

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

Worldview, Values and the World Economy

Over 100 years ago, a path breaking book by the famed sociologist Max Weber was published: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Among other things, Weber made a profoundly important argument about the connection between religion and economics. Where Karl Marx loathed religion as the opiate of the people, Weber maintained that the Protestant faith actually was the origin for the development of the capitalist system. In summary, Weber argued that the Calvinist doctrine of election produced believers who sought to demonstrate their elect status by engaging in commerce and accumulation of material goods. Therefore, Protestantism created a work ethic and a system of social trust so necessary for capital formation and commerce. Obviously provocative and controversial, the Weber thesis remains relevant. Weber identified the importance of religious and theological values to worldview building and human behavior. A civilization's worldview determines its values and, therefore, to some extent, explains human behavior. Europe today continues to use phrases such as "human rights and human dignity," which are rooted in the Christian values of Western Civilization, but few Europeans know why they continue to believe such values are important. The ghost of dead religious beliefs haunts Europe—and that is very important. The Weber thesis is probably too simplistic but it raised an important question—the relationship between religious values and economic behavior. They are not disconnected or irrelevant. The connection between the two is incredibly important.

As an illustration of such a connection, I was struck by a recent essay by columnist David Brooks, entitled "The Spirit of Enterprise." Permit me to summarize his argument. He asks a provocative question—"why are nations like Germany and the US rich?" He answers that it is due to habits, values and social capital. There is a simple ethical formula at work in these nations: Effort should lead to reward as often as possible. "People who work hard and play by the rules should have a fair shot at prosperity. Money should go to people on the basis of merit and enterprise. Self-control should be rewarded while laziness and self-indulgence should not. Community institutions should nurture responsibility and fairness." But this ethical construct is being undermined in Europe and in the US: People view lobbyists diverting money on the basis of connections; traders making millions off short-term manipulations; governments stealing money from future generations to reward voters. The overall result is a "crisis of legitimacy," where social trust shrivels and effort is no longer worth it. What has happened? Over the past several decades, nations like Germany and the Netherlands have played by the rules and practiced good governance. As Brooks says, "they have lived within their means, undertaking painful reforms, enhanced their competitiveness and reinforced good values. Now they are being browbeaten for not wanting to bail out nations like Greece, Italy and Spain, which did not do these things, which instead borrowed huge amounts of money that they are choosing not to

repay.” Further, “They are defending the values, habits and social contract upon which the entire prosperity of the West is based.” All of this occurring in Europe cannot be taken lightly by the US. “The structural problems plaguing [the US] economy remain unaddressed. As a result, the United States suffers from a horrible crisis of trust that is slowing growth, restricting government action and sending our policies off in strange directions.” The future for Europe and for the US revolves around how we answer these fundamental questions: Which values will be rewarded and reinforced? Will it be effort, productivity and self-discipline? Or will it be bad governance, now and forever? How we answer these questions will determine the future of the US. We cannot ignore them and we cannot pretend they are unimportant. The worldview, the values and the ethical foundation of America are being undermined in a way we have never seen before. The very survival of our way of life is now in question.

See Brooks’ brilliant essay in the New York Times (2 December 2011).

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO

Sound Doctrine and Joel Osteen

In his Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), the Apostle Paul argues very compellingly that “sound [i.e., healthy] doctrine” produces godly living. The two are thereby inextricably linked. Paul exhorts his two protégés—Timothy and Titus—to teach their people sound doctrine. This will influence how they live in society, relate to the state and represent the Lord well. Superficial, shallow tidbits of religious information are not sound doctrine. Strong, expository preaching and teaching are how people learn sound doctrine. There is no other way for this to be done.

Therefore, it is especially disturbing for one of the key leaders of 21st century evangelicalism to model just the opposite of what the Apostle argued nearly 2,000 years ago. Why does Osteen represent the shallow, superficial Christianity that is the exact opposite of what Paul represented?

Here are a few examples:

- “Part of our core message is that seasons change, and when you believe, if you don’t get bitter, and you don’t get discouraged, you may not change overnight, but you can have peace.”
- “People need to be reminded that every day is a gift from God, and bloom where you’re planted and be happy where you are, and to make that the choice to get up every day and be grateful.”
- “I believe that [Mormons] are Christians. . . . I don’t know if it’s the purest form of Christianity, like I grew up with. But you know what, I know Mormons, I hear Mitt Romney—and I’ve never met him—but I hear him say, ‘I believe Jesus is the son of God,’ ‘I believe he’s my savior,’ and that’s one of the core issues.” “I’m sure there are other issues that we don’t agree on. But you know, I can say that the Baptists and the

Methodists and the Catholics don't all agree on everything. So that would be my take on it."

As theologian Albert Mohler has argued: "The main point of concern in Joel's latest comments [on Mormonism] is the lack of any biblical standard of judgment and the total abdication of theological responsibility. He relegates doctrinal disagreements between Christians and Mormons to the status of theological debates between Protestant denominations and then includes Roman Catholicism. . . Comparing any form of Trinitarian orthodoxy with Mormonism is another class of question altogether." Osteen is a major representative of evangelical Christianity and his comments are reprehensible and theologically wrong. How can he actually say that he represents Jesus Christ? How can he claim to be a preacher of the gospel? Does he really not know what Mormons believe? Is this what he teaches his congregation—there is really no difference between Mormonism and biblical Christianity?

What then do Mormons believe about Jesus and about God as Trinity? Mormonism teaches that God the Father was once a man, but became God. He has a physical body, as does his wife (the Heavenly Mother). Mormons deny the trinity, arguing that the Father, Son and Spirit are three separate gods. Mormons likewise teach that it is possible for all faithful Mormons to one day become gods too. Mormonism teaches that Jesus is a separate god from the Father (Elohim) and is the spirit child of the Father and Mother in heaven. He is, therefore, the "elder brother" of all men spirit beings. His body was created through sexual union between Elohim and Mary. In fact, Mormonism teaches that Jesus was married, as a polygamist, to the two Marys and Martha. His death on Calvary's cross does not provide full atonement, but does guarantee resurrection for everyone. Further, the LDS church actually defines salvation as exaltation to godhood, which can only be earned through obedience to LDS leaders, Mormon baptism, tithing, marriage (which they believe is eternal) and secret temple rituals. Using 1 Corinthians 15:29, the LDS church also teaches that present day Mormons can be vicariously baptized for their ancestors, who will then be "saved." For that reason, Mormons spend a great deal of time studying their family's genealogy so that they can be baptized in their place.

Joel Osteen magnifies the superficiality of 21st century evangelicalism. If he really does not know the difference between Mormonism and biblical Christianity, he should be ashamed of himself! He represents a Christianity "lite," which seeks not the gospel, but a "feel-goodism," which bears no resemblance whatsoever to what Jesus taught or commanded. As a leader, he should take a strong stand for sound doctrine and the distinctive theology of genuine, biblical Christianity. He has not done so—and in that is his shame.

See www.Albertmohler.com (26 October 2011) and James P. Eckman, *The Truth About Worldviews*, pp. 89-98.

PERSPECTIVE NUMBER THREE

The Political Demise of Herman Cain

Herman Cain spent a part of his life in Omaha, Nebraska, where I live. Shortly after I became president of Grace University I met him. We were beginning a major fund-raising effort at

Grace and he was a man I wanted to meet. We had lunch together and we talked about his business (Godfather's Pizza) and about his faith. At that point, he was attending one of the significant African-American churches in our community. I gained an incredible respect for him. He was articulate, confident and successful. His life is a classic tale of individualism, hard work and fortitude. Cain is a graduate of Morehouse College and Purdue University. He ran a very successful company here in Omaha and then became, among other things, a significant motivational speaker. Then he decided to run for president of the United States. His campaign centered on his 9-9-9 tax reform plan, which was appealing for its simplicity and a certain degree of common sense. For a short while, he was even leading in the Republican Party polls.

Then, the political bottom fell out of his campaign. A series of women claimed that Cain was guilty of sexual harassment while he was leader of the National Restaurant Association. As a part of a legal settlement, the National Restaurant Association conceded that it had made financial payments to two of the women. Even with those revelations, Cain remained a viable candidate. But, he crossed a point of political no return when Ginger White, an Atlanta woman, charged that he and Cain had a 13-year long affair, one that just ended. Some of the details have not yet been proven, remaining to some degree a "he-said, she-said" affair. Yet, one cannot ignore the reality that a number of women have made serious allegations. Indeed, Cain admitted in public that he has paid Ginger White quite a bit of money, all without his wife's knowledge. Amazingly, Cain's attorney made the audacious and ridiculous claim that Cain and White's relationship "appears to be an accusation of private, alleged consensual conduct between adults—a subject matter which is not a proper subject of inquiry by the media or the public." He went on that "No individual, whether a private citizen, a candidate for public office or a public official, should be questioned about his or her private life. The public's right to know and the media's right to report have boundaries and most certainly those boundaries end outside of one's bedroom." I could not disagree more! As Albert Mohler has declared, "Character does not end at the bedroom door." Herman Cain has a character flaw and these sexual escapades indicate the core of that flaw. It is the public's business whether candidates have sexually harassed women. It is the public's business to know whether a candidate has had a 13-year relationship with a woman, not his wife, which included significant payments of money. The question of character is indeed one of the most important issues in evaluating candidates for public office. Herman Cain has tragically failed that test of character and that is very sad. We should be praying for him, for his wife and for his family.

See www.albertmohler.com (30 November 2011).