

# PLANS FOR RECONSTRUCTION

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Is there such a thing as a Christian worldview? Does the gospel of Christ so profoundly shape a person's thinking that he develops something so intellectually coherent that it can fairly be called a philosophy, or a metaphysical system? Or is this a misunderstanding of what it means to call Christ your 'lord and saviour'?

I don't often meet people who have a coherent worldview. Most people have inherited or gleaned their ideas from a variety of sources—family, primary school teachers, television shows, books read as a teenager—and allowed these ideas to accumulate over time, like a jumble of Lego blocks, tossed one on top of the other without seeing whether and how they might fit together. There's nothing to condemn in that; we begin our intellectual awakening in the midst of life, cast into a world of language, culture and institutions, as the existentialist philosopher Heidegger emphasised. And the fact that we hold contradictory beliefs may, in some areas, have no impact whatsoever on our lives. Notwithstanding Socrates, the unexamined life is still worth living to most of us.

But there does come a time for many people when they become aware of the *shape* of their own thinking, belief and philosophy. One of the marvels of humanity is our ability to 'step back' from our own Heideggerian state of 'in the midst-ness' and take a long, hard look at what we believe to be true, and why we believe it. Contrary to some extreme forms of postmodern theory, in which the human being is nothing but a social construction, we *are* capable of apperception—analysing our deep structures of thought, emotion and

response. We are socially constructed, but we know we are, and therefore we are not bound by that social construction.

When a person starts to examine his own belief system, he always finds flaws and challenges. For some, these are challenges to inherited religious thinking which, it is concluded, was childish and cannot be sustained in our enlightened era. For others, the reverse occurs. They find flaws in their non-religious conception of life. They start to notice how much they care about such things as peace, justice, morality, history, God's existence, love and purpose. They start to reconstruct their worldview.

In his book *Making Sense of It All*,

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philosopher Thomas Morris springs out of the *Pensées* of Pascal to explore the difference that a Christian worldview makes to a person's life. Pascal concludes that evidence and proofs 'incline the heart', challenging some convictions and reinforcing others. For many thinkers, Pascal and Morris among them, a Christian worldview makes a lot of sense of the external and internal worlds of observation and experience. "Most days," Morris writes, "I know that the sun is up not by seeing it in the sky but by seeing everything else in its light."<sup>1</sup>

Christianity enlightens most aspects of life. A degree of adaptiveness is built into the Christian worldview because of its view of creation and of God's sovereignty over human activity. If it is indeed God's world, in its inception and continuance, then all human discovery is to be received as true understanding, and understood within the large scaffolding that Christian theology erects.

The Christian worldview may not be comprehensive, but it is more comprehensive than pretty much any other system of thought. To me, this comprehensiveness is an element of its persuasive power: it keeps answering questions I throw at it.

Sometimes, worldview thinking provides

the *penultimate* answer to ethical or philosophical questions. It gives the broad brushstroke reasons for holding one position rather than another when more specific arguments seem to reach an impasse. For instance, in the current debate over the personal status of embryonic stem cells, I am suspicious that the most powerful reason why a Christian might be opposed to their use in experimentation is that it does not accord with the Christian worldview. When a Christian outlines her basic beliefs about God's nature, the purpose of human life, and the parameters of human responsibility, it may just be untenable to make the decision to use an embryonic stem cell in such a way

that it is destroyed. It just doesn't fit into the Christian worldview. It's a blunt and broad conclusion—a penultimate one, rather than the final word—but it may be the best that is currently available.

That collection of views and opinions that we inherit as children from the various sources of our individual life stories ought not to be called a worldview. Worldviews need to be built, not inherited. They require thinking, rethinking, assessing and reassessing. They don't simply slip into place. They are a conscious activity of the apperceptive mind, in stunning fashion able to critique its own structures and realign its commitments. This issue of *Case* has plenty of instances of such reshaping—in biology, in the built environment, in literary theory, and even in the arcane field of magic—and I trust plenty to offer those who are involved in the worldview reconstruction business. All of us, I hope. ©

*For a reading list and reviews on building a Christian worldview, see the CASE website.*

#### END NOTE

1 Thomas V. Morris, *Making Sense of It All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1992, p. 192.