WORLDVIEW EVANGELISM: THE SEVEN ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS OF LIFE

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INTRODUCTION: MY STORY

In March of 1971 I prayed to receive Christ as my Savior and Lord at a Campus Crusade for Christ conference in New Hampshire. I was 16 years old and a mess. I had spent most of the previous 3 years using drugs every chance I could get. Partly as a result I was failing at just about everything, school, sports, social life. I had been a convinced atheist from about age 12. I was picked on continually due to my scrawny stature and awkward manners and, to tell the truth, a good bit of it I deserved. There were times I picked on others when I got the chance. I stole, I lied, I cheated. I was not the sort of friend you would want to have.

After my parents caught me with drugs again in the Fall of 1970, they made me go with my sister to Campus Crusade for Christ meetings at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. I remember being trained to share the evangelistic tool, The Four Spiritual Laws, with other believing students for practice. Being an atheist it was a source of some considerable humor to me.

I came home stoned from school one day in March, 1971, and my sister managed to convince me to go with her to a Crusade conference in New Hampshire. It was the last thing on earth I wanted to do but being stoned it was hard to say no effectively and I ended up in a car with my sister, the leader of Campus Crusade at UMass and his wife. I brought my hash pipe for some fun. They prayed before starting the car and I distinctly remember putting in at the end of their prayer a very sarcastic, “Yes God and make David a Christian!” Nasty kid, I wonder now at their patience.

That night I roomed with a slender red-haired Crusade neophyte named Rich and I lit into him. He did not get much sleep that night. I told him all the reasons why I thought Christians were idiots and why God does not exist, and how only losers who need crutches follow God and all the other usual secularist fanfare. To my great surprise Rich did not respond defensively. In fact, he seemed to listen intently to everything I said. He didn’t seem to care about winning an argument with me. He was astonishingly non-judgmental of my views. Not that he was a pushover but when we finally fell asleep about 3 in the morning something heavy had been lifted off my back. Someone had really listened to me and had something to say in return that was clearly motivated by love.
The next morning I awoke with the strangest desire to become a Christian. I went down to the lake and threw the hash pipe and contents in. Then I went running around the conference center to look for Rich. I found another Crusade leader who was astonished to be confronted by someone eagerly desiring to pray to receive Christ. It was perhaps the happiest day of my life to that point.

I wish I could say it was all peaches and cream from that point on, but it wasn’t. In many ways I was still a pretty nasty kid and my struggle with drugs was not over yet. It was more than a year until I made a final definitive break with that past, with some pretty humiliating defeats in between. But I have always credited Rich with starting me down this new and wonderful pathway.

Ten years later I arrived in Bangladesh with a new family and a deep desire to share the good news of Jesus with Muslims. During my first week in the country I was talking with more seasoned missionaries and I made them a proposal. I asked if they wanted me to translate the four spiritual laws into Bengali so as to witness to Muslims by that means. Their response was simple. “Cashin”, they said, “For the next two years we want you to shut up and learn!” It was the best possible advice. As I learned the language I also became apprenticed to a Muslim background believer who taught me his way of reaching Muslims. It was a revelation, effective and had me involved in Bible studies with Muslims all the time. I thought I had found the new ultimate method for working with Muslims. Yet, when I taught this same system to missionaries in Indonesia, it didn’t work.

Over time I have come to see that methods are culture, history and assumption bound. My studies in the book of Acts also introduced me to the wide variety of evangelistic approaches used by the New Testament Church. We are all called as believers to do evangelism, whether we are good at it or not. It is certainly good to know various ways to present the Gospel and to know the key elements from the scripture that indicate a person has crossed over to faith in Jesus. This short booklet is meant to train you in the listening and learning stage as you seek to understand the person you want to share the Gospel with. It is primarily designed to help you be a good listener, like Rich was for me. It is about how to ask deep questions and enjoy the wide variety of answers you will hear, with a non-judgmental attitude. I trust that it will also open the door for you, once you have fully understood the person you are speaking with, to be able to share the good news of Jesus in ways where they can see the relevance themselves. I believe that is what Rich showed me in 1971.

Questions and Projects:

1. Write out in a single page your testimony of how you became a follower of Jesus Christ.
2. Did you have someone like “Rich” in your life? If you did, reflect back on how that person listened to you and what kind of effect that had on you.
CHAPTER 1: WORLDVIEW EVANGELISM

I love to tell people about Jesus. I’m not particularly good at it. I’m an introvert. Focusing on other people is not my strong point. So for years I have disciplined myself to use chance meetings on planes and beaches, in homes and schools to talk about the one who rescued me. But for many years I did something that made me feel uncomfortable. It seemed like I was always trying to angle people into a position where it “fit” to make a Gospel presentation. My presentation was usually politely rejected. I think most Christians don’t even try. They expect that their message will be rejected because, using the method they have been taught, they have often been rejected in the past.

I really have a passion to see everyday Christians encouraged to share Jesus and find a positive response. And I believe this is possible. In recent years I am finding my evangelistic conversations becoming more and more interesting. They are not scripted in any way, and I have no particular agenda to witness. Instead, I find myself increasingly asking people questions. Seven questions to be exact. And I find myself listening much more carefully with great interest to the responses that I get. I am finding that non-Christians increasingly tell me “This is the most important spiritual conversation I have ever had” or “this is the most significant conversation that I have ever had on a plane” or “This is the best talk I have had in the last two years”. These are quotes from the last four months, and all supplied by people who self identified as atheists. Natalya, Sam and Will said these things to me, in spite of the fact that they all heard the story of my testimony and also a message about the necessity to come to Jesus. Now if this was the kind of response you got regularly to sharing your faith, would you be interested in doing it a little more often?

What I particularly like about this approach is that it allows me to have on-going conversations with those whom I see just briefly on a regular basis. Like the young woman who received Christ this past March after 7 weeks of brief 5 minute conversations on the seven questions in a health club. The idea of asking good questions is not original to me. I remember years ago reading a book by Paul Little entitled “Know Why You Believe”\(^1\). He had a chapter in the book entitled “Evangelism of the Ears”. He emphasized that you need to listen and understand where the person you are talking with is coming from. You might say that this short book is an attempt to systematize “evangelism of the ears”.

\(^{1}\) Little, Paul, E., Know Why You Believe, IVP, reprinted 2008.
Over the past 10 years I have been involved in a project to study different cultures. During this time our school has sent out nearly 800 teams or individuals to investigate and understand local cultures. They have focused on all manner of cultures, workplace cultures, ethnic cultures, age group cultures. Their assignment has been to understand the underlying worldview that people express through their culture.

That word “worldview” is challenging. I define it as “how people look at life”. But it is deeper and more difficult than that. We are really asking what kind of assumptions do people have about life? Assumptions are difficult to define because they are usually unconscious. So over the years students have invented questionnaires that try to get at these unconscious assumptions. Over time we have made a few discoveries. First, assumptions tend to follow certain broad trends that we see around us. In other words, they are highly predictable. Second, we note that they are constantly in a state of change and flux, particularly in those who are younger. Worldview is not a static foundation that generates a static culture. Worldview is a dynamic set of ideas, beliefs and values that are constantly influencing and being influenced both from within and without.

Over the years I developed a grid of worldview which I call the “four quadrants”. It is like a pie chart with four pieces. One of those pieces is fairly easy to understand and usually is at the center of studies of culture. I call it simply “social structures”. Family and societal structures are readily apparent in every culture. They are fairly easy to describe and the assumptions that underlie them, though a bit more difficult to describe, are also usually pretty clear. The other three quadrants are much more complicated.

The first of these three quadrants is in the upper right of the diagram. It has to do with “being”, specifically “human beings” and all other kinds of “beings” in the universe. Simply put, we struggle with who we are. Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is our ultimate meaning and
purpose in life? What is the nature of our problem and how do we solve it? How can we be successful in life and where does real power come from? I derive from this list 5 essential questions of life that every human being needs to answer in order to make sense of their life. We will come back to these five questions later.

Usually the foundations of a person’s beliefs lie in stories of origin, power and destiny that they believe in. It is possible to go through life without answers to these questions and our culture certainly supplies us with many diversions to distract us. It is claimed that Socrates said, “the unreflected life is not worth living”. That is my opinion as well. Asking good questions is a way to get people to reflect on life, something that most people rarely do.

There remain two other categories or quadrants as I like to call them. The first answers the question “how do I know true from untrue”. This is the upper left-hand quadrant in the diagram. This is by far the most complicated and difficult area for people to reflect upon. At the simplest level it deals with how I sort information. What do I pay attention to and what do I ignore. But it is much more than that. This quadrant ultimately asks the question how do I know what I know? How do I prioritize my life and my impressions? What do I find persuasive and what is not persuasive? What is authoritative in my life and what is not. We shall look at this one question and its many facets in a later chapter.

Finally we come to the quadrant of ethics. This is the lower right hand quadrant in the diagram. How do I know right from wrong? Now this question is obviously related to the previous question. True and false and right and wrong are clearly connected. When I tell a lie, I am not only saying something that is false, I am potentially saying something that is morally wrong and perhaps punishable under law. Cheating on taxes is a good example. But it is also possible to tell a lie that is not considered morally reprehensible. Santa Claus is a good example. So, for the sake of analysis we will keep these two categories of truth and ethics separate. In this quadrant we are simply asking how can a person know right from wrong?

These three categories and their seven questions will be the focus for the remaining chapters of this book. My purpose will be to train you in how to ask good questions and just as importantly, to listen well to the responses you get. I am not actually asking you to do evangelism at this point. In fact, some of these conversations may never lead to a discussion about Jesus. Not all of my conversations do. But they are meant to get you and another human being to reflect together on the meaning of life.

Before we start the next chapter perhaps a word is needed on how to start these conversations. For my students this is not difficult. They are simply trying to do a culture study to pass a class. People usually respond to that kind of request. For me, I simply say that I am fascinated by cultures and worldviews and would like to ask the person a few questions about their worldview. My interest is genuine. People are fascinating and I don’t have an agenda to share Jesus. If the conversation shouldn’t go that way, it doesn’t. But many times that person will ask me how I answer these questions. Then sharing about Jesus is something natural and normal. Perhaps most importantly, it is adapted to where that person is at, because I have gotten to know them. As I said at the start, I’m an introvert. But I find if you simply try, you will begin to have some really fun conversations.
I have one final point; maintain a non-judgmental attitude! People will tell you all kinds of things that you may regard as strange, totally false or wrong. But your purpose in this discussion is to understand, not to judge. The quick move to either judgment or starting your agenda, stops the process of you fully understanding your friend. Aim for full understanding rather than what your next point might be.

Projects and Questions:

1. Make a list of five non-Christian friends that you have never shared Jesus with.
2. Pray over each of them daily for the next week.
3. At the end of that week try to start a conversation with each of these friends concerning the first question we will discuss in the next chapter.
4. Write down after each conversation a brief summary of what they said and what happened.
Chapter 2: Myths of Origin, Power and Destiny

Do you remember the list of questions I put forward on the subject of being? I asked the question, “who are we and what is our identity?” Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is our ultimate meaning and purpose in life? What is the nature of our problem and how do we solve it? How can we be successful in life and where does real power come from? This is a complex set of questions that I want to break down into just 5 essential questions about who we, as human beings, are. We will deal with three of them in this chapter.

You will recall our quadrants from the previous chapter. Here I have selected out the first quadrant from the upper right:
Notice that I have filled out the diagram moving from core beliefs in dark red to surface expressions within a culture in white

Students of religion recognize that all of humanity’s systems of philosophy and religion, including secularism, seek to answer the question of humankind’s origin. The beliefs that we have about this are often called “myths of origin, power and destiny”. Simply put, where do we come from, how do we gain success/purpose in life and where are we going? Every faith or philosophy at some level must answer these questions. The word “myth” is not used negatively. We are not asking whether something is historically true or not. We simply want to understand our friend’s root metaphor of human identity. You might substitute the word “metaphor” or “story” to make this point clearer.

The story of human origin really only has three possible answers. We are either the product of none, the product of one or the product of two. You might say that zero-ism, one-ism and two-ism are at the core of all human philosophy and religion. Traditionally over the last 100 years in the western world two of these viewpoints have dominated, “big-bang evolutionism” and biblical “creationism”.

The big-bang and its evolutionary fall-out are a classic one-ism. We start with a universe which is an absolute singularity, a one-ness. It is in a primeval state of incomprehensible compactness and absolute unity. Suddenly, inexplicably, the singularity explodes and over billions of years expands to the present universe we see. That universe is full of diversity but ultimately its unity remains the same in principle. It is the unity of pure materialism, there is nothing beyond that spawn of matter.

In the context of this material fall-out certain types of atoms move together in astronomically complex ways to form life. They become reproducing life forms who themselves are able to morph over time into ever more complex life forms. Humankind is not the crown of that “creation”. It is simply a transitional form among many arising and disintegrating in the material soup. There is no “other” who designs or forms or makes or creates. There is no binary polarity of an ultimate sort. There is only one-ness that somehow differentiates.

Biblical creationism is two-ism. There is a material universe but also a God who stands outside of the material universe and forms it. Big-bang, becomes the analogy for “let there be light” as God creates the universe, “ex nihilo” out of nothing. This universe is separate from God and becomes the place of God’s creative activity. It is not God and God is not it. It is a dualistic polarity. Ultimately humankind is brought forth as the final stage of this process and is the only creature created “in the image of God”. There is a connection from God to the material world in the form of humankind. As God is a world-maker, so humankind becomes a culture maker. Everything else said in the Bible is an expression of that two-ness, that duality, that polarity.

Most of the time when I talk with non-Christians, I get a mixture of these two viewpoints. There are those who are highly scientific, rational types and keep to pure one-ism. For them the scientific explanation is the only rational explanation. They are naturalists not supernaturalists. But this has problems, as we shall see shortly. A smaller group, generally Christians or other monotheists, will affirm the biblical narrative. African Americans often affirm this narrative. This may be the result of their being the most churched population in America. But many people, in keeping with post-modern ideas,
will affirm a little of both. The reason may be that pure one-ness, absolute materialism, cannot suggest any ultimate purpose for a human being. As one nuclear engineer atheist put it to me aboard a plane one day, “I have absolutely no sense of purpose to my life”.

Dualism suggests relationship. Image of God also suggests relationship on an eternal scale and thus a sense of ultimate purpose and direction. This carries problems with it as well. The well known issue of theodicy (the justice of God), is a case in point. Simply put, why does God allow suffering? Suffering is an unavoidable consequence of relationship, as many will testify. If you want to get rid of the pain of relationship, switch to one-ism. There is no relationship. There is no question of justice. Life is also, ultimately, purposeless. You can only complain if there is an “other” who listens. If you want to complain you must be a “two-ist” in order to have someone to complain to.

This brings us to our second question. What is the source of power? How are we successful in life? How is success defined and what is our ultimate goal in success? This is where evolutionary one-ism gets into trouble. Most people have a hard time answering this question. But for the true evolutionist the answer is simple and direct: “Survival of the fittest”. Power comes in the process of competition. The weak are trampled and die and the strong get to mate and pass on their genes. It is a brutal system, which is why most want to mollify it with something. I’ve even had atheists throw in the possibility of God at this point. But if you are going to be consistent with your system, then this is the only answer to the question of power in one-ism.

This may be one of the reasons why big-bang evolutionism finds Hindu one-ism alluring. Both systems are one-isms. The universe arises out of one undifferentiated unity. Now many secularists will argue that modern society requires cooperation; that competition must be reigned in through government agencies that look after the general good. What you are describing here is two-ism. You are describing cooperative relationship. You are describing humankind in right relationship with humankind and with some higher sense of morality. Let me contrast that with what one consistent evolutionist told me. She said survival of the fittest was right. “There is no reason to keep retarded or physically misdeveloped children alive”, she intoned. That is a viewpoint fully consistent with a purely material universe. Since the Jews could be slaughtered by Hitler, who could say that he was wrong to do it? In an exploding universe of power, the only thing that matters is power, nakedly expressed in survival of the fittest. Notice here the connection to the issue of ethics.

How does the two-ist look at power? This varies considerably according to the particular two-ist philosophy. If you are a Vaishnava the source of power is an ecstatic love relationship with Krishna. He is the “other” and you unite with him in love. Sound familiar? For Jews and Muslims the way to power is through the keeping of the law. What you can know about God is his law and fulfilling his obligations ties God and man together. Many secularists will say something about trying their best, leading a good life and caring for others. All of these reflect a relational dualistic viewpoint. For the Christian, who is thoroughly dualistic, faith in the finished work of Jesus and walking in relationship to him is the source of power and purpose. There is even a “person” of power in the Holy Spirit, who indwells the believer.
This is often the point where I will ask people about their dreams and what they hope to accomplish in life. It is my favorite part of these conversations. If people sense you will take them seriously it is amazing the stories they will tell and the hopes and dreams they will express. And, just as often, people will express that they have no dreams and no sense of ultimate purpose. Sometimes this is the point where people will ask me the question, “how do you answer this question”? Often I put that question off and say that I really want to hear their answers first. But with the young woman at the health club I felt it appropriate to say, “I believe the Westminster Catechism when it says that my ultimate purpose in life is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”. She had spent some of her childhood in a Presbyterian Church so that answer rang a bell. Faiths usually have pretty clear, succinct answers to these questions.

This brings us to the question of destiny. What is your destiny? If you are an evolutionist your destiny is, hopefully, to pass on your genes and disintegrate. One-ism sees the ultimate goal is to melt back into the cosmic one-ness. Perhaps there is a cycle of birth and rebirth. The individual dead end of evolution has tended to make Hindu conceptions more popular of late. So one will often meet people who believe they will reincarnate. This is ironic since rebirth in Hinduism is the great curse that all Hindus want to escape from. Here we see a pattern of worldview change which is very typical. People fuse together ideas that are often contradictory because it meets a certain need. Here the Judeo-Christian conception of creation as “good” is fused with Hindu ideas of reincarnation even though these ideas come from a system that sees the world as “bad” or “illusory”. The need that feeds this syncretism is the unsatisfying nature of evolutionary thought. But in either case the ultimate goal is non-being at least in an individual sense.

Two-ists see destiny in the light of relationship. They will be with God or with the gods. Perhaps they will become gods themselves. The self is thus seen as retaining individuality and consciousness while enjoying relationship with the other. As one Hindu philosopher once put it, “I love the taste of sugar, I have no desire to become sugar”\(^2\). In other words, the pleasure lies in the difference. I can enjoy the other because I am other than the other. Or as the French put it, “Viva la differens!”

A word needs to be said about Buddhism at this point. The ultimate goal in Buddhism is to realize that the goal of one-ness is void (Sunya) or “empty”. The Buddha came to a very interesting insight. Absolute one-ness is indistinguishable from non-being. Remember Descartes famous truth “cogito ergo sum” meaning “I think therefore I am”. The Buddhist would reverse this by saying, “I think I am, therefore I am deluded”. The ultimate goal is the total extinguishing of any sense of “being”. Even one-ness is not. So we have a third possibility, zero-ism. Nothing is at all. Origin in Buddhism is the result of “Avidhya” (ignorance) and power comes through knowing the truth that there is no substantial self at all.

Most people will not be able to express themselves in these kinds of sophisticated terms. You will discover that their ideas and beliefs are mixed up and often quite contradictory. They don’t often think about these things, but when you ask good questions, most people are interested to try to express what they think. Don’t rush things for them. Don’t always have a good answer. When they are going down

\(^2\) A statement attributed to the early Hindu devotional philosopher, Ramanuja, (1017 – 1137 C.E.).
an interesting road, ask them more questions. If you really listen to what they think, you are unusual. In our frenetic age people don’t listen to people very much. This might be the start of a nice friendship.

Projects and Questions:

1. This week ask the second question concerning power/purpose of your five friends. You can even do it as a group if you like.
2. Look for ways to show hospitality to your friends.
3. Pray for each of your friends at least once a week.
4. Reflect on what the Bible says about power and purpose in life. Look up 1-2 Bible verses on the subject and write them down.
5. Write down briefly what your friends said in this second conversation.
Chapter 3: How do I Know What is True?

This is the question that throws everybody. Most of the time you’ll get a blank stare. People just don’t ask this question very much. I’m not going to go into the quagmire of the question how we can know anything at all. That is too complicated for me. But most people live in a world where there is a category “true” and a category “false”. How do they know, when they receive new information, whether it is in one category or the other? Now post-modernism does give us a way out of the problem. We simply affirm that it is neither. We say that it all depends on your perspective. Yet even the most die-hard relativist has to see somethings as either black or white. It isn’t all grey, even if that category has expanded immensely in the last 50 years. If someone says that it all depends on your perspective and that what is true for you may not be true for them, ask them “what if I claim the earth is flat?” They will have to affirm that somethings are verifiably true or false. So the problem remains, “how do you know which is which?”

The material we will cover in this section is derived from the upper left hand quadrant in our chart we looked at in chapter 2. Here is the chart expanded to include various ways that people determine truth:
So how do people determine if something is true or not? The most common answer you will hear from average people on the street in the U.S.A is, “I can feel it!” or something like that. “I sense it.” This is not an answer to the question but simply an affirmation that one does have a grid of analysis, but it is not explicit. So this is an area to explore with people. What are the things that you assume about true and false that makes you feel something? Make explicit the foundations of why you feel the way you do! There are four ways that people determine true from untrue.

The first of these are systems of logic. The first area of logic I want to consider is the area of authority. Many people believe in authoritative sources that they trust to tell them both what is true and how to sort truth from lies. For Muslims, the Qur’an is the authoritative source of truth. For Christians the Bible is considered authoritative. People who believe these sources are authoritative are a fairly small portion of our general population in the U.S. Some people think that public opinion is authoritative. What the majority of people say in opinion polls is often used for political arguments.

For many, the findings of science are authoritative. If one can demonstrate that a certain cause leads to a certain effect using scientific method, then those findings are authoritative. For some certain paradigms are authoritative. The paradigm of a cause, like “Occupy Wall Street” or “Gay Rights” can consume a person’s life. These are paradigms of oppression and liberation and can be very authoritative in certain people’s lives. So what does your friend think is authoritative? What is he or she willing to give their life to?

A second area that controls how people determine truth is more mundane. I call it “sorting systems”. Everyone sorts reality and there are just two categories; important and unimportant. You illustrate a sorting system every time you sort your mail. What goes into the waste paper basket and what do you keep? News organizations sort the news. Some items they consider unimportant and these never make
the headlines. This is the source of bias in the news. I like to say that important bias does not lie in how you tell a news story. Important bias lies in the news story that you do not tell. How do you determine what is worthy of your attention and what is not?

All cultures set up systems for sorting reality and these impact all four areas that I spoke of earlier as “quadrants”. How do you sort your social structures? Do you prioritize extended families or the nuclear family? How do you sort social priority, does productivity come first, or relationship? How do you sort the idea of “being”. Do you sort for naturalism or supernaturalism? In other words do you ignore the world of spirits or do you prioritize that world? Most Americans will say that they prioritize family over things and relationship over productivity. But that often seems to be theory rather than practice. It is fascinating to hear people try to enunciate what their priorities are.

A third area is more complicated, I call it types of argumentation. What kind of arguments do you prioritize? There are several systems of logical argument and everyone uses them all at least sometimes. But cultures have a tendency to prioritize some types of logic over others. Western thinking since the time of the Greeks has tended to prioritize linear logic. This was the kind of logic that tended to reduce cause and effect to one-to-one relationships for the purpose of analysis. There was a strong emphasis on simplifying the question to its primary issue. This was very effective in mathematics, in Newtonian physics and medicine. “Why did the car smash into the wall?” is a question amenable to linear logic.

The world, however, is very complicated, particularly in the realm of human relationships. It is very hard to apply linear logic to human relational problems. And so other areas of logic exist in the West as well as in the rest of the world, which we can call analogical or complex logic. We sometimes speak of “fuzzy” logic, not because it is unclear, but because its sets or factors are not simplified and clearly bounded, but are analyzed in the context of all their potential effects and interactions. “Why did this couple get divorced?” is not a question easily answered by linear logic. So what kind of logic does your friend use to determine if something is true or not? It is likely they use different logic in different contexts.

The final area in determining truth is simply “persuasion”. What do people find persuasive? I went to Bangladesh a typical linear logic three point sermon type of missionary. I came back a story teller. Why? Bangladeshis were not impressed with highly logical theological arguments on subjects such as the nature of the trinity or the historical veracity of the resurrection of Christ. I had books on my shelves full of these kinds of discussions and arguments and they were singularly useless for missionary work in Bangladesh. This is not to say they didn’t have a place at a later time. Bangladeshis do use linear logic. But for farmers it was irrelevant. So what do you think is persuasive?

How people determine what is true is a very complicated area. Yet in so many ways we found our lives on what we think is true. Truth is something Jesus spoke regularly about. He set priorities for his life and called his disciples to certain priorities. He persuaded people using parables and analogical reasoning. He had authorities that he stood upon and which he called his disciples to build upon. He
even made the audacious statement that He was the truth. Clearly we must understand our people’s view of truth if we are going to persuade them of the truth of Jesus.

Questions and Projects

1. Did anyone ever try to convince you of the truth of Jesus before you were a believer? Did this help or hinder you? What assumptions did they make about truth that you did not agree with?
2. Ask your five friends questions about truth. Take all the time you need.
3. Write down a brief summary of each friend’s view of truth.
4. Pray for each of your 5 friends at least once a week.
Chapter 4: How do I Know Right from Wrong?

The area of rules about right and wrong is sometimes referred to as “Axiology” and I include here a brief expansion of the chart from chapter 1 focusing on the axiological quadrant of worldview. Again the inner core concerns assumptions of the culture and the outer ring refers to surface structures we can see in the culture.

In our multi-cultural world, ethics is becoming an increasingly complicated issue. There are two trends going on simultaneously. One trend is calling for “universal human rights”. This is a trend that sees ethics as having universal application. The playing field should be level and the same rules apply to everyone. The other trend is toward moral relativism. Everything depends on your context. Each culture is autonomous and is allowed to have its own set of rules that are appropriate to their background and worldview.
These two viewpoints grapple today across the world. Some years ago I had a professor for dinner in my house. Towards the end of the meal the professor made the following statement, “I have come to such a place of tolerance in my life that I can accept that it is fully culturally valid and acceptable for Hindus to burn their widows alive on their husbands’ funeral pyres”. The assumption that underlies this, of course, is the idea that all cultures live in discreet locations separate from all other cultures. They are autonomous and can do what seems right to them in their own context. Today we live in a world of diaspora where all cultures on earth are migrating and interacting as never before. I wonder how that professor would feel if it was his daughter, married to an Indian fellow down the street, who was about to be thrown on the man’s funeral pyre?

When you ask people how they know right from wrong, a significant percentage will answer in the same way that they answered concerning telling the difference between true and untrue. They will express something about intuition or feelings. They will often say, “I can sense it” in much the same way they “sense it” when they are being lied to. This is not an answer to the question. What is the foundation of that “sense”? What underlying assumptions control how they feel? As people reflect on this they may talk about the influence of their parents or of principles they have learned like “tolerance” or “equality”. There are some who will speak of religious values and ethics, this would be particularly true of Muslims and evangelical Christians.

It is always interesting to explore people’s views on universal human rights. The idea is very popular but collides directly with moral relativism. So what is universal and what is relative? People get pretty quickly confused and uncertain when confronted with these contradictory ideas. In many ways al-Qaeda has strengthened the argument of the universalists by reintroducing the terminology of moral evil into western dialogue. On the social movement level the average person may feel more comfortable with moral absolutes even though the courts continue to move in the direction of relativism (The establishment of Islamic law courts in Great Britain for instance). Overall, the advantage in these “culture wars” lies with those who can articulate a moral principle and its application. Equal rights for women and gays would be an example. “Freedom” in the area of speech and religion would be another. “Democracy” as a universal political system is a third ideal.

This raises one other thorny issue in ethics. How do we distinguish between cultural relativism and moral relativism? There is a very obvious difference. Cultural relativism can be combined with ethical universalism, whereas moral relativism cannot. It is obvious that the same moral principle can be expressed in very different ways in different cultures. In fact, the difference in expression will be essential to maintaining the universal meaning. The most obvious way that this is seen is in the use of language. Universal human rights have to be translated into Swahili, Arabic and Hindi (and another 5000 or so languages) in order for their meaning to be properly understood in all local cultures. Moral relativism would simply say that there is nothing universal to be translated into any languages. There are only local morals and ethics. There is nothing universal to be imposed from above or translated into any local thought patterns or speech forms. Moral relativism is, of course, culturally relativistic. But you can be a cultural relativist without being a moral relativist.
So the question remains. Are there moral universals? And if so, how are they determined? This is a wonderful topic to explore with your friend(s) at length! I am also impressed with how simply Jesus answers this thorny question. He simply says, “love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength” and “love your neighbor as yourself”. I remember sharing this with the lady at the health club when she asked what my moral system had at its core. It is amazing what simple yet profound answers faith gives to these issues which fever the brow of those seeking to re-invent the wheel.

Questions and Projects

1. Reflect on your own views of right and wrong. To what degree do you actually live according to your own system of ethics? If this troubles you, be comforted. Nobody does! I’m not making excuses, just stating facts. If you can be honest about this with yourself you will be much more attractive to your friends.

2. Reflect on Mt. 7:1-5, Luke 6:37 and John 12:47 as attitudes that should profoundly affect your way of dealing with non-Christians and especially Muslims.

3. After you have had conversations with your five friends, write down a brief summary of what each said on this subject.

4. Pray for each of your five friends this week.
Chapter 5: What Is the Nature of Humankind’s Problem?

I was seated on a bench at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, with an older gentleman who was drinking a beer. We had been talking about the first 5 of my seven questions. He offered me a beer and I respectfully declined. I spoke of the problem I had with drugs as a young man and noted that I had a bit of an “addictive personality” so it was best for me to stay away from alcohol. That led into the question of humankind’s problem. When I asked him he sipped his beer and thought for a moment. “Selfishness” he said. I couldn’t have agreed with him more. My problem with drugs was partly a result of a powerfully selfish attitude that put my own feelings at the center of the universe. There was little genuine interest in other people’s feelings or needs.

It is astonishing how universally people accept the idea that humankind has a problem. They all have stories to tell. This fellow told the story of a successful restaurant that he started and which was then stolen out from under his feet. I have worked in prison ministries for 6 years and there are plenty of tragic stories to tell there. Like the baby-faced 22 year old in for 20 years on aggravated manslaughter. He had already served 5 years. He never knew his dad. He understood that he was doing hard time somewhere. Mom was a crack head. He began having sex with the gang’s girls at age 12, carried his first pistol at 13. At 17 in a drug deal gone bad shootout his life on the outside came to an end. The kid is brilliant. He passed all his college level courses including mine with straight A’s. He writes music that could put him on the charts. He should have been walking out of college to a successful career. Yes, he made choices. But this kid had the deck stacked against him from the get-go.

So what is the nature of humankind’s problem. I don’t need to say much about sin in these conversations. Your friend will supply you with all the examples you could ever want. All you need to do is listen and ask them to elaborate. People in western culture today and, indeed, across the world, are cynical, discouraged and burned out. I think it is the internet and other media that makes us feel this way. To show you how much has changed let me tell you a story about a strange little book I read years ago called “The Vision”. It was a book about the end of the world. It was published by a charismatic pastor named David Wilkerson, better known for the book “The Cross and the Switchblade”.

In Wilkerson’s book he envisioned a time in the future when all kinds of horrible things would take place. One of his prophecies concerned the making of “snuff” films where actual murders would be
filmed and then secretly distributed. I remember thinking at the time that this was madness. No one would dare do that and surely, if they did, they would be caught and prosecuted. Today, on the internet, you can watch thousands of video clips showing people being brutally murdered. If you’d like a good case of post-traumatic stress, I can give it to you in five minutes on the internet. You can watch people brutally having their heads hacked off to peals of “allahu akbar!” You can watch groups of people being lined up against a wall and machine gunned into a ditch and then each one is methodically shot through the head for good measure; all on video and published for the whole world to see. It is not hard to find the brutality and sin of man.

I asked a young Ukrainian woman stranded at the Munich airport what she thought the major problem of man was. “Selfishness”, she hissed with evident revulsion. “What is the solution” I asked. Just as vehemently she responded, “There is no solution because people can’t change”. “That is not true”, I gently replied, “take a look at me”. “Would you believe that this college professor was once a drug addict deeply in trouble with the police and going nowhere in life?” I went on to share the same testimony that I shared at the start of this book. Yes, I was disagreeing with her. But what I really wanted to do was to interject a message of hope into her narrative of despair. I find that asking good questions opens doors like this all the time. So talk to your friends about humankind’s problems. Listen deeply, and non-judgmentally. Share from your own failures. You may very well find a wonderful opportunity to share your testimony to Jesus in a very appropriate way.

Questions and Projects

1. Talk with your five friends about the problems of humanity. Find ways to bring this to a personal rather than theoretical level.
2. If it becomes appropriate to share your testimony, do so. Remember that you wrote out your testimony after the introduction to this book. Look at it again.
3. Write down briefly what your friends said.
4. Pray for each of your five friends this week
Chapter 6: What is the Solution to Humankind’s Problem?

This is the final question in our series. It is a wide-open question for which there are innumerable answers. This is where you can really get a sense of people’s bearing in life. Many are deeply discouraged. The fact is, you don’t really know what your friend has been going through. One person that met Christ with me in recent years was watching the marriage of her parents disintegrate while we were having conversations. I had no idea what deeply emotional issues she was reflecting on when I asked what she thought the solution to life’s problems was. But God knew and was drawing her to himself.

Sometimes God intervenes directly to show a person the way. I was leading a small Bible study in a little town in Bangladesh some years back when a middle aged man suddenly came into my room. He sat down on the floor with me, looked me square in the eye and asked, “What does Matthew 1:21 say?” This is not the sort of question that I hear every day from a Muslim so I asked him “Why do you want to know?” He looked astonished and replied, “Because Jesus told me to ask you!” Now I was astonished and I asked him to tell me his story.

The previous night had been the night of “shobe bhorat” or the “night of power”. It was the night during the month of Ramadan when Muslims believe that the first chapter of the Qur’an was sent down to Prophet Muhammad. As such that night is an auspicious night. Prayers on that night are worth prayers on 10,000 other nights in terms of earning brownie points with God. So Seyyid decided to stay up and pray all night in order to earn God’s favor for the coming year.

In the middle of the night he fell asleep and had a dream. In his dream, first his father came to him. Now his father had been dead for 6 years, so this was an extremely important sign and Seyyid fell to his knees in his dream. He asked his father the most important question he could think of. “Father, father” he said, “tell me the way of salvation, how can I know if God will accept my deeds?” The father sadly shook his head and said, “I don’t know, but talk to the one who comes after me”. Then the father vanished. “Deeds” are the only way of salvation in Islam, the only solution to the problem.

Shortly another man appeared in his dream. Now this man died before Seyyid was born, but he recognized him immediately from pictures he had seen. It was his grandfather. Now his grandfather was remembered as the most religious man in the village’s history because he was the first one to go on
pilgrimage to Mecca. As a hajji he was privileged to dye his beard red with henna and was thus very recognizable from his beard in pictures. Once again Seyyid fell to his knees and asked his most important question; “Grandfather, grandfather, tell me the way of salvation, how can I know if God will accept my deeds?” The grandfather sadly shook his head and said, I don’t know, but talk with the one who comes after me. Then he vanished. So who would come next, who was more righteous than grandfather who could answer such a question? Is there another way than “deeds”?

Finally, another man appeared in his dream. I don’t know how my Muslim friends recognize this man when they see him but they always do. It was Hazrat Isa Masih (The Lord Jesus Christ). Once again Seyyid fell to his knees and asked Jesus his question. “Jesus, Jesus, tell me the way of salvation, how can I know if God will accept my deeds?” Jesus said to him, “I will show you, but first you must go to the missionary in Kaliakor and ask him what Matthew 1:21 says.” Now Seyyid had never seen a Bible. He had no idea what “Matthew” referred to or what “1:21” might mean. But now he insisted that I tell him what this all meant. I opened the Bible to the Matthew 1 where the angel is talking with Joseph about the child that is to be born to him. At verse 21 the angel says, “You shall call his name Jesus for he will save his people from their sins.” This was exactly the answer to his question. One cannot earn salvation by good deeds. It only comes through the grace of God. So starting from that passage I shared the message of Jesus with Seyyid and he became a follower of Jesus.

I shared this story with a secularist on an airplane this past spring on my way to Atlanta. He had shared earlier that he did not believe in anything other than the physical world. So I asked him, “How do you explain this?” He said, “I think you must be a Christian.” I found it very affirming that my attitude had been open enough that he did not know where I was coming from initially. He then went on, in contrast to all he had previously said, to talk about experiences with ESP and other supernatural things. I sensed that a hope had emerged in his heart that maybe there was a supernatural world after all. So I shared briefly the message of Jesus and he was the one who said to me, “this is the most significant conversation that I have ever had on a plane.” People are looking for solutions and I hope someone else meets up with this fellow and lovingly shares more of Jesus with him. You never know who talked to this person before you, it might have been an angel in a dream.

Questions and Projects:

1. Ask your five friends what they think the solution to humankind’s problems is.
2. If they do not ask you what your solution is, you might gently ask, “would you like to know how I answer this question?” I did that with a young Chinese lady named Spring a couple of weeks ago on a flight to Ghouangzhou, China. She said “yes” and was delighted to hear the message of Jesus. She asked to stay in touch and to receive a Bible from me. We are in touch via internet and she has begun a discussion group with her friends on the seven questions. Step out in faith and see where God leads you.
Chapter 7: How do Different Worldviews answer the questions of origin, power and destiny?

The remainder of this book will provide you with some typical examples of how different worldviews answer the seven essential questions of life. I will also provide some discussion points that I have found helpful in dealing with different religions. It is also often true that people will self-identify as followers of a particular religion yet know almost nothing about that religion. The answers that I provide from that religion may not agree with what they say. Remember that all worldviews are flexible and subject to change. In a person’s wandering through life they may even be convinced that something is in their religion which their religion flatly denies. I ran into this all the time in my dealings with Sufi mystical Muslims. Consider the following poem:

Ai Muhammad kame walla
Come Muhammad granter of all desires
Ai he Allah amar buke ai!
Come, oh God, come into my chest

The Sufi group that I learned that song from always used it as a dedication song which introduced their highest sacrament, ... toking up on the hash pipe! For an orthodox Muslim the song is unmitigated blasphemy. Muhammad is being associated with God who then enters into their bodies in the form of hashish smoke. Yet each of the participants would affirm themselves as good Muslims. Expect some surprises as you talk to people.

It is also true that very religious people have a much easier time answering these questions. Really these questions are what religion is about. Religion really is a synonym for “worldview”. That can make religious people a bit boring, since their responses, depending on the religion, are highly predictable. But that actually facilitates talking about Jesus. Once you have learned to respond to their typical responses, discussions can become very interesting indeed.

I will also keep to a pattern in the remainder of the book. I will use the pattern of “zero-ism”, “one-ism” and “two-ism” as I walk through the worldviews, organizing them according to their core philosophical viewpoint. That means we will always begin with Buddhism at the start of each chapter.

Origins, in Buddhism, are founded on “ignorance” (avidhya). That is to say, the material universe is a mass of unreal vibrations. The Buddha’s conception of what is real was based on the idea that things that change are not real. They are the product of ignorance and think they are when they are not, for
they continually change. What is real is that which is unchanging. But then in his meditation the Buddha realized that everything changes all the time. He saw even the soul as a constantly changing phenomenon. Further the supposed source of the universe, if truly undifferentiated, was insubstantial and unreal because even it changed in the emergence of the universe. Thus “reality”, that which “does not change”, is void (Sunya). The idea of “being” is ignorance. In fact, it is the source of our problems. We think we are, therefore we suffer. But I’m getting a little ahead of the story.

So ignorance is the source of the universe. We are all a mass of unreal vibrations deluded to think that we are somehow real. Reality is absolutely void. From the standpoint of the universe, nothing can be said about this ultimate reality of “void”. Buddhism thus denies ontology (the study of being). There is no being, there is no human being, there is no ultimate being. There isn’t even “isn’t” because “isn’t” is an ontological statement. It is a “being” statement and “being” statements are unreal. Everything is void, everything is empty. If you think this is hard to grasp, most Buddhists would agree with you. It is a profound little piece of philosophy and I think it is correct to call it “zero-ism”.

Zero-ism creates a problem for the Christian witness. At the core of reality for the Christian is God who declares via His very name, “I am who I am” (Ex. 3:14). From the Buddhist perspective this is an inferior statement. But that is because the universe is the product of unreal material. Everything from rocks and stones to demons and demi-gods is the product of ignorant vibrations. The Christian would say that God is Spirit, not material, not vibrations, not unreal. The spirit creates the material universe with its relentless change yet is not part of it and does not change. Verses on the unchanging nature of God (Mal. 3:6) may be helpful at this point if you are dealing with a knowledgeable monk. There is something that does not change, and that something is Spirit which formed the universe in all of its mutability.

The average Buddhist lay person does not know the creation stories of Buddhism. I was talking with Mr. K, a Japanese Buddhist in Nagoya one night over dinner. He knew nothing of the stories of creation in Buddhism and furthermore asserted that none of the Buddhist monks in his temple knew the stories either. There is a reason for this. It is not particularly important to the Buddhist how we got to where we are. The point is to escape from it. The lay Buddhist may live in the world of spirits, which certainly may “exist” in one sense and need to be placated for success in life. This would be true of most Buddhists in Sri Lanka. A Chinese Buddhist may be an avowed atheist (a worldview that fits Buddhism pretty well) and yet offer sacrifices to ancestors. So explore your Buddhist friends’ view of the spirit world. Then again, if he is an atheist, his materialistic view of the universe may make him a better consumer but it will not satisfy his soul. Chinese Buddhists have been coming to Christ by the millions over the last 30 years. If you have a Chinese Buddhist friend, this is a discussion you want to have.

The one-ist viewpoint on creation runs the gamut from atheism to many different religions. The secular materialist sees the world as the product of a big-bang. The materialist regards the on-going process of creation as evolution. But however much the matter of the universe may change, it is still nothing other than matter. It is subject to the laws of Newtonian and quantum physics. It is the product of chance and happenstance. It has no more ontological meaning than the flow of sludge through a sewer system. This viewpoint finds two philosophies alluring. One is Buddhism. Buddhism may deny matter, but it
does allow the atheist to be “spiritual”. You will find this viewpoint particularly strong in Europe, where the universities are full of discussion groups on Buddhism. If you want to pack a stadium in Europe for a religious meeting, call the Dalai Lama.

This viewpoint really calls for, in the words of C.S. Lewis, “The Abolition of Man”\(^3\). This may be the reason why many intellectuals in Europe really only dabble in Buddhism. Buddhist meditation, like other forms of meditation, may be seen as a means to relax or to relieve stress. “Mindfullness” may help them with issues of concentration, but they generally do not become monks. In that sense they are very similar to Buddhist laity around the world. In their day to day activities they are pure materialists.

The other philosophy that is attractive is existentialism. This is where each individual takes control of their destiny as little gods realizing their human potential. This puts all the onus on the individual to figure everything out and to actualize themselves. Rather than try to reinvent the wheel, those with a sense of their own limitation often apprentice themselves to a movement. This provides a sense of purpose and direction. But many, such as my nuclear physicist friend, simply affirm that they have no purpose or direction. These are people you want to talk with.

It would be worthwhile to briefly mention post-modernism at this point. The post-modernist is at war with the idea of universal explanations. They call these “meta-narratives”. That is to say, post-modernists deny the validity of any universal explanation of human origins that should apply to everyone. To the post-modernist, meta-narratives are the source of oppression in the world as groups inevitably try to force their viewpoint on others. They would be open to rejecting even evolution if it is aligned with a totalizing meta-narrative such as Communism or Fascism. Of course they would also reject the meta-narrative of biblical creationism. Post modernists swim in the sea of constant cultural change as the natural milieu of life. Whatever feels right for you is right for you and whatever feels right for me is right for me. Tolerance is the general byword of this movement, as is moral and cultural relativism. Ultimately this viewpoint tends to set the individual at the center of the universe. In that sense they can be anything from zero-ist to two-ist. Discussion is the only way to figure out where they may be at. This attitude comports well with individualism. Yet the post-modern generation is desperately looking for a way to establish a sense of community where mentoring is available\(^4\).

Let’s turn to some religious forms of one-ism. There are many varieties, so I do not pretend to cover all the bases here. Non-dualist (advaitya) Hinduism and many forms of spirit worship (animism) fall into this category. In many ways Hinduism is like a philosophized animism. It is dangerous to use the term “Hinduism” because it is a misnomer. There is almost nothing that all “Hindus” believe collectively. Anything you could name, the Vedas as scripture, reincarnation, worship of cows, etc... is denied by significant groups of Hindus. This also applies to creation stories. Some are dualistic (dvaitya) and some are non-dualist (advaitya). Some reflect images of war in the emergence of the universe, others reflect a sexual conjunction. Some reflect a creator God and others, such as the Ajivikas (lit. “non-soul”)\(^5\), regard the universe as pure matter. You might call them the atheistic skeptics of Hinduism. But generally

\(^5\) The philosophical group itself has died out but its influence remains.
Hindus and animists can be sub-divided into non-dualist (one-ist) and dualist (two-ist) in regard to the emergence of the universe.

Perhaps the best known Hindu story of origins is the story of the cosmic egg. Somehow the universe was an original unity in the form of an ovum, one and undifferentiated. This may have evolved from an earlier, more explicitly sexual image. Now this image can also be interpreted dualistically as a product of union between two primeval gods. However in non-dualist philosophy there was this original unity which suddenly burst forth into all the diversity of the material universe. The means for this event are varied. This oneness bursting forth is sometimes associated with a primeval cosmic sound, an original mantra which generated the universe. All of this emergent stuff is illusion (maya). Behind all the diversity is ultimate oneness. So the task is to return to that primeval state of oneness.

Yoga and the Tantric systems within “Hinduism” follow this line of thought. The human body becomes the microcosm of this cosmic reality. Whatever is in the universe is reflected in you. Pantheism is another way of naming this viewpoint. God is in everything and everything is God. The teacher or “guru” is also God. The universe is thought of as a false duality or polarity which, if brought into union gives release from the illusion of the material world. So, in kundalini yoga there is a female force at the base of the spine which must be subtly brought into union with the male side of the polarity in the Saharasrara lotus at the top of your skull. When they are unified you devolve back to the primeval ovum and become “immortal”. Illusory diversity is eradicated and you are absorbed into the absolute oneness that is the reality of the universe. Such is the means of escape from the curse of reincarnation.

In animism the distinctions between dualism and non-dualism are not so important. The universe is conceived of as primarily static. There is no goal of return to a unified steady-state. Life is cyclic but not going anywhere in particular. The main issues are to deal with the ancestors and the spirit world. Here the westerner really needs to uproot his/her conditioning. The spirit-world is by definition “not real” to the typical secularized westerner. But if you want to have good conversations with this group, you had better leave those assumptions behind. The chart below represents the animistic view of the universe as a place where the physical and spiritual realms overlap in a causative way. Notice that the western naturalistic secularist denies the reality of the right hand spirit world. It has no influence on the physical world because it does not exist. Even Christians are influenced by this separation which is typical of western enlightenment rationalism. The neglect of this realm often makes the message of the western missionary seem highly theoretical and irrelevant to the daily needs of people in other parts of the world. Yet Jesus is at the center of the overlap between the physical and spiritual worlds. This is where Christianity’s relevance and power is most clearly seen:
The Problem of the Neglected Middle

Physical World
- Laws
- Visible
- Predictable
- “Real”
- Humans
- Animals
- Plants
- Things

Spiritual World
- Transcendent
- Invisible
- Unpredictable
- Not “real”
- God
- Angels
- Demons
- Ancestors

Place of overlap
- Power/truth
- encounter
- relevance

Two-tiered Christianity: Christian
On Sunday, Animist on Mon-Sat.

This chart is clearly two-istic. Most animists that I have conversed with are dualist, even though one-ist trends can be found. For that reason I will look at animists as part of our discussion on dualism.

Let’s turn our attention to the dualists. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are dualistic religions. God is one and He is separate from His creation. There is a permanent duality, not merely a polarity here. God creates the world, ex-nihilo, out of nothing. But there are many subtle differences in their view of this dualism. Judaism sees God as separate from his creation, yet knowable and personally approachable by every believer. Though law is the understanding of the will of God, God himself is knowable in some sense before the law. God talks with Adam in the Garden, He calls Noah to build an ark, he adopts Abraham as a blessing to all nations without giving Abraham even a single law to follow (Gn. 12:1-3). Theophanies, where God is physically visible to his people are not unknown (Ex. 33:18-23). The Old Testament is full of images of intimacy between God and His people. God even presents himself as a woman who writes the names of Israel on her palms (Is. 49:16). So there is a clear separation between God and His creation, yet intimacy of knowing beyond the matters of the law is possible.

There is another significant point in Judaism. Humankind is made in the “image” of God. Humans, in some sense, are both separate from the rest of creation, and indelibly marked with the reflection of God. While this concept is never explained in the Old Testament, it is surely experienced throughout. God’s focus is humankind and His interest is relationship. When he calls David a man who “followed me with all his heart” (I Kg. 14:8), He expresses something of this relational aspect.

Christianity takes relationship and the area of theophany to the point of incarnation. God creates a world separate from Himself and then invades that world in the actual physical person of Jesus Christ. It is a one-time only incarnational concept. The holy of holies is stripped away and every person can know
god intimately as an actual adopted child of God. This kind of familial language is pervasive in the New Testament. This is New Testament Christianity’s significant addition to the intimacy relationship concept of the Old Testament. Humankind in the image of God is reconciled to eternal intimacy with God through the one and only “Son of God”.

Islam moves in quite the opposite direction. The creation story is essentially borrowed from the Jewish apocrypha but the concept of humankind in the image of God is lost⁶. God is absolutely separate from his creation. He does no theophanies (Muhammad does not receive revelation directly from God but rather from his angel) and the concept of incarnation is made the worst possible sin in Islam. Associating anything with God is “Shirk” or idolatry. God is wholly other, unknowable, unexperiencible. As Isma’il Faruki once put it, “The only thing that a Muslim can know about God is his law”⁷. One might say that a Muslim is not in relationship to God, he is in a singular relationship only with the law of God which is “the complete code of life”.

At the opposite end of this spectrum from Islam is dualistic Hinduism. In this grouping of beliefs incarnation is central to the system. We have the 10 Avatars of Vaishnavism, 10 divine saviors which come down to lead humanity to the right pathway. Now the one-ists of Hinduism play this idea back the other way. If there is a spark of the divine in everything, one might say that all of creation is an incarnation. And the one-ist will argue that all these incarnations of God will ultimately merge back to absolute divine unity in the end. Scholars of religion refer to this idea as pantheism.

But the Hindu dualist will argue that there is no fun in becoming sugar, as I pointed out earlier. Thus the polarity imagery between creator and created, is maintained as reality not merely illusion. The Hare Krishnas are typical Hindu dualists. God is separate from them but God can be experienced through adopting a mode of relationship. One can be a child of Krishna or one can relate to Krishna as parent. A very popular mode is to relate to Krishna as lover (sringara), with all the sexual potential which the polarity imagery provides. This relates to empowerment which we will take up later.

The animistic dualist, often see creation as the product of some high God. There may be a dualistic notion of a high God and consort. Sometimes this God is involved with the creation but more often is perceived as distant. What is involved in the creation is the spirit world. Spirits are usually the product of the high or higher gods and are the primary forces at work in the world of humans. Creation is holistic, that is, everything is deeply related to everything else. This is very similar to the Hindu concept of the spark of the divine in all things. The spirit world as well as inanimate power (animatism) may be accessed. One may say that the animist dualist relates primarily to the creation in terms of spirits and how they impact the physical universe. All are part of the same continuum.

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⁶ Dr. Bernie Power notes a single instance in Bukhari’s Hadith which indicates that humankind is made in the image of God. However, the translator of the Hadith interprets this in a way different from the biblical concept of “image” and clearly tries to stay away from a biblical idea of relationship to God. Dr. Bernie Power, Engaging Islamic Traditions, William Carey Library, 2014, p. 81.

This brings us to our second question in this chapter, how is humankind to be successful? How are we to be empowered and realize our purpose in this life?

All “being” as well as power associated with being is false from a Buddhist perspective. It may be useful for gaining advantage in the material world but is no help in matters relating to the “truth”. The Buddhist means of power really depends on the use of the false “self”. In that sense the system is inconsistent with its own assumptions. If the self is unreal, how can it be the means to the “realization” that Buddhism is after? Another way of putting this is: If I do not ultimately exist, why do I have to strive to realize it? Indeed, what is striving, if self is unreal? The Buddhist philosophers had a very complicated system to explain this logical conundrum. I will not go into that here. Suffice it to say that power comes through meditation. Meditation promotes “mindfulness” which enables the Buddhist monk to “perceive” the nature of reality as “void”. It is simply a meditative leap of faith. One cannot think one’s way into this perception. One can only back into it by removing step by step all sense of a real self. Once self is extinguished realization can occur. One enters the stream of a new perception of reality, a non-ontological reality, “nirvana”. On the way there one may experience great power. DeCaroli, in his book on “Haunting the Buddha” points out that Buddhism appealed to animistic peoples because the monks seemingly had extraordinary powers over the spirit world. A monk who had achieved this ultimate realization could return to earth as a “Boddhisatva” endowed with immense power to lead others into this realization. So power and fulfillment were ultimately found in the total extinguishing of the self. But realization of the void endowed one with great power in the material world.

Power for the secular evolutionist is a real problem. The primary principle of power in evolution is survival of the fittest. This is a very brutal method whereby the weak are crushed and eaten, and the strong get to eat, mate and pass on their genes. There can be no sense of rightness or wrongness in this mechanistic system of survival. There is no such thing as feelings, mercy, or compassion except as these may promote mating, birth and the survival of one’s own offspring. Furthermore this source of power is purely instinctive and cannot be changed. This conception of power became the foundation of the secular totalitarianisms of the 20th century. Communism and Fascism were as brutal as they were because they conceived of society and political structures as being in an evolutionary process, the one headed to the classless society and the other to the superhuman race. The process of that evolution was determined by naked power. Whoever had the power to crush and conquer, had the right to power. No wonder that the typical evolutionist today looks for other answers on the subject of power.

One-ist Hinduism has a complicated matrix of answers to the question of power. For some, the mystic syllable that created the universe is the source of power. Chanting that “mantra” particularly as part of a properly performed ritual is essential to empowerment. This ritualism is very similar to animistic conceptions of power. If the ritual is performed correctly there is an automatic result. One of the reasons that the Vedas were preserved over thousands of years of oral tradition without major changes was simply the fact that exact rendition of the ritual chants was essential to their effectiveness. Priests maintained the correct pronunciation of words long after the actual meaning of the words had been lost.

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in the mists of time. Ritualism is just a method. As such, it can be adapted to almost any philosophical system. Ritualism is a power concept in Islam as well as animism.

A second philosophy of power within oneist Hinduism is the idea of empowerment through knowledge. India had systems of philosophy more complicated and sophisticated than the Greeks at that time. Their philosophies could be broadly classified as either one-ist and two-ist just as could the Greeks (Epicureans versus Stoics). The very act of engaging in philosophical discourse was believed to be empowering. The knowledge that one garnered could be the means of deliverance from the curse of reincarnation. Similar notions of the salvific power of knowledge can also be found among the Greeks. As one-ists any concept of ultimate relationship, did not exist in this system of knowledge. This sets apart Hindu one-ist knowledge from biblical knowledge which always involved experience and relationship. Of the remaining 4 systems of empowerment in Hinduism only one will need to be mentioned here, empowerment via devotion. However this method tends to be two-ist, for obvious reasons, and we will consider it in the next section. Since animism has a strong tendency to two-ism we will consider their conception of power under two-ists.

What is the source of power and purpose in Judaism, Christianity and Islam? For a relatively small world religion, Judaism has many different answers. For the Hasid, knowledge of Torah and keeping the laws are a source of empowerment. One Hasidic expression has it that if all Jews worldwide would just keep all the commandments for one day, then Messiah would come. However, large segments of the Jewish community have moved away from Torah and follow broadly “Jewish culture”. In keeping with their biblical heritage they may seek to “heal the earth”. Jews are unusually involved in philanthropic activities and may seek empowerment in collective voluntary organizations. Many Jews are quite secular and their views on empowerment may not differ much from secular evolutionists or post-moderns.

Power for the Christian comes not just from God, but via the actual dwelling of God within the human being. Jesus promises that His disciples will be endued with power “when the Holy Spirit is come upon you” (Acts 1:8). In contrast to Judaism, the law is not seen as a means of empowerment but rather only as a proof of the inability of man to keep it and thereby empower/save himself. Empowerment is also a matter of grace. Although this concept is also found in Judaism, within the Christian faith grace takes on an all encompassing value. Humans are “adopted” into the “family” of God and become “children” of God through his grace shown in Jesus Christ. No baby ever empowers itself to be born but receives birth and new life as a gift of the parents. This concept of grace and gift lies at the core of Jesus’ statement, “you must be born again” (John 3:3). The believer receives the empowering relationship as a gift of grace from God. Empowerment occurs through the believer’s walk of faith in the leading of the Holy Spirit and in right relationship to Christ. There is power in weakness, the cross becomes the means of salvation to all who believe. There is a nuanced kinetology (Law of cause and effect) in Christianity and Judaism. God is all powerful and sovereign yet humans have free will and creation runs by laws somewhat distinct from God’s immediate interaction. Natural disasters can be seen as the handiwork of Satan, rather than God as part of the dualistic struggle for salvation (Job 1:9-12).
In Islam, power is the central characteristic of God. Allah is the only action in the universe. Everything else is passive and merely instrumental. Everything that happens, happens as Allah wills. At the same time, humankind is involved in a test. The test is administered through the power precepts of Allah, His law or “Shariah”. Allah’s laws are the only thing that a Muslim can know about God. Following law is the only means of empowerment by which the Muslim can hope that he/she will be accepted by God.

The story I told earlier of Seyyid Shahadot Hussein and his dream, illustrates this. He believed that by staying up all night and praying he would gain “suab” or brownie points with God. Since it was a special “night of power” he knew that his prayers would be worth prayer on 10,000 other nights. My cook in Bangladesh had a similar idea. He would chant his Qur’an for two hours every night. Now he was illiterate in his mother tongue of Bengali and could only “read” Arabic. He understood nothing of it, being only familiar with the pronunciation of Bengali and could only “read” Arabic. He understood nothing of it, being only familiar with the pronunciation of the letters. When I asked him why he did this, he also said, “suab (brownie points) would be available”. So power and success comes through following the ritual laws of God. In a similar vein, those who do not correctly fulfill the law suffer punishment. I watched a 10 year old boy try to recite his Arabic prayers on a TV show on religion for children. Problem was he kept mispronouncing the Arabic guttural “h’s” in his prayers. After making him repeat his prayers several times, the Muslim religious leader lost patience with him. He shouted “don’t you realize that if you mispronounce your prayer Allah will not hear your prayer and for every prayer not heard you must spend 40,000 years in hell!” This is very similar to animistic ritualism. The source of power is believed to reside in the correct rendition of ritual. Heart attitude may even be unimportant.

Dualistic Hinduism finds empowerment through modes of relationship to God. These modes of relationship find their expression in different forms of worship. Worship in Hinduism is much more of a household event rather than a temple event. Every home will have an altar, sometimes with devotion expressed to many different deities. Different deities have different roles and functions. Some, like Ganesh, are believed to remove obstacles in life. Others, like Sarasvati, are believed to bring success in intellectual and educational pursuits. In Bengal the Manasa goddess cult protected from snakebite. There is a genre of Hindu poetry known as the mangala kavya or “welfare poems”. These deal with how the God’s seek out worshippers. Worship, or “puja” at the root in Sanskrit means “feeding”. God’s who are unfed have been known to beat up unsuspecting worshippers until the worshipper managed to figure out which deity they need to feed. The feeding (worship) process conveys “punya” or a kind of empowering righteousness.

The sophisticated Hindu in the West is not as likely to regard deities as “hungry ghosts”. Their modes of relationship may be highly philosophized into techniques of meditation or forms of more ecstatic worship such as what we see amongst the Hare Krishnas. Sufi Muslims incorporate many of these concepts into their ecstatic worship of God particularly in the subcontinent of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It is pretty easy to see how syncretism promotes various ways to empowerment through a sense of the presence of God. There is a great deal of borrowing between these different systems. Even one-ists can be ecstatic at times though for them the ecstasy is in a final and indissoluble unity.

What is our destiny? For the zero-ist Buddhist this is an absurd question. It implies ontology which is “false” and removal of false “self-hood” could hardly be called a destiny. There is a concept of heaven in Buddhism at a secondary level, in the same way that there are spirits and ancestors to placate in order
to gain success in the world. But the ultimate goal and destiny is final extinguishing of the “self”. This is considered to be a great “bliss”, a joy beyond description and a final release from the grinding wheel of existence. But who can manage the complex process to get there? Well, really you have to be a monk to make it. The laity’s role is to aid the monks in their search for salvation and to gain merit in the process. Perhaps in the next life one will be ready to become a monk and make the leap of faith.

Some schools of Buddhism recognized the extreme difficulty of the Buddhist path and sought ways to simplify the process. Various schools including the Tantric Buddhist schools looked to a sudden realization through physical processes. But these tended to move into even more complex ritualism. One school, the Nichiren school in Japan, actually espoused a kind of message of grace. By simply saying the name of the Amida Buddha one could be translated at death to nirvana. In any case the ultimate destiny is beyond any ontological conception.

Destiny for the one-ist secular evolutionist is pretty simple: Dust. All living creatures, if successful, pass on their genes and turn to dust. There is no life after, there is not spiritual world or on-going relationship. We are atoms, merely, and will return to atoms. As Betrand Russell the famous atheist mathematician put it near the end of his life, “I believe that when I die I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive”\(^9\). As was said earlier, destiny and purpose are closely inter-related. It is very hard to find a sense of purpose in so dreary an ultimate outcome.

It is difficult to talk about destiny in any unified sense when speaking of Judaism. Most Jews are quite secular and many would espouse views like the secular evolutionist. A label does not guarantee a certain kind of response. Only the Orthodox Jews still espouse an on-going hope in the return of Messiah and the establishment of a world-wide Kingdom of God on earth. The Lubavitchers have even espoused the idea of a Messiah who dies and rises from the dead. Jews within the reformed and conservative traditions are much more likely to hope for justice and healing on earth brought about by the society of just and good people. Their views would be very similar to “liberal” denominations within Christianity. It seems that both Jews and Christians who have this view are having considerable difficulty keeping their children within this framework.

Within Christianity the ultimate destiny is heaven, or, with the return of Christ, heaven on earth. This is conceived of as an eternal relationship in the presence of God and without the hinderance of the reality of sin. Of course, within the Churches, there are many viewpoints. Quite a few of the mainline denominations have virtually abandoned this view although it may still exist in their liturgy. Their views are closer to reformed and conservative Judaism. The older churches, Catholic and Orthodox, still hold, through their liturgical traditions, to these concepts of a final rule of Christ, though their congregants may vary considerably in their belief in this, just as would be the case in conservative Protestant Churches.

Christianity also combines this final salvation with a strong belief in a final judgment. People outside of Christ, in orthodox Christian thought, are lost. This motivates the on-going missions emphasis of

Christianity. While this may have faultered in the West, particularly in Europe, the new churches of Africa, Asia and Latin America have definitely picked up this banner. As liberal Christianity in the West gradually dies, it is being replaced by a vibrant and highly evangelical majority world Church. One might even say that Europe is now the “dark continent” which is being re-evangelized by missionaries from Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In Islam judgment is the first point in destiny. There is no assurance of salvation in Islam, and works are the only means. So how much is enough? How does one counterbalance all the evil one has done. That evil is often reckoned in terms of ritual failures. Not praying or not fasting in Bangladesh would land you for horrendously long periods in Hell according to local religious leaders. Muslims, if they are orthodox, live in a palpable fear of hell and the judgment of God. Angels are not cozy creatures but beings held in abject terror. Now Muslims in the West often shy away from discussion of this, partly because they perceive that the vast majority of Westerners do not believe in Hell. It is well worth your while to discuss destiny and the role of fear in the life of your Muslim friend. Interestingly, the only sure way to avoid judgment is to die a martyr in Jihad, holy war.

Destiny for the dualist Hindu is some form of union with the divine in the context of relationship. Devotion to deity is a kind of power that cleanses the soul from its karma and sets one free from the curse of reincarnation. It is impossible to generalize much beyond this. Hinduism, like Buddhism, has a concept of heavens and hells. Deeds in previous lives raise one to a higher or lower spiritual position and a “jiva” or spark of the divine can move along a spectrum from rock to minor deity over many incarnations. The universe itself is cyclic, and in this sense shows its similarity to animism. Even after the summation of the age there is a new breakdown and the cycle repeats itself over the eons. Some absolute final goal of a Kingdom of God that lasts for ever and ever is not part of the system. This view is very similar to the Stoic philosophers of Greece who were cyclic pantheists.

Dualistic animists regard the world in much the same way as Hindus, just with a little less philosophy attached. History is cyclic. There is no ultimate destiny. It is success in this world which is the focus. Relationship to the spirits and to the ancestors is the key to worldly success. When one dies, one may be recycled to the land of the ancestors or perhaps return after a period of rejuvenation to earth. The similarities to various Hindu conceptions abound.

QUESTIONS AND PROJECTS

1. This is the stage at which you should begin to design a message from the Word that is relevant to your five friends and also faithful to the Gospel message. Take a system of evangelism that you have used in the past and look for ways to bridge to this from what you have learned about your friends’ worldviews.

2. Begin with something positive that the Bible affirms in their worldview. Then connect it to something that is missing in their worldview which the Bible addresses, like Paul did with the pagan poets in Acts 17.
3. Then make a Gospel presentation based on the points you designed above and call your friends, one at a time over the next 5 weeks, to give their lives to Jesus Christ.

4. For those who respond, or who are interested to discuss further, begin a weekly Bible study in your home for them.

Chapter 8: Worldviews and Truth

In John 18 Pilate asks a rhetorical question of Jesus. He says, “What is truth?” (John 18:38) There is a world of sarcasm in his statement. He is a consummate politician used to making choices between bad and worse. He slices up grey areas and rarely finds genuine blacks and whites. But his example shows the problem of his denigration of the concept of truth. In the end he executes a man that he knows is innocent of wrong-doing under horrific torture because it is politically expedient to him. Truth is important.

What is the “Truth” and What is Authoritative?

Not surprisingly, most world religions have some very clear ideas about truth. Buddhism, in spite of its denial of being, is very convinced that its view of reality is “The Truth”. Muslims believe that the Qur’an and the behavior of the Prophet is ultimate truth and authoritative. For Christians the Bible is the ultimate source of Truth. So we are going to find some pretty contradictory viewpoints here. Lets begin by looking at what they consider authoritative.

In zeroist Buddhism the four noble truths and the eight-fold path are “The Truth”. The first four truths explain the nature of suffering and its relationship to “self”. The eightfold path explains the truth of how one can escape from the delusion of the self. Don’t go to the Buddha for help with day to day living. Go to the Buddha to understand The Truth. This truth would supercede all other truths of this world and walking in this truth is the ultimate goal of life. A Buddhist takes “refuge” (sarana) in the
“wisdom” (buddha) of these noble truths, in the practices (dharma) they engender and in the community (sanga) they establish. There are authoritative scriptures for Buddhists, but they tend to vary from community to community. Hinayana Buddhists in Sri Lanka tend to revere the “Tripitaka” as the central authoritative text on belief and practices. In Japan the Lotus sutra, a much later document, is seen by many as authoritative. However, for the Buddhist on the street authority may reside in local monks whose opinions are considered authoritative. They are the “real” Buddhists and understand what the lay-person cannot.

For the one-ist believer in big bang and evolution, scientific method is the source of truth. This is related exclusively to the physical properties of the universe since a spiritual world is, a priori, denied. Problems are reduced to one-to-one corresponding relationships and then within that simplified framework theories are developed and proven or disproven by subjecting the theory to test. If the same factors produce the same results under the test, in keeping with what the theory predicts, then the theory is gradually seen to be “True” and becomes part of the scientific understanding of the universe. This method has been very powerful in creating a model of the universe which is logically consistent, highly predictive, and able to solve on-going human physical problems. But humans are more than just moving atoms. Most people would see scientific truth as being helpful to a limited set of issues but certainly not universally applicable in human relationships. One finds a creeping attempt to use scientific method to define even the most intimate aspects of human behavior, such as hormones and pheromones. But most people find the scientization of human emotions like love to be highly robotic and inaccurate in describing the complexity of human interaction. Scientific one-ism does not have a “truth” answer to the meaning and purpose of life. This is a wonderful place for conversation with people of this opinion.

Hindu one-ism has any number of “Truth” sources and authorities. There are tantric scriptures, yoga sutras, upanisadic texts and, of course, the Vedas. The guru, or teacher, is himself God in many schools of thought and is automatically the ultimate authority. When John Lennon of the Beatles wrote his song “Sexy Sadi” about the Maharishi Maheshyogi he was voicing his disgust with the divine pretensions of a man who clearly had other interests in mind. India of late is becoming deeply influenced by western historical and scientific thought. It is part of India’s explosive educational and economic growth on its way to becoming a superpower. Some of these old authorities are being subjected to critical thought as never before and the powerful Hindu political movements can be seen as a reaction against that secularization. Hindu India is going through many of the same upheavals concerning Truth and authoritative sources that Christianity has been going through for the past 200 years. In-depth conversations about authority and issues of consistency between faith matters and matters of science and history can be a very fruitful area for discussion. Hindutva, the Hindu nationalist movement, is actually working on our behalf. Their radicalism is pushing many Hindus away from traditional sources of Hindu authority.

Authority in Judaism, as a twoist philosophy, is fragmented into many different schools. Torah would be the obvious answer but Torah has for most Jews become merely a symbol of their Jewishness and in no way authoritative for their day to day lives. Under the influence of historical-critical ideas the reformed

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and conservative schools of Judaism interpret Torah through modernist and post-modernist viewpoints. The Orthodox continue to celebrate Torah as the actual Word of God fully authoritative for today and in all aspects of life. There is also a marked interest among the orthodox in religious personalities. The Lubavitcher fascination with their deceased leader, Rabbi Schneerson, comes to mind. But the average Jew on the street that you meet may not have a viewpoint on truth and authority much different from a secular or liberal minded non-Jew.

For the Christian, authority is vested in the Bible. Most Christian denominations began with this as their bedrock. In some cases the Bible was augmented with Christian tradition as in the case of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Many of the so called mainline Protestant denominations no longer hold to this authority. As I sit in New Zealand writing this the local bishop of the Anglican Church has announced that the Bible is a book of fairy tales and Jesus did not rise from the dead. This kind of talk along with clergy sex scandals have deeply reduced the level of authority vested in the Christian clergy. You may run into some liberal Christians who hold these opinions. Do not shy away. The Churches that believe these things are all dying, surviving on the endowments provided by previous generations of faithful. As their world crumbles some are hungry for something of real authority; someone who actually believes in and obeys the Bible. Explore this issue of authority even with the self-identified “Christian”.

As with the previous two religions, Islam is a book-authority faith. In fact their authority is literally as much of God as can be incarnate. The Qur’an is the literal eternal word for word dictation of God. It was brought down from heaven gradually by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. As such it is a totally unquestioned and unquestionable document. Most Muslims of whatever sect will usually affirm it as the highest authority in life. Because of this rigid idea of revelation in Islam there is very little of the liberal-conservative spectrum that you find in Judaism and Christianity. There is a tiny minority of Muslims, such as Irshad Manji, who will call for a reform of parts of the Qur’an, but their numbers are very small and found almost exclusively in the West. Of course, it is possible that there are numbers in the Muslim world as well, but they are silent. They have to be silent because denying the Qur’an’s authority openly could get them killed. So in that sense their opinion does not matter. However, in the west, it is possible that you may run into an occasional Muslim who is questioning the teachings of the Qur’an. Generally those people move in one of two possible directions. They become atheists, or they become Christians. Do not shy away from Muslims. This is a very interesting moment in history for Muslims and many are turning to Christ.

A secondary but equally important source of authority in Islam is the traditions of Muhammad. These contain what Muslims often refer to as “the complete code of life” with rules for all aspects of living. Many of these laws are medieval and highly contradictory to both science and modern values. Rank and file Muslims generally do not know the traditions well. If you run into a religious Muslim they will often know many stories from the traditions that have authority for how they should live their lives moment to moment. Generally religious Muslims also follow closely the advice of religious leaders who have great authority in their lives. But, as civil wars break out across the Muslim world and state after Muslim state becomes a failed state; as increasing atrocities of Muslim killing Muslim are publicized, there are those, even among the religious, who are questioning Islam in their hearts as never before. Even
religious Muslims are turning to Jesus Christ in numbers unthinkable even 30 years ago. This is the time to strike up conversations with Muslims!

Two-ist Hinduism and animism are similar in that their systems of authority are highly diffuse and regionalized. Typically a Hindu is a follower of a specific tradition that may have its own set of scriptures, and religious authorities. However, that does not mean a division into various denominations. Typically all of these groups will have a place in a local Hindu temple in the West. There are statues of all the different deities and one will also often find representations of the Buddha and Mahavira of Jainism. As in Chinese folk religion and animism it is a community temple, not a denominational type structure. All the groups and deities have their place. Amongst nominal Hindus and animists authority may be more vested in western scientism or, in some cases, in some powerful local religious personality.

In our discussion of the ideas of truth we noted the importance of systems of logic. Broadly speaking we defined them as of two types; linear logic and analogical logic. All cultures and religions use both. The difference lies in their degree and emphasis. I will be generalizing based on personal experience in these areas and there is plenty of room for critique of my viewpoints.

In zero-ist Buddhism there is a fundamental problem with linear logic. That problem is based on their view of the reality of the material world. For Buddhism the material world is fundamentally unreal and uninteresting. Buddhists had the printing press in China 800 years ahead of Gutenberg. Their inability to leverage that tool for widespread education and advancement in math and science can be partly attributed to their disinterest in the material world and their lack of a strong historical developmental linear logic system. Modern secular Buddhists from China and Japan are no longer afflicted by this disinterest. But what one sees is, as in the case of India, a kind of compartmentalization. The spiritual world and its concerns lives on under analogical reasoning while education, business and research live in a separate linear logic world. That uneasy bifurcation of the mind creates situations where a Chinese Buddhist will deny the existence of God, as science and the Communist party require him to do. Yet he will still sacrifice to ancestors, believe in ghosts and genuinely feel embarrassed with his atheism.

One-ist Hinduism also suffers from this bifurcation of the spiritual and natural world. One could also say that this bifurcation has always existed. Hindu speculative philosophy developed every imaginable system of belief and logic including a highly linear system of categorization that fostered both mathematics, scientific type studies (as much as we can speak of these in the medieval period) and atheism (the Ajivikas). On the other hand, the cyclical nature of the Hindu conception of the universe hindered the development of historical study while the concept of the material world as “illusion” (maya) certainly restrained deeper studies of the material world. In many ways one will still find this bifurcation amongst Hindus of all sects today. The business, mathematics and scientific world lives in a different place in their heads than the world of the spirits and gods.

Jewish two-ism combines a strong sense of linear history and development combined with a confidence in the reality of the material world and an emphasis on the importance of literacy. This is one of the reasons Judaism has produced an inordinate number of Nobel prize laureates in science, math and
medicine. While there are still elements of Jewish mysticism, and a wisdom literature based on analogical reasoning, Jews, perhaps more than any other religious group, are deeply in the thrall of linear logic and atheism.\footnote{An interesting illustration of this is found in an internet posting from 2011 entitled, “Why is atheism so popular among Jewish people, compared to other religions?” http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20120306181420AA7nfj8}

Christian two-ism expresses a gamut much like Judaism. As the emphasis on Linear logical, historical critical method and scientism have gained sway in the western world there has been a massive falling away from the Church and dogmatic faith. Most of the mainline denominations and a significant portion even of the Catholic Church have been reduced to a fragment of their former size and influence. We are now into the third generation that can be called “post-Christian”. But this is true primarily in the West. Africa, Asia and Latin America continue to produce a strong faith based tradition where the Bible remains authoritative and scientific knowledge remains in balance to analogical and faith based systems. One may also say, that post-modernism has put analogical reasoning back on the map in the western world with new paradigms of research based on paradigms of oppression and liberation. These systems of logic reject the hegemony and control of any system, such as scientism. As such they are not a purely negative development from a Christian perspective. So if you are dealing with a person who still self-identifies nominally as a Christian, this issue of logic is an interesting one to explore.

Islam has not produced anything of value in science, math or medicine since the 13th century. It is a religion locked in medieval thought patterns, pre-modern if you will. There are successful Muslim scientists but they are all located outside of the Muslim world. All attempts at introducing modernist thought to Islam, such as historical critical thinking regarding the Qur’an and Hadith (traditions of the Prophet) have been violently rejected. In fact, the situation is getting worse. The Muslim madrassas of today are increasingly involved in exclusively rejectionist Islamic thought often involving rote memorization of texts the students do not even understand. All Logic, whether linear or analogical, is approved on the basis of whether it passes the litmus test of Qur’an and traditions. Thus, Ibn Baz, the grand mufti of Mecca believed that the sun rotates around the earth and published on this topic. This was because, in his opinion, the Qur’an is a terra-centric document\footnote{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abd_al-Aziz_ibn_Abd_Allah_ibn_Baaz, There is significant debate over whether Ibn Baz also affirmed a flat earth viewpoint at one point in time.}. Scholars who have questioned even minor points in the Qur’an or traditions have been driven into exile or murdered.

However, most Muslims in the West are deeply influenced by western educational ideas and may not in any way reflect these medieval attitudes. They may be aware of these struggles within the Muslim world and are deeply troubled by them. Be careful not to criticize Islam or the Prophet, but explore their beliefs about logic. Once your friend has opened up further to you it may be time to ask some difficult questions about historical errors in the Qur’an.

Animism, in its two-ist form, is deeply involved in the spirit world. There is a revival of this in the West in the form of Wicca and other new-age movements. Here Christians need to deal with their own linear logic assumptions. You will recall my earlier discussion on the “realm of the neglect middle”. Animism
believes deeply in the reality of a spirit world that overlaps the physical world in a causative way. The spirits cause things to happen in a way that is not reducible to linear logic; cause and effect. Elements of this viewpoint can be found in all cultures and religions. Japan, though highly secularized, produces numerous films and literature based on the idea of a real spirit world. Along with post-modernism this can be seen as a reaction against scientism’s claim to universality. There is something more to life than mathematical equations. Whoever you talk with, questions about their beliefs in the spirit world can be very helpful in understanding both their ideas about logic and their level of dissatisfaction with the explanations and purposes of life suggested by the modernist, materialist-industrial complex.

One final area should be mentioned but not delved into. The fourth area of truth pertains to persuasion. How do we persuade for the truthfulness of our claims. There are, broadly speaking, two paradigms; proof and emotion. Proof tends to connect to linear logic. Emotion tends to connect to story-telling and analogical reasoning. These do not so easily break down into categories typical of one religion of another. They all have both. And, every individual has both. I am not going to discuss this but I would make this recommendation. If you are a three point sermon person, learn how to be a story-teller.

Projects:

1. Collect your notes from discussions with your friends and write up a brief summary of their culture and viewpoints on the seven questions.
2. Look for new friends and ways to expand your circle of friends to continue to share the Gospel in this way.
3. Look for partners in your church who are willing to pursue a home-based Bible study approach with non-Christian friends.
4. Train them in this system as well.
Chapter 9: Worldview and Ethics

How do we know right from wrong? To what degree are rules universal? What is the nature of human rights? Are they universal, and whose list do we choose? Is this determined by votes or is there a higher authority? The question of ethics is a huge conundrum in the 21st century. It was complicated enough when we lived in isolated little cultures only having to interact with people like ourselves who spoke the same language and followed generally the same customs, say 5000 years ago. When you met another culture, you went to war. But now we live in a world of diaspora. People from every tribe and tongue and people and nation are living in the midst of people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. We speak now of vast grey areas today instead of black and white. We speak of “multiculturalism” and “cultural relativism” and the importance of “tolerance”. Yet this very mixing of the cultures brings ethical issues to the fore as never before. Who would have thought about female genital mutilation 30 years ago in the West? Who would have imagined “honor killings”? How do we balance the needs of the individual with the demands of society? This is perhaps the most confused area in most people’s thinking today and it is rife with double-standards. The very fact that humans are concerned about fairness indicates a deep striving for some kind of universal norms, a level playing field if you will. Examining what the worldviews say about ethics will be the task of this chapter.
I find it interesting, and perhaps a little counter-intuitive, that zero-ist Buddhism has a very high set of ideals for moral behavior. If the universe is unreal, then what is the point of behaving ethically? Yet the Buddhist eightfold path, in its broadest application to laity and monk alike, is really a set of high moral standards. “Do not kill”, “do not commit adultery” etc. are considered part of the cosmic circumstance. If you do wrong, you will decay further into ignorance. Your “karma” or “works” will weigh you down deeper into this world of meaningless unreal vibrations. Let aside the question of how works attach to that which is unreal. The Buddha described this as a process of “grasping” where an unreal self sought to affirm itself and provide itself with pleasures. Moral behavior was the first stage in realizing “the truth” by restraining the grasping of the self.

In one aspect the Buddha rejected the ethical systems of both one-ist and two-ist Hinduism. Both Hindu systems were deeply influenced by a particularism known as the caste system. This particularism sees humans as being at various stages in spiritual development and those at the higher stages have different rules that those at lower stages. This became associated with racism and social status and was used to discriminate against the lower castes in India. The Buddha saw all this as unreal, and therefore the distinctions of caste were equally unreal. Even the distinction of male and female was suspect, but the Buddha, for the sake of social propriety, maintained those distinctions. However, one particularism remained, the distinction between monks and laity. However, the Buddhist will say that any lay person can go over and become a monk.

One-ist and two-ist Hinduism have innumerable ethical systems. In fact, the particularism of the caste system, finds its reflection in the concept of caste duty as a means of purification. Whatever duty your particular class is called to, is the means of enlightenment. If you are a warrior, then fight as a warrior, just do so dispassionately. If you are a farmer, do the caste duty of the farmer. There was even a system of caste duty for robbers, the so called system of “Thugee” which was suppressed by the British. Fairness was not a question in these systems, nor was universality. Each system was adapted to the particular needs of its social group. Moral relativism has been a part of Hindu thinking for at least 3000 years. However, India is in the grip of a deep revolution. The discrimination of the caste system has been legally rejected (although it lives on in social custom). Marriage across caste lines is becoming more common. Relativism remains a strong current in Hindu ethical thinking but it is now augmented by strong movements for equal rights for women and discriminated castes.

Two-ist Judaism finds its ethical foundation in the law. The law becomes a parameter for defining a relationship. Israel receives the 10 commandments at Sinai, half concerning her walk with God and half concerning her walk with other people. There is also a clear familial sense in Judaism that has tended to knit Jews together despite having very different views. God is also knowable and expresses himself in familial terms to the Jewish people. For the modern secular Jew a mixture of modernist and post-modernist viewpoints is typical. We shall return to this when we discuss secularism and its views.

For the two-ist Christian Jesus defines ethics in terms of two basic laws, derived from Judaism. The first is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself. One may add to this a particular emphasis on forgiveness in the sense of taking the consequences of another’s action on oneself. This is the core of the Christian concept of “grace” or
unmerited favor. Grace is ultimately expressed in the cross of Christ as God paying the debt of sin and its consequences Himself. The Jewish temple system of sacrificial atonement has ended but it lives on in the Christian “seder” of the Lord’s supper. One other significant difference should be noted. While the Jewish 10 commandments continues to be deeply affirmed by Christians, the mosaic ritual law has been set aside. There is no “kosher” for Christians unless they are of Jewish background and choose to maintain those rites. Of course nominal and secular Christians are a different category which we will consider later.

Two-ist Islam is a system of laws. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, “The only thing a Muslim can know about God is His law”. In this Islam borrows deeply from Judaism, even maintaining some rituals of the Jewish faith such as laws of kosher and sacrifice. But unlike Judaism, the God of Islam is not familial. You cannot know him, you cannot experience him, you cannot have a relationship with him. Thus the primary science of Islam is law. All Islamic writings are saturated with principles and norms established by legal precedents. The Qur’an, while liturgical, is also considered a book of law. The practices of the Prophet (his Sunnah) become the basis for all manner of legal principles. You might say that Islam is a religion about ethics and what is the correct thing to do in every imaginable circumstance. Muslims will often say that Islam “is a complete code of life”. Unlike Jesus who reduces the law to just two principles, Islam revels in the complexity of proper legal adjudication of all imaginable human circumstances. This is actually Islam’s greatest problem and weakness.

We may define this problem in 3 ways. First, the system is obviously incomplete. It does not account for the rapid change in human circumstance in the 20th century and rigidly clings to arcane medieval practices like female genital mutilation, honor killings, killing of those who leave Islam, chopping off of hands for thieves and stonings of adulterers, execution of homosexuals, denial of women’s rights, mistreatment of non-Muslims, and the list could go on and on. The system cannot adapt and Islamic law has been seen as perfect and complete since the 13th century. It is as if history ended at that point.

A second issue, which is deeply sensitive in the 21st century, is the issue of discrimination. Islam is religious apartheid. It discriminates against people based upon their religious beliefs. Non-Muslim minorities are treated badly in all majority Muslim countries. In many Muslim countries the discrimination extends to Muslims in minority theological communities. Shia are discriminated against in majority Sunni countries (which are most Muslim countries) and Sunni are discriminated against in majority Shi’ite areas though probably not so severely. Unorthodox groups such as Sufis, Ahmadiyyas, Alawis, Alevis, Bahai (who are considered Muslim apostates), Druze and any Muslims who leave Islam are deeply discriminated against, if not killed in some circumstances.

These are not subjects that one can discuss directly with a Muslim. That is the third issue. But I think there is much room for an appeal to conscience at least with regard to the mistreatment of minority Muslims. Why should Ahmadiyyas be discriminated against in Pakistan? Why were they declared by the parliament Of Pakistan to be “non-Muslim”? Isn’t that a sort of modern witch hunt? Is this really what parliaments should be doing? What about the Iranian treatment of the Bahai? Is it really right to

13 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahmadiyya, accessed May 13, 2014. Ahmadiyyas have been declared non-Muslims by virtually all Islamic councils across the earth and suffer persecution in all Muslim countries as a result.
violently suppress and mistreat such a tiny and non-threatening minority? Of course most westerners are not familiar enough with these issues to raise them with any confidence. If you have Muslim friends, it might be worth your while to study at least one suppressed minority group within Islam enough to give an apology for them, particularly if they are a group within your Muslim friend’s country. See what they think? Many Muslims are deeply distressed at the violence going on in the Muslim world and its religious roots. Some are troubled enough to be looking for another way.

Post modern ethics are synonymous with moral relativism. This leads to an institutionalized set of double standards. To explain this I need to return to the story of my professor friend who affirmed the Hindu rite of Sati; burning of a widow on her husband’s funeral pyre. This same professor, later that evening, told the story of his “bigoted catholic father”. Why was his father a bigot? Because when the professor switched majors from accounting (His father’s business and chosen career path for his son) to indology, the father cut him off financially. The professor became livid with anger at this “injustice and bigotry”. I had a different question on my mind. I couldn’t ask it because that would have been the end of the relationship. But the thought that went through my mind was, “Do you mean to tell me that what your father did to you in his culture was somehow worse than burning you alive on a funeral pyre?” In other words, the father was being judged by an entirely different set of standards than people in the Hindu culture. The father did not remove the son’s possibility of choice. He just simply refused to pay for it. What choice would the Hindu widow have?

In fact, Hindu friends that I have shared this story with are outraged with the Professor and accuse him of being a colonialist. Why? Because his idea would put Hindu culture back 150 years to the time before the British banned the practice. Western culture is allowed to change and develop, Hindu culture should go backwards. Such backwardness would allow the western imperialists to dominate India, they opined. It is also clear that the Professor’s reaction was based on what had a direct affect on himself. It was not his mother, or sister or daughter being burned alive. But what his father did had a direct impact on his situation and therefore he was offended. Look carefully at western culture today and you will find these double standards everywhere. One example I use with post moderns is this: Why can we insult Jesus and the Christians any way we want, but you are not allowed to insult Muhammad and the Muslims. Not that I like insulting people. But the main double standard here is pretty obvious. Christians will not kill you for doing this. Thus insulting them should be allowed, because they will not react badly. In other words, Christians should be disrespected for being tolerant. Some Muslims should be respected because they are intolerant.

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14 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Bah%C3%A1%27%C3%ADs, accessed May 13, 2014.
What is the nature of our problem? I put this question two nights ago to two young Vietnamese women who are visiting New Zealand. Their response was fairly typical of what one will hear across a very broad spectrum of humanity. They said that people are selfish and greedy. It was virtually the same thing a Ukrainian women said to me in a Munich airport, and an American woman on an airplane flight to Knoxville. Most people will admit this problem. But where does it come from? What is the source of this selfishness and greed?

In zero-ist Buddhism the answer is the self itself. You think that you are therefore you are deluded. You are beset by “grasping”, the cravings of the false self. If the self can be eradicated, shown to be unreal, then perhaps one can leap by faith across to a different view where grasping is removed and selfishness and greed are exposed for the sham that they are. But that is getting ahead of the story.
One-ist Hinduism has many answers to this question and many answers to its solution. But the basic issue seems to be, like Buddhism, the rise of the self. Unlike Buddhism, however, one-ist philosophy sees the self as having a real component. One might call this the spark of the ultimate. Somehow fragments of the absolute unity have come loose in the emergence of the material world. Evolution and emergence, in this sense, is a negative process. Little bits and pieces of the ultimate unity are floating around deluding themselves that they have some kind of independent existence apart from the “ONE”. As they move about in their delusion they become stained with the results of their actions. The stains of their actions, like some kind of cosmic verdigris, clings to them and sets them into a cycle of birth and rebirth. This process is suffering. It is the curse from which every one-ist Hindu seeks to escape. If you have it bad in this life, it is because your “self” in a previous life has behaved in a deluded way and you must now suffer for it. This is the view typical of Tantric groups and Yoga. Two-ist Hinduism follows pretty much the same system of ideas but conceives that the ultimate reality is truly bifurcated and that the process of escape is not via unity but via relationship. We shall return to this.

Judaism as a strict two-ist philosophy sees the problem of humankind, selfishness and greed in many different ways. The Orthodox Jew would see disobedience to the Torah as broken relationship to God and the primary source of the human predicament. Conservative and Reform Judaism are more likely to look at the problem of broken human relationships, injustice and oppression as expressions of unequal economic circumstance and lack of education. There is also a strong philosophy on healing the earth from the acts of the oppressors. All three would agree that the human predicament goes back to a primeval selfishness while not necessarily accepting the idea of an original “sin”. Many in the Conservative and Reformed viewpoint would not be very different in answering this question from a secular, post-modern viewpoint.

In Islam the major problem is “forgetfulness”. Human beings are forgetful and ungrateful. They only think about God when in deep need and then once their needs are satisfied they forget God once again. One might say that Islam is all about reminding people of God. The call to prayer sounds out 5 times a day, a reminder. Prostration in prayer is a reminder of one’s actual position before God. Fasting, is a reminder that all good things come from God. In this sense Islam does not attribute a direct proclivity to sin. There is no original sin. Humankind is simply weak and easily forgets. The problem is a little deeper than Muslims would like to admit from their own scriptures. If Adam, who was a Prophet of God, was unable to keep just one single command, how are we supposed to keep hundreds? He could not escape the consequences of breaking a single commandment. How will it be for us? Islam would say that we are not born sinners. Only if we sin do we become sinners. But the weakness of man does indicate his proclivity to sin, whatever name you give it. Thus there is a need for very strict laws to reign in the weakness of humankind.

Animism regards the problems of the world in a context of the immediate. The problem of humankind is a lack of power to gain what they want. The world is full of spirits and power sources, but humankind are not generally trained to understand the communication of the spirit world or to access it’s power. At this level, popular Buddhism, Hinduism and, indeed, all world religions converge in the search for power and success. Humans experience sickness. They have economic wants. They are not sure what their next step in life should be. Their crops are in danger. They are unable to have children. They can’t
find a suitable spouse. These are the day to day static problems of life that animism addresses, as we shall see later, in the form of power rituals and power practitioners. Buddhism and Hinduism developed philosophical speculations to explain why these problems arose. In that sense they are a type of philosophized animism. Animism itself, like the Mangala cults of India, did not bother so much with the cause but focused on the solution.

The problem, from the two-ist Christian perspective, is sin. Human beings are in rebellion against God and it is God who is seeking to reconcile them back to relationship with himself. The interplay of the Garden of Eden, is one of relationship, God to human and human to human. Disobedience to God leads to distrust both of God and each other. Relationships break down and require reconciliation, forgiveness and restoration. Selfishness and greed, in a word, are so ingrained that humankind cannot save themselves. They are trapped in a pit of their own making from which they cannot climb out. Hence there is the necessity of God accomplishing their salvation. Many mainline denominations of Christianity have tended to move away from this narrative particularly as they have accepted historical criticism of the Bible and have left behind the functional authority of Scripture. Amongst nominal Christians a post-modern viewpoint is common. Here a distinction from a secular person is hard to find.

In the western world post-modernism and modernism continue to hold sway in different spheres. The former tends to be the accepted paradigm within socio-cultural relationships. The latter holds sway within science and technology. Modernism, and the “enlightenment project”, saw ignorance, lack of education and belief in the supernatural as the primary cause of humankind’s problems. If you are sick, modern medicine offers the solution. If you are economically depressed, get educated and work your way out of the pit. If you have needs that can’t be met, turn to technology as the means to solve the physical problems of life. There is nothing beyond the physical, demonstrable, scientifically verifiable world.

The partial rejection of this paradigm in favor of “post-modernism” came in two parts. First, technology created more problems than it solved, for instance, the atomic bomb. Second, scientific linear logic with its inherent reductionism was poorly adapted to deal with the relational issues that lie at the root of human problems. This paradigm still holds sway in the strictly scientific and technological realms for the simple reason that it is very effective and accurate. But outside those realms, post-modernism has gained considerable influence.

Post-modernism sees the problem of humanity primarily in the realm of oppressive relationships. Specifically, humankind suffers under the oppression of universalist systems. Communism is a universalist system. Christianity is a universalist system. That is to say, these are systems that claim to explain the entire history and purpose of humanity. They want to explain everything and everyone. They are condemned as “totalizing metanarratives” that automatically oppress the minorities under them. A universalist system wants to explain totally the meaning of life and to provide a narrative that explains all aspect of human history and culture. All minority positions face extinction in the face of this or that universal system. “Western Civilization” is a totalizing meta-narrative. Through most of the 18th-20th centuries it held the narrative of progress, education and “civilization” and considered the rest of the world backward, uneducated, and “superstitious”. Post modernism regards these kinds of attitudes
as the primary source of humankind’s problems. They emphasize “multiculturalism” and the idea that every culture is valid in its own context. Hence there are no meta-narratives that control and oppress, only local culturally relevant narratives.

This system has also run into problems. First, “no meta-narratives” is itself a meta-narrative, albeit a negative one. So we haven’t really escaped that problem. It is likely we will find that this secular narrative once in majority position will become equally intolerant of minority positions. You might say that “political correctness” is the oppressive meta-narrative of post-modernism. The second problem emerges from the issue of diaspora. As long as all cultures were separated into discreet, separate, geographical locations each group could maintain their own system of ethics and culture without reference to outsiders. Of course such a situation has hardly existed in human history. And today every major city on earth is a patchwork quilt of hundreds of ethno-linguistic and socio-cultural groups. Whose rules apply in this mixing of civilizations? Where do “universal human rights” stand in this chaos?

Chapter 11: The Solution to Humankind’s Problem

Each of the world’s religions and philosophies, no matter how large or small, contain within their narratives some means of dealing with the problem(s) of the human condition. Zero-ist Buddhism calls humankind to the noble 8-fold path. This path is designed as a kind of two step procedure. The first half of the path relates to all Buddhists, both lay and monk, and calls for moral behavior. The second half is really only for monks. It calls them into the disciplines of the monk lifestyle and culminates in a sophisticated system of meditation. By meditation the false self is deconstructed and a glimpse can be gained of the ultimate state of nirvana where all the grasping of false-self are extinguished. The process is arduous and only a small percentage of the population can engage in it. The process carries within it the inherent contradiction of great effort by a false self to realize the falseness of self. But it must be said that Buddhists have generally had a peaceful impact on society as attested through the work of the Dalai Lama. The influence of the 8-fold path on society has been positive.
One-ist Hinduism has followed diverse pathways depending on the nature of the problem identified. In one broad category the solution to human delusion is ritual. As humans engage in rituals of offering and sacrifice they obtain what they need and preserve the universe. This was the viewpoint of the Brahmins. Sound and ritual are directly connected to the origins of the universe and can be used to maintain the proper course of society. Each major group of Hindus maintains their own set of rituals and duties that maintain society. Ignorance is dealt with in this way and negative behaviors are suppressed. A second category of practices to deal with human delusion relates to meditation and various kinds of Yoga. Here Buddhism and Hinduism are very similar. The task is arduous for a one-ist Hindu, not to negate the self, but to submerge it in the “one”. Some Yogists would refer to this as a “devolution” back to the primeval undifferentiated unity. The ultimate solution, as with the Buddhist, lies in a meditative realization that lies beyond the means of most people.

Two-ist Hinduism provides a third means. It involves relating to God(s) through adopting modes of relationship. While this viewpoint does not eschew meditation and Yoga, it emphasizes primarily the power of emotion and relationship to lift the devotee above the ignorance and even the “ritualism” of other Hindu groupings. There is much tacit critique of other systems within Hinduism, carried out by Hindus who feel their approach is superior. That does not mean that other means are considered untrue, only perhaps a bit less effective. There is an immense amount of borrowing between these various systems. One can meet Hare Krishnas who practice Yoga and Brahmins who regard philosophical speculation as a means to enlightenment rather than ritual. Most Hindus in the West show, however, a bifurcation in their worldview. Many have been deeply influenced by western science and scientism. This has led to a two-tiered worldview in which science and math are the purvey of linear logic and religion is in a different compartment in which the supernatural is affirmed. It is not at all unusual to meet a Hindu PhD in science who maintains an altar for offerings at home.

Animism provides a wide spectrum of solutions to day-to-day problems both outside and within larger religious traditions. These are not necessarily connected to a broad long term goal or solution. The Chinese folk religionist in Taiwan who casts an oracle bone in a temple in order to determine his next step in business, is not necessarily seeking a solution to the world’s problems. His ritual is designed for a specific personal need. Such practices are found in all world religions, including Christianity. Women afflicted with Zar spirits in Sudan go to the Sheikha to dance and drum their spirits into submission. They would still consider themselves good Muslims. Animism’s solutions are local, personal and ritual based. They often involve a category of holy men or women who are able to discern, communicate, possess, manipulate and utilize sources of power to solve human problems. Some of these practices may be connected to some broader concept of salvation. Often these broader patterns are found through syncretism with a larger religion. Sufism in Islam follows that pattern. Or they may deal with day to day problems without any long-term sense of direction or purpose.

For two-ist Judaism, as we alluded in the previous chapter, there are many suggested solutions to humankind’s difficulties. The more liberal wing of the Jewish movement emphasizes healing the earth, justice and education. The orthodox wing of Judaism emphasizes following the Torah and keeping the laws of Moses as the solution for the Jewish nation. It is in this wing that a messianic hope is still nurtured. But this hope is also connected with keeping the law. As one orthodox expression has it, “All
the predestined dates for redemption (the coming of Messiah) have passed and the matter now depends only on the repentance and good deeds\textsuperscript{15}. This orthodox emphasis on the law has had a great impact on the larger cousin of Judaism, Islam.

For the Muslim the law, or Shariah, is the only aspect of God which a Muslim can know. It is the complete code of life which provides answers for how God would expect humans to act in every conceivable circumstance. There is a strong utopian current in orthodox Islam not unlike the aspirations found amongst orthodox Jews. If the law could be fully and perfectly kept than a messianic age of peace and prosperity would ensue. Hence there is a drumbeat in all Muslim societies for the reestablishment of Shariah as the sole law code for the human race. There is no liberal wing of Islam as is found in Judaism and Christianity. There is no internal debate as to the historicity or logic of Qur’an, Sunnah and Hadith. The only real debate going on in the Muslim world today is between orthodox and hyper-orthodox. The solutions offered are increasingly utopian and detached from reality.

Perhaps the greatest issue within the Islamic solution is its conception of God. Although Islam is powerfully two-ist in its beliefs, those beliefs actually raise God to such a height of control and transcendence that one may regard the system as one-ist. God is the only actor. Humans are mere puppets. All actions in the universe, including the actions of Satan, are fully determined by God. In such a system there is no room for relationship, no room for consultation, no room for human complaint or questioning. The only act in the universe is God and everything else is mere instrumentality. That coupled with an exceedingly literalistic philosophy of dictational revelation makes social change and religious adaption profoundly difficult.

Christianity as a two-ist philosophy has broken into thousands of different viewpoints. There are the liturgical traditions of great age within the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. There is the plethora of denominations within Protestantism. There is an overlay of historical critical method and liberalism in all three groups. There is also a charismatic revival touching all three groups. And we have about 2 billion people attached to lesser or greater degrees to the movement.

Nevertheless certain common streams about solving mankind’s problem are easy to see in all branches of Christianity. The primary concept common to all is that restoration and reconciliation of right relationship with God is what Christianity is about. Central to this thesis is the idea that God sent Christ, His only son, to become the reconciler and forgiver of humankind’s problem with sin through His death on the cross and resurrection. Believers become, through baptism, members of a fellowship of redeemed who are to work for reconciliation and right relationship between God and all peoples and between every person to each person. This vision is by God’s grace and work alone and the kingdom of believers cannot be established by human effort though helpful reforms are certainly possible. The final kingdom of God can only be established by the return of Christ, although the liberal wing of Christianity would downplay this idea.

\textsuperscript{15} \url{http://truefreethinker.com/articles/jewish-judaism-jew-never-had-keep-613-commandments}, accessed May 13, 2014, quote cited from the Talmud-Sanhedrin 97b by Rabbi Rabh.
Where does the post-modernist stand on the issue of solutions. As I have mentioned before, one lady of this persuasion said there is no solution, since humans cannot change. The idea of autonomy of cultures and viewpoints, the idea that you do what you want and I will do what I want, easily lends itself to the idea that people are unchangeable. Indeed they should not be changed in any way, for they are autonomous. The idea of multiculturalism, a word which is merely a synonym for “tolerance”, emphasizes that each culture should be free to do whatever it wants as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else. In a world where all cultures are now mixed together, sorting out what does or does not hurt other people is becoming increasingly important and difficult. Then there remains the even more complicated question, when cultures disagree, whose position is to rule? Then there is the absurdity of autonomy. People can’t change but drug addicts should. People can’t change but they should quit smoking. People can’t change but alcoholics should.

Because of the inconsistencies and contradictions post-modern solutions tend to focus on injustices and causes. These are not macro solutions for all of humanity but micro solutions to specific issues. Gay, women’s and animal rights would be in this category as well as all larger circumstances of discrimination. Environmental issues are also a popular cause to champion. Tackling the issue of the homeless, slavery, and sex trafficking could be added to the list. All of these individual problems need to be dealt with holistically. These are not merely issues of economics but of human behavior, ideas, beliefs and values. Yet the very act of focusing on specific issues encourages a kind of compartmentalization. As if each problem is separate and autonomous from every other problem. The lack of a worldview explanation and method for dealing with these issues means that piece-meal efforts devoid of a holistic approach are likely to be ineffective. Hegemonistic Communism has fallen. Now is the age for totalitarian Islam to coercively suggest new “holistic” solutions. This religious apartheid and utopia will fail. Perhaps the next stage will be a multi-culturalism that still promotes a universal vision. This would be a multi-culturalism that still contains at its core a universal set of ideas, beliefs and values that can be applied uniquely in every culture. This is what Christianity is becoming.
Chapter 12: The Biblical Worldview

Dr. William Larkin and I worked out a brief review of the nature of the Biblical worldview as part of our class “Understanding Cultures and Worldviews” which we taught together for 9 years. That brief summary with a few updates is reproduced here. The reader will find in this text some references to Sire’s book “The Universe Next Door”. This text is highly recommended on the topic of worldview and we have kept those citations in place to compare our own rendition of worldview with Sire’s.

I. Ontology: True Accounts of Origin, Power, and Destiny/Purpose

Creation: God, a personal (triune), all powerful, all-knowing, loving and holy spiritual being, created the cosmos out of nothing. He did it directly, by his command, in discrete supernatural acts, which brought into existence all things, instantaneously and perfectly, according to their kind. He created the first human male, Adam, immediately, from the dust of the ground and through his in-breathing constituted the human as a living soul, in the image of God. He created Eve, the first human female, directly from Adam (Genesis 1–2; Sire, Universe Next Door [4th ed.], pp. 29-31). Humans made in the image of God are called into intimate eternal relationship with the triune God who by his very nature is relational.

Power: God, the sovereign creator-sustainer God, is by his sovereign decree, the primary cause of all that exists in the spiritual and physical world. In his works of providence, he preserves and governs all his creatures and all their actions. His cosmos operates with a uniformity of cause and effect which involves secondary causes: laws of nature, free will, contingency. Kinetology or causation, then, has two dimensions—primary cause: God, and secondary causes: physical laws, free will, and contingency by which the sovereign will of the primary cause is accomplished. And this causation occurs in a universe in which entities in the spiritual world and in the physical world
interact with each other under God’s sovereign will and he, himself, can intervene directly in the physical world. The entire Bible assumes and models this kinetology as it unfolds the drama of redemptive history. God, after humankind’s fall into sin, has embarked on a rescue mission to redeem lost human individuals and re-establish their relationship with him, restoring them to goodness (Sire, pp. 29-31, 37-40). The principle of evil (Satan) exists and can influence physical events under the sovereign permissive will of God.

Destiny: The triune God, Lord of humankind, will end human history with the return of his Son to judge, after the general resurrection, all humans who have ever lived, as well as the fallen angels. Those, who are trusting in Christ alone for salvation, will greet him as redeemer and enter into the eternal joy of a new heavens and new earth. Those, who have not turned from their sinful rebellion, will know eternal condemnation away from the presence of God (the Book of Revelation, particularly chaps. 19–22).

Purpose: Humankind’s purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

A. Concept of God: God is an infinite and personal (triune), transcendent and immanent, sovereign and good (holy and loving) being who is spirit (Sire, pp. 26-29).

1. Symbols & Aesthetics: The Scriptures, though they foreswear idolatry (Exod. 20:4-6), do see a role for symbols for teaching and expressing the faith. For example, the whole OT sacrificial system and worship pattern gave a picture of the vicarious atonement way of becoming right before God, fulfilled in Jesus’ death on the cross (cf. Exodus and Leviticus with Hebrews 8–10).

God is the source of all that is beautiful and the standard of all perfection. Whatever the art and whatever the medium, the unity and complexity of the Triune God and his brilliance (originality and vitality) defines the beautiful (Ps. 50:2; 96:79;
2. Worship Rituals: The Bible presents rituals of initiation—baptism, of fellowship and commitment—the Lord’s Supper and of corporate, family, and individual worship (Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; chap. 14; Psalms).

B. Concept of History: History is linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God’s purposes for humanity (Sire, pp. 42-44).

1. Cycles of Celebration: The OT people of God were directed in weekly (the Sabbath) and periodic (the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, Booths) cycles of celebration. Work and rest, productive activity balanced with recreative activity (recreation), including pausing to remember and celebrate God’s goodness in redeeming and sustaining his people, was a divine pattern for shalom—full health. Such principles with the transformed practice of the Lord’s Day and celebrations of the Christian calendar flow from the New Testament (Exod. 20:8-11; chaps. 20–24; Leviticus; Jn 20:19; Acts 20:7-12; Rev. 1:8).


C. Man and Spirits: Human beings are created in the image of God and thus possess personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness and creativity. Human beings were created good, but through the Fall, the image of God became defaced, though not so ruined as not to be capable of being restored; through the work of Christ, God accomplished salvation and began the process of applying it: restoring people to goodness. For each person death is either the gate to life with God and his people or the
gate to eternal separation from the only thing that can ultimately fulfill human aspirations (Sire, pp. 31-34, 37-41).

The Bible teaches that, in addition to the visible, physical/natural world of humans, animals, plants and things, there is an invisible, distinct, spiritual/supernatural world of God, angels, Satan, demons, and departed spirits. This spiritual world overlaps with the physical. Scripture recognizes that the overlap is the context of a cosmic spiritual struggle between good and evil in which humans are active participants. Satan and his demons are finite in power and knowledge under the final governance of a sovereign God. They seek to retain or extend dominion over humans through immoral and false means: temptation, persecution, false teaching and worship, occult practices. In the end, the battle is for humans’ allegiance and is an attempt to legitimize false authority. Christ’s death and resurrection is the paradigm for the Christian’s engagement with these dark spiritual forces: victory through weakness (Eph. 1:19-23; 6:12-20; Col. 2:15; Heb 2:14).

1. Religious Beliefs (see throughout this document)

2. Religious Practices: The means of grace–prayer, the Word, the sacraments, worship, fellowship, service (Acts 2:42-47)

3. Religious Organizations: the Church (Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12–14; Eph. 4:1-16)
II. Epistemology: Human beings can know both the world around them and God himself, because God has built into them the capacity to do so, their intuitional knowledge, and because he takes an active role in communicating with them through general revelation—creation and conscience, and special revelation, the Bible (Sire, pp. 34-37; Rom. 1:18-25, 32; 2:14-16; 2 Tim. 3:14-17; Heb. 1:1-2).

A. Systems of Logic: The Biblical worldview answers the question: How do I determine what is true? And, it does so, by assuming, commending, or modeling these understandings of the following categories:

1. Truth Claim Extent: These will be statements which are objective, absolute, directly knowable in any culture, and whose content corresponds to reality. Those which come from Scripture are especially to be commended (Acts 26:24-26; Lk 16:17; Matt. 28:18-20; Deut 17:1-7; 2 Tim 3:15-17).

2. Authority/Warrant: The authority which validates the use of certain types of evidence in support of truth claims is the Bible, a supernatural authority: God’s inspired and inerrant Word. It functions as the unique and compelling, full, final authority, an intelligible, referential standard (2 Tim 3:15-17; Jn 10:35; Lk 16:2731; Deut 19:15/Matt 18:16; Rev 22:18-19; Jn 8:26-28, 38, 43-47; Jas 2:8).

3. Types of Argumentation: These, will be both relevant to cultural expectations and assumes that human rationality can comprehend meaning of statements that is single, objective, definite, fixed, authorially intended sense about an extralinguistic referent (Acts 2:29-30; Acts 26:24-26; Gen 2:19-20; Matt 19:4-6).

4. Types of Persuasion: They will appeal to the whole person, again within the cultural context. They will use clear logic to make sense to the mind. They will have a winsomeness that moves to heart to embrace the truth claims. And that embrace will be by the human will to believe and obey the truth (Lk 24:13-35).
In each of these areas, the effects of the fall must be contended with. Cultural preunderstanding of blind and rebellious man will set aside truth claims and relativize or declare unintelligible Scripture’s authority. It will pursue types of argumentation which set aside Scripture’s authoritative claims on a subject, through either interpretational fragmentation or distortion of the text’s meaning. And this will affect the cognitive aspect of types of persuasion. And, as for the “heart” and “will” aspects, sin driven existential situation and concerns can distort Scripture’s meaning and application, either by asking the wrong questions of a passage or finding the wrong answers there. And rationality under sin’s sway will operate with biases of relativistic doubt and the conviction that Scripture from so long ago and so far away is unintelligible (Isa 6:9-10).
B. Sorting Systems: The Biblical worldview answers the question: What is the true (real)?

It assumes and models an approach which identifies the “what” of our perceptions by using language to make distinctions and order segmented reality into categories. Humans’ sorting systems are a combination of rationality common to all humans, no matter the culture—the image of God in man—and the impact of categories supplied by our cultural preunderstandings and influenced by our existential situation and concerns. Again, man, made in God’s image and fallen, is the culture maker who produces these sorting systems (Acts 28:1-6). Examples of how Scripture models the presence of sorting systems in each quadrant follows

1. Ontology: deity—one true God vs. idols which are no gods at all (1 Cor 8:1-6)
2. Metaphysics: character of association (the Church)—unity of love vs. divisive rivalry (1 Cor. 3:1-9).
3. Axiology: freedom’s use—license for the flesh vs. to serve in love (Gal. 5:13).

III. Metaphysics: Structure of Reality Reflected in Social Structure

A. Family Structure: See below for descriptions of the biblical understanding of each aspect of family structure.

2. Nature of Family: Multi-generational, two parent unit with children, and with responsibility for older generations (Exod. 20:12; Eph. 6:1-5; 1 Tim. 5:3-16)
3. Rites of Passage: modeled in bar mitzvah (Lk 2:41-52)
4. Expressions of Sexuality: Chastity outside marriage and fidelity in life-long, heterosexual, monogamous marriage (Exod. 20:14; 1 Thess 4:1-8; 1 Cor. 6:9-20)
5. Social Ideals: Respectful wife, loving husband, obedient children; servant leadership in state and workplace (Rom. 13:1-7; Eph. 6:5-9)
6. Ancestors: Respect for, not worship of (Exod. 20:12; Heb. 11:1–12:2)

B. Social Institutions: See below for descriptions of the biblical understanding of each aspect of social institutions.

1. Systems of Enculturation: Education in godly, Scripture-based wisdom in home and church (Deut. 6; Proverbs; Acts 2:42-47)

2. Economic Structures: Structures which implement values of economic freedom via private property; justice and fair dealing; care for the disadvantaged; ecological stewardship (Exod. 20:15; Micah 6:8; Lev 19:9-13; Gen. 1:28; 2:15)

3. Associations and Social Groups: Associations and Social Groups characterized by brotherhood, generosity vs. reciprocity, and service vs. being served (Psa 133; Lk 14:7-14; 22:24-27).

4. Communications: Truth telling, gracious communication (Exod. 20:16; Col. 4:6; Eph. 4:25-26, 29-32).

IV. Axiology: Ethics. Ethics is transcendent and is based on the character of God as good (holy and loving, Sire, pp. 41-42)

A. Framework for Ethics (Authority Structures): A Creator God enters into covenant relationship with humans with stipulations, his moral will for humankind, which is the expression of his character, as holy, righteous, and good. The two great commandments, expounded in the ten commandments are its content (Matt. 22:37-40; Exod 20:1-17).

These are universal moral norms, grounded in God’s nature and the creation order; promulgated in a situation with transcendent factors and lacking situational limitations in their formulation; and consistently present in progress of redemption and revelation. In addition to universal norms, the biblical worldview comprehends all the essential components of ethical decision making: authority structures, motive/intent, act & rationale, consequences, and values (Tiessen, “Toward a Hermeneutic for Discerning Universal

The Redeemer God, in the new creation, by the Spirit makes a holy and righteous life possible for all who are in Christ. Under the authority of Jesus as Lord, following the standards of his universal moral norms, motivated by thankfulness, acting with a rationale that the obedience to God’s norms in his Word is for his glory and our good, guided by the values of the fruit of the Spirit, looking to the consequences of blessedness as the fruit of obedience and chastisement for disobedience, the person with a biblical worldview acts ethically (Rom 8:1-17). Axiology deals in the following areas and a biblical worldview speaks to each.

1. Authority Structures: home, work, state (Eph. 5:22–6:9; Rom. 13:1-7)
3. Heroes: Hebrews 11
4. Leadership: servant leadership (Matt 20:20-28)
5. Secularization: separation of church and state (Lk 20:19-26)
7. Societal Problems: God’s Ideal—reconciliation with peace and justice (Isa 11:19)

B. Norms, Values and Consequences (Guilt vs. Shame): see above under IV.A.
1. Public vs. Private Sins: Throughout Scripture both private and public sins are exposed (e.g., David, 2 Samuel 11--12, 24)
2. Status, Prestige and Recognition: Biblical Values—humility and gracious thankfulness to others (Phil. 2:1-11)
3. Psychology/Medicine
4. Moral Ideals: see above IV.A.