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How to Organize Discipleship Training - Part 4
Interacting with Non-Biblical Worldviews in the World

By Freddy Davis

There are a lot of different belief systems in the world. These are represented by the many religions, cults, and philosophies that we see all around. And while virtually all of us interact with people who adhere to various belief systems, it is not an understanding of belief systems per se that is most helpful in those interactions. While understanding the history, structure, and specific doctrines of the various belief systems is important, it is even more important to understand the worldview categories upon which these belief systems are built.

Who has not become frustrated and confused because there are so many different religions out there. How can anyone keep up with them without devoting practically full time effort to studying them?

Well, this is one place where understanding worldview concepts is so valuable. The truth is, every belief system in existence is some expression of only four worldview categories. Recognizing this fact is a profound game-changer when it comes to interacting with people who hold different beliefs. If we can learn the basics of the four worldview categories, we will automatically know the foundational beliefs of every belief system that fits within each category. With that, when we interact with someone who holds a different belief from our own, we don't have to learn a lot of new information. We will already know the basics, so all we will need to add are the particular idiosyncracies of that religion. So let's take a look at the four worldview possibilities.

What Are the Worldview Possibilities?

Since worldview beliefs are the most basic beliefs in existence, it is critical that we understand them first of all. There are four worldview categories, and every belief system (religion, cult, and philosophy) in existence somehow emerges out of them. Let's take a moment now to understand each one.

Naturalism

Naturalism is the belief that the only thing that exists is the natural universe. There is no God or any other element of transcendent reality. Since nothing exists outside of the natural universe, Naturalists believe that empirical science is able to account for every aspect of reality.

Animism

Animism is the belief that all of reality is divided into two parts – the physical world and the spirit world. Animists believe that everything we see tangibly in the physical world belongs in that realm, and the spirit world is occupied by various spirit beings. The big picture belief is that the two parts of reality interact with each other symbiotically. As such, what happens in one part has a direct effect on what goes on in the other part. The primary objective of people in the material world, then, is to make sure they take care of the needs of the spirits. If they do, life will go well. If they don't, the spirits will cause them problems in this life. When people die physically, they automatically enter the spirit world as spirits.

Far Eastern Thought

Far Eastern Thought is based on the belief that the material universe represents an illusory expression of

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reality. This is the case because it is greatly separated from ultimate reality. Far Eastern Thought adherents believe that ultimate reality exists and operates in an entirely different way from material reality. It exists as an impersonal life force beyond the natural universe, and has no material or personal element to it. This worldview system asserts that the personal and material aspects of reality that we seem to experience in this world are actually not real (they are illusions).

Far Eastern Thought adherents believe that pieces of the life force have spun off of the main body, and have gotten so far away that they have taken on a different character – personal and material. Based on the laws of reality, they believe that these spun off pieces are working their way back to the main body by means of reincarnation, with karma as the propelling force. If a life form in the material universe lives its life properly during a single lifetime, it accumulates good karma and is able to advance to a higher life form in its next life. When it gets to the highest stage and accumulates enough good karma, it is able to leave the material world and rejoin the main body of the impersonal life force. Thus, the main goal of life is to accumulate good karma.

Theism

Theism is the belief that there exists a transcendent creator God who created the material universe, and mankind, for his own purposes. Theists believe that God has somehow revealed himself and his ways to mankind, and it is the responsibility of each person to receive that revelation and live in a way that pleases God in order to gain heaven at physical death.

Hybrids

In the strictest sense, the hybrid category is not a worldview at all.

However, since there are many belief systems based on the hybrid concept, it is important to understand its existence and character. Hybrid belief systems take essential elements from two or more of the four worldview categories and attempt to merge them into a single belief system. However, since every worldview literally contradicts every other worldview, every hybrid belief system contains irreconcilable internal contradictions.

Belief Systems

As mentioned above, every belief system in existence is based upon some worldview system. Thus, while every belief system does contain its own idiosyncracies, all of them answer the three essential worldview questions (Who is God? What is man? What is salvation and how does one achieve it?) in the same way as its worldview host. While the following is not an exhaustive list, it does give a good overview of many of the more prominent belief systems and where they fit within the worldview paradigm.

Naturalism

- Secular Humanism
- Atheism
- Agnosticism
- Skepticism
- Existentialism
- Marxism
- Positivism
- Postmodernism

Animism

- Japanese Shinto
- Traditional African Religions
- Witchcraft/Wicca
- European Paganism
- Astrology
- Fortunetelling
- Spiritism
- Voodoo/Santeria
- Native American Religions

Far Eastern Thought

- Hinduism
- Hare Krishna
- Transcendental Meditation

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Buddhism

Taoism

Jainism

Sikhism

Theism

Christianity

The Way International

The Unity School of Christianity

Children of God

Jehovah's Witnesses

Mormonism

Judaism

Islam

Hybrids

New Age

Satanism

Unitarian Universalism

Scientology

Confucianism

Baha'i

Unification Church

Christian Science

Practical Implications of World-view Beliefs

Learning about the various worldview possibilities can be an interesting study by itself. But there are actually some very practical reasons for acquiring this knowledge. When you interact with actual people, one of the things you will certainly want to do is communicate with them in a way that is understandable. The truth is, different worldviews promote very different understandings of how reality is structured, and thus very different values. And where different values confront one another, conflict inevitably results. Beyond that, there is an actual way reality is structured, and any belief that runs contrary to that actual reality will unavoidably generate tension and conflict in society.

A contemporary example of how conflicting values in a society create conflict is seen in what is currently going on in American society. The basic beliefs of the Black Lives Matter and Antifa movements, for example, represent forms of Naturalism. On the

other side, the natural human desire for law and order represent basic beliefs of biblical Theism. The goals and methods of these two beliefs cannot be reconciled. So when they come in contact with one another, a cultural conflict results.

Here are some specific examples of conflicting beliefs butting heads in actual real world situations:

- Naturalism - The naturalistic Marxist beliefs that govern China have resulted in a totalitarian state that oppresses its own people and threatens its neighbors.
- Animism - The animistic Voodoo beliefs that are the foundation of Haitian society have resulted in a corrupt government and societal chaos.
- Far Eastern Thought - The Pantheism undergirding every form of Hinduism in India has resulted in a society that holds fatalistic beliefs that have led to abject poverty for the masses.
- Non-Christian Theism - Probably the best example of the failure of non-Christian Theism can be found in the totalitarianism and religious/social legalism found in virtually all Middle East countries due to the dominance of Islam.
- Hybrids - There are no countries dominated by a hybrid belief system, but one does not have to look far to see the totalitarian tendencies of most hybrid beliefs. These groups are usually dominated by a dictatorial leader who controls virtually every aspect of adherents' lives. One need look no further than beliefs such as Scientology or the Unification Church to see how these tend to play out.

If we have any desire to effectively interact, or even communicate, with people who hold worldview beliefs that are different from our own, it is essential to understand their worldview beliefs and how they are differ-

ent from our own. With that knowledge in hand, we place ourselves in a position to share Christ with people who would otherwise never understand our message.

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