

Eight World Views: Analysis of *Hidden World Views* by Steve Wilkens

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Individualism

Wilkens defines individualism as “the belief that the individual is the primary reality and that our understanding of the universe and lifestyle should be centered in oneself”.¹ It assumes one’s interests, goals, and desires are top priority and must be pursued by whatever means necessary. Practically, this has taken on two different forms, “utilitarian individualism” and “expressive individualism”. The former recognizes and accepts rules, laws, and regulations as a means to aid oneself toward the “American Dream.” The latter understands rules as a threat to personal expression and individuality, and thus, freedom rejects imposed responsibilities or limitations set forth by others. A positive attribute of individualism is the acknowledgement of one’s freedom and responsibilities that come with that freedom. The main problem of individualism is a fundamentally flawed view of reality. Each individual is one of billions of people living on a flying space rock in an incredibly magnificent cosmos. Elevating oneself to think that all revolves or should revolve around oneself is delusional. Another major flaw of individualism is the view of human nature. It makes oneself out to be God by taking and doing what is desirable and good in their own eyes, instead of denying oneself and submitting to the Creator.

Consumerism

God created the cosmos with living organisms -plants, animals, and humans- all of which are consumers. Consumerism is when one takes what was supposed to be consumed and makes it the absolute good. Consumerism absolutizes consumption by believing that one can find fulfillment and complete satisfaction, salvation, by accumulating more.² It promotes using and

¹ Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews : Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2009), 27.

² Ibid., 46.

accumulating things bringing fulfillment. As a result, money becomes a primary source of power with the ability to buy more things, create status, influence others, and even protect one from the uncertainties of life. Consumerism promotes competition and innovation which have led to inventions that have saved countless lives. Its best attribute is the acknowledgement that humanity has inherent longing, needs, and desires. Consumerism falsely asserts that fulfilling those needs will be the supreme answer to all life's problems. It takes what is good and makes it God. Consumerism redefines humanity's needs apart from the Creator, giving a false sense of identity and fulfillment

Nationalism

Nationalism is the belief that one's own nation is uniquely favored by God and an integral part of God's plan. Patriotism, the love for one's country, is inherently a good thing. It becomes imbalanced, distorted, destructive, and evil when one loses perspective and offers their highest loyalty to a specific state.³ In order to win the allegiance of people, a nation will claim the highest source of authority, usually God's, blessing upon its value, ideals, and mission. Nationalism positively helps avoid individualism because its people are willing to make sacrifices for their nation. In some cases, nationalism can provide for common goods-food, clothing, shelter, healthcare- of those in need. Some negative aspects of nationalism are its violent history based on the fact that "others" are viewed as challengers. It ignores the multinational makeup of Jesus' kingdom. Nationalism also overreaches its demand for loyalty. For example, in the United States, some Americans find it unimaginable for a person not to

³ Ibid., 62.

pledge allegiance to the flag or sing the national anthem, in some nations journalists can be imprisoned for writing an article critical of their government.

Moral Relativism

Moral relativism has a dynamic history that started from the belief that truth and morality were grounded in superior deities. It then morphed into a modernist view that truth could be identified at the individual level. This was rejected by a postmodern view that questioned a unified knowable truth. Now, moral relativism is the belief that truth, morality, and ethics are relative and are determined by each person. Moral relativism argues that imposing one's truths on another person is arrogant, intolerant, violent, and oppressing. It seeks to promote peaceful tolerance that allows each person to freely pursue and express their individual truths.⁴ Moral relativism makes morality subjective as they deem moral issues incompatible with observation and quantifications. Moral relativism accurately demonstrates moral selectivity, as the individual can be focused on their specific morals while ignoring others. For example, one could argue some Christians are resolutely outspoken about certain sins, such as homosexuality, but less vocal about others, like gossip. Ultimately moral relativism fails as it strips the Creator of His order and deems people the ultimate decider of good. Furthermore, it has a major logical fallacy by arguing that relativism is an absolute truth, while at the same time denouncing universal truths.

Scientific Naturalism

Scientific naturalism states all that exists is physical and can be reduced to its elemental material composition.⁵ In naturalism, the physical matter of the universe is reality. Scientific

⁴ Ibid., 89.

⁵ Ibid., 100.

naturalists believe that humans' progression in scientific knowledge and technology are the real solutions to all problems. On the upside, naturalism's desire is to seek what is factual about the universe is a nice alternative to moral relativism. However, there are several problems with naturalism. First, it diminishes the status of humanity as image bearers of Yahweh. If humans are comprised of a nanofraction of nature's "stuff" while living in a very complex and "stuff" filled cosmos, humans become infinitely insignificant. The only problem with this understanding is the Bible and God's partnership with humanity which establishes mankind's significant role within Creation. Secondly, because scientific naturalism believes nonphysical realities do not exist, it denies the realization of God, Holy Spirit, and a spiritual realm. Naturalism's belief that "matter as eternal" becomes as much of a faith statement as "God is eternal" and its own Godless religion.⁶ Eliminating God from the picture requires a completely alternative definition and reality of the universe.

The New Age

New Agers say that there is no part of the universe (or beyond) that is not God, including us. This means the divine power of the cosmos is not just available to us; they are us.⁷ They believe there is an inner divinity that goes well beyond our present reality and ability that is waiting to be unlocked. As opposed to Christianity that claims the possibility to experience God's power through relationship, a New Age worldview claims we are all gods, available when we achieve the "Higher Self." A positive aspect of New Age thinking is their recognition of the importance of the reality of the spiritual realm. This breaks the barrier of legalism and "religion" and serves as a reminder to all Christians of God's victory over evil and desire to dwell with and

⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁷ Ibid., 122.

within each of His image bearers. A problem with the New Age is that it does not see a separation between the material world and spiritual world, allowing all to become gods, and thus, their own means of salvation (which is a scary thought). Christianity believes that nature is a product of God's creative activity and thus dependent and separate from God. In other words, nature's dependency means that for the Christian, "we are God's."⁸

Postmodern Tribalism

Postmodern tribalism is the belief that one's identity is anchored in ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or some other element. This identity has a stronger pull than the general category of "human being." Tribe members also share a powerful sense of identity within a smaller group defined by common language, experiences, and ideas. The postmodern part of tribalism pertains to the rejection of a defined universal truth. As a result, in postmodern tribalism truth is shaped by one's gender, history, culture, race, or sexual orientation, and these social structures are rooted in the quest for power. A positive result of postmodern tribalism is that it can help develop empathy. Christians are currently living in a postmodern world, where school and work events make Christians feel outside the societal normal. These experiences can allow Christians to empathize with other people who also feel like societal outcasts. A key problem with postmodern tribalism is that it is culturally reductionistic; it reduces a person's identity to their social construct. For followers of Jesus, adjectives will never and should never be the ultimate authority in their life.

Salvation By Therapy

⁸ Ibid., 133.

Up until the twentieth century, historically, people have always taken their problems to the local pastor or priest. More recently, in Western society, people take their issues to a psychologist as a means to obtain the good life, an idea that parallels what Christians call salvation. Wilken identifies three therapeutical approaches-psychoanalysis, person-centered therapy, and behaviorism- that broadly fall into one of three main views. On one side of the spectrum is the “biblical counseling” conviction that rejects psychology and believes all problems are spiritual in nature and should be dealt with by means of spiritual tools, i.e. the Bible. Just as reductionistic, but on the other extreme end of the spectrum is “salvation by therapy.” This position “reduces spiritual problems out of existence by defining them as exclusively psychological in nature.”⁹ In the middle of these two extremes is a healthier position that offers therapy from a biblical and Christian lens. Psychology serves as a good reminder of how easy it is to be connected to the past, but can also work from a reductionistic viewpoint of the human life. Salvation by Therapy promotes the therapy ideal method to achieve the “good life” rather than a means to further one’s identity as an image bearer in Jesus.

Take Aways

It is striking to me how many world views are naturally reductionistic. Each worldview, with its own nuance, reduces humanity’s identity. Whether it is from differing world views, such as naturalism and postmodern tribalism, they all still pervert the very core believe about human purpose and existence. Upon further reflection, it is not shocking at all that a vast majority of people who ascribe to one of these worldviews struggle with their identity. Wilkins opened his book by saying these worldviews should not be considered “outside the Church”, I agree that

⁹ Ibid., 163.

these world views can be present within the church, with Christians living within a cultural context and its consequential effect on a Christian's identity.

Another striking takeaway from the book is the commonalities between worldviews. I appreciate how Steve Wilkens included a positive, beneficial aspect of each worldview that a follower of Christ can relate too. As much as the differences between Christianity and other worldviews overshadow the similarities, and rightfully so, it is far less black and white than people understand it to be. Conversely, the problems Wilken's identified with each worldview have significantly enhanced my understanding, academically, and pastorally, of each of the worldviews. While it was extremely insightful to read the history and core claims of each worldview, it was even more advantageous to learn, in the most practical sense, how other worldviews drastically differ from Christianity.

Admittedly, while reading the chapter on nationalism, I had to thoroughly examine my heart and life and see what problematic viewpoints I was holding onto. The nationalism chapter, above all else, was something I found needing refinement in my life. Maybe it was a conservative household I grew up in or the fact that I served in the United States Army, I realized there were bits and pieces of nationalism engrained in my belief structures. While I may not render it so bluntly in my social circles, I have found that I elevated the United States Constitution and other governmental constructs on a close pedestal to the Bible. Repentantly, I have Steve Wilkens to thank for a piece of freedom I am experiencing from shedding the chains of nationalism in my life.

Ministry Application

Something that has changed my entire life outside of making Jesus the Lord of my life, is realizing my new creation, image bearing, restored identity. After further reflection of Steve

Wilken's book, I see how easy it is for Christians, swimming in an aggressive cultural current of diverging worldviews, to lose sight of the value and importance that God has placed upon humanity. For those who follow Jesus in order to receive their "get out of hell free card," the true beauty of God's redemptive story and Jesus' mission of bringing the Kingdom of God to earth, is lost. This book is a great reminder that it is not only other worldviews that miss the mark when it comes to human identity, but also those within the church who do not know the foundational storyline of the Bible, of how our Creator God made mankind in his image and partnered with them to continue the ordering of creation. Despite humanity's rebellious and self-centered heart, God made a way to be reunited to humanity once again through the life, death, and resurrection of God Himself, Jesus. The heart of teaching, preaching, and discipleship must never diverge from this basic and foundational truth.

Another ministry application is the opportunity to encourage and challenge my congregation to relate to, and win over, those who follow a worldview contra Christianity. It is far too easy for followers of Jesus to separate, distance, and remove themselves from people with "secular" beliefs. Unfortunately, I do not see this method as a way for the world to encounter Jesus. Instead, a great way for Christians to be able to speak into the life of someone who resides in the opposite "moral camp" is to relationally find common ground between the worldviews. A goal of admiring the positive aspects of another's worldview is to grow in relationship and respect, which will hopefully lead to a deeper dive into each other's convictions. As a result, it might give the Christian an opportunity to clear up any misconceptions the other person might have about Jesus. Prayerfully this would lead to the illumination of Holy Spirit upon their life. Wilken's book not only opened my eyes to the different worldviews, but it also gave me a new perspective to shepherding, serving and leading those inside the church and outside.

Bibliography

Wilkins, Steve, and Mark L. Sanford. *Hidden Worldviews : Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives*. Downers Grove, Ill., IVP Academic, 2009.