Chapter 2
The Christian World View—A Radical Alternative

Peter Wilkes

A world view is the intellectual framework by means of which we correlate all our experience in the world and make coherent sense out of it. That experience includes everything about the "external" world which comes to me via my senses and also those internal awarenesses I have about myself.

A world view is basic to every person's existence. By it we react to and operate on the world around us and establish for ourselves what we *are*. It is at once the foundation both for self-awareness and for action in the world.

The definition should make clear why we all *must* have at least one world view. It is simply not possible to operate in the world as a human being without *some* way of making sense out of experience. The difficulty, of course, is that we may have not just *one* world view but two or three or even more. At work I operate as a scientist striving for objectivity in my experiments. At home I may work on quite different logical bases as a husband, father, ball player, observer of

TV or any of the other things that even professors are known to indulge in.

The aim of the thoughtful individual since Socrates (and perhaps before that) is to operate with one world view capable of making sense out of *all* experience in a natural way. It will be our contention in this series that Christianity provides such a world view.

First, however, we need to look at a problem. Since a world view is a framework for understanding data, the data themselves cannot provide the framework. They may suggest an area in which a framework is needed, but they cannot substitute for it. Our world view, therefore, must be built from a set of presuppositions which we use without being able to prove. That is why we call them *presuppositions.* They are supposed prior to the data and are not obtained by reflection on our experience. *They* are the means by which we reflect.

If all that sounds complicated, permit me an example which illustrates what is really a simple point. We cannot help being aware of the external world through our eyes. But to understand our vision we have to analyze it in a three-dimensional frame. People who are born blind, and who later achieve sight as adults, have to learn that process, but it proves difficult for them to make sense of their impressions. The three-dimensional frame by which we interpret our binocular vision is distinct from the vision itself.

There is a further point in the illustration. We have no choice in the interpretation; it reflects the facts of our own construction. We are bound to the presupposition of three-dimensionality.

We conclude that at least some of our presuppositions are forced on us by our natures and that we have no logical system for testing them in advance. Instead they provide the axioms for our logic. All the logic can do is to test whether the presuppositions are compatible with each other.

This important limit on the proper use of logical argument may be unpalatable, but is nonetheless real.

Intellectual Honesty and the University

Now let me answer another question. Why should a group of five diverse professors be so concerned with the issue of Christianity and secular dogmas that we find ourselves addressing a large throng of students in this series? Believe me, it would be much easier and less intimidating to proceed quietly with my research in the engineering college.

We are giving these lectures because we sense that within the university it has become established practice to operate from a world view without ever saying what it is. Since some of the world views used in formal lectures are antithetical to Christianity we want to draw attention to what is happening.

We believe that if professors start from a Marxist position in an area like political philosophy or sociology they should say so frankly. The results that flow from such a position will then be seen by students to be a consequence of that stance. I believe we owe it to the honesty of our intellectual discipline and to our students to make it clear that our lectures are not "received truth" handed down from professional heights but deductions from experience based on our world view.

If the university is to practice that "fearless sifting and winnowing" which is the basis for its existence as a "marketplace for ideas" a deeper level of honesty is demanded. We Christians are here trying to articulate our position in the hope that others will respond. We can then debate about the deeper issues on which our lives are based, but which are often ignored or confused in the secular world of the university.

Since that sounds like a tall order, a note of limitation may be appropriate. In defending a Christian world view we are doing that and no more. We are emphatically *not*

defending that vast history of abuses of the Christian world view which have occurred in the past. It is after all perfectly possible to discuss the merits of Marxism without defending its malpractice in Soviet Russia. Similarly, we can sensibly defend Christianity without having to defend an appalling list of terrible mistakes carried out in its name but in flagrant abuse of its principles.

God and the World

A Christian world view begins with God. We are people of the book which begins, "In the beginning God. . . ." God exists outside nature and outside humanity and quite independent of both. Unbelieving critics have rarely understood how profound and far-reaching that is, as we shall see.

Note that God's existence is not a postulate to be proved by logical argument, as has so often been attempted in the past. If I can carry out an analysis about whether or not God exists, I am automatically assuming that I have a fundamental framework within which I can place God in order to work out God's relation to other things. It is precisely this that I am *not* saying about God.

On the contrary, my contention is that the existence of God is the foundation for the Christian world view, a presupposition, a basis on which the rest of the system is to be built.

It follows that the famous "proofs" of God are not merely wrong in logic (although I suspect they are), but in addition are wrong in conception. They should never be attempted. In them God becomes secondary, contingent on us, whereas the Christian position is that we are dependent in every sense on him.

A second feature of the Christian world view follows naturally. The world is created by God and humankind is part of nature. From such an obvious statement the conclusions are surprisingly important.

First, nature matters. It is to be taken seriously. It is no accident that modern experimental science developed in Christian Europe. It did so because Christianity takes the real world seriously. It does not treat it as myth or illusion as some of the eastern religions do. Rather it demands that actions in the world be treated responsibly and seriously.

Second, the statement provides an explanation for the extraordinary fact that the world appears to us as rational. That assumption lies at the heart of science. Albert Einstein, perhaps the greatest modern scientist, commented, "To understand why nature is thus and not otherwise, is for the scientific mind, the highest satisfaction; that if I may say so is the religious basis for scientific effort." Whitehead, the philosopher of science, makes the same point: "Faith in reason is the trust that the ultimate nature of things lie together in a harmony which excludes mere arbitrariness. It is the faith that at the basis of things we shall not find mere arbitrary mystery."

The world corresponds to thought because both humankind and the world are created by a rational being, whom we call God. Science is, therefore, explicable within the context of a Christian position.

The study of nature includes the study of human beings. In biology, psychology and sociology the scientific approach has had considerable success. Since human beings are part of the world, in the Christian view it is appropriate to study humankind as human animal, and success is to be expected and indeed encouraged. Professor Becker in the following lecture will explore the limitation of such a view, since the Christian position is that while *homo sapiens* is indeed an animal as part of the world, that is not all he or she is. Professor Richardson will illustrate the problems that arise when human beings are viewed as merely part of an economic system. In all these cases our view is that there is *more* to being human.

Humanity and Christianity

The third point in the Christian world view is the basis for the idea that humanity is "something more." The view that man is somehow different is pervasive. We have great difficulty denying it in practice even though it is often denied in principle. When we do that, the confusion that then arises can be instructive.

Christians regard humankind as operating on three levels. First, each individual operates as a subject regarding the world as object. That is what science is all about. Its essence lies in the detached observer trying to understand without being involved.

Second, humankind also exists within a network of subject-subject relations. In the world of human relations a human being operates sometimes as subject and sometimes as object. Or we are both subject and object simultaneously. At this level even when we act "objectively" upon other humans we cannot help being influenced by the fact that they *are* human. Thus our actions include some degree of consciousness of what the other is feeling.

It is precisely our ability to react that way which makes up our humanness. To be otherwise is to become "inhuman." Loving one another obviously requires such an exchange. Morals and ethics are built on it also. This is the actual business of living and dying as a human being.

At this level to try to operate scientifically as a detached experimentalist is ridiculous and inappropriate. It is to cease to be human and to attempt the impossible. The difference between functioning in the subject-object realm of science and the subject-subject realm of human relations is easy to illustrate. In those splendid English double-decker buses, large notices forbid the traveling populace from spitting. A visiting scientist might be intrigued that such notices are made of anodized aluminum, or exhibit a certain symmetry of the letters. Yet the ordinary Englishman concludes that if he expectorates, he will be liable to a $50 fine!

The objective scientific analyses may be correct, but there is a meaning to which they do not penetrate. On reading the notice, one finds himself addressed; the reader is in a subjective situation, receiving a message and obliged to react. He is immediately in the world of interpersonal relations.

If we stand back and observe other humans as things we can try to be objective. People then appear at one with the animal kingdom and the answers obtained are consistent with those assumptions. To study people at the subject-subject level, however, is to be engaged. The questions we then ask and the answers we obtain are quite different. Secular humanism has never been able to provide a world view that encompasses both. Christianity does so by recognizing a third and higher level for human existence which alone makes sense of the other two.

At that third level, the object-subject level, each person finds himself or herself to be the object being acted on by God. As at the second level, human beings are addressed, and detached observation is inappropriate. Instead we find ourselves called on to respond. The response is not to an equal, however, but to the Creator, to the Lord.

To the Christian, men and women bear the imprint of being designed for these three levels or modes of existence. That is what is meant by our creation "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). It implies that humans have the capacity to hear and respond to God. Immediately it is clear that the meaning of being human lies outside ourselves. We are only one end, the minor end, of a "conversation." To understand human nature we need to see something of the other end of the communication channel.

From this basic set of ideas about man, nature and God, the Christian is in a strong position to understand and explain human activity in a simple and straightforward way.

We can begin by noting that meaning and purpose in human existence can never be found by a scientific study. The conclusions we reach by that approach are limited by

the framework within which the questions are asked. Questions of meaning, purpose and value cannot even be expressed in a scientific framework, let alone answered.

Suppose it is springtime and you have received a grant from the National Science Foundation to study young love. You scour the campus to find an eager young lover. You sit him down and strap onto him an assortment of hardware to measure his physical and mental responses. You then conduct an experiment by introducing his beloved into the laboratory and busily record his salivation, skin pigment, general agitation and accelerated pulse rate. When you have finished, you may have a scientific description of a set of responses to a stimulus but you have not even begun to understand what it is to be in love. To do that you have to approach the question in a different way, perhaps by abandoning your objectivity and experiencing it for yourself.

In our society there is a continual tendency to confuse the first two levels. Such confusion is evidence of the inadequacy of a purely materialistic world view. Behaviorists who explain human beings as entirely animal still go outside their laboratories and fall in love, and when they do, materialism is abandoned and an older world view takes over.

In contrast, our Christian world view finds its source of such ideals as love and justice in the upper object-subject level of human experience—in God himself. Within that framework no sophisticated sleight of hand is needed. The recognition of meaning and purpose in human life is personal. Spiritual relationships fit naturally alongside physical and material aspects of human life in the world.

The very objectivity of science which has made it so effective in the natural world is precisely the limitation which forever excludes it from the whole realm of personal relations. Yet for most of us that is the area that really matters.

It is very important that science is not excluded by an

artificial regulation. Christians are not on the battlements defending some sacred area from materialist hordes. It is rather that science by its *intrinsic* assumptions excludes itself from asking questions about values. Exactly the same subject may be studied, but the level of questioning differs. To return to our young lover—the meaning of his love simply cannot be addressed by a scientific approach, although certain aspects of his behavior can be.

Naturally, if you use one approach and exclude all others, you have predetermined the answers you will obtain. You may even conclude that love does not exist; there is nothing but a physical reaction. Such a conclusion is *not* scientific. It is a consequence of your world view which denies the possibility of asking subjective questions. Yet if you remain human you cannot avoid them, so you meet the bankruptcy of a materialistic world view face to face.

Protagoras once said, "Man is the measure of all things." On the contrary, the Christian replies, man is not even the measure of himself, for his meaning is inexorably fixed beyond his horizon. It lies in God alone.

It should by now be clear that if we cannot study men and women on certain levels scientifically, the same is true of God. I am reminded of the Soviet announcement after their first space flight, that they had been out into space to find God and lo! he was not there! I sometimes wonder if at the back of the spacecraft they had an inflatable cage in which they intended to entrap him and bring him back to earth as evidence of the victory of dialectical materialism.

Theirs was a peculiarly crass example of a frequent mistake. It was an attempt to take an objective position over against God, to make God object to our subject. Secular philosophers have always attempted that, yet the attempt is doomed to failure from the start. It is a misconception of both God and man.

Try to envision the possibility of Hamlet studying Shakespeare. The absurdity is at once evident. To us who exist

on the same level of reality as Shakespeare, however, every act of Hamlet reveals the richness of his creator's mind. In a somewhat similar way, the reality of human life is contingent on the more basic reality of God's existence.

The Search for Meaning

If as Christians we are right in our view that the value and meaning that our natures demand have a source outside ourselves, then a further question presses upon us. How are we to find value and meaning if the objective approach is excluded?

Even to phrase the question in that way is to begin to slide into the objectivity trap. The truth is that we cannot help finding and using our source of values all the time.

When we first began to experience the external world, we did not have to seek it out. We knew it was there because ever since we began splashing our breakfast cereal in our eyes it has been pressing itself upon us. It is an awareness intrinsic to our being.

Of course, in describing experience in this way I exclude the more esoteric philosophers who are unsatisfied with anything except a totally circular logical argument. They sit contemplating their own navels in frozen inactivity as a consequence.

An appropriate illustration of the importance of the direct perception of values is the question of freedom. The concept of freedom is notoriously slippery. My definition of it is simply the internal awareness I have of an ability to make a choice between options. Much of our life presupposes that such ability is common to us all. Our concept of law is built on it. For example, if I am accused of an illegal act and can demonstrate that I was forced to act by somebody else, that is an acceptable defense: the act was *involuntary.*

In science itself as a human activity it is assumed that the scientist can evaluate experimental results, *choose* rationally

between them and *decide* on new experiments. Our everyday speech and behavior are so full of the concept of an individual's freedom to choose that it seems impossible for us to live without it.

Nevertheless, to explain it remains a very knotty philosophical problem which no one seems able to solve to anybody else's satisfaction.

The characteristic secular approach is to try to find the source of our freedom by an objective "scientific" study, as we have already seen. If we objectively study man as an animal, then since the object becomes a *thing,* we are not surprised that he or she appears to be fully determined. Naturally, our internal awareness is irrelevant to the picture. Since that awareness is intrinsic to the practice of science, however, it is logically prior—which makes our deterministic conclusion invalid.

B. F. Skinner provides a delightful illustration of all this in his popular book *Beyond Freedom and Dignity.* After telling us that scientific study demonstrates that our freedom is an illusion and that we act only in conditioned responses, he leaps to the subjective level and proposes that we should *control* humanity by a rational *choice* of conditioning. (The words, *control* and *choice* of course, presuppose exactly the freedom he has denied to us.) In fact the very act of writing a book to persuade us that he is correct presupposes our ability to decide. The confusion has become hopeless. We are easily bemused by the sound of scientific argument into thinking that it has a wider validity than it does. So-called scientific humanism has made a fetish of that kind of confusion. It occurs each time the conclusions of objective study are applied to human beings as if they (or we) are *merely* animals and nothing more. Any world view in which it is proclaimed that its values are those of "scientific materialism" is caught in this confusion.

The confusion can be dangerous. C. S. Lewis noted that such use of objective thought is always applied to the rest of

us by some "in-group." "The power of man to make himself what he pleases means the power of some men to make other men what they please." Skinner's response to that observation is devastating in its frankness. He simply says, "This is inevitable in the nature of cultural evolution." So much the worse for cultural evolution!

Hidden beneath all this confusion we can detect the essential problem for the humanist world view. Built into our very existence is a framework of values which includes freedom and some kind of moral sense (which is its corollary) without which we are incapable of making sense of our own existence. The humanist world view also depends on these values but has no explanation whatever for their existence. Any attempt to obtain them by observation of human beings results in a circular argument since the same values are used in the process.

Morals at the Subject-Subject Level

Because the existence of values is *experienced* at the interpersonal or subject-subject level, it is common to suppose that values are *obtained* there. So the next question is this: Can the values essential to a rational world view be obtained from humanity itself?

There are two obvious problems with the morals and meaning obtained that way. The first is that the morals used by people in various societies differ. If we could all examine ourselves and produce a statement of the inner moral compulsions which move us and they all turned out to be the same, we would have arrived experimentally at a universal moral. It is, however, abundantly clear that such is *not* the situation. The note of anguish in humanist manifestos is there precisely for that reason. Human affairs remain stubborn, pleas for harmony fall on deaf ears, ideology continues to divide us. There is experimentally no universal morality (but of course, if there were, Christians would ask why and would take it as a pointer to God).

The second problem in trying to obtain moral values and meaning from humanity itself is failure to satisfy the demand of universality. Secular humanists have long recognized that truth. Marx and Engels, for example, insist on it! "Justice," writes Engels, "is just the idealized glorified expression of existing economic relations." Marx comments, "Such phrases as 'a fair distribution' are obsolete verbal rubbish." Engels sneers, "How superstitious of LaSalle [the French socialist] to still believe in justice."

Marx and Engels, in their rigorous historical analysis of humanity, excluded moral values, seeing them as the fruits of class exploitation. Such a critique is always possible of man-generated morals and meaning.

In spite of that, Marx experienced the categorical imperative of an absolute moral. His great work, *Capital,* continually resorts to the violent language of moral outrage in his merciless exposure of the exploitation of the working-class poor of nineteenth-century England. Much of the attraction of Marxism has always lain in its high moral tone. In quoting the French socialist Louis Blanc in the Communist Manifesto, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need," Marx was drawing on a sense of *universal* justice. Marxists have often followed their founder in thus rising above the restrictions of their own dialectic and expressing their humanness in moral demands. That is to their credit, but it exposes the impossibility in practice of avoiding moral commitment. Just as we cannot avoid operating on the basis of freedom (even when we deny its possibility), so we cannot help assuming the existence of an absolute morality.

The dangers of tyranny implicit in behaviorism are to be found also in the intellectual rejection of absolute moral values. Lenin added to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine that the proletariat would rule over the bourgeoisie with a rule "enforced by violence and unrestricted by law." Beyond Marx lay Lenin and beyond Lenin, the tyrant Stalin!

The Christian Basis for Morals

In contrast with the confusion implicit in all attempts to obtain morals and meaning at the person-person level, the Christian world view presents an elegant simplicity. Our sense of a universal moral imperative, an obligation to do the right, is reflection of our Creator in our created personalities.

The *ultimate* source of goodness and justice in the universe is God. Our experience of those values points up the creaturely nature of humanity which I have described as the object-subject relation.

Even so, confusion arises because humanity is flawed and the reflection of God is distorted. We are familiar with the term original sin. It is a fact that we human beings continually try to deny our creatureliness, our state of dependence on God. In our attempt to make Man an independent source of values we end up turning him (or her) into God. That is precisely what we mean by sin.

Our attempt at autonomy is inevitably self-defeating. We cannot deny our own natures even when we try, as we have seen. The confusion of secular dogmas is itself evidence of that impossibility. The essential nature of sin is reaching for the unattainable. Is it any wonder that secular man is confused?

Man's stubborn attempt at autonomy has many consequences. Among them are physical consequences, which Dr. MacKinney will address in his lecture.

Revelation

The highest level of our human nature implies the possibility of communication. Although we are objects to God's all-encompassing subjectivity, he insists on treating us with dignity as people and not as things. That is why we experience the inward call to goodness, justice and love.

That inward experience, however, is insufficient to overcome the confusion inherent in our flawed state. Indeed it

leads all too easily to self-righteousness, to sin clothing itself in white robes. That tendency, at its worst when it is religious, demonstrates our ability to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory!

To human confusion and sinfulness God responds with revelation: objective, concrete revelation in time. God is not hidden, nor is his nature a matter of opinion. He revealed his goodness in the moral revelation to Moses and Israel recorded in the Old Testament. Revelation reached its height in Jesus, who claimed to be a living revelation of God's nature: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

A claim to historical revelation requires, I think, some justification. First, to be effective it needs to be transmitted accurately. In my estimation the last century and a half of unremitting critical examination has led again and again to justification of the historical accuracy of the biblical record, as even a liberal critic like John A. T. Robinson has agreed. Professor Schoville will take up that point in his lecture.

A second requirement for revelation is that it should prove itself in some way. The miracles of Jesus were there expressly to authenticate his claims. That is particularly true of the resurrection. Jesus claimed that his death was to be God's method of dealing with human alienation from himself. His resurrection was the triumphant vindication of that claim. It was a demonstration that the human rebellion against God and its dark consequence of death had both been defeated.

The five professors participating in this series are themselves witnesses to the life-giving power of that message. We have found that the revelation of Jesus has the power to change our lives. The record of men and women who have found the Christian world view the only one to do justice to all our experience is truly impressive. It contains some of the greatest names in philosophy, the sciences, the arts and the humanities and it includes too, an innumerable multi-

tude of ordinary people whose testimony continues to authenticate that revelation today.

A Radical Alternative

Why is Christianity a *radical* alternative? Radical means that it goes to the *root.* Christianity is pertinent to our desperate situation because it speaks to the problem at its root—the human heart. I have been reading feverishly in the last few weeks to prepare for this lecture, a whole sequence of books by humanists, scientists, secularists and materialists, all claiming to have the true world view. Among them I read *Chance and Necessity* by Jacques Monod. I was struck by the fact that after several hundred pages of proving that the objective path of studying man leads to the conclusion that there is no purpose, no meaning, no morals and quite possibly no future, Monod stops at the edge of the pit of despair. In the last three pages he cries out that somehow we *have* to find some kind of effective moral system. I honor the appeal that Monod makes because it is a human appeal, reaching out from heart to heart. I long to be able to tell him of the Christian world view, which I think can provide a sound basis for answering his questions, as I have tried to show.

The Christian world view is a basis for action. It provides a basis for the rule of law because it is realistic. It doesn't have a naive and optimistic view of human beings. It enables us to regard ourselves with a clear-eyed realism which takes into account the wars, the holocaust and all the other miseries that our own century has produced. We can see that human beings (including ourselves) are capable of falling into terrible traps. Indeed, we are often most dangerous when we are being most religious. Christians see all those things clearly and see the dangers. They know that checks and balances have to be built into any system because of the dangerous thing that man now is because of his flawed nature. Over and above that, Christians insist that people

should behave the way they are created to behave, and we see in the gospel a basis for personal transformation that will satisfy that demand. It was an Old Testament prophet who wrote, "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream" (Amos 5:24). That must be the insistent cry of every Christian in every age. Wherever injustice rears its head there must be Christian people objecting to it and standing alongside those who suffer. Not to do that is to defy the whole basis of the world view that I've been trying to describe. Because in Christ God took on human suffering, his people can do no less if we really believe we are his people.

The action that results from this world view is radical because it is individual. The experience of radical Christianity always begins with a transformation of an individual life. We need not wait for the crowds to find the truth; we can experience it for ourselves. Once experienced, it becomes the basis for community and fellowship. But it starts with each one of us alone before God.

No longer the masses, the classes, the great groups that have so dominated the ideologies of the twentieth century, but the individual acting alone if necessary—that is the radical basis for continuing revolution. Because, of course, the problem is within. Bertrand Russell in one of his quieter moments wrote, "Love your enemies is good advice, but too difficult for us." Of course. It is precisely there that Christianity begins with the statement that men and women need the help of God. Finding God's help through Jesus Christ, we can overcome our sinfulness and can indeed love our enemies.

In Christ we confront the impossibility of the human situation, the pit of despair, with a love that is divine. Christ's love takes on death itself out of love for humankind. Christ's resurrection destroys the finality of death and through a new birth opens the way to a new life.

Recommended Reading

Barcus, Nancy. *Developing a Christian Mind.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977.

Blamires, Harry. *The Christian Mind.* Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1968.

Holmes, Arthur. *All Truth Is God's Truth.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.

McKay, Donald. *Clockwork Image.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974.

Schaeffer, Francis A. *The God Who Is There.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968.

_____. *Escape from Reason.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968.

Sire, James W. *The Universe Next Door.* Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976.

Chapter 3
Man: Naked Ape and Nothing More?

Wayne M. Becker

A lecture series like this provides me with one of those rare opportunities to draw together into the same forum two topics that are exceedingly important to me—my academic profession and my religious faith. I come to campus every day with two hats, one labeled "biologist" and the other labeled "Christian." Usually I'm obliged to wear them one at a time, but this lecture gives me a chance to wear both of them at once. I am grateful for that, because I regard it as tremendously exciting to be a biologist, but am also aware that biology is the study of life with a small *l.* I see a lecture like this as an appropriate occasion to underscore my conviction that there is also a dimension of life that is meant to be spelled with a capital *L.* So I propose to wear both hats at once right now, seeking to share with you the difference it makes to look at life through the eyes of the "Christian alternative."

We ought to begin, I think, by asking—the Christian alternative to *what?* If it is our intention in this series to ad-