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THE CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW

II

by

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"The Protestant Faith"

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A favoured principle for business efficiency is the slogan "management by objectives". If you know what your objective is you can turn your attention to thinking of the way by which the objective can be reached. The same principle holds for life in general and for church life. It sometimes seems to me that often christians never ask themselves what is the objective of church institutions or church activities though they give their time and money to maintain them.

Objectives must be set in their context, and the widest context is that of life in general. What is the objective of life, moment by moment and what is life's ultimate outcome? Our lives are set in the context of the world. Is the world an accident or has it inherent rationality? We may not perhaps often ask ourselves questions like this, perhaps never get round to asking them consciously, but we will have supplied an answer in our attitudes even though we may not have reflected on the question, and our answers may contain contradictory elements in them and such contradictions will hinder the attainment of a happy and peaceful frame of mind. So the subject is worth reflecting on. What is our view of the world and of life? The Bible puts forward a consistent and coherent view which is the exact opposite of the view put forward through our educational system and the mass media. The Bible makes the world dependent, at every point, on God. Our modern world outlook (insidiously inculcated, for example, by television) makes no mention of God at all. For example how often do you find politicians in their speeches referring to God or His laws for human life? Our political as well as our social institutions leave God right out. An extraordinary situation if God exists as most people in Australia are willing to acknowledge!

The biblical point of view is the opposite. God is the centre of its world view and this is both rational and consistent. For if God is the almighty creator, the law giver and judge, then a world view in which He is not the centre must be wrong, and a world view which shuts Him out all together (which our modern twentieth century world view does) must be unutterably wrong and mischievous.

Let me illustrate the biblical world view by asking about so common a phenomenon as why you think the sun rises. Our life depends on the regular movement of the sun through the heavens. What causes this rising and setting? You may say gravity, but this answer has not carried you any distance, for gravity is a term which describes but does not explain: it tells you what happens but not why it should happen or why it happens that way. Jesus said: "Your heavenly Father makes the sun to rise". (Matt. 5:45). It is God's constant will which is the ground for all that we observe happening. There is nothing inherent in the things themselves. All that science can do is to observe and describe and therefore predict what will happen in the future but that prediction rests on God's unchangableness. Jesus said also that it is God who sends the rain. In a word, it is His will which is the source of the power which makes things happen. St. Paul said "In Him we live and move and have our being". (Acts 17:28). The Bible is abundantly clear that all the phenomena of the natural world originate in God's will. Psalm 104 is a good example of this attitude to the world: "You make springs gush forth in the valleys: they flow between the hills. You cause the grass to grow for the cattle and plants for men to cultivate. O Lord how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all: the earth is full of your creatures". All natural phenomena are under God's complete control and he is the source of the power which sustains them and He is actively superintending the things that happen. Thus Jesus said that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from our Heavenly Father. There is nothing to which this does not apply. For example,

3/.

there is no ant moving in the jungles of the Amazon whose movements are not under God's control and whose power to move is not sustained by His will.

Inanimate matter, too, rests in His will for its existence and its continuance. He brings forth the stars and it is through His power that not one of them is missing (Isaiah 40). We know that the stars are ultimately composed of electrons whirling around the nuclear of the atom, so we may extend Isaiah's statement to say that there is no electron in the most far flung galaxy whose movements God is not fully aware of, and it moves only because He sustains it. Of course this notion of God in control of the world is vastly beyond our powers of imagination but then of course creation is vastly beyond our powers of comprehension. God is infinitely great and He has created nothing that is too much for Him to superintend or which has escaped from his control or knowledge. All of His creation He knows about and He upholds everything at every moment of its existence. This means that there is nothing fortuitous or accidental, and that there is therefore no such thing as luck. This, too, is part of a biblical world view. In Proverbs we read that God controls even the way a lottery falls out.

If we move from the world of the inanimate nature to the world of men and women we find the same consistent world view that God is in control of everything, including the wills of men. For example Joseph's brothers planned to do away with Joseph but events turned out differently, and Joseph was able to say to them later "You meant it for ill but God meant it for good". In the ultimate view it was not they who had sent him to Egypt but God. "You did not send

me here but God." Or take the tragedy of the crucifixion where an innocent man fell foul of the dominant group and was done away with through manipulation of the judicial system. The Scripture makes clear that what happened was all in accordance with God's will. It was He who had decided on it long before it took place in history, as we read in Acts 4:27 "Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the Jews gathered together against Jesus to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." Or take the case of Job who suffered both as a result of natural disasters when the whirlwind destroyed his children and at the hands of the wicked brigands who slaughtered his servants and carried off his property. Yet he knew that nothing happens apart from the will of God and so was able to say to those who brought him the bad news "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, Blessed be the name of the Lord". Jesus himself set us an example of how we should view life when He said of ~~the~~ events of the crucifixion which were on the point of overwhelming him: "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it". All events whether natural phenomena or human actions are within the sovereignty of God. That is why we should, as Peter reminds us, humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God when we find ourselves in adverse circumstances, for these circumstances have been allowed to happen to us through the will of God and they are purposeful to bring us blessing, so that if we receive them from God and humble ourselves He will in due course exalt us, for His purposes are purposes of blessing. And even the immediate trouble He has promised to limit so that it is within our capacity to bear. Thus we need not fear that our circumstances will become too great for us (II Cor. 10:16). Circumstances are simply the opportunity for faith.

Not only are the events of the present under God's control but also the future. That is why we should have an unquenchable hope and why there is no place for fear, for God has promised provision for our needs and protection from our enemies so that we need not fear what men or indeed what the devil can do to us. God limits our trials to what we are able to bear. All that happens to us will be the cup which our Father gives us. Faith, joy and peace should characterize the Christian. And the great event of the future is the culmination of God's purposes of salvation in the coming of Christ's kingdom when evil will be abolished on the great day of judgement when the secrets of our hearts will be revealed. The modern world is quite oblivious of judgement. For Christians it will be a time of joy and vindication, and a time of re-union and of fellowship with Christ and God. The culmination of God's purposes for the world with the coming of Christ should never be far from our thoughts.

Our modern western civilization excludes God entirely in every sphere of decision and action, thought or entertainment. In this it is assisted by the media, particularly by the television. The consequence is that western civilization is rapidly disintegrating because it refuses to recognize any dimension of life beyond the material, and the temporal. But human life, to remain human, requires a supernatural dimension. If this is omitted, society and social relations lose their basis and as a consequence society becomes an animal farm where the manipulators of our life decide who should be allowed to live, whether infants in the womb or old people at the

other end of life. They are responsible to no one but themselves. Hitler was such a manipulator. He incinerated six million people whom he thought the world was better without for no other reason except their ancestry, and it is inevitable that our society will take on the same form in due course, perhaps in the near future, for the reason is the same. Our Western civilization refuses to have God in its knowledge (Rom. 1).

Human life depends on having an eternal dimension if it is to remain human life, otherwise it becomes an animal farm where the farmer selects what animals he will keep alive, according to his own decision. But human relationships and human society cannot exist on these terms, for this attitude to life de-humanizes everything, and this is what Western society by its own choice is sinking to. For example, it deliberately shuts out the concept of God from the way it organizes its political institutions and its educational curricula. It shuts out God from its moral decision, for example, setting aside beaches for naked bathing without asking whether it is right for people to expose their bodies to each other like this, whether it is in line, that is with the creator's purposes in giving us a body. But the idea of the creator has been shut right out. But when you shut out the concept of God, right and wrong have no foundation but likes and dislikes remain as the criteria for decisions. Western civilization may shut out God and as a consequence will quickly fall into disintegration, anarchy and dictatorships: but fundamentally God does not cease to exist because we shut our minds to Him. What happens to us we will richly deserve, but God is merciful and will redeem his people through these judgements.

Those who know God have a plain and simple duty to live in the light of this knowledge and to witness to God in every

situation we are in whether at work or at home or where ever it may be. This witness may involve us in suffering as it involved Jesus and as it involved the early christians who followed him. But it will be the way by which God brings salvation to those who are at present turning their backs on Him. We see this happening in Russia, for example. If we are to witness effectively we will need to be in constant relationship with God through prayer and we will need to know his mind by reading and reflecting on Scripture both individually and in the group which is His church, for we need the strength that God gives us through Christian fellowship. In the end Christians are optimists because God remains unchangingly the merciful and gracious God who will bring his purposes of salvation to fulfilment. That is why we ought never to budge in our obedience to Him or allow our joy to become clouded by circumstances. But woe to those on whom the judgement of God falls, which we bring on our own heads if we try to shut God out of his own creation. We must make God the centre of our life and always acknowledge Him, for human life must have an eternal dimension if it is to remain human. Too often Christians, and Christian institutions, spend their time, energy and resources on essentially this-worldly activity.

The Christian world view has hope in God as its very centre and we see from time to time these hopes being fulfilled, as I say even at the present time in Russia there is a resurgence of spiritual witness. Our Western civilization

may come tumbling round our ears as the Roman civilization came tumbling but centuries later Christendom arose in Western Europe. Fifty years of the Russian revolution has purified the church and within another fifty years we may see the purified christianity establishing itself in Russia. We do not know the future of Australia but it is absolutely essential that we Christians purify and intensify our world view, in which God in Christ must be the centre.

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SECTION II

It is well known that the Christian church has a gospel. Now "gospel" simply means "news". What is the news that Christians bring to other people? In a word it is that Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter who lives in Israel some 2,000 years ago and who was put to death by the Roman occupying power is at this present moment boss of the universe, that He is governing everything that happens in the political and personal lives of everybody and He is God's appointee to head up human life and is now Lord of everything created. It is an extraordinary piece of news and a fact which no one would have imagined if Christians had not told them. It is the sort of news which knocks into a cocked hat every other form of religion and it puts paid to humanism, materialism and scientism. Christians in the early centuries gave their lives for the truth of this news. They were only asked to make the smallest concession to acknowledge the divine lordship of the emperor alongside the other "Gods many and Lords many" by putting a pinch of incense on the emperor's statue, but they died rather than do it because there are no other lords, Jesus of Nazareth alone is Lord.

This message involves the scandal of historical singularity, that is, that God is known through Jesus and nowhere else. It means that in every other form of religious activity or lack of it there is only ignorance of God. The savage kneeling before his idol or the unbelieving scientist investigating the atom is equally far from the true God. Only through Jesus do we know God. For the Christian news is that Jesus of Nazareth is God. Jesus himself testified to this extraordinary fact: "Before Abraham was, I am", and His

associates agreed and Jesus approved. Thus Thomas acknowledged the risen Jesus as; "My Lord and my God" and Jesus replied with a blessing on those who believe in Him.

In Jesus God has come into a new relationship with His creation and particularly with humanity. While remaining the eternal God he has taken our nature and become the subject of our experiences even to the extent of experiencing death and the penalty of sins. Again we are faced with the historical singularity of the way of salvation. Jesus' death is the only event which saves us from condemnation for our sin against God. Thus it is inconceivable that anyone should come to God or should worship Him acceptably, while that person deliberately bypasses Jesus of Nazareth who is boss of everything now because He is "God with us." Jesus is Himself the great architect of the universe. So there is only one way to God as Jesus Himself taught; "No one comes to the Father but by me". How do we stand with regard to Jesus? Do we acknowledge Him as boss and Lord of everything? Does our world view make God the absolute sovereign centre of the universe and Jesus of Nazareth Emmanuel and Lord, the centre of the universe and of human history. History is not yet complete but we look forward to when the coming of Jesus will make plain the fact that he is the ruler. History as we know it will then reach its completion and everything will be manifest and receive its right judgement.

Since Jesus is Emmanuel - God with us - and Lord, His life and teaching is also the standard for all human life, relationships, values and objectives, for in Him the creator was present, living the life of a man. Jesus summed up the principle of human life when he said; "I am among you as he who serves". Service is relationship in which the other person is the

11/.

centre. A lot of people make money the primary objective of life. If we make service to those who come within the orbit of our life our primary objective, then the making of money cannot be that, so that the making of money should only be a by-product of service, and its accumulation only the means for furthering service. When we remember that serving others is the divine principle for human living as exemplified in the divine-human life and summed up by the Lord Himself, we will recognize many areas where the principle of service should be applied, not only in business but also in the home: for the headship of the husband to the wife is the headship of service in the interests of his wife and nothing more. There is no dominance in the notion of service. The two ideas contradict one another. If the headship of the husband is that of service as it was and is in the headship of Christ, then the response of submission will be joyful, evoking service in return, just as Christians joyfully serve Christ.

Service and selfcentredness are antithetical. We must seek to eliminate selfcentredness by following the principle for which the creator designed our human natures, namely that of serving one another, a principle which Jesus not only enunciated but also exemplified.

The modern slogans of doing your own thing, fulfilling your own personality, looking after number one, contradict the way God made human life to function. If you adopt them you won't be happy. Serve God, serve one another, that is the way life has been designed to be lived. If you follow it you will be fulfilling your own

nature. When we recognize that Jesus is the centre of God's purposes it becomes extraordinarily instructive to see what He did, and what happened to Him. He was perfectly obedient to the will of His Father, just as we are required to be, and this led to His death. How extraordinary that God should become man only to be destroyed by men at an early age. This event mirrors the depth of the heinousness of human nature, for those involved in it were ordinary people, and from many points of view admirable people. But they hounded Jesus to death. Yet it was through the death of Jesus that God brought about the greatest of all events in the universe, namely the destruction of the power of the devil and the release of those enslaved by him. And in this way Jesus opened up the way of forgiveness and restoration of fellowship with God. Once again we must face the scandal of the historical singularity of the Christian faith. There is and can be no other method of restoration of fellowship with God except through the death of Jesus, and this restoration of fellowship is sealed by the gift of God's own presence through the Holy Spirit's presence to our spirits, so that we may describe our relationship as friendship with God, friendship which is shared by all Christ's people and so becomes creative of the Christian church, the fellowship of the saints, those who have turned to God in Christ and who are awaiting the completion of His kingdom with the coming of His Son from heaven.

This is the christian world view and this is the christian news. News which can be vindicated by historical research or philosophical reflection by those who have the scholarly equipment for this, and is vindicated in the experience of those who believe the word of God and come to the experience of forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit.

13/.

Our message is Jesus. That is our news, news of the unique and singular event, which no one would ever have guessed if they had not been told, that God is with us in the person of Jesus, that the death of Jesus is the defeat of Satan and the release of those held captive by him. That Jesus is Lord and will return to judge every man according to the secrets of each ones heart and to receive us with joy into His fuller fellowship, when God will dwell among men, wiping every tear from their eyes. His servants will see His face and serve Him throughout eternity. History is moving to this great event and God has given anticipatory proof of it through the resurrection. This is the Christian news and should be our consistent world view.

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