

# **What in the World Is Going On?**

Identifying Hollow and Deceptive Worldviews  
A Guide for Christian Parents, Churches, and Schools

This book is dedicated to  
Maggie, Noah, Maren, Madelynn, Marissa, and Ahna  
who are first and foremost children of the heavenly Father.

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DAVID C. THOMPSON

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# Preface

This short book is written for any Christian who has ever wondered how the Christian faith fits into the present culture in which he or she now lives. It is not always an easy read, but it is extremely important and revealing. So please read carefully and persevere. It should cause Christian parents, teachers, pastors, and college and high school students to say, “Now I see how important my beliefs are in this culture in which I live, eat, and breathe; I now better understand how Satan seeks to undermine my faith and the faith of those I love.”

I deal here with a number of truths about different worldviews. I paint a fairly black-and-white picture of each one. But, as I point out a couple of times, people do not necessarily fit nicely into one and only one worldview. Most are not consistent; no one perfectly so, including the Christian. Please remember this as you read through the rather stark descriptions of the various false worldviews. Also, there are a number of worldviews not explained in this book. Looking back, I wish I would have included more. But perhaps that will come in an updated edition. Those in particular that I would like to include at some point are Feminism, Nihilism, Utilitarianism, Socialism, Narcissism, and Islam. These also impact the present times in which the Christian church exists and individual Christians live their lives. Of those I do describe, I include specific, real-life examples and anecdotes. They are not by any means exhaustive. There are many, many other actual instances of how each worldview plays itself out in culture. But those are for you to identify after you better under-

stand a particular worldview and how it expresses itself in culture.

I use footnotes in this book. They include references, of course, but they also contain important information, explanations, and insights that may be helpful in explaining the text. I strongly encourage you to read them as well.

Finally, there are study questions for each chapter at the end of the book. Some require deeper thought, further study, or assistance from those who might have more specific knowledge (such as pastors, teachers, and creation science experts). Take advantage of them. You can also e-mail me with questions or challenges (including challenges to me and what I write). I can be reached at [preacherthompson@yahoo.com](mailto:preacherthompson@yahoo.com).

I hope and pray that this book will be helpful to Christ's beloved bride on earth and honoring of the Bridegroom—the true crucified, resurrected, and ascended Son of God and Son of Man—to whom *every thought* is to be made captive and obedient (2 Corinthians 10:5).



# 1.

## What Worldviews Are and Why Christians Should Understand Them

### **WHY THE INTEREST IN WORLDVIEWS NOW?**

In the spring of 2006, my 17-year-old daughter found herself engaged in a discussion about homosexuality with her newfound friends from her brand-new school, all of them professing Christians and one even a pastor's kid. Her friends were intelligent and "Minnesota nice." Her well-thought-out view on the subject, based on natural law and God's Word, was coherently explained (I've heard her do it before); she did so without a soapbox or holding up a placard with a Bible verse on it. After the conversation one of her friends, representing what was on the minds of all of them, asked her, "Are you a homophobe?" The concept that homosexuality is unnatural, unhealthy, and biblically wrong was totally foreign to them. It was unthinkable. In fact, they couldn't wait to get together to watch the Academy Award-winning, pro-gay movie *Brokeback Mountain*.

Where do these church-going teenagers and thousands of others like them get their views? After all, theirs was the foreign one 30 years ago. What prevents them from understanding and even considering an alternative perspective? Their worldview.

A person who views homosexuality as normal could more easily be tempted toward that sin, or he or she could just as well avoid it. But whichever the case, there is still something else going on here, something just as sinister, something that actually undermines Christian salvation for both the individual and the biblically based church. The issue is not homosexuality per se, but the false worldview in which it finds support and what that worldview can do. Behind an immoral lifestyle, behind a false teaching, or behind a sinful practice is often a worldview in conflict with Christianity.

Though many false worldviews have always existed, they may have not necessarily been out in the open. But something happened in our society within the last century or so that allowed them to come out of the closet. What was that? The fading of a Christian culture, or of a culture that at least gave some sort of recognition to the Bible as a source of truth in many areas of life. Whatever the case, today we are faced with numerous worldviews that feel more free than ever to promote themselves in our society. Most of the time they go unnoticed as belief systems trying to win over hearts and minds, especially of the young.

If Christians treasure *justification by grace for Christ's sake through faith*, then they cannot ignore the study of worldviews. Worldviews can affect everything from one's moral perspective to one's understanding of the Trinity, the Scriptures, the Son of God, law and gospel, faith, and the means of grace—doctrines vital to eternal salvation. The bottom line is false worldviews are adversarial to the one thing needed—Jesus Christ (Luke 10:42).

### **KNOWING THERE IS A DEEPER PLOT**

Satan's arsenal of afflictions, temptations, murders, and lies have one ultimate goal; they are always a part of a darker scheme. A good example is Job. Satan's ultimate design in

afflicting Job is found in these words to God: “But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face” (1:11, emphasis added). Satan, by means of affliction, was eager that Job rebel against and reject the one who had created, redeemed, and sanctified him. Satan uses his lies to the same end: to have Christians rebel against and do away with Christ (John 8:44). And that is where false worldviews come in. They contain lies, lies that are somehow in opposition to the truth of God’s Word. The purpose of a false worldview is either to prevent one from coming to the truth—to Christ—or to tear one away from him. This may seem overly alarming. But it is not.

### **WORLDVIEW EXPLAINED**

The concept of worldview is closely related to the terms *philosophy* and *religion*. It is a set of presuppositions or assumptions to which one holds. A worldview can be compared to a pair of glasses: when putting on different lenses of different strengths, one gets a different view of the world each time. The worldview a person “puts on” gives him a certain perspective; it is how one looks at life and the world. It helps determine how he thinks, what he believes about nature, what he values and to what extent, how he views issues like homosexuality, what he thinks sin is or if it even exists, how he believes the universe originated, what he thinks about the supernatural, whether or not truth can be known, who Jesus of Nazareth is (or was), where truth comes from, and what the nature of man is like. In short, a worldview helps determine how one sees every aspect of life. Thus, there is a biblical, or confessional Lutheran, worldview. Putting on biblical or Lutheran “glasses” and keeping them on would give a truly objective and truthful view of life.

No one is exempt from having a worldview or, more accurately, worldviews. They are formed in a person’s mind and heart by his upbringing, education, place of worship,

friends, the media, art, relationships, culture, etc. Ultimately though, if they are false worldviews, their source is Satan; if it is a true worldview, then God is the source. One does not have to sit at the feet of a teacher or professor to become a disciple of a particular worldview; worldviews are just as likely to be absorbed by osmosis. All one has to do is exist in culture: watch the *Simpsons*, read *Time* magazine, curl up with a book, peruse a newspaper, talk with Aunt Helen, listen to the news, socialize, attend history class. And being the sheep that we are, we are more than willing to adopt the more culturally popular worldviews.

The typical person probably does not even know he holds to a certain worldview. And if he does know, he will likely not think critically about his worldview. He will not ask himself whether his worldview might be true or false; where it comes from; why it was rejected a generation ago; and very important, how it may conflict with certain religious or doctrinal teachings—another worldview—to which he also holds.

A person will likely rotate “glasses,” even within the same day, depending on the topic. Not even the Christian consistently wears his biblical worldview lenses (though that is the goal). Whereas his view of the reality of the resurrection of Christ may be directed by his Christian and biblical worldview, his view of controversial social issues such as stem cell research or abortion may be influenced by a completely different and contrary worldview.

The number of worldviews is almost endless. Some of the more popular worldviews in our culture include Post-modernism, Neo-Marxism, Naturalism, Nihilism, Utilitarianism, Feminism, Pantheism, Paganism, Secular Humanism, Darwinism, Existentialism, and Communism. You can even classify the different Christian theological systems into worldviews: Lutheranism, Catholicism, Calvinism, and Evangelicalism. Same with the non-Christian religions:

Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, etc. Notice that the concept of worldview is quite inclusive: it embraces both philosophies and religions. There can also be much overlap among worldviews. Even the confessional Lutheran worldview has much in common with several of the above and perhaps one or two teachings in common with the rest.

### **HOW ARE WORLDVIEWS DANGEROUS?**

Previously it was mentioned that a Christian may be guided by the Scriptures regarding the resurrection of Christ but influenced by a false worldview, like Postmodernism, in his view of social issues. But who's to say whether or not Postmodernism won't eventually distort his view of the resurrection as well, not to mention other scriptural teachings? Satan loves the "slippery slope" method: on the way down, a false worldview can quickly swallow up more and more scriptural teachings, including essential ones.

St. Paul said, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Colossians 2:8). Therein lies the key truth about false worldviews. False worldviews are always deceptive; that is, they can look good but are inwardly evil. Many of the teachings of a false worldview may be true, good, or practical in and of themselves, but the worldview as a whole is still always deceptive. In fact, the most deceptive worldviews may be those that are almost entirely true but have one subtle teaching that can easily worm its way into the mind of an individual because it's hard to detect and everything else about it makes so much sense. A false worldview may sound good, necessary, normal, and beneficial, but that should not be used to justify or overlook its sinister and evil intentions.

While I was teaching at Bethany Lutheran College in Minnesota, a student who had transferred to the local state

university called me. She told me she had been struggling with her major but that things had gotten better. When I asked her to explain, she told me she was being taught things about the family that were in conflict with what she had been taught at home and in her church. What helped, she said, was an “assessment” she and all students in her major had to take, an assessment that indicated she was “too narrow” in her views and needed to learn to be more “tolerant.” This made sense to her, at which point she started struggling less. Unbeknown to her, she had begun to swallow the worldview of Postmodernism, which teaches that all views are to be respected and none are to be considered more true or better than any other. But just how long would it be until she applied this postmodern way of thinking to the Christian religion and say, “I have been too narrow-minded in my thinking of religion; other religions are to be respected for they can save just as well as Christianity”?

### **LUTHERANS LOVE TO JUDGE (OR OUGHT TO)**

In Matthew 7 Jesus told his disciples not to judge. “Do not judge” (verse 1) is now perhaps more widely quoted than John 3:16. These days non-Christians love this verse because of its current interpretation and application. Many Christians and their churches have jumped on this “don’t judge” bandwagon. After all, it’s not only the command of Jesus, but it is also the “loving” thing to do.

It is quite interesting, however, that right after Jesus told people not to judge, he proceeded to make judgments. He called people hypocrites, dogs, pigs, ferocious wolves, and false prophets—all in the same chapter. Was Jesus contradicting himself? Actually, the Christian church has, to a degree, lost a very valuable tool. When the Lord told his disciples not to judge, he meant in the sense that they not put themselves above others or read evil motives into others’ hearts. That’s the bad kind of judging. But there is clearly a

good and necessary kind of judging as well. Jesus commands believers to “make a right judgment” (John 7:24). And the apostle John tells his readers to “test [i.e., judge] the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). An example of this good judging would be the Berean Christians (Acts 17). In other words, Christians are to compare any and all teachings, practices, lifestyles, religions, philosophies, and worldviews to God’s Word, the ultimate standard. Christians are simply to concur with what God’s Word has already pronounced. If God says something is good, so do his people. If God condemns something, so should Christians. They are simply agreeing with God.

Lutherans have been good at this, at least in the past. In *The Book of Concord*, the teachings or confessions of the Lutheran church, there are over two hundred antitheses in roughly six hundred pages. Antitheses are simply those teachings that Lutherans condemn because God condemns them. God condemns them because they are somehow in conflict with the teachings found in his Word. Not only are false doctrines and false religions condemned but also false—“hollow and deceptive”—philosophies. The reason for all these antitheses is that God and his church understand the slippery slope method of Satan, also known as “yeast” (Galatians 5:9), which spreads without even being seen. In other words, Christians are to judge in this good sense not because they are holier than the Islamic fundamentalist, the utopian dreamer, or the pantheist neighbor; but because God has established truth that he desires to be believed and through which he desires to preserve his people. For the good of the church on earth, Christians must judge worldviews.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This current cultural love affair with being nonjudgmental comes from the worldview of Postmodernism and its emphasis on “tolerance,” which is described in chapter 4.

## A CONFSSIONAL LUTHERAN WORLDVIEW

What is meant by a *confessional* Lutheran worldview? Why not simply use the term *Christian* or *biblical* worldview?<sup>2</sup> Confessional Lutherans believe the Bible; it is God's Word from beginning to end; it is true and without error in all it says. But since many branches of Christianity claim the same thing about the Bible, confessional Lutherans go on to state or confess the true biblical teachings in a number of thoroughly formulated writings. These writings were put together in *The Book of Concord*.

Actually, all churches, Bible-believing or not, are confessional churches in one sense: they all *confess* certain teachings to be true and others false. Even those who say they have no confession or who assert they simply teach what the Bible teaches are confessional. As soon as a preacher says, "God says . . ." and the people respond with an "Amen," the pastor has stated a confession and the congregation has agreed to it. The difference, in my opinion, is confessional Lutheran churches are usually more honest about being confessional. They state clearly and boldly their confessions in writing, confessions that do not change with the spirit of the times or the popular worldviews, as do those churches who have unwritten or vague confessions. Thus the Lutheran Confessions help preserve among its churches the truth that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

The Apostles' Creed was the first confession of Christianity. When further clarification was needed due to controversy, the Nicene and the Athanasian Creeds were developed and adopted as true explanations of the Scriptures. At the time of the Reformation, Christians very much needed to distinguish truth from error; so after carefully probing into the Bible, Lutheran theologians wrote the Augsburg Confession, the Apology to the Augsburg Confession, the

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<sup>2</sup>Note: when I use the phrase *biblical worldview* or *Christian worldview* in this book, it is synonymous with *confessional Lutheran worldview*, unless the context suggests otherwise.



Small and Large Catechisms, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, and the Formula of Concord. All ten of these confessions are included in *The Book of Concord*. They are scriptural and have stood the test of time (please do not take my word on them; read them yourselves). Confessional Lutherans do not put their confessions above or even alongside the Bible. They do, however, say they are a totally accurate explanation of God's Word. And even though these confessions are the product of men and could have erred, confessional Lutherans say they do not. They are drawn from the Scriptures and draw the Christian back to the Scriptures.

There are many Christian or biblical worldview seminars, books, and videos today. Generally they are associated with the theologies or worldviews of Evangelicalism and Calvinism. These worldview productions deserve much credit. They have done an admirable job of describing popular worldviews in conflict with Christianity and where they are to be found. Many Christians, including confessional Lutherans, have been protected in the Christian faith because of the worldview work of evangelicals and Calvinists. To their shame, confessional Lutherans have remained on the sideline in their understanding and teaching about worldviews. They have allowed these others to have almost a virtual monopoly on the subject. But times are changing.

There are two advantages of approaching the subject of worldviews from a confessional Lutheran perspective. First, confessional Lutherans are big into doctrine. They love doctrine because it is God's Word. As they sometimes say, doctrine is life. So when there is a serious confessional Lutheran worldview product (seminar, recording, or book), it will usually start with God's doctrine—expounding on the true teachings of the Scriptures. This is important because there needs to be that standard against which to measure other

worldviews, and the only standard that will do is God's—his Word, his Bible, his doctrine. A careful comparison between the false and true cannot be done unless both are carefully laid out. That is why in this book, the first order of business is to explain the confessional Lutheran worldview. Then the readers are better equipped to get on with the business of understanding what is false about other worldviews. Worldview seminars and publications by evangelicals and Calvinists will either assume some understanding of the true doctrine among the readers or listeners or teach a limited or inaccurate biblical worldview to them. Second, there are a number of biblical teachings that Lutheran doctrine, by the grace of God, has a better grasp of and that directly impact the subject of worldviews. These teachings include

- natural knowledge of God,
- the nature of man,
- the Scriptures as Christ-centered (christocentric),
- justification,
- the means of grace,
- vocation,
- the two kingdoms (sometimes called church and state),
- the last things (Christ's second coming).

Understanding these teachings will enhance one's awareness of unbiblical worldviews and how to deal with them.

## **TWO VICTIMS**

In the summer of 2005, I got into a lengthy discussion about Darwinism with a young man who was in his first year of college. We debated the topic on the basis of religion, philosophy, and science. During high school he had become somewhat convinced that the theory of evolution

(Darwinism) was true, but at that time he was apparently still interested in Christianity. In college, thanks to the zeal of a professor, he had become an ardent disciple of Darwinism and, consequently, an atheist. The slippery slope was very evident. He was convinced math and science “proved” evolution. At the end of our civilized argument, he summed up everything by saying, “Well, I guess either you trust in God or you trust in numbers.” Satan won this battle. Hopefully there are more battles to come in this young man’s life and in the end he will call Jesus “my Lord and my God.” But his story is all too common—rejecting Christ because of a false worldview.

The individual is not the only one endangered by false worldviews. Christian congregations, schools, synods, and whole denominations are constantly being tempted and influenced by popular worldviews. This is especially true among Christian colleges, including confessional Lutheran colleges. They can hold out their confessional stance with one hand but offer the fruit of Satan with the other, without even realizing it. Their instructors often go off to other institutions of higher learning to increase their knowledge and acquire doctorate degrees, only to come back with a worldview that they themselves do not realize is in conflict with the Christian mission and teachings of their college. But all of this is nothing new within Christendom. The church on earth will always be the church militant. This does, however, call for vigilance and going on the offensive with boldness. “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5).

### **WHY CHRISTIANS SHOULD STUDY WORLDVIEWS**

Christians need to study worldviews because Satan loves to deceive. So when a Christian researches worldviews from

a biblical or confessional perspective, a number of things can happen, to the great displeasure of the devil. First, the Christian will better understand the confessional Christian worldview; he will be well equipped to look at life and the world from God's perspective. Second, he will better grasp false worldviews and how they conflict with God's Word. Third, he will be able to spot false worldviews and know how they manifest themselves in culture—the different avenues through which they come: Hollywood, churches, schools, political ideas, prominent people, government, special interest groups, etc. Fourth, he will be better equipped to guard his faith and help others guard theirs. Fifth, he will know how better to defend the truth of Christianity and challenge the false worldviews (1 Peter 3:15). Sixth, he will be more aptly prepared to proclaim law and gospel, sin and grace, within the cultural context of false worldviews (Acts 17:16-31). Finally, he will know better how to love his neighbor—his wife, his daughter, his fellow church member, the guy next door, his coworker, or anyone else caught up in a trendy but false worldview.

### **COMMON QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY WORLDVIEWS**

In the next chapter, I will begin with basic Christian doctrine—confessional Lutheran teaching—arranged according to fundamental questions that worldviews frequently ask. In chapters 3 through 5, I will summarize several popular worldviews, helping reveal their answers to many of these same questions. Here are the fundamental questions of worldviews:

1. How does a worldview understand the Prime Reality—that which has always existed and explains all other things?
2. How does a worldview understand the source of knowledge and truth? How does it claim to know truth and right from wrong?

3. How does a worldview understand and explain the universe—how and why it exists?
4. How does a worldview understand man and his relation to the Prime Reality and the universe?
5. How does a worldview understand and explain evil?
6. What is a worldview's solution for evil?
7. How does a worldview understand the future, the final reality, or the “end game”?
8. How is a worldview reflected in various disciplines (such as theology, ethics, philosophy, science, history, art, music, sociology, and politics) and various media?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Some may see this last question as violating a sacred or commonsense separation between Christianity and the world. But it is here in these disciplines that the most critical assumptions of the various worldviews are often communicated. Very few will become convinced of a false worldview because they have read or studied its creed, statement, or manifesto; rather, a worldview will communicate its assumptions through the disciplines of science, the arts, sociology, and so on, and in this way recruit disciples. Quite often Christians will divorce these disciplines from the Christian worldview, assuming there is no connection between the two. It is then, especially, that these disciplines can act as effective vehicles of the various false worldviews. Luther understood very well that all of life and learning need to be connected to God's Word: “But where the Holy Scripture does not rule I certainly advise no one to send his child. . . . I greatly fear that schools for higher learning are wide gates to hell if they do not diligently teach the Holy Scriptures and impress them on the young folk” (*What Luther Says* [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959], #1327).

2. List some assumptions of the false worldviews described that automatically exclude true Christian faith. Why should any false worldview assumption—no matter how minor—be taken seriously?
3. Read Colossians 2:8 and 2 Corinthians 10:5. Notice the verbs (“see to it,” “demolish,” “take captive”) and discuss how those are important for the life of the individual Christian and the life of the church.
4. What does it mean to be vigilant, faithful, and prayerful? How are these found in the hymn stanzas quoted? Where are the teachings “grace alone” and “Scripture alone” found in this hymn? What do these two teachings tell us in our fight against false worldviews?