

Understanding and Responding to Different Worldviews

Our thoughts and beliefs, as well as our daily life, are inevitably connected to a set of background convictions about the world. For many people the majority worldview in their culture is often just assumed and not identified and spelled out. This is one major obstacle in communicating the Christian message. For the evangelist it is therefore necessary to develop an understanding of different worldviews and be able to respond to them. Charlie Hadjiev will respond to Stefan, focusing on how to communicate the gospel in the context of an Orthodox and post-Communist cultural situation.

Stefan Gustavsson is a member of the European Leadership Forum Steering Committee. He is director of Credo Academy, a Christian study centre in Stockholm, which focuses on cultural analysis, worldview studies, apologetics and evangelism. He is the author of several books and writes regularly for different Swedish magazines. Stefan also serves as General Secretary of the Swedish Evangelical Alliance.

I. What is a Worldview?

A. "The truth is that a worldview is like colored glasses; it colors everything at which we look. It is a grid through which one views all of life. As such it helps form our thoughts, values, and decisions. The tragedy is that most people do not even know what their worldview is, how they got it, and how important it is in their lives."
Norman Geisler, in Phillips, Brown & Stonestreet, *Making Sense of Your World: A Biblical Worldview*

B. "A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions, that may be true, partially true or false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides that foundation on which we live and move and have our being." James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*

II. Two ultimate alternatives, three main groups and seven basic questions

A. Impersonal or personal? (Francis Schaeffer)

B. Christian Theism, Western Naturalism or Eastern Pantheism (C S Lewis)

C. Seven Basic Questions (James Sire):

1. Ontology: what is prime reality?

2. Nature: what is the nature of external reality?
3. Anthropology: what is a human being?
4. Death: what happens to a person at death?
5. Epistemology: why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. Ethics: how do we know what is right and wrong?
7. History: what is the meaning of human history?

III. A Biblical Worldview

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” Heb 1:1-3

A. Living God; personal, infinite and good

B. Creator, sustainer and savior

C. Inspiration and incarnation

IV. Worldview questions in the New Testament

A. Two examples: Jesus's resurrection from the dead & Jesus return in glory.

B. Paul's question to Festus and Agrippa:

“Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?” Acts 26:8

C. The structure of Paul's defense in Acts 26:

1. Presents his foundational belief in God: “hope in what God has promised our ancestors”

2. Challenges them to think through the meaning of God's existence; “Why any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?”

3. Reports events in his own life: a vision from heaven, with outward physical manifestations; saw, felt, heard ...

4. Defends the truth when questioned: “true and reasonable”

5. Invites them to investigate: “it was not done in a corner”, “do you believe the prophets?”

D. First century critics to the Christians: “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.”
2 Peter 3:4

1. Peter's fourfold answer

- a) Creation: an unexpected (!) beginning of the universe

- b) History: God's involvement at the time of the Flood

- c) God's being: his relationship to time

- d) Jesus's teaching: the situation is coherent with his promise

V. Responding to Naturalism and Pantheism

A. Evaluating truth claims:

- 1. Coherence as a system of thought

- 2. Correspondence with our shared reality

- 3. Livability on a daily basis

B. Impersonal monism – everything should be explained in terms of impersonal matter (Naturalism) or in terms of impersonal spiritual reality (Pantheism) – has problems on all three levels.