

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

THE CENTRAL EVENT VIEW OF HUMAN HISTORY MODEL (CEM)  
AN APOLOGETIC FOR A CHRIST-CENTERED CHRISTIAN  
VIEW OF HUMAN HISTORY

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## **ABSTRACT**

Thesis: The Central Event view of human history is the only sufficient view of human history.

The Central Event (CE) view of human history is a view of human history that holds that a single, Central event within human history possessed certain aspects and characteristics at such a level that, when it occurred, all of human history, both before, during, and after, were forever impacted. The impact of the Central Event was so great and complete, that it defined how humankind is to view and understand all of human history. The event that the CE view declares is the Central event of all of human history is the Christ Event. The Christ Event encompasses the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Working with the CE view of human history as its foundation, this study has developed the Central Event Teaching Model (CEM) for Christian apologists. The objectives of the CEM include 1) creating an awareness within the Christian apologetic community of the importance of identifying the types of views of human history that are prevalent in our world today, 2) equipping Christian apologists with a tool to help them share the Central Event view in a concise and effective way, and 3) meeting a deep spiritual need that is present in our world today.

The first chapter is a literature review of the key contributing voices that the CEM model has used for its foundation and support. The most impactful of all these voices is that of Wolfhart Pannenberg. However, other significant voices include David Bebbington, Arnold Toynbee, G. Ernest Wright, and Rolf Rendtorff.

The second chapter examines three alternative views of human history. These include the Cyclical (CY), Human Progress (HP), and Relativistic (RL) views of human history. The goal of this examination will be to demonstrate the various reasons why this study has found these views of human history to be insufficient.

The third chapter will examine the Central Event (CE) view of human history. The task of this chapter will be to examine what this study has labelled God Events, and what it is about these God Events that enable them to be worthy foundational elements for the CE view of human history.

The fourth chapter will continue the examination of the CE view of human history, and God Events, but it will focus on the one Event that the CE view holds to be the Central Event of human history. This Central Event, again, encompasses the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

The final chapter of this study includes the Central Event Teaching Model (CEM) for Christian apologists. This model will include 17 specially created diagrams that will serve to help explain and teach the CEM to Christian apologists, while also providing for them illustrative tools then can use to employ the CEM in their own apologetic efforts.

THE CENTRAL EVENT VIEW OF HUMAN HISTORY MODEL (CEM)  
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## INTRODUCTION

Whether or not an individual is conscious of the fact or not, it is my contention that every human possesses a view of human history. Even if that view is focused solely on an individual's daily existence, which would likely produce a view that would seldom think about human history beyond the individual's everyday life, I believe a view of human history nevertheless still exists. This contention that I make here is not a one that requires that every human be viewed as a historian in the traditional sense in order for them to hold to a view of human history<sup>1</sup>. Rather, it is a contention that there exists a philosophical level of history, whereby each and every individual regardless of their profession or station in life, can be considered to be a historian who possesses a view of human history. Georg Hegel spoke of this level of philosophical history and of those whom he believed participated in this level of historical inquiry when he wrote that "Philosophy of History means nothing but the thoughtful consideration of it [history]." And who did Hegel hold uses thought? "Thought is, indeed, essential to humanity. It is this that distinguishes us from the brutes. In sensation, cognition, and intellection; in our instincts and volitions, as far as they are truly human."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, if thought is, as Hegel states "essential to humanity", and is that which makes one "truly human", then it seems logical to conclude that each member of humanity at some level must therefore employ thought when confronted with the human experience. And a part of that

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<sup>1</sup> When I use the phrase in the traditional sense, something that I will expound upon in chapter five, I do so to describe an individual who intentionally analyses past human events and, without letting their personal views and cultural biases influence them, reports these past human events in either a chronological or topical format.

<sup>2</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and J. Sibree, *The Philosophy of History* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 8.

human experience it also seems logical to conclude, would be human history and the events that make up this human history. Therefore, when confronted with the events of human history each human, regardless if they are not fully conscious of what they are doing or not, will employ that which Hegel believes is essential to their humanity, thought. And this in turn, it seem logical to conclude, would then result in the development of a philosophical view of human history within each human.

But, even if it can be logically concluded that each human does seem to possess the ability to employ their essential use of thought, which should result in a philosophy or view of human history, there is no guarantee that these same humans would spend any considerable amount of time considering what factors and experiences may have influenced or shaped that philosophy or view. Nor is there any guarantee that will take the time to consider how their view of human history might impact not only on their daily life, but also how one might come to understand humanity and their human experience.

At this point some might be tempted to ask why an individual's philosophy or view of human history is of any importance at all. Some might also be tempted to ask how a view, even one in which an individual may not even realize they possess, can impact their understanding of humanity and their human experience. It is my position that not only is an individual's philosophy, or as I will refer to it within this study their view of human history, important, it is also impactful because I contend that one's view of human history plays a significant role in how an individual will come to understand many of the important questions that are often asked about human life. These important questions can include those that may seem to only impact one's daily life, but more often their focus can rise to the level of how and why human life came to be, or more specifically, questions that seek to know if there is any direction, purpose, or ultimate

meaning to be found within the human experience.<sup>3</sup> If this is an accurate assessment, then when these questions are asked by someone whose view of human history is limited to and/or focused solely on their own individual human existence, the chances of finding answers to questions from beyond their limited individual human existence and, at the same time, finding any understanding and knowledge that it might afford them, seems to be slim or near impossible. Thus, questions about direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning, for an individual such as this, will likely get trapped within a potentially hopeless, and in some cases, possibly an impenetrable self-centered and self-focused circle.

As I will contend throughout this study, humanity seems to have had a long history of placing itself at the center of its own existence, and for those who possess a self-centered or self-focused understanding of their existence, the only view of human history that seems possible

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<sup>3</sup>In support of my contention that questions of direction, purpose, and meaning, and the type of questions that surrounds them, are both common and significant to humans, consider the following. First, on the topic of meaning. Michael J. MacKenzie and Roy F. Baumeister, "Meaning of Life: Nature, Needs, and Myths," in *Meaning in Positive and Existential Psychology*, eds. A. Bathhyany and P. Russo-Netzer (New York: Springer, 2014) 25-26, 35. MacKenzie and Baumeister write that "A need for meaning broadly refers to a motivation to find answers and explanations for life events. It is a desire for life to make sense of things and to have a purpose... [and purpose] involves an individual's perception that life activities are related and connected to future events." And furthermore, MacKenzie and Baumeister conclude that "humans have a need for life to make sense and to be meaningful... The quest for a meaningful life extends beyond just a desire to quell some inner drive. Meaning has several practical applications as well; it helps people discern patterns in the environment, it greatly enhances communication, and facilitates self-control." Michael F. Steger, Patricia Frazier, and Shigehiro Oishi. "The Meaning in Life Questionnaire: Assessing the Presence of and Search for Meaning in Life," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* Vol. 53, No. 1. (2006): 80-81. Steger, Frazier, and Oishi conclude that despite differing definitions and paths to find meaning, "theorists uniformly regard meaning as crucial. Meaningful living has been directly equated with authentic living and in eudaimonic [contented state] theories of well-being, which focus on personal growth and psychological strengths beyond pleasant affect, meaning is important, whether as a critical component or as a result of maximizing one's potentials." Next on the topic of purpose. Todd B. Kashdan and Patrick E. McKnight, "Origins of Purpose in Life: Refining our Understanding of a Life Well Lives," *Psychological Topics* 18, no. 2 (2009): 304. Here Kashdan and McKnight write that "purpose is defined as a central, self-organizing life aim. Central in that if present, purpose is a predominant theme of a person's identity. If we envision a person positioning descriptors of their personality on a dartboard, purpose would be near the innermost, concentric circle." Paul T. P. Wong, "Toward a Dual-Systems Model of What Makes Life Worth Living" in *The Human Quest for Meaning: Theories, Research, and Applications*, ed. Paul T. P. Wong (New York: Routledge, 2012), 10. Wong writes that "purpose is the most important component in the meaning structure because it serves several functions as the engine, the fuel, and the steering wheel. Purpose includes goals, directions, incentive objects, values, aspirations, and objectives and is concerned with such questions as these: What does life demand of me? What should I do with my life? What really matters in life? A purpose-driven life is an engaged life committed to pursuing a preferred future. Purpose determines one's direction and destiny.

would be one that is centered on and/or revolves around the individual. But a single human cannot ask questions about their human existence in isolation. Humanity is connected. This connectivity cannot be denied, since, as every human must agree, no human has ever lived in complete isolation. Every individual, either living now or who lived in the past, was born into a family. That fact alone demonstrates that unity and connectivity among humans cannot be denied. Thus when a single human seeks answers to questions concerning their human existence, they do so as a member of the human race, and therefore, their questions are asked not only for themselves, but also as a member of the human race. It would seem quite illogical then for an individual to ask any question or raise any concern about whether or not there is a direction, a purpose, or an ultimate meaning to one's human existence, if they do not also expect that the best answers might actually address, not only their individual human existence, but also their existence as a member of the human race.

This is why I will suggest that a view of human history that leads to a self-centered or self-focused view of human existence is an insufficient, illogical, and ultimately an illegitimate view of human history. This is also why I will suggest that the view of human history that can best address questions of direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for humankind sufficiently, logically, and legitimately, must be one that leads the individual to look beyond oneself for the direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning that they seek. But this view of human history cannot stop there. I believe that it must also provide the individual who acknowledges the need to seek a view of human life and human history from beyond themselves, real and practical answers to questions about direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning that they can also apply to their own daily existence and individual human lives. Therefore, I believe that the view of human history that is needed is the view that both allows each human to embrace their connectivity as a



member of humanity, while at the same time also allows them to embrace their individual significance within humanity.

But what kind of view of human history can lead to such a reality? It is my position and, a foundational position of the Central Event Teaching Model, that the view of human history that offers the greatest potential to produce this result is the Central Event View of human history, or what will be referred to in this study as the CE view. This Central Event or CE view, holds that there have occurred events within human history that were and continue to be so impactful that they possessed and continue to possess the ability to give direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning to most, if not all of human history. In addition, they are also events that, although they occur within human history, possess the added ability to define and project direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning onto both past and future events as well. Thus a Central Event (CE) is an event that occurs within human history, but at the same time also transcends human history. Furthermore, CEs are events that both occur within, and yet, stand beyond or outside of human kind and human history.

While there are a number of significant events that have occurred throughout human history, I will suggest that there is only one Central Event that best meets the criteria defined above fully and sufficiently, and that Central Event is the Christ Event. For it is the Christ Event, which encompasses the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, that I and the CEM will demonstrate holds the greatest potential to provide answers to questions of direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for the individual human life and for all humanity as a whole.

One important note, which will be addressed in more detail later in this study, but is worth mentioning at this point, is that since I will be referring to a number of human historical events that could be classified as Central Events, there exists the possibility that in doing so, the

emphasis of importance that is placed on the Christ Event as the Central Event of all of human history, could appear to be lessened. Therefore, to avoid this I have chosen to label other Central Events as God Events (GE).

### The Defense of the CE View and the CEM

In defending the position that the Christ Event is the one event from which the CE view obtains its position as the best possible view of human history, I will outline and describe four of the most prevalent views of human history in our world today. These include the Cyclical (CY), Human Progress (HP), Relativistic (RL), and Central Event (CE) views. These four views of human history are by no means the only views of human history that may now exist, or may have ever exist, but I hold that these four are by far the most influential views of human history, and furthermore, that their influence can be found at some level in every other alternative view of human history.

In chapter two of this study I will demonstrate why I believe the first three, the CY, HP, and RL views are insufficient views of human history. Insufficient in that they fail to adequately meet the three key components that I will demonstrate that a sufficient, logical, and legitimate view of human history must possess. These three key components are a genuine and legitimate direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for human history; components, I hold, that are necessary to help humanity answer the important questions of human existence and human history. In addition, I will argue that part of the illegitimacy of these three alternative views of human history lies in that each of them ultimately leads to and results in a self-centered and self-focused view of human history.

Once I have demonstrated the illegitimacy of these other three views of human history, I will then begin my defense as to why the fourth view of human history, the CE view, is the best choice out of the competing views of human history. I will accomplish this objective by demonstrating how the CE view not only addresses each of the three key components of direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning, but also in how the CE view does this in a way that avoids a self-centered or self-focused result. I will argue that the CE view avoids a self-centered and self-focused result by being the view of human history that rests upon an event, the Christ Event, that is not only an actual historical event that occurred within human history, but that it is also an event that possessed and, continues to possess, the ability to stand outside of or transcend human history. In order to successfully accomplish this, I will use chapter three to advocate a position that while there can only be one Central Event, the Christ Event, there are other Central Events, God Events, that have occurred and continue to occur within human history. I will show that these God Events share the same characteristics as the Central Event, the Christ Event, the only difference being in that they fail to fulfil these characteristics as fully or as completely as, I will show, does the Christ Event. I will argue that these God Events are 1) actual historical events that 2) possess supernatural elements which, while they are occurring within human history, they nonetheless 3) transcend all of human history, revealing not only the existence of a supernatural entity that stands beyond human history, but at the same time 4) help to answer the questions of direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning within human history and human existence. In addition, I will argue that these God Events, depending on when they occurred within human history, 5) possess the ability to either point forward or back to the Christ Event, while at the same time being defined by it as well.

In chapter four, using the same pattern of logic and reasoning used in defining the God Events, I will argue for and defend my ultimate position that the Christ Event, the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, must also be viewed as an 1) actual historical event that not only 2) possesses supernatural elements, but it possesses these supernatural elements in their fullest and most complete expression possible. Likewise, I will argue for and defend that the Christ Event is an event that not only occurred within human history, but it also 3) transcends all of human history, 4) revealing and perfecting the human understanding of direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning within human history and human existence in their fullest and most complete form.

Finally in chapter five, I will introduce and explain the Central Event Model, or CEM. This teaching model is a visual depiction of what this study will have demonstrated in the first four chapters. In doing so, the CEM's goal will be to equip Christian apologists with a sound and concise tool that they can utilize in their efforts in defending the Orthodox view and understanding of a Christian worldview, a worldview that is both defined and supported by a Christian view of human history (i.e., the CE view) that is centered on the Christ Event.

#### Methodology - Why the Need for a Teaching Model?

My goals in this study are to set a foundation for the legitimacy of a teaching model like the CEM, while at the same time to help Christian apologists to see the value and effectiveness of a tool like the CEM. Therefore, my methodology behind these stated goals have three main objectives.

*1) To create awareness among Christian apologists of the importance of identifying the types of views of human history that are prevalent in our world today.*

One of the most important factors in preparing and executing a successful defense (*apologia*) of the Orthodox Christian faith for Christian apologists is realizing that those whom they encounter with their defense will possess a view of human history. This view of human history, which in many ways is similar to their world view, provides the lenses through which each particular individual will view their human existence. Therefore, if Christian apologists are to be successful in their apologetic endeavor, they must first identify the view of human history that each individual they encounter possesses.

*2) To equip Christian apologists with a tool to help them share the Central Event view in a concise and effective way.*

Next, if the view of human history that is identified within an individual that Christian apologists encounters is not the Central Event (CE) view, apologists can use the CEM to help each individual 1) to see the flaws and shortcomings in the view of human history that they hold while at the same time, 2) to help the individual come to an understanding as to why the CE view of human history is the best view to help them find purpose, direction, and ultimate meaning in their daily lives, as well as within the human experience as a whole.

I believe that if Christian apologists are not properly equipped to counter an anti-Christian view with a sound Christian alternative, their effectiveness will be severely limited. The CEM model is designed to provide Christian apologists with a greater ability to refute a non-Christian view of human history and, at the same time, the opportunity to promote a view of human history that this study will demonstrate is superior to all others. I believe that the modern world is full of skeptical individuals who are cautious when someone attempts to strip away views they may have held for a long period of time. I also believe that these same individuals are likely to be even more cautious when someone also attempts to replace their long held views

with something that may be foreign to them. This is why I contend that it is essential for apologists to be as soundly prepared as any good teacher should be.

When Dr. Michael R. Mitchell, in his book *Leading, Teaching, and Making Disciples*, writes that a good teacher is a devoted teacher, the CEM believes this sentiment can also be implied for Christian apologists. As such, preparing themselves to be sound apologists, like a sound teacher, is something I believe is a must. Thus apologists should devote themselves to 1) studying, 2) observing, and 3) applying their apologetic methodology. Mitchell writes that “a devotion to study implies quality as well as quantity of time spent in mastery of the material..., observing refers to doing, practicing, and applying, rather than simply and passively seeing or hearing...,” which implies that apologists must take “the responsibility to pass it on to others.”<sup>4</sup>

This call for apologists to not only embrace the call to be a teacher, but also a soundly prepared one, was seen by Greg Ogden as being an essential part of the missional, apologetic, and teaching strategy of the apostle Paul. Ogden writes that “Paul’s message and motives were true... his message was not based on error... [and] further, Paul’s conduct was above board. There was no intention to deceive or lead astray, but he was open and honest, convinced of the truth of his message.”<sup>5</sup> And likewise, this same call comes to us from C.S. Lewis, who wrote that “he [Christ] wants a child’s heart, but a grown-up’s head. He wants us to be simple, single-minded, affectionate, and teachable, as good as children are; but He also wants every bit of intelligence we have to be alert at its job...”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Michael R. Mitchell, *Leading, Teaching, and Making Disciples: World-Class Christian Education in the Church, School, and Home* (Colorado Springs, CO: Crossbooks, 2010), 201-208.

<sup>5</sup> Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Connect, 2007), 217.

<sup>6</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1960), 75.

3) *To meet a deep spiritual need that is present in our world today.*

Questions of direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning are questions that touch the hearts and minds of every human at some point in their life. And finding a view of human history that can help the individual begin to find answers to these questions, which include the answers for their daily lives and for their eternal hope, should be at the heart of every apologetic endeavor. David Bebbington may have said it best when he wrote “History on Christian premises has the apologetic task of revealing as credible the belief that God stands behind and acts within the historical process. It also serves the evangelistic task of proclaiming Jesus Christ as the one whose victorious work assures us that God will bring history to a triumphant close. *Christian history brings hope.*”<sup>7</sup>

But before I begin this journey toward meeting these three objectives through the process of defining and advocating the CEM model and the CE view of human history, I will use chapter one to establish the foundation of support that is being employed in the formation of the CEM. This literature review will cover the significant prior research and writings that surround the key components of a Christian view of human history. This will include writings from three specific areas. The first will review works focused on Comparative Views of Human History and include David Bebbington’s *Patterns in History*, and Arnold Toynbee’s *The Christian Understanding of History*. The second area will review works focused on a Central Event view of Human History, and will include G. Ernest Wright’s *God Who Acts*, and Rolf Rendtorff’s *The Concept of Revelation in Ancient Israel*. The third area will include works focused on a Christ Centered

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<sup>7</sup> David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1990), 188.

View of Human History, and will include three works from Wolfhart Pannenberg. These include *Revelation as History*, *Jesus – God and Man*, and *Faith & Reality*.



## CHAPTER ONE – LITERATURE REVIEW

The authors and works to be reviewed in this chapter are by no means the only voices who have lent support in the formation of the CEM, but rather, they represent the essential foundational voices to which the CEM is most indebted.

### Literary Review of Works Focused on Comparative Views of Human History

#### **David Bebbington – *Patterns in History***

The genesis of the inspiration that led to the Central Event Model (CEM) lies in David Bebbington's *Patterns in History*. It was Bebbington who unashamedly declared that, despite what someone wants to believe about historians, no historian approaches the writing of history from a completely unbiased point of view. Bebbington holds that "their basic beliefs about the past, about its shape and meaning, are likely to remain and are certain to influence what they write."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, "the historian's outlook, whatever it may be, plays a major role in shaping the history read by his contemporaries and sometimes by posterity. This is why the underlying assumptions of historians are so worthy of scrutiny."<sup>9</sup>

This in turn led Bebbington to argue that if history is less about what really happened, and more about the philosophy of history that the historian possesses, then it is one's philosophy about history that not only gives the historian their starting point, it is also that which shapes and influences the entire process.

If Bebbington is to be taken seriously concerning these two points, 1) that no historian is unbiased, and 2) that the historians' bias is wrapped up in their philosophy of history, then

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

anyone who encounters a historian or reads a history that has been written needs to know the following three things: 1) What the philosophies or views of history are, 2) how a philosophy or view of history impacts a historian's writings, and 3) what philosophy or view of history does the particular historian whom they encounter holds. As this study discusses the ramifications of these three important items that Bebbington has laid out, it does so with the goal of stressing why the Central Event view of history is the best choice that I believe can lead humanity in its pursuit of direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning within human history. However, in order for me to successfully utilize Bebbington's work in an effort to support this view, it is important that I first clarify some issues of terminology.

First of all, when Bebbington speaks of history, what I contend and believe is important to point out, is that he is speaking of a human history. To some this might seem like an obvious point that needs no further clarification. However, since I will be speaking of and arguing for a view of human history that I believe God has and will continue to act within, I feel that it is important to make a clear delineation between what is human history and what is, for lack of a better term, God's history. Therefore, when I use the term human history, I am speaking of only that history in which mankind has, is, or is yet to experience at particular times and particular places. And even though God may have, or may continue to be a pivotal actor within certain human historical events, God, and the whole of His history, is still something that also stands apart from human history. Or, more simply put, the only time mankind can experience God historically, is within the realm of human history.

Secondly, as I work with Bebbington's categories of philosophies of history, I have chosen to substitute Bebbington's use of the term "philosophy" of history with the term "view" of human history. In addition, Bebbington held that there were five categories of philosophies, or

views of human history. It was his belief at the time he was writing this particular work, that these were the most commonly held views within human history.<sup>10</sup> While I do not disagree with Bebbington's conclusion, it is my position that those five categories can be reduced to four. I believe that Bebbington's separate category of Marxism shares enough in common with both the Human Progress and the Relativistic views, that making Marxism a separate category or view does not appear to be necessary.

As a result, I believe that from Bebbington four clearly defined categories or views of human history that are worthy of their own category can be established. These four being 1) Cyclical (CY), 2) Human Progress (HP), 3) Relativistic (RL), and 4) the Central Event (CE) views.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, from Bebbington, I contend that the CEM finds support in the notion that all recorded human history, of which was, is, and will continue to be, recorded by human minds, is a history that possesses aspects of the historian's philosophy of history. And therefore, when any recorded human history is encountered, the individual encountering it needs to take this into consideration. And furthermore, since the recorded history that is encountered was recorded under the influence of the presence of the historian's philosophy of history, having a sufficient understanding of the most common philosophies, or views of human history, becomes something that Bebbington strongly encourages.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 17-20.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 17-20. For further clarification, Bebbington does not use the actual term Human Progress, therefore when this study holds that he argues for a view of human history, it is speaking to Bebbington's understanding that this particular view is that where the "central concept is progress. The straight line of the Christian pattern is preserved, but the theological rationale is removed," thus the idea of attributing the advance and progress believed to be found in human history as being attributed to humans alone. In addition, the Central Event view used in this study is labelled by Bebbington as the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and finally, what this study labels as the Relativism View, is that which Bebbington describes as a view where the "central motif is the idea that each nation enjoys a distinctive culture... and the historian's task is to understand cultures different from his own by a technique of empathy."

### **Arnold Toynbee – *The Christian Understanding of History***

While it is true that I have given David Bebbington credit for being the genesis of the Central Event Model (CEM), this is not to imply that Bebbington was the originator of a view of human history that hinges on a Central Event. This is obviously not the case. The credit given Bebbington rests on the fact that he was the author that first sparked my journey, which in turn led to the creation of the CEM teaching model. One very strong voice that preceded and influenced Bebbington's views was that of Arnold Toynbee.

For this study, and likewise, for the CEM teaching model, Toynbee offers two very important contributions. These are his 1) view that humankind has its best chance of finding direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning in a Christian, or Central Event view of human history, and 2) in his belief that the CE view has the potential to free mankind from the desperate hopelessness of a Cyclical (CY) view of human history.

The direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning that Toynbee found in a view of history that was centered on the Christ Event was based on what he saw as three distinctive traits found in the Christian religion and the Christian view of human history. Two of these distinctive traits Christianity actually shares with Judaism. These are “that they see meaning of existence, and the heart of religion, in personal encounters between human beings and a God who is likewise a person; and they also agree with one another in believing that these encounters take the form of historical acts and events in this world.”<sup>12</sup>

But it is the third distinctive trait, meaning, which Christianity does not appear to share with any other religion or view of history that seems to set Christianity and the CE view of

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<sup>12</sup> Arnold Toynbee, *The Christian Understanding of History*, in *God, History, and Historians: an Anthology of Modern Christian Views of History*, ed. C.T. McIntire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 180.

human history apart from any other religion or view of history. It is this third distinctive trait, meaning, which Toynbee saw as being centered on Christianity's view of God's mercy and compassion that took place within the Christ Event. Toynbee believed that no other belief system or view of history

entertained the idea that this divine compassion and mercy could move God, for the sake of His creatures' salvation, voluntarily to "empty Himself" of His power and expose Himself to the suffering to which His creatures are subject. The distinctive turn which Christianity seems... to have given to the Judaic view of the nature of God and the character of His relations with human beings is the declaration that God is Love as well as Power; that this divine love has been manifested in an unique encounter between God and mankind in the shape of Christ's Incarnation and crucifixion; and that God's revelation of Himself as love is more significant than His revelation of Himself as Power...<sup>13</sup>

Toynbee's second contribution to the CEM is found in how he sees his first contribution, the idea of a God who is involved within His creations' history, expanded to include the notion that this same God is also willing to display His love through this involvement for His creation at the highest conceivable levels. And it was this love which Toynbee believed freed mankind from the ultimate reality of what a Cyclical View (CY) of human history, is his view, tended to lead to. This ultimate reality of the CY he believed was wrapped up in the idea that despite the mundane and harmless aspects of the cyclical patterns that are a part of human history, if continuous ongoing cycles is all that mankind can ever hope for, mankind must also accept a human history that will include their individual demise. "The dismay that this tragic discrepancy inspires in us is magnified when we face the truth that mortality is the fate, not only of individual men and women, but of mankind's supra-personal collective achievements..."<sup>14</sup> But an even greater "freeing" takes place within the reality of a CE view of human history, centered on the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 182.

Christ Event. Toynbee believed that, not only are we freed from the hopeless cycles, the CE view and the Passion in particular, also “gives meaning to human suffering that can reconcile us to the tragedy of our life on Earth; for it assures us that this tragedy is neither the meaningless and pointless evil that it has been declared by...”<sup>15</sup> non-Christian or non-CE views of human history.

This “meaning within suffering” that the CE view reveals in the Christ Event is thus, in Toynbee’s view, “a means to an end, and its purpose is to give human beings an opportunity of sharing in Christ’s work...”<sup>16</sup>

Thus from Toynbee, I find a voice that calls me to embrace the one view of human history that Toynbee believed best provides humanity with a real possibility of finding a direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning. And this one view of human history is a Christian view of human history that is centered on an single central event, the Christ Event.

#### Literary Review of Works Focused on a Central Event View of Human History (OT)

Two voices that I will predominantly depend upon in support of a Central Event view of human history, whose focus is mainly directed toward the Old Testament, includes G. Ernest Wright’s *God Who Acts*, and Rolf Rendtorff’s *The Concept of Revelation in Ancient Israel*. In choosing to first focus on support from the Old Testament, it is not this my goal to imply that how one is to view God’s activity within the Old Testament is in some way completely different to how one is to view God’s activity in the New Testament. Rather, just as the Old Testament sets part of the foundation on which the New Testament rests, it is my position that by first focusing on how God’s activity within human history was viewed in the Old Testament, one is

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 184.

able to be in a better position to gain a more complete understanding God's activity within the pages of the New Testament.

### **G. Ernest Wright – *God Who Acts***

G. Ernest Wright will be the principal voice on which I will depend on when discussing those who support the existence of a CE view within the Old Testament. But as is certainly the case, Wright is also a strong voice and supporter of viewing Scripture as one whole, rather than two completely separate and non-connected testaments. This, in part, is the thrust of the opening chapter of the *God Who Acts*, where Wright stresses that the history found within the pages of the Old Testament is what separates the Jewish and Christian understanding and view of human history from other non-Jewish and non-Christian understandings. This is especially true when it comes to those who hold to a Cyclical View (CY) of human history.<sup>17</sup> It is within the pages of the Old Testament where Wright sees Israel breaking free from a CY view and understanding. Instead, Wright finds Israel embracing a view of human history that placed the actions of God at the center. Wright believed if proponents of the CE view were tempted to ignoring the Old Testament in the pursuits, they will most likely find that the CE view they are promoting will lack its foundational support. He believed that “for the Christian, Christ is the key to the central contents of the Old Testament, but at the same time it is the Old Testament which provided the clue to Christ.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1952), 24. Here we see Wright pointing out that “Polytheistic man, born on the rhythmic cycle of nature, has no primary concern with history, instead his focus of attention is upon the yearly cycle.”

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 29.

But just as important as are the “clues” for Christ that are found within the Old Testament, Wright stresses that a CE view of human history<sup>19</sup> is not built on a faith of abstract ideas, but rather, is a faith that holds that the events described within the Old Testament are events that actually happened. The writers of the Old Testament viewed and sought to understand God through His actions. And these were not simply actions that they were viewing like an audience views a play on a stage. Rather, these were actions by God that the Old Testament writers were a part of themselves. And unlike the other views of human history discussed in this study, the faith of the Old Testament writers “was not a faith projected on history...,” but it was a faith that saw actual historical events of God acting within human history as those which “illuminated the meaning of subsequent history.”<sup>20</sup>

Wright also declares that even within the writers of the New Testament, we can see support for the Old Testament as the foundation for the CE view. For example, Wright believes this is what we see the Apostle Paul doing in what he calls “the simplest summary of the central biblical events as the New Testament... contained in the address attributed to the Apostle Paul at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:16).”<sup>21</sup> It is within the Scripture passage from Acts 13:17-23 where Wright sees the five key events on which a CE view rests. These are how God 1) chose the Patriarchs, 2) delivered the Israelites from Egypt, 3) directed the conquests, 4) raised up David, and eventually “according to promise, 5) raised up a Savior in Jesus.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, “the history...

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<sup>19</sup> When I state that Wright is supporting a CE view, I do so on the fact that Wright uses the term Biblical faith, of which he clearly understands to mean a view of human history that is focused on God’s actual actions within human history as being both central and key to an accurate view of human history.

<sup>20</sup> Wright, *God Who Act*, 54-55.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 70.



begins with the Patriarchs and ends with David; from that point Paul passes immediately to Jesus Christ.”<sup>23</sup> And in doing so, Wright believes, Paul “suggests that the events from Abraham to David are the most significant history of the former times and that Christ is the continuation, the clarification and the fulfilment of the redemptive purpose of God within it.”<sup>24</sup>

One of the key understandings of the CE view that I will use for support, is how the CE view believes that God acts within real human events. These are to be understood as events that occurred, or stand within human history, but at the same time are to be understood as events that also transcend human history in that they obtain their ultimate meaning from outside of human history. I have chosen to use the term God Events for such occurrences, and I contend that these “God Events” are the very same events Wright is speaking of when he uses the term “Happenings.” For Wright, a “‘Happening’ becomes history when they are recognized as integral parts of a God-planned and God-directed working....” Furthermore Wright holds that it is only through these “Happenings” or “God Events” that we can really gain any clues to the ultimate meaning of human history. This is a central point of Wright’s overall argument, and in support of this he writes:

History is filled with suffering, tragedy, death, defeat, war, destruction, insecurity and disillusionment. Consequently, Biblical man recognized the anger as well as the love of God.... Nevertheless, the kerygma proclaimed his saving acts as the clue even to the meaning of tragedy, war, and suffering. History never escapes God’s hand, its terrors never mean that he is unjust; his anger never conflicts with his love.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 70. Obviously, the 5<sup>th</sup> key Old Testament event, the raising up of Christ, is an event that actually occurred within human history in the period we have come to call the New Testament era, but it is the “promise,” that God would send Christ, that Wright believes Paul clearly saw in the Old Testament.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 70.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 82.

But within this understanding of God Events is also found one of the underlying reasons as to why some have missed God's ultimate meaning within human history. The reason, which Wright believes is especially true for those who hold to an HP view, is in how mankind has historically let the anxiety of his daily life lead him astray. In Wright's view, it is not so much mankind's failure to believe that there is a God, but rather, it was mankind's failure to fully trust God's promises in the midst of his own personal turmoil. Thus it was not a failure to believe in a God, but rather, it was a "failure to believe that God meant what he had promised... [and this] led them continually to assert their own wills."<sup>26</sup>

### **Rolf Rendtorff – *The Concept of Revelation in Ancient Israel***

Another important voice that I will lean heavily on concerning the significance of God Events within the Old Testament is Rolf Rendtorff. And in the case of Rendtorff, what is found is a view that does not only see God acting and interacting within human history throughout the Old Testament, but it also sees these God Events pointing to a Central God Event that was still yet to come.

Rolf Rendtorff joined Pannenberg as a contributor to *Revelation as History*, with his portion, *The Concept of Revelation in Ancient Israel*. And significant for this study is Rendtorff's declaration that Ancient Israel clearly held an understanding that God was revealed in His actions, specifically in "his saving activity."<sup>27</sup> Rendtorff believed that it was God acting through a series of saving acts, which included saving the Israelites as they escaped Egypt (Exodus 14:31), His display of power and might with Elijah against the prophets of Baal on Mount

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,... 96.

<sup>27</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, "The Concept of Revelation in Ancient Israel", in *Revelation as History*, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, London, 1968), 31.

Carmel (I King 18:39), and even is the healing of Naaman the Syrian (I Kings 5:15), to name just a few, where the Israelites saw God most clearly revealing Himself to them. And in doing so, the Israelites also “acknowledged both the superiority and the uniqueness of Jahweh through what they had experienced....”<sup>28</sup> Thus, for Rendtorff, the view of human history that Ancient Israel possessed was indeed one that included God Events, in particular, God’s saving acts within human history. For it was through these saving acts, which were on display within these God Events, that they “develop a knowledge of God, a knowledge that only he is God and has power... [and thus] by means of the whole chain of events starting with the exodus from Egyptian slavery to the occupancy of the land promised to their fathers.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, Ancient Israel saw the direction of human history on display within the fulfillment of the promises that God had made to them.

Another aspect that Rendtorff believed added additional significance to these God Events, was in the fact that Ancient Israel, despite having access to the Word of God spoken through the prophets, the Revelation that they found was not limited to those words alone. Rather, they also found Revelation from God in how those words were displayed through God’s actions within human history. Rendtorff held, their “acknowledgement is not brought about by the isolated word, but by the activity that the word proclaims and sees in its entire context in the historical tradition.”<sup>30</sup>

But there is yet an even more significant declaration made by Rendtorff concerning how Israel came to understand what was being revealed to them through God’s saving actions. This

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 46.

was in how Ancient Israel saw this continuous activity of God not only shedding light on God and His power within the historical context in which the God Events occurred, but also in how these God Events, when taken together as a whole, pointed to something which had yet to occur. “Jahweh had always manifested himself as himself, and Israel had lived on this self-revelation of his for centuries. However, the experiences in its history also led Israel to the understanding that the final revelation of God was yet to be expected.”<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, Rendtorff finds within the pages of the Old Testament, an Israelite people who held to a view that not only acknowledged that God was an active participant within their history, but within His actions through these various God Events were revealed to them some significant truths about their God. For not only did they find direction on display as God, especially in His saving acts, was fulfilling the promises He had made to them, but they also sensed that God had even more that He had not yet revealed.

#### Literary Review of Works Focused on a Christ Central View of Human History (NT)

#### **Wolfgang Pannenberg – *Revelation as History, Jesus – God and Man, and Faith & Reality***

The work of Wolfgang Pannenberg concerning the Christ Event as the Central Event of Human History is clearly the strongest and most thorough voice on the topic. Therefore, I have turned to Pannenberg more than any other voice in support of my position. And, while I will turn to Pannenberg’s voice in more than just the three titles mentioned in the heading above, it is these three works where I believe Pannenberg’s argument is found in its most complete form. Thus, it seems quite appropriate to take a moment to review each of these works separately.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 47-48.

## Revelation as History

Within Pannenberg's portion of this work, which he edited and co-authored with Rolf Rendtorff, Trutz Rendtorff, and Ulrich Wilkens, is a summary of five theses that Pannenberg had formulated concerning the revelation of God, and in particular, how this revelation impacted human history. Here is a summary of these five theses, focusing specifically on the portions that impacted the formation of the CEM.

**Thesis I – The Self-Revelation of God in the Biblical Witnesses is not a Theophany, but is Indirect and Brought about by Means of the Historical Acts of God.** Pannenberg wrote that

The Old Testament essay has shown that a decisive insight concerning revelation is found in the Israelite traditions, in which an understanding of Jahweh is obtained through his historical activity. The earlier traditions about appearances of Jahweh were connected closely with Israel's cult and place of worship are suppressed and displaced by the thought that Jahweh is to be revealed in his acts in history.<sup>32</sup>

In these words I find Pannenberg declaring that what is found in the witnesses from the Old Testament are witnesses that viewed certain pivotal events as being signs of God's activity within human history. For example, within what is often viewed as the most pivotal of all events found in the Old Testament, the Exodus, which was arguably the one event that directly impacted the Israelite people more than any other event prior to the Christ Event,<sup>33</sup> Pannenberg sees this first thesis on display. Exodus 14:31 reads, "Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his

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<sup>32</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 75. Wright states that "the exodus stands in the Hebrew Scriptures as the great defining demonstration of YHWH's power, love, faithfulness and liberating intervention on behalf of his people."

servant Moses.”<sup>34</sup> “According to this...” [Pannenberg writes] faithful trust was effected by the evidence of historical facts that brought about salvation and revealed Jahweh’s deity and power.”<sup>35</sup> And the significance of accepting that God’s actions were on display in the Old Testament helps humanity to approach God’s actions within all of history, including His actions within the Christ Event. Pannenberg writes that “it is only within this tradition of prophetic and apocalyptic expectation that it is possible to understand the resurrection of Jesus and the pre-Easter life as a reflection of the eschatological self-vindication of Jahweh.”<sup>36</sup>

**Thesis II – Revelation is Not Comprehended Completely in the Beginning, but at the End of the Revealing History.** This second thesis of Pannenberg is one which Pannenberg uses to defend his position that, even though God is revealed in all His actions within human history, He is only fully revealed in the Christ Event. And although humanity is experiencing a period of human history in which the Christ Event has occurred in its past, the fullest and most complete understanding of God’s full revelation within the Christ Event is something that for humanity is yet to come. In two key passages that support this claim, Pannenberg writes “it is not so much the course of history as it is the end of history that is at one with the essence of God. But insofar as the end presupposes the course of history, because it is the perfection of it, then also the course of history belongs in essence to the revelation of God, for history receives its unity from its goal.”<sup>37</sup> And “...revelation does not have its place in the beginning, but at the end of history... in the fate of Jesus, the end of history is experienced in advance as an anticipation.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Exodus 14:31

<sup>35</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 126.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

**Thesis III – In Distinction from Special Manifestations of the Deity, the Historical Revelation is Open to Anyone Who has Eyes to See. It has a Universal Character.** What Pannenberg is arguing here deals specifically with his belief that the Christian faith does not have to be a “blind faith,” but rather, is a faith that is compatible with both modern scientific challenges and one that could stand up against Historical Criticism. Pannenberg’s argument here, as will be discussed in more details in chapter four, came against two variations of commonly held views found in the Christian theology of his day. Specifically, these were views held by two groups that Pannenberg labelled the radical pietists, including Bultmann and his *Fact-Value Dichotomy*, and the conservative pietists.<sup>39</sup> Both these groups were claiming that the Christian faith did not have to be based on actual historical events, and instead, a spiritual confirmation that arose through the salvation experience was validity enough.

Pannenberg’s key responses to these views found in Thesis III were that “Faith has to do with the future... a person does not come to faith blindly, but by means of an event that can be appropriated as something that can be considered reliable.” And “The proclamation of the gospel cannot assert that the facts are in doubt and that the leap of faith must be made in order to achieve certainty.”<sup>40</sup> And, finally, “...only the knowledge of God’s revelation can be the foundation of faith.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>39</sup> Stanley Grenz, "Wolfhart Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence," *The Asbury Theological Journal*, Vol. 46: no. 2 (1991): 76, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol46/iss2/7>. See also R. David Rightmire, "Pannenberg’s Quest for the Proleptic Jesus" *Asbury Theological Journal* no. 44 (1989): 53.

<sup>40</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 138.

**Thesis IV – The Universal Revelation of the Deity of God is Not Yet Realized in the History of Israel, but First in the Fate of Jesus of Nazareth, insofar as the End of All Events is Anticipated in His Fate.** This fourth thesis is in many ways a continuation of Pannenberg's belief that the Christ Event possessed a revelation from God that not only far exceeded any of His prior actions, like the Exodus, but also that there would be no other event in human history that was still to come that could surpass that which was revealed in the Christ Event. But what stands out in this thesis that is especially important for the CEM, are two further declarations that Pannenberg makes concerning the value of the Christ Event.

The first can be seen when Pannenberg writes that, "...now the history of the whole is only visible when one stands at its end. Until then, the future always remains as something beyond calculation"<sup>42</sup> What Pannenberg is stressing here is foundational for those who hold to a Central Event view of human history. This being that, humanity cannot fully know or fully understand the direction, purpose, and the ultimate meaning they seek within human history until human history comes to its culmination. This does not mean they cannot experience and understand it as some level, which Pannenberg believed they could, it is just that until the culmination of human history occurs, this experience and understanding is not as full as it will be at that time. And it is in Pannenberg's second declaration in this thesis where he gives humanity some even better news. For Pannenberg declares that "While it is only the whole history that demonstrates the deity of the one God, and this result can only be given at the end of all history,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 139

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 142.



there is still one particular event that has absolute meaning as the revelation of God, namely, the Christ event, insofar as it anticipates the end of history.”<sup>43</sup>

Pannenberg is declaring that when humanity accepts that the Christ Event is the Central Event of all of human history, they can find a direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning which will not become complete until Christ returns, but is yet sufficient because the end of human history has already been witnessed in the Christ Event. Thus, humanity is given a taste of the direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning it longs for, and through what God has already revealed to them within the Christ Event, they also have been given the hope and assurance of the fullness that is yet to come. And on this note, Pannenberg adds that “ So long as man is still under way toward the still-open future of the eschaton, the Christ event is not overtaken by any later event and remains superior to all other concepts as the anticipation of the end.”<sup>44</sup>

**Thesis V – The Christ Event Does not Reveal the Deity of the God of Israel as an Isolated Event, but Rather Insofar as it is a Part of the History of God with Israel.** It is in this final thesis that Pannenberg brings home his overarching theme concerning revelation, and for the purposes of the CEM, it provides the overarching theme as well. This theme is that all of God’s actions throughout human history, which came as real events within human history, were events in which God was revealed to mankind. And among these events is found the Christ Event, which is to be viewed as the one “Central” event of human history whereby God is fully revealed. For the CE view this sums up why it claims that the CE view is the best and most legitimate view of human history. It is legitimate in that it is the view of human history that accepts that God is not only a Player within human history, but that He is also the Definer and

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 144-145.

Provider of direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for human history, which has, is, and continues to occur in the fullest sense within the Christ Event.

It is also within this final thesis where Pannenberg provides the CE view with two significant foundation statements. And it is these two foundational statements that provides support for my position that CE view is the best view of human history in providing mankind direction, purpose, and meaning. The first of these foundational statements deals with direction, and is seen when Pannenberg writes that “the Word of God as promise... [and this] prophetic word is the vehicle of proclamation and thus is not of itself the self-vindication of God... [but is where] one gains a revelation of God’s deity in seeing the way in which he fulfills promises.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, direction is that which can be found as mankind witnesses God fulfilling His promises within human history.

The second foundational statement, which deals with purpose, is seen when Pannenberg writes “the appropriate response to this event [Christ Event] of the eschatological self-vindication of God is that of ‘reporting,’ and this can be so proclaimed in every language, culture, and situation as the decisive act of God’s salvation.”<sup>46</sup> And thus, purpose is found when mankind shares this reality with its own world. And, as the CE view holds, it is in finding this direction and realizing his purpose, that mankind is able to find ultimate meaning as its relationship with God is being restored through what Christ has done.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 154.

## Jesus – God and Man

One of the most logical places to discuss the work of Pannenberg surrounds his views concerning the Christ Event as the Central Event of human history. In particular, consider Pannenberg's method of Christology. For it is within this that Pannenberg helps one come to a clearer understanding as to why the Christ Event has to be viewed as a real series of historical events occurring within human history. And it is in the very first chapter of *Jesus – God and Man* where we find Pannenberg revealing that which shaped his Christology.

Behind Pannenberg's method of Christology was his support of a Christology "from below," as opposed to a Christology "from above." Pannenberg found himself writing and working in the heart of Europe during the middle of the twentieth century, where there existed a rich and vibrant debate between these opposing viewpoints. His voice was just one among some of the great theologians and philosophers that influenced his day. These other voices of influence included two from the past, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl, and contemporaries Werner Elert, Paul Tillich, Karl Barth, Paul Althaus, Emil Brunner, and Carl Ratschow. At stake in the debate was the point at which one should begin their study and understanding of Jesus Christ.

Between these two views, Christology "from above" was much older "and far more common in the ancient church. This can be seen beginning with Ignatius of Antioch and the second-century Apologists... [and continuing with] Alexandrian Christology of Athanasius in the fourth century and Cyril in the fifth century."<sup>47</sup> The development of this view "from above," by the time Pannenberg's contemporaries like Brunner and Barth had weighed in, was a view

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<sup>47</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1977), 33.

that held that “The doctrine of the Trinity is presupposed and the question posed is: How has the Second Person of the Trinity (the Logos) assumed a human nature?”<sup>48</sup>

Pannenberg had three points of contention with a Christology “from above.” First of all, Pannenberg, while not denying Christ’s divinity in the least, did not feel that it was appropriate to presuppose this divinity without first “inquiring about how Jesus’ appearance in history led to the recognition of his divinity.” Secondly, Pannenberg believed that a Christology that worked “from above” has a problem understanding the significance of the real Jesus of history, and the relationship between this real historical Jesus and the Judaism of the day, which Pannenberg held was “essential to an understanding of his life and message.” And thirdly, and what I believe is the most logically reasoned objection, is in how Pannenberg believed that to take a position “from above” requires one to “have to stand in the position of God himself in order to follow the way of God’s Son into the World.” This attempt to make this leap over an obvious limitation, as Pannenberg viewed it, is not something that is even an option for a mere human mind. And thus, the only starting point for Christology, for Pannenberg, must be one “from below,” which, he held, must start with the historical man of Jesus and, and in “his relationship with God as it is expressed in the whole of his activity on earth.”<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, it is in Pannenberg’s Christology “from below” that I believe is found support in two of the most important aspects of what makes the Christ Event the Central Event of human history. First, it helps to show why the Christ Event, as all other God Events, must be an actual historical event occurring within human history. For, as Pannenberg stressed, that is the only vantage point that humans can view such events. And secondly, it helps one to see that despite a

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.,34.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 33-36.

limited human vantage point, humanity can still see the divine within human history, which is displayed in the character and transcendent quality of the Events that reveal a God who acts within human history.

### Faith & Reality

Pannenberg, writing as what could be described as an apologist for a proper view of history, begins *Faith & Reality* with a call directed towards Christians and, more specifically Christian historians. This was a call for them to settle for nothing less than an understanding of human life and human history that, not only recognizes that God has acted within human history, but that these actions must be placed at the center of this understanding. “What would be the purpose of proclaiming God as our creator and the one who keeps us in existence or as the Lord of history, if our lives were led entirely without regard to God’s will and activity?”<sup>50</sup> Pannenberg made this plea in the midst of what he believed was a modern understanding of human history that repeatedly placed man at its center, an understanding that he clearly viewed as a fallacy.

Pannenberg believed that an obvious proof for the fallacy of a man-centered view of human history is that “inter-connection between various events which transcend the individuals who have been responsible for the events themselves are not, it must be stressed, simply the work of active men. History rises above the model of the process which operates of its own accord.”<sup>51</sup> In other words, certain events in history possess a transcendence beyond which mankind appears to have no right to lay claim. This claim alone, Pannenberg would declare, must be credited to God’s presence and action within human history and thus he would contend; only a view of human history that begins with God at its center is acceptable. It is therefore

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<sup>50</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1977), 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Pannenberg's argument that it is the duty of Christians to shed from themselves the self-centered and self-focused tendencies of our world, and instead, "learn to see this all-embracing and transcendent miracle of nature, life and history as the sign of God's presence among us..." And when this happens, "...it will once again become meaningful to speak about God whenever we wish to speak about the real meaning of our life and our history."<sup>52</sup> And, with this as his rallying cry, Pannenberg moved forward in his defense of his view that placing the Christian faith in its proper position is that which can help to bring about the best possible way to understand both human reality, and humanity's place within God's larger plan.

One key point that Pannenberg stresses in *Faith & Reality*, which helps lend its support to the goals of this study, is in how he believed that the unity and connectivity that joins mankind into one overarching and defining human history, is also able to bring mankind into a clearer understanding of human life and human history. However, this unity and connectivity can only be properly understood in light of God's actions that, although they occur within human history, possess the ability to transcend human history.

The transcendent quality of God Events, as I have chosen to label them, is a quality that allows them to have a meaning and purpose for their immediate historical context, while at the same time continually adding to a fuller and more complete human understanding of both God, and ultimately human history. Thus, through the consistent actions of a never changing God, there emerges continuity to how God has and continues to reach out to mankind. And through this continuity, which mankind can witness in God's actions, mankind's understanding of God can grow. One of the clearest ways humans can see this unity through continuity within God Events is in how Pannenberg saw these God Events possessing the three key aspects, direction,

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 7.

purpose, and meaning. I will now briefly look at how Pannenberg supports the notion that all three of these key aspects can be found within the God Events, and to why he believes they are necessary for a Central Event view of human history.

**Direction.** When it comes to addressing the notion that direction can be found within God Events, it seems appropriate at this point to define what I mean by direction. It is my contention that direction is that which helps humanity come to a clear understanding that human history has come from somewhere and, more importantly, is heading somewhere. It helps mankind look beyond the details and events of their daily lives, enabling them to see a clear and significant pattern within human history. And for Pannenberg, this direction is seen in the pattern of promise to fulfillment he found working through what I have chosen to label God Events.

Pannenberg sees within God Events continuity in how “God fulfills his promises. These promises point explicitly to new divine activity that will take place in the life of men in the future... [as] the Israelites always regarded historical events as the fulfillment of God’s earlier promises because they respected God’s freedom to fulfil his promises in whatever way he liked.”<sup>53</sup> Pannenberg continues

The Israelites experienced within the framework of promise and fulfillment and explicitly acknowledged that there was a close link between the different but contingent events of history and that this link existed because of a faithfulness of God whose activities were contingent. It was in this way that the theme of promise and fulfillment became the basic pattern in Israel’s idea of history.<sup>54</sup>

As I now turn to Pannenberg’s views on purpose and meaning, there is a point of order that seems necessary to address. This point of order is that, while I will deal with these three key aspects of direction, purpose, and meaning, in that order, Pannenberg goes about it in a slightly

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 13.

different manner. For Pannenberg, turning next to meaning before purpose is actually preferred. This is because within Pannenberg's particular line of thought, the meaning that is to be found within human life and human history, once found, then leads mankind to be able to grasp its purpose.

**Meaning.** One of the eternal questions that has seemingly been a part of every age of human existence and throughout every human culture, is the question of meaning. Is there meaning to life, and if so, is it even something that humans have the ability to conceive or understand? To these questions, Pannenberg appeared to most certainly answer in the affirmative. And when searching within Pannenberg's logic and reasoning, two unique and yet, unified answers emerge. For Pannenberg, the meaning of human life and human history rests in 1) mankind's longing to experience, in its fullest expression, the fact that we were created in God's image, and 2) experiencing human life with a perfect knowledge of absolute truth. It is Pannenberg's contention that both of these answers, which I will now briefly unpack, are not only a possible reality that humanity can experience, but they have already both been revealed in their fullest expression in the Central God Event, the Christ Event.

Volumes have been written on the topic of what it means to say that mankind has been created in God's image. Rather than spending time on a human answer to this question, Pannenberg would prefer a simple acknowledgement of the reality that being created in the Image of God has already been defined and displayed in Christ. For in Christ, mankind witnessed what God had intended all along for humanity, a perfect relationship between God and mankind. Pannenberg declared that

Man is not complete from the start as an image of God. He has a history which is directed to the attainment of his destiny, to the realization of true and perfect humanity in union with God. The goal of his history of man's becoming man has already appeared in Jesus,



and this sets the theme for all subsequent history: all human beings are to come to share in the truly human character which appeared in him.<sup>55</sup>

How, one might ask, can a God Event like that Christ Event, which happened within human history at a specific point and time in the past, “set the theme for all subsequent history” as Pannenberg claims here? This is seen within the understanding of how God Events have the ability to occur within human history, but yet also transcend human history. For despite the fact that human history yet continues, in Christ, and in particular the Christ Event, an event has occurred that both points to and fully confirms the end. This “end” Pannenberg holds, is found within Christ’s resurrection, and is an “end anticipated by Jewish apocalyptic [that] has already taken place in a human being, though, indeed, so far only in one man, Jesus of Nazareth, and that it took place in the event which became known to his disciples as his resurrection from the dead.”<sup>56</sup> And it is in the confirmation of the promise that mankind can also share in this resurrection, a promise that has already been fulfilled in Christ, although it has yet to be experienced for the rest of humanity, it provides those whose faith is in Christ a clear destiny, and in turn, provides a meaning for life here and now. Pannenberg is clear to point out that this “faith” is not just a hope for the possibility of a promise, but instead, it is a “faith” that has already occurred within human history. And, furthermore, it is a “faith” that “presupposes a basis: something which continually proves to be true against all doubt.”<sup>57</sup>

Thus, for Pannenberg, mankind first finds meaning in human life in that which it experiences in the image of God on display in the example of Christ. Next, relying heavily on

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 69.

Hegel's philosophical<sup>58</sup> line of thinking, Pannenberg helps one to see that when mankind seeks to experience the image of God as God intended in Christ, the union they find with Christ is also a union with absolute truth. And it is in the experience of absolute truth, an experience that mankind shares with Christ, a love for all humanity is also found. And this unity is one that transcends the individual man or woman, revealing to mankind its connectivity with its fellow man and woman. And even more important, it possesses the potential to lead mankind to the last of the three key aspect, purpose.

**Purpose.** Purpose, often seen on some levels as meaning, is different from meaning in one key way. Whereas meaning becomes that which leads to a clearer understanding, purpose becomes what we do with this understanding. Therefore, Pannenberg would say, now that the holder of a CE view of history has found meaning within Christ and the Christ Event, their purpose is to become participants with Christ in sharing this understanding with all of humanity. This is what Pannenberg believed Paul was expressing in 2 Corinthians 4:2-6.

For Paul, the revelation of God... is addressed to all the world through Jesus' resurrection, which was an event that took place on the greatest forum of history. This event has still to be made known everywhere. Even if there are those who are blinded, who do not want to see the truth which is open and manifest, that makes no difference: the facts themselves preach the message announce by Paul.<sup>59</sup>

The notion of "blindness" that Pannenberg references here (2 Cor. 4:4), is understood as a spiritual blindness that occurs among those who have not placed their faith in Christ. But, for

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 46-47. Here Pannenberg writes that "Hegel's philosophy gave a profound interpretation to freedom in the modern sense as a fruit of the Christian belief in the Incarnation. It grew, he claimed, from the union of man with absolute truth, which at first was believed only as having occurred in the one person Jesus, but then, as a result of the Reformation, became general, since now everyone through faith can participate in the union of God with man which took place in Christ. Union with absolute truth, however, raises man, he says, above the isolation of his existence and makes him capable of that devotion to general truth which opened the way to modern times. Hegel also realized that man's freedom requires a religious basis. Freedom only grows from participation in absolute truth, from the human being's bond with the divine mystery of life."

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 61.

Pannenberg, there is more than just a spiritual blindness that results. If, as Pannenberg holds, the Christ Event, like other God Events, is an event that has occurred within human history, then the results and ramifications of the Christ Event are also to be found within human history. Thus, the blindness of the unbeliever, which is spiritual, can also manifest itself into a blindness that will impact the individual within their human experience as well. Pannenberg writes that “anyone who will not trust himself to the God revealed in Jesus’ resurrection will also obscure for himself any recognition of the history which reveals God...”<sup>60</sup> Therefore, despite Pannenberg’s notion that God has acted within human history, he seems to indicate that there are obvious reasons why some claim to not be able to see God’s active presence within these God Events. And if one cannot see this “hidden” God as Pannenberg implies, then how, some might ask, is mankind to cross this apparent gap and find their purpose?

Pannenberg would answer this question by pointing out that while there may appear to exist a gap for the unbeliever, the gap is not un-crossable. For Pannenberg, mankind’s refusal to place their faith in Christ does not justify any claim that God Events are hidden to the human eye and understanding. Instead, what Pannenberg stressed was that the gap, if one exists, could be crossed by mankind through an acceptance of a starting point of human history where God has, is, and will continue to reveal Himself. Then, along with the aid of the Holy Spirit,<sup>61</sup> the knowledge of God can thus reveal itself to mankind within the God Events.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>61</sup> Two points of clarification are needed here. First, the “Holy Spirit” that is addressed here is to be understood as the third person of the Holy Trinity composed of the Father (God), Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit. A concise definition of the Holy Spirit is to be found in Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, 177. Here Pannenberg writes, “that the Spirit is the personal center of Christian action residing outside of the individual makes it understandable that in Paul, as elsewhere in primitive Christianity, the Spirit is characterized both as person distinguished from the Christians and also as a power that they possess internally. The Spirit comes to our aid (Rom. 8:26), gives witness to our spirit (v. 16), and claims our service (ch. 7:6); but he is also given to us, received by us, dwells in the believers, rests upon them. That both series of statements belong together is made clear by the

Therefore, Pannenberg declares that only by shaking off the tendency to place oneself at the center of one's own history, and instead, by accepting a CE view as one's starting point, can mankind be in a proper position to not only see God acting within human history, but more importantly, find a sufficient understanding of meaning within human history. A meaning, which Pannenberg has described as 1) mankind's longing to experience in its fullest expression what it means to be created in God's image, and 2) experiencing through Christ a perfect knowledge of absolute truth, with all of humanity. For in experiencing in its fullest expression what it means to be created in God's image, mankind also, as Pannenberg declares, accepts God's first commandment to worship Him alone with a perfect knowledge of the absolute truth that in Christ, through whom God is revealed in His fullest expression within human history.<sup>62</sup>

This meaning then, reveals to the individual their purpose within their human existence. And, as was stated earlier, this purpose is centered on the notion that mankind is to become a participant with Christ in the sharing of the meaning they have found.

### Summary

Now that I have taken the opportunity to review what I believe are the most significant voices of support for a CE view of human history, and for the CEM teaching model, I will now turn to an overview of the Cyclical, Human Progress, and Relativistic views of human history. In

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insight that the Christian exists outside himself to the extent that he lives in faith in the resurrected Jesus and thus "in the Spirit." The immanence of the Spirit in believers exists only through the fact that as believers they have found the ground of their life *extra se*, beyond themselves.

Second, a question that often arises when an argument such as this is made, is how can someone who is spiritually blind ever come to a saving faith in Christ without the ability to see God's activity within human history, since they lack the aid that is given by the Spirit to those who must first become believers? In Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 65, Pannenberg addresses this by his claim that "no one has to wait for an experience of the Spirit in order to come to know God in Jesus. It is precisely the other way round; the Spirit is present when anyone recognizes Jesus' life-history as a revelation of God. Only through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and faith in it, is the Spirit bestowed (Gal 3:2, 14).

<sup>62</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 85-86.

doing so, it will be my goal to support my position as to why it finds these views to be far less adequate than the CE view when it comes to mankind's search for direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning.

## **CHAPTER TWO – THE CYCLICAL, HUMAN PROGRESS, AND RELEVATISTIC VIEWS OF HUMAN HISTORY**

As was previously stated, it is my goal to demonstrate that the most legitimate view of human history is the Central Event (CE) view, which is a view of human history that has been and continues to be shaped and defined by a Central event within human history. I will spend chapters three and four establishing this position. However, before I do, I believe that it is important to address what leads me to contend that the three other views of human history previously named in this study, the Cyclical (CY), Human Progress (HP), and the Relativistic (RV), views of human history are insufficient views of human history.

### **The Cyclical View (CY) of Human History**

I will first turn my attention toward the Cyclical view of human history. In doing so, I will 1) examine how the Cyclical view, which has found its greatest expression within Eastern philosophical thought, grew out of a human desire to transfer their experiences of the cyclical patterns common to daily human life onto the expanse of all of human history. I will also show 2) that by accepting a CY view, one must also accept both an infinite progression and infinite regression of time within human history, both, as the CEM will show, are found to be irrational and illogical. Finally, 3) I will demonstrate how the CY view, although it may possess some minor aspects of one of the key components previously mentioned, in this case direction, it ultimately does not produce a direction beyond its cyclical nature, nor does it possess any evidence of a purpose or any ultimate meaning for humanity within human history.

## Cyclical: Patterns in Daily Human Life

All views of human history that will be discussed have a number of shared characteristics. This comes as no surprise when one considers that one of the biggest influences in shaping a view of human history lies in the patterns humans have and continue to experience in their daily lives throughout all of human history. The view of human history that has been impacted the most by these patterns is the Cyclical view of human history.

Many historians, and even those who would not claim the title of historian, have identified that significant aspects exist within the human experience that have and continue to play a large role in the development and continued prevalence of the Cyclical view. These aspects are the repeating patterns that are commonly found within the human experience. It is these repeating cyclical or circular patterns found within many areas of the human experience that has led some to conclude that all of human history is nothing more than a never ending cyclical existence.

David Bebbington names two main contributors to the popularity of the cyclical view of human history, these being the cycle of the individual human life, and the cycle of the yearly agricultural patterns that are so important to many cultures.<sup>63</sup> Bebbington explains that this cyclical pattern was then taken by man and projected onto their view of human history, and eventually onto their views of religion as well.<sup>64</sup> This Cyclical view developed acutely in the eastern cultures of China, India and the Middle East. Therefore it stands to reason that many of the expressions of human histories coming out of these areas of the world are full of repeating

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<sup>63</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 21. "There are two main explanations for its popularity. First, the life of any individual follows a pattern of growth to maturity followed eventually by decrepitude and death... Secondly, societies that were predominantly agricultural tended to conceive of history as a part of nature. They came to think that yearly rhythm of the seasons was reproduced on a grander scale in the world of men."

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 21.

cyclical patterns. Examples of these include the cycles of Chinese Dynasties and the Indian Cosmic Cycles. In the case of the Chinese Dynasties, a circular pattern was seen with the rise, reign and eventual decline of a number of successive dynasties.<sup>65</sup> In the case of the Indian Cosmic Cycles, a view was accepted that “the universe is passing through a cycle of enormous proportions. The cycle normally consists of four yugas or ages, each of which is preceded by dawn and followed by twilight.”<sup>66</sup>

### **Cyclical: An Illogical View of Human History**

History does appear to reveal that humans can fall victim to viewing their daily lives as being nothing more than a series of events that continue to occur day after day and year after year. And, despite the fact that this may be the only level of understanding of human history that a number of people may ever knowingly ascend to since it focuses on the immediate experiences of the human existence, the notion of an infinite number of cycles that have always been occurring, and subsequently, will continue to occur throughout infinity is an illogical and irrational conclusion.

Why? Consider the following. The blame for the inclusion of the infinity within the CY view of human history lies at the feet of mathematics.<sup>67</sup> While the notion of infinity may work in certain fields of mathematics, it is my contention that it is not legitimate in dealing with human

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 21. Here we see Bebbington’s understanding of where Cyclical interpretations came from, and why they became popular. Bebbington wrote, “cyclical interpretation has been widely diffused in China, India, the Middle East and the Graeco-Roman world.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>67</sup> William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2008) ,116-124. In the section, The Universe Began to Exist, Craig discusses the problem with applying the mathematical concept of infinity in areas of rational thought outside of mathematics. See also Kragh, Helge “The True (?) Story of Hilbert’s Infinite Hotel.”, Cornell University Library, last modified March 27, 2014, accessed 6/9/2015. <https://arxiv.org/abs/1403.0059v2>, 4-5.



history. But this is exactly what has occurred with the CY view of history. As the proponents of this view were busy transferring the cyclical aspects of human life onto the whole of human history, one of the results this inevitably lead to was that human history within this view had to include both infinite progression and infinite regression. And furthermore, this resulting conclusion of infinite progression and infinite regression within human history has also lead proponents to conclude that human history therefore, must not have had a beginning, nor will it have an end. This resulting conclusion has been strongly refuted by William Lane Craig, who has shown the absurdity of such a view of human history. Speaking specifically to the problem created by accepting infinite regression, Craig finds those who promote this as holding a view that includes a "...universe (that) never began to exist... (which if true) ...then prior to the present event there have existed an actually infinite number of previous events. Thus, a beginningless series of events in time entails an actually infinite number of things, namely, events.”<sup>68</sup> Explaining this absurd notion more thoroughly, Craig continues:

So before the present event could occur, the event immediately prior to it would have to occur; and before that event could occur, the event immediately prior to it would have to occur; and before that event could occur, the event immediately prior to it would have to occur; and so on *ad infinitum*. So one gets driven back and back into the infinite past, making it impossible for any event to occur. Thus, if the series of past events were beginningless, the present event could not have occurred, which is absurd.<sup>69</sup>

Equally absurd to the notion of infinite regression, which leads to a conclusion of a beginningless past, is the notion of an infinite progression of a never ending series of cyclical patterns. David Hilbert declared that this notion is simply illogical and irrational. “The infinity is nowhere to be found in reality. It neither exists in nature nor provides a legitimate basis for

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 120. Words within () were added for clarification.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 122.

rational thought.”<sup>70</sup> It was along this line of understanding that Hilbert conceived his Hilbert Hotel.<sup>71</sup> The Hilbert Hotel is a hotel that has an infinite number of rooms and can serve an infinite number of guests. The absurdity of such a notion comes to light when one must accept that this hotel can be full with a no vacancy light shining brightly in its window, while at the same time, since it has an infinity of rooms, must also always have a vacancy light shining in the same window since it must also always have room for one more.

Thus, to accept a CY view of human history, which requires one to also accept within this view the notion of infinity, is to accept a view of human history that has no logical or rational place within human history.

### **Cyclical: Lacks Significant Aspects of Direction, Purpose, or Meaning**

Another problem with the CY view of human history is in how the cultures that hold to this view lack any significant aspect of direction, purpose, or meaning that stretches beyond one's daily life.<sup>72</sup> Among these three (direction, purpose, and meaning), only direction seems to play a role in human life. However, this direction is only circular, and from it flows very little that can lend itself to the establishment of a purpose or meaning within human history.

Therefore, within the CY view of history, any human effort spent in an attempt to change or impact their existence and history becomes futile.<sup>73</sup> Thus, human history is viewed as nothing

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<sup>70</sup> Helge “The True (?) Story of Hilbert’s Infinite Hotel.”, 3.

<sup>71</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 118.

<sup>72</sup> Toynbee, *The Christian Understanding of History*, 176-177. Toynbee, writing in favor of the Christ Event over and against the Cyclical view of human history wrote that “through the Incarnation God affirms humanity, the world, and history. History receives its meaning, direction, and purpose, and life is freed from the mere cycle.

<sup>73</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 25. Bebbington was reflecting specifically on the Indian Cosmic Cycles when he wrote that “human activity is in the last resort futile, since all will take place exactly as it did before.

more than a part of an endless cycle from which the classic golden age has passed, and human existence finds itself now in decline, awaiting the conclusion of the current cycle and the beginning of the next.

David Bebbington writes that within the CY view of human history “what matters is not to perform great or good deeds within the historical process, but to escape from it.”<sup>74</sup> This view of escaping the historical process, found in the religious experience and efforts of Eastern religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, reduces the importance of the human role, and likewise the significance of any human action or human event on the meaning of history.

But even as we see the CY view seemingly diminishing mankind’s possibility of a real and lasting contribution to the historical process, there still remains a clear self-centered aspect. And although it could be argued that this self-centered aspect within the CY view is far less prominent than it will be shown to be within the Human Progress and Relativistic views, it nonetheless still plays a role.

This self-centered aspect of the CY view is quite ironic when one also views how those Eastern philosophies that have been influenced by it, claim to have as one of their foundational aspects the call for humility and the emptying of oneself for the common good of all. For example, in Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching*, one can find the following two examples. In chapter 16 it calls followers to “Effect emptiness to the extreme,”<sup>75</sup> and in chapter 22 we find “Let yourself be broken and you will be whole. Let yourself be crooked and you will be straight. Let yourself be empty and you will be full.”<sup>76</sup> In addition, Sara Rushing, in her article “*What is Confucian*

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>75</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (New York, NY, Barnes & Noble Classics), chapter 16.

<sup>76</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching* (Santa Cruz, CA, Blue Star Books), chapter 22. Rory B Mackay writes that “This verse contains more of the existential paradoxes Lao Tzu was so fond of. He tells us that if we want to be whole, we

*Humility?*,” writes that “One will not find much explicit consideration of humility as a concept or virtue in the *Analects* of Confucius. Yet humility is a pivotal theme running through the text.”<sup>77</sup>

One example of this theme of humility in the *Analects* can be seen in the first lines of Book 5.

1. In the local community, Confucius was submissive and seemed to be inarticulate. In the ancestral temple and at court, though fluent, he did not speak lightly.
2. At court, when speaking with Counselors of lower rank he was affable; when speaking with Counsellors of upper rank, he was frank though respectful. In the presence of his lord, his bearing, though respectful, was composed.<sup>78</sup>

Yet, despite these examples of humility from Taoism and Confucius, it seems that when one tries to live out this aspect of humility, while also clinging to a cyclical pattern of human history, all that seems likely to result is an empty rhetoric that appears to lack any true direction, purpose, or ultimate meaning. Ultimately what seems most likely to result is a view of human history that is at its heart, a self-centered and self-serving view.

### Human Progress View of Human History

Two views of history, the Human Progress and Central Event views, are both what are known as linear views of history. Both these linear views share with the CY view the understanding and acceptance that there are indeed cyclical patterns that are a part of the human experience of life. And furthermore, these cyclical patterns have been repeating on some level

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must first allow ourselves to be broken. If we want to be given everything, we must willingly give up everything.” See also, Lao Tzu’s *Tao and Wu Wei*, Dwight Goddard and Henri Borel, trans., (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2008) chapter, 22. Goddard and Borel’s translation of this particular chapter, which they give the title “Increased by Humility,” also speaks of a call for humility in Tzu’s teachings when they write that “the wise man, embracing unity, as he does, will become the world’s model. Not pushing himself forward he will become enlightened; not asserting himself he will become distinguished; not boasting of himself he will acquire merit; not approving himself he will endure. Forasmuch as he will not quarrel, the world will not quarrel with him.

<sup>77</sup> Sara Rushing, *What is Confucian Humility*, in *Virtue Ethics and Confucianism*, Stephen Angle & Michael Stole, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 173.

<sup>78</sup> Confucius, *The Analects* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1979), Book 5.

throughout all human history. However, for linear views, these cyclical patterns are only an aspect of human history; they do not define them. Rather, these two views embrace a view that human history has come from somewhere, and that there is a path or line that human history continues to follow. In other words, the HP and CE views hold that human history had a beginning point, and it will also have an ending point.

One of these linear views of human history which gained strength and popularity in western cultures during and following the period of European Enlightenment, a popularity which continued all the way to and through the early portions of the twentieth century, became known as the Human Progress (HP) view of human history. This HP view was based on the concept that some form of progress was created and perpetrated by humans. “Human history is therefore the account of the improvement of the human condition from barbarism to civilization.”<sup>79</sup>

Pannenberg wrote that those in the HP camp have held a view that “since the eighteenth century, history has been conceived of as a continuous stream toward the progressive realization of humane standards of life. World history appeared as a unified process, periodized by the succession of empires each of which was born from a new people rising to historical prominence.”<sup>80</sup> But the “unified process” the HP view thought they saw within human history, for proponents living prior to the twentieth century, would soon prove to be only a mirage.

In part, the “unified process” that was thought to exist within the HP view, came about as certain cultures’ began to view human history as being dominated by the progress they experienced in life. Many concluded that since life is better today than it was yesterday, somehow human actions in dealing with life must be better today than yesterday; therefore,

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<sup>79</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 68.

<sup>80</sup> Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History*, 83.

humans must be the reason life is better today than yesterday. This view, held by such thinkers as Voltaire, Hume and Gibbon, was often used as “an alternative to the Christian view of history.”<sup>81</sup> In addition, the HP view held to a position that man’s progress had freed the world from their silly superstitions and the belief that man needed something beyond himself to make this world a better place. But despite these and other thinkers influenced by the HP view, there are those, like Pannenberg, who have declared that some obvious shortcomings and negative characteristics exist within the HP view of human history. It is these negative characteristics that will now be addressed.

### **Human Progress View: Negative Characteristics**

This simplistic model of human daily experience is an example of how human experience, like it was with the cyclical patters of daily life, can again be illegitimately transferred onto an individual’s view of human history. The HP view of human history, centered on what some have come to believe about the power and success of human progress, carries with it four significant negative characteristics. These include (1) the elimination of divine intervention, (2) a high, but unjustified expectation of the future, (3) an assumed ability to determine what is progress, and what is not,<sup>82</sup> and (4) in spite of what may have appeared as the existence of a unifying process within the HP view, in reality, no clearly defined unity exists.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 77.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 68-69. Bebbington argues that the idea of progress, which in turn contributed to the formation of the Human Progress view of human history, was what he termed “a secularization of the Christian view of history... [an] idea of progress [that] betrays its Christian origins.” Furthermore he argues that this view of human progress possessed the first three negative characteristics I have included here, those being a lack of divine intervention, high expectation of the future, and that there exists a criterion for assessing what is progress and what is not.

<sup>83</sup> Pannenberg, *Human Nature, Election, and History*, 83. Pannenberg declares that there were many individuals in the 18<sup>th</sup> century who believed that human progress had revealed a unifying process of continual human progress, but in reality, Pannenberg in, Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 74-75., holds that it is only in a view

## Negative Consequences: Elimination of Divine Intervention

One significant player, or players, in the determination of the various views of human history are the historians who have been involved in the formation of these views. If a historian holds to a Human Progress view, then it is almost certain that they will have made a key *a priori* determination concerning human history. This *a priori* determination was that if a God existed, His impact or activity within human history was non-existent. This means that from the outset, any history created by someone who held to an HP view of human history, is a history that would have no place for any form of divine intervention.

Herbert Butterfield stated that “in the long run there are only two alternative views about life or about history... either you trace everything back in the long run to sheer blind chance, or you trace everything back to God.”<sup>84</sup> This simplistic yet, profound statement concerning how one chooses to view human history is exactly what those who hold to a Human Progress view of human history did when they chose the former over the latter. The importance of the choice made between these two alternatives becomes evident in how human history is both interpreted and eventually recorded. Before any History student reads or studies an account or an event of human history, they will find that the history they encounter has already been influenced by the choices made by the writers. Most historians, like many others who deal with the sciences, in this case a Social Science, typically hold to a claim that their interpretation of human history is based on a pure unbiased examination and explanation of the known facts surrounding human events.

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of human history, like that of a Judeo-Christian view of human history where a true unity exists. It is here where we see Pannenberg arguing that beginning with ancient Israel’s understanding “of the world as a whole as history of mankind was opened up only through the Old Testament,” and ultimately finds it’s unity in the fate of Jesus. Thus, Pannenberg holds, that the removal of God by modern thinkers likewise removes the impact of Christ, and furthermore, any coherent unifying aspect of human history.

<sup>84</sup> Herbert Butterfield, “God in History”, in *God, History, and Historians*, ed. C.T. McIntire (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 197.

But when any historian examines the evidence of a past human event, the historian's willingness or unwillingness to allow for the possibility of divine intervention would appear to have a strong impact on the history that results. This is what David Bebbington argues

History... entails investigation, questioning, [and] inquiry... [furthermore] the discipline itself is not a matter of reading, but of researching. It entails calling accepted views into question on the basis of freshly discovered or freshly interpreted evidence. History demands a critical frame of mind.... The problem of the historian himself... [and] the exercise of the historian's judgment.... Those criteria are influenced by the cultural, political and religious values he may hold.<sup>85</sup>

Therefore, a Human Progress view of human history, produced by a historian who denies the possibility of divine intervention *a priori*, is a view of human history that can only result in a purely human influenced interpretation. This *a priori* denial of the possibility of divine intervention within human history, in Pannenberg's view, makes the HP view a less than legitimate view of human history. Furthermore, Don Olive argued that when a HP historian makes this *a priori* denial of the possibility of divine intervention in human history, they are violating one of the necessary methodological principles that Pannenberg believes must govern proper historical research.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the importance of a historical method that does not

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<sup>85</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought*, 4-5. It should also be noted that Christian historians must also not let their Christian view of history cause them to misuse their position as a historian. See Robert Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective*, 3<sup>rd</sup>. ed. (Grand Rapids: MI: Baker Academic, 2008.) 134. Pazmiño reminds the Christian historian that "...the Christian can appropriate history with a sense of appreciation and inspiration – despite warnings that history should not be used exclusively for political purposes or as a form of evangelism that focuses solely on inspiration. Inspiration is a secondary result of the pursuit of truth through historical investigation...

<sup>86</sup> Don Olive, *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind: Wolfhart Pannenberg*, (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1973), 57. Here Olive writes that Pannenberg held that "the first methodological necessity for the historian is a concept of history which does not rule out any possibility a priori. Some discussions of the possibility of Jesus' resurrection turn upon the argument that the resurrection of a dead person violates the laws of nature and is therefore impossible. Such an argument, however, cannot claim the authority of modern science, for science emphasizes that only a part of the laws of nature are ever known. Furthermore, although conformity to law represents one important aspect of individual events, no individual event is ever completely determined by the laws of nature. The laws of nature are themselves contingent, so that in principle no definitive judgments about the possibility or impossibility of an event can be made. The high probability of an event's occurrence or nonoccurrence can never be transmitted into a statement of factuality."



deny the possibility of divine intervention within human history *a priori*, for Pannenberg, is an absolute necessity for the other linear view of human history, the Central Event (CE) view. The CE view, as I will demonstrate, despite it also being a linear view of human history, is nonetheless a view of human history that stands in direct opposition to the HP view, and in the HP view's *a priori* denial of divine intervention.

#### Negative Consequences: A High Expectation of the Future

Bebbington argues that during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and for some time thereafter, a number of prominent thinkers like David Hume and Adam Smith were quite certain that because of the advancements of mankind most areas of human life were improving, in their view, there was no end in sight. Bebbington writes a “strong conviction” existed that “progress would certainly continue... [and] man would attain a state of unparalleled happiness...”<sup>87</sup>

Compared to those thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century who espoused the HP view, today's world has the advantage of standing on the other side of a 20<sup>th</sup> century that produced two horrific world-wide conflicts. Standing on this side of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, seems to allow for a hindsight that would see that the HP's high view of a human centered future was a flawed notion. Instead of finding a brighter future without God, mankind, it could be argued, has discovered an empty and dark reality. This is exactly what William Lane Craig was speaking of when he wrote the following words.

Modern man thought that when he had gotten rid of God, he had freed himself from all that repressed and stifled him. Instead, he discovered that in killing God, he had only

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<sup>87</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought*, 69-79. Bebbington believed that the era of Enlightenment led Deists and secular thinkers to begin to look at human history as an un-interrupted path of improvement. This path of improvement was spread across all of the known sciences, and furthermore, replaced any notion of divine elements that may have contributed to or caused the path of progress that they believed human history had revealed.

succeeded in orphaning himself. For if there is no God, then man's life becomes absurd. If God does not exist, then both man and the universe are inevitably doomed to death.<sup>88</sup>

If mankind has learned nothing else from human history, the lessons of man's continual and repeated short-comings and failures are lessons that seem dangerous to be ignored. While it is true that mankind has advanced in many areas of human life, human history nonetheless is an imperfect history full of imperfect humans filled with the imperfect results from their imperfect actions. The stark reality for those who hold to a HP view of human history is that what might have once appeared as a bright future full of unity and advancement through the power of human effort is in reality a dark, doomed future that is at best clouded, but more likely is a future that appears will be overshadowed by human failures and shortcomings. And sadder yet for those in the HP camp, is that when the bright future that the HP view rested upon failed to become a reality, the HP view was and seems to be left with no one and nowhere beyond itself to turn to for answers.

Negative Consequences: Assumes the Ability to Determine What Is and What Is Not Progress

Obviously, one of the most important aspects of the Human Progress view of human history is the idea of progress. In its most basic understanding, progress is something that is not only moving forward, but in addition, must be moving forward toward a particular goal or ultimate destination. Thus if the HP view of human history is to be taken seriously as a legitimate view of human history, then it would make sense that proponents of such a view must be able to point to a particular goal or ultimate destination that mankind is heading toward. In David Bebbington's understanding, the goal and destination that proponents of the HP view point to is a

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<sup>88</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 71.

movement from barbarism to civilization.<sup>89</sup> The HP view believes that the fact that mankind was once void of a unified and advanced civilization, but now finds himself living and experiencing such a civilization, then the only possible reason for this unification and advancement must be progress. And since the HP view has already eliminated the possibility of divine intervention, the only possible explanation for this declared progress lies in the hands of mankind alone. Neither Pannenberg nor Bebbington would deny that what HP view has deemed as progress has definitely been witnessed on some level throughout human history. They both seem to hold to a view that there does seem to have been movement among humans from a former state of barbarianism to a more civilized human existence. But where both Pannenberg and Bebbington believe the HP view misses the mark is in how the HP view gives mankind credit for both understanding this as progress, and making the progress a reality solely on his own. Bebbington writes:

Man, according to the idea of progress, has advanced not just in matters like technology and improvement of material conditions. There has been progress also in the use of man's intellect and, in many versions, in his moral capacity. Human history is therefore the account of the improvement of the human condition... [and] There is a striking similarity to the Christian story of man's pilgrimage between two points, but the starting-place is no longer creation and the finishing-place is no longer judgement.<sup>90</sup>

Therefore Bebbington, while not denying the notion that progress has occurred throughout human history, still finds the HP view, one that champions man making his own declaration of where he has come from and where he is ultimately headed, as a self-centered and self-determinant point of view.

Pannenberg also finds the HP view's ability to determine, and furthermore, perpetuate a real and lasting form of progress through the power and efforts of humankind alone a human

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<sup>89</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought*, 68

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

impossibility. His argument here lies in the fact that within the aspects of human progress within human history there is a never ending stream of human conflict. He writes that:

Only if the antagonistic goals and actions of individuals were ultimately to serve a common interest or could be assimilated in a collective planning process, and if all side effects of human action could be grasped in advance, could the course of history be controlled by human beings and guided in the direction of continuous progress in civilization. But hopes of this kind that were cultivated by an “enlightened” faith in progress seem unrealistic today.<sup>91</sup>

What is most important in Pannenberg’s words here is the understanding that despite a human history that has been witness to mankind’s consistent inability to work together for a common goal and purpose, and despite all the war and conflict that mankind’s self-centered and self-focused nature has caused, there still has been progress. And if progress is occurring in spite of mankind’s obvious inability to produce such progress, then maybe something or someone else would seem to have to be the real cause. And furthermore, just maybe this something or someone might also be that which can stand both outside of and beyond mankind, and who likewise could be producing a unified direction and ultimate destiny for the progress mankind is experiencing with human history. In Pannenberg’s view, this other possible power at play within human history would have to be Jesus Christ.

#### Negative Consequences: No Clearly Defined Unity

One aspect that Pannenberg believed was absolutely essential for any view of human history to claim validity, was that it must have a clearly defined aspect of unity. The Central Event view of human history, which will be discussed in chapters three and four, has as one of its core aspects the belief that not only does God act within human history, but that these God

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<sup>91</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2004), 504-505.

Events have the ability to transcend human history in a way that allows them to be a point of unity for all of mankind. In addition, God Events are not events that happen in isolation of mankind, but rather, are actual human events that are experienced at certain times and at certain places by various humans within human history. Their impact, while more obvious to the lives of those who are present during the time and place when such an event occurs within human history, has the special ability to transcend their immediate time and place within human history in a way that impacts all humanity and human history, and in doing so, become points of unity. And, what is especially important to remember when dealing with these God Events, a point that was stressed by Pannenberg, is in how he asserted that they are events that no man or woman has right to lay claim to.<sup>92</sup> But by laying claim to all human progress, both actual and perceived, this is exactly what the HP view attempts to do.

When the HP view does not acknowledge God as an active player in the progress of mankind and human history, it removes, or at the very least, refuses to acknowledge, the very events that provide mankind the opportunity to find unity out of what at times might seem like chaos within human history. And furthermore, when mankind holds to a view that removes this opportunity to find unity within human history, it also severely reduces the likelihood for mankind to also find the direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning that it also seeks.

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<sup>92</sup> See this study's earlier comments in chapter one, where Pannenberg's views concerning this issue were initially presented. "Pannenberg believed that the most obvious proof for the fallacy of a man-centered view of human history is that "inter-connection between various events which transcend the individuals who have been responsible for the events themselves are not, it must be stressed, simply the work of active men. History rises above the model of the process which operates of its own accord." And, Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 5.

### **Human Progress View: Human-Centered and Human-Focused (Self-Centered and Self Focused)<sup>93</sup>**

One of the most obvious aspects of the Human Progress view is that it is inherently Human-centered and Human-focused. As Pannenberg has declared, “according to the modern understanding of human history, man is given a central position.”<sup>94</sup> This is simply a logical outcome to a view of human history that places all of its successes and advancements within the realm and power of human minds and human hands. It is this same inherently Human-centered and Human-focused aspect that also reveals an inherent weakness within the HP view. Pannenberg outlined the development of this human-centered view, and the inherent weakness that accompanied it as he writes about how these modern philosophies of history have all emerged within a process of the secularization of the biblical understanding of all reality as history. Man was now to be the bearer of world-history in place of God. And, unfortunately for the proponents of the HP view, as well as for all of mankind, this weakness shown true in two horrific world wars and a world-wide economic depression, which made humankind’s continual progress look less like a true historical reality. “The rather naively optimistic hope of the immediately preceding centuries in the apparently natural progress of human civilization has lost its impetus in a century which has experienced the most destructive and terrible wars in modern history.”<sup>95</sup>

In the end, the HP view of history seemed to possess some direction, although it appeared to be a self-centered and self-focused direction, and, at least for a time, some human-

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<sup>93</sup> I have chosen to use human in place of self in this subsection for emphasis, but I am doing so with the full intent of using human-centered and human focused as equivalents to self-centered and self-focused.

<sup>94</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 4.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

centered meaning. But repeated human tragedies robbed its direction and meaning of any apparent significance, nor have I found that the HP view produces any form of genuine purpose.

### The Relativistic View of Human History

Although it has not been mentioned specifically thus far in this study, there is an overarching sentiment I am working from that is often expressed by the adage, “you can’t get there from here.” What is meant when someone expresses this is that if you want to reach the destination you seek, there is typically not only a specific road you must take, but in some cases, you must also begin your journey from a specific place. This is clearly the position I hold about the two previous views of human history that I have thus far discussed. The same is true for the Relativistic (RL) view of human history. In the case of the RL view, not only do its proponents declare that each human has a uniquely genuine and legitimate destination that they are heading for, but each human also has uniquely genuine and legitimate roads, forms of travel, and reasons for why, when, and how, they have decided to set out for their destination. Thus the RL view, while claiming to be a view of human history that places each individual’s own personal views on an equally legitimate plain also seems to, as I will demonstrate, result in being a view of human history that allows each individual to claim their unique and legitimate view is superior to all others.

In this section it will be my goal to show that the RL view is not a sufficiently legitimate view of human history by showing that the RL view 1) supports a flawed use of human experience, is 2) inherently contradictory, and worst of all, 3) is inherently self-centered and self-aggrandizing. In addition, 4) I will also argue that the RL view seems to lack any genuine or legitimate direction, purpose, or ultimate meaning for humanity and human history.

## Relativistic View: An Illegitimate Use of Human Experience

Although I have chosen to use the term Relativistic to label this particular view of human history, it is important to point out that this label is to be understood as being synonymous with the more commonly used term cultural relativism. Therefore, within this section of the study I will be using the terms interchangeably. In addition, I have also chosen to include all three variations of Relativistic views and understandings, under this one heading of Relativistic. These include Individual Relativism<sup>96</sup>, Cultural Relativism, and Moral Relativism.<sup>97</sup> It is on that note that I now look at my first objection to the RL, that being its illegitimate use of human experience.

Melville J. Herskovits, a proponent of cultural relativism, defines cultural relativism as a view whose “judgments are based on experience...” and furthermore, this “experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation.”<sup>98</sup> Therefore, for Herskovits, the reality that is experienced by the individual becomes a legitimate reality for that individual. This in turn leads him to conclude that those things that might come from outside a particular person’s individual experience cannot, and should not, impact, define, or redefine an individual’s view

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<sup>96</sup> David Yount. "Individual and Cultural Relativism," Salor.org, last modified August, 2012, accessed September 25, 2016, <http://www.saylor.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/BUS20511.2.1.pdf>. Dr. Yount defines Individual Relativism as “The view that what is ethically right is relative to each and every person. For instance, if person A believes bribery in business is ethical, it is; if person B believes bribery in business is unethical, it is.”

<sup>97</sup> Emrys Westacott. "Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed September 25, 2016. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/moral-re/>. Moral Relativism is defined as “the view that moral judgments are true or false only relative to some particular standpoint (for instance, that of a culture or a historical period) and that no standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others. It has often been associated with other claims about morality: notably, the thesis that different cultures often exhibit radically different moral values; the denial that there are universal moral values shared by every human society; and the insistence that we should refrain from passing moral judgments on beliefs and practices characteristic of cultures other than our own.

<sup>98</sup> Melville J. Herskovits, “Cultural Relativism and Cultural Values,” in Frances Herskovits, ed., *Cultural Relativism: Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism* (Random House, 1972), and included in Steven Satris, ed., *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Moral Issues*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Bulford: McGraw-Hill/Dushkin, 2004), 6.



and perspective of his world. This, in Herskovits' understanding, is paramount. For this means that

When we reflect that such intangibles as right and wrong, normal and abnormal, beautiful and plain are absorbed as a person learns the ways of the group into which he is born, we see that we are dealing here with a process of first importance. Even the facts of the physical world are discerned through the enculturative screen, so that the perception of time, distance, weight, size, and other "realities" is mediated by the conventions of any given group.<sup>99</sup>

This self-defining of one's world and, what I believe includes one's view of human history, as Herskovits is proposing here, is that which comes directly as a result of what the individual experiences within their immediate cultural setting. It is this "self-defining view through experience" that then will determine and shape how each individual will respond and participate with each new experience, both from within in and from outside the individual's immediate culture.

On the surface, what Herskovits is claiming has a ring of truth. Experience is very significant for each and every human individual. The "human experience", by its name alone does seem to require that humans must have experiences. The five human senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell, all work together to allow each human the ability to experience their world. And it is through the use of these senses that humans can learn and evaluate the world that they experience. But, within this "ring of truth" there does seem to lay a serious flaw. The flaw is that cultural relativists use experience as a final determinant or a tool for making final judgments. And the significance here is that this, as Janet Kanarek<sup>100</sup> puts it, is cultural

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>100</sup> Janet Kanarek, "Critiquing Cultural Relativism," *The Intellectual Standard*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 1, accessed July 31, 2016, <http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/tis/vol2/iss2/1>. On page three Kanarek writes "Thus, the starting point of cultural relativism is an assertive epistemological claim about man's nature. Judgment, it holds, is reliant on experience – experience that is inseparable from its cultural context. Since man's judgments are culture-bound, so too are his methods of reasoning and knowledge."

relativism's way for finding one's starting point. But not a single unified starting point exists for all of mankind. Instead it is a claim for a uniquely legitimate starting point for each culture, and if you follow this line of reasoning all the way to its fullest extent, it seems to also allow for the possibility for a uniquely legitimate starting point for each individual within each culture. And if that is the case, then when one applies the previously mentioned adage "you can't get there from here," to the cultural relativists world, what is found appears to be a world where every single individual is heading to a uniquely legitimate destination, by a uniquely legitimate manner, on a uniquely legitimate course, with a uniquely legitimate starting point, all of which has been determined by each individual's uniquely legitimate way of understanding their world. And if this is true, then what can be expected to be found will be "innumerable cultures and... innumerable realities, each with their own truths and moralities. There can be no universally "good" or "bad" practices since what constitutes "good" and "bad" is relative to each culture...<sup>101</sup>," and, its most extreme understanding, relative to each individual.

While this "uniquely legitimate" way of finding and making personal judgments from experiences alone is a situation that I hold to be quite problematic, that does not mean that human experiences do not have their place within the process of finding meaning, and/or helping us to make determinations or judgments. The Christian foundations on which the Central Event (CE) view and the CEM is built upon definitely has room for and places a significant level of value on what can be found within human experiences. As will be argued beginning in chapter three, experiences are the way humans come to know God by experiencing His actions and the impact of His actions within human history. But unlike what the RL view holds, the experience

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 4.

is not the final word for the CE view. Instead, experience is simply the channel through which our views are tested and verified.

One Christian scholar who valued experience in its proper place was John Wesley. One of Wesley's most impactful contributions to the Christian tradition was found in his use of what has come to be known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. When an issue concerning the Christian faith arose, Wesley's

first appeal was to the Holy Bible... Even so, he was well aware that Scripture alone had rarely settle any controverted point of doctrine... Thus, though never as a substitute or corrective, he would also appeal to... Christian tradition at large as competent, complementary witnesses to "the meaning" of this Scripture or that... But Scripture and tradition would not suffice without the good offices (positive and negative) of critical reason. Thus, he insisted on logical coherence and as an authorized referee in any context between contrary propositions or arguments. And yet, this was never enough. It was, as he knew for himself, the vital Christian *experience* of the assurance of one's sins forgiven, that clinched the matter.<sup>102</sup>

And, when one comes to understand how Wesley used experiences, one can find with Wesley's view that "experience justifiably stands alongside Scripture, tradition, and reason as authoritative criteria for the Christian faith. All need to be taken into consideration when we reflect on basic Christian beliefs."<sup>103</sup>

Albert Outler called Wesley's use of experience his "special genius" and Don Thorsen writes that "many consider Wesley's insights into experience as a source of religious authority one of his greatest contributions to the development of Christian theology."<sup>104</sup> Both Outler and

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<sup>102</sup> Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral – In John Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*: Volume 20, Number 1, (Spring, 1985), 8. accessed at [Wesley.nnu.edu/fileadmin/imported\\_site/wesleyjournal/1985](http://Wesley.nnu.edu/fileadmin/imported_site/wesleyjournal/1985).

<sup>103</sup> Don [Donald A.D.] Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2005), 143. This four-fold formula, with Scripture as primary and tradition, reason, and experience, as significant, but secondary, is also supported by Thomas C. Oden. Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, Harper Collins paperback ed., vol. v. 1, *The Living God* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper San Francisco, 1992), 331-341.

Thorsen believed that Wesley was surely impacted by the value of the experiences of his life. Two such experiences for Wesley were, one, during a storm<sup>105</sup> on his return trip from Georgia to England in early 1738, an experience that raised significant doubts surrounding his own salvation, and the second, at Aldersgate<sup>106</sup> on May 24, 1738, where Wesley finally did experience the reality of his salvation. There is little doubt that these two experiences had a significant impact on Wesley. But Wesley, as was displayed in the extended quote from Outler above, did not rely solely on these or any other experience. The experience for Wesley was only the testing ground, or as I am arguing, the channel through which he came to know and understand his faith and his God, Jesus Christ. If Wesley did not also have Scripture as his foundation, giant shoulders of tradition to stand upon, and a God given ability to employ rational thought, the experience alone would not suffice. But because he had all four, always with Scripture at the top, he could find value in and through human experiences. To this point, Outler added. “But always, Biblical revelation must be received in the heart by faith: this is the requirement of experience.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>105</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*: Third Edition, Vol. 1 and 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 72-73. Here we find Wesley’s frightful encounter with a storm at sea. “The captain was upon deck in an instant. But his men could not hear what he said. It blew a proper hurricane; which beginning at south-west, then west, north-west, north, and, in a quarter an hour, round by the east to the south-west point again. At the same time the sea running, as they term it, mountain-high, and that from many different points at once, the ship would not obey the helm; nor indeed could the steersman, through the violent rain, see the compass. So he was forced to let her run before the wind, and in half an hour the stress of the storm was over... I went to America, to convert the Indians; but O! who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of mischief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled.”

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 103. Here we find what has come to be known as John Wesley’s Aldersgate Experience. “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

<sup>107</sup> Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral – In John Wesley,” 11.

I agree with the sentiment of John Wesley that there is value in human experiences, for it is within the human experiences that one can come to know and understand God. But, unlike the RL view, I contend that human experiences are not to be used as the definer of one's view of human history, nor are they to be used as tools to be the final judge of or for human history.

### **Relativistic View: Inherently Contradictory**

A second aspect of Herskovits' definition for cultural relativism includes the notion that not only are personal judgments or conclusions about human life and human history to be based on personal experiences, these same judgments and conclusions will also uniquely and legitimately develop within each culture. This means, then, that different people living within different cultures will very likely develop their own unique and legitimate judgments and conclusions about certain experiences. I believe that based on this line of logic, two very important questions arise. First, if one group of people or culture comes to certain judgments and conclusions that are dissimilar to other uniquely legitimate judgments and conclusions that are being developed in and by a different group of people from a different culture, would that not cause these resulting judgments and conclusions themselves to have a high possibility of being inherently contradictory? Second, would not this form of RL logic also have to dictate that every resulting judgment and conclusion formed within each culture have to be viewed as being both valid in the culture in which they are developed, while at the same time possess the possibility of being viewed as invalid in another culture?

As was the case with how the RL view dealt with experiences, I am willing to acknowledge that cultural influences will definitely impact the judgements and conclusions that a particular culture will produce through the experiences they encounter. To deny this fact at its

most basic level would require one to also deny that different cultures with different practices and beliefs exist. But the how and why certain judgments and conclusions about human life and human history developed is not ultimately the issue. The issue lies in the RL position that all culturally formed judgments and conclusions can be valid in one culture, but not necessarily be valid in another culture. To some, this seems to be problematic, especially when the judgment or conclusion falls within the realm of morality.

One proponent of the RL view, John J. Tilley, finds no issue at all with the inherent contradictory nature of the RL view. This includes judgments and conclusions that concern issues of morality. He holds that “although for every culture some moral judgments are valid, no moral judgment is universally valid. Every moral judgment is universally relative.”<sup>108</sup> One way that Tilley argues that allows the RL view to hold such a contradictory view is that he contends that “cultural relativism implies no test for moral validity. That is, it does not tell how to check moral judgments for validity or how to identify the cultures for which the judgments are valid.”<sup>109</sup>

But this claim that the RL view does not have an instrument available to it to check moral judgments between different cultures does not hold water for Janet Kanarek. Kanarek finds that within the accepted inherent contradictory of valid for one but not for another, a second contradiction resides. She writes that

cultural relativism holds that all convictions are culture bound. These convictions have neither applicability nor truth outside of the cultural context from which they originate. Such a conclusion must then apply equally to cultural relativism... [meaning] it would be wrong, by its own accord, to apply cultural relativism cross-culturally since it is just another culture bound theory.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> John J. Tilley, "Cultural Relativism," *Human Rights Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2000): 505, accessed June 10, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4489287>.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 509

In other words, this means that since cultural relativists must accept that the very theory that cultural relativism is founded upon, just like any judgment or conclusion, has to have been formed within a particular culture, then it too cannot be applied cross culturally. Therefore, by their own admission, cultural relativism has no validity outside of the culture it was formed, and thus, it would be a contradiction of its very definition to apply this theory to any other culture beyond the culture of origination.

Another scholar who also views this inherent contradictory view as nonsensical is Vincent Ruggiero. In his book, *Corrupted Culture: Rediscovering America's Enduring Principles, Values, and Common Sense*, Ruggiero proposes that “the fundamental test of any idea is whether it can be applied without creating insurmountable difficulties and contradictions.”<sup>111</sup> Thus, from the very outset, Ruggiero sees the RL view failing this all important test. For when a culture, or in the extreme cases, an individual within a particular culture, is given full authority to come to their own judgments and conclusions about human life and human history by and through their experiences alone, what is actually occurring is that each individual is being given a license to create their own truth.

The idea that people create their own truth and reality (also known as relativism) means that there is no requirement to which anyone's created truth and reality must conform; in other words, that whatever anyone *decides* is *true* will by that very fact, *be true*, at least for that person. That, in turn, means that no one's truth is better than anyone else's, so no one can ever be wrong about anything. In other words, more than everyone having a right to an opinion, everyone's opinion is necessarily right.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Kanarek, “Critiquing Cultural Relativism,” 6.

<sup>111</sup> Vincent Ryan Ruggiero, *Corrupted Culture: Rediscovering America's Enduring Principles, Values, and Common Sense* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2013), 112.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

Ruggiero has made it quite clear that someone who holds a RL view will indeed find that they have been given control over making judgments and conclusions about any and everything, and, what is of the greatest concern, is that their judgments and conclusions have been elevated to the level of truth. But common sense tells us that if individual A claims to hold a unique and legitimate truth concerning a human experience, then they are likely to find themselves contradicting individual B who has been given the authority to hold the same claim. And, as Ruggiero believes, this “reality has no application to everyday experience.”<sup>113</sup>

Consider, if you will, my earlier contention concerning how proponents of the RL view gives each individual the right to claim their own starting point, course, mode of transportation, and ultimate destination. This analogy is similar to Ruggiero’s notion that “if we wish to take a trip to an unfamiliar place, we don’t close our eyes and imagine the route – we get a map. If our car breaks down, we don’t create our own truth about what is wrong – we have a mechanic inspect it and determine what is actually wrong.”<sup>114</sup> What Ruggiero is driving at here appears to imply that if a view of human life and human history allows for this type of scenario, like the RL view appears to do, this simply will not work in everyday life. The RL view’s inherent contradiction will thus lead to contradiction after contradiction in daily life, and in the lives of all other individuals that anyone would encounter. The number of contradictions seems to become endless, impacting each individual at almost every moment and time. And even more, if it is impacting each individual on a continual basis, then would these same contradictions not also be seen occurring within their societal institutions, governmental structures and policies, and even their religious organizations? And what I conclude is the saddest result of such a possible reality,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 113.



which will be addressed in the following subsection, is that the only apparent winners in a world guided by the RL view seems to be those who are able to acquire enough power to impose their view of truth on to others. And, as I also contend, it is a resulting view of truth that seems to ignore the relative side of cultural relativism, and instead appears to encourage the possessor the right to not only claim its superiority, but as history has shown, the right to force it upon as many other individuals as is possible, and for as much time as is possible.

### **Relativistic View: Inherently Self-Centered and Self-Aggrandizing**

I now turn my attention toward what I conclude to be an inherently self-centered and self-aggrandizing aspect of the RL view. In doing so, I will argue that this self-centered and self-aggrandizing aspect is another clear contradiction that appears to exist within the RL view. And the contradiction that I find here lays in one of the RL views' most popular claims to legitimacy. This is a claim that holds that the RL view of human history not only enables mankind to see the value and legitimacy of their own culture, but that it also should lead mankind to see the value and legitimacy of every other culture beyond its own. Unfortunately for the RL view, history seems to tell a much different story.

Individuals who hold to a RL view of human history have been around for most of recorded history. Protagoras, a philosopher from the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., is viewed by many as the first noted philosopher to hold a RL view.<sup>115</sup> However, my focus here will be directed toward a

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<sup>115</sup> Joshua J. Mark, "Protagoras", *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, last modified September 02, 2009, accessed July 23, 2016, <http://www.ancient.eu/protagoras/>. Mark writes that "Protagoras of Abdera (c.485-415 BCE) is considered the greatest of the Sophists of ancient Greece and the first to promote the philosophy of Subjectivism, arguing that interpretation of reality is relative to the individual." See also, Baghrmian, Maria and Carter, J. Adam, "Relativism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/relativism/>>. (Accessed July 26, 2016). "Although the term 'relativism' is of recent coinage, doctrines and positions, with some of the hallmarks of contemporary relativism, date back to the very beginnings of Western philosophy. Protagoras of Abdera 9c. 490-420 BC) is often considered the first overt champion of relativism...."

cultural relativist from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Johann Gottfried von Herder. I believe that Herder's form of cultural relativism, and resulting RL view, shines a perfect light on what one can find in the modern day form of RL, a form that presents for those who taste of it a seemingly altruistic flavor that unfortunately is soured by a seemingly self-centered reality.

Herder's cultural relativistic views were very much in line with those previously shared about Melville Herskovits. Like Herskovits, Herder not only held that each culture had the right to form its own cultural judgments and values, but also, because each culture possesses a self-defining right, he also felt that it was illegitimate to claim that other cultures had the right to judge each other.<sup>116</sup> It is important to note that, in his day, Herder was actually hailed as a hero of anti-colonialism during a period of history when European nations were in a race for Empires.<sup>117</sup> But while Herder might have believed his form of cultural relativism would lead to a common respect and legitimacy for every culture, which he hoped might allow each culture the right to govern themselves in the way that their culture best seemed fit, that does not seem to be what history has now revealed<sup>118</sup>. Rather, what resulted in the following two centuries in Herder's

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<sup>116</sup> Brad King, "Herder and Human Identity," *Philosophy Now*, Aug/Sep 2016, accessed July 23, 2016, [https://philosophynow.org/issues/112/Herder\\_and\\_Human\\_Identity](https://philosophynow.org/issues/112/Herder_and_Human_Identity). King writes that "Herder's view is a cultural relativist one in that he maintains that since each culture originates its values, it can only be judged on its own terms. And since there are no external, objective, universal values by which anyone can judge a culture, one culture is as 'valid' as any other."

<sup>117</sup> Herbert S. Lewis, *In Defense of Anthropology: An Investigation of the Critique of Anthropology*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2014.) <sup>117</sup> Lewis writes that "insofar as it had to do with colonialism the doctrine of cultural relativism was a direct consequence of opposition to colonialism, cultural arrogance, and ethnocentrism! Johann Gottfried von Herder... [was] outraged by European overseas adventure and deeply trouble by ethnocentrism..."

<sup>118</sup> Kanarek, "Critiquing Cultural Relativism," 11. Here is found Kanarek pointing out that despite RL claims that cultural relativism promotes a mutual respect for all varying beliefs among varying cultures, this is not what has been seen to have occurred. Instead what she sees is "the moral disarmament of the innocent... [whereas] the innocent are left morally defenseless against their aggressors. Its [RL] framework – if taken to be true and applied as such – automatically disarms the victims. It does so through its universal denial of any standard by which an idea or practice may be judged, at least cross-culturally."

Germany was a form of nationalism which ultimately fed a nationalistic fervor that placed Germany at the heart of two horrific twentieth century world wars<sup>119</sup>.

Much like the proponents of the Human Progress (HP) view, Herder's RL view led him to also adopt a false understanding of the human potential to progress without conflict. From Herder's own words it appears one hears this flawed understanding.

Even our brief history already demonstrates beyond all doubt, that the increased diffusion of true knowledge among people has happily diminished their inhuman, man destroyers. Since the downfall of Rome there has arisen no other cultivated nation in Europe, which has founded the whole of its constitution on war and conquest... In proportion as they advanced in civilization, and learned to have a regard for their property, the more amiable and peaceful spirit of industry, of agriculture, of trade, and of science, forced itself upon them unnoticed, or indeed often against their wills. Men learned to use without destroying... and thus in time, from the nature of the case itself, a peaceful balance between nations took place; for, after centuries of wild warring, all began to perceive, that the object of every one's wish was not to be attained, unless they contributed to promote it in common.<sup>120</sup>

Thus from Herder we hear a notion concerning humankind and the human capacity that seems to believe that when mankind allows everyone the right to live and make choices freely on their own, based on the way their particular culture has deemed appropriate, then the result will

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<sup>119</sup> Paul Hasall, "Johann Gottfried von Herder: Materials for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind, 1784" *Fordham University Modern History Sourcebook*, accessed July 23, 2016, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1784/herder-mankind.asp>. Hasall implies a connection to Herder's cultural relativist ideas that, whether or not Herder intended, resulted in a nationalism that inspired later German political movements. Hasall writes that "It is here that Johann Gottfried von Herder played such a vital foundational role. His Materials for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind laid the intellectual foundations for the claims of romantic philosophy that the nation was all. ...his theories were soon picked up by German political activists. See also, Kanarek, "Critiquing Cultural Relativism," 10-11. Kanarek writes that "the 1939 German invasion of Poland... elucidates this issue. During World War II, the German Nazis believed they had a moral and valid claim to take over the rest of the world... justifying national conquest as an ordained right of the Aryan race for the purposes of natural development. Conversely, Poland maintained and acted on the principle of national sovereignty." Despite these diametrically opposed principles, Germany invaded Poland under the pretense that it had a right to do so, while Poland staunchly denied such a right. In the cultural relativist framework, however, the German claim to Poland is just as valid as Poland's claim to sovereignty.

<sup>120</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Reflection on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, as found in *German History in Documents and Images: Vol 2. From Absolution to Napoleon, 1648-1815*, 9, accessed June 11, 2016, <http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/>.

be almost utopian.<sup>121</sup> But utopia does not seem to be what resulted from this call for a RL view. Instead of a mutual respect, many who embraced this form of cultural relativism appear to have used it to find value and legitimacy in their culture, but for the most part it does not seem like they used it to promote equal respect for other cultures or alternative cultural values. Instead, what seems to have occurred is that some used Herder's RL view to produce a nationalism with a "central claim... [being] first the 'people in politics are best understood as a defined and bounded group with a common history, language and tradition; and second, that a 'nation' has unique claim to be considered a legitimate political basis for sovereignty..." And throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this type of nationalism took on a number of forms, including "calls for cultural pride, liberal-national superiority..." and, worst of all, it seems to have led to a "nationalist rhetoric... used by right-wing fascists movements... [and] also Marxist 'national liberation' movements."<sup>122</sup>

So, what happened? Why did a seemingly benevolent RL view that called for mutual respect and mutual autonomy of cultures and nations, instead seem to result in a self-centered and self-aggrandizing form of nationalism? And why, instead of producing a utopia, did this nationalism seem produce human strife and suffering on a level that might have seemed unimaginable? It is my view that this type of self-first and self-serving result will most likely occur when any view of human history lacks a unifying central point of focus and foundation. And furthermore, this unifying central point of focus and foundation needs be one that must arise

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<sup>121</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *On World History: an Anthology*, ed. Hans Adler (Armonk, NY: Routledge, 1996) Part 1, Chapter 4, Paragraph 4. Here again we find Herder holding that his RL view would lead to an utopia. His forth statement in this chapter reads as follows. "Should reason in Europe someday, in ways not possible to be determined to us, gain so much in value, that it be joined with human kindness, *what a beautiful season for the members of the society of our entire species!* All nations would take part in it and enjoy this *autumn of reflectiveness*. As soon as the law of equity pervades trade and daily conduct everywhere on earth, all nations are brothers; the younger one readily will serve the older, the child the judicious elder with all that is at its disposal."

<sup>122</sup> Hasall, "Johann Gottfried von Herder".

from outside (transcend) of humanity and human history. Otherwise, there will most likely exist no legitimate unifying direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for all of humanity and human history.<sup>123</sup>

### **Relativistic View: Lacks Genuine and Legitimate Direction, Purpose, or Ultimate Meaning**

Relativistic views, and in particular those like Herder's, seem to possess an oddly apparent hypocritical element. This can be seen when one looks at how Herder himself went about the practice of his relativistic views. For while Herder was calling for an RL position that claimed that every culture had an equal self-defining right to choose best within their own culture to live and exists as they saw fit without outside judgment, he was at the same time openly casting judgment after judgment upon those cultures whom actions he found fault. Thus while Herder called for "nations [to] modify themselves, according to time, place, and their internal character: each bear[ing] in itself the standard of its perfection, totally independent of all comparison with that of others,"<sup>124</sup> he was also quick to criticize those independent cultures or leaders whom he saw "deviating from the path of reason, justice, and happiness... [that] impels them against their will to overstep the line of moderation... [whom he believed] probably will suffer during the remainder of their lives the consequences of a slight follow, and dereliction of reason."<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> I acknowledge that history has produced a number of seemingly nationalistic endeavors by individuals or groups who have been labelled as Christian. It is my contention that in cases such as these, the same lack of focus on a "central" point of focus and foundation exists. Therefore, while some Christians may claim a view of human history that is centered on Christ, their self-centered or self-focused actions show that this claim is most likely in word alone.

<sup>124</sup> Herder, *Reflection on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, 13.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 15.

But who is determining what is reason, justice, happiness, or moderation? Would not it have to be Herder? For if one follows Herder's RL views and line of thinking, then any judgments he makes would have to arise from his personal views formed within his personal cultural setting. And if this is the case, then why does it appear that Herder is one minute promoting the notion that it is illegitimate for one culture to criticize and cast judgment on another culture's views, and the next, openly criticizing the actions of those from a different culture with whom he appears to disagree with? Is this not a clear violation of the very RL view that he is promoting? I would answer yes.<sup>126</sup> And what is unfortunate for Herder, is that many of the judgments he made against civilizations like the Ancient Greeks, Egyptians, and Romans, all whom history has shown did use their superior views (nationalism) and superior strength to harshly rule over and impress their views on other "lesser" cultures, do seem to have a ring of truth. But, in the end, it is Herder's very own RL views that make any of his seemingly legitimate claims, illegitimate within a cultural relativists system. Because, is he not himself attempting to cast judgments beyond his own cultural point of view?

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<sup>126</sup> In order to be fair, I am willing to concede that not everyone who has studied Herder and Herder's cultural relativist views, particularly when it comes to how Herder could hold such views, and yet, openly criticize various groups of people and cultures, find fault with him. One such individual who does not believe that Herder was a true cultural relativist is Sonia Sikka. See also Sonia Sikka, *Herder On Humanity and Cultural Difference: Enlightened Relativism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 20. She holds that what Herder actually believed was a form of Universalism, whereby each culture should provide the people who live within that culture the possibility of human flourishing. He believes that it was possible for a culture to determine their own views, and they had the right to do so, but sometimes certain people within certain cultures found their way into power, and when they did, they did not allow the people of the culture to live as the majority view of the culture believed would allow for human flourishing. She writes that "Only because Herder posits human flourishing as a goal, and thinks that some things genuinely contribute to this goal while others do not, can he pass critical judgement on the societies he considers." Despite this observation by Sikka, I hold that Herder still has not provided a legitimate view of human history that justifies his claim to be the judge of what is and what is not human flourishing. It is probably also worth noting that some might be tempted to come to Herder's defense, particularly during such times when Herder appears to be criticizing his own culture, which some feel is allowable since it may not be cross-cultural criticism. But that seems to lead to another question of how exactly the RL view determines the borders of a particular culture? It seems difficult for the RL view to answer such a question since it leaves me wondering just how the RL view can determine who is and who is not a part of a particular culture. That determination, would it not, also have to be determined within each culture independently?

This is why I believe that the RL view fails as a legitimate view of human history. It simply, by its own admission, does not allow for any legitimate truth claims that can be applied to all cultures at all times. Something I contend is necessary to provide humanity and human history with direction, purpose, or ultimate meaning.

#### Herder's Relativistic View Lacks Direction

I have made the claim that I believe that the best view of human history is a view that provides mankind direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning. As was stated in chapter one, I hold that direction is that which helps humanity come to a clearer understanding that human history has come from somewhere and, more importantly, is heading somewhere. It is direction that helps mankind look beyond the details and events of their daily lives, and enables them to see a clear and significant pattern. It is my position that, if someone is looking for direction within the RL view, specifically the RL view held by Herder, they will have difficulty finding one.

I believe that another contradiction found in the RL view of Herder, one that I believe reveals the lack of direction in his RL view, is in how one minute Herder seemed to be praising mankind's ability to bring about a better world for all through their self-defining abilities, while the next he sees folly in any claims that mankind has actually achieved anything lasting or significant. This can be seen when Herder writes that "nations flourish and decay: but in a faded nation no new flower... ever blooms. Cultivation proceeds; yet becomes not more perfect by progress..." And ultimately, what Herder sees within human history is mankind "wander[ing] in a labyrinth, in which our lives occupy but a span; so that it is to us nearly a matter of indifference, whether there be any entrance or outlet to the intricate path." And furthermore he adds, "let a man sum up the periods of the happiness and unhappiness of nations, their good and

bad rulers, nay the wisdom and folly, the predominance of reason and of passion, in the best: how vast will be the negative number.”<sup>127</sup>

Thus, within Herder’s RL view, there appears to be a sentiment of what could be defined as a hopeless lack of direction. I am willing to accept that much of this “directionless” rhetoric from Herder does seem to have a motive behind it. And it would seem likely that the motive fueling Herder’s hopeless view of mankind’s progress resides in his overarching criticism of those from history who he believed had ruled with a harsh and suppressing hand. But here again arises the same question as to how anyone who holds a RL view can make such accusations? Even if they are simply observations of what Herder views as failures from the past, where in his RL view does he allow for a legitimate way to determine for all what is or is not a failure? And, even more important, where is Herder’s solution to what he clearly sees as a history lacking any real direction on which mankind can both witness and embrace? For if these previously unsuccessful cultural experiments, as Herder seems to want to label them, that were using the self-defining right that the RL view claims was legitimate for them to possess, do not seem to measure up to Herder’s uniquely derived RL view of successfully providing mankind any legitimate direction, what gives Herder the right to believe he possesses that which will allow him to be more successful? And furthermore, what within the RL view could even be used to legitimately compare Herder’s ability with the abilities of other cultures?

Ultimately, the only direction that even seems possible within Herder’s RL view, which ultimately does not appear to provide anything of value for humanity as a whole, seems to be its never ending circular and self-refuting foundations.

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<sup>127</sup> Johann Gottfried von Herder, *Reflection on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*... 2.



## Herder's Relativistic View Lacks Purpose

As I have and will continue to argue, if mankind cannot see an overarching direction within human history, the likelihood that it will find any purpose within human history seems almost impossible. Purpose, I hold, is that which mankind finds as it grows in its acceptance and understanding that human history has a direction. And furthermore, it is within this direction where mankind not only finds a starting point and a final destination for human history, but it can also find a genuine place or purpose where it can participate within this direction. Unfortunately, Herder's RL view seems to allow no place for this to happen.

Herder, a Deist, who for a time was a Lutheran pastor, appears to have been influenced strongly by the Humean philosophies that were prevalent in his day. As a result, these Deistic/Humean beliefs seem to have led him to hold to a view that although a God existed, there was little chance that God Himself acted or interacted with human affairs or within human history. Herder wrote that "When he [God] had created the Earth, and all its irrational inhabitants, he formed man, and said to him: 'be my image; a god upon Earth; rule and dispose. Whatever of noble and excellent thy nature will permit thee to produce, bring forth: I will assist thee by no miracle; for I have placed thy own fate in thy own hand...'"<sup>128</sup>

And again, "The deity has in nowise bound their hands, farther than by what they were, by time, place, and their intrinsic powers. When they were guilty of faults, he extricated them not by miracles, but suffered these faults to produce their effects, that man might the better learn to know them."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 4.

On the surface, one might be fooled into believing that mankind could actually find purpose within the world that Herder's RL view describes. God, in his view, had certainly created mankind and seemingly entrusted him to rule and such as he saw fit. And, as Herder also believed, mankind seemed to possess the ability to learn from his mistakes. But if, as Herder clearly states in both quotes above, God is not an actor by "miracle" within human history, how is mankind ever to know if he is actually succeeding or not? And, by what scale is mankind to measure this, being that Herder's RL view only allows such judgments to take place within each culture? Regardless of how Herder might answer the two preceding questions, it is my conclusion that for Herder, since God was not setting or providing any direction for humankind and human history ("not by miracle"), then He surely was not providing a place for mankind to find purpose within a God ordained direction.

#### Herder's Relativistic View Lacks Meaning

As I stated in this study's introduction, I hold to a view that one of the most common questions that has challenged mankind throughout much, if not all of his history, is whether or not any meaning exists in life. And furthermore, I believe that this meaning mankind is looking for is a meaning that can provide him with the assurance that there is something bigger than just what he experiences in his daily life. This also provides an overarching unity that ties all of mankind and his history together. Unfortunately, if mankind attempts to find this meaning within Herder's form of RL specifically, or within any RL view that holds to the same basic foundations of self-defining and judgment exempt cultures, I do not believe any meaning will be found.

Beginning in chapter three, I will demonstrate why I believe that the best place for mankind to find the meaning that it is searching for is within the reestablishment of a relationship

with its Creator that mankind lost. In addition, I will argue that mankind can both perceive and experience this meaning as it comes to recognize the direction within human history that is discovered as God fulfills His promises to mankind through His actions within human history. And, within this direction is where mankind can also find its purpose as individuals are invited to participate with God as the reality of this direction is shared with others.

Therefore, it is my contention that for the RL view of human history to provide mankind with this type of meaning, it would first have to also provide mankind with direction and purpose, something that I have already concluded is missing. For by removing God as a pivotal actor from within human history, as Herder has clearly done, I believe that the RL view has removed the possibility of finding meaning right from the outset.

Despite what Herder and others in the RL camp want to believe, I believe that humanity needs something that comes from beyond itself, something that transcends it and provides for it a unified understanding of right and wrong by which all cultures can measure themselves. Herder states that “unity out of multiplicity, [and] order out of disorder” can be found for mankind, if mankind can successfully employ his “human reason.”<sup>130</sup> But what he never seems to state in any way for his RL view to provide any legitimate way to provide all of mankind from every culture a unifying understanding of “human reason.” For, by his own admission, would it not be unreasonable for any proponent of the RL view to claim that their particular cultures understanding of “human reason” should somehow be accepted as valid for any other culture beyond their own?

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 14.

## Summary

As I bring to a close this chapter on views of human history that stand in opposition to the CE view, I do so with a somber realization. In every view covered in this chapter, which included the Cyclical, Human Progress, and Relativistic views, one seems to find humankind searching for understanding. It appears that something inherent within the human soul cries out for answers, as well as a common longing for something better. Humanity has been witness to both the positive and negative sides of its own history, and for the most part, it seems to have favored the former over the latter. But for those seemingly trapped within what I believe are short-sided views of human history, views that do not seem to allow mankind the opportunity to look behind themselves, their own history seems to confirm for them how time and time again human effort and striving alone has proven to be an exercise in futility. It is my contention that humanity needs that which can only come from outside of it. I also believe that humanity needs that which can break through the hopeless human-only striving by providing a direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning that humanity not only can perceive, but more importantly, can participate with. Therefore, I will now turn my focus toward the one view of human history that I believe can best provide humankind with that which it truly longs for. This view of human history is the Central Event (CE) view of human history.

### **CHAPTER THREE - THE CENTRAL EVENT VIEW OF HUMAN HISTORY**

The Cyclical, Human Progress, and Relativistic views of human history all resulted as philosophers and historians attempted to give meaning to human history based solely on either the daily human life experiences or the supposed advanced knowledge and power of human kind. But, as has been shown, these views all appear to have been unable to fulfill all three components that I believe are necessary in a sound view of history: direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning. And furthermore, it also seems that none have been able to avoid the development of a philosophy or view of human history that result in a self-centered or self-focused view of human life. Thus, it is my position that there remains only one view of human history that is the most accurate, all encompassing, and legitimate view of human history. This is the view that is shaped and defined by a Central Event.

The name Central Event, which seems to imply that it is a label that would be given to only one, single, Central human event, does seem to beg the question as to what human event can be declared to be the one, single, Central event of human history. And furthermore, what would be required of that event to deem it worthy of the label of Central Event. These are questions which will be addressed, shortly, but before attention is turned to the Central of the Central Event of human history, consider first the second word of the label, Event.

Logic deems that if one event can be labeled as the Central Event of human history, there must be other important or impactful occurrences within the human experience and human history that must also rise to a higher level of worthiness that, although they pale in comparison to the Central Event of human history, they nonetheless are pivotal Events that impact at some level all of human history. Every day of a human's existence, each person will experience a number of events or occurrences, the number of which could conceivably be as large as the

number of seconds of time that occurs within each day of an individual's life. Despite this conceivably large number of events or occurrences, it is quite likely that some of the events or occurrences will from time-to-time play a more important or impactful role within the individual's life. For example, if an individual comes down with food poisoning because they ate a questionable piece of fish for lunch, that event or occurrence will most likely impact that particular individual's life on that particular day far more than if that same person also ate some fries with the bad fish that caused the individual no such discomfort. It is these more important or impactful events that have within them the potential to either alter or, at some level, define how one individual comes to view their human experience. In our example here, how the individual will think about fish from that day forward will most likely be impacted.

Furthermore, while these more important or impactful events, like getting food poison from eating a bad piece of fish, might also carry within them the potential to impact other individuals beyond the particular individual who ate the bad fish, like members of their family or social circles, or the emergency room doctor who treated the food poison, there may be little chance that the impact of the food poison event will be felt much beyond the particular individual's immediate human existence.

But throughout human history, there have been certain important or impactful events or occurrences that have shown to possess the potential to rise to an even higher and more pivotal level of significance within human history. This higher and more pivotal level of significance, as human history has shown, can be determined by the event or occurrence's ultimate impact being felt by a significant number of humans over a significant length of time. The assassination of

Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand of Serbia, which has come to be known as the spark that set into motion the events that ultimately led to the First World War, is such an example.<sup>131</sup>

But, even events such as the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, and the World War that followed, still do not rise to the level that can share the label of Event with the Central Event. Despite the significant impact an event like the Duke's assassination had, and will most certainly continue to have on human history, events like these still lack certain characteristics that keep them from attaining what I believe to be the highest level of an event or occurrence within human history. Therefore, one of my goals will be to address what characteristics must be included within an event of human history that can allow it to fall within the category of an "Event." It will also be one of my goals to address what it is about the characteristics possessed by the Center Event of human history that I believe enables me to give it the additional descriptor of "Central." But before I addresses the issue of required characteristics, I will first examine some key foundational points from Pannenberg's own writings that will help to show how he understood both what an "Event" was, and what it was about the Central Event that set it over and above all other "Events".

It is at this point in this discussion that an important assumption must be clarified. The CE view and the resulting CEM teaching model to be discussed in chapter five, is presenting a view of human history that is a consistently Christian view of human history. Because it is a Christian view, it presupposes a few things, namely that 1) there is a God, and equally important, that 2) He has, is, and continues to act within human history. In addition, it is my position that 3)

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<sup>131</sup> Steve Mintz, "The Global Effect of World War I," The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, accessed September 10, 2015, <http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/world-war-i/resources/global-effect-world-war-i>. "World War I killed more people--more than 9 million soldiers, sailors, and flyers and another 5 million civilians--involved more countries--28--and cost more money--\$186 billion in direct costs and another \$151 billion in indirect costs--than any previous war in history. It was the first war to use airplanes, tanks, long range artillery, submarines, and poison gas. It left at least 7 million men permanently disabled."

what is contained within the Bible, the Holy Scriptures of Christianity, is an accurate account of mankind's attempt to understand and explain how God has revealed Himself as He acts within human history. Therefore, the discussion from this point forward will be guided by these three significant claims that while they themselves are not necessarily limited to a Christian view of history, they nonetheless separate the CE view from the Cyclical, Human Progress, and Relativistic views. And furthermore, it is because of these presuppositions, and their obvious impact on this study's views of certain events, that I will from this point forward refer to these Events as God Events.

#### Pannenberg's Understandings of God Events and of the Central God Event

Working off of the three points established above about a Christian view of human history, that 1) there is a God, 2) that He has, is, and continues to act within human history, and 3) that many of God's actions are accurately recorded within the Bible, I will now examine two significant aspects surrounding Pannenberg's understanding of God Events. These two aspects include how these God Events 1) are revealed to mankind, and 2) how they transcend the time and place of their occurrence. But even more important than examining Pannenberg's understandings of these two key aspects, will be to examine Pannenberg's understanding as to how the Christ Event, which he likewise agrees is the Central Event of all of human history, stands over and above all other God Events

#### **Pannenberg's Understandings of How God Events are Revealed to Mankind**

As one examines Pannenberg's understanding of how God Events are revealed to mankind, what one finds is a clear separation in those points of human time and history in which



God's actions (God Events) have provided mankind with an indirect revelation of God, and the Christ Event, which he believes provided mankind with a direct revelation of God. And, furthermore, Pannenberg is clear in his understanding of what this means for mankind, as it receives these two different types of self-revelation of God. For it is Pannenberg's contention that how mankind comes to know God relies heavily on mankind's recognition and understanding of the significant differences between these two types of God's self-revelation.

Direct communication transmits content without a break from the sender to the receiver. In indirect communication, the path is broken: the content first reveals its actual meaning by being considered from another perspective. Indirect communication is on a higher level: it always has direct communication as its basis, but takes this into a new perspective.<sup>132</sup>

From this statement above, one is able to see Pannenberg providing two simple, yet significant points concerning indirect self-revelation of God. The first is that there exists a break in the path between God and the receiver, mankind. But Pannenberg also makes it clear that despite any break in the path, that which is being communicated still has God as its foundational source. But he is willing to concede that this indirect revelation does create a situation whereby there exists a less than perfect transmission. So, what does this mean? How is mankind to best deal with indirect self-revelation from God? Thankfully, I have found that Pannenberg provides mankind with three valuable answers, or pieces of advice, on how it can best deal with God's indirect self-revelation.

The first piece of advice from Pannenberg is that mankind must be willing to accept that God is the source of this indirect revelation. This means that for mankind to find the clearest understanding of what God is revealing about Himself through indirect revelation, mankind must accept that God can and does reveal himself in human history. And in what way does God reveal himself indirectly to mankind? For Pannenberg, this occurs in God's actions within human

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<sup>132</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 14.

history, or, God Events. Pannenberg writes that “Yahweh [God], showed himself to be God by the historical deeds he performed.”<sup>133</sup> These deeds, indirect in that they come in the form of human historical events or occurrences, none the less, were clear revelatory acts that both revealed God to mankind, and had their source in God.

Yahweh does not descend from heaven in order to give a few chosen ones a special lesson about his being and attributes, by which men are then fully supplied with all necessary knowledge of God. Yahweh does not speak much about himself, but acts and announces certain events. His deeds indirectly throw light back on him.<sup>134</sup>

The second piece of advice that Pannenberg provides mankind in dealing with God’s indirect self-revelation is in how he sees the clearest understanding of God found in this indirect activity (God Events) being found by mankind in the totality of the God Events. Pannenberg writes that “the power to manifest Yahweh’s deity is, in fact, not attributed only to this or that individual event, but is increasingly ascribed to whole patterns of events.”<sup>135</sup> And, Pannenberg adds that it is only in the “totality of his speech and activity, the history brought about by God [that] shows who he is in an indirect way.”<sup>136</sup>

The final piece of advice, which builds on the first two, is that “the knowledge of revelation belongs to the end of the events.”<sup>137</sup> What Pannenberg means by this, is that not only is it important for mankind to seek an understanding of God through the totality of His actions within human history (God Events), but that the understanding of God through His self-revelation cannot reach it highest or clearest result, until God has fulfilled or completed His

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<sup>133</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 53.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>136</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 13.

<sup>137</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 56.

actions within human history. And for Pannenberg, this is because it is only at the “end” where God not only will be fully revealed. But, because Pannenberg also believes that the “end” has already occurred in the Christ Event, the “end” has already taken place. For Pannenberg the Christ Event, which encompasses the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, is both the Central God Event of human history and the only direct self-revelation of God.

Pannenberg states that

While it is only the whole history that demonstrates the deity of the one God, and this result can only be given at the end of all history, there is still one particular event that has absolute meaning as the revelation of God, namely, the Christ event, insofar as it anticipates the end of history.<sup>138</sup>

To which Pannenberg adds

Since the end of all history which is still to come for us, already took place for Jesus at that time, nothing new beyond it has happened since, and Jesus in fact is to be regarded as the definitive self-demonstration of the God of Israel....<sup>139</sup>

Therefore, Pannenberg’s understanding of how God’s self-revelation through His actions within human history (God Events), can be summed up as follows. God Events are real historical events that have occurred at specific times and places within human history. These God Events are indirect forms of God’s self-revelation which mankind must view in their totality if mankind is to find the highest or clearest picture of God. And, furthermore, mankind can only find the highest and clearest picture of God by viewing God actions at their end, which has already occurred in the Christ Event. And for Pannenberg, the Christ Event, as the Central Event of human history, is the only direct form of God’s self-revelation.

Next, I will demonstrate how Pannenberg’s understandings of God Events, and the Central God Event, the Christ Event, does not end with his understanding of how and in what

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<sup>138</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 144.

<sup>139</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith & Reality*, 58-59.

form they are revealed. For in each God Event Pannenberg also finds a level of transcendence that no other events within human history have the ability to possess.

### **Pannenberg's Understandings of How God Events Transcend Human History**

The next area I will examine concerning Pannenberg and his understanding of God Events, and the Central God Event, the Christ Event, is in the area of transcendence. In the next major section of this chapter, I will focus its attention on declaring what it believes is required of an event within human history to be classified or labelled a God Event. One of the major requirements that I will propose is that a God Event must carry the special ability to stand out from the cyclical patterns of life, causing those cyclical patterns of life to fade into the background. In doing so, I believe that God Events are thereby able to transcend all of human history while yet still occurring within and impacting human history and particular times and places. This is the overarching premise that Pannenberg also holds. But there are two additional aspects surrounding Pannenberg's understandings of how God Events transcend human history that I will now examine.

These two additional aspects include 1) Pannenberg's view that as God Events transcend human history, they provide for human history and mankind a level of unity and continuity that far exceeds other events within human history. And 2) Pannenberg also finds within the transcendence of God Events a basis and foundation for the Christians faith. In both cases, I will present how Pannenberg understands these two aspects within God Events as a whole, and in how Pannenberg sees the transcendence of the Christ Event standing over and above all other God Events.

## Pannenberg's Understanding of the Unity and Continuity Found within the Transcendence of God Events and the Christ Event

One very important way in which Pannenberg understood the transcendent aspect of God Events, which is especially important when attempting to promote the Central Event view of human history as the superior view of human history, can be seen in how he saw God Events providing for mankind a single and unified view of human history. Through Pannenberg's own personal experience, he found that a large portion of mankind was somewhat reluctant to look to God as a starting point for its view of human history. He writes that "nowadays, we may have many reservations concerning any attempt to trace the course of historical events back to a divine reality guiding them, but it is undeniably true that history always transcends the particular aims of each individual."<sup>140</sup>

This "undeniably true" belief of Pannenberg's, was something he held to be clearly on display within the understanding he witnessed being put forth by the writers of the Christian Scriptures. Pannenberg writes that "it [was] possible for man in the Bible to see the connection between historical events because the God who is active in each new event is the same God who was also active in the past."<sup>141</sup> In making this statement, Pannenberg saw "the man in the Bible's" ability to grasp what God was doing within human history through God Events was providing mankind with a direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning through "a single great historical movement."<sup>142</sup> And in doing so, God was providing each generation of mankind a way in which it could both connect and participate with all of mankind, both past, present, and future.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 5

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 15

However, if a large portion of mankind was reluctant to “trace the course of historical events back to a divine reality guiding them,” then how is it that Pannenberg saw all of mankind being unified through God Events, and in particular with the “man of the Bible?” This is where the continuity that Pannenberg saw within the transcendence of the God Events comes into play.

For the history of God, which began with leading Israel out of Egypt and the settlement in Palestine, did not come to an end with the resurrection of Jesus. It became from then onwards a history of the spread of the Christian faith, a history of the Christian mission. Hence the nations of the West were drawn into Israel’s history of God, received from it their world-historical mission, and are still part of a history with the God of the Bible. Only in this light is the history of the West a homogeneous continuity of events, the beginnings of which are bound up with the origins of the people of Israel.<sup>143</sup>

In these words from Pannenberg concerning the continuity that he saw leading to unity through the transcendent impact of God Events, there is another important process being described. This additional process is one whereby mankind was also finding a direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning through the aid of this transcendent impact of God Events. First, it was through a God acting on behalf of Israel, and later witnessed by Christians in the resurrection of Jesus, that they both found a direction existing within human history. Next, the practitioners of the Christian faith discovered a purpose within human history through their participation with the direction they found as they shared their faith in Jesus and His resurrection. And finally, it is within this purpose in action, in Pannenberg’s understanding, that eventually brought the western world into a unified human history, which provided for it the reality that it also could share in the reality of a unified ultimate meaning for mankind.

Therefore, Pannenberg argues that it is through the transcendent aspects of God Events where a unified human history is both discovered and guided by the actions of God. And it is within this unified human history where mankind can also find the direction, purpose, and

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 73-74.

ultimate meaning, something that I hold is needed in a sufficient view of human history. And, furthermore, the Christ Event, which culminates in the Resurrection, becomes the Central God Event by providing the ultimate form of unity as it reveals to mankind the reality that it too can share in the transcendent power of Jesus' resurrection. It is along this line of understanding that led Pannenberg to declare

Here is the significance of Jesus' resurrection for us. In him the end of the world-history is already accomplished: and end that awaits us also, but for us is still hidden in the future. It is only within the framework of the biblical understanding of the world as God's history directed to a final end that the meaning of Jesus' fate for our life becomes intelligible.<sup>144</sup>

And, thus, "our link with Jesus' fate – with His sayings, his suffering and his cross – also guarantees our future participation in what has already appeared only in Jesus"<sup>145</sup> is sealed and made complete through the transcendent power of this Central of all God Events.

#### Pannenberg's Understanding of the Basis and Foundation for the Christian Faith

The second aspect, whereby Pannenberg declares that the transcendence of God Events also possesses the ability to form a basis and foundation for the Christians faith, is something that is understood by Pannenberg through the combined transcendence of the God Events.

Recall the example concerning the assassination of the Arch Duke given at the outset of this chapter. This event is widely described as the spark that ignited the World War I.<sup>146</sup> But it is

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>146</sup> The notion that the assassination of the Arch Duke Francis Ferdinand was the spark that ignited World War I is widely held. For examples, see Tatah Mentan, *Dilemmas of Weak States: Africa and Transnational Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 50. See also Mira Wilkins, *The History of Foreign Investment in the United States, 1914-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2004), 1.

also widely held that other contributing factors<sup>147</sup> had been accumulating over time within the military powers of Europe, which created a situation whereby the spark of the assassination could ignite a World War. In a similar line of thinking, this is how Pannenberg sees the ongoing series of God Events occurring within human history, Events that had the power to both transcend their immediate time and place, accumulating in such a way that helped Christians by forming for them a basis and foundation for their faith. Speaking specifically about the Christ Event, but expressing a view he held for all God Events, Pannenberg declares that the

Christian faith is bound up wholly and entirely with those historical events almost two thousand years ago and with their total meaning. It has no truth independently of these events. It was only through these events that the God of Israel himself showed the whole world that he was the sole true God. Hence our faith in God too is bound up precisely with the events which constitute the Life's destiny of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>148</sup>

And to this, Pannenberg adds, "faith presupposes a basis: something which continually proves to be true against all doubt. That is the news of events which together make up Jesus' life's destiny."<sup>149</sup> And thus, through the transcendent power of the Christ Event, and Event that while it stands over and above all other God Events, yet works with and through the witness and reality of these other God Events, to form for Christians a basis and foundation for a faith that mankind can find within human history.

Now that I have demonstrated how Pannenberg understands the significance of what occurs when God acts within and through human history, and how this significance is seen at its highest and most complete way in the Christ Event, the next task will be to present my understanding of a God Event, and eventually in the next chapter, the Christ Event.

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<sup>147</sup> Michael J. Lyons, *World War II: A Short History* (London: Routledge, 2016), 1-4. Lyons reviews a number of contributing factors that were contributing factors to the outbreak of World War I.

<sup>148</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith & Reality*, 68.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.



### What is a God Event?

Building off Pannenberg's foundational understandings surrounding God Events, it will now be my task to explain my understanding of God Events, and to why I believe that a Central View of human history can and should be built upon them. In order to accomplish this, I will now address what I hold is required of an event from human history to be viewed as a God Event. I will do so by establishing first of all, what characteristics an event must possess in order for it to be given the label of a God Event. And secondly, what is it about such an event that although it can never be on equal standing with the Central Event of human history, it nonetheless shares enough in common with the Central Event to possess the potential to impact all of humanity, while also transcending and influencing the whole of human history. It is to these issues that I will now turn.

I contend that a God Event is that which possesses each of the following characteristics.

1) A God Event must be an actual historical event that occurs within human history. 2) It must be a supernatural event, which has a source from outside of human history. 3) It must carry the special ability to actually stand out from the cyclical patterns of life, causing those cyclical patterns of life to fade into the background, thereby transcending all of human history while yet still occurring within and impacting human history. 4) It must possess and reveal what I believe is genuine and legitimate direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for human history that is limited only in that it is itself defined by and/or points to the Central Event of human history. And finally, 5) a God Event must result in a view of human history that is other-centered and other-focused.

### **A God Event: Must Be An Actual Historical Event**

The argument that a God Event must be an actual historical event is at its core a logical argument. To be deemed historical, an event must be one that has occurred at a specific time and place within human history. Thus, a myth or story that is completely fabricated within the human mind has not, nor can it ever occur within human history in the exact same form or manifestation. If an event did not actually occur at specific time and place within human history, it cannot be a part of human history, or be labelled as historical. Therefore, I contend that that for an event to be given the designation of a God Event, it must be an event which had to have occurred at a specific time and place within human history.

Another important clarification is also needed at this point. When I state that an Event must have occurred within human history, does this mean that any claim or story from the Bible that is presented to have occurred outside of human history, like those occurrences described as taking place in heaven, should be rejected as being untrue or unverifiable? This is not my position at all. Rather, I would simply conclude that any occurrence which is to have taken place solely outside of human history is simply not in the same category as historical events that have occurred within human history. The validity or truthfulness of such occurrences are not subject to the same standards, and therefore, are not the focus of this study. Thus, what this study's focus is limited to is on those events from the pages of Christian Scriptures that claim to have taken place within human history, and because they hold this claim, they themselves must be real historical events that occurred at a particular time and place within human history.

Orthodox Christianity holds that the whole of Christian Scriptures, which includes the 66 books that make up the canon of Scripture, which are subdivided into the Old and New Testaments, make up a "list of divinely inspired and authoritative narratives, prophecies, gospels,

letters, and other writings that make up the Word of God...”<sup>150</sup> Therefore, regardless of where a God Event is recorded in Scripture, the same requirements concerning its historicity will apply. Thus whether the event is found in the Old or the New Testament, the event must be viewed as being an actual historical event within human history. A strong area of support for this claim is in the fact that we find this notion to be true among those who actually recorded the events found in Scripture.

The notion that the Old Testament writers believed that God did indeed act within human history is what G. Ernest Wright saw in how the writers of the Old Testament viewed significant God Events in human history. “The knowledge of God was an inference from what actually had happened in human history. The Israelite eye was thus trained to take human events seriously, because in them was to be learned more clearly than anywhere else what God willed and what he was about.”<sup>151</sup> Among scholars like Wright, whose own eyes tend to be focused more on God Events from the Old Testament, the necessity to view the acts of God as real historical events is central. The single most important and pivotal God Event in the Old Testament, which could be argued stands second in significance only to the Christ Event in the New Testament, is the Exodus. James K. Hoffmeier, who cites both Wright and Pannenberg in his work, *These Things Happened: Why a Historical Exodus Is Essential for Theology* holds to this view. In defense of this position, Hoffmeier writes, “I have intentionally narrowed the historical focus to the sojourn and exodus from Egypt because these events... are recognized as the most important events in Old Testament salvation history.”<sup>152</sup> And furthermore, Hoffmeier adds,

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<sup>150</sup> Greg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.), 37.

<sup>151</sup> Wright, *God Who Act*, 44.

The Old Testament Scriptures do not treat the sojourn-exodus-wilderness events as trivial matters. Rather, these events stand at the heart of Israel's religious life, as evidenced by the fact that these themes are ubiquitous throughout the Old Testament itself. Clearly the biblical writers throughout the Old Testament believed that the exodus occurred as presented in the Pentateuch, for they repeatedly affirm their faith in Yahweh, who brought them out of Egypt, through the Sinai wilderness, and into the land, as God had promised Abraham and his offspring.<sup>153</sup>

Furthermore, Pannenberg wrote "Yahweh, showed himself to be God by historical deeds he performed." Speaking specifically about the Exodus, Pannenberg writes that "this idea was linked most vividly with the exodus from Egypt, which ancient Israel took as Jahweh's primal act of salvation."<sup>154</sup> And the "miracles accomplished by Moses in the name of Yahweh... (were) not a figment of imagination, but a real power."<sup>155</sup> And Hoffmeier, again emphasizing the absolute necessity in viewing these God Events as actual historical events, keenly concludes, "if these things did not happen, there is no theological lesson!"<sup>156</sup>

This notion that God did indeed act within human history is also a view clearly held within the Early Church. Graham Cole writes that "It is no accident then that the great creeds of the early church such as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds preserve the biblical narrative structure: the Father as Creator, the Son as incarnate, as the Spirit as life giver. These early Christians believed that God had spoken and acted not in some suprahistorical realm but in the here and now."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, "These Things Happened: Why a Historical Exodus Is Essential for Theology," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?: A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture*, eds. James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), Kindle Location 2475.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., Kindle Location 2589.

<sup>154</sup> Pannenberg, et al., *Revelation as History*, 125.

<sup>155</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 53.

<sup>156</sup> Hoffmeier, *These Things Happened*, Kindle Location 2601.

Since one of my the goals with this study is to offer an apologetic for a Christ Centered view of human history through its support of the CE view, it seems quite appropriate to include supporting views to this position that flow out of apologetics arguments. The first comes from Hoffmeier, who holds that

If orthodox Christian faith based on the Bible does not require its foundational events to be real and historical, one must ask, Why have anti-Christian polemicists for nearly two thousand years... have been so obsessed with undermining the Bible's historicity and accuracy... Obviously they think historicity matters, and in their mind if the Bible is shown to be inaccurate and filled with errors, its message is invalidated.<sup>158</sup>

Angus J. L. Menuge adds

The striking difference between Christianity and other religions: The central claims of Christianity depend on historical facts that can be independently confirmed. After all, what makes faith valid is not faith itself but the object of faith. The gospel is not merely a subjective feeling or comforting mantra but involves historical events completely eternal to believers.<sup>159</sup>

Finally, I also believe that in emphasizing the historicity of what one finds within the Christian Scriptures, it is important to remind the Christian historian of their responsibility. This responsibility includes resisting the urge to try to twist or mislead. Therefore, when “invoking providence... [the Christian historian] must... [use] caution, especially for the historian, who is commissioned with the job of telling the story of the past accurately.”<sup>160</sup> However, I also believe they must hold firm to what is recorded about God and His activity in the biblical account and

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<sup>157</sup> Graham A. Cole, “The Peril of a “Historyless” Systematic Theology,” in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?*, Kindle Location 1340.

<sup>158</sup> Hoffmeier, *These Things Happened*, Kindle Location 3045.

<sup>159</sup> Angus J.L. Menuge, “The Transcendent Incarnate: J.W. Montgomery’s Defense of a Christocentric Weltanschauung,” in *Tough-Minded Christianity: Honoring the Legacy of John Warwick Montgomery*, eds. William A. Dembski and Thomas Schirrmacher (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008.), 98.

<sup>160</sup> John Fea, *Why Study History: Reflecting on the Importance of the Past* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 80.

boldly be willing to include within their version of history the fact that human history has witnessed God as an active participant. David Bebbington reminds the Christian historian that

the consequences for a Christian outlook on history are serious. If a Christian historian tries to write without a thought for providence, he is likely to succumb to some alternative view or blind of views that happens to be in fashion... Faith and history should be brought together... A believer should not be a Christian and a historian but a Christian historian.<sup>161</sup>

### **A God Event: Must Be a Supernatural Event**

G. Ernest Wright writes, “Happenings become history when they are recognized as integral parts of a God-planned and God-directed working, extending from creation to the eschaton. Each individual event has historical significance only when it is taken into and used by this supra-individual, purposive activity.”<sup>162</sup>

Here we see Wright declaring that a happening, which I have chosen to label a God Event, is that in which God Himself acts, not just in how the Christian sees God working in and through His creation, but in a way that sees God actually stepping into the normal patterns and events of human history in a way that leaves humanity forever impacted and changed. The term often used for these types of God Events is supernatural. This implies the real essence of God Events are supra, meaning above, beyond, or outside of the context of nature, or the normal way things happen. It is these very types of supernatural God Events, or at least the claims to them, that those like David Hume and Johann von Herder have flatly rejected. Hume’s views on the supernatural can be summed up by his claim that “there is nothing mysterious or supernatural in

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<sup>161</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 186.

<sup>162</sup> Wright, *God Who Acts*, 82.

the case, but that all proceeds from the usual propensity of mankind towards the marvelous...”<sup>163</sup>

And furthermore, Hume discounts the possibility of a supernatural event because, as he believes, “there must... be a uniform experience...” By this he means that the only possible events or occurrences must be those that are observed often in the natural course of human history.<sup>164</sup> The problem with Hume’s rejection here is that Hume is making his claim *a priori*, meaning that he is rejecting the claim of a supernatural event, not on the historical merits of a supernatural event, but simply because he does not believe a supernatural event is even possible. This type of *a priori* rejection is simply unacceptable in the view of John Warwick Montgomery. He holds that “no historian can legitimately rule out documentary evidence simply on the ground that it records remarkable events; if they cannot be successfully explained by analogy with other events or by an *a priori* scheme of natural causation.”<sup>165</sup>

There is another problem with Hume’s argument that is seen by Pannenberg. In this case, it is in Hume’s use of the supposed “laws of nature.” Pannenberg uses this argument especially when dealing with the subject of the Resurrection of Christ, which I hold is the Central God Event, or the event on which the CE view truly stands or falls. Contra Hume, Pannenberg declares

First, only a part of the laws of nature are ever known. Further, in a world that as a whole represents a singular, irreversible process, an individual event is never completely determined by natural laws. Conformity to law embraces only one aspect of what happens. From another perspective, everything that happens is contingent, and the

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<sup>163</sup> David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1777), 80.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 76. This is where Hume rejects miracles (supernatural events) on the fact that he claims there must be sufficient evidence to validate any occurrence, which must be observable to a number of human witnesses. Of course Hume also holds that even if there is a large number of witnesses, but what they are claiming to have witnessed are events that cannot be found occurring commonly in nature, then they must be rejected *a priori*.

<sup>165</sup> John Warwick Montgomery, *History and Christianity* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Pub, 1986), 21.

validity of the laws of nature is itself contingent. Therefore, natural science expresses the general validity of the laws of nature but must at the same time declare its own inability to make definitive judgements about the possibility or impossibility of an individual event, regardless of how certainly it is able, at least in principle, to measure the probability of an event's occurrence. The judgement about whether an event, however unfamiliar, has happened or not is in the final analysis a matter for the historian and cannot be prejudged by the knowledge of natural science.<sup>166</sup>

Therefore, not only does Pannenberg support my notion that Hume is incorrect in his flat rejection of the supernatural, but his statement also seems to support what Wright was stating when he stressed that not only are certain God Events definite evidence that God can and does break into the normal patterns of human history, but as He does so, God is revealing Himself to mankind. And therefore, each time humanity experiences one of the God Events, whereby God chooses to reveal Himself through His actions that occur within human history, our knowledge of God is forever impacted, and if needed, adjusted and/or readjusted. This is clearly what Pannenberg is declaring when he writes, "...the God of the Bible is shown to act in each new event in the light of what he has done before in history and in most cases the earlier happening is in turn seen in a fresh light, the light thrown on it by the later event. In this way, there is in the Bible an underlying historical continuity within the series of new and extraordinary events."<sup>167</sup>

This notion of God's activity as being significant to the writers of the Old Testament was one of the central focuses of Roff Rendtorff's *The Concept of Revelation in Ancient Israel*. It is here that Rendtorff's claim that an important understanding of God held by the Israelites was in how God's power was displayed in His saving acts. The importance to the Israelites was in how "Jahweh himself becomes visible in his powerful acts of salvation. He becomes known through these acts; [and thus] whoever sees or experiences them can know God in them. He becomes

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<sup>166</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, Kindle Location 2011.

<sup>167</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 11.



revealed in them.”<sup>168</sup> It is this form of revelation, that which is found in God’s active presence within Israel’s history, that in turn shaped the Israelites worldview. And even if certain God Events within the Old Testament, like the Exodus Event, may have been held in higher regards than others, the knowledge of God held by the Israelites was shaped by the entirety of God’s activity within their history.<sup>169</sup>

### **A God Event: Must Transcend all of Human History**

When a term like transcendent is used, it carries the risk of being understood to describe an event or occurrence that is above or beyond the physical reality of the human experience, and thus, could be viewed as being that which can only occur outside of human history. This is not how I am using this term. When I state that a God Event must transcend all of human history, I do so to explain that certain events, although they most definitely occur at certain times and places within human history, possess a level of importance and significance that enable them to impact all of human history. God Events do this by defining or explaining events that may have preceded it, and likewise, point to or prepare mankind for that which is yet to come. Thus, the transcendent quality of the event is centered on the impact the event has on the human history of which it is a part.

This is especially important for a Christian view of human history. For if Christians claim that God can and does act in history, and that when He does so, something impactful about God is revealed to mankind, then how one views all of human history will hinge on what God

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<sup>168</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, “The Concept of Revelation in Ancient Israel,” 32.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 32. Here Rendtorff writes that “the assurance that the cultic congregation in Jerusalem has is not gained by directing its attention to a specific acts in its past, but to the tradition of the saving acts of Jahweh with the hope that now and in the future he will save this city.”

revealed to mankind in these God Events. Therefore, when Christians accept that a God Event is an event where God acts within human history, then that which is revealed to mankind must transcend, or have impact, beyond that particular time and place. Pannenberg helps to see the importance of this transcendence.

We may therefore conclude that, because of the historicity of this unique process of life, we no longer believe that nature, life and history can ever be described in detail as processes that take place simply on their own accord... we learn to see this all-embracing and transcendent miracle of nature, life and history as the sign of God's presence among us it will once again become meaningful to speak about God whenever we wish to speak about the meaning of our life and our history.<sup>170</sup>

This understanding that God has, is, and continues to act within human history and furthermore, when he does through God Events, that which is witnessed has the special ability to transcend all of human history, also had a significant impact on Augustine of Hippo's concept of a sacred history<sup>171</sup>. Sacred history for Augustine "is history written under divine inspiration and endowed with divine authority, presenting, under this inspiration, its historical material within a perspective which transcends that of the secular historian, for it is throughout conceived as part of the pattern of God's redemptive work."<sup>172</sup> And it is thus through this transcendent power of God Events, which one could only find within this sacred history, was a to be found the power that could "furnish the clues to what God has really done."<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 7.

<sup>171</sup> Augustine of Hippo, "City of God," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo: NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), xv, ch 8.1. In this chapter can be found an example of Augustine describing the sacred history as being that history which was written by the authors of the Christian Scriptures.

<sup>172</sup> R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 16.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

## **A God Event: Must Possess and Reveal Direction, Purpose, and Meaning**

Any view of human history that lacks a genuine and legitimate direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning, is not a view of human history that I hold is sufficient to address mankind's important questions concerning both human history and the whole of human existence. Likewise, the Cyclical, Human Progress, and Relativistic views, although on the surface may present some aspects of one or more of these key aspects of direction, purpose, meaning, in each case, they not only fail to present them sufficiently, they also seems to result in leading mankind down an illegitimate self-centered or self-focused path of understanding of human history and human existence.

In the case of the Central Event view of human history, something very different is occurring. It holds that each individual God Event, which are all to be viewed as occurring at specific points of time and place where God acts within human history, although isolated in their immediate time and place, are still to be understood as being joined together with the same goal through their transcendent characteristic. And furthermore all these God Events jointly working together with the Central Event provide mankind with the best possible conditions to find a genuine and legitimate direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for both human history and for the whole of human experience. Therefore, I will now examine each of these key components individually, and in doing so, I will demonstrate why I believe that these God Events within the Central Event view of human history are able to provide mankind with a genuine and legitimate form of each.

## Direction: From Promise to Fulfillment

G. Ernest Wright has declared that “the focus of the Biblical man’s attention... was not on the cycle of nature, but on what God had done, was doing and was yet to do according to his intention. Promise and fulfilment thus become the central Biblical themes.”<sup>174</sup>

In making this statement Wright is declaring how the Judeo/Christian views human history and how God has acted within that history, a history that is centered on an apparent pattern of promise and fulfillment. Thus the direction of human history follows this defined path from each of God’s promises to mankind, through the time and place in which God fulfills them. Scripture is full of examples of God’s promises, including His promises to Abraham and his descendants through the Old Covenant, Moses and the Israelites concerning their exodus out from under the Egyptians, and ultimately the promises that God has revealed through Christ within the New Covenant.

In each of these examples mankind has found a direction laid out before him by God’s active fulfillment of His promises. Those who have accepted that God is active and working to bring each of His promises to their ultimate fulfillment, find that in spite of the seemingly directionless cycles of their daily existence, human history does appear to be moving along a path in a direction that has been marked out by God’s hands. And ultimately, it will direct mankind to that point of time when they will experience the final fulfillment of God’s promises. Pannenberg writes that “he (mankind) has a history which is directed to the attainment of his destiny, to the realization of true and perfect humanity in union with God.”<sup>175</sup> Therefore, as Pannenberg has stated, the true and perfect relationship that mankind once shared with God, a

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<sup>174</sup> Wright, *God Who Acts*, 25.

<sup>175</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 45.

relationship that mankind broke when sin entered his world, is the final stop on the path of restoration that God has promised to him.

Purpose: To Participate with God's Direction

When mankind accepts that God has seemingly given it a direction within human history, which can be seen as God continually acts throughout human history through certain God Events, whereby God reveals not only His promises to mankind, but also in how He has, is, and continues to fulfill these promises, mankind can then began to understand what its role is in God's plan. Christopher Dawson states this perfectly when he writes that "now Christians not only believe in the existence of a divine plan in history, they believe in the existence of a human society which is in some measure aware of this plan and capable of co-operating with it."<sup>176</sup>

But what exactly is the form of this cooperation that mankind participates in, whereby mankind ultimately finds its purpose in human history? It is my contention that mankind finds its purpose in human history as it participates with God in the sharing of the reality of the promises that God has made for mankind, and in how God will faithfully fulfil these promises. Thus, Christians tell their world His story.

In the Old Testament, God is seen offering this purpose to the Israelite people. In His choosing of them, referred to by Wright as His divine election<sup>177</sup> to be the people in whom He would eventually send the Messiah, the incarnate Jesus Christ, He also gave them the

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<sup>176</sup> Christopher Dawson, "The Christian View of History", in *God, History, and Historians*, C.T. McIntire, ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 44.

<sup>177</sup> Wright, *God Who Acts*, 50. Here Wright is stating that "the Divine election is not based on merit because of the leaders of the faith... Israel's greatness lay in what the nation was a simple fact, that God had chosen her; and God's choice rested in his own mysterious grace... Evidently, God was at work with some purpose of his own in history, and for some reason he had chosen Israel as his special agent in accomplishing that purpose – the weak of the earth to confound the strong.

opportunity to participate in His fulfillment of His promises to mankind. Therefore, The nation of Israel's "mission was to teach the nations of the world about God – to spread to the rest of mankind the special revelation it had – the knowledge of God as revealed in history."<sup>178</sup>

This same "purpose" that was given the Israelites by God, to participate with God in testifying to their world about what God had revealed to them within human history, is likewise what I believe is what is given to Christians today. This was what seems to be the central focus of the Great Commission given by Christ in Matthew 28: 19-20 (NIV) "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Meaning: God's History is Our History

When I use the phrase that God's history is mankind's history<sup>179</sup>, I am claiming that ultimate meaning can be found within human history only in God's activity through God Events. As I have shown above, when the Christian finds the direction of life in human history, whereby God is moving through human history from His promises to their ultimate fulfillment, he also finds life's purpose to share and be a witness to this direction of life in human history. Therefore, the only logical place for mankind to also seek meaning in human history is to look for it in those God Events whereby God has acted within human history. "It is clear that ultimately God, and

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<sup>178</sup> Butterfield, *God in History*, 203-204.

<sup>179</sup> In addition, I am also using this in the same way that I believe Augustine was doing so as he saw those who wrote the biblical history, or sacred history, as seeing this same movement or direction within human history. See Markus, *Saeculum*, 14. Markus, when writing about the biblical authors whom Augustine held were the writers of the sacred history, writes that Augustine saw "a man to whom divine inspiration discloses the significance of the historical facts which he recounts. The form and content of his narrative may be historical; it is his judgement, his interpretation of them in terms of the pattern of the redemptive history into which divine inspiration vouchsafes his insight, that differentiate his history from history as it might be written by a non-inspired writer."

not men who he makes his partners, is the mover of history.” And because this is true, then “We must continually search that history.... We must look into it repeatedly for help in understanding our own situation.... We must be aware of its provisional nature but also realize its universal responsibility.”<sup>180</sup>

When mankind looks beyond itself for meaning, and in doing so, looks to human history where a faithful God has faithfully kept His promises to mankind, the very same promises that are extended to each individual when they accept their role in God’s history, what they find that provides human history with meaning is wrapped up in the hope and peace that this reality gives them. “The Biblical sense of the meaningfulness of history possessed a hope which could look far beyond the current history, but the final age to which God was directing events was one that had concrete substance.”<sup>181</sup>

Therefore, meaning in the history of mankind comes, not from mankind, but from beyond mankind. It is found not in our own seeking, but in God’s active seeking to restore the relationship that mankind’s sin has broken. In God’s active movement within human history to fulfill His promises to mankind, and by choosing those who accept this understanding of human history to experience a purpose that comes from God, the human life and thus, all of human history has meaning. The God Events of God’s activity in human history are what validates and gives meaning to all of human history, and therefore, to all of human existence.

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<sup>180</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 104.

<sup>181</sup> Wright, *God Who Acts*, 53.

### **A God Event is Other-Centered and Other-Focused**

As I have shown, the Cyclical, Human Progress, and Relativistic views of human history were all found to be inadequate in part because they all seem to eventually result in self-centered or self-focused outcomes. The Cyclical because it appears to be focused on how the human experience is impacted within the individual's daily life, the Relativistic because it appears to allow each culture to produce their own truth claims, and Human Progress because its key foundational elements was that it was based on human effort and supposed human progress. I believe that the Central Event view of human history is able to avoid these results by turning its focus outward. And this outward focus, centered on the God Events within human history, is where mankind can find the direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning that it believes mankind is seeking.

This outward, other-centered view of human history, a view that I believe is aided by and through the God Events, stands in contrast to the inward, self-centered views produced by these alternate views of history. This overarching idea was important demarcation between the two cities in Augustine's *City of God*. Previously in chapter three, I mentioned Augustine's concept of a sacred history, and in how he saw the biblical writers acting as historians whose writing and recording of history was produced by and through their belief that God was an active participant within the history of mankind. This concept of a sacred history was a part of how "Augustine saw the whole course of history, past, present and future, as a dramatic conflict of two cities," one "earthly city" of the pagans, and its "heavenly counterpart" the city of God. Within the earthly city, one would find a city with "its own, unifying, social bond, located somewhere among the perverse, self-centered and temporal purposes aimed by its members. Their common



allegiance to such fleeting values....”<sup>182</sup> But within the City of God, a city’s whose focus was outward first toward God, and second, toward its fellow man and woman, Augustine saw something significant. Concerning this outward focus toward God in Augustine’s understanding, R.A. Markus writes

The members of the two cities are distinguished according to the objects in which they seek their final satisfaction, that is to say those they with the ‘enjoy’ for their own sake, above all else, to the pursuit of which their other concerns are subordinated. The citizens of the heavenly city recognize no object worthy of such ultimate allegiance but God.<sup>183</sup>

And toward its fellow man and woman, Markus continues

To know what a man’s disposition is in regard to a particular object, we need to know not only whether he ‘loves’ it or not but also, or rather, in what way he ‘loves’ it. For the love of something for its own sake, without reserve and as the finally satisfying quelling of one’s longing, is very different from the ‘love’ of something desired as a means to something else; the overwhelming, unconditional self-commitment to something or to some person, differs greatly from the ‘love’ of something valued modestly on the scale of goods which one appreciates in some way or other.<sup>184</sup>

Thus by looking outside of ourselves at the God Events, whereby God has acted within human history to provide for mankind direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning, I believe we can see in Augustine, mankind finding itself being able to see the bigger picture within human history. This bigger picture is a larger movement of God that transcends not just a time and place, as mentioned above, but also the single individual. “Nowadays, we may have many reservations concerning any attempt to trace the course of historical events back to a divine reality guiding them, but it is undeniably true that history always transcends the particular aims of each individual.”<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Markus, *Saeculum*, 62.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>185</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 5.

But this transcendence of human history according here also to Pannenberg has as one of its goals to lead the individual to an other-centered and other-focused position. It does not mean however, that the individual is no longer significant. Rather, the significance for the individual is wrapped up in the significance of the whole of mankind. This is exactly what Christopher Dawson says that a view like the Central Event view, which was stated earlier is a Christian view of human history, does. “Now Christians not only believe in the existence of a divine plan in history, they believe in the existence of a human society which is in some measure aware of this plan and capable of co-operating with it.” Therefore, the other-centered and other-focused aspect of the Central Event view does seem to offer mankind the key component of direction, by stressing it is not us, but God who is directing human history. Likewise the CE view also appears to reveal purpose, as the individual joins with other Christians in the opportunity to co-operate with God within human history, resulting in a real possibility of finding ultimate meaning within human history and within the human experience as a whole.

### Summary

I opened this chapter with a brief foundational discussion centered on Pannenberg and his understanding of both God Events and the Central God Event, the Christ Event. Working from Pannenberg’s foundational understandings, I set out to explain that while there may only be one Central Event within human history, the Christ Event, there are other events, God Events, that while they may pale in comparison to the Central Event, they are nonetheless are significant events within human history. The significance of these God Events rest in the notion that they are events within human history that possess five key characteristics. These key characteristics are as follows.

1. I argued that a God Event must be an actual historical event. This was an argument from logic, which simply stated that the only events that can be a part of human history must be events that have actually occurred at a specific time and place within human history.

2. I also argued that a God Event must be a supernatural event. In doing so, I argued that, contra to those like Hume and Herder who reject supernatural events *a priori*, God Events are events that are “supra”, meaning above, beyond, or outside of the context of “nature”, or the normal way things happen. And as such, they are events whereby God has, is, and will continue, to act within human history.

3. Next I argued that God Events must transcend all of human history. In doing so, I showed that while God Events have to be an events that occur at a particular time and place within human history, they nonetheless possessed a special quality and ability to impact all of human history by defining or explaining other events, while at the same time pointing to or preparing mankind for that which was yet to come in and through the Christ Event.

4. I also argued that God Events must possess and reveal direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning. Direction being that which mankind can find as he witnesses God fulfilling His promises. Purpose I showed was what mankind finds as he cooperates or participates in the direction he find God unfolding before Him. And finally, meaning I described as that which does not come from mankind, but from beyond mankind. Nor is it found in mankind’s seeking, but rather is found through his acceptance and witness of a God who is actively working on his behalf to restore the relationship with God that had been broken by mankind’s sin.

5. Lastly, I argued in this chapter that a Central View of human history, a view that is formed and shaped with mankind’s acceptance and witness of God’s real and active presence within human history, is a view of human history that affords mankind the opportunity to look

beyond himself at the bigger picture of what God is doing within human history. And in doing so, mankind is able to turn his focus outward toward God and toward his fellow man and woman.

## CHAPTER FOUR - THE CENTRAL EVENT OF HUMAN HISTORY:

### THE CHRIST EVENT

Having addressed what type of occurrence can be deemed a God Event, it will now be my task to demonstrating what I believe allows me to declare that of all the God Events, there is one that stands alone as the Central Event for all of human history. To do so, I will argue that the Central Event must not only possess each of the same five characteristics that a God Event is required to meet, but it must meet each of them in the fullest and most complete way possible. This means that the Central Event 1) must not only be accepted as a historical event occurring within human history, it must also meet the highest standards<sup>186</sup> that are placed upon any event that is deemed historical. It also means that the Central Event 2) must not only be a supernatural event, one where God is found acting and revealing Himself within human history, but it must be the one supernatural event whereby God is fully revealed through His actions. It means that The Central Event 3) must not only possess the special ability to stand out from the cyclical patterns of life causing them to fade into the background, but it must also transcend all of human history, including each and every other occurrence within human history that has been deemed a God Event. Next it means that the Central Event 4) must not only possess and reveal genuine and legitimate direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for human history, it must do so in a way that allows for every other God Event to point to and be defined by it. And finally, this means that the Central Event 5) will not only result in a view of human history that is other-centered

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<sup>186</sup> When the phrase “highest standards” is linked to an event from history, the notion that is being implied is that the event in question should be tested against the same level of scrutiny and established criteria that all other events deemed historical face. This also means that the Christian historian must not let their Christian bias or point of view impact their evaluation of an event that may or may not impact their theological understandings or Christian beliefs. Thus, the Christian historian has the same task of all historians. Fea, *Why Study History*, 54. Fea writes that “the task of historians is to pursue the truth, wherever it may lead. They work with original or primary documents to reconstruct the past in all its complexity and fullness. While the historians might choose the subject they will study based on current events or personal interest, they must always let the evidence speak, even if that evidence leads them toward a conclusion that might not be useful.” And, likewise, the events they declare as historical must be evaluated along this same understanding of historical analysis.

and other-focused, it must be that one God Event that is also the central cause of this necessary result.

### The Central Event of Human History is the Christ Event

Therefore, according to the previously established argument from the outset of chapter three concerning God Events, I declare that the Central Event, the one God Event whereby God Himself acted within human history at a specific place and time in a way that transcended all other God Events, revealing God fully to mankind, and thereby providing mankind with a direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning to human history and the whole of the human experience in its fullest and most complete form, is the Christ Event. And when I speak of the Christ Event, I am speaking of the God Event that encompasses the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **The Christ Event: Must Be an Actual Historical Event**

As was previously argued, I hold that a God Event must be a historical event. This means that it must be an event that has actually occurred at a specific time and place within human history. The main reason that I believe this must be the case is because unless a God Event occurs within human history, then there seems to be no legitimate way to argue that humans could have ever experienced the event which would in turn challenge the events historical validity. And I believe that this historical validity is especially important when the topic of discussion happens to be centered on how one comes to view human history. In addition, it may be the case that a position such as this, one that requires a God Event to be historically valid, might appear to put me squarely in conflict with others within the Christian tradition who may

hold to the notion that the faith one has concerning certain foundational Christian events found within Christian Scriptures is ultimately more important than the events historical validity. I do not believe that a conflict necessarily has to be the case. However, it might be an issue if the emphasis that is place on faith is a form of blind faith.

If the issue is with those who would claim that the only faith required is a blind faith, and they go onto define blind faith as a faith that is without the need for any historical validation whatsoever, then, I wholehearted admits that a conflict does certainly exist. For a notion of a blind faith is not enough to satisfy those within the same Christian tradition who are quick to point out that if the Christian faith is to have any real value, it must be a faith that is unafraid of any challenges to its historical validity. Pannenberg, being one who most certainly fell into this second group, declared that "...historically-assured certainty is the greatest certainty we can ever have of past events. If Christian faith presupposes information about events of a distant past, it can gain the greatest possible certainty about those events only by historical research."<sup>187</sup>

Stanley Grenz, in his article "*Wolfhart Pannenberg: Reason, Hope, and Transcendence*," believed that Pannenberg's "historical-assured certainty" position was in many ways fueled by what was the post-Enlightenment world's movement away from a foundation of faith in historical events to an "experience of conversion" position. This shift had reached a point whereby many within the Christian faith began to view any historical content concerning the Christian faith as irrelevant. Grenz wrote that

At the heart of Pannenberg's alternative to this development... [was that] faith cannot be derived from itself, but only beyond itself in Christ. From this Pannenberg concludes that faith is dependent on a historical basis. Specifically, the historical revelation of God must form the foundation for the act of trust, if faith is to be trust in God and not in itself. He admits that the revelation which grounds faith remains contestable in this world. But he nevertheless adamantly declares that only the field of argument, and not a nonrational

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<sup>187</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 71.

decision of faith, can meet the philosophical and historical challenge to the Christian claim to knowledge of God.<sup>188</sup>

Another important issue raised by Grenz in his comments above concerning Pannenberg's "historically assured" position, is in how Pannenberg and others from a CE point of view contend that a faith that requires no historical validation at all is simply not a rational position to hold. Avery Dulles, who himself would not necessarily place himself fully in the "historically assured" camp, none-the-less, does see Pannenberg's position here as one of his camp's strengths.

The acceptance of revelation [from within human history] is seen not as a blind leap but a fully reasonable act. Biblical faith commends itself to reason insofar as it gives to history an intelligibility for which philosophy, unaided by revelation, would search in vain. In an age dominated by historical consciousness, historical revelation can offer an answer to a widespread quest for meaning and purpose in history.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Grenz, "Wolfhart Pannenberg: Reason, Hope and Transcendence," 76. Available at: <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol46/iss2/7> Grenz further writes that "In the Enlightenment, however, the understanding of an authoritative testimony to historical knowledge, taught by Augustine and Luther, was replaced by science and a newer historical methodology that sought to reconstruct past events by employing scientific and critical tools. As a result, the historicity of events became uncertain, and the historical basis for faith was called into question. Thus, in the post-Enlightenment world, humanity lives without revelation, understood in the sense of a world from beyond history by means which reality can be viewed through the eyes of God... [and that] This modern position has given birth to two distinct, yet equally erroneous, alternatives... radical pietists, in whose ranks Pannenberg includes Rudolf Bultmann. [See further note on Pannenberg's view of Bultmann's position below] Others follow the path of what he terms "conservative pietism," in which the plausibility of the historical aspects of the faith is grounded in the experience of faith. Thus, for example, personal conversion is made the basis for the certainty of the events of Jesus' history, such as his miracles and the Resurrection. Concerning the issue raised above concerning Bultmann, See Rightmire, "Pannenberg's Quest for the Proleptic Jesus," 53. Rightmire saw Pannenberg's issue with Bultmann, surrounding what he saw as Bultmann creating a *Fact-Value Dichotomy*. He writes that Pannenberg's reaction was to argue that "redemptive history contains both the fact of God's revelation and the meaning of the event. [and while] Pannenberg sympathizes with the attempts... [to] safeguard the gospel from historicism, but vehemently disagrees with the total separation of the historical Jesus from the Christ of faith evident in the later kerygma theology. For him, historical verification is not a crutch, but the integrating feature of his theology as a whole. See also, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1991) 5. Here we find another example of Pannenberg expressing his position concerning the need that we view the Christ Event as an actual historical event. "We cannot honestly go on to identify ourselves as Christians if the story of Jesus Christ and of his God is merely a story (in the sense of fairy tale) – fiction, but not history. The Christian faith cannot live by relating to the history of Jesus as to a myth of Christian ancestors... The story of Jesus Christ has to be history... if the Christian faith is to continue."

<sup>189</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992), 62. Dulles' comments here are included within his evaluation of the model of "Revelation as History," specifically within the subsection "Merits of the Historical Model." His comments concerning the rational component of the "historical assurance" was the fourth merit of the model he listed, which also included 1) how "history as revelation" meets the need of those who find the power of God manifested more powerfully in His actions than they might just in His words, 2) how the model picks up on certain biblical themes that "propositional" model may have underplayed, and 3) how the



Ultimately, I hold that this fearlessness against any challenges from historical research is even more important when the God Event that is at question is the Christ Event. Since the Christ Event includes the Incarnation, Passion, and the Resurrection of Christ, and since these God Events make up the Central Event on which the Christian faith stands or falls, the need for this Central Event to be viewed and accepted as an actual historical event becomes ever more important. Speaking specifically about the Resurrection, but including the sentiment that I believe is essential for each component of the Christ Event, Pannenberg states that

Christians must have confidence that the reality of Jesus' resurrection will constantly stand the test particularly of historical research and that historical doubt will constantly be overcome with the progress of research. But there can be no 'sheltered area' for faith. If there were, faith could not be founded on historical facts. The fact that the fate of Jesus, in which God himself is manifested, remains open to historical doubt is an essential part of the fact that Jesus was truly a man.<sup>190</sup>

Furthermore, when faced with a challenge to the historicity of an event like the Resurrection, which includes a man rising from the dead, a notion which someone like Hume denied *a priori* on the basis that Hume believed it defied the laws of nature, Pannenberg had an answer. Writing in *Jesus: God and Man*, Pannenberg holds that

as long as historiography does not begin dogmatically with a narrow concept of reality according to which 'dead men do not rise,' it is not clear why historiography should not in principle be able to speak about Jesus' resurrection as the explanation that is best established of such events as the disciples' experiences of the appearances and the discovery of the empty tomb.<sup>191</sup>

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model provides more of a total pattern of a history that links all ages and cultures together in a history linked by these revelatory acts. To be fair to Dulles, it should also be noted that he also found space to raise certain criticisms concerning this model, including how some are concerned that a model overly focused on history can lead to a devaluation of the Word of God. However, it is the CEM's perspective that this can only happen if God's "Words" and "deeds" are separated. However, the CEM does not believe that God's "Word's" and "deeds" have to be separated, in that since the giving of God's Word to the prophets and writers of Scripture occurred within human history, then they also should be considered to be a part of human history, and thus, be deemed as God Events.

<sup>190</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 73.

<sup>191</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, Kindle Location 2252.

And to those who would simply oppose Hume with a call for faith alone, Pannenberg continues.” If, however, historical study declares itself unable to establish what ‘really’ happened on Easter, then all the more, faith is not able to do so; for faith cannot ascertain anything certain about events of the past that would perhaps be inaccessible to the historian.”<sup>192</sup>

Therefore, siding with Pannenberg, I hold that it would simply be both illegitimate and illogical to claim that the Christ Event is to be deemed as the one Central Event that stands above all other God Events, and all other lesser events within human history, while at that same time not also claiming that this same Christ Event must be a real historical event that can be measured against any other historical event within human history. For if Christians cannot hold confidently to this claim, then, as Pannenberg expressed, how can they hold confidently to any of the claims they make about such an event?

This seems to be even more important for the orthodox Christian believer, whose entire Christian faith stands or falls on whether this Christ Event, the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, did actually occur at a certain time and at a certain place within human history.

### **The Christ Event: Must Be a Supernatural Event**

Having already dealt in the previous chapter with those like David Hume who refuse to accept any event in human history that might be considered supernatural, based on little more than an *a priori* rejection alone, that issue will not be revisited here. But rather, as also stated previously, I will work from the earlier established position that declared that a God Event is an actual historical event whereby God has not only been shown to act within human history, He

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., Kindle Location 2252.

has also revealed Himself to humanity by and through His actions. Thus what makes the Christ Event the Central Event of human history, is that not only is God revealed within the Christ Event, but God is fully revealed in the most complete and perfect way. This, then, is why I can claim that the Christ Event is the God Event that all other God Events are to be measured, defined, and if needed, redefined against.

One of the key aspects of the Christ Event that sets it apart from all other God Events is in how Pannenberg views the way in what is being revealed about God by God is transmitted to mankind. The main difference Pannenberg sees hinges on whether the God Event comes to mankind via a direct or indirect transmission. “Direct communication transmits content without a break from the sender to the receiver. In indirect communication, the path is broken...”<sup>193</sup> In the case of a God Event which falls into the category of indirect, Pannenberg continues: “Instead of a direct self-revelation of God, the facts at this point indicate a conception of indirect self-revelation as a reflex of his activity in history. The totality of his speech and activity... shows who he is in an indirect way.”<sup>194</sup>

Therefore, within indirect communication, God is still actively revealing Himself within human history, but because there is a “break” in the path, it cannot be viewed at the same level as the God Event whereby God is fully revealed. This is what sets the Christ Event apart, for in the Christ Event we have God Himself, in the Incarnate Jesus Christ, communicating to mankind without the use of any intermediate or indirect form of communication. “Direct communication would have God himself – without mediation – as its content...”<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History...* 14.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 15.

A second important aspect of the Christ Event that also sets it far above all other God Events is found not just in the God Event itself, but in the Who that was revealed in the God Event. “The distinctive Christian understanding of historical occurrences... has at its heart not a set of ideas but a person.”<sup>196</sup> And this “person” is Jesus Christ. Pannenberg, summarizing for the Christian why Jesus Christ must stand as the “Central Event” for all of human history, writes

Christian faith is bound up wholly and entirely with those historical events almost two thousand years ago and with their total meaning. It has no truth independently of these events. It was only through these events that the God of Israel himself showed the whole world that he was the sole true God. Hence our faith in God too is bound up precisely with the events which constitute the life’s destiny of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>197</sup>

This realization of the fact that the Christ Event was not only a real event that occurred within human history, but that it was a real event whereby God Himself came and lived among humanity, should at the very least cause one to stop and, even for just a moment, ponder that reality. This is Jesus, the God and the Creator, who has walked the same roads, both literally and figuratively, as all mankind had before or has since. A Jesus who saw before Him a God ordained path (direction) on which he chose to travel upon (purpose). And this was a path that ultimately led Him to the cross where His sacrifice provided for mankind that which could repair the relationship that sin<sup>198</sup> had broken with God. And it was this sacrifice on the cross that gave mankind and all of human history, meaning.

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<sup>196</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, “The Christian Understanding of History,” in *God, History, and Historians*, ed. C.T. McIntire (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 52.

<sup>197</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 68-69.

<sup>198</sup> The concept of “sin” is to be understood as any transgression against a law or command given by God. Many Christians hold to an understanding that when mankind sinned, the relationship that had existed between God the Creator and His creations, mankind, was broken. Furthermore, because of mankind’s sin, it could not repair the broken relationship with God. Therefore, Jesus Christ, who Christians believe was God incarnated as a man who was both fully God and fully man, was mankind’s only hope. For in the Christ Event, Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, a sacrifice of One who was fully man and without sin, was the solution for both mankind’s sin problem and its broken relationship with God. See Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man*, Kindle Location 3965. Here we find

### **The Christ Event: Must Transcend all of Human History, Including All Other God Events**

As was discussed earlier, it is my position that a God Event must be an event that transcends all of human history. Although occurring at a definite time and place within human history, it possesses the ability to transcend that time and place to ultimately impact all of human history. As I now examine the Christ Event, I draw the same conclusion concerning this God Event as it did for each of those times when God acted within human history. But now I will go a step further. I conclude that the Christ Event, the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which took place at a definite time and place within human history, not only transcends all of human history, and it likewise transcends all other God Events. This means that each time God was revealed within human history by and through His actions, those God Events not only pointed beyond themselves and their time and place within human history, they also pointed toward or back to the Christ Event. Furthermore, each God Event, which mankind used in an effort to grow in its knowledge of who God is, is further defined and, if needed, redefined by what God has revealed to mankind within this Central Event of human history.

Thus, in the Christ Event, we have a God Event that, while it occurred in the middle of recorded human history, it none-the-less becomes the Central Event by being the God Event which has and continues to help mankind more than any other God Event in its growth in understanding all that God had been and is still doing within human history. And, likewise, it

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Pannenberg's explanation of this concept of sin and the broken relationship with God that required the Christ Event. Pannenberg writes "We must, however, avoid the idea that active obedience is connected with fulfilling the will of the Creator formulated in the law while passive obedience goes beyond this offering the obedience as satisfaction for sin. We shall see that Jesus' vicarious suffering may not be understood as a work of satisfaction. The fulfillment of human destiny has been revealed in Jesus through his resurrection from the dead. Jesus did not experience this event only for himself but for all men; Jesus' resurrection allowed the destiny of all men to a life in nearness to God [restoration of mankind's broken relationship with God], as Jesus has proclaimed it, to appear in him." Words in [ ] added for clarification.

has, like no other God Event, both shaped and guided mankind's understanding of what God has done, is doing now, and will ultimately do at the end of human history. "God, through Israel and especially Christ, revealed the end of history in the middle of history, so to speak, and thereby provided from outside history the terms in which the process of history made sense."<sup>199</sup>

This notion of the Christ Event occurring in the middle of human history, and yet being that God Event which impacts, defines, and if necessary, redefines mankind's understanding of what God has done, is doing, and will do within human history, is at the heart of Pannenberg's understanding of the Christ Event. Pannenberg also sees the Christ Event as transcending and thus linking all of mankind as well. "For it is within the Christ Event that all of mankind is linked together within God's story. It even continues beyond this to the present time, for the proclamation of God's activity in Jesus Christ and the Christian mission have led to the people of the Western world and then people all over the world becoming intimately involved in this same history of God."<sup>200</sup>

And furthermore, Pannenberg adds that "Jesus, in the uniqueness of his activity, which was only possible in that time, and his effectiveness, places every man in every situation through all possible changes of the times before the ultimate decision in the face of the God who is coming, just as he did at that time in his earthly ministry. This constitutes the universal validity of his activity."<sup>201</sup>

This understanding of how the Christ Event transcends not only time and place, but also how it transcends and links all of mankind, Pannenberg declares, is found only through a perspective of human history that looks for God and at God's activity through the Christ Event.

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<sup>199</sup> McIntire, *God, History, and Historians*, 13.

<sup>200</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 9-10.

<sup>201</sup> Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, 244.

Only by viewing all of human history through this lens, in Pannenberg's view, is mankind able to come to a clearer understanding of all of God's revelation because it allows mankind to view it from the end of human history, in its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. For it is:

in the fate of Jesus, the end of history is experienced in advance as an anticipation... in the fate of Jesus as the anticipation of the end of all history, God is revealed as the one God of all mankind who has been expected since the times of the prophets... It is from this perspective, namely, the explication of the Christ event as an event for all peoples, that it becomes clear that the father of Jesus Christ has always been the one God from the very beginning of Israel and, indeed, from the beginning of the world.<sup>202</sup>

Thus in the Christ Event, mankind has been given the end of the human story. In addition, not only is mankind given an event that can teach it how to view God and His actions within human history, but it is also given the event that possesses the ability to teach it these things in a way that no other event seems to be able to do. And, moreover, within the Christ Event is given the one event, that not only acts as the connecting point that provides a link for all the God Events, but also gives to mankind that which links all human events throughout all of human history. And by linking all of human history to and through this one Central Event, the Christ Event provides mankind with a perspective, or view, of human history and all that entails. And it does so in the most perfect way possible for humanity, because it provides humanity a way to view its history through Christ. And it is when one learns to embrace this perspective that one can begin to see how God, through the Christ Event, has given mankind a real and genuine direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for their life, and for all of humanity.

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<sup>202</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 134-135.

## **The Christ Event Must Possess and Reveal Direction, Purpose, and Meaning in Their Fullest and Most Complete Form**

When I claim that the Christ Event, which I believe is the Central Event of all human history, must possess and reveal direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning in its fullest and most complete form, I do so because the Christ Event not only sufficiently meets the previously stated requirements for a God Event, it meets each of them with absolute perfection. How is it that I can make such a claim? One way in which I believe I can do this is based on what Christians believe about the nature of God. If, as Christians believe, God is perfect in all His characteristics<sup>203</sup>, then there is nothing that God does that is not perfect. Therefore, since the Christ Event, the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection, is as Pannenberg believed, the only God Event in which God is fully revealed, then all that which was and is revealed by and through the Christ Event concerning God, must likewise be deemed to be perfect.

I, however, am willing to concede that because mankind possesses an imperfect nature, what will result within mankind's understanding of God will always be less than perfect. And, it would seem that this imperfect nature was and still is further exacerbated when mankind sought and continues to seek understanding within the God Events whereby God was not or is not fully revealed. Nevertheless, mankind's imperfect nature and imperfect interpretation has not, nor never will it, I contend, diminish God's perfect act within human history through the Christ Event.

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<sup>203</sup> The Christian notion of God being perfect in all His characteristics is derived from the Christian understanding of God as Holy. See W.T. Purkiser, *Exploring Christian Holiness: Volume One, the Biblical Foundations* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1983), 28. Concerning God's perfect nature, or His holiness, Purkiser writes "In his careful study of the concept of holiness, O. R. Jones surveys the biblical terms most often associated with holiness – fear (awe), power, love, wholeness, separateness, and moral goodness – and notes how all converge at the idea of God."



Therefore, as I now turn my focus on how direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning are perfected by the Christ Event, I do so guided largely by Pannenberg's understanding of the Christ Event as being the only full and direct revelation of God, which Pannenberg most thoroughly outlines in his work *Revelation as History*. It is within this work, first published in German in 1961, and aided by Rolf and Trutz Rendtorff, and Ulrich Wilkens, that Pannenberg provides the CEM with the foundational statement for this section.

Revelation is no longer understood in terms of a supernatural disclosure or of a peculiarly religious experience and religious subjectivity, but in terms of the comprehensive whole of reality, which, however, is not simply given, but in a temporal process of a history that is not yet completed, but open to a future, which is anticipated in the teaching and personal history of Jesus.<sup>204</sup>

#### Direction: Perfected by the Christ Event

As previously discussed, the form of direction that the Central Event view of human history provides for mankind, is a direction that is seen in and through God's promises, and in the fulfillment of those promises. When dealing with the Christ Event, the direction that mankind finds is one that is both fulfilled and, simultaneously, is yet to be fulfilled. This notion of the already but not yet, is the same notion that Christians experience when Christians consider the Kingdom of God.<sup>205</sup> Through the Christ Event, Christian's believes that Jesus Christ ushered

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<sup>204</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, Preface to the American Edition, ix.

<sup>205</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 80. Ladd helps one to understand what is meant by the Kingdom of God when he writes "Jesus' message of the Kingdom proclaimed that God not only will finally act, but that God was not again acting receptively in history. In fact, God had entered into history in a way and to a degree not known by the prophets. The fulfillment of the Old Testament promises was taking place; the messianic salvation was present; the Kingdom of God had come near. God was visiting his people. In Jesus, God has taken the initiative to seek out the sinner, to bring the lost into the blessing of his reign." See also George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959.) 21. Here Ladd writes "The Kingdom of God is His kingship, His rule, His authority. When this is once realized, we can go through the New Testament and find passage after passage where this meaning is evident, where the Kingdom is not a realm or a people but God's reign. Jesus said that we must 'receive the kingdom of God' as little children (Mark 10:15). What

mankind into a new era, or as Hans Conzelmann refers to it, a new epoch of human history.

Conzelmann discusses how Luke viewed

Jesus as one and the same time a particular historical figure and an eternal type. The historical continuity is seen in the fact that he builds on the foundation of the Kingdom. Alongside this historical connection there is a typical one, according to which he appears as the supra-temporal “fulfillment” and gives in his ministry a foretaste of the future Kingdom.<sup>206</sup>

Thus, the direction mankind finds in the Christ Event is one that can be viewed in the present in the promise that God made to provide a way to restore mankind’s relationship with Him. But since that which is being fulfilled, although a present reality, will not be fully experienced by mankind until Christ comes again<sup>207</sup> to bring human history to its final culmination, there remains that element of the not yet.

In addition, I hold that what the Christ Event does as it perfects the direction mankind had found within the other God Events, is that it also helps mankind see all the God Events of human history as one continuous unified God Event of God’s actions. Pannenberg supports this by stating that within the Christ Event mankind finds a “history that demonstrates the deity of God (that is) broadened to include the totality of all events.”<sup>208</sup> What this does, Pannenberg holds, is that it leads mankind to view human history, and how God is acting within human

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is received? The Church? Heaven? What is received is God’s rule. In order to enter the future realm of the Kingdom, one must submit himself to perfect trust to God’s rule here and now.

<sup>206</sup> Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, Hans, Translated by Geoffrey J. Buswell. London: Faber, 1960), 185.

<sup>207</sup> The phrase used above, “until Christ comes again” is used in reference to what is known in most Christian circles of understanding and belief as the *second* coming of Jesus Christ. Christ came the *first* time as Jesus in the incarnation. The *second* time Jesus comes, He will come to bring human history to its culmination. This belief in the *second* coming is a part of both the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. See “The Apostles’ Creed.” Anglicans Online. Society of Archbishop Justus, n.d, accessed December 30, 2016. <http://anglicansonline.org/basics/apostles.html>. “He will come again to judge the living and the dead.” See also “The Nicene Creed.” Anglicans Online. Society of Archbishop Justus, n.d, accessed December 30, 2016. <http://anglicansonline.org/basics/nicene.html>. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.”

<sup>208</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 133.

history, from the end first. This means that mankind can now look at human history from a perspective which accepts that which has been fulfilled, but has not yet been experienced by mankind. Christians hold that since Christ, the Incarnate God with us, became a man and took upon Himself mankind's punishment through the Passion, and defeated sin and death through the Resurrection, mankind has already witnessed what will be fulfilled through Christ in those who belong to Christ at the end of human history.

It is not so much the course of history as it is the end of history that is at one with the essence of God. But insofar as the end presupposes the course of history, because it is the *perfection* of it, then also the course of history belongs in essence to the revelation of God, for history receives its unity from its goal... (thus) revelation does not have its place in the beginning, but at the end of history... in the fate of Jesus, the end of history is experienced in advance as an anticipation.<sup>209</sup>

Therefore, in the Christ Event, as Pannenberg here has stated, mankind has seen a perfected direction for human history, as he is witness to the perfect fulfillment of all that God has promised through the Christ Event.

Purpose: Perfected by the Christ Event

The purpose that the Nation of Israel was given in the Old Testament, and which Christians are likewise offered today, to participate with God by sharing with all of mankind the direction of God's action within human history, from promise to fulfillment, I believe is also perfected through the Christ Event.

For the Nation of Israel, the God Events they witnessed that helped them come to an understanding of the direction of human history, a direction to which they could find their purpose, was yet an imperfect purpose. This was not solely the result of mankind's imperfect

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 133-134. Perfection was bold and italicized for effect.

nature, but was actually due to the fact that the Nation of Israel had yet to witness the Central Event of human history, the Christ Event. And despite the power and significance of God's activity through the Exodus, which many Christians hold was probably the closest to a Central Event prior to the Christ Event, the purpose they experienced had yet to be perfected.<sup>210</sup>

In the Christ Event, God's perfect direction within human history was revealed to mankind, and hence, so was mankind's opportunity to find a perfected purpose that they could realize in their participation with God through the sharing of the Gospel message with all mankind. And despite the previously mentioned imperfection of mankind's nature, which would have been a part of any form of participation mankind was and is likely to add; this should not diminish the perfected purpose found within the Gospel at all. This is because, in Pannenberg's view, the most important aspect that mankind brought to their participation in the Old Testament, and which they can bring yet today, is also the most important aspect of mankind's participation in God's purpose. This, Pannenberg held, is in mankind's faith. "True faith is not a state of blissful gullibility. The prophets could call Israel to faith in Jahweh's promises and proclaim his prophecy because Israel had experienced the dependability of their God in the course of a long history. The Christian risks his trust, life, and future on the fact of God's having been revealed in the fate of Jesus."<sup>211</sup>

Therefore, mankind can find purpose within human history that has been perfected by the ultimate "God Event", the Christ Event, in which they, despite their imperfect nature, can still share in it if they are willing to place their faith in it. And, as Pannenberg stressed quite strongly,

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 32-33. Here one finds Rendtorff explaining how Jahweh was made known by his powerful saving acts toward the Israelites, "and especially... (in) the exodus out of Egypt... (but) the assurance the cultic congregation in Jerusalem has is not gained by directing its attention to a specific act in its past, but to the tradition of the saving acts of Jahweh with the hope that now and in the future he will save his city."

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 138.

it is not a blind faith, but rather, it is a faith that the Christ Event is a God Event that meets all the CEM's requirements of a God Event, including being an actual historical event that occurred within human history.

#### Meaning: Perfected by the Christ Event

In the earlier section concerning meaning, I summarized that meaning is not necessarily something that mankind finds, but rather, it becomes a form of validation for human history. As I now turn my focus specifically on the Christ Event, I again turn to Pannenberg for two additional ways that he finds that humanity can find meaning within this "Central" event of human history. These are, 1) the way mankind finds meaning through the Christ Event as he gains a fuller understanding in what it means to be created in God's image, and, 2) in how mankind can find the source of absolute truth.

The key area of human history, and likewise, of human life, where meaning is absolutely essential, is in mankind's relationship with God. As was discussed in the previous two subsections, the direction that mankind finds in "God Events", which is perfected in the Christ Event, is in how God's promises and the fulfillment of those promises are all working together to make a way for mankind's relationship with God to be restored. The CEM holds that when mankind sinned<sup>212</sup>, the relationship he had with God was broken. And since mankind could not repair this brokenness on his own, he needed God to act and reveal Himself to mankind within human history. And it was through the Christ Event, the one God Event in which God fully revealed Himself to mankind, that the fulfillment of His promises was perfected. The CEM believes that mankind, because of what Christ did within human history, has once again been

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<sup>212</sup> The commonly held view among Christian that there was a point in human history mankind first transgressed or disobeyed God, as found in the third chapter of Genesis.

given the opportunity to experience a perfect relationship with God, and although that perfect relationship will not occur until the culmination of human history, it is no less a present reality.

Pannenberg stressed that without this perfected relationship with God through Christ, mankind was incomplete. The incompleteness that mankind experienced stemmed from the fact that without God, mankind could never experience his ultimate destiny. Pannenberg believed that since mankind was created in God's image, mankind had been given a special place among God's creation. But until the relationship with God was restored, mankind lacked the one thing that was required for it to achieve both its destiny, and the meaning it sought within human history. Pannenberg wrote that "man is not complete from the start as an image of God. He has a history which is directed to the attainment of his destiny, to the realization of true and perfect humanity in union with God."<sup>213</sup> Thus, discovering that mankind can find meaning in the realization that God has made him in His image, is the point at which mankind can also begin to find how his relationship with God can begin to be restored. For even when mankind finds that he is but a mere imperfect representation of God's image, within the person of Jesus Christ, mankind finds a perfect representation of what it means to be made in God's image. Therefore, within a Christ centered (CE) view of human history, "the goal of his history... has already appeared in Jesus, and this sets the theme for all subsequent history."<sup>214</sup>

Therefore, ultimate meaning for mankind in Pannenberg's understanding is, 1) a meaning that validates both human history, and likewise, all of human life, is perfected within a repaired and restored relationship with His Creator. In Christ, mankind has witnessed the reality of the

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<sup>213</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 45.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 45. See also 48-49 where Pannenberg describes his view of Christ being the perfect representation of what it means to be made in God's image. "As God's image, Jesus is the prototype of true human perfection, and every individual human being approaches his human destiny to the extent that his life is transformed into the likeness of the love of God revealed in Jesus' deeds, in order in that way to become truly human and truly free."

perfected union with God, and only through Christ can mankind participate within this union. Thus, the direction that Christians witness, follow, and participate in, which likewise provides them purpose, compels them to strive for the full restoration of the lost relationship with God, a relationship which provides meaning for their life now, and a meaning that forever grows as they forever grow closer to the Father through Christ.

And 2) mankind also finds that, as his relationship with God in being perfected by God through the Christ Event, so too is mankind's encounter with absolute truth. And this truth is not a binding, rule-filled absolute truth, as the world<sup>215</sup> might believe, but rather, is a "freedom [that] only grows from participation in absolute truth, from the human being's bond with the divine mystery of his life. [And] ...to be free, man needs to be set free for his true destiny, for the freedom which lives by communion with God."<sup>216</sup> And this freedom mankind finds, which is a significant component of the meaning he finds, is found as he begins to love as God loves.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> The term "world" is used here to represent humans who 1) are not classified as Christians, or 2) who hold to a notion that no foundation to establish foundational truth exists within human understanding.

<sup>216</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*, 46-47. It should be noted that Pannenberg is clearly in debt to the writings of Hegel. He writes that "Hegel's philosophy gave a profound interpretation to freedom in the modern sense as a fruit of the Christian belief in the Incarnation. It grew, he claimed, from the union of man with absolute truth, which at first was believed only as having occurred in the one person of Jesus, but then, as a result of the Reformation, became general, since now everyone through faith can participate in the union of God with man which took place in Christ. Union with absolute truth, however, raises man, he says, above the isolation of his existence and makes him capable of that devotion to general truth which opened the way to modern times."

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 47. Concerning Pannenberg's understanding of this freedom found as mankind experiences his relationship being restored through Christ, is in how this freedom helps express Christ's love with all of mankind. He adds that "To respect in every individual human being his vocation to this freedom means to honour the image of God in him and to respect his mystery as a person. The content, however, by which such freedom lives, is love. Only the person who loves is free. Here the ambiguous word 'love' is understood in the sense of the free, creative giving with which the God of Jesus receives sinners, and with which Jesus himself invited to his table those excluded from the society of the pious and the respectable. It is the 'bestowing virtue' which Nietzsche praised. Nietzsche, of course, no longer realized that he was in fact glorifying the Christian idea of love."

## **The Christ Event Must Be the Central Focus For All of Human History and the Whole of the Human Experience**

By declaring that the Christ Event is the Central Event of all of human history, I am declaring that the Christ Event must become the central focus for all of human history, and furthermore, that it must also be the central focus of the whole human experience. The Christian who accepts the Christ Event as the “Central Event” must in turn be willing to let every thought and action be guided by the direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning that can be found within the Christ Event. Therefore, as the Christian looks back through human history, including their present circumstances and at their faith in the God’s future promises, promises which have already been fulfilled in Christ, they must have no other guiding focus than that of Jesus Christ.

Pannenberg writes that “we must continually search that history in which we are derived from God. We must look into it repeatedly for help in understanding our own situation (direction), and in finding our proper role in historical action (purpose). We must be aware of its provisional nature but also realize its universal responsibility (meaning).<sup>218</sup> In Pannenberg’s words here are clearly displayed the ideally sought results within a human life that has been influenced by a Central Event view of human history. The human self must move to the background when it comes to determining from where mankind looks to in an effort to find direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning. This does not mean, nor should the Central Event view be accused of causing, a diminishing in the significance of humankind. Rather, humankind is elevated by its humble admission that it is not the center of all human existence. Within a Christ-centered view of life, mankind is freed from having to face an uncertain future. Mankind is freed

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid.,104. Words found within the () were added by the CEM to demonstrate how the CEM sees Pannenberg emphasizing the three key components of a sufficient view of human history.



from having to make decisions concerning aspects of human existence that he was never intended to have to make. And specifically for the Christian, especially those who might have bought into the self-centered and self-focused Human Progress view of human history, which in turn might have led them to believe that they could usher in the Kingdom of God through their own power and efforts, Pannenberg is quick to declare that a Christ-centered view of human history also frees mankind of this seemingly short sided human understanding. “I shall not make the mistake of previous periods and think of the establishment of the Kingdom of God as something which could be brought about by human effort.”<sup>219</sup> This does not mean that the Christian does not have work to do as a member within their future place in God’s Kingdom, but “the danger is removed if we remain humbly aware that any Christian ordering of life is at best incomplete and can be no more than a precursor of the final future of the Kingdom of God.”<sup>220</sup>

Therefore, I hold that mankind must rid itself of a human-centered or human-focused (self-centered or self-focused) understanding of its place within human history, and in its place, mankind must accept a Christ-centered understanding. In addition, mankind must stop fighting against or resisting what God has revealed through His actions within human history, actions that found their perfect fulfillment in Christ. Then, when mankind accepts its role (purpose) within God’s plan (direction), a humble role with an outward focus on others because of Christ, it is there that ultimate meaning, which both validates the individual existence and the whole of human existence, is found by mankind as its ultimate reward.

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 108.

## Summary

Building on what I argued in chapter three concerning a God Event, I used this chapter to establish what I believe allows me to declare that the Christ Event, the God Event that included the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the Central Event of human history. I did this by declaring that not only does the Christ Event possess the same key characteristics that I argued must be found within each God Event, but that it possesses them in the most perfect and complete way possible.

This first included the key characteristic that a God Event must be an actual historical event that occurred at a specific time and place within human history. My focus here was shaped by my contention that if the Christ Event is the one event from human history on which the Christian faith stands or falls, it is absolutely essential that it was an actual historical event.

Next I concluded that not only must the Christ Event be viewed as being a supernatural event, an event whereby God is revealed to mankind, but that the Christ Event surpasses all other God Events in that it is the only God Event where God is fully revealed to mankind. For within the Christ Event, God Himself entered into human history by fully revealing Himself in Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, I argued that the Christ Event, like all God Events, must possess the ability to transcend its specific time and place within human history, by being an event that possesses the ability to impact all of human history. Additionally I argued that the Christ Event possesses the unique ability to transcend all other God Events by being that which all other God Events not only point to, but are defined by.

I also dealt in this chapter with how the Christ Event surpasses all other God Events in its ability to provide mankind with direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning. I did this by first

arguing that the direction mankind can witness is perfected by the Christ Event as mankind finds that the individual God Events are actually one continuous movement by God through which He is fulfilling His promise to restore the relationship mankind's sin had broken. Second, I argued that not only can mankind find purpose in human history through the Christ Event as he shares the reality of this purpose with his fellow man and woman, but as he does, he finds his imperfect participation being perfected by and through the Christ Event. And finally, in the Christ Event mankind encounters his true destiny on display as he witnesses what is truly means to be made in the image of God, and likewise, he is able to have an encounter with absolute truth.

Finally, I concluded that the Christ Event is the one God Event that for mankind represents that one single point of focus that he can direct all his heart, mind, soul, and strength toward. As mankind does this, his focus is not only directed toward an event, but it is directed toward the fully revealed image of God in Jesus Christ. And in doing so, he finds his outward focus directed toward God and toward his fellow man and woman being perfected.

## CHAPTER FIVE – THE CENTRAL EVENT TEACHING MODEL (CEM)

I have now reached the point along my journey where it becomes necessary to address my overarching goal. This goal is to provide Christian apologists with a tool designed to help them along their apologetic endeavors, specifically those endeavors that deal with identifying and reshaping individual's views of human history. In the subsection of the Introduction, *Methodology – Why the Need for a Teaching Model?*, I stated that there are three objectives I am seeking to accomplish through the CEM. These objectives include 1) creating an awareness within the Christian apologetic community of the importance of identifying the types of views of human history that are prevalent in our world today, 2) equipping Christian apologist with a tool to help them share the Central Event view in a concise and effective way, and 3) meeting a deep spiritual need that is present in our world today. It is to these objectives that I now turn.

### The Awareness and Importance of Identifying a View of Human History

As was stated in the opening sentences of this study's Introduction, the CEM embraces the conviction that whether or not an individual is aware of its existence, each individual does hold to a view of human history. And despite what might seem like an overarching self-centered characteristic common to most humans, there still does seem to exist within each individual an acceptance at some level of a limited human capacity. But despite this acceptance of a limited human capacity, I still believe that many humans are reluctant to look beyond themselves for answers concerning direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning within their human existence. This in turn is what can lead humans to seek these answers from a perceived wealth of knowledge from history which plays a large role in leading to the formation of a variety of views of human history. But holding to a view of human history, regardless of how these beliefs were formed

does not necessarily mean that each individual is to be viewed as a historian in the traditional sense. A historian in the traditional sense is generally thought of as being an individual who intentionally analyses past human events and, without letting their personal views and cultural biases influence them, reports these past human events in either a chronological or topical format. Along this same line of thought, John Fea adds that the historian in the traditional sense needs to try “to understand the past on its own terms, [which means] the historian treats it with integrity rather than manipulating it or superimposing his or her values on it to advance an agenda in the present.”<sup>221</sup>

Taking these two definitions of a traditional historian into account, it would seem then that they would not be describing most humans, and therefore, clearly something else must be going on within each human that allows the CEM to claim that every human holds to a view of human history. What the CEM believes is actually the case is that, while each human is not a historian in a traditional sense, each human can be classified as being a philosopher of history.

### **Every Human is a Philosopher of History – The Problem of the Historian**

As was stated above, one of the necessary components needed to classify someone as a historian in the traditional sense, is that the individual must intentionally evaluate historical events. The process of evaluating historical events can take on a number of varying forms. This could include such things as doing personal interviews with people who experienced certain events. It might involve taking part in an archaeological dig at a historical site. Or, it could even include sifting through hundreds of thousands of pages of legal or governmental documents. These types of historical inquiries are typically classified as objective, in that they seem to allow the historian to carry out their inquiry without appearing to cause the historian to be influenced

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<sup>221</sup> Fea, *Why Study History*, 52.

by his or her own personal emotions or biases. But there are those who believe that at times, some historians in the traditional sense also do employ some subjective forms of historical analysis as well. It is the employing of these subjective methods that led David Bebbington to claim that there exists “the problem of the historian.”<sup>222</sup> For Bebbington, this means that in the process of selecting and arranging historical evidence, the historian is forced to exercise his or her own personal judgments. And when personal judgments are used, it typically brings into play the historians personal cultural, political, and religious influences and the views, thoughts, opinions, and even biases that these influences have developed. This in turn seems to create a situation that can cause the traditional historian to also become a philosopher of history, which is what seems to occur when the historian allows itself to work within the subjective realm.

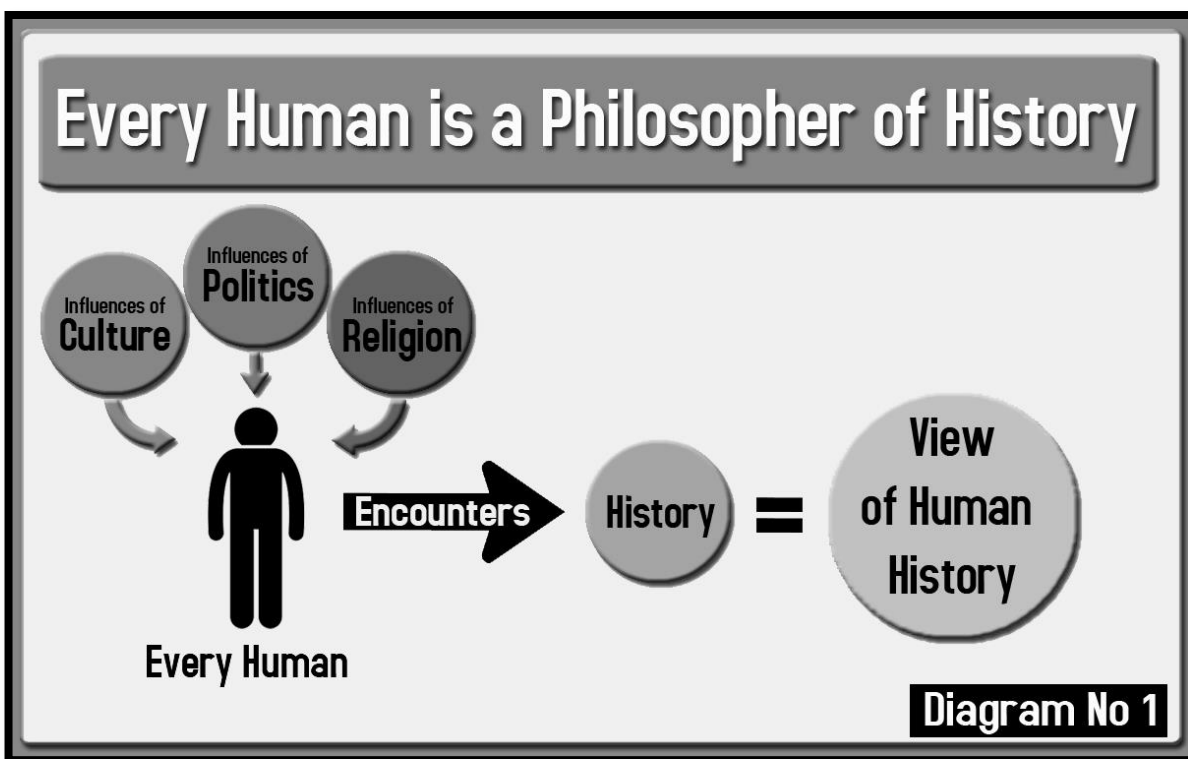
### **Every Human is a Philosopher of History – The Shaping of a View of History within Every Human**

It is within this subjective realm where the CEM believes most humans also encounter history. And if this is true, then it is very likely that whether the individual in questions is aware of it or not, this encounter of history seems likely occur under the influence of the individual’s own personal cultural, political, and religious views, which are known as subjective influences or elements. Then, when the individual encounters a historical account, which will most often not be a historical account that they themselves created in the traditional sense, they run the risk of likewise encountering the subjective elements found in the historian who wrote the account. And these additional subjective elements that they may encounter, subjective elements which could include the cultural, political, or religious influences of the historian they are encountering, are subjective elements that may have come about through what Bebbington describes as the

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<sup>222</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 5.

“problem of the historian.” And this, it would seem, is likely the type of breeding ground on which the individual’s view of human history would be formed. (See Diagram 1).



Therefore, not only does each human hold to a view of human history, but it is very likely to be a view of history that has been formed under the influence of a number of possible subjective elements, many of which may exist without the individual ever being aware of them. It is on that note that I now turn to examining some of the most prevalent views of human history that appear to have resulted through this stated formula.

### Views of Human History

Through the process described in the previous section and, visually depicted in Diagram No 1, Christian apologists should now have become aware that 1) each person they encounter

will hold to a view of human history. They should also now be aware of 2) how that view of human history most likely came into existence. Next for Christian apologists comes the two-fold challenge of 1) identifying the view of human history possessed by the individual they encounter, and if that view of human history is not a Central Event (CE) view, 2) helping the individual come to an understanding of why the CEM believes that any view other than the CE view seems to be insufficient.

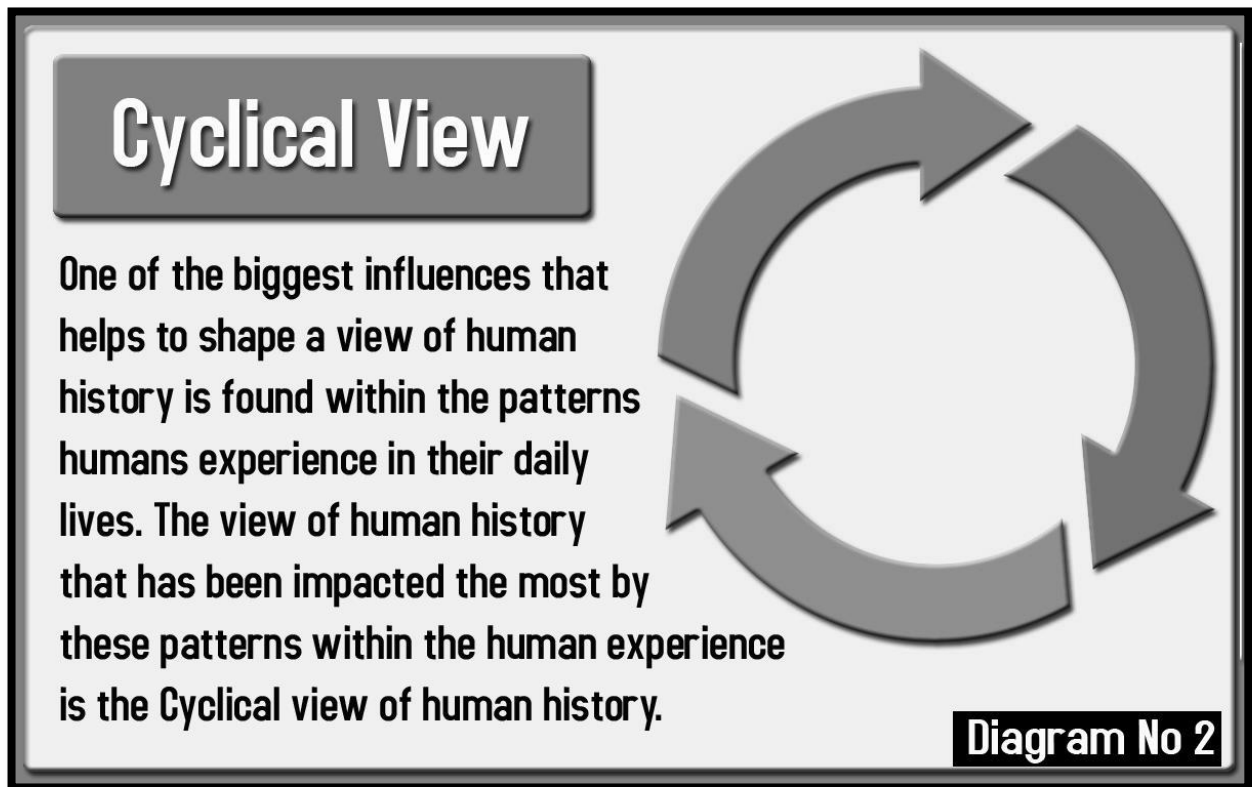
### **Identifying the Views of Human History**

I argued in chapter two of this study, that the most prevalent views of human history that Christian apologists will encounter in the world today are mostly likely the Cyclical (CY), Human Progress (HP), Relativistic (RL), and Central Event (CE) views. What follows is a brief summary that apologists can use to help identify the first three of these views. The CE view will be addressed later.

#### **The Cyclical (CY) View of Human History**

As I take a look at these various views of human history, one thing is likely to become apparent. This is the fact that these various views of human history all seem to share similar characteristics. This should not come as too big of a surprise to Christian apologists when they consider that one of the biggest influences that help to shape a view of human history is found within the patterns humans experience in their daily lives. The view of human history that has been impacted the most by these patterns within the human experience is the Cyclical view of human history.

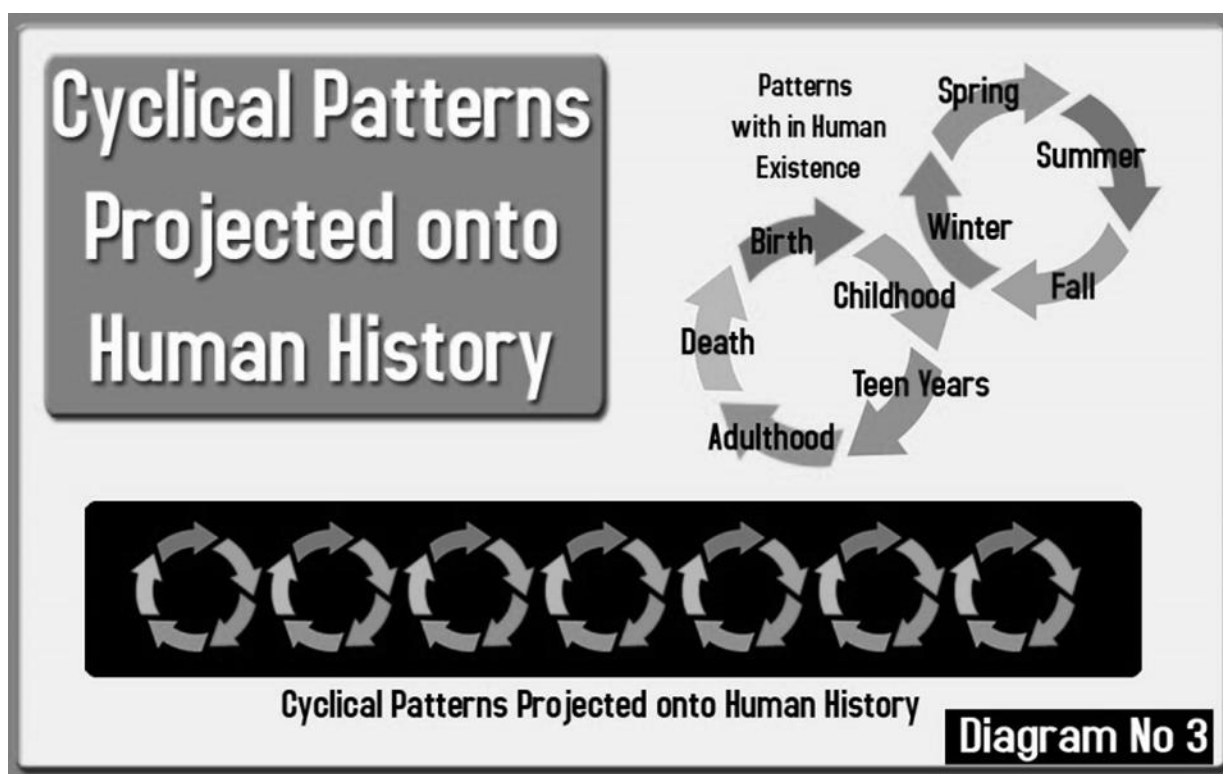




There exists certain aspects within the human experience that have and continue to play a large role in the development the CY view. These aspects are the repeating patterns or cycles that the CEM fully acknowledges do exist as a part of the human experience. It is these repeating cyclical, or circular patterns, that have led some humans to come to a conclusion that all of human history is nothing more than a never ending cyclical existence. David Bebbington has identified two main contributors to the cyclical view of human history, these being the cycle of the individual human life, and the cycle of the yearly agricultural patterns.<sup>223</sup> Diagram No 3 shows the presence of various cyclical patterns that the CEM acknowledges do exist within the human experience. In the case of Diagram No 3, we see the cycle of a human life, and the cycle of the seasons of a human calendar year. What appears to have happened for those who hold to a

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 21. “There are two main explanations for its popularity. First, the life of any individual follows a pattern of growth to magruiity followed eventually by decrepitude and death... Secondly, societies that were predominantly agricultural tended to conceive of history as a part of nature. They came to think that yearly rhythm of the seasons was reproduced on a grander scale in the world of men.”

CY view of human history, is that they seem to have assumed that since certain cyclical patterns existed in a number of areas within the human experience, then projecting these cyclical patterns they experienced in their daily existence onto their view of human history seemed legitimate. The result, as is depicted at the bottom of Diagram No 3, is a view of human history formed that became dominated by these cyclical patterns.



Areas of the world where cyclical patterns have been found to dominate the views of human history can found most prominently in the eastern cultures of China, India and the Middle East. Therefore, it stands to reason that many of the expressions of human histories coming out of these areas of the world are full of repeating cyclical patterns. Examples of these include the cycles of Chinese Dynasties and the Indian Cosmic Cycles.<sup>224</sup>

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 24.

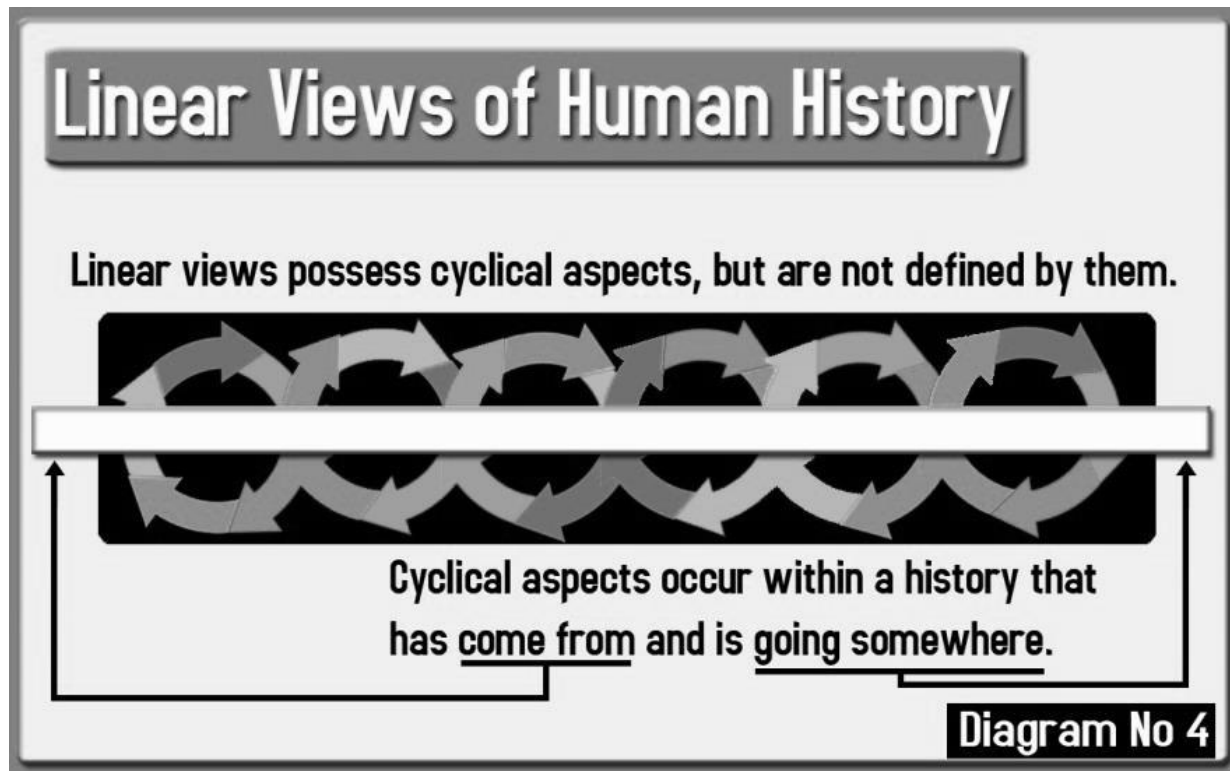
The important reality that today's Christian apologists must be aware of, especially the western Christian apologists, is that despite where the CY views of human history were formed, which would be mainly in Asia and South East Asia, there has been a proliferation of these cultures and their influences into the western world, which also includes their CY view of human history.<sup>225</sup> Thus, there seems to exist within the western world today a high likelihood that although a limited number of individuals Christian apologists may encounter will hold to a strict CY view, the influences the CY view had made throughout the western world are large and growing.

#### The Human Progress (HP) View of Human History

The next view, the Human Progress view of human history, belongs to a category of views of human history known as linear views. As can be seen depicted in Diagram No 4, there is an important aspect that is found to exist within linear views of human history, like the HP view, that is also found to exist within the CY views of human history. This shared aspect is an acceptance of the existence of cyclical patterns that are a part of the human experience. Likewise there is also shared understanding that these cyclical patterns have been on some level repeating throughout human history. However, one important distinction that is found in a linear view of human history that sets it apart from the CY view is that these cyclical patterns are only

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<sup>225</sup> See "Religious Plurality and Christian Self-understanding," World Council of Churches, accessed September 24, 2016, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/religious-plurality-and-christian-self-understanding>. The council reported that "The global religious situation is also in flux. In some parts of the Western world, the institutional expressions of Christianity are in decline. New forms of religious commitment emerge as people increasingly separate personal faith from institutional belonging. The search for authentic spirituality in the context of a secular way of life presents new challenges to the churches. Further, peoples of other traditions, like Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, etc., who have increasingly moved into these areas, as minorities, often experience the need to be in dialogue with the majority community. This challenges Christians to be able to articulate their faith in ways that are meaningful both to them and their neighbors; dialogue presupposes both faith commitment and the capacity to articulate it in word and deed."



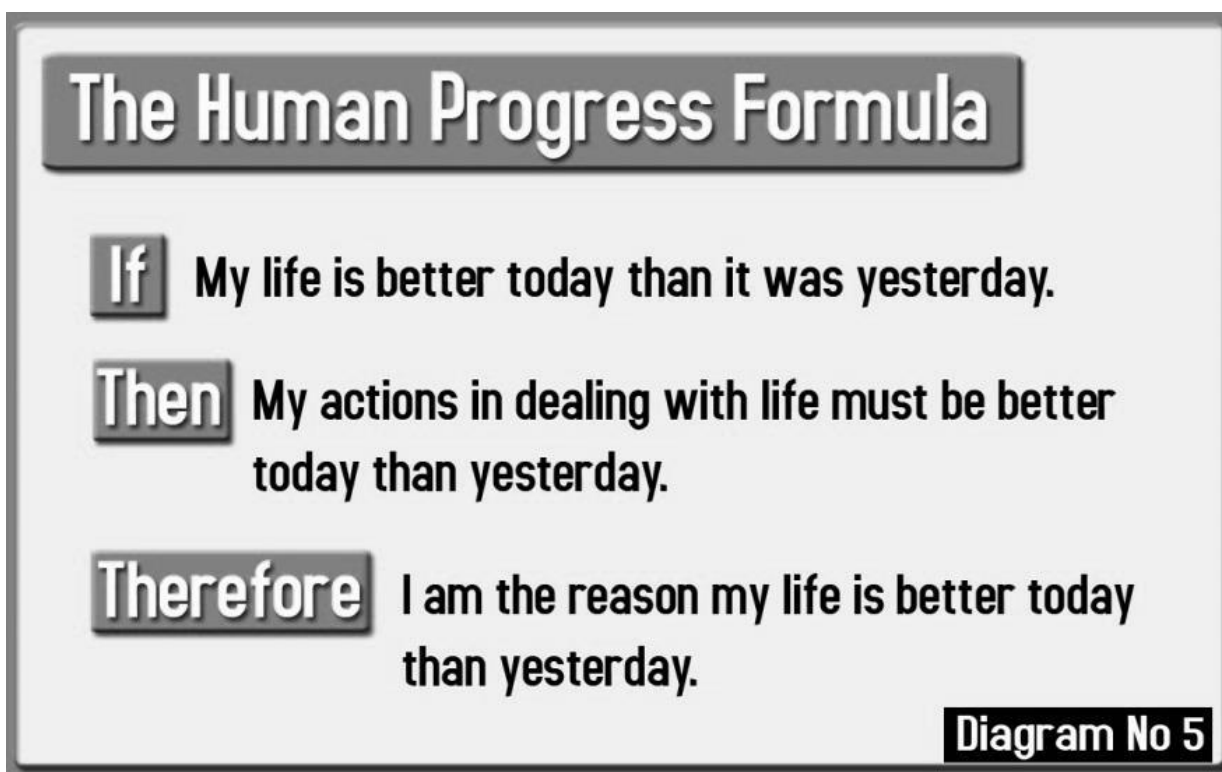
an aspect of human history; they do not define it. Rather, linear views embrace a view that human history has come from somewhere, and that there exists a path or line that human history continues to follow. Or in other words, they hold that human history had a beginning point, and it will also have an ending point.

One of these linear views of human history, which gained strength and popularity in western cultures during and following the period of European Enlightenment, a popularity which continued all the way to and through the early portions of the twentieth century, became known as the Human Progress (HP) view of human history. This HP view is based on a belief that some form of progress was created and perpetrated by humans. “Human history is therefore the account of the improvement of the human condition from barbarism to civilization.”<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 68.

Pannenberg wrote that “since the eighteenth century, history has been conceived of as a continuous stream toward the progressive realization of humane standards of life. World history appeared as a unified process, periodized by the succession of empires each of which was born from a new people rising to historical prominence.”<sup>227</sup> While Pannenberg would not deny that human history does possess an apparent unity, the unity that HP proponents believed they were experiencing was a unity that they were willing to give humans full credit for producing.



In part, the “unified process” that was thought to exist within the HP view, came about as certain cultures’ began to view human history as being dominated by the progress they experienced in life. Many conclude (See Diagram No 5) that since my life is better today than it was yesterday, somehow my actions in dealing with life must be better today than yesterday; therefore, I am the reason life is better today than yesterday. In addition, the HP view believes

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<sup>227</sup> Pannenberg , *Human Nature, Election, and History*. 83.

man's progress had freed the world from their silly superstitions and the belief that man needed something beyond himself to make this world a better place.

As will be noted later in this chapter, the HP view has definitely suffered in popularity over the past century. But this does not mean that many of its central understandings, especially those aspects that lead humans to believe they can succeed on their own merits and talents alone, do not still exist. Thus, the Christian apologists' need for an understanding of the HP view along with, as will be discussed later, its flaws and shortcomings, is something that the CEM believes remains important.

#### The Relativistic (RL)<sup>228</sup> View of Human History

The next view of human history is the Relativistic (RL) view of human history. This view of human history seems to have existed on some level throughout most of human history and is likely the most prevalently held view that Christian apologists in the western world are likely to encounter in today.

Melville J. Herskovits, a proponent of cultural relativism defines cultural relativism as a view whose "judgments are based on experience..." and furthermore, this "experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation."<sup>229</sup> Therefore, the reality that is experienced by the individual becomes a legitimate reality for that individual. And, likewise, anything that might come from outside a particular individual's experience cannot, and should not, impact, define, or redefine an individual's view and perspective of their world or their view of human history.

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<sup>228</sup> Although I have chosen to use the term Relativistic to label a particular view of human history, it is important to point out that this label is to be understood as being synonymous with the more commonly used term cultural relativism. Therefore, within this section of the study the terms will be used interchangeably.

<sup>229</sup> Herskovits, "Cultural Relativism and Cultural Values," 6.

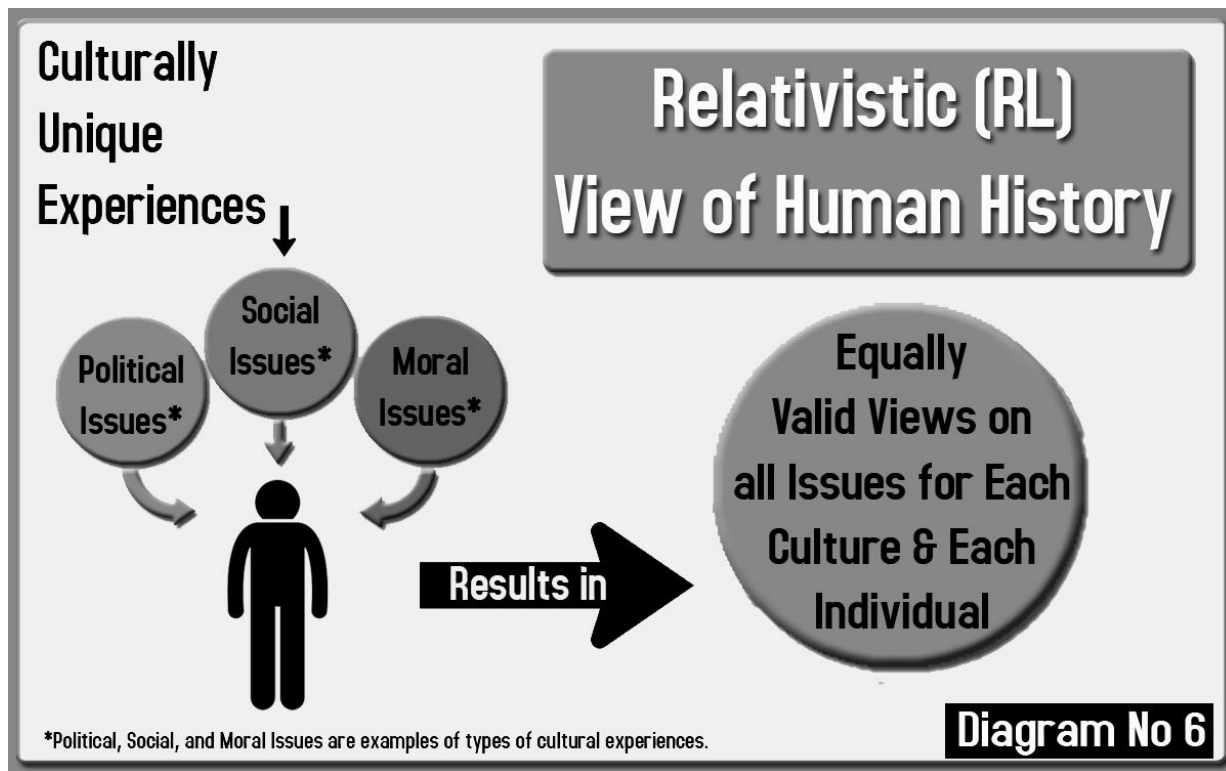
It is experience, then, that appears to be the key for those who hold to a RL view. The CEM, however, does not necessarily take exception with the RL's view concerning the importance of human experiences. Nor does the CEM deny that experiences can impact the formation of a view of human history. The CEM believes that experience does appear to be very significant for each and every human individual. The "human experience", by its name alone, does seem to require that humans must have experiences. The five human senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell, all work together to allow each human the ability to experience their world. And it is through the use of these senses that humans can learn and evaluate the world that they experience. But cultural relativists, in a similar way to when the CY view used the cyclical patterns they experienced in life to define their entire view of human history, seem to use experiences as a final determinant or a tool for making final judgments, including judgments that impact their view of human history.

Another unique aspect of the RL view is in its willingness to acknowledge that since the different people who live within different cultures will have different experiences, not only will these different experiences lead to different views concerning human life and the human experience, these differing views created from these different experiences are to be accepted as equally valid. And this includes those differing views that might fall within the realm of morality. Even if what is produced in one culture concerning morality differs greatly from another culture surrounding a similar moral issue, the RL view claims that it is fully willing to accept such outcomes. The reason that the RL view can claim to accept such outcomes is because, as John J. Tilley explains, "...although for every culture some moral judgments are valid, no moral judgement is universally valid. Every moral judgment is universally relative."<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> John J. Tilley. "Cultural Relativism." *Human Rights Quarterly* 22, no. 2 (2000): 501-47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4489287>. 505.

And, furthermore, Tilley holds that no culture has the right to judge another culture since “...cultural relativism implies no test for moral validity. That is, it does not tell us how to check moral judgments for validity or how to identify the cultures for which the judgments are valid.”<sup>231</sup>



Finally, since the RL view holds that each culture can claim the right to hold uniquely valid views on any and all issues related to the human experience, and since no instrument or tool exists to judge any of these uniquely held views at any level, what has appeared to result is not only a view of human history that is uniquely valid for each culture, but more so, it is a view of human history that seems to allow for a uniquely valid view of human history for each and every individual within each and every culture. (See Diagram No 6)

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 509



The importance of understanding the basic tenants of the RL view for Christian apologists is seen when apologists realizes that each time they encounter an individual who holds to an RL view, their experience will likely be unique. And this is largely the result of a view of human history that calls for and encourages individuals to make their own judgments and determinations concerning human life and its history, based solely on their own personal experiences. Therefore, what will be important for Christian apologists will not be to attack the judgements and determinations that are produced through those who hold to an RL view, but instead, it would be more advisable to attack the very foundation on which the RL view has been built. How Christian apologists might go about this will be addressed in the next section where the CEM will present the shortcomings that it believes are present within each of these three alternative views of human history..

### **The Shortcomings of the Cyclical, Human Progress, and Relativistic Views**

Before the CEM examines the Central Event view of human history, it will first address what it identifies are inherent shortcomings that exist within the first three views previously discussed in this chapter. In doing so, it will present arguments for Christian apologists that are intended to explain why the CEM believes that these views of human history not only do not appear to offer mankind the direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning that the CEM believes mankind is seeking, but also in how each of these views of human history all seem to result in self-centered and self-focused views.

There is another important note that I wants to make at this point, which is also intended to be a caution to Christian apologists. Confronting someone who holds to one of these three alternate views of human history with the short comings that I am about to present, without also

offering them a better or superior alternative, is only completing a portion of the apologetic task. Therefore, while understanding the short comings of a view of human history is important, understanding why I am concluding that the Central Event view is superior to these alternate views is even more important.

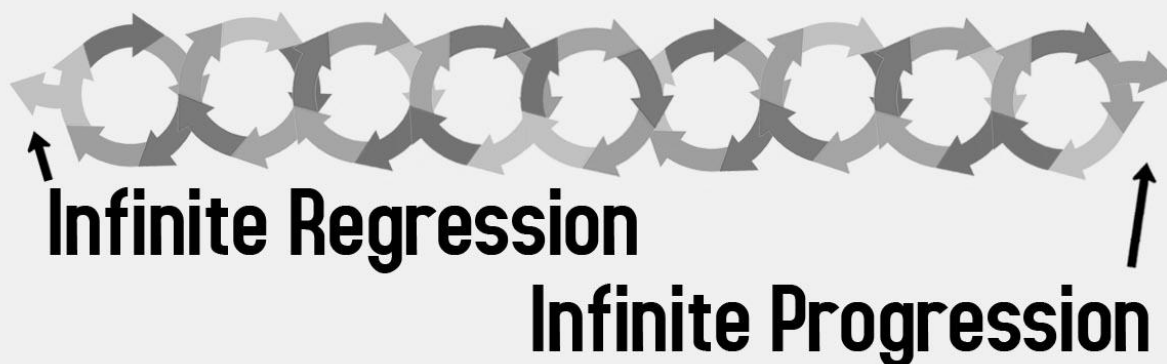
### The Shortcomings of the Cyclical (CY) View

The CEM believes the Cyclical view of human history has certain inherent shortcomings that make it an inferior view of human history when compared to the CE view. The first of these flaws is seen in the CEM's position that when an individual accepts the CY view of human history, they must also be willing to accept the existence of the reality of the notions of infinite progression and infinite regression.

One of the central aspects of the CY view includes the notion that human history appears to be little more than a series of continuous cycles that can be found in many areas and experiences of human life. And, as was stated earlier, it was the transferring of these cyclical experiences onto a view of human history that seems to have led to the development of the CY view. When this occurred, the cyclical aspects and experiences of human life seem to have taken center stage, and likewise seem to have led to the notion that there must have been an infinite number of cycles that have always been occurring, and subsequently, will continue to occur throughout infinity. (See Diagram No 7) The blame for the inclusion of the infinity within the CY view of human history appears to lie at the feet of mathematics. While the notion of infinity may work in certain fields of mathematics, the CEM holds that it is not legitimate in dealing with human history. But this is exactly what appears to have occurred with the CY view of human history. One such scholar that has shown the absurdity of the inclusion of such notions within a

## The Shortcomings of the Cyclical (CV) View

### The Inclusion of the Notion of Infinity



**Diagram No 7**

view of human history is William Lane Craig. Speaking specifically to the problem created by accepting infinite regression, Craig finds those who promote this as holding a view that includes a "...universe (that) never began to exist... (which if true) ...then prior to the present event there have existed an actually infinite number of previous events. Thus, a beginningless series of events in time entails an actually infinite number of things, namely, events."<sup>232</sup>

The CEM also finds that equally absurd is the notion of infinite progression. This is because the notion of infinite progression seems to require one to accept that the future of human existence will be made up of a series of a never ending series of cyclical patterns. David Hilbert declared that this notion is simply illogical and irrational. "The infinity is nowhere to be found in reality. It neither exists in nature nor provides a legitimate basis for rational thought."<sup>233</sup> It was

<sup>232</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 120. Words within () were added for clarification.

<sup>233</sup> Helge "The True (?) Story of Hilbert's Infinite Hotel.", 3.

along this line of understanding that Hilbert conceived his Hilbert Hotel<sup>234</sup>. The Hilbert Hotel (See Diagram No 8) is a hotel that has an infinite number of rooms and can serve an



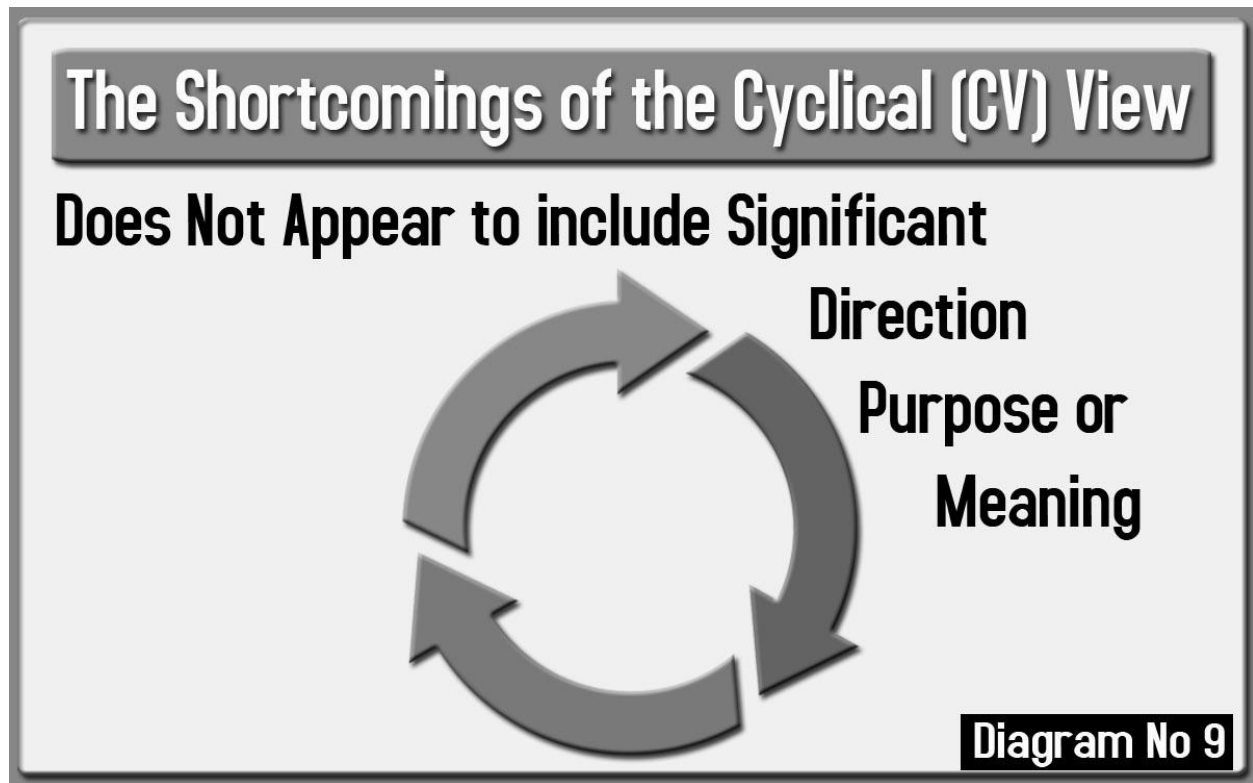
infinite number of guests. The absurdity of such a notion comes to light when one must accept that this hotel can be full with a no vacancy light shining brightly in its window, while at the same time, since it has an infinity of rooms, must also always have a vacancy light shining in the same window since it must also always have room for one more.

A second inherent shortcoming that the CEM believes it has found within the CY view of human history is that it does not appear to include significant aspects of direction, purpose, or ultimate meaning. To be fair, the CEM is willing to admit that the CY view of human history does seem to include some limited aspects of one of these three important elements of human history. In this case, there does appear to be some direction, but this direction, since it is a part of

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<sup>234</sup> Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 118.

the cyclical patterns that are central within the view, is only a circular direction. And furthermore, the CEM does not believe that from this direction seems to flow much that can then help lend itself to the establishment of a purpose or meaning within human history. (See Diagram No 9.)



The CEM believes that one unfortunate result of this limited aspect of direction is that it seems to require those who embrace it to also have to accept that their human existence is part of a larger human history that is also made up of nothing more than an endless series of cycles. This, Bebbington believes, leads to a notion that “what matters is not to perform great or good deeds within the historical process, but to escape from it.”<sup>235</sup> This view of escaping the historical process, found in the religious experience and efforts of Eastern religions like Buddhism,

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<sup>235</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 25.

Hinduism, and Taoism, seems to reduce the importance of the human role, and at the same time, the significance of any human action or human event on the meaning of history.

#### The Shortcomings of the Human Progress (HP) View

As has been previously stated, the Human Progress view of human history can be summed up by the statement that since progress at various levels has been witnessed to some extent within human history, this progress has been credited solely to humans. The CEM believes that this view, like the Cyclical view, has serious shortcomings that leads it to conclude that the HP view is an insufficient view of human history.

The first shortcoming, is that the HP view has all but removed any notion of divine intervention. Bebbington viewed the HP view as a betrayal of its Christian origins. He believed that in holding to a linear view of human history similar to the CE view, proponents of the HP view offered the same “confidence in the future and... [an] acceptance of unchanging moral values...”<sup>236</sup> This was due in part, Bebbington held, to how man saw that he had “...advanced not just in matters like technology and the improvement of material conditions... [but also] in man’s intellect and ...in his moral capacity.”<sup>237</sup> Now while this observation might not be in complete opposition to how the CE view might interpret what mankind has experienced within human history, the HP view positions itself in opposition to the CE view when it appears to make mankind the sole source of all the progress he has witnessed. And, if mankind is the sole source of all the progress he has witnessed, then there becomes no room left for any form of divine intervention. And what Christian apologists then faces is an individual whose concept of human

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 68.

history, and mostly their entire existence, has never considered the possibility of any form of divine intervention. This type of result, which can be classified as being a denial of divine intervention *a priori*, is what many would classify as being influenced in large part to the work of historians who, by denying divine intervention *a priori*, have, crossed from the ranks of a historian in the traditional sense into the realm of becoming a philosopher of history. This, Butterfield would argue, is a complete betrayal of what it means to be a historian in the tradition sense, and what he called “the problem of the historian.”<sup>238</sup>

A second shortcoming that Christian apologists can find within the HP view is in its high expectation of the future. The issue here is not so much in an individual holding onto a hope for the future, but rather, in how the HP view illegitimately viewed mankind’s supposed past progress as an indicator of an assuredly bright manmade future. Individuals like David Hume and Adam Smith were quick to see the advancements of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as signs for continued growth and increased wealth and general human welfare into the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, and of course, they were more than ready to give credit for all this continuance of perceived growth to mankind alone.<sup>239</sup> But, unfortunately for all mankind, the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not turn out to be the landscape for continued growth and success at the hands of mankind. Rather, it became marred by two devastating world wars and an accompanying world-wide economic depression.

The next shortcoming that Christian apologists can identify within the HP view, which is closely associated with the previous shortcoming, is in the way proponents of the HP view

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<sup>238</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 4-5. This is where Bebbington writes that “history... entails investigation, questioning, [and] inquiry... [furthermore] the discipline itself is not a matter of reading, but of researching. It entails calling accepted views into question on the basis of freshly discovered or freshly interpreted evidence. History demands a critical frame of mind... The problem of the historian himself... [and] the exercise of the historian’s judgment... Those criteria are influenced by the cultural, political and religious values he may hold.” See also Olive, *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind: Wolfhart Pannenberg*, 57, for additional support for Bebbington’s “problem of the historian.”

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-79.

## Shortcomings of the Human Progress (HP)View

- \*An *A Priori* Elimination of Divine Intervention**
- \*An Illegitimate High View of the Future**
- \*A Falsely Believed Ability to Determine Progress**
- \*No Clear Unity Produced Through Man's Efforts Alone**

**Diagram No 10**

believed they possessed the ability to determine what was and what was not progress. Although it is true that hindsight is 20/20, that still does not keep someone from examining the devastating world wars and economic depression that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in doing so, coming to a conclusion that the high hope of mankind's continued advancements that was held by proponents of the HP view, was at best off the mark. And if the HP view was 'off the mark,' concerning its high hopes for mankind, since history has shown that instead of progress, the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought negative worldwide disasters, then it seems legitimate to also come to a similar conclusion concerning the HP view's ability to determine what was and what was not progress or growth? The CEM believes that this is exactly what could be a legitimate conclusion. For it seems, and Bebbington would agree, that with the HP's perceived view of mankind's growth in



economic and social areas, also grew the HP's hubris, as the HP view believed that mankind's intellect was also on a continual increase.<sup>240</sup>

The final shortcoming that the CEM believes Christian apologists will encounter within the HP view is in an area that Pannenberg found to be of utmost importance within a view of human history. Pannenberg saw the proponents of the HP view holding to a notion that mankind's perceived growth and progress was not only leading mankind on to more growth and progress by and through mankind's own power, but also that it was mankind's growth and progress that was producing a unity for all of mankind. Unity is something Pannenberg believes can be found within human history, but he does not believe the credit for this unity can be found within mankind's own power or strength. Rather, Pannenberg saw within mankind's actions throughout human history, despite any perceived "good" intentions, more disunity than unity. He held that "actions and the human plans and intentions behind them cannot render the course of history intelligible [unity], because human beings thwart one another's plans and intentions."<sup>241</sup> Instead, in Pannenberg's view, the only form of unity to be found within human history cannot originate from man, but can only be found within divine providence.

Therefore, when Christian apologists encounter someone who holds to the HP view of human history, what they are likely to encounter will be someone who shares the following flawed beliefs. These includes the elimination of any divine intervention, a misguided high expectation of the future full of human progress, a progress that they themselves believe they

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 68. Bebbington viewed that proponents of the HP view concluding that the "idea of progress... advanced not just in matters like technology and... material conditions... [but] also in the use of man's intellect and... moral capacity.

<sup>241</sup> Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 504-505.

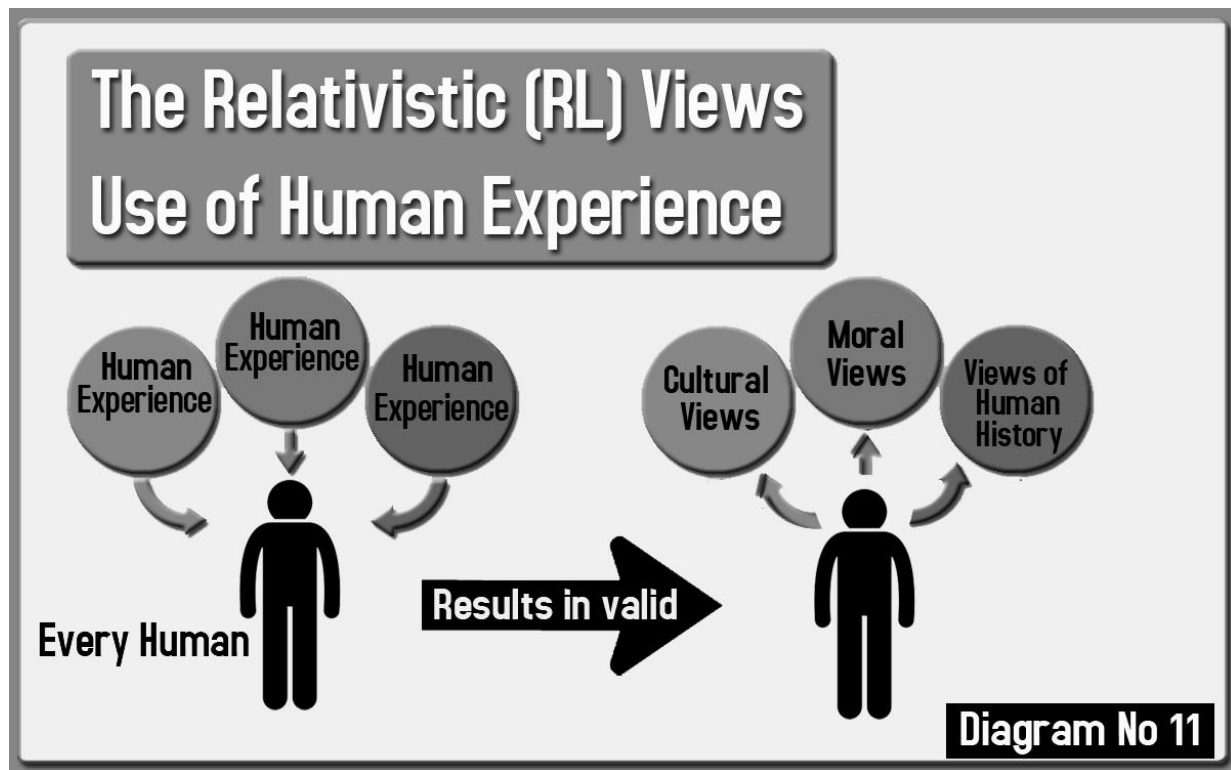
have the right to determine, and finally, a flawed understanding of what has produced an apparent unity with humanity.

### The Shortcomings of the Relativistic (RL) View

As the CEM now turns its attention toward the RL view of human history, Christian apologists are reminded once again that in the western world, this is the view of human history that will most likely be held by those who do not hold to a Christian, or Central Event view of human history. For this reason, the largest portion of chapter two, which dealt in greater length with these non CE views of human history, was spent on explaining the RL view. Here now is a review of the flaws that I believe are found within this view of human history.

The first shortcoming encountered is the RL view's illegitimate use of human experience. The overarching understanding within those who hold to the RL view of human history is that each culture has an inherent right to make decisions concerning human life and human history based solely on what each culture interprets from the experiences that are to be found within each culture. Therefore, experiences become the key player within the RL view.

The issue the CEM has with the use of experiences by the RL view is not with its belief that what individuals encounter within their life experiences is important. The CEM believes that human experiences are extremely significance. The problem is how the RL view promotes the use of experience. Instead of using human experience as an aid in determining final decisions and judgments about areas of human life and human history, for the RL view, experience becomes the only tool. One serious shortcoming with this way of using experiences results when one considers just how many possible final judgments can be made when each and every individual is given the right to come to their own conclusions through what they believe to be



their own personal experiences. This is clearly what Melville J. Herskovits, a major proponent of the RL view unashamedly declares is not only an expected result, but one that he believes is perfectly legitimate.<sup>242</sup>

When Christian apologists address someone who holds to this view and the use of personal or cultural experience as a final determinant or judge, they can do so with the confidence that the CE view also shares a high view of human experience. It is impossible for a human to experience human life without having human experiences. The use of the five human senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell by each human is absolutely essential to provide each individual with some level of understanding of their personal human experience. But experiences alone, without some context or other guiding set of parameters would seem to result in a less than perfect judgment or final determination of what each experience means. John

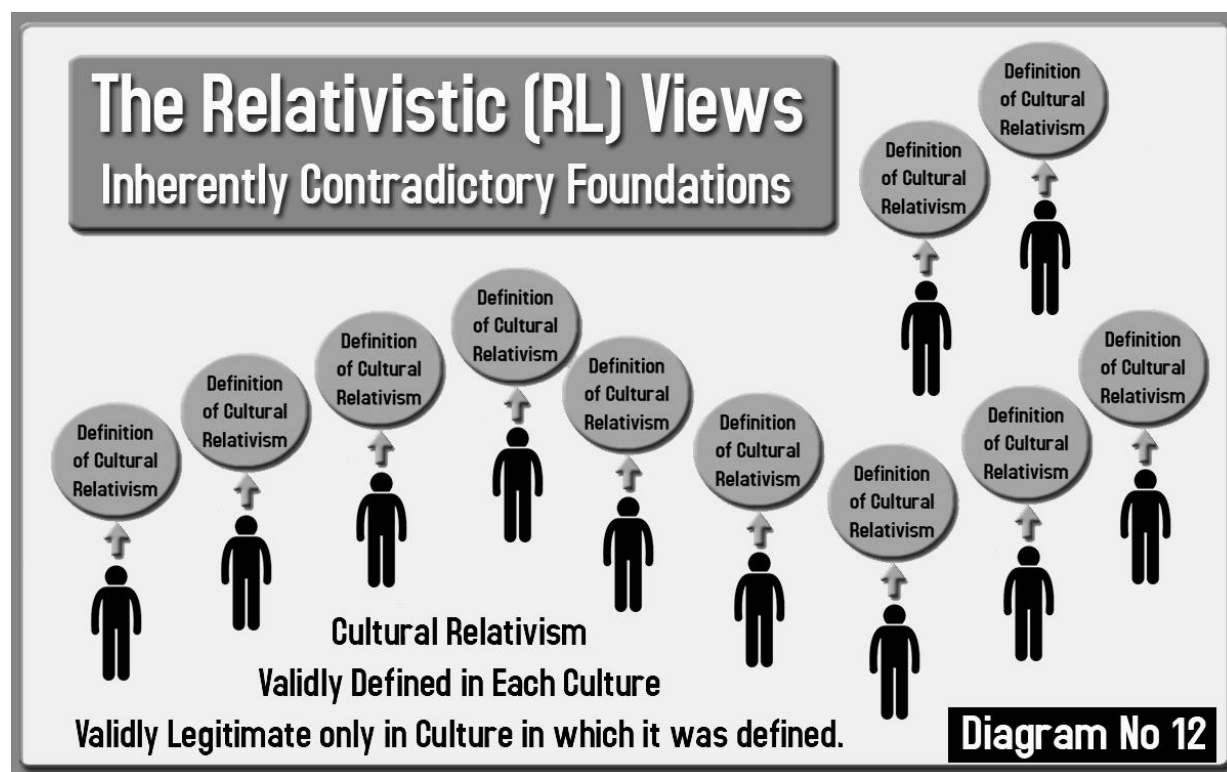
<sup>242</sup> Herskovits, "Cultural Relativism and Cultural Values," 6. Herskovits declares that "judgments are based on experience..." and furthermore, this "experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation."

Wesley, the father of Methodism, held human experience in very high regard. But he did not believe experience alone could ever be used as a final judge or determinant. Rather, he believed experiences, along with the guiding parameters and co-judges and co-determinants of tradition, rational thought, and most importantly, Christian Scripture, of which he believed stood over and above the other three, were also absolutely necessary.<sup>243</sup>

The next shortcoming that the CEM believes that Christian apologists will find when they look seriously at the RL view of human history, is this view's inherently contradictory foundation. As was stated in chapter two, the CEM is willing to acknowledge that the RL's position concerning cultural influences and how these influences can impact the judgments and conclusions that a particular culture will produce through the experiences they encounter is something that obviously can and does occur. And likewise, the CEM believes that to deny this fact at its most basic level would require one to also deny that different cultures with different practices and beliefs exist. But what Christian apologists need to be aware of is that the CEM does not believe that the focus should be placed on how or why certain judgments and conclusions about human life and human history are developed. Rather, the issue lies in the RL's position that all culturally formed judgments and conclusions can be valid in one culture, but not necessarily be valid in another culture. And where the CEM believes this becomes really problematic is when the judgments or conclusions produced within this view of human history fall within the realm of morality. This problematic result is most prevalent within those among

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<sup>243</sup> Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral," 8. Here he quotes Wesley, in dealing specifically with how use should use these four determinants of Scripture, tradition, rational thought, and experience, when it comes to issues of faith, wrote "first appeal was to the Holy Bible... [then to] Christian tradition at large as competent, complementary witnesses to "the meaning" of this... [Next he] he insisted on logical coherence and as an authorized referee in any context between contrary propositions or arguments. [And finally] the vital Christian *experience* of the assurance of one's sins forgiven, that clinched the matter.



the RL camp who are specifically labeled moral relativists<sup>244</sup>, but the CEM believes that the majority of those who hold to some form of a RL view, tend to be perfectly at ease with allowing the basic tenants of relativism find their way into the moral realm. This is the case with John Tilley, who declared that “every moral judgment is universally relative.”<sup>245</sup>

Therefore, it seems that what the RL view and proponents like Tilley are saying is that since morality, and judgments about morality can be culturally specific, what is moral in one culture may be immoral in another. And if this is true, then at the heart of the RL view there appears to exist an inherent contradictory foundation. But what is also quite obvious, and a point

<sup>244</sup> Westacott, "Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy," Moral Relativism is defined as “the view that moral judgments are true or false only relative to some particular standpoint.”

<sup>245</sup> Tilley. "Cultural Relativism", 505.

that Christian apologists should not miss, is in how this inherently contradictory foundation that the view is built upon is also what seems to nullify it. For, as Janet Kanarek<sup>246</sup> believes, since cultural relativists must accept that the very theory that cultural relativism is founded upon, just like any judgment or conclusion, has to have been formed within a particular culture, then it too cannot be applied cross culturally, or be considered valid for all cultures. (See Diagram No 12) Therefore, by its own admission, cultural relativism, and the RL view, has no validity outside of the culture it was formed within, and thus, it would be a contradiction of its very definition to apply this theory to any other culture beyond the culture of origination. And as Vincent Ruggiero has stated, “the fundamental test of any idea is whether it can be applied without creating insurmountable difficulties and contradictions,”<sup>247</sup> and the CEM holds to a position that the RL view and its culturally relative foundations cannot do this.

The next shortcoming the CEM believes that Christian apologists can find within the RL view, is in how this view of human history seems to possess the most serious potential to lead to self-centered views, which in turn can lead to significant notions of self-aggrandizing. To explain why the CEM believes this, and to also address the question concerning the additional label of self-aggrandizing, which I have not done in my criticism of the CY or HP views, the CEM has chosen to use as an example, the RL views of Johann Gottfried von Herder.

Herder was an 18<sup>th</sup> century German clergyman who also a philosopher, theologian, and most famously, a social critic. Herder was praised in his day for his criticism of how many European nations were racing for empires without considering the views or cultural rights of many of the people who inhabited the areas of the world being forced under their control.

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<sup>246</sup> Kanarek, “Critiquing Cultural Relativism,” 6

<sup>247</sup> Ruggiero, *Corrupted Culture*, 112.

Herbert S. Lewis wrote that Herder's views concerning the legitimacy of cultural relativism was "a direct consequence of opposition to colonialism, cultural arrogance, and ethnocentrism..."<sup>248</sup>, which he believed Herder saw within colonialism. But a utopian world where every culture's views and beliefs were acknowledged and accepted as equally legitimate and equally valid, was not what many scholars saw as the result of Herder's push for an RL view of human life and human history. Instead, it seems as though what was produced was an extremely self-aggrandize German nationalism. And this turned out to be a German nationalism that played a significant role in two horrific world wars and a world-wide economic depression.<sup>249</sup>

The final shortcoming that the CEM wants to present to Christian apologists surrounds what the CEM believes is the omission of the three key components that a view of human history needs to possess if it is to be viewed as a legitimate view of human history. These three key components include direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning. The CEM believes that in the case of the RL view, none of these three are met sufficiently, or at the very least, if any claims for them exist within a culture, their validity does not extend beyond that particular culture.

I defined direction, or specifically the direction that I am looking for within a view of human history, as being that which helps humanity come to a clearer understanding that human history has not only come from somewhere, but that it is also heading somewhere. Or, another way of looking at direction within human history, might be to think of it as that which helps mankind look beyond the details and events of its daily existence. Instead, direction enables

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<sup>248</sup> Lewis, *In Defense of Anthropology*, 117.

<sup>249</sup> Kanarek, "Critiquing Cultural Relativism," 11, and Paul Hasall, "Johann Gottfried von Herder: Materials for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind, 1784." Both these authors support the notion that Herder's RL (cultural relativistic) views produced a reality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that was in diametrical opposition to what Herder claimed it would lead to.

mankind to see that patterns do exist within human history, patterns that mankind can participate with that can help to lead it to also find purpose and ultimate meaning with human history.

Therefore, when Christian apologists look to the RL view in an effort to see if there exists any form of significant direction, it would seem that they cannot look at the RL view as a whole, but instead, the CEM believes that Christian apologists appear to be forced to look at each culture individually. This is due in large part to the very foundation upon which the RL view has been built. Since cultural relativists openly admit, as I have previously shown, that cross cultural judgments are not supposed to exist, then it would seem the same situation would also have to be applied to the search for direction. Since, as Kanarek declared previously for us, “convictions have neither applicability nor truth outside of the cultural context from which they originate,”<sup>250</sup> then what one culture might view as direction would not necessarily be viewed as direction in another. And, if the RL view cannot provide any form or tool to produce some universally accepted view of direction, then the CEM believes that Christian apologists can conclude that none exists.

As Christian apologists next turn their focus on determining whether or not the RL view can provide any purpose that the same situation which caused the view to lack any significant direction has done the same for purpose. As was defined earlier in this study, the CEM holds that purpose within the human experience and human history is found when mankind finds that he is given an opportunity to participate with the direction that he finds. If, as seems to be the case with the RL view, no direction exists, then finding purpose from that direction does not seem possible.

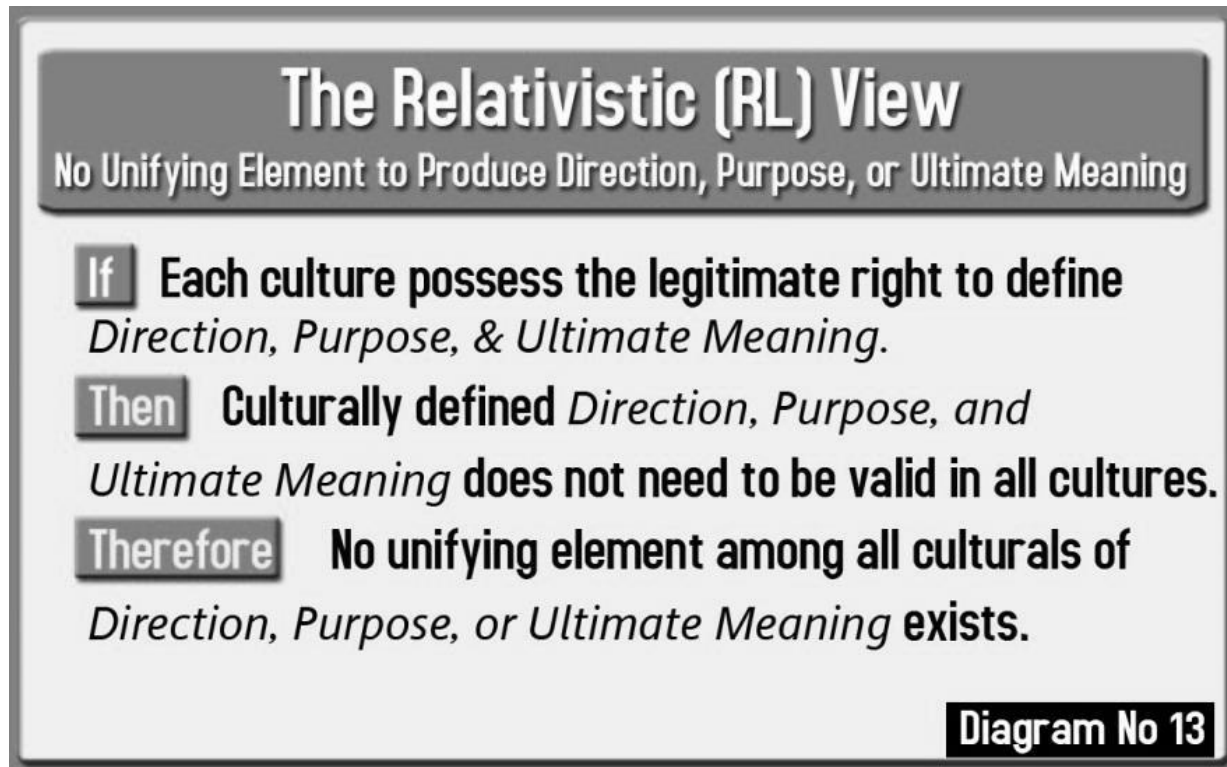
There is yet another important factor at play within the RL view that Christian apologists must also consider. This factor is that the direction that mankind finds within human history,

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<sup>250</sup> Kanarek, “Critiquing Cultural Relativism,”... 6



which in turn helps mankind find his purpose, is a God ordained direction. A God ordained direction is a direction that the CE view and the CEM believes is found through the witnessing of God acting and fulfilling His promises to mankind within human history. But if you eliminate the possibility of God acting within human history, like RL proponents like Herder do, then from the outset, the possibility of finding direction or purpose are likewise eliminated.<sup>251</sup>



Therefore, it is the very foundation on which the RL view is built that prevents it from producing a legitimate way to determine for all cultures an acceptable definition of direction or purpose within human history. And it is also the RL's foundation that seems to eliminate any possibility of divine intervention within human history, something which the CEM believes is

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<sup>251</sup> Herder, *Reflection on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, 6. This elimination of divine intervention by Herder specifically, is seen by Herder's claim that God does not assist mankind through any miracle, and instead, has left man's fate within his own hands. See also Norman L. Geisler, *Miracles & the Modern Mind*, as found in R. Douglas Geivett & Gary R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1997.) 73-85. Here we find Geisler outlining the Humean position against miracles, and thus, God's intervention, as an illegitimately argued position.

needed for mankind to find direction and purpose. If both of these statements are true, then Christian apologists would be on the right track if they were to conclude that these two foundational pieces of the RL view also seem to severely impact and limit the search for ultimate meaning within this view of human history. Meaning, is that which must come from outside of or from beyond mankind. It is that overarching transcendence that provides the unity mankind needs to first, encounter a God ordained direction, and second, allow for mankind to find his purpose by participating with this God ordained direction. And in finding his purpose, mankind also can find ultimate meaning as he likewise finds that the relationship he once had with God is being restored.

Therefore, it is the position of the CEM that within the RL view, Christian apologists will find a view of human history that does not allow for any unifying element to exist in order to produce a unified view of direction, purpose, or ultimate meaning. And without this unity, then any direction, purpose, or ultimate meaning that any culture using the RL view might claim, just as is the case with any other culturally specific claims, it cannot offer the same for anyone outside of their culture.

### The Central View of Human History

The CEM, or Central Event Model, is a teaching model that is centered on the position that the Central Event (CE) view of human history is a superior view of human history. The CEM believes that the CE view is superior, because it is the only view of human history among the alternative views presented in this study that can provide humanity with the direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning, three aspects that it believes mankind is seeking in order to help to answer significant questions surrounding the human experience and human history. In

addition, the CEM believes that the CE's superior position is also attained by the fact that it is the one view of human history that also possesses the greatest potential to prevent a self-centered and self-focused outcome.

Since chapter three and four of this study spent a considerable amount of time explaining what I mean by the Central Event (CE) view of human history, it will not be the CEM's goal to restate that same information here. Rather, what the CEM will attempt to do is to use this portion of the study to compare and contrast the CE view with the other three alternative views of human history addressed in this study.

### **How the CE View differs from the CY, HP, and RL Views of Human History**

In this portion of the study, it will be the CEM's goal to provide Christian apologists with a basic comparison and contrast between the CE view and the other three alternative views of human history addressed in this study. This will help both Christian apologists, and those individuals with whom they encounter who may not hold to a CE view of human history, to see some important ways these views are similar, but more importantly, why the aspects concerning the CE view that do differ from the other views are essential.

As was stated previously, the CE view does not contest the existence of cyclical or circular patterns that greatly influence the human experience. Proponents of the CE view also experience the seasons of the year and cycles of human life. However, where the CE view differs greatly from the CY view, is in the fact that the cyclical patterns of human life, while acknowledged, are not used by the CE view to define all of human history. Rather, what the CE view believes is the legitimate tool whereby human existence and human history is to be defined, is through the acceptance and influence of God Events (GE).

In chapter three, I defined a God Event as the following. A GE 1) is an actual historical event that occurs within human history. 2) It is also a supernatural event, which means that it has a source from outside of human history. 3) A GE is an event that possesses the special ability to actually stand out from the cyclical patterns of life, causing those cyclical patterns of life to fade into the background, and in doing so, transcend all of human history while yet still occurring within and impacting human history. 4) A GE must also possess and reveal what the CEM believes to be genuine and legitimate direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for human history that is limited only in that it is itself defined by and/or points to the Central Event of human history. And finally, 5) a GE must result in a view of human history that is other-centered and other-focused.

Chapter three of this study also went into great detail in arguing for and supporting why I believe that these five components make up what I have chosen to call God Events. Briefly reviewed, the CEM holds that any event that is to be deemed as being historical, must itself be an event that has occurred, or will occur within human history. Any argument to the contrary is simply illogical. The necessity that a GE be viewed as supernatural is also an argument from logic. If the event does not occur within the natural order of the human experience, but instead, comes from above or supra, it must be viewed as supernatural. However, the CEM understands that in the case of supernatural events, arguing from logic alone does not satisfy critics like Hume who rejects supernatural events *a priori*<sup>252</sup>. But at the same time I also presented in this study the views of individuals, like John Warwick Montgomery, who argue that discounting a

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<sup>252</sup> Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* 80.

claim form history, simply because it might seem remarkable or supernatural, is unacceptable.”<sup>253</sup>

In addition, when the CEM claims that a GE must be an event that is transcendent, it does so with the support of those like Wolfhart Pannenberg<sup>254</sup>, who held that it is through God acting within human history that allows mankind the ability to come to know God, in that it is through these events that God reveals himself to mankind. Finally, the core argument that the CEM is built upon is that a legitimate view of human history is one that provides mankind with direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning, and in the process, does not lead to a self-centered or self-focused result. Therefore, any accepted event that the CEM labels as a GE, cannot be an event that would work counter to that core argument.

With this definition established, I will now show Christian apologists how the CEM can be used to contrast the CE view with the CY view, and in doing so, show those whom they encounter to hold to a CY view, why the CE view is superior.

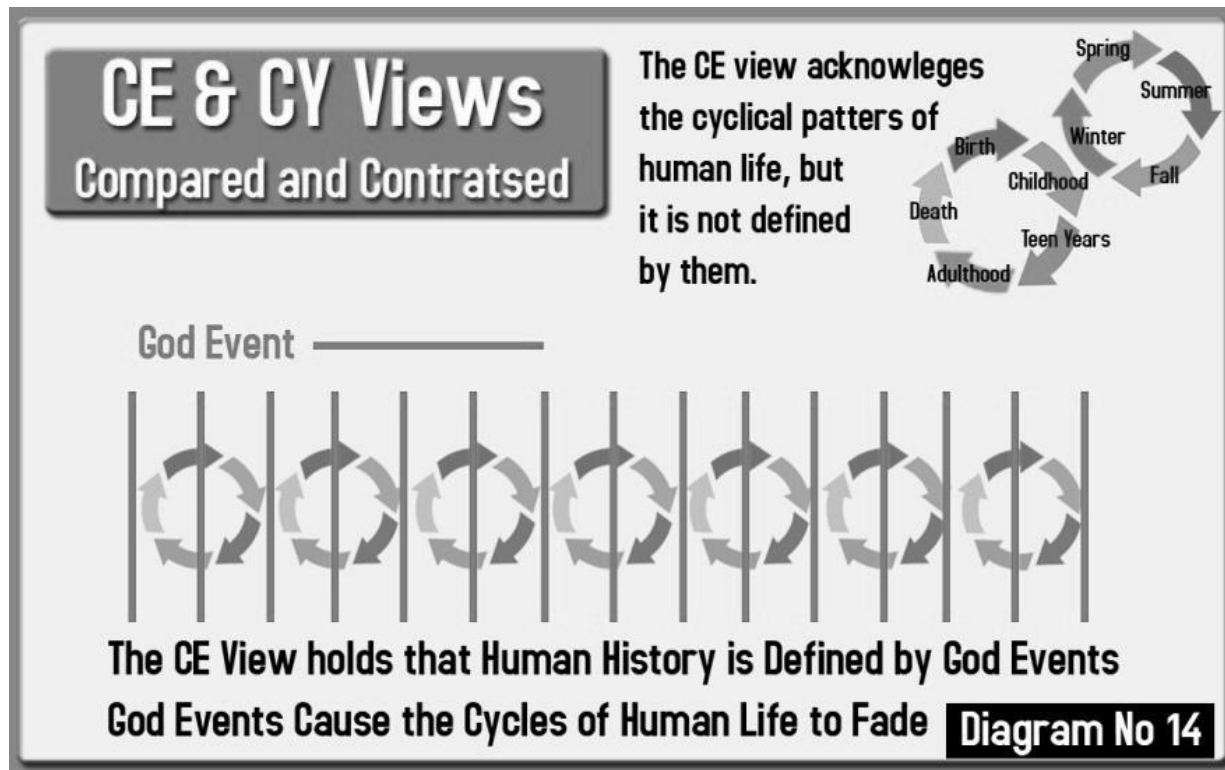
### The CE View and the CY View: Compared and Contrasted

As Diagram No 14 visual displays, the CE view acknowledges that cyclical patterns do exist within the human experience and human history. And it also acknowledges that these cyclical patterns are an important part of human existence and human history. However, this is not what defines the CE view. Rather, the CE view holds that God Events, events whereby God has acted within human history at specific times and specific places, is what defines human history. And, since these GE are actual historical events that occur at a specific time and place

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<sup>253</sup> Montgomery, *History and Christianity*, 21.

<sup>254</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality* 6-7.



within human history, they also possess a supernatural aspect whereby something about God is revealed to mankind within them, the importance and significance of which transcends that time and place where and when they occurred. This transcendent quality of the accumulation of these events, which also leads to an accumulation of mankind's knowledge and understanding of God, causes the cyclical patterns of human existence and human history to fade into the background. Their significance, while still a reality, pales in comparison to the significance that is found within the GE.

Therefore, while the cyclical patterns of the human experience and human history are important, and continue to be a part of each human's existence, forming a view of human history around them fails to provide humankind with anything that can stand out or over them. As David Bebbington has argued, the CY view of human history does not present anything beyond a cyclical existence, nor does it provide mankind with any way to escape from a seemingly

hopeless, purposeless, and meaningless existence. And even though the CY view may possess some direction, that direction is only cyclical. Furthermore, despite calls from religious views like Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, that have formed under the influence of the CY view, for followers to try to escape from the historical process, all that seems to result is an inward focus that does not seem equipped to help humans to move from beyond the self and self-centered or self-focused notions and understandings.<sup>255</sup>

But, in contrast to this apparent cycle of self-centered and self-focused existence, what the CE view offers mankind through these GE is a view of human history that can allow mankind to look beyond its daily existence to something that forces it to acknowledge that there is something over and above their own personal human existence.

As I now move onto the comparing and contrasting the CE view with the HP and RL views, Christian apologists will begin to see what they will find within the CE view will be more than just a cyclical direction. Rather, it is a linear direction that comes through the GE, which in turn, eventually helps mankind to find purpose and ultimate meaning as well

#### The CE View and the HP View: Compared and Contrasted

One very important comparison between the CE and HP view is that both these views of human history are linear. Simply put, this means they both hold that at some level human history had a beginning point, and it will also have an ending point, or at the very least history is coming from and or going somewhere. But, for the most part, this sharing of a linear view is where the comparison between these two views stops.

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<sup>255</sup> Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 25. See also Mackay commentary on , Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 22. See also Goddard and Borel's comments in Lao Tsu's, *Tao and Wu Wei*, chapter 22. Finally see Sara Rushing, *What is Confucian Humility*, 173.

Bebbington helps us see this more clearly as he provides an explanation to exactly how these two linear views contrast each other at almost every point. Speaking specifically about those within the Judaeo-Christian traditions that hold to a linear view of history from the CE perspective, he writes that “the historical process begins at a particular point, creation; and it continues under providential guidance to its goal, the last things,”<sup>256</sup> or the culmination of human history. But when this linear aspect is contrasted with those within the HP camp, things take a drastic turn. Bebbington continues, “The straight line of the Christian [CE] pattern is preserved, but the theological rationale is removed.”<sup>257</sup>

When Bebbington says the theological rationale is removed from the HP view, he is essentially saying that everything that makes the CE view unique, minus the linear shape, is essentially removed. The HP view does not allow for divine intervention, which means that it does not acknowledge any God Events, nor does it hold that anything beyond mankind has, can, or will alter the progress it believes mankind has, is, or will make. The result is a linear shape within the HP view that has a starting point at what it would call a time of uncivilized barbarianism. And the HP view has an ending point, which it would call a self-defined achievement of an ideal form of progress.

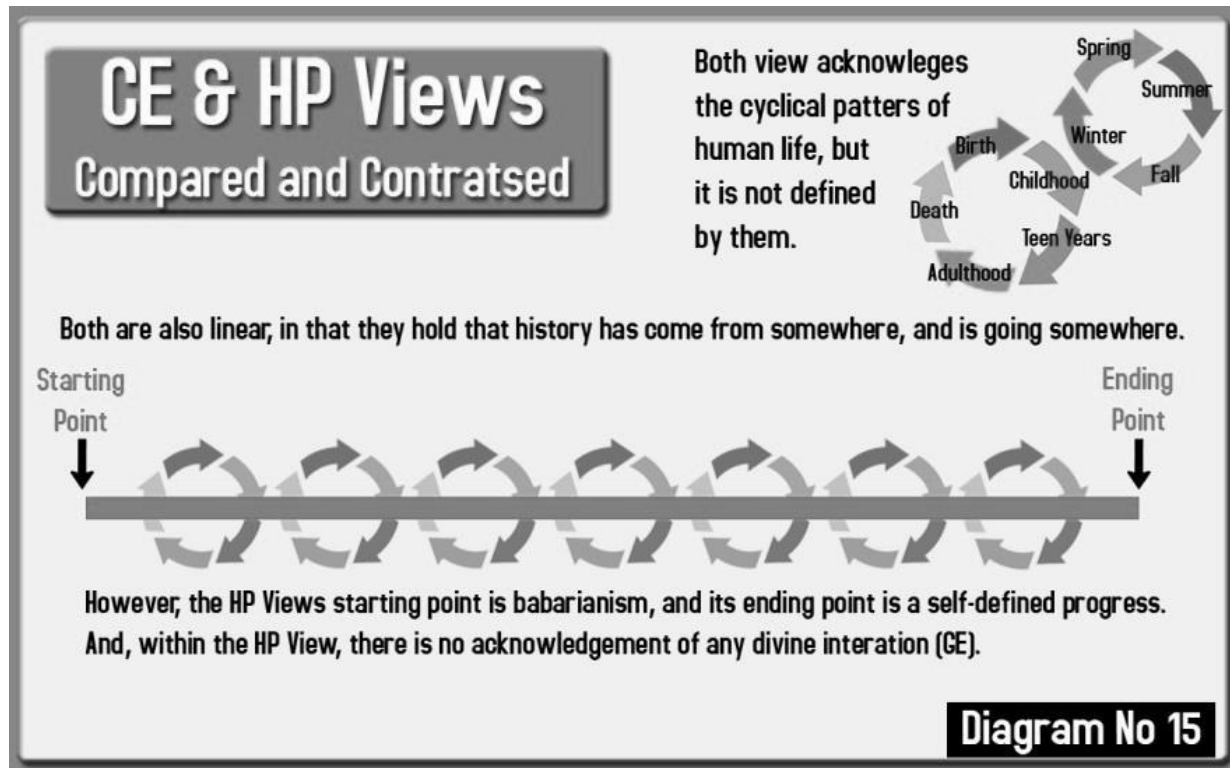
This removal of the theological rationale, or simply put, the removal of divine intervention, leaves mankind with only itself to look to for any lasting or significant direction, purpose, or ultimate meaning. But, as history has shown, although mankind may from time to time find that it has progressed from some point A to some point B, no progression via man alone has appeared to have continued indefinitely without some form of reshaping, restructuring,

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, 19.





or a redefining. For when proponents of the HP view in the 20<sup>th</sup> century looked around at the destruction and worldwide devastation within mankind's social, political, and economic structures, instead of looking beyond itself for answers, since the HP view does not allow that, mankind seems to have only been left with an option to conclude that its understanding of progress must have missed the mark. And, most likely, a new manmade one would take its place.

Regardless of how proponents of the HP view dealt with some obvious shortcomings of mankind throughout history, the only allowable focus within the HP view, mankind himself, seems to continue to struggle to offer any significant or lasting direction, purpose, or ultimate meaning, and instead, results in the very thing the view is built upon, a self-centered and self-focused result. For Christian apologists, the CEM believes that pointing out mankind's shortcomings is important when it comes to convincing a proponent of this view of why it

appears to be an illegitimate view of human history. However, it should be noted that when Christian apologists argues that the negative consequences of mankind's acts and deeds is a good indicator that a view of human history that relies solely on mankind's self-defined view of progress is not legitimate, they might be faced with having their CE view brought into question. The questions they might face is if their view, the CE view, holds that God can and does interact within human history, then where was God during these times of great suffering and devastation? This, unfortunately, is not always an easy question to answer, but G. Ernest Wright does offer proponents of the CE view some helpful words.

...in the Biblical view this does not mean that the responsibility of man for his own acts is removed, nor does it mean that God is unrighteous. There is always an element of mystery in God at this point, but Biblical man simply recognized what to him were simple facts: namely, that the primary acts of God were redemptive and reveal his saving purpose throughout all history, and that his acts of judgment were the just penalty on sin.<sup>258</sup>

#### The CE View and the RL View: Compared and Contrasted

When it comes to comparisons between the CE and RL views of human history, Christian apologists are likely to find few. At the heart of what separates or contrasts these two views of human history are diametrically opposing philosophical foundations. But, as previously stated, there is one aspect that these two views do share. This one aspect is that both views do place a high level of importance on human experience. However, whereas the RL view allows each culture, and at some level, each individual within each culture, the right to use their human experiences as tools to make final judgments and conclusions, the CE view is never willing to go as far. Rather, just as John Wesley<sup>259</sup> and Thomas Oden<sup>260</sup> have declared, while human

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<sup>258</sup> Wright, *The God Who Acts*, 82-83

experiences are key components in helping mankind come to a clearer understanding of a view of human history, they are still only one contributing factor. Experiences alone are never enough to allow for any final judgments or conclusions.

Within the CE view, human experiences, and in particular the experiences mankind has with the God whom the CE view believes is an active participant within human history, are clearly important. For it is by experiencing God through His activity and presence within human history (God Events) that the CE view believes mankind is able to find its direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning. But even though God allows mankind to participate within the process, it is still God who the CE view holds is both the creator and definer of these experiences. And while the CE view acknowledges mankind's limited capacity to fully understand all that God has, is, and will do within human history, it still holds to a position that mankind can find a sufficient understanding because of the faith it places in God's infinite capacity. Thus, when it comes to what the CE view believes is the legitimate way in which human experiences are to be used, it turns to Wesley, who helps the proponents of the CE view to see, that "experience justifiably stands alongside Scripture<sup>261</sup>, tradition, and reason as authoritative criteria for the Christian faith, he did so to remind proponents of the CE view that all need to be taken into consideration when we reflect on basic Christian beliefs and how they impact human history."<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral – In John Wesley", 8. See also Don Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* 143.

<sup>260</sup> Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 331-341.

<sup>261</sup> The CE view includes Scripture into the larger understanding of Revelation.

<sup>262</sup> Don [Donald A.D.] Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral*, 143. This four-fold formula, with Scripture as primary and tradition, reason, and experience, as significant, but secondary, is also supported by Thomas C. Oden. See Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology*, harpercollins paperback ed., vol. v. 1, *The Living God* (San Francisco, Calif.: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 331-341.

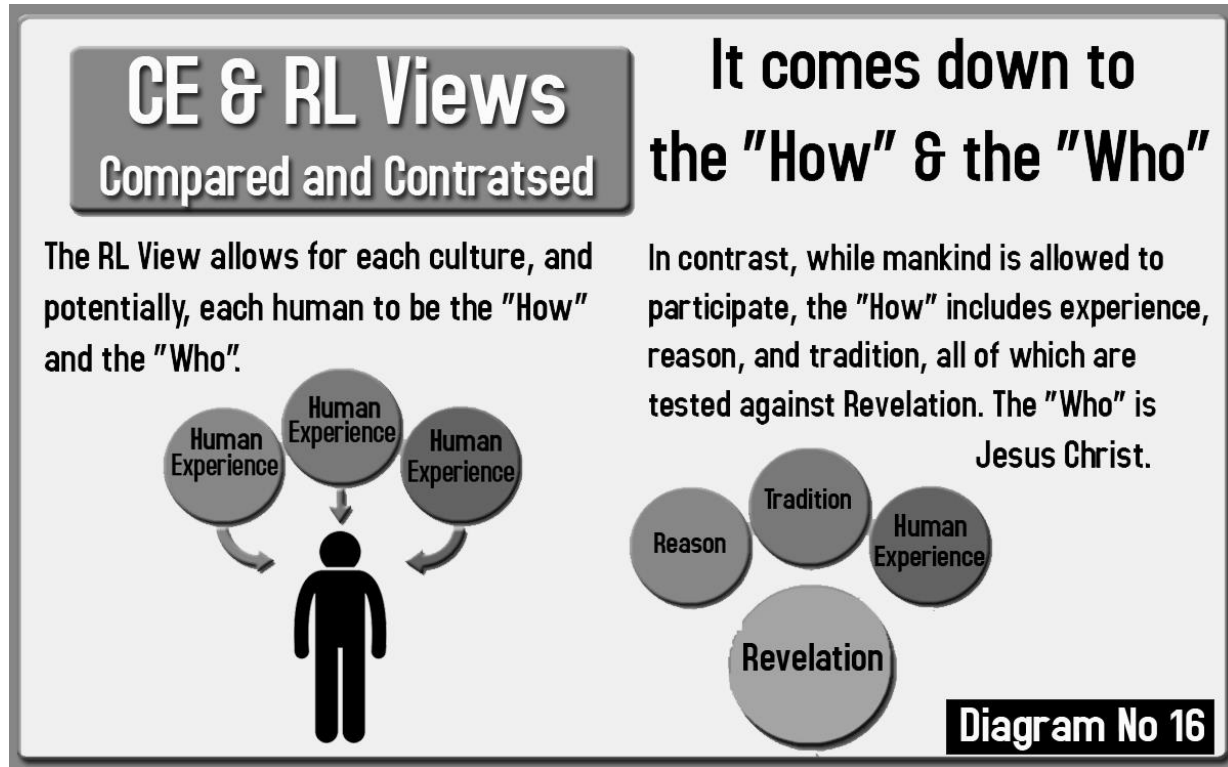
While one could view the differences over the use of human experiences between the CE and RL views as being the how each view is formed, the second area where these views contrast significantly could be viewed as the who within the formation process. As I shared earlier, Melville Herskovits defined the cultural relativistic perspective that has influenced the formation of the RL view of human history, as being one where not only is experience elevated to the level of the tool whereby final judgments and conclusions can be drawn, he also stated that “experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation.”<sup>263</sup> Therefore, in the process of making final judgments and conclusions about the human experience and human history within the RL view, the who is to be accepted as every culture individually. And, based on Herskovits words here, it seems it could be argued to potentially included each and every individual within each and every culture.

In contrast, what one finds within the CE view when one is seeking the who within the formation process, is not a seemingly endless number of competing candidates that stake an equally legitimate and valid claim, rather, the CE view offers a single who in Jesus Christ. For within the CE view, a view that finds its human history shaped by its acceptance and acknowledgement of God Events, there stands one God Event that it has deemed as the Central of all the God Events, that being the Christ Event.

As one comes to understand the philosophical foundations of these two opposing views, the resulting differences become quite obvious. Within the RL view, a view that allows each culture and potentially each individual, to produce equally valid judgments and conclusions based on their own personal human experiences, the results are at the least a culturally-centered and culturally-focused result, and at its extreme, a self-centered and self-focused one. However,

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<sup>263</sup> Herskovits, “Cultural Relativism and Cultural Values, in Satris, ed., *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Moral Issues*, 6.



within the CE view, whereby the focus is turned outward toward Christ, there seems to be a greater potential for a result that, at least, should be an other-centered and other-focus, and at its best, a Christ-centered and Christ-focused result.

Therefore, when Christian apologists measure the CE view up against the RL view, the confidence that they seek within the CE view when it is contrasted with the RL view, ultimately does not have to rest on their own shoulders. Rather, Christian apologists can rest on the knowledge that what makes the CE view superior is not just found within the "how" it was formed, but more importantly, it is found within the "who" that formed it. For in the Christ Event, the event the CEM believes has the greatest potential in producing direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning for mankind, so too is found a more than sufficient foundation for the Central Event view of human history.

## Why the Central Event View Needs Its “Central Event”

Beyond the areas presented above, whereby the CE view has been compared and contrasted with the other alternative views of human history presented within this study, there stands two areas that the CEM believes are by far the most important. These two areas surround the CEM’s position that 1) what allows it to claim that the CE view of human history is the superior view of all the views presented here, is that only within the CE view is mankind able to sufficiently and legitimately find direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning within human history. And, 2) that the CE view is the only view that seems to be able to produce an other-centered and other-focused outcome. And, at the heart of this position, is the added belief that among all the Central Events, or what I have labelled God Events, there is one God Event that stands far over and above all other God Events. This Central Event is the Christ Event, and event which includes the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

As a reminder, the direction that mankind finds within the CE view is the direction that both the Israelites of the Old Testament and Christians within the New Testament era and beyond, witnessed through the fulfillment of the promises that God has, is, and continues to make toward mankind. As G. Ernest Wright declared, the direction that grabbed ahold “of the Biblical man’s attention... [was] on what God had done, was doing and was yet to do according to his intention. Promise to fulfillment thus became the central Biblical themes.”<sup>264</sup>

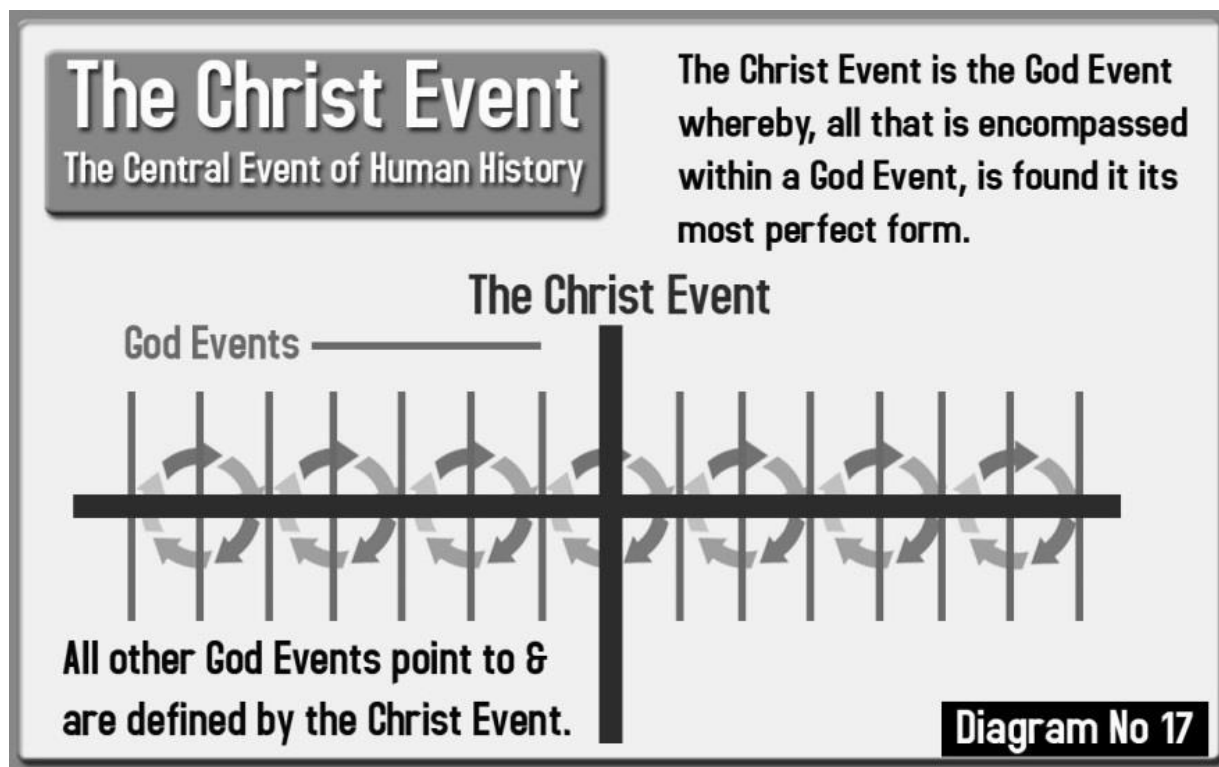
Next, through mankind’s focus, which was now turned toward this series of promises that God had, was, and continues to fulfill, one finds mankind finding its purpose within God’s larger plan. This purpose mankind found was realized within the Old Testament, where Wright saw God offering purpose to the Hebrew people in His choosing them to be the line through which

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<sup>264</sup> Wright, *God Who Acts*, 25.

He would send the Messiah, the incarnate Jesus Christ<sup>265</sup>. This purpose was also realized within the New Testament or Christian era. Christopher Dawkins wrote that “Christians not only believe in the existence of a divine plan in history, they believe in the existence of a human society which is in some measure aware of this plan and capable of co-operating with it.”<sup>266</sup>

Thus, with mankind’s focus now turned toward the direction it found within human history, one that was shaped through what it witnessed in the fulfillment of God’s promises to mankind, mankind was now also able to find its purpose. And this purpose was mankind’s opportunity to participate with God, and His plan, through the sharing of this reality of a direction and purpose within human history with his fellow man and woman. This in turn, led mankind to also find the ultimate meaning it had sought within the human experience. And what



<sup>265</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>266</sup> Christopher Dawkins, “The Christian View of History,” in *God, History, and Historians*, ed. C.T. McIntire (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 44.

was this ultimate meaning that mankind found? It was an ultimate meaning that came, not from mankind, but from beyond mankind. For it was not found in mankind's own seeking, but in God actively seeking mankind in an effort to restore the relationship with God that mankind had lost when sin entered the world. And, although it does seem possible, in the view of the CEM, that mankind can find direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning through each of the God Events at some degree, it is only through the Central Event, the Christ Event, where this direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning are to be found in their most complete form.

This then is why the CEM believes it can claim that what Christian apologists are able to show those whom they encounter concerning the CE view of human history, is that at the heart of the CE view is the Christ Event that not only sufficiently meets all the previously stated requirements for a God Event, but it meets each of them with absolute perfection<sup>267</sup>. And how is it that the CEM can make such a claim? The CEM believes it is able to do this based on what Christians have come to understand about the nature of God. If, as Christians believe, God is perfect in all His characteristics, then it seems quite legitimate to also accept that there is nothing

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<sup>267</sup> The claim that the Christ Event meets all requirements for a God Event with absolute perfection, is based on the view held by Christians that the Father, God, and the Son, Jesus, are One. And if God and Jesus are One, then everything that Christians hold to be true about God is the same as what they hold to be true in Jesus. And if God is perfect, then Jesus and all that is included within the Christ Event is also perfect. For further clarification on the prevailing view of God's perfection, this study offers the following. George Christian Knapp, *Lectures on Christian Theology*, (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1831), 156. Knapp provides a solid and succinct definition. He writes that "the best definition of God, -- the one in which all others are comprehended, is the following: God is the most perfect being, and in this cause of all other beings. (a) the first clause of this definition is comprehensive of all the particular attributes, by which God is distinguished from other beings, such as eternity, necessity, independence, freedom and perfection of will, etc. This definition may be expressed in more popular and scriptural language, by saying, God is the supreme being, the Most High, exalted over all, to whom none can be compared. (b) The second clause of this definition is added, because the contemplation of all other beings, the aggregate of which is the world, facilitates the knowledge of this most perfect being, by rendering it obvious, that no other beings possess all the perfections, which are united in him. In this view, God is regarded not only as he is in himself, but also in the relation to other existing things." For a good summary of Pannenberg's understanding of God's perfection, see Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World, Volume 2 Trinity and Revelation*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014.) 294-295.



that God does that is not perfect. And because, as Pannenberg believed, it is only through the Christ Event, the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection, where God has chosen to fully reveal Himself,<sup>268</sup> then all that which was and is revealed by and through the Christ Event concerning God must likewise be deemed to be perfect.

This perfect aspect of the Christ Event is then experienced by a perfect direction within human history. This occurs as God's ultimate promise to provide a way through which mankind could have the relationship with God, a relationship that mankind lost when sin entered the world, restored, has, is, and will continue, to be fulfilled in the most perfect way possible. Likewise, mankind's purpose was, is, and continues to be, perfected through the Christ Event. This occurs when mankind found and, as he continues to find, that the promise of a restored relationship with God is not just a promise that Christ was offering to mankind, but moreover, was a promise that Christ was also allowing mankind to participate in by giving mankind the opportunity and commission to share this promise with its fellow man and woman. A promise of a restored relationship with God that, while it is still yet to come in its fullness within mankind's history<sup>269</sup>, has become a present reality through what was accomplished through the Christ Event. And within this purpose, a purpose that enabled and continues to enable mankind to not only find within Christ his own relationship with God being restored, but mankind also find that its focus was and continues to be turned outward and away from himself through the acceptance of the purpose made possible through the perfecting quality of the Christ Event. And as mankind now, as Augustine would concur, seems to be looking toward the heavenly city<sup>270</sup> finds that its

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<sup>268</sup> Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, 131-135.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>270</sup> Markus, *Saeculum*, 62-68. Refer to my earlier comments concerning R.A. Markus' views concerning Augustine in sub-section "A God Event is Other-Centered and Other-Focused" from chapter three, 108-110.

focus is becoming primarily centered on Christ. And this focus is one that includes an other-focused and other-centered reality, one in which mankind has and continues to witness through the perfecting quality of the Christ Event.

Finally, through this present promise of a future restored relationship with God, mankind has found that which gives the human experience, and likewise, all of human history its ultimate meaning. As mankind finds his ultimate meaning being perfected by the Christ Event, Pannenberg declares that mankind is also finding two additional significant realities being perfected. These two realities include 1) mankind's longing to experience in its fullest expression what it means to be created in God's image, and in mankind's experiencing through the Christ Event, 2) a perfect knowledge of absolute truth. For in experiencing in its fullest expression what it means to be created in God's image, mankind also, as Pannenberg declares, accepts God's first commandment to worship Him alone with a perfect knowledge of the absolute truth that in Christ, and through the Christ Event, God is revealed in His fullest expression to mankind and within human history.<sup>271</sup>

### The CEM Summary and Final Notes to Christian Apologists

What has been presented within this final chapter had as its stated goal to accomplish three objectives. These included 1) creating an awareness within Christian apologists of the importance of identifying the prevailing views of human history, 2) equipping Christian apologists with a concise and effective tool to share the Central Event. And 3) to allow apologists to participate with Christ by helping the world they encounter to meet a deep spiritual need that the CEM believes is present in our world today. And it is this deep spiritual need is that

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<sup>271</sup> Pannenberg, *Faith and Reality*... 85-86.

which is to be found within the human experience and a sufficient human history that must include a genuine direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning. The CEM believes that what it has presented within this final chapter has accomplished these objectives.

However, within each apologetic endeavor, Christian apologists are reminded that despite the likelihood that the majority of those whom they encounter within the world today will hold to some variation of the views of human history shared within this study, the individuals they encounter will likely not all hold to them at the same level or in a completely similar way. Therefore, there may be certain elements and examples shared within the first four chapters of this study, which were not specifically or fully shared in the final chapter, that Christian apologist might find more helpful in certain situations.

The apologetic endeavors of Christians today, as has been the case since that actual time and place whereby the Christ Event occurred within human history, remains challenging. But the CEM believes that Christian apologist have something of utmost importance on their side. It is what Pannenberg declared can be found within the restored relationship with God. A restored relationship that results in the realization that ultimate meaning can be found within the human experience and human history. And, a perfect knowledge of a perfect truth that accompanies this discovery of ultimate meaning found in Christ. Therefore, armed with the confidence that is guided by and through what Christ did, is doing, and will continue to do through the Central Event, the CEM believes strongly that Christian apologists can go into their world with a similar confidence that they too are following the true direction, experiencing the true purpose, and through it all, realizing that the only true ultimate meaning within the human experience and human history is to be found within the Central Event view.

## CONCLUSION

I began this study with the premise and belief that each individual, whether they are cognizant of the fact or not, comes to develop a view of human history. This is a view of human history that develops within each individual through various cultural, social, and religious experiences. And the significance of this view of human history comes to light, the CEM holds, when it is used to help individuals in their attempt to come to an understanding of the important questions that are often asked concerning human life and the human existence. And these important questions include those that might impact an individual's daily existence, but more often, they become questions that are concerned with larger issues surrounding direction, purpose, or ultimate meaning for both the individual's personal existence, and for their view of human history.

Chapter one of this study was used to review the significant voices and literature that contributed the most to the formation of the CEM. I am indebted to all of these voices and their contributions, but there stands four voices that I am indebted to the most. This includes David Bebbington's *Patterns in History*, and the way Bebbington helped to shed light on the "problem of the historian," and on the significant impact the historians "in the traditional sense" play in the formation and shaping of the various views of human history. Also included among these four voices is Arnold Toynbee and his *The Christian Understanding of History*. It was Toynbee that made me aware of the existence and significance of the human need for direction, purpose, and meaning that humanity has, is, and continues to seek within a view of human history. In addition, Toynbee is also credited in helping me to shape and define the categories of views of human history that were discussed.

G. Ernest Wright's *God Who Acts*, provided me with the best picture from the Old Testament of individuals, who themselves, realized that their lives were being shaped by and through how they saw God as an active participant with human history. It was through the witnessing of this activity by God that lead to the development of the formula of promise to fulfilment, which defined the direction that biblical man saw within human history, and which also helped biblical man to find his purpose and meaning.

And finally and most importantly, I am indebted to the various works that were reviewed in chapter one by Wolfhart Pannenberg. Better than anyone else, Pannenberg helped me to see the significance and impact of the Christ Event and to the reasons why I can confidently declare that within the Christ Event is found the one Central Event of all of human history.

In chapter two, this study reviewed what it holds are the three most common, non-Christian views of human history. These included the Cyclical, Human Progress, and Relativistic views. In so doing, I identified in various ways why I believe that none of these alternative views of human history seem to be able to address the key aspects that a sound view of human history must possess. These key aspects include providing mankind with direction, purpose, and ultimate meaning within the human experience and human history, and in the process, avoid leading individuals to a self-centered and self-focused result.

In chapter three I began my defense of the Central Event view of human history. To do this, I spent the bulk of the chapter in support of the existence of certain events within human history called God Events. These God Events are events whereby God has, is, and continues to be an active player within human history. Furthermore, I declared that these God Events must be 1) actual historical events, that are 2) supernatural in nature, 3) transcend all of human history, and which must 4) possess and reveal direction, purpose and meaning. And, in addition, how the

Central Event view of human history, which finds its foundation in and through these God Events, is able to result in an other-centered and other focused outcome.

Next in chapter four, this study applied these above stated requirements for God Events, to the Christ Event, which is the God Event that includes the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And furthermore, I showed how in one event, the Christ Event, mankind and all of human history, was, is, and continues to be given the one event that not only meets all the same requirements placed upon the God Events in chapter three, but it meets them in the most perfect way possible.

Finally, chapter five took all that I had argued in the first four chapters, and presented them as a clear and concise tool for Christian apologists. Through this Central Event Model (CEM), Christian apologists were provided a visual presentation of my overall thesis, along with support and suggestions for apologists that they can employ in their apologetic efforts with those whom they encounter who may not hold to a Central Event of human history.

In summary, I hold that I have demonstrated successfully that the only sufficiently legitimate view of human history, one that can provide mankind with a view of human history that includes a direction, a purpose, and ultimate meaning, while also avoiding a self-centered or self-focused view, is the Central Event view of human history.

I did this by first declaring that there exists within human history special times and places, deemed as God Events, whereby God has acted within human history. These God Events are events that have impacted all of human history and human existence; while at the same time have also served as times that God has used to revealed Himself to mankind. Furthermore, I declared that among these God Events, there stands one above all others which it deemed the Central Event of all of human history. This Central Event is the Christ Event, a God Event which

encompasses the Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. I hold that only within the Christ Event is God fully revealed. And since it is only through the Christ Event whereby God is fully revealed, the Christ Event is the one God Event within human history that all other God Events can point to, and likewise, be defined by. In doing so, the Christ Event provides mankind with a direction, a purpose, and ultimate meaning in the fullest and most perfect way possible. And when mankind embraces the Christ Event as the Central Event of all of human history, mankind finds a human history and a human existence that allows him to experience what it truly means to be created in the Image of God, which in turn allows mankind to also experience a real and genuine absolute truth. And for those who accept the promises that God has fulfilled in Christ, they likewise find a view of human history and human existence that is centered and focused on Christ, as well as being centered and focused outward on others for Christ. And through this outward focus, they humbly accept that because of Christ and what was accomplished within the Christ Event, they too will share in all that God has fulfilled through Him.

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