

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska
31 March 2012

The Christian Worldview: Answers to Serious Challenges

As a Christian leader, I believe that only the Christian worldview provides answers to the challenges of our world. Let me use three examples in this edition of *Issues in Perspective*.

Challenge number one: *The Tree of Life*—suffering, disappointment and pain. In so many ways, the movie, *The Tree of Life*, is one of the more beautiful movies of recent years. Written by Terrence Malick and starring, among others, Brad Pitt, Sean Penn and Jessica Chastain, *The Tree of Life* poses some significant questions about life. The movie follows the lives of three brothers growing up in the 1950s. The mother of these three boys desires that her sons follow the “way of grace” in life—a way that is not selfish, but accepts disappointment, pain, insult and injury. By contrast, the father wants his boys to defend themselves and “be a man.” Physical strength and dogged determination are the pathways to success. But, as the film progresses, one of the sons, Jack, experiences not only a loss of innocence but also immeasurable loss. He asks God, “Where are you? You let a boy die. You let anything happen. Why should I be good when you aren’t?” This movie affirms the tension we feel as humans: A world of beauty, wonder and design mixed with brutality, hurt and profound loss. What is God’s role in all this? The Christian worldview provides answers, but does not completely resolve all the tension.

- First, the Bible makes it very clear that Jesus, in His perfect innocence and by means of the cross, became a victim of the most monstrous evil in order to eradicate this evil from the world. That is the vital center of biblical Christianity. God became a victim of evil to do away with evil!
- Second, the book of Job helps us arrive at a framework for processing hurt, pain and evil. Mart De Haan posits five conclusions from the book of Job.
 1. Some pain is the result of our own choices (Job 4:8).
 2. Other suffering comes through the judgment of friends who unintentionally add to our grief by assuming that we prosper or suffer in direct proportion to what we believe (Job 1:8; 32:3).
 3. In addition, some misfortune comes from an enemy who believes people only trust God for what they can get out of Him (Job 1:6-22).
 4. Sustained suffering can disillusion even the best of God’s servants (Job 3:1-26).
 5. At the lowest moments of our lives, God may use the wonders of what He has made to remind us that we do have reason to trust Him (Job 38-42).

The tree of life that is in the center of the Garden of Eden was violated by our original parents, but their sin led to another tree—the Cross! That Tree provides the solution to the evil and suffering of this fallen world.

Challenge number two: Sergeant Robert Bates and the murder of 17 Afghans. The horror of what Sgt. Bates did is unimaginable. With apparent premeditation, he wantonly murdered 17 innocent people. Why did he do this? Did he snap? Was it overuse of alcohol? Was he drunk? Was he deranged? Some of these questions we may never be able to answer, but the case of Sgt. Bates raises rather profound questions about human evil. Are humans innately good? Are we born righteous people? Or are all of us capable of doing something just as horrific as Sgt. Bates? If we are not basically good, then what keeps us from all doing monstrous evil as Sgt. Bates did?

Biblical Christianity answers these questions. From the book of Genesis on, the Bible presents irrefutable evidence that all human beings are depraved—there are none righteous, no not one! From Romans 1:18 through 3:20, the Apostle Paul develops the sustained argument that humanity has rejected the clarity of God’s revelation about Himself and His nature (1) in the physical world (1:18-32), (2) through placing His moral law on the human heart and conscience (2:1-16) and (3) through His moral law to Israel (2:17-3:8). Humanity has rejected all three revelations—intentionally and willfully. The Bible also develops quite foundationally that all humans experience the struggle within between light and darkness and between good and evil. Further, even those who have placed faith in Christ still struggle with the internal battle between the flesh and the Spirit (see Romans 7 and Galatians 5). God’s common grace powerfully and effectively restrains the evil that is so pervasive in this world; but the compelling truth is that humanity is in rebellion against God. There are no exceptions. Human beings are, therefore, a curious mixture of seeming virtue but horrible depravity. The US must deal with Sgt. Bates; it must hold him accountable for his dastardly acts. But, we who are Christians must also remember that all humans are capable of heinous acts of violence and despicable thoughts that can fester and grow into violence. Romans 3:23 declares that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Hence, the necessity for a Savior to come in the person of Jesus Christ. Without Him there is no hope and when He removes the restraining force of His common grace (the Holy Spirit), evil will be unleashed in a massively self-destructive fashion, which will then bring about the end of history and the return of God’s Son (see 2 Thessalonians 2).

Challenge number three: Homosexuality and the challenge to God’s order. I remain amazed about the rapidity of western civilization’s accommodation to homosexuality and to same-sex marriage. Both are blatant challenges to God’s Creation Ordinance in Genesis 2 and to the crystal clear teaching throughout God’s Word. Homosexuality and heterosexual immorality are both equally condemned in God’s Word. Only within the bonds of marriage is the beauty of sex to be enjoyed. But the culture now supports an in-your-face challenge to this creation ordinance. Further, with homosexuality and same-sex marriage, there is the deep-seated commitment and intentional strategy to depict both as normal and mainstream. As Joel Belz of *World* magazine has observed: “It’s pointless to worry about battles being waged in literature, the library systems, the entertainment industries, the information media, fashion, higher education, and most of the liberal churches—for the battles in those venues are long since over.” This accommodation is so complete, it would seem, that anyone who even raises the ethical issue of human sexuality is condemned as homophobic and naïve. The Bible is quite candid and forthright about sexuality; there is no ambiguity. But the Bible also details with graphic frankness what happens when a culture or a civilization willfully and knowingly departs from God’s Creation Ordinance. Because of the depths of our depravity, somehow American

civilization believes that it alone will be the exception to God's rule. It is not an exception! God is very clear about the consequences of intentionally abandoning His order of things (see Romans 1:18-32). God created His world to operate according to His moral law and, in His common grace, even when unbelievers follow that order there is common grace blessing. But when that moral law is violated there are natural consequences to violating that moral law. That is what we are now observing in American culture. This egregious challenge to God's created order of things will not be done with impunity.

See Mart De Haan in "Been Thinking About" (March 2012) and Joel Belz in *World* (24 March 2012), p. 5.