already written. We are “called to be” stresses freedom and future. God leads us to respond to his call. “Following His call, we become what we are constituted to be by creation. We also become what we are not yet, and can only become by re-creation as called people.”¹³⁹ Bernard Shaw: You see things as they are, and ask why? But I dream of things that never were and ask, why not? Benjamin Disraeli: Imagination governs mankind. T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia: All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find it was vanity, but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible.

Calling is the premise of Christian existence itself. Created in the image of God, each person has intrinsic self-worth and value. God’s call restores that which the fall has marred or eroded. Calling means that everyone, everywhere, and in everything fulfills his or her (secondary) calling in response to God’s (primary) calling.”¹⁴⁰ Writing about the “Estate of Marriage” in 1522, Luther declared that God and the angels smile when a man changes diaper.¹⁴¹ Bishop Thomas Becon wrote: “Our Saviour Christ was a carpenter. His apostles were fishermen. St. Paul was a tent-maker.”

¹³⁴ Ibid, 20-21.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 14, 20.

¹³⁶ Ibid, 46.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 35.

¹³⁸ George Steiner, *Real Presences* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 216.

¹³⁹ Os Guinness, 24.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 34.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Calling gave to everyday work a dignity and spiritual significance under God that dethroned the primacy of leisure and contemplation. Calling gave to humble people and ordinary tasks an investment of equality that shattered hierarchies and was a vital impulse toward democracy. Calling gave to such practical things as work, thrift, and long-term planning a reinforcement that made them powerfully influential in the rise of modern capitalism. Calling gave to the endeavor to make Christ Lord of every part of life a fresh force that transformed not only the churches but also the worldviews and cultures of the Reformation countries.

This call is primarily the result of God's grace. To Israel He said: "The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you...." (Deut. 7:7-8). Peter applied this same truth to the church saying: "But you are a chosen race ... for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you received mercy" (1 Pet. 2:9-10). No Christian, then, should boast of his gift or service. Bart Simpson, an American cartoon character, when asked to pray for his food said: "Dear God, We pay for all these ourselves. Thanks, but no thanks." Our attitude should be like that of David who was awed by God's goodness upon him that from a shepherd of flock he was made king of Israel: "Who am I that you have brought our family this far."

Serving Christ existentially in our society.

Even if one accepts the fact that God is calling him or her to serve Him in the world, are there guidelines for meaningful service? In fact, is there a framework of analysis that can help Christians in evaluating contextual situations and the appropriate Christian responses to such culture-specific needs? I find the framework of Albert M. Wolters on his analysis of creation as *structure* and *direction*. By *structure* is "anchored in the law of creation, the creational decree of God that constitutes the nature of different kinds of creatures."¹⁴² It refers to the substance, the essence, and nature of things in creation. In other words, there is a norm that governs the existence and life of everything that God created. This divine norm finds expressions in institutions and relations that define their constitutions and norms of conduct. For example the relationship between God and man and then between human and human is defined by the Decalogue (Ex. 20:1-17; Matt. 22:27-40). There are norms for Government and authority (Rom. 13:1-6; 1 Pet. 13-20), for marriage and sexuality (Gen. 2:23-24; Heb. 13:4). The same can be said of business and other areas of life. Moreover, each institution is unique and is created "after their kind." Each of these created institutions or realities are, according to Abraham Kuyper, a different "sphere of sovereignty". This results in a "differentiated responsibility" where "no institution is subordinate to any other."¹⁴³ The extent of responsibility of authorities in a given societal institution is "defined by its normative structure" in creation. For example, God has a creational norm for government, family, business, and other institutions such as schools or clubs. If so, then government and business should not be run like a family.

Direction deals with "the distortion or perversion of creation through the fall on the one hand and the redemption and restoration of creation in Christ on the other. Anything in creation can be directed either toward or away from God – that is, directed either in obedience or disobedience to his law."¹⁴⁴ This aspect may be dealt with in two ways. Firstly, where the creational norm of the structure is clear, then a situation is evaluated against such norm, determine deviations or distortions and a corresponding action is to be taken to reform or transform the structure back to God's creational norm. Take for example, if a Government is oppressive, Christians are to take steps to change leadership in an election (where possible) or identify the laws that are oppressive and repeal or amend them to be aligned with God's laws. The legislative agenda will be part of the *positivizing* process whereby a general principle is given expression in the particular. Here the sanctifying work of the Spirit will be working through believers in renewing the structure so that it will serve God in His gracious plan that government will do good.

¹⁴² Albert. Wolters: 49.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 82.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 49.

But what happens where the creational norm is not clear such as dancing? This is where one's worldview applies. Here discernment must be done to determine the critical issues related to dancing. In this case, it is related to sexuality. But what is *structural* about dancing? There is bodily movement, rhythm, music, and social interaction which are clearly part of God's good creation. These are designed for enjoyment. It can be healthy and beautiful. In the Old Testament, these were accepted as part of celebration. But anything in creation can be corrupted and dance can be impacted by human sin. What is good is corrupted when it is used for sexual arousal, or aggression, or promiscuity. Add to this other reinforcing elements like provocative dress, suggestive music, hypnotic lighting, liquor or drugs, type of dancing. All these can lead to sexual provocation. Social dancing "becomes the kind of sexual foreplay that is appropriate only to marriage."¹⁴⁵ In some Christian circles, dancing is prohibited as a "world amusement" and can lead to carnality of intent and imagination. Jesus said that to lust against a woman is adultery. Certainly, there is a need to explore an ethics of the imagination in sexuality.

A situation like this, and other cases can be cited, needs spiritual discerning within the communal context of the body of Christ. The creational norm of dancing can be affirmed so that it becomes God-honoring. The report of the Dutch Reformed Church in North America on dancing is very instructive.

We need to sort out (1) what there is about the dance that goes back to creation and reflects a gift of God, (2) what the impact of our fallen condition is on dancing, and (3) if and how Christians may seek to redeem this area of life. Unless we keep these questions in mind we continually run the risk of condemning the legitimate in our zeal to reject evil, or of embracing the corrupt in our desire to do justice to the good. We are always in danger of rejecting the creational in the name of the fall, and of accepting the fallen in the name of creation.¹⁴⁶

Others have dealt with this by examining the pairing of partners (only between husband and wife), or dance as exercise without partners, or some cultural dances. Recently, liturgical dancing is slowly being appreciated even by an increasing number of conservative evangelicals to appreciate the positive potential of dance. The appropriateness of the place and the occasion are also to be considered to avoid others from stumbling. King David danced when the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem. The Lord of all creation is also the Lord of the dance.

Restoration of all creation.

I go back to this theme again because it is important that the Christian worldview is not myopic but cosmic. The Christian calling is not limited to his vocation or job site on how he can apply his gifts and skills to bring about reformation as needed. He is to participate in the totality of God's agenda to restore all creation to God through Jesus Christ the risen Lord. Hence, it includes all areas – personal, institutional, social, political, and religious – all must be touched by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit and transformed in Christ Jesus. The Christian call is not just to service but to lifestyle as well. "Scripture speaks centrally to *everything* in our life and world" says Woltes "including technology and economics and science. The scope of biblical teaching includes such ordinary "secular" matters as labor, social groups, and education."¹⁴⁷

In our vocation, however, wherever and whenever practiced, Christ is the Standard of our lives and the Spirit of our services. He is our plumb line, the point of reference of what is normative and right. Moreover, Christ as Head of the Body should remind us to work together, not against each other. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 90.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 93.

¹⁴⁷ Albert M. Wolters: 7.

individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). Christ, the man, is given whereby we all can be evaluated objectively by God.

As I close this section, some may ask: "Where specifically in the kingdom does God call me to do?" It is a matter of prayer but I am confident that God will answer that prayer to the one who earnestly seeks. I am reminded of what Frederick Buechner once said: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

8. RE-CREATION



Where is history going? This is an inescapable question especially since the subject of the Second Coming involves the meaning and the goal of history. Since the Second Coming is related to the consummation of the Kingdom, then that which is coming must define how we live today. That future must make sense to us if we want to live fully in the kingdom now. "It must be something we can now plan or make decisions in terms of, with clarity and joyful anticipation. In this way our future can be incorporated into our life now and our life now can be incorporated into our future."¹⁴⁸ How then should we live?

"The Christian understanding of history," writes John Warwick Montgomery, "can be visualized as a line which begins with creation, centers on the redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ, and finds its termination in a sanctifying final judgment:



Growing up in poverty and observing the gross injustices around me that further oppressed the poor in a culture where selective justice is the norm and where justice is a matter of whom you know and how much you can afford to pay, the idea of the Christian God and the last judgment appealed to me in my early quest for Truth. The idea of divine justice, in the end, is reassuring, that justice will be meted to all and that those that suffered in silence (the rich will do what they will and the weak will suffer what they must) will receive justice. For if there is no afterlife and if there is no final judgment in the afterlife, then death frees the unpunished perpetrators of crimes and injustices. The victim continues to suffer for eternity. The fact of judgment after life is also critical to objective morality. "For morality to be real," says Vishal Mangalwadi, "there has to be a final auditing beyond this life, because the books are never fully balanced in this life."¹⁵⁰

The idea also provides meaning and direction in life. Man and woman are not here by chance and that history is not just a random movement of events. Rather, the fact that history is going somewhere, gives us a sense of destiny as

¹⁴⁸ Dallas Willard, 376.

¹⁴⁹ John Warwick Montgomery, *Where Is History Going?* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1972), 32.

¹⁵⁰ Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Quest for Freedom and Dignity* (Mumbai, India: GLS Publishing, 2001), 118.

a people. Arnett points out, "... it is well to note that the subject of the Second Coming involves the meaning and the goal of history. Scripture indicates that history is built along redemptive lines, and that, in moving to its final goal, it is a conflict of opposing forces heading toward a crisis."¹⁵¹

The historical line that Montgomery presents is only an outline of God's plan in creation. From Redemption to the Final Judgment, evangelical scholars debate the different stages and events to get there. These debates center on the concepts of the tribulation of believers, the rapture of the saints, and the millennial reign¹⁵² of Christ before the Final Judgment. Regardless of position, there is a general agreement that the Final Judgment will come. There will be the eternal separation of the saints (to heaven) from sinners (to hell), the judgment of Satan and his minions, and the new heaven and the new earth.

The judgment of humankind

Believers, when they die will go to heaven (Abraham's bosom – Lk. 16; presence of the Lord). They will be happy in His presence though still provisional and incomplete because it is an intermediate state between death and resurrection. "For the completion of their happiness they await the resurrection of the body and the new earth which God will create as the culmination of his redemptive work."¹⁵³ "For heaven and earth will then no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be one (Rev. 21:13)."¹⁵⁴ "The OT insists on the fact of human survival of death. This is asserted as true of godly and ungodly alike."¹⁵⁵ Death "is rather to be seen as an alteration of place, from earth to Sheol; and of state, from the body-soul unity of life on earth to the separate life of the soul in Sheol. Death is defined by God himself as "the dust returns to the earth ... and the spirit ... to God" (Eccl. 12:7).¹⁵⁶

In the NT ... "a plain declaration of the bliss of the people of God and the condemnation of the unsaved...." The Lord Jesus illumined immortality when He said, "These shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life." (Matt. 25:46). In the case of Lazarus the "fixity of the great gulf and the impossibility of reversing that situation which death initiated" (Lk. 16:26 cf. Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:12).

Those who die without Christ, "the judgment God passes is on its quality 'eternal' (Matt. 25:46; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20:10), and in its form 'fire' (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:14,15), 'punishment' (Matt. 25:46), 'destruction' (2 Thess. 1:9), and the 'second death' (Matt. 25:46). The word eternal rules out universalism that eventually all will be saved or that they will be annihilated.

"As regards to personal element of this life, the life beyond will be marked by continuity and transformation ... we shall see and know our loved ones. As regards the toils of this life, there is the blessed rest – Rev. 14:13; ... its trials and uncertainties, provision and security ... sorrows, comfort and joy – Rev. 14:14-17.¹⁵⁷ "But their happiness

¹⁵¹ William M. Arnett, 281.

¹⁵² William M. Arnett, *The Second Coming: Millennial Views*, Basic Christian Doctrines, Carl F. Henry, Editor (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1986), 279-280. Arnett sums up the millennial views. (1) Postmillennialism "that view of last things which holds that the kingdom of God is now being extended in the world through the preaching of the Gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit, that the world eventually is to be Christianized, and that the return of Christ will occur at the close of a long period of righteousness and peace, commonly called the millennium. It figuratively interprets "a thousand years" six times in the first seven verses of Rev. 20 to mean an indefinite long period of time. (2) Amillennialism (nonmillennarian) interprets Revelation 20 symbolically and spiritually, and omits an earthly millennium. (3) Premillennialism insists that the millennial passage must be interpreted literally and that the Second Coming of Christ will inaugurate His reign as King in person on the earth. This will involve two steps: the rupture and the revelation

¹⁵³ Ibid, 274.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 291.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ J. A. Motyer, *The Final State: Heaven and Hell*, Basic Christian Doctrines, Carl F. Henry, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1986), 291.

will be provisional and incomplete. For the completion of their happiness they await the resurrection of the body and the new earth which God will create as the culmination of his redemptive work.”¹⁵⁸

The New Creation

Interpretations vary on the text of the end times. Peter wrote to the churches in diaspora: “the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). Yet he was “looking for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” according to God’s promise (v.13). The question is: Will the Old Earth be deatomized, annihilated, before the New? However this is answered “the people of God on the new earth will include believers from both the Old Testament covenant community and from the church of the New Testament era.”¹⁵⁹

The Genesis story tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But because of man’s fall into sin, a curse was pronounced over this creation (3:17). “God now sent his Son into this world to redeem that creation from the results of sin. The work of Christ, therefore, is not just to save certain individuals, not even to save an innumerable throng of blood-bought people. The total work of Christ is nothing less than to redeem this entire creation from the effect of sin. This purpose will not be accomplished until God has ushered in the new earth, until Paradise Lost has become Paradise Regained.”¹⁶⁰ Hoekema argues that in “both (texts) the Greek word used to designate the newness of the new cosmos is not *neos* but *kainos*. The word *neos* means new in time or origin, whereas the word *kainos* means new in nature or in quality... (the new earth) means, therefore, “not the emergence of a cosmos totally other than the present one, but the creation of a universe which, though it has been gloriously renewed, stands in continuity with the present one.”¹⁶¹

Scriptural teaching is one of “redemption in cosmic dimensions.”¹⁶² Salvation is not just for a few but “the final glory, therefore, shall be universal in scope.”¹⁶³ (cf. 21:1). If creation was *ex nihilo*, “this new heaven and earth will not be a creation out of nothing, but a renewal, a transformation ... a complete transformation.”¹⁶⁴

The judgment will provide finality to one’s eternal state and destiny and usher in a new habitat – a new creation. “From Genesis 3:15,” says Hoekema, “the fall resulted in (1) corruption of the will, (2) death, (3) banishment from Paradise, and (4) cursing of the ground. Salvation will have to include the removal of all these.”¹⁶⁵ “For heaven and earth will then no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be one (Rev. 21:13).”

The value of Kingdom Work

Hoekema gives helpful insight on Rev. 21:24-27: “... the inhabitants of the new earth will include people who attained great prominence and exercised great power on the present earth.... One could also say that whatever people have done on this earth which glorified God will be remembered in the life to come (See. Rev. 14:13).... Hendrikus Berkhof suggests, “Whatever has been of value in this present life, whatever has contributed to ‘the liberation of human existence,’ will be retained and added to on the new earth.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁸ Arnett, 74.

¹⁵⁹ Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible And The Future* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 285.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 275.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 280.

¹⁶² Ibid, 282.

¹⁶³ Herman Hoeksema, 675.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 677.

¹⁶⁵ Anthony A. Hoekema, 1979; 275.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 286.

“As citizens of God’s kingdom, we may not just write off the present earth as a total loss, or rejoice in its deterioration. We must indeed be working for a better world now. Our efforts to bring the kingdom of Christ into fuller manifestation are of eternal significance. Our Christian life today, our work, our struggles against sin – both individual and institutional – our mission work, our attempt to develop and promote distinctively Christian culture, have value not only for this world but even for the world to come.”¹⁶⁷ In the end “what remains is the picture of the positive results of all the work of Christ, the description of the glorious realization of all the promises of God, the final everlasting reward of the righteous (Chapter 21:1 - 22:5).”¹⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

A good lesson can be learned from the classic work of J.R.R. Tolkein, *The Hobbit*.

“Then the prophecies of the old songs have turned out to be true, after a fashion!” said Bilbo.

“Of course!” said Gandalf. “And why should not they prove true? Surely you don’t disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself?”

“You don’t really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!”

Eschatology provides a worldview framework for the church’s mission in the contemporary age. For the world and the Christian faith community we live in the present era of the already-not-yet. We have tasted the goodness of the eternal community and fellowship with God through Christ. At the same time we have not entered into the fullness of God’s future community. This awareness deters us from all triumphalism.¹⁶⁹ Willard states, “Human history is then no longer a human affair, it is Someone Else’s project.”¹⁷⁰

The cruciality of the worldview may be defined by two corollaries: to reorder the internal life of the community in ways faithful to Yahweh, the other to invite the world out beyond this community to reorder its life with reference to Yahweh. Both recognize that God is at the center of life (the life of Israel, the church, and the world) requires the reordering of everything else.¹⁷¹ This new arrangement is guaranteed by the King of kings who said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth....” (Matt. 28:18). All the plenitude of power is in Christ – nothing can be added and nothing has been subtracted.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord for you know that your labors in the Lord are not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:58).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 287.

¹⁶⁸ Hoeksema, 1974; 671.

¹⁶⁹ S. Grenz, 850.

¹⁷⁰ Willard, 383.

¹⁷¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 747.