

Christianity through a Worldview Lens

John Valk¹

Professor of Worldview Studies
Renaissance College
University of New Brunswick
PO Box 4400
Fredericton, NB
Canada E3B 5A3
valk@unb.ca

ABSTRACT

Worldviews are those larger pictures that *inform* and in turn *form* our perceptions of reality. They are *visions of life* as well as *ways of life*, are individual and personal in nature, yet bind adherents together communally. Coming to understand a worldview can serve to illuminate particular beliefs and values, and may be helpful in a post-Christian, post-modern or even post-secular era filled with religious, spiritual and secular beliefs of various kinds that hold sway today in the public realm. This article looks at Christianity through a worldview lens using an “ultimate/existential questions” framework (who and what are we; meaning and purpose; responsibilities and obligations; discerning right from wrong; power, force or being greater than humans; and life after this life) to get at the heart of some fundamental Christian beliefs and values.

Keywords: afterlife; Christian worldview; higher power; meaning and purpose; responsibilities; ultimate questions; worldview.

Introduction

Comprehending essential Christian beliefs and values is a dynamic and lifelong process. In a sense the more one comes to know them, the more elusive they appear. They require interpretation and explication. They are complicated by context. They are fervently debated. They impact actions and behaviours in a myriad of ways. Yet, they are there and

1. John Valk has a PhD in Religious Studies and is Professor of Worldview Studies at Renaissance College, University of New Brunswick. He focuses his teaching, research and writing on worldviews (both religious and secular) and on the impact these worldviews have on the public square.

they have changed the lives of men and women for 2000 years and they continue to do so. They also seem unfazed though not unchanged by modern secular theories which predicted their demise (Berger, 1999).

Learning of Christian beliefs and values can take many different forms. Some people have been exposed to them through lifelong membership in religious communities that give them particular elucidation through traditional doctrines which, as the history of Christianity has clearly shown, differ widely (Latourette, 1975). Others learn of them through public educational systems that in their increasingly secular character often render religious beliefs and values as narrow and antiquated (Prothero, 2007; Nord, 1995). Some hear of them through the media which tend to reduce complex beliefs into simplistic sound bites (Marshall *et al.*, 2009). Yet others develop a scorn for them as a result of strident bestsellers whose vitriolic authors unabashedly distort the essence of the Christian message (Dawkins, 2006; Hitchens, 2007).

These developments have had wide impact. With society becoming more differentiated and individualistic, religious communities have diminished in number and influence (Bellah *et al.*, 1985). Fewer young people receive instruction in the essentials of the Christian faith from family or church. Education, once grounded in religious traditions, has become estranged from its earlier moorings, if not hostile to it, and caters to a wider public with different interests (Marsden, 1994). A completely secular outlook today has gained traction and adherents, and has diminished the importance of religion (Taylor, 2007). Yet, in the process, something has been lost and that loss is being felt by younger and older alike (Parks, 2011; Smith, 2001). Not surprisingly, younger students seem not averse to having religious/spiritual beliefs and values addressed in education but not in a dogmatic or prescriptive manner (Chickering *et al.*, 2006; Astin, 2004). Some educators themselves lament a system that no longer concerns itself with the big questions, so often the domain of religious traditions (Kronman, 2007; Connor, 2006). Others recognize that public education itself has succumbed to particular beliefs and values (Valk, 2007; Marsden and Longfield, 1992).

With monumental changes occurring in rather short order in our society, new approaches to teaching Christian beliefs and values may be needed, in public educational systems but perhaps also within religious educational systems. Religious communities are challenged to express essentials of the faith in a manner not rigid or authoritarian but open to new queries if not approaches in light of new beliefs and values that the global world has brought to us. Educational institutions are challenged to teach about some of the larger questions of life but in a context that is inclusive. Both must recognize that there are multiple beliefs and values

competing in today's public square. Teaching about Christian beliefs and values may gain increased traction, especially among the young, when undertaken using new or different pedagogical approaches or insights. One such approach might be to speak about them through a worldview lens, as one worldview among many, all seeking the hearts and minds of an inquisitive if not a more sceptical audience.

A Worldview Approach

Worldviews are those larger pictures or frameworks that *inform* and in turn *form* our perceptions of reality (Valk, 2010; Sire, 2004; Naugle, 2002; Peterson, 2001). Worldviews are *visions of life* as well as *ways of life*. They are individual and personal in nature, yet become communal and public in scope and structure when particular visions bind adherents together in communities of belief, thought and action (Olthuis, 1985). Worldviews encompass religious and spiritual traditions yet also include secular perspectives such as humanism, scientism, capitalism and consumerism (Cox, 1999; Loy, 2003). Worldviews, like traditional religions, come to historical, social, economic and cultural expression in a variety of different ways (Badley, 1996).

The term *worldview* is inclusive of a multiplicity of beliefs and values that inform both private and public thoughts and actions. It recognizes secular perspectives with functional and structural similarities to traditional religions (De Botton, 2012). It also resists restricting matters of faith exclusively to traditional religions or to those of religious/spiritual persuasion or affiliation. Everyone has a worldview, and every worldview presupposes a "leap of faith" of some degree for absolute certainty eludes the human condition.

Worldviews impact all areas of life, guiding, determining and shaping what is considered meaningful, what is worth doing, and which causes may require sacrifice. Individuals and groups of individuals often determine what is important and why in their economic, communal, political and educational decision-making according to larger meta-narratives or outlooks (Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Nelson, 2001). Worldviews can exercise conservative influence and progress but they can also stimulate individuals and groups to become agents of social change, healing and redemption.

There are similarities and differences between worldviews as much as there are within them (Prothero, 2010). It is not unusual for traditional religious worldviews to agree or disagree sharply with each other on certain fundamental beliefs, which becomes all the more apparent as interfaith dialogue increases. It is equally not unusual that some religious

worldviews have affinity with non-religious or secular worldviews. All worldviews embrace certain basic or universal principles such as freedom, justice and equality, and good dialogue between different worldviews brings out in greater or lesser degrees their convergence or divergence. Good dialogue also increases understanding among them in the manner in which these basic principles are expressed in particular ways of life. How particular beliefs become translated into specific actions in the public square depends on local, regional or national contexts where worldview differences play themselves out. Cox (1999), Nelson (2001) and Faulkner (1997) all give vivid examples and insight into the impact that worldviews, religious or secular, have in shaping individual thoughts and actions, and how these in turn shape the society and culture of which we are part.

Coming to understand a worldview is not an easy task and describing a particular worldview poses huge challenges because of the wide diversity that exists within each worldview. Describing a worldview also comes with the risk of being definitive or prescriptive. Yet heuristically setting the parameters of a worldview serves to illuminate and demarcate particular beliefs, values, principles and at times even behaviours. Doing so may also be helpful in a post-Christian, postmodern or even post-secular era where religious and secular beliefs of various kinds hold sway in the public realm.

There are a number of frameworks or models that assist in enhancing our understanding of worldviews. Tillich (1957) and others focused on worldviews as responses to life's larger concerns or questions which in turn become the foundation of beliefs and actions (Sire, 2004; Olthuis, 1985). McKenzie developed a model that incorporates questions of ultimate meaning but adds to these penultimate concerns that "shape the currents of ordinary life" and immediate personal concerns which arise from "the context of life goals, life activities, and interpersonal relationships" (McKenzie, 1991: 13). Smart (1983) articulated a six-dimension model helpful in identifying and describing aspects and rituals common to both religious and non-religious worldviews. Wright (1992) and others focus on stories or narratives that define human reality, are often expressed in powerful symbols and come to include a praxis or way of being in the world.

In a broader societal context that acknowledges multiple worldviews, how might one now speak of a Christian worldview that circumvents debates about which worldview is true or false or right or wrong and avoids reducing Christianity merely to institutional affiliation and attendance? How might such an approach expand an understanding of Christian beliefs and values that goes beyond prescriptives embedded

in traditional religious community doctrines yet continues to take them seriously? How might it be presented in a wider educational and multicultural context to reveal parallels with structural and functional equivalents, but also to highlight its wisdom and insight into the fundamental nature of reality that often gets underplayed if not neglected from the perspective of both the social and natural sciences? How might those in both church and academy broaden and deepen their understanding of essential Christian beliefs and values?

One way is to look at Christianity through a worldview lens that focuses on some of the great fundamental questions of life, or as theologian Paul Tillich put it, our “ultimate concerns.” An “ultimate/existential questions” worldview framework is often used by theologians, philosophers and others to get at the heart of some fundamental religious beliefs and values, Christian or otherwise (Valk, 2010; Naugle, 2002; Sire, 2004). These ultimate questions, pondered by ancient Greek philosophers, medieval Christian scholars, Enlightenment rationalists, the world’s spiritual teachers, and no less us today, concern who we are, the meaning of life, our purpose in the universe, responsibilities and obligations to ourselves, others and the earth, discerning right from wrong, and questions regarding the existence and nature of a higher power, being or force in the universe. Responses to these questions shape particular perceptions of reality, and in turn influence particular thinking and behaviour.

Discussing some of these big issues with an openness to input from various worldviews, especially religious worldviews, has generally fallen out of favour in the public academy, with many faculty feeling ill-prepared to broach such big questions (Astin and Astin, 2004). Religious institutions may be unwilling to risk exposing their catechumens to such big questions without being prescriptive. Religious Studies, perhaps the last bastion of such fundamental questions, find themselves marginalized in the larger academy and under scrutiny within their own field over intense disagreement of their own subject matter (McIntire, 2007). Delineating a Christian worldview, let alone any worldview, comes with huge challenges.

The Challenge

Yet these challenges must be overcome. Years of researching and teaching about worldviews in a public university setting has revealed a number of insights: (1) The pedagogy utilized in the churches leave the young largely perplexed if not disinterested and with few skills to translate institutional language into public forums. (2) Public education

in general does little to inspire the young in searching the great religious and spiritual traditions in search of life's big questions (Smith, 1990). (3) All too many students who reluctantly admit affiliation to their religious traditions and those who have become adverse to them tend to reduce their scope to little more than weekly ritual observances.

What is needed, therefore, is a worldview approach that levels the playing field, is inclusive and stimulates the thinking of younger and older alike to determine for themselves their own beliefs and values. Ultimate questions can be asked of any worldview and any person, religious or secular. It can be done in a comparative manner, to highlight beliefs and values of others all the while stimulating thoughts and ideas of one's own beliefs and values. Such an approach is interdisciplinary in nature, and resists tendencies to lodge the pursuit of such broad questions in any one particular discipline. It signals to students that worldviews necessarily grapple with all of life's issues, be they faith matters, ethical dilemmas, social challenges, cultural difficulties, economic concerns or environmental problems. It challenges students to confront their own worldviews – their own beliefs and values – as they examine the beliefs and values of other worldviews. It opens up to students vast riches embedded in the Christian worldview that may escape notice when Christianity remains confined to an institution increasingly relegated to the margins of society or a discipline increasingly relegated to the margins of the academy. Lastly, this approach has relevance for theological education not as a covert attempt to restore theology as “queen of the sciences” but to expand it so it has a meaningful place at the academic table.

Defining a Christian worldview is not intended to present a definitive or exhaustive version. It is rather to come at it from a number of open questions that defy prescriptive responses. Each question inevitably leads to ever deeper and more nuanced understandings, especially as dialogue increases with other religious or secular traditions. Yet, comparatively and heuristically, it is valuable if not necessary to highlight certain parameters or fundamental beliefs of a particular worldview in a manner that resists oversimplification and reductionism or even harmonizing it with other worldviews. Describing that worldview is not through exclusively grounding it in authoritative scriptures, theological tomes, philosophical treatises or catechetical teachings – it is not a proof-texting exercise. Though it relies heavily on these valuable sources as guides, it comes more so from critical and thoughtful reflection, comparisons, and even some audacious assertions – the pursuits of advanced theological and/or philosophical education – so it comes alive to its adherents. It is to ask of Christianity the kinds of ultimate or existential questions

one might ask of any worldview, religious or secular. It is an attempt to give sufficient breadth yet also some depth and distinctiveness to a Christian worldview as one worldview among others that make up the rich diversity of beliefs and values we see in our plural societies today. Lastly, it is an attempt to give profile to the value that Christian beliefs and values bring to the public square (Habermas, 2006).

The responses given here are brief but they are not exhaustive; they just become richer in articulation as they are probed, as higher theological or philosophical studies will reveal. A major caveat in highlighting a Christian worldview, let alone any worldview, as both a *vision of life* and a *way of life* is, of course, the realization that “practicing what one preaches” is an enormous challenge for all humans regardless of their worldview, something history reminds us of all too often.

Christianity through a Worldview Lens

Who and What are We?

The opening narrative in the Hebrew Scriptures tells the story of humans created in the image of God but made of the stuff of the earth. That story stands in stark contrast to other ancient and even modern narratives. It indicates that humans are not cosmic accidents of a random evolutionary process; slaves or servants of higher feuding powers; autonomous beings alone in a universe that has no inherent meaning; or defined solely by their biological, chemical or neurological components. They are rather spiritual/physical entities bearing the image of a Creator God, who bestows on them – male and female – co-creative capacity and potential, and a mandate to be stewards and caretakers of the earth. Through individual and communal activity, humans are called *to be* and *to do*: to enjoy life and living on the earth that is their habitation; to provide for themselves and others by increasing the common good and enhancing relationships; and to become fully human through individually and collectively unfolding their co-creative capacity and potential (Vanier, 1998; Hardy, 1990; Wolters, 1985). Humans are part of a larger cosmic story as earth creatures with the earth as their home (McFague, 1993; Marshall, 1998). The earth provides abundance for living well and living well is to live in relationship with the Creator (“the glory of God is the human fully alive” – *Gloria Dei, vivens homo* – Irenaeus) and in harmony with the earth (Berry, 1988).

Yet Christianity recognizes that people do not always live well, and this is often as a result of their behaviours and actions. As such, it warns against dominating or exploiting others or the earth for personal gain. It warns against hubris, greed and power-lust, which lie in the heart of

every person in greater or lesser degrees and continues to be the story of the historical unfolding of the human race. Rather, Christianity calls humans to nurture, guide and direct the unfolding of human creativity and potential, for the benefit of all and the protection of the earth. The focus here is on the human; the human is the subject of all activity: not money, prestige or the material (John Paul II, 1981). The focus is also on the earth; the earth is the place of human activity: humans are to be “earth-keepers” (Bouma-Prediger, 2010; Gottlieb, 2006).

As image-bearer of the Creator, the human is sacred; special among all creatures and created life. It is not to be sacrificed for purposes of personal, national or even international prestige, gain or whim. But specialness is not construed as anthropocentric dominance over or in competition with a biocentric environment. Humans are to live responsibly within the biosphere on which they are vitally dependent. Humans to a more heightened degree than all else are dependent on the flora and fauna of the earth, for survival and flourishing. All humans are to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their situation, circumstance or station in life. Protecting the most vulnerable, giving a “hand up rather than a hand out,” dignifying the physically or mentally challenged, and not allowing even the most hardened criminals to languish in prisons reflects the view that even the least are still image-bearers of the Creator. Human and non-human life are to be treated with care and concern, for all things hang in a “sacred balance” (Suzuki, 1997).

Meaning and Purpose

From a Christian perspective, meaning and purpose is writ large, built into the very fabric of the cosmos, and grounded in a loving Creator God. The universe is here not by accident but by purpose (Collins, 2006). Humans may not fully comprehend the scheme of cosmic and earthly life or the complexity of the human and its ways – they are not the Creator. Yet, through faith and conviction, they proclaim that the purpose of life is, in the words of Desmond Tutu, to “give God glory by reflecting his beauty and his love” (Friend, 1991). Humans do so when they “love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8). Meaning and purpose reside in unfolding human potential, unleashing creative energies, restoring justice, nurturing loving relationships, seeking equality, striving for peace, appreciating the beauty around us, and establishing harmony with the earth (Eagleton, 2007; Wolterstorff, 1987).

Christianity links human becoming to the divine purpose. Meaning and purpose reside in giving artful expression to the divine and the human, in unfolding the creativity that lies within each human, in striving for peace, justice, security and right relationships, in acting

locally but thinking globally, and in being stewards of the earth and the resources contained in it (Gottlieb, 2006; McFague, 2001). Meaning and purpose reside in living well, in the complex and varied dimensions of human and earthly life.

Christianity calls humans to use natural capital sustainably and social capital responsibly, to focus our consumptive habits on need rather than want, to encourage local entrepreneurship to alleviate poverty and hardship, and to ensure that the human is always dignified and free. Organizations such as Oikocredit, Habitat for Humanity, Bread for the World, Citizens for Public Justice, and Christian Earth-keeping, to name just a few which live out of the spirit of the Christian worldview, attempt to link earth, human and divine purpose by restoring meaning and purpose to the earth and the lives of countless whose circumstances, be they political, economic or social, deprive them of the freedom to live productive and creative lives in harmony with their natural surroundings.

Responsibilities and Obligations

Humans are social creatures. They are not individuals socially isolated from one another, but form communities large and small that bind them together (Smith, 2003). Membership in a community comes with benefits and securities, sometimes unrecognized or underappreciated, but it also comes with responsibilities and obligations. It entails not only taking but also giving back and as such recognizes citizen responsibilities and obligations, at a variety of levels, which centre on people making their communities, and by extension the world, a better place in which to live (Wallace, 2007). Humans are also earth creatures, one among a vast array of flora and fauna that inhabit the earth. Their being and livelihood are dependent on the survival and wellbeing of the earth and all in it. Because their rational and technological prowess create potential for dominance and exploitation, they bear added responsibility as specially gifted among the creatures of the earth. Humans are to resist anthropocentrism in favour of a more creation-centred orientation (Berry, 2000).

Individual and collective initiatives recognize, for example, the need for corporate and entrepreneurial success and profitability but always with priority given to the human and care bestowed on the earth. Responsible action ensures that the human is not sacrificed on the altar of efficiency or expediency nor treated as a commodity or a cost, and that the earth is not despoiled, desecrated and ravaged to enhance the insatiable appetites of the enriched few or the consumptive middle class (Bethke Elshtain, 2006; Chappell, 1993). In essence, responsible human action entails leaving a softer footprint on the earth, by striking

a sustainable balance between human activity and nature's needs. It entails treating fellow humans with dignity and respect, especially the most vulnerable among us, from fetal life to palliative care. It obliges us to strive for equality and fairness between genders and generations, communities and cultures, ensuring just relationships, seeking openness and opportunity, and sacrificing so all have according to their needs (Wolterstorff, 2007; Tutu, 1999).

In striving for these things, Christians sometimes find themselves in situations where they go against the grain of powerful social, economic and political forces to do what is right and just, not what is safe or expedient, and sometimes at great personal risk. Here they may well find themselves in the company of those who embrace other worldviews, yet can be enriched by linking arms with them as a way to gain increased understanding as well as increased support for just causes. Accomplishing these things is monumental and always incomplete, yet it is undergirded by an epistemology of hope grounded in the belief that God seeks healing and restoration of the earth and all within it. As such, Christians pray in all earnestness and humility the words of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr: "God, give us the courage to change the things that can be changed, accept the things that cannot be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference," as they do the words of St Francis of Assisi: "make me a channel of your peace."

Discerning Right from Wrong

Well-known rabbi and scholar Abraham Joshua Herschel said "Man's understanding of *what* is right and wrong has often varied throughout the ages; yet the consciousness that *there is* a distinction between right and wrong is permanent and universal" (Dosick, 1993: 184, original emphasis). Right spirit is that which embraces generosity, love, mercy, justice and kindness. Right attitude is that which seeks to live well in relationship with God, with one's fellow humans, and with the earth. Right action is that which seeks neither harm nor injury of others and the earth for individual gain, needless suffering for human convenience, or wanton destruction of the environment for human expediency. What is right is that in everything we seek to do to others is what we would have others do to us, and Christians can work in conjunction with all peoples who seek to live out this desire (Somerville, 2006; Kung, 1996). None of this is easy, for history demonstrates that rights often clash, especially when responsibilities and obligations are narrowly circumscribed.

From a Christian or Judaeo-Christian perspective an understanding or discernment of right and wrong is grounded in stories that emerge from Scriptural texts. But these always require interpretation in light

of continually unfolding circumstances, contexts and situations, and within a tradition and a community of discernment. Yet, history itself can be a powerful teacher, as can nature, when we heed their lessons. In any event, a Christian worldview teaches that discerning what is right or wrong is not ultimately a matter of individual autonomous choice, even as people individually and collectively must discern right courses of actions in circumstances that are always new and always changing (MacIntyre, 1984). But even in those circumstances, Christians recognize that revealed texts and ecclesiastical traditions ought not to serve as rigid rules or directives but as valuable guides in discerning present and future courses of action.

Scriptural stories remind men and women that power corrupts at all levels, and that hubris and greed, envy and wrath, can easily arrest if not destroy human flourishing and potential, in politics as much as in ecclesiastical office, and that wisdom and discernment are required to resist and curtail their corrosive impacts (Ciulla *et al.*, 2006). On the other hand, those same scriptural stories instil in some immense courage to seek change and to strive for that which is right, sometimes at the risk of pain and death. Individuals such as Rosa Parks who loathed the injustices of racial segregation, church leaders such as Oscar Romero who confronted oppression in El Salvador, labour leaders such as Dorothy Day who struggled for the rights of workers, and political leaders such as Tommy Douglas, Baptist minister and most famous Canadian, who fought for universal Medicare, came to realize that certain traditional attitudes, ways of doing things or public policy were simply wrong and unjust, and required change (Zynda, 2010; McLeod and McLeod, 2004; Jordan, 2002; Parks and Haskins, 1999).

A Power, Force, or Being Greater than Humans

Christians affirm the existence of a higher power or being understood to be God: God as Creator and ground of all being; a theistic not a deistic God; a mystery beyond comprehension; and a force embraced not only by Christians (Armstrong, 1993). God is not subsumed within nature but transcends it; a spiritual force that gives life and breath to all that exists. God is not of our own (patriarchal) making symbolizing the ideal of humanity (Feuerbach, 2004), the power of the ideal (Dewey, 1934), or a “fully natural God” who is the “very creativity in the universe” (Kauffman, 2008). God is Creator, unseen but not without witness, beyond knowing but not unknowable, powerful but not impersonal, and freedom-granting but not controlling. God is triune, revealed, manifested and incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, and continually active in the world through the actions of the Spirit. God desires relationship

with his/her image-bearers, seeking the reciprocating love of humans, and their restoration and redemption so human flourishing can occur (Ward, 2008; Nouwen, 1994).

Christianity affirms a being greater and beyond the human, a being that is not nebulous or vague, wrathful or vengeful, but is personal and loving, both troubled and concerned with human activity and the restoration of human relationships. Human activity in conjunction with divine activity creates the possibility for humans and the earth to flourish for both were created good. Yet, humans succumb to competing and conflicting forces within their own hearts and minds, and sometimes also to surrounding forces that compel, coerce or induce them to abhorrent actions. In spite of these humans are called to restorative and redemptive endeavours which, when conjoined with divine action, can melt the coldest of human hearts; repair devastated human relations; and restore peace, justice and harmony (Wolterstorff, 1987).

Such endeavours can be found in Desmond Tutu's South African *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, a restorative and redemptive effort to bring healing to a nation beset by racial turmoil; in William Wilberforce's initiatives in the British Parliament in eliminating slavery from the British Commonwealth, based on the belief that humans were created with dignity and freedom bestowed upon them by God; and in Mother Theresa's Sisters of Charity toiling in the slums of Calcutta to give a human touch to the destitute and dying, premised on the belief that the poorest of the poor are also created in the image of God and, as such, require dignity. These actions are rootedness in a greater and deeper mystery that reaches beyond individual and collective human initiatives (Tutu, 1999; Belmonte, 2002; Kolodiejchuk, 2007).

Life after this Life

The Christian tradition affirms life beyond this life. Often referred to as heaven, it is pivotally connected to the life and teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in whom God has reconciled all things. Christians believe that life in the here and now is not the only life, that there is more to this life than science can reveal, and that there is a link between this life and the next (Wright, 2008; McGrath, 2003). As such, what is done in the here and now is not disconnected with what unfolds in the life to come (Marshall, 1998).

Life after this life is a dimension of existence beyond our own physical space/time continuum and a transition into a new realm of being and existence (Segal, 2004; McDannell and Lang, 2001). We are separated from that realm by a veil that is difficult to penetrate let alone comprehend from the perspective of the here and now (Wright, 2008). Yet, agreement

exists that human life is a journey into God that begins now and continues into the life beyond, that some continuity/discontinuity exists between this life and the next, that the renewed earth will be a transformation of this earth, and that peace and justice will reign (Peters *et al.*, 2002; Polkinghorne and Welker, 2000).

Christians take hope from such a belief for it gives purpose to activity in this life and its orientation towards the future. While hope springs eternal in the hearts of humankind, it must be grounded in something not lost at death for it to be ultimately meaningful. This hope captivated the imagination of Martin Luther King Jr. His famous "I have a dream" speech was based on the vision of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah (Isa. 11:6-7) for a future state realizable only partially in the here and now. All human attempts in the here and now to "beat swords into ploughshares" (Isa. 2:4) are premised on the belief that those actions are not ultimately futile, foolhardy and fruitless, but anticipate a future of *shalom*.

Belief in a life to come also asserts that light ultimately triumphs over darkness, that death does not have the final word, and that great injustices in this world will not go unheeded. It is also a response to lives cut short, unrealized potential, and relentless suffering (Wright, 2006). Yet, try as some might, humans will not come to understand how all of this might unfold, let alone determine who will populate the life to come and how. Furthermore, while Christianity has always affirmed life after this life, its focus is resolutely centred on living well in this life.

Conclusion

A worldview approach to highlighting essential beliefs and values sets certain parameters and boundaries yet avoids dogmatic prescriptions. Out of necessity it remains open to further interpretation and exposition of beliefs and values. It also, and most importantly, serves as a means by which to engage other worldviews, not to refute them, but to enter into dialogue with them. Such dialogue can be immensely enriching for it acknowledges that one cannot really know oneself (one's own worldview) without knowledge of the other (other worldviews), or as the German philosopher of religion Max Mueller famously put it, "he who knows one knows none." Questions asked of the other become questions asked of the self.

A worldview approach also levels the playing field. The ultimate/existential questions are germane to all worldviews and impinge on all of us. The questions serve as points of contact and conversation with members within a particular worldview as well as with those of different worldviews. The questions also get us beyond reducing a

worldview, especially a Christian worldview, to dogmatic content or ritualistic behaviour bereft of content. They enrich not only the dialogue but also one's understanding of the worldview itself and are conducive for exploration within both church and academic context.

A worldview approach makes a distinction between a communal and a personal worldview. Describing a larger Christian worldview can be insightful and beneficial for those seeking to understand their own personal worldview, for it cannot be assumed that the two are the same. Coming to understand one's own worldview is assisted by having a larger Christian worldview by which to make comparisons but also to guide and direct.

The above responses to these "ultimate/existential questions" get at the heart of a Christian worldview, even if those beliefs and values beg for further nuancing and explication, a task for those seeking greater depth and understanding and a task for religious/theological education. Nonetheless, it is these basic beliefs and values that give expression to a Christian worldview and what it perceives to be the nature of reality, that which undergirds it, and where lies hope for the future. These basic beliefs and values can serve as guides for religious instructors to give direction to parishioners. They can serve as basic parameters for religious educators who seek to present a Christian worldview alongside other worldviews.

Both religious instructors and educators can communicate to their respective parishioners and students a Christian worldview perspective that gives focus to a creation- and creature-centred universe and their place in it rather than to material things that seem to dominate our modern society. It acknowledges meaning and purpose as more than what individuals or groups of individuals alone devise. It recognizes that humans have responsibilities and obligations that go beyond fulfilling individual and immediate desires. Discerning right and wrong necessitates that individuals and groups of individuals heed the wisdom of the past to confront the challenges of the present and future. Above all it recognizes that humans are not alone in the universe but are connected to something far beyond the individual and the collective, an entity concerned with them in the here and now and the beyond. It calls people to live that reality, acknowledging their responsibilities and obligations towards it. It affirms a power and being greater than themselves, with which they seek to live and work in conjunction, and to transform a current reality anticipating a future fulfilment in this life and the life to come.

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