

Reformation
& Revival



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Truth famine is the ultimate and worst of all famines. Unless modern culture recovers the truth of truth and the truth of God, civilization is doomed to oblivion and the spirit of man to nihilism.

Carl F. H. Henry

...there are several characteristics of television and its surroundings that converge to make authentic religious experience impossible. [Most television preachers use] the most modern methods of marketing and promotion...this is an unusual religious credo. There is no great religious leader—from the Buddha to Moses to Jesus to Mohammed to Luther—who offered people what they want. Only what they need. But television is not well suited to offering people what they need.

Neil Postman

The Conversion of the Mind

Bill Crouse

One effect of global, high tech communication on this shrinking planet is the increased exposure we have to other lands, peoples, and worldviews. Today students on major university campuses will likely encounter professors who teach their subjects from vastly different perspectives. For example, a Hindu may be found teaching psychology; a Marxist, history; an existentialist, literature; and a humanist, science. Young people are now confronted with a virtual supermarket of worldview options upon which to base their lives. As a result, many Christians—confused, defensive, and often in the minority—tend to incorporate much non-Christian thinking into their own worldviews.

Christianity as a world and life system (*weltanschauung*) was not always on the defensive, nor has it always been viewed as one option among many, as we find today. For much of the history of Western civilization, Christianity has been the basis for world order. In the areas of critical thought, moral order, and culture, Christianity (i.e., its ideas) was predominant. Christianity set the agenda. This is not to say every important thinker or artist of the past was a devout Christian. But many were, and those who were not at least affirmed or accepted the basic rudiments of the Christian worldview.

Retreat and withdrawal of the church from active engagement in culture began, we believe, somewhere in the nineteenth century when it failed to adequately answer the contra-Christian arguments of the Enlightenment. Instead, the church took an increasingly defensive posture. As Christianity slowly lost ground in its conflict with Enlightenment humanism, it began to concede the area of culture to the enemy. This concession was no doubt partly due to the church's embrace of the erroneous Neoplatonist idea which dichotomized life into the "sacred" and "secular" (or "spiritual" and "physical"). In keeping with this view, the "sacred" or "spiritual" area was deemed more important. Therefore

the church became increasingly preoccupied with the mystical and the hereafter, and looked upon itself only as an instrument of spiritual or internal change, while it retreated from its mandate of being salt and light in society.¹

Many Christian leaders spoke out against this error but were largely unheard. Perhaps the most eloquent was the great New Testament scholar J. Gresham Machen. He challenged his students at Princeton Seminary in 1912:

The Christian cannot be satisfied so long as any human activity is either opposed to Christianity or out of all connection with Christianity. Christianity must pervade not merely all nations, but also all of human thought. The Christian, therefore, cannot be indifferent to any *branch* of earnest human endeavor. It must all be brought into some relation to the gospel. It must be studied either in order to be demonstrated as false, or else in order to be made useful in advancing the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom must be advanced not merely extensively, but also intensively. The church must seek to conquer not merely every man for Christ, but also the whole of man.²

Another strong voice calling for a Christian penetration of culture earlier in this century was Oxford scholar and prolific Christian author, C. S. Lewis. He remarked:

I believe that any Christian who is qualified to write a good popular book on any science may do much more by that than by any directly apologetic work. What we want is not more little books about Christianity, but more little books by Christians on other subjects—with their Christianity *latent*. It is not the books written in defense of Materialism that make the modern man a Materialist; it is the Materialistic assumptions in all the other books. In the same way, it is not books on Christianity that will really trouble him. But he would be troubled if, whenever, he wanted a cheap popular introduction to some science, the best work on the market was always by a Christian.³

And more recently, the late Francis A. Schaeffer, popular apologist and theologian, has forcefully and effectively communicated the role of the church in culture to a generation of young people looking for an explanation (a worldview) that spoke to all of life. It is this author's opinion that Schaeffer's greatest contribution has been to alert the church to its complete role in the world. The cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 is still in effect. The power of the Gospel is not only sufficient to change lives, but to change culture as well. Christians are to challenge their spheres of influence with Christian truth claims. We believe that God still wants Christians to bring all areas of thought and life under the captivity of the lordship of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). To do so involves the developing of a decidedly Christian worldview. It involves the individual Christian thinking God's thoughts after Him in every discipline of study—whether in art, science, history, psychology, or economics, and applying what he or she learns, on the canvas, in the laboratory, at the chalkboard, in the counseling process, or in the business world!

Of late many fine Christian books on the subject of worldviews have been published, but most of these books only critique and analyze various worldviews. While there is certainly a place for this, our experience in a variety of ministries has taught us that criticism must be followed by suggestion of a positive alternative. Analyzing what is wrong with the world is important, but we feel there is a corresponding need to set a new mood with the attitude, "Look what Christianity offers the world."

For those who believe the church's mission is solely spiritual and that the cultural mandate was negated by the Fall, worldview building will be seen as an exercise in futility. If that is the opinion of any readers, we challenge you with this question: What would the world be like without the works of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, or Calvin?

These men were not just great theologians; they distinguished themselves in their attempts to develop a Christian world-and-life view which incorporates the implications of Christian thinking into every area of knowledge.

It is the conviction of this author that Christ is Lord and that all areas of life and thought are to be brought under His dominion. It is therefore the duty of every believer, not only to think Christ's thoughts after Him, but also to act accordingly as His regal representative on earth.

Most Christians will agree that the Christian worldview should be applied in personal relationships, in the family and in the church. But, should Christian principles also be applied in culture and in government? In other words, should Christians try to reform society? If the Christian experience of the new birth is genuine, we believe it cannot be otherwise. Changed people thinking "Christianly" and applying Christian principles will lead to changes in every area of life including the institutions with which believers come into contact.

In saying this, we wish to make it perfectly clear that we are in no way advocating an "ecclesiocracy," or that Christian principles should be imposed by force on unbelievers. Christ clearly taught us in the parables how this change would occur—through the evangelization process or the revival-reform dynamic (cf. Matthew 13).⁴

The conversion process is not just a change of heart or an emotional experience. We are also to be converted in mind. In Romans 12:2 Paul speaks in the imperative: "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." But we are not to stop there.⁵ We are to apply biblical thinking in every area of life. To a Christian medical doctor it will mean, among other things, the application of the biblical view concerning the dignity of life. To a Christian legislator, it means seeking to make laws which are in accordance with the principles of

Scripture. To a Christian artist, it means creating works of art which speak truthfully and honor the Creator.

The implications of this are clear. Christians will thus inevitably be in conflict with non-Christian worldviews. Thinking worldviewishly in a context of like-minded people is one thing, but holding to certain convictions about the world and ultimate questions where there exist a plurality of answers and no consensus is another. At the close of the twentieth century we find ourselves in just such a state. The Judeo-Christian concept of reality based on revealed absolutes no longer enjoys the consensus it once had in Western civilization. Various forms of humanism are presently in the ascendancy and are threatening to impose their worldview on all of life. As Christians, and as Christ's theocratic representatives, we have a mandate to enlarge His kingdom during our sojourn on earth. This is taught, we believe, by Jesus in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:11-26). The servants were charged to increase their master's assets during his absence. The goal was not to break even. They were to profit, to improve the situation! Thus Christians today should not be building cloisters but a culture that increasingly reflects God's will. This means that Christians have a divine call to every worthy vocation, be it science, economics, medicine, the arts, politics, or the military—each according to his gifts and abilities.

Should Christians then attempt to Christianize the world? Yes, in the sense that efforts should be made to convert people from ungodly ways of thinking and acting. We hasten to add, however, that we are not referring to the transference from our Western culture those aspects which do not have biblical sanction. We should attempt to speak only where Scripture speaks. Many laws in the Old Testament applied specifically only to the Hebrew culture. For example, the Mosaic Law decreed that a homeowner had to have a wall around the roof of his house (Deut. 22:8). The

purpose of the law was to protect children from falling off the roof. In the dwellings of their day many family activities occurred on the roof. To seek to impose such a measure on modern societies with different structures is ludicrous. However, the principle that can be deduced here is that parents are responsible for the safety of their children. Such can be proclaimed in any culture. In our pluralistic society conflicts and polarization are inevitable because the opposing humanistic worldviews have a different basis for determining moral values. Each side attempts to legislate laws based on its own moral perspective. The abortion controversy is a perfect example of conflicting worldviews. Those advocating abortion-on-demand do not want the worldview (religious views) of those against abortion imposed on them. At the present, however, the will of those advocating pro-choice is being imposed on those who are opposed. This imposition takes form in several ways: tax money is being used to pay for abortions, and our children are increasingly exposed—in various avenues of our culture—to nonbiblical views of human life.

How can the Christian consensus of the past be restored to what it once was? Obviously not by the power of the sword (2 Cor. 10:3-4)! Rather we seek to evangelize and influence those who oppose God and His laws. This takes time, just as it has taken centuries for humanism to get where it is today. Western civilization with its Christian roots did not rise in a day either. Jesus taught this principle of time to His disciples in the parables (Matt. 13). A mustard tree starts with a tiny seed and takes some *time* to grow to maturity. Yeast also takes *time* to leaven a whole loaf of dough as it works quietly and persuasively within (Note that its action is latent, not blatant!). We Christians are called upon to “leaven” the whole “lump” of society. We are to effect change in its composition. The process is spiritual in that people’s hearts are changed through the preaching

of the Gospel, and whose minds are then influenced and changed by the teaching of biblical principles (Christian worldview).

Christians should therefore strive to set the agenda on cultural issues (i.e., to be a genuine counter culture) and to be the continuing conscience of society. This again is taught by Jesus when He declared His followers to be the “salt” and “light” in the world (Matt. 5:13-16), two of the most common and necessary elements in every household. Through the use of these two metaphors Jesus is describing the positive and wholesome influence His disciples are to have in the world. Salt was of extremely high value as a commodity.⁶ It was used as a condiment (Job 6:6), as a preservative (Bar. 6:28 in the Apocrypha), for purification (Mark 9:49), as medicine (Ezek. 16:4), to seal covenants (Num. 18:19), as a symbol of wisdom and wholesome speech (Col. 4:6), and as a method of sterilizing an enemy’s field (Judg. 9:45). Salt, however, when contaminated by white limestone or gypsum dust, loses all its value. It is only salt found in its pristine state that has any value. The application is obvious. The command to the disciples of Christ is to “keep oneself unpolluted by the world” (James 1:27). It is only in this pure state that the Christian can effectively offer a counterculture. If through the metaphor of salt the church is to offer something of value to the world, it is only through the second metaphor of light that the world can discern this value. It is light which dispels darkness and presents the truth of what is really there. The teaching of Jesus in this all-important passage makes it quite clear that Christians are not to be passive in their earthly sojourn. Indeed the application of this truth in the early church changed the face of the Roman world.

The Need for a New Mood

As Christ’s ambassadors we must not be intimidated by

the size of our task. We serve a powerful God, and He has given us all the necessary tools to carry it out. There is no room for pessimism in the Christian's thinking. It is not only time for a new mind, but for a new mood as well. Communism in past decades has had its successes because its adherents believed victory was inevitable. Christians, above all people, should reflect the same certainty. We know that the Gospel works wherever it is applied; it brings order out of chaos.

We must guard against a pessimism that arises from a faulty emphasis in our eschatology. We are not to retreat because "things are going to get worse according to biblical prophecy. Therefore, we might as well let things get worse, then Jesus will come and straighten out this mess. We should not polish the brass of a sinking ship." This attitude is found nowhere in the New Testament writings. In fact, three books of the New Testament contain warnings about the seriousness of retreating from our task (cf. 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Hebrews). Furthermore, Jesus said, "No man knows the day or the hour" (repeated many times in the Gospels). Most agree that the second coming of Christ will occur in the midst of worldwide suffering and conflict. Our error today is one of presumption, concluding that these events must be near. They well may be, but what if they are five hundred years away? Do we not have to face this as a very real possibility? How will we "occupy" in the twenty-first century if our Lord tarries? Do we not have the awesome responsibility of equipping the church and our families to be God's ambassadors in this microchip world?

We have every reason to be optimistic. Why advise Christians to be active if they cannot win? We initially focus on raising godly seed in our own household, establishing a small beachhead in enemy territory. We next build strong churches where we ourselves find strength and teaching that equip us for our task. We then live before and confront

the world wherever God has called us. We are to "occupy until He comes." We have the promise of victory from the Lord Himself when He prophesied to His disciples that the gates of hades would not prove stronger than the church (Matt. 16:18). The picture Jesus paints is a walled city in which Satan and his kingdom have taken refuge. The gates and walls, however, are no match for the battering rams of the kingdom of God. Many times Christians read this passage and reverse the figure. Jesus is not saying that the church is huddled behind the walls with the forces of Satan trying to kick in the gates. It's the other way around. The gates of hell are not strong enough to prevail against the force of the Gospel. We can be optimistic. We must begin to think in these terms, and of taking the offensive.

Humanism as a system contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. It is bankrupt, and we Christians need to take advantage of its weaknesses and reestablish the Christian worldview with its moral and spiritual capital. In doing so we must have a quiet confidence and optimism that Christianity will triumph.

As we seek to perform our task it is essential that we have a proper attitude toward the lost. It must be a "but for the grace of God, there go I" kind of an attitude, or the truth we preach will meet with a negative reaction. We recognize that some of the enemies of God will resist even a gracious approach, but we must never present the truth nakedly to the lost. It must be adorned with a genuine love and compassion for our fellow humans as creatures whom Christ loved enough to die for.⁷ (See Ephesians 4:15 and 1 Thessalonians 1:5.) The entire Epistle to Titus seems to stress this very thing. The apostle instructs Titus to rebuke the Cretans for teaching false doctrine. Yet the rebuke would have had a hollow ring to it if his own life were not above reproach. In the rest of the Epistle Paul exhorts his young apprentice to "make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (2:10),

and for Christians to devote themselves to “doing what is good” (3:8). One of the reactions of those who came into contact with our Lord while He was on earth that boggles our mind is the fact that sinners were attracted to Him (Luke 15:1). His adornment of the truth made it alluring!

We are living at an opportune time in history. Not only is there an immense spiritual vacuum throughout the world, but there also seems to be a corresponding dearth of ideas and solutions to solve current problems. We must have confidence that the revealed truth of God is adequate for our times and all times. We must not make rallying cries like “Jesus Is the Answer” or “The Bible Has the Answers” into hollow slogans. We must demonstrate to the world that Christianity works. As the truth is lived we must then be prepared to:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Author

Bill Crouse is president of Christian Information Ministries International, Richardson, Texas. The primary thrust of his ministry is to assist believers in defining and defending the Christian worldview.

End Notes

- 1 We are in no way demeaning the spiritual ministry of the church or the mystical relationship of the believer to Christ. Our point is that the ministry of the church must be viewed wholistically.
- 2 This address on “The Scientific Preparation of the Minister” was delivered September 20, 1912, at the opening of the one hundred and first session of Princeton Theological Seminary. It is found in the *Princeton Theological Review*, Vol. XI, No. 1, 1913, p. 1.
- 3 C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock*, Walter Hooper, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1970), 93.
- 4 We see revival and reform as two sides of the same coin. True revival leads to reform in individual lives and in society. Trying to push for reform without the revival of men’s hearts is futile. As new-born men are then sanctified those institutions with which they come into contact will also be sanctified.
- 5 The early Christian church would have been of little consequence in the Roman world if its ideas had only changed minds. It was the actions that caused Caesar concern. Even today a totalitarian society is not concerned about a Christianity that is confined to a certain religious ritual at a certain geographical location (in church) at a certain time (on Sundays). As long as Christianity can be kept on a “reservation” its enemies will rejoice.
- 6 The most common interpretation of “salt” in this passage is that of a preservative. But it is almost certain from the context and related teachings of Jesus that a wide use of

salt is meant. Jesus did not come to preserve the corrupt system He found in Israel. He did not come to put new wine in old wineskins, but rather new wine in new wineskins (Matt. 9:16-17). For an excellent treatment of the use and symbolism of "salt" in Scripture see the article on "salt" in Colin Brown (ed.) *The New International Dictionary of Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1978).

- 7 For an excellent treatment on the subject of how to present the gospel to a non-Christian world see Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1968). See sections IV, V, and VI. And also Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1970). See especially Appendix II.