



WALLER

WORLDVIEWS

MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

Growing up in South Dakota, I recall the excitement when my father built a new house for our family. I gazed with curiosity as he measured and staked out a plot of land; then using a John Deere tractor and scoop, dug a deep trench much wider and longer than the plot. Next, he lowered into place some wooden forms and filled them with concrete. After it hardened, the forms were removed, leaving sturdy basement walls. Only after packing dirt against the outer side of the walls did he began constructing the house.

As I watched, it suddenly dawned on me that the foundation was now mostly hidden from view. No one would ever know all the planning and hard work my father had done. Though it was largely invisible, nothing was as important as that *foundation*, which provided the base and structural stability of our new home.

Worth of a Worldview

A worldview is in many ways like the foundation of a house. While essential in the lives of students (and teachers), it is generally not on display for others to see. Nevertheless, the worldview that is programmed into our hearts serves as the foundation, the undergirding structure of our lives. And that holds true, no matter what

worldview one embraces.

This raises some crucial questions Seventh-day Adventist educators need to address: What do our students know about worldviews? Are they aware of their own worldviews and their effect on everyday decisions? Have we discussed these matters with our students?

If asked, it's likely that students will say that they can't recall having made a decision about a worldview. That's probably true. What they need to understand is that each person begins forming a worldview the moment he or she is born. Almost immediately, little minds begin to subconsciously piece together certain notions about their surroundings. It doesn't take long for a child to become aware of things that make him or her feel good or cause discomfort. Babies quickly figure out how to get what they want.¹ Initially, their world centers on what they perceive as providing warmth, nourishment, and a sense of security. Over time, this childish view of reality expands and becomes more complex. However, the process of developing, shifting, or updating one's worldview never ceases; it continues throughout life.

Having a worldview is not optional. Every person has one—whether aware of it or not. This suggests some questions people should ask themselves: Have I thought about my worldview? How does it work and affect my life? Does it need

to be re-evaluated or modified? The answers to such queries will require intense exploration and self-examination. The more informed students become about what they believe and the difference that it makes, the more perceptive they will be about their own issues and the world around them.

The teenage and young adult years are a time of a spiritual uncertainty, often leading to a crisis that causes youth to either validate their beliefs or abandon them. Much of this is brought on by sophisticated media that challenge young people from religious families to reconsider nearly every belief they've ever held. Social networking sites, television, and the Internet impel them to re-evaluate their spiritual moorings, examine new options, and make fresh commitments as they endeavor to forge a faith that is "their own." That's healthy and good! However, if in the process they do not establish or work from a biblical worldview, they will be ill-equipped to live out their Christian faith in a secular and pluralistic society.

Christian educators must help young people realize that if human beings are unable to discern their own worldview, it's unlikely they will understand or effectively relate to the worldviews that sharply divide modern society. This does not bode well for people who want to be persuasive witnesses of the gospel to a hostile and unbelieving world.

BY GORDON KAINER

Because the world is filled with religious dissension and rampant pluralism, students need to understand the diversity of worldviews that makes up their culture. It's like driving on a superhighway with hundreds of exits to choose from; each with new things to see and experience, each with a different destination. Ignorance about the variance in worldviews can leave a person perplexed or feeling suspicious and threatened by the beliefs and behavior of others.

And it doesn't help matters that adults hardly ever talk about worldviews, much less their pros and cons. When is the last time you heard a sermon about worldviews? Rarely does it surface as a topic of discussion around the family table, in the workplace, or in school yard conversations. After all, there are easier things to discuss like money, weather, styles, sports, or the latest gossip!

A Biblical Worldview

Choosing a worldview is essential for our youth because *at the heart of every worldview is a statement about God.*² God recognized the importance of this concept, and thus immediately introduces Himself in the opening narrative of His message to human beings, the Bible. In this initial encounter, the Creator describes the newly created world that came into being via the limitless power of His word. And through that word He also reveals the *divine blueprint* for life—meaningful life as He intended it. Christians are correct in their belief that the opening pages of the Bible serve as the foundation of divine revelation and are vital to all that follows.

Beginnings are important! If you miss the first 10 minutes of a movie, you may not be able to figure out the plot. Skip the first few pages of a book, and there's a good chance you will miss important information. So it is with Genesis. No one can afford to overlook the really significant opening chapters of Genesis. It is here that the student will find the *original* worldview that was given to Adam and Eve by the Creator.

Contrary to popular belief, the Book



No one can afford to overlook the really significant opening chapters of Genesis. It is here that the student will find the *original* worldview that was given to Adam and Eve by the Creator.

of Genesis is not “Once upon a time” mythology. Rather, “In the beginning God” provides a firsthand glimpse of a real world and the truth about Creation, the Fall, and redemption. These foundational truths have far-reaching implications. They not only serve as the basis for creating a truly realistic worldview, they also help youth to understand why *worldviews make a world of difference*.

As you assess worldviews with your students, share with them the significance of the opening words of the book *Education*: “Our ideas of education... [are in]... need of a *broader scope*, a *higher aim*.”³ The author goes on to explain that such a view of education requires the recognition of three important principles:

- Discern “the purpose of God” in the creation of humankind.
- Understand “the change in man’s condition” as the result of sin.
- Accept “God’s plan for still fulfilling” His purpose for the human race.⁴

The conclusion offered is that these basic tenets are not only “the object of education” and “the work of redemption,” but also “the great object of life.”⁵

Using this excellent description of a biblical world will afford you the opportunity to help the next generation of Adventists to appreciate and value the godly counsel our church has been given.

A Worldview Defined

In 2006, I had surgery on both of my eyes. After the cataracts were removed and intraocular lenses inserted, I was delighted to discover that my vision was so much clearer—colors were brighter, everything was more distinct, and I could once again read fine print and decipher street signs. My vision went from 20/60 to 20/20. This can be compared to what a worldview is supposed to do.

A worldview, which literally means “a way of seeing,” is the determining factor in how we think and act. It can be compared to a pair of glasses we use to try to see things clearly and make sense of what’s out there. It helps us get the “big picture.” In other words, it provides our personal outlook on life, shaping how we perceive and interpret reality. Someone has aptly described a worldview as the hinges on which all of our everyday thinking and doing turns.

Human beings cannot live without the kind of orientation and guidance that a worldview provides. They need some sort of rationale to live by, a mental map that helps them navigate the world effectively. All of us have been at a mall or hospital where we’ve seen a map with a large red star with these words: *You are here!* The map helps us to orient ourselves, to get the right perspective. When Helen Keller was asked if anything was worse than being blind, she wisely observed, “Yes, having sight but no vision.”⁶ And Solomon poignantly adds: “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18, KJV). A worldview enables young and old alike to distinguish what is real and enduring from that which is trivial and fleeting. In the broadest

sense, it points out what is ultimate and how everything else relates to it.

A Construction Site

After you've surveyed the meaning and the significance of a worldview with your students, it's time for them to answer some basic questions: *How would you describe your worldview? Do you think it reflects a Christian or a worldly perspective? Is it valid and true? How do you know?* Such queries can help them to see that getting a handle on their worldview can be quite challenging.

A few months ago, I was driving through the city in which I live and noticed a sign near a construction site: "Watch Out—Men at Work." It reminded me that the Christian life is also a construction site—a place where hard work and significant changes are always taking place. That also holds true when developing a worldview. As a general rule, this lifelong process takes place in the midst of spiritual conflict, ambivalence, or stiff opposition. All the more reason our youth need to know that a biblical worldview is an essential part of their survival gear in today's spiritual arena.

Evaluating the spiritual implications of one's worldview in a society that's inundated with secular perspectives is both crucial and challenging. Exposures to the philosophy of counterfeit spirituality can subtly, but surely, sidetrack even committed Christians. If we are not constantly on the alert, the very heart of redemptive religion—"Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2, NKJV)⁷—can easily fade into the shadows.

What measures can you as an Adventist educator take to prevent this from happening to your students? To start with, passionately extol the virtues of a Christian worldview. Help students to understand that in contrast to the other worldviews,⁸ Christian theism is the only one that rightly describes the human condition and upholds a solution that is effective and lasting. The reason: Christian theism alone is *centered on Jesus* and *structured by His Word*—the heart and soul of the Chris-

tian's worldview. Since atheism is *human-centered* and pantheism *nature-centered*, demonstrate in practical ways the advantages of the *Creator-centered* approach of Christian theism. Finally, students need to see that theism is not only true but also works better in the real world than any other option.

In recent years, serious Bible study has seemingly become less important



Evaluating the spiritual implications of one's worldview in a society that's inundated with secular perspectives is both crucial and challenging. Exposures to the philosophy of counterfeit spirituality can subtly, but surely, sidetrack even committed Christians.

to younger church members—and to older ones as well.⁹ But being well grounded in the teachings of God's word is an essential part of Christian growth. To counteract the influence of our secular society and human nature,

teachers must demonstrate that biblically based beliefs really are the building blocks on which everything else depends. And if we want young people to have a passion for witnessing to those whose views are different from their own, we must help them to see that their beliefs must be transformed into action by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Putting the Puzzle Together

Our students need a conceptual framework that ties everything together, enabling them to understand themselves, their world, and their place in it. Whether they're religious or not, they want to know the reason for their existence. The longing to understand the significance of life here and now, and the certainty of a life hereafter, is part of each person's moral makeup. They desire a philosophical construct that synthesizes their hopes and beliefs, moving them from fragmentation to

integration. Rather than randomly focusing on seemingly unrelated pieces of reality, they want a picture of the whole, helping them to cope with complexity and change. Just as the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle are virtually impossible to put together without the picture on the box top, so the many diverse pieces of life make no sense without some kind of unifying theme. Such a framework is a worldview—a systematic way of seeing how everything fits together.

A worldview must not be seen, however, as merely an academic concept or a formal cut-and-paste process. It involves a prayerful, passionate search for answers to intensely personal questions that everyone wrestles with—a desire to achieve purpose and direction. A worldview must serve as an encompassing vision of life, as well as a vision for life. It is the basis for *understanding the whole of reality*—God, the universe, and ourselves.

Like a life philosophy, a worldview asks and answers questions that deal with ultimate issues. As the angel of the Lord asked Hagar: "where have you come from, and where are you going?" (Genesis 16:8, NKJV), implying an-

other question: “Why are you here?” If the Lord desired an answer to these questions from a frightened runaway maid in the midst of a desolate wilderness, then surely He expects no less from us today. Just as He wanted Hagar to know that her life would affect a great “multitude” of people, so He desires our students to know that their lives really can make a difference!

The Supreme Benchmark

As we have seen, a worldview is a set of basic beliefs that a person accepts as true. Quite often, these perspectives may be so internalized that they go largely unquestioned. But if a worldview has faulty or inaccurate presuppositions (its primary elements), then the way one interprets and evaluates life will be flawed. It’s like driving down the freeway and suddenly seeing a road sign that indicates you are heading the wrong way.

When people are traveling in unfamiliar territory, they rely on maps (or a GPS) that they believe are precise and accurate. It is likewise imperative that their life map—their worldview—is trustworthy, accurately reflecting the way things really are. If not, the results can be devastating and deadly! This was made quite obvious a few years ago when a San Francisco businessman died because he used an online map that failed to point out the hazards of a particular road in the wintertime. Physical maps and worldview constructs all play an important role in our lives.

Unfortunately, not all maps are equally reliable. In fact, some are totally erroneous, like the old ones that depicted the Earth as flat! For that reason, students need to be shown that many cultures are immersed in naturalism or other non-Christian worldviews, and thus are in a collision course with biblical theism. This highlights an underlying premise of a theistic worldview: it establishes biblical authority as normative and confirms the integrity and trustworthiness of the Bible.

Worldviews are generally absorbed, however, from parents, family, and the surrounding culture and are usually pieced together early in life. Each cul-

ture or religion instinctively assumes that its outlook on life is the correct one; thus, it’s handed down from one generation to the next like sacred oracles. The truth is that most people simply embrace the worldview with which they grew up. And that’s not always a good thing!

But unlike earlier generations, today’s youth are largely molded by whatever worldview dominates the popular media. Television, videos, movies, and the Internet are increasingly significant resources for the younger generation in constructing a worldview. The “culture wars” that have become such a divisive issue in western society are in reality a

Our students need to realize that church creeds, religious and family traditions, secular philosophies, as well as their personal preferences and reasoning are subordinate to God’s revelation.

conflict of worldviews. Even family members find themselves pulled in opposite directions by influences at home, in the classroom, the workplace, and at church. The heated debates over moral, social, and political issues that flood the news, in effect, reflect the broad spectrum of worldviews in the world today.

It is essential that young believers have an infallible standard by which to test the accuracy of their worldview. They need a frame of reference that transcends human reasoning or comprehension. From personal observation and sensory perception alone, they cannot determine with absolute assurance what life is all about—who they are, where they came from, and where they’re going. This is because the knowledge they gain from their senses and personal experiences is limited, fragmentary, and sinfully biased. Scripture depicts our un-

derstanding as “shortsighted or blind,” our thoughts “dark and confused” and “our knowledge...partial and incomplete” (2 Peter 1:9; Romans 1:21; 1 Corinthians 13:9, NLT).¹⁰ All the facts that it’s possible for a person to gather in a lifetime, added to all that’s been amassed by previous generations, are but illustrative of a few principles. Since humans are unable to collect all the data or definitely verify knowledge they already have acquired, there is no certainty that any of their conclusions are accurate and true.

Why does Christianity maintain that the Bible is the best source for a trustworthy worldview? To start with, it is impossible for humans to step outside their own limited experience—their insignificant slot in the vast expanse of the universe—to gain access to universal knowledge that is valid for all times and places. Thus, their greatest need is instruction from a Source that exceeds their finite limitations. Christians believe that an infinite, all-knowing God gives them, *in His Word*, an objective worldview that is “true and righteous altogether” (Psalms 19:9, NKJV). It’s their assurance that the picture on the box top is the right one!

The Christian worldview accepts the Bible as the divine measurement by which everything else is judged. Our students need to realize that church creeds, religious and family traditions, secular philosophies, as well as their personal preferences and reasoning are subordinate to God’s revelation. This does not mean that their reasoning powers are to be ignored. Both divine revelation and human reason are essential in the Christian life. For example, one legitimate function of their reasoning ability is to interpret and apply God’s revelation.

An All-Encompassing View

In today’s world, evil behavior is often viewed as the lingering effects of evolution, some kind of inner glitch, karma, the result of a bad environment, or maybe something in between. Aware of humanity’s confusion and inability to sort out truth from error, God does not leave us groping in dark-

ness. He knows that our sinfulness blinds us to the real truth about the world and ourselves. And so through divine revelation, He enlightens and expands our perception about the creation, fall, and restoration of humankind. Only in the theistic worldview is there a Great Controversy¹¹ motif which serves as a comprehensive framework for understanding the entire span of human history.¹²

The Christian worldview recognizes not only the *high* level at which the biblical account places human beings at their creation, but also the *low* level to which humanity has sunk as a result of sin. Both the *dignity* as well as the *depravity* of humankind are intricate parts of the biblical perspective (see Romans 1:18-25).

All of this implies that the right perspective on evil is a critical part of the Christian worldview. It makes clear that human beings are in a fallen condition, that no aspect of human nature is unaffected by the Fall, no realm of life is spiritually neutral. Sin means turning away from God at the core of our being—which colors everything we think and do. Even the natural world has been affected by human sin.

The existence of Satan and his role in the affairs of the human race is significant in the Christian worldview. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible reveals with clarity the mysterious origin, the continuing history, and the ultimate end to the conflict between God and Satan. Viewing life from this perspective provides Christian youth with a tremendous advantage when dealing with a chaotic and confusing world, where evil prospers and goodness rarely triumphs.

The Christian worldview reflects reality—all is *not* well with the world. The presence of sin is a challenge to God's character and authority and threatens the very existence of humankind. At the heart of a biblical worldview, a conflict rages between good and evil. God has chosen to expose the nature of this conflict, to deal with the issues of the controversy, and to provide redemption for the human race through Jesus Christ.

It's crucial that Adventist educators clearly recognize that though all worldviews ask the same underlying *questions*, they are worlds apart in their *answers*. It's important to help your students embrace the ultimate Answer: Jesus Christ—who, as the Creator, Redeemer, and coming King is the very essence of the biblical worldview. ✍

This article has been peer reviewed.



Gordon Kainer is an educator who served as an academy religion teacher for 40 years, and has published seven books. Since his retirement in 2001, he has resided in Santa Rosa, California.

BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR ADDITIONAL READING

- Berry, Sharon R.; and Ollie Gibbs. *Future Quest: A Practical Application of a Biblical Worldview*. Nashville, Tenn.: Lifeway Christian Resources, 2003.
- Caner, Ergun; and Dale McClesky. *When Worldviews Collide*. Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2005.
- Cotham, Perry C. *One World, Many Neighbors: A Christian Perspective on Worldviews*. Abilene, Texas: Abilene Christian University Press, 2008.
- Davis, Freddy. *Worldview Witnessing*. Otsego, Michigan: Page Free Publishing, 2008.
- Deckard, Steve; and David DeWitt. *Developing a Creator-Centered Worldview*. Ramona, Calif.: Vision Publishing, 2003.
- Kainer, Gordon. *World Views Make a World of Difference*. Brushton, N.Y.: Teach Services, Inc., 2008. Website: <http://teachservices.com>.
- Kern, Steve. *No Other Gods: The Biblical Creation Worldview*. St. Louis, Mo.: Kern Enterprises, 2007.
- Mueller, Walt. *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldviews and Christian Truth*. Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- Noebel, David. *The Battle for Truth: Defending the Christian Worldview in the Marketplace of Ideas*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 2001.
- Powderly, Kent G., Jr. *One Faith—Many Transitions: Worldviews in Church History*. Lincoln, Neb.: Writers Club Press, 2002.
- Raley, Harold C. *The Light of Eden: A Christian Worldview*. Houston, Texas: John M. Hardy Publishing Co. 2008.
- Samples, Kenneth. *A World of Difference: Putting Christian Truth—Claims to the Worldview Test*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007.
- Sunshine, Glenn S. *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews From Rome to Home*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009.

Sire, James W. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*. Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

_____. *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*. Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Widder, Richard A.; and Wendy Widder. *The Forest and the Trees: Helping Teachers Integrate a Biblical Worldview Across the Curriculum*. Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2008.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Earl Jabay expresses it this way, "The first thing a baby does when he comes into the world is to establish his kingdom. He, of course, is the king. He is Number One. Because there is none higher than himself, he is in the position of a god. Babies do all of this their first day among us" (*The Kingdom of Self* [Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1974], p. 7).
2. See, for example, Norman L. Geisler and Williams Watkins, *Perspectives: Understanding and Evaluating Today's World Views* (San Bernardino, Calif.: Here's Life Publishers, 1984), p. 15.
3. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1903), p. 13.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
6. Cited in http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/h/helen_keller.html.
7. Texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers.
8. There is general agreement on the three primary worldviews—Monotheism, Pantheism and Naturalism (Atheism). A distinction needs to be made between Monotheism that includes Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, and what is generally known as *Christian* Theism. There is no consensus as to the total number of worldviews. Other commonly known worldviews are Panentheism, Agnosticism, Deism, Nihilism, Polytheism (Neopaganism), and New Age philosophy.
9. Of about 60 million Americans who "say that they have already made a commitment to Jesus...only about three million of them have a biblical worldview" (David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007], p. 75).
10. Bible texts credited to NLT are quoted from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.
11. The term as used here refers to *the* conflict that underlies all others—the rebellion of created against their Creator. Christians view all lawlessness and evil behavior as direct fallout of humanity's sinful condition.
12. Ellen White admonishes educators to teach the students the nature of the Great Controversy and their personal involvement in this great warfare. See *Education*, page 190.