

1-1-2000

## A Worldview for the Third Millennium

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### Recommended Citation

Colson, Charles and Pearcey, Nancy (2000) "A Worldview for the Third Millennium," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol5/iss1/8>

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BY CHARLES COLSON & NANCY PEARCEY\*

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# A WORLDVIEW FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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**Confronted with competing worldviews,  
it is imperative that we learn to distinguish between  
the true and the false.**

**W**hat is the mission of the church? That was the sermon topic one Sunday as I visited a friend's church, but I found my mind wandering. I had just signed a contract to write a book on Christian worldview, and I was experiencing writer's remorse. Did this book really need to be written?

Suddenly the pastor's words jarred me back. The mission of the church, he said, is to prepare for Christ's return in five ways: prayer, Bible study, worship, fellowship, and

evangelism. In that instant, all lingering doubts about the book were erased. Prayer and worship are central to the church's life, of course; but we can never overlook our responsibility to redeem and restore all of culture. Though well intentioned, the pastor's words were a sure prescription for the continued

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marginalization of the church.

Yet his message is typical of evangelicalism. Our movement's great strength—yet also its weakness—is defining faith in terms of personal salvation alone. Though this focus on conversion has fueled great evangelical fervor, it has also made soul-winning an end in itself. Yet we are not only saved *from* sin, we are also saved *to* something: to the task of developing God's creation.

Genesis teaches that on the first five days, God did the work of creating directly. But on the sixth day, He formed human beings in His image to carry on His creative work, commanding them to fill and subdue the earth (Gen. 1:28). This is the "cultural commission," and it is just as binding as the Great Commission. It means we must go beyond personal conversion and develop a faith that encompasses every part of life—every sphere of work, every aspect of the world.

In short, a worldview.

Developing a worldview is not some ivory-tower exercise; it is crucial for everything we do. Take the realm of personal life and moral choices. Since every choice we make—who we marry, what career we aspire to, how we raise our kids—reflects our beliefs about reality, having the right worldview is essential for the proper ordering of our lives. If we don't understand God's creative purpose, both moral and phys-

ical, then we will live like a person who walks into a room blindfolded and bumps his shins against the furniture.

Second, worldview is important for apologetics. What happens when your children come home from school with challenges to their faith raised in science class? Can you explain to a skeptical neighbor the problem with moral relativism? Believers today face a clash of worldviews, and it is imperative that we learn to recognize and analyze what is false. Unless we know the biblical approach to science and ethics, to law and the arts, we have no defense against contrary ideas.

Third, having a complete worldview is crucial for evangelism. When Paul addressed the Greeks on Mars Hill, he framed the gospel in a context they could understand, quoting their own poets. And he did not begin with the message of salvation, he began with Creation: "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth" (Acts 17:24). Paul argued that even the Greeks, though unschooled in Scripture, ought to know that God is no golden idol. Since He created us, He must be a personal being—and thus someone to whom we are personally accountable. Only after establishing who God is did Paul preach about the resurrection. This is the approach we must take in our modern Athens, starting with Cre-

ation, and only then explaining the Fall and redemption.

Indeed, these are the same basic elements that every worldview must have: *Creation*—Where did we come from? *Fall*—What’s wrong with the world? Why is there evil and suffering? *Redemption*—What’s the solution, and how can we build a better world? By comparing worldviews on each point, we can show that only Christianity offers a consistent, rational answer—one that fits the real world.

This is the key to reviving our witness in today’s culture. Many Christians are discouraged by a sense that we are losing the “culture war,” and they talk about withdrawing. But one reason we have not been more effective is that we have a truncated view of Christianity—like the pastor with his five principles. We must understand that we are engaged in a great conflict of worldviews, and we cannot contend with

anything less than a comprehensive biblical worldview.

Paradoxically, the note of despair is being sounded just as the new millennium is offering us the greatest opportunity in generations. A recent *Wall Street Journal*/NBC poll uncovered a startling turn-around in attitudes: 84 percent of self-described conservatives and 33 percent of liberals say that what’s “important for society” today is to “promote respect for traditional values.” People are realizing that the prevailing worldviews fail to provide a basis for a safe and stable public order.

Surely this is no time to withdraw. Instead, we must seize the opportunity to demonstrate that Christianity gives the only rational, coherent framework for public and private life and, indeed, for reality—because it begins with the God who is sovereign Creator of all.

This is a message our fragmented world yearns to hear. □

## R E F L E C T

**C**an a fragmented Christianity bring a coherent message to a fragmented world? And, closer to home, can a fragmented church bring a coherent message to its members and, through them, to its community?—Eds.