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Policy Development Using a Biblical Worldview Perspective

by Freddy Davis

As I write this, there are a lot of bills working their way through the Florida legislature – many of which contain very good ideas (Note: One can select bills from any year and the result will be the same). Some of these bills do such things as provide for more efficiency in educational institutions, protect the privacy of certain individuals, promote the security of the state's citizens, provide for better health care, give tax breaks and incentives, provide perks and relief for senior citizens, regulate gambling, support Israel, regulate the immigration of refugees, and adjust regulations regarding water management.

For example, in this year's Florida legislature:

- HB (House Bill) 305 would require each district school board and Florida college board of trustees to review agreements and contracts before purchasing non-academic commodities and contractual services.
- HB 1025 defines the term "utility," and provides an exemption from public records requirements for matters related to information security.
- HB 1033 revises the membership of the Technology Advisory Council to include a cyber security expert.
- HB 1175 requires hospitals and insurers to make available information which can be used by consumers to make better health care decisions based on cost and quality.

And, we could go on and on as, literally, hundreds of bills were filed this year. The truth is, there is no shortage of new laws or tweaks to current law which could be made. Most of these proposals,

hopefully, will serve to benefit the public. On the other hand, there are many which are designed specifically to help certain special interests.

In the legislative environment, people tend to fight over these various policies. It is not surprising, of course, that this happens. It has always been that way. Whenever certain people benefit from the status quo and others benefit when changes are made, you have the makings of some pretty impressive disputes. As most people are focused on their own self interest, these kinds of quarrels will always be around.

In spite of the fact that the fights we see out in the public square are virtually always based on people's interest in various laws and policies, that is not really where the problems lie. What is really at issue are the principles which underlie the various policies.

This leads us to an interesting dynamic. When a situation exists in society where the vast majority of people adhere to one particular set of underlying principles, the disputes which emerge relate almost exclusively to attempts to gain some kind of an advantage for particular groups or individuals. However, when society has great disputes regarding which set of underlying principles is right, not only do you have fights designed to gain an advantage, but also about the very nature of right morality itself.

For instance, in virtually all of the bills mentioned above, the fights have to do with helping certain groups of people gain some kind of advantage – whether it be about what information can be hidden from the public, how public money is spent, or how the public is to be protected. But there are other bills

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where the fights have more to do with what kind of moral beliefs are right. For instance:

- HB 43 provides that churches or religious organizations may not be required to solemnize any marriage or provide services, if such action would violate sincerely held religious beliefs.
- HB 45 prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity or expression. (This is the so called "bathroom bill.")
- SB (Senate Bill) 68 allows concealed carry license holders to openly carry a handgun.
- HB 865 puts very strict requirements on abortion services and providers.

In each of these cases, the fights that go on among the policymakers are not related so much to gaining an advantage for a business – though there will be a certain amount of this, as well. Rather, they are fights over what constitutes moral and immoral behavior. One side fights because they see the purpose of the bill as being immoral, while the other side fights because they see it as moral.

So, how can this be? How is it possible for two people to look at the very same policy and one think it is moral and the other think it is immoral? It is possible because they are working off of two completely different worldview foundations. It is the worldview beliefs which define an individual's understanding of morality.

Biblical vs. Naturalistic Worldview Beliefs

What is a Worldview?

A worldview is a person's most basic understanding of the structure of reality (what is real and not real). There are four basic worldview categories, and every one, literally, contradicts every other one. We can get to the bottom line of a

worldview system by determining how it answers three particular questions. Each worldview system has its own unique way of answering each one.

1. What is the nature of ultimate reality?
2. What is a human being?
3. What is the ultimate one can achieve in this life?

I mentioned that there are four worldview categories. That said, there are two which are at the root of most of the conflict in modern American culture. It is, for the most part, the conflict of these two which result in the disagreements among our politicians concerning what kinds of laws and policies to support.

Naturalism

Naturalism is the belief that everything, in all of reality, can be accounted for based on the natural laws of the universe. Thus, Naturalists believe that there is no God, nor any kind of supernatural reality. Its primary authority source is human reason. Based on this foundation, Naturalism answers the three worldview questions as follows:

1. Ultimate reality consists of the natural universe. There is nothing more.
2. Human beings are purely natural animals which naturally evolved to their current place in the evolutionary tree.
3. The ultimate a person can achieve in life is physical survival, and to obtain their highest personal desires.

Biblical Theism

Biblical Theism is the belief that the God described in the Bible objectively exists, and that he created mankind for a purpose – which he has revealed. Its primary authority source is the Bible. Based on this foundation, Biblical Theism answers the three worldview questions as follows:

1. Ultimate reality is the God of the Bible, who transcends the material universe and created it for his own purpose.
2. Human beings are persons created in the image of God, but are fallen.

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3. The ultimate a person can achieve in life is to enter into a personal relationship with God based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How Worldview Beliefs Result in Particular Policy Decisions

Everyone will evaluate the goodness or badness of a particular policy based on the presuppositions of their worldview beliefs. So, as Christians, we will evaluate good policy based on how it lines up with biblical teachings. Naturalists, on the other hand, will evaluate good policy based on how it lines up with naturalistic presuppositions. Thus, whenever someone evaluates a policy as bad, it is usually based on the belief that there is something wrong with the principles underlying it.

To understand this more fully, let's take an example that is very clear cut – abortion. On this issue, a biblical worldview perspective would look particularly at the second worldview question and assert that innocent human life should not be taken under any circumstances – because human beings are persons created in the image of God. The Bible teaches that it is simply wrong to take innocent human life. A Naturalist, on the other hand, does not recognize the existence of God, and sees human beings as nothing more than one of many animal species which exists on the planet. As such, human life is no more valuable than any other life form. Thus, the taking, or not, of human life is judged moral or immoral based on one's perceptions about the situation surrounding the possible taking of the life. Those who would advocate for abortion see it as a matter of personal autonomy, not as the taking of innocent life.

Of course, not every policy decision is as clear cut as abortion. People make policy decisions about how to organize an educational system, how to manage natural resources, how to

manage traffic flow, and thousands of other things. But even in these areas which, seemingly, do not get into matters easily designated "moral or immoral," there is a moral component in the mix. This moral component is evaluated based on one's worldview beliefs. That being the case, even in situations where biblical Theists and Naturalists might agree on policy, the REASONS for taking the stands they do will differ.

In every case, the reason a Christian would give for making a particular decision has to do with what he or she believes God would want based on the teachings of the Bible. For instance, decisions on matters related to the management of natural resources would be based on the belief that human beings are stewards of God's creation. As such, we should take care of the environment because it belongs to God. A Naturalist's reasoning would have nothing to do with God, but rather with how it would affect some temporal circumstance – for instance, how it would affect the physical survival of a particular local population. What you end up with is a desire for the same outcome, but the reasons for wanting the outcome are very different.

By the same token, a Christian's decisions about education would be based on the belief that God has revealed that we should strive for excellence, and that we should help others do the same. The reasoning for a Naturalist would relate more to practical matters regarding how society can best promote survival and maintain order.

Making proper policy decisions goes way beyond the policy itself, all the way down to the "reasons" for the policy. So, people who begin with biblical principles should end up with policies that are compatible with biblical belief.

One other point ought, also, be made. When a person, who generally promotes good policies based on right principles, ends up promoting some bad policies instead, there is an important and serious dynamic at play. In a case like that, you can bet that, at some point, the individual has hybridized his or her principles. They have gone to looking at the outcome without giving thought to the underlying principles the decision was based upon.

There is no doubt that basing policy decisions purely on principle is the harder route to go. It not only requires that one solidly know the worldview princi-

ples of their own faith, but that they have also made the effort to understand the implications of those principles AND have made the personal commitment to follow them.

Now, if you think this article is only about politicians who create law and public policy, think again. It is actually about everyone who makes any kind of decision in life. Everyone has a moral foundation that is the basis for the decisions they make. As Christians, it is crucial to make sure that our foundation is a biblical one, and that our personal commitment to Christ compels us to follow it completely.

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