

The Need for a Comprehensive Worldview

The Bible reveals God as the all-powerful creator of everything (Col. 1:16). He is portrayed as the Supreme Ruler over all creation (Mt. 28:18) who orders and holds together the entire cosmos (Col. 1:17). He is not neutral towards His creation. He loves and delights in it (Gen. 1:31). But all is not as it should be. The Bible reveals sin not as an isolated spiritual ailment, but as something that has radically disordered the cosmos (Rom. 8:19-22). The redemption that God provides through Jesus will result in a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1) – not just saved human souls. While Jesus is our savior and redeemer, he is much more. He is the savior of the whole world – the redeemer of the entire cosmos (Jn. 3:16). The Bible reveals Christianity not as a religion, but as a comprehensive worldview—the only view that aligns with reality.

This understanding of Christianity is not new. Indeed, it is very old. It was concisely expressed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Church at Colossae:

[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.
-- Colossians 1:15-20

In this magnificent passage, Paul presents us with an all-encompassing Christian view of the universe. Notice that the words “all” and “everything” appear six times. Centuries later, this same all-inclusive Christian worldview was expressed by the great Dutch statesman and theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) this way: “There is not a square inch of the universe over which King Jesus does not claim, ‘Mine!’”¹ Yet today, for many Christians, this comprehensive view of reality has been obscured.

Today, there is a tendency for some to divide the world into opposing components. One component is labeled “sacred” and has to do with the spiritual life and eternal things. Everything else goes into a “secular” category. For those who hold this divided view of reality, the consequences are profound. While they may love Jesus as their spiritual savior, they fail to honor him as Lord over all areas of life. An invisible line divides their personal faith in Christ, their church attendance, worship, prayer life, and Bible study from other areas of life such as work, leisure time, or care for their physical bodies. Anything that is labeled “secular” is assumed to be of little concern to God. Christianity is narrowed down to a scheme for spiritual salvation. The cross is a ticket to heaven and little more. When this divided understanding of reality takes hold within a church, it results in the separation of the church from its surrounding culture. Sunday worship services and vocations in “full time Christian service” are believed to be of greater value to God than seemingly secular pursuits in areas such as the arts, law, politics, social services, care for the physical needs of the poor, and so on. Little effort is made to connect the core doctrines of the Bible to cultural and civic life, to encourage church members to serve as salt and light (Mt. 5:13-16), bearing witness to the truth in all areas of society. Evangelism is pitted against care for the poor, “full-time Christian service” against careers in law, business or politics. One category is higher and the

¹ David Hall, “Life of the Party.” *Tabletalk* from Ligonier Ministries and R.C. Sproul, Oct. 2002, p. 55.

other lower. The church is sealed off from society. It exists in a Christian “ghetto” with its own sub-culture of language, media, and entertainment. When the divided mindset impacts church, it becomes impotent and ineffective at impacting culture. Rather than discipling the nations as Christ commanded (Mt. 28:18-20), it is disciplined by the nation—that is, the values and dominant beliefs of the surrounding culture begin to influence and shape the church.

Despite this, there is cause for great hope. God is at work in our generation. He is active around the world leading his bride back to a comprehensive, undivided understanding of reality. He is reminding his followers that he is Lord not merely of some limited spiritual realm—he is Lord over all! He created the spiritual and the physical realms and cares for them both equally. He seeks to be glorified not only in the church building, but also in the home, the school, the company, the courthouse and the houses of government. Furthermore, he is reminding his bride that while he passionately and actively seeks and saves lost people trapped in sin (1 Ti. 2:4), his redemptive plan is far grander than saving human souls for heaven. He is about the business of redeeming all things distorted through the Fall (Col. 1:19-20). It is in this all-encompassing redemptive agenda that he calls his Church to participate.

The 15th century European reformers had a motto that reminded them, in a very practical way, of God’s comprehensive concern for all areas of life and all spheres of society. The phrase was “coram Deo” which means “before the face of God.” All of life is to be lived before the face of God and to his glory. There is no higher, no lower—no sacred, no secular. God is Lord of all. Today a new word is proving useful in directing Christians back to this same comprehensive, undivided mindset—the word “wholism.” While the word is relatively new, the idea behind it is as old as the universe itself. Wholism derives from the root word “whole” and is used to describe whole systems made up of multiple, interacting parts that function together.

The concept of wholism is both liberating and challenging. It holds the power to free us from a debilitating mental dualism. It provides a fresh, faith-expanding perspective—one that leads to a newfound freedom to enjoy embodied human life in all its wonder. It opens the door for us to take new interest and delight in God’s magnificent creation. It liberates us to explore vocational alternatives outside of “full time Christian service” and still know that we are both serving and glorifying God. As churches gain this new perspective, they escape the Christian ghetto and infiltrate the culture, taking with them the power of God’s Word lived out in human flesh. Yet it is challenging because it shows us that our faith must impact our entire lives. When we truly grasp wholism, we realize we can no longer withhold certain segments of life from God. Jesus wants our whole lives—every part—to glorify him. He wants us to join him in advancing his Kingdom in all areas of culture and all spheres of society. For those who have been trapped within a divided mindset, this can appear to be a fearful and radical step. Yet he promises that when we join with him, our burden will be easy and our yoke will be light. The responsibility of advancing the Kingdom belongs to God, yet he gives us the privilege of joining with him. When we do, he supplies the strength we need to do things we could never do on our own.

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