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Embodied Apologetics as Pragmatic Evidence for Christianity

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by

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

At every turn it seems modern Christianity is in retreat. According to Barna, "In 2000, 45 percent of all those sampled qualified as practicing Christians. That share has consistently declined over the last 19 years. Now, just one in four Americans (25%) is a practicing Christian."[1] Christians have few convincing answers for the pressing issues of the time or cogent arguments to counter a post-Christian worldview. Barna notes that half of the departures of practicing Christians are those who slid into non-practicing Christians while the other half walked away from faith completely to become non-Christians.[2]

The postmodern era left the world doubting the truth claims of Christianity. In a post-Christian world, many are ignorant altogether of the truth claims of Scripture. Their knowledge of Christianity is most likely rooted in the specific trappings of an individual church or denomination and how that expression of Christianity is manifested. The Church isn't winning people to Christ or "ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15).[3]

An increasing number of Christians live lives that are indistinguishable from the world. It is no wonder that the world is not being attracted to Christianity. It is not only that Christians do not have an answer for unbelievers, but they are not even being asked questions. For example, on

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[1] "Signs of Decline & Hope among Key Metrics of Faith," accessed May 19, 2024, https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/.

[2] "Signs of Decline & Hope among Key Metrics of Faith."

[3] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are taken from the New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

divorce, born-again Christians are now just as likely to divorce as non-Christians.[4] The world needs a witness to the validity of the truth claims of Scripture to show that living like Jesus works.

Statement of Purpose

Authentically[5] living like Jesus and following the clear commands of Scripture works. It leads to a visibly-fulfilling and satisfying life that provides a proof of the truth of Christianity. Pragmatism is very compelling to a wide range of worldviews because, regardless of the validity of a truth claim, people want to believe in things that they see working in the real world. One aspect of pragmatism as an apologetic is embodied apologetics. As Jesus stated, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

People should be Christians because, if they really did what the Bible says, then their lives would be better in every meaningful aspect. If people want a better marriage or to be a better parent or a better worker or a better boss or happier, they should become a committed follower of Jesus authentically living out the worldview espoused in the Bible. Augustine wrote, "If I were to ask you why you have believed in Christ, why you have become Christians, every man will answer truly, 'For the sake of happiness.'"[6] This subset of pragmatism would powerfully aid the Church not only in winning a lost world but also in strengthening the resolve

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[4] "Born again Christians are just as Likely to Divorce as Non-Christians," accessed May 23, 2024, https://www.barna.com/research/born-again-christians-just-as-likely-to-divorce-as-are-non-christians/.

[5] To live authentically means to live and act as one professes to believe. There should be no gap between expressed beliefs and witnessed behavior.

[6] As quoted in John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2011), 52.

of many Christians. The fact that the Bible's life instructions work is not a reason to believe, but it is a validation of its authenticity and of its truth claims.

Statement of Importance of the Problem

This thesis researches pragmatic apologetics and seeks to give hope to existing Christians and win non-believers to Christ. Not only this, but by using tools outside the biblical worldview the modern Christian is able to avoid an argument about the presupposition of Scriptural truth. By inverting the discussion of the causal link, the objection about the place of Scripture is sidestepped until the unbeliever is convinced of the truth of the Christian lifestyle. Being convinced about the truth of the Christian lifestyle doesn't cause, and may not even lead to, a decision to become a Christian. However, it should lead to a decision to believe that what the Bible says is true and that Jesus is who He said He was. The subtitle of this thesis could be *#JesusWorks*. Christians are called to "be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15). Peter's exhortation is not a suggestion; it is a command. It is important to obey this command to be able to effectively win unbelievers to Christ by living an authentic Christian life. Christ-followers are also called to "follow Christ". That mandate extends to living an authentic life that mimics Jesus' life.[7] This leads to fulfillment and abundance that bolsters the confidence of the believer and is attractive to a lost world. What believers say will not matter if their lives do not align with their faith.

Statement of Position on the Problem

Embodied apologetics serves as pragmatic evidence for Christianity. The lived experiences, visible practices and demonstrated values of believers serve as a compelling defense

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[7] Chapter 3 will deal in detail with what it means to mimic Jesus' life.

of the faith in a post-Christian society. This pragmatism extends to an individual's motivation. This thesis defines the solution to the problem as living out an authentic life based on the doctrines of primitive Christianity.[8] Doing so would equip modern Christians with the answers to the questions raised within a post-Christian society. It would also provide a powerful witness to the truth and relevance of the Bible. This author holds an embodied Christian life in the highest regard. There is no more effective witness, no more effective generator of peace and hope than to live like Jesus. This means to love as He loves, to forgive as He forgives, and to walk in integrity as He walks in integrity. The reason many Christians are unfulfilled and see no growth and no fruit is that their lives do not resemble Jesus' life. The answer to the questions and doubts of a post-Christian society is embodied Christianity. Behavior validates belief and is its best indicator. Only what is lived out in a life really matters when determining an individual's beliefs. Walter Brueggemann writes, "I practice daily what I believe; everything else is religious talk."[9] Christians must move beyond religious talk and provide substantive answers to life's biggest questions based on workable life actions.

Limitations/Delimitations

While this thesis addresses embodied Christianity in a post-Christian world, it does not primarily deal with other religions. The primary focus is Christianity versus atheism or secularism. Other religions will be addressed but not in an in-depth manner as with atheism. This thesis is also for evaluation in the current Western, post-Christian culture of the United States of

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[8] Primitive Christianity focuses on the beliefs, values, and experiences of the early church. This topic will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3.

[9] Walter Brueggemann, "Richer by Far," accessed June 17, 2024, https://richerbyfar.com/tag/walter-brueggemann-the-costly-loss-of-lament/.

America. No attempt is made to analyze the same solution in different cultural settings or at different points in history. Expressions of Christianity may have different forms based on the cultural context. What embodied Christianity looks like in principle is always the same everywhere and at all times. What embodied Christianity looks like lived out in an individual culture and time can be unique. This thesis chooses to compare the primary doctrines of primitive Christianity instead of a particular, current denominational expression of those doctrines. The very core claims of Christianity and the overriding principles present in the life of Jesus precede further specific developments of the understanding of specific doctrines and articulations of those doctrines.

CHAPTER 2: PRAGMATISM AS AN APOLOGETIC

Introduction

Utilizing pragmatism as an apologetic for determining spiritual truth is risky business. In his article, "Classical tradition and Judeo-Christian revelation in Clement of Alexandria", Claudio Calabrese writes, "If the being manifests the objectivity of the entity, the philosophical action puts the existence at stake."[10] Asking deep ontological questions while at the same time espousing a philosophy of pragmatism puts at risk the fundamental presuppositions of a worldview. But the worldview that is true should be capable of withstanding this kind of examination. Indeed, it should be better for it as any inconsistencies or inaccurate descriptions will be surfaced and must be resolved.

Over 65 years ago in his article, "Toward a Christian Pragmatism", Howard Burkle wrote, "If a philosophy does not promise immediate and tangible benefits, it has no point and does not receive serious consideration. The attitude involved here constitutes a culturally innate principle of verification, a marketplace pragmatism, which obscures and prejudges every truth claim."[11] This "marketplace pragmatism" is the measuring stick by which worldviews are ultimately judged. The question continually asked by individuals, even if not directly, is, "Does it work?"

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[10] Claudio Calabrese and Nassim Bravo, "Classical Tradition and Judeo-Christian Revelation in Clement of Alexandria," *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 3, no. 1 (2020): 57.

[11] Howard R. Burkle, "Toward a Christian Pragmatism," *The Christian Scholar* 41, no. 4 (1958): 578.

Defining Spiritual Pragmatism Through the Lens of Worldviews

Definition

According to Sung, in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, "[i]n a realist Christian perspective a worldview is, first and foremost, an outlook on reality composed of basic presuppositions about its composition and character, by means of which humans situate themselves in the world and interpret their lived existence as (to some extent) intelligible and (a few exceptions aside) as meaningful."[12] Worldviews help explain the world and make sense of it. Everyone has a worldview, whether acknowledged or defined or not. This worldview is the lens through which all moral decisions are made. It is how an individual sees the world. Worldviews can be inconsistent with what an individual espouses. That is a primary source of stress.

The words spoken aloud form an expression of an individual's worldview. This expression has a usual verbal meaning but also a pragmatic meaning. In his book, *Learning the Language of Scripture: Origen, Wisdom, and the Logic of Interpretation,* Mark Randall James writes concerning "the distinction between semantic and pragmatic aspects of an utterance. The semantic aspect is that which a sentence contributes to its meaning irrespective of its context of use, including the lexical meaning of its words. Its pragmatic aspect is that part of its function that depends on its use in a particular speech situation."[13] The pragmatic aspects of the verbal expression of a worldview are of critical importance when attempting to reconcile the words and

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[12] E. Sung, "Worldview," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, eds. W. A. Elwell and D. J. Treier (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 2474.

[13] Mark Randall James, Learning the Language of Scripture: Origen, Wisdom, and the Logic of Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 114.

actions of individuals. As much as these words are important, of greater importance are the actions individuals take.

Pragmatism is one measure of defining a worldview. It is defined by the actions its adherents take and the effectiveness of those actions. Pragmatism as a philosophical tradition in the United States dates to the 1870s. It emphasizes "human experience, practical methods, and scientific knowledge for dealing with philosophical issues."[14] Its focus has been on the practical.[15] This practical focus is one view of how to address or measure a worldview.

Nancy Pearcey in her book, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, writes, "The best way to drive out a bad worldview is by offering a good one, and Christians need to move beyond criticizing culture to creating culture."[16] The Bible frequently espouses the replacement principle. It is not enough to eliminate the negative; it must be replaced with the positive. It is not enough to abandon a wrong worldview; an individual must choose to embrace the correct worldview. Different worldviews will be explained further.

Competing Worldviews

The first worldview to be examined is Christianity. Once a dominant force in the American cultural landscape, Christianity has been in decline for several decades.[17] Tim Morey in his book, *Embodying our Faith: Becoming a Living, Sharing, Practicing Church*, writes about the American Church that it "has enjoyed a sort of home-court advantage. The nation was

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[14] John R. Shook and Tibor Solymosi, "Pragmatism: Key Resources," *Choice* 50, no. 8 (2013): 1367.

[15] Shook and Solymosi, "Pragmatism: Key Resources," 1373.

[16] Nancy Pearcey, Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 66.

[17] "Signs of Decline & Hope among Key Metrics of Faith."

culturally Christian, and the language that we used to describe God…was understood by the vast majority of Americans. When we spoke about God or Jesus, we could reasonably assume that roughly the same image would come to mind for the listener. The average person held values that were marginally Judeo-Christian."[18] This is no longer true. The Christian Church in America is no longer the center of the cultural life of the nation. This complicates understanding what qualifies as *the* Christian worldview. Reconciling primitive Christianity as espoused by the early Church with historic American Christianity requires balance. Including a view to the current state of the American Church is necessary for a well-rounded worldview.

The primary facet of the primitive Christian worldview is that of the nature of God. His sovereignty can be described in many ways. In his book, *The Things of Earth: Treasuring God by Enjoying His Gifts*, Joe Rigney quotes John Calvin when he writes, "The world was no doubt made, that it might be a theatre of the divine glory."[19] Further Rigney quotes Gerard Manley Hopkins when he writes, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."[20] God is omnipotent (Rev 19:6), omniscient (Heb 4:13), sovereign (1 Tim 6:15), beneficent (Psa 145:9), and transcendent (1 Kgs 8:27). Love is his very nature (1 John 4:16). God had no beginning (Psa 90:2), never changes (Mal 3:6), and has no end (Psa 102:27). The prophet Isaiah writes that his "ways are higher than [our] ways" (Isa 55:8-9). The Christian worldview is centered on the very character of God and that what he has communicated in His written Word is trustworthy and true (cf. Psa 19:7; 119:160).

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[18] Tim Morey, Embodying our Faith: Becoming a Living, Sharing, Practicing Church (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 140.

[19] J. Rigney and J. Piper, *The Things of Earth: Treasuring God by Enjoying His Gifts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 61.

[20] Rigney and Piper, *The Things of Earth*, 61.

Fundamental to a holistic Christian worldview is an understanding of the origin of mankind. Reinhold Niebuhr was famous as a Christian theologian who espoused Christian Pragmatism, which is a Christian version of principled pragmatism. Principled pragmatism is the middle ground between idealism and pragmatism devoid of principles. [21] In his article, "Reinhold Niebuhr and the Ethics of Christian Realism", John Marsden writes of Niebuhr's position, "any account of the human subject as sinner should always be juxtaposed with that of imago Dei or original righteousness. The two, he insists, must be held together in creative tension."[22] In the Christian worldview, human beings are both sinners by nature and image bearers of God. This shapes everything that flows doctrinally from Christian thought. In returning to Niebuhr, in his article, "Reinhold Niebuhr's 'Christian Pragmatism': A Principled Alternative to Consequentialism", Mark Haas writes,

> Although Niebuhr believed that the principles of justice were to be applied pragmatically…they were to be derived deontologically…The result of this two-step process of applying deontologically derived principles in a pragmatic fashion was an effective strategy…for fulfilling the prescriptions of the law of love to the greatest degree possible, given the world as it is.[23]

The tension between the two natures of mankind is present in this balancing act. The law of love is based in the image of God that mankind bears while the "world as it is" is a result of the sin nature of mankind corrupting the current world.[24]

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[21] Tony Payne, "Uncovering the Principles in our Pragmatism," accessed June 17, 2024, https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/uncovering-the-principles-in-our-pragmatism/.

[22] John Marsden, "Reinhold Niebuhr and the Ethics of Christian Realism," *International Journal of Public Theology* 4, no. 4 (2010): 492.

[23] Mark L. Haas, "Reinhold Niebuhr's 'Christian Pragmatism': A Principled Alternative to Consequentialism," *The Review of Politics* 61, no. 4 (1999): 605.

[24] The law of love is found in Jesus' greatest commandment recorded in Matthew 22:39, "You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." A sin nature is the nature that all human beings possess because of Adam's choice. This is detailed in Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

A third, more philosophical, aspect of the Christian worldview is that of affections. John Piper is a pastor/theologian who places a high emphasis on enjoying God and not just following Scriptural mandates of morality. Piper is apropos when he writes in his book, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight*.

> Perhaps you can see why it is astonishing to me that so many people try to define true Christianity in terms of decisions and not affections. Not that decisions are unessential. The problem is that they require so little transformation. Mere decisions are no sure evidence of a true work of grace in the heart. People can make 'decisions' about the truth of God while their hearts are far from Him. We have moved far away from the biblical Christianity of Jonathan Edwards. He pointed to 1 Peter 1:8 and argued that 'true religion, in great part, consists in the affections.'[25]

Christians are to be known not primarily for what they believe but for whom and for how they love. Jesus says in the great commandments that all are called to, "Love the LORD your God with all you heart, with all your soul, and with all you mind…and to love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt. 22:37–39)

There are a multitude of non-Christian, theistic worldviews. These range from the other great monotheistic religions of Judaism and Islam to eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Each of these is unique and has its own tenants and beliefs. There are widespread and fundamental differences in many of these worldviews as their core doctrines are radically different; however, many share a common basis for a theistic worldview. A theistic worldview acknowledges the existence of a divine entity or entities and defines the relationship between that being(s) and humanity as foundational to the understanding of the worldview. Paul Feinberg writes that atheism comes from the Greek word *atheos* and means "without God."[26] The atheist

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[25] John Piper, The Dangerous Duty of Delight: Daring to Make God Your Greatest Desire (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2001), 22.

[26] Paul Feinberg, "Atheist," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, eds. W. A. Elwell and D. J. Treier (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 241.

worldview is described in scientific and secular terms. Only what is observed scientifically

exists. The immaterial is the unreal to an atheist. By definition, it is in direct opposition to a

theistic worldview. These differing worldviews present an opportunity to utilize pragmatism to

judge the truth claims that each makes.

Truth Claims of Worldviews

There are many methods to evaluate truth claims, but one is pragmatism. Although
Wagner is writing about church growth, he defines pragmatism appropriately when he writes,

> Clearly, the chief criterion that determines which strategy we choose is whether it
> accomplishes the goal. In a broad sense, no other criterion justifies choosing the means
> you use to accomplish a certain goal. It would be irresponsible to invest time, energy and
> money in some process that would not achieve your objectives.[27]

This philosophy works with a variety of disciplines, including the examination of worldviews.

An example of this is when Louis Ruprecht writes, "Reinhold Niebuhr…understood the

combination of a tragic sensibility with his moral-political version of 'Christian realism' as

necessary for a meaningful prophetic social engagement, that is, a 'Christian pragmatism'"[28]

Niebuhr knew that principled-pragmatism viewed through a Christian worldview required an

acknowledgement of how the world is and not just how one might hope it to be. This provided an

important reason for espousing a realistic view of determining one's actions.

There is historical precedence for this approach in Christianity itself. It is the Social

Gospel. Welch writes, "A transatlantic and trans-denominational movement spanning roughly

from the 1870s to the first half of the twentieth century, the Social Gospel sought to cure social

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[27] C. Peter Wagner, Strategies for Church Growth: Tools for Effective Mission and Evangelism (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1987), 28.

[28] Louis A. Ruprecht, "Cornel West and the Tragedy at the Heart of North American Pragmatism: A Retrospective Look at the American Evasion of Philosophy," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 38, no. 2-3 (2017): 189.

issues such as labor, temperance, and urban poverty by applying Christian theological principles like caritas and Christ-like behavior, known as the imitatio Christi."[29] The Social Gospel stopped a step early in the process, however. The point of the pragmatic examination of the truth claim is to the validate the truth claim and then proceed to construct a worldview around those accompanying truths. Morey writes, "Is there a way that we as the church can be faithfully, even radically, biblical, and at the same time be culturally relevant?"[30]

<div align="center">Purpose of Worldviews</div>

Worldviews help define a framework for understanding the world. St. Augustine understood this. In his article, "Ethical Realism and Contemporary Challenges", Anatol Lieven writes, "As Augustine taught, to live and act for the good in the City of the World is an ethical duty; but to do so effectively requires a realistic view of human nature and human society. Any other approach points in the end toward utopian fanaticism or academic seclusion—to the revolutionary firing squad or the monk's cloister."[31] There was a balance for Augustine between acting godly in a temporal world and how those actions played out in real life. The balance was struck pragmatically.

Other cultures value a pragmatic approach whether it is Christian or not. Nishant Alphonse Irudayadason writes in chapter 2 of *Spirituality and Society: New Pathways of Consciousness, Freedom and Solidarity*, "The validity of beliefs, whether religious or not, is thus to be measured by their effects, which involve the conduct of the human person from moral,

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[29] Shawn Welch, "A Working Faith: Social Gospel Theology, Pragmatism, and Jacob Riis's Consecration of the Camera," *Journal of American Culture (Malden, Mass.)* 44, no. 3 (2021): 210.

[30] Morey, Embodying our Faith, 131.

[31] Anatol Lieven and John Hulsman, "Ethical Realism and Contemporary Challenges," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 28, no. 6 (2006): 414.

religious, and political points of view. To correctly establish a belief, it is necessary not only to measure its effects but also to compare it with other points of view, which constitute a 'community of researchers.'"[32] This measure of a worldview is universal. Worldviews provide guidance on how to live. This can range from moral decisions to prioritizing activities to making important life decisions. They provide the boundaries that an individual can use to build a life from a series of actions.

Measuring the Results of a Worldview Pragmatically

The Christian Church has historically resisted pragmatism as a tool for discerning truth. Wagner concludes, "Due largely to a fear that immoral means might creep into Christian strategy, we face the widespread attitude that Christians cannot and should not be pragmatic. If pragmatic implies an 'anything goes' attitude which may harm others or offend God, I would agree. But I see the term in a different light. My dictionary defines pragmatic as 'concerned with practical consequences or values.'"[33] These practical consequences or concerns are precisely what is square in view when measuring the result of a worldview.

An analogy sometimes provides a clearer picture of an abstract idea. Mark Douglas in his article, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Two Pragmatisms", writes,

> Niebuhr's pragmatism is an inprincipled pragmatism. That is to say, it is developed within the context of certain norms that have a trans-historical character and which Niebuhr derives from religious resources. To borrow one of Niebuhr's images, these transcendent principles are the warp threads that give the blanket of Christian social

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[32] Ananta Kumar Giri, Pragmatism, Spirituality and Society: New Pathways of Consciousness, Freedom and Solidarity, ed. Ananta Kumar Giri (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 20.

[33] Wagner, Strategies for Church Growth, 29.

ethics its basic shape, while pragmatism provides the woof thread that gives each blanket its unique historical color and character.[34]

This blending of timeless truth with the practical implications in a particular place and particular time for a particular people provides a blueprint for utilizing pragmatism. Pragmatism measures the benefits of a given action. These measurements, though, must be all encompassing both of this life and the next.

<div align="center">Individual</div>

Individuals naturally look out for their own best interests. This includes their happiness or fulfillment. In his book, *Christian Pragmatism : An Intellectual Biography of Edward Scribner Ames, 1870-1958*, Creighton Peden quotes Ames in speaking of the individual, "The organization of his efforts in order to make his activity most effective, and to attain the fullest satisfaction of his various needs, is one of the great concerns, psychologically expressed, of the human being."[35] Piper concurs when he writes, "The longing to be happy is a universal human experience, and it is good, not sinful. The deepest and most enduring happiness is found only in God. Not from God, but in God. The happiness we find in God reaches its consummation when it is shared with others in the manifold ways of love."[36] Happiness is not wrong as a goal; it is just a matter of where that happiness is found. Longing to be happy is pragmatic by nature.

Piper writes extensively about joy and motivations, "Instead of saying Christians don't live for gain, he [Paul] says Christians ought to live for greater gain than the slick money lovers

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[34] Mark Douglas, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Two Pragmatisms," *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 22, no. 3 (2001): 224.

[35] W. Creighton Peden, Christian Pragmatism: An Intellectual Biography of Edward Scribner Ames, 1870-1958 (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Pub, 2011), 23.

[36] Piper, *Desiring God*, 27.

do." [37] Piper also notes, "If Christ is followed only because his gifts are great and his threats are terrible, he is not glorified by his followers." [38] The inner heart of a Christian is just as important as his actions. Luke records Jesus telling his followers that what shows up in the visible actions comes from the heart, both good and bad (Luke 6:45).

There is a better definition of happiness though, which is flourishing. Aaron Rosales in his article, "Clergy Well-being: The Role of Lived Values and Values Fit", writes, "In contrast to burnout, flourishing involves strong relationships, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and optimism." [39] He continues with details on what flourishing looks like, "Specifically, flourishing encompasses more than work and life satisfaction—or even overall happiness. Material wealth may accompany flourishing, but the core of flourishing is richness in the meeting of human needs, such as self-acceptance, social connection, and self-efficacy." [40] This flourishing is really what all humans long for and drives their life decisions. Fulfillment and meaning are much deeper than superficial happiness. True flourishing is vanishing. Piper opines, "The last two hundred years have seen an almost incredible devaluation of the fight for joy." [41] Fighting for joy requires a pragmatic approach to defending one's actions in the face of criticism. Returning to the subject of satisfaction (happiness, joy, flourishing) as a measure of motivation for Christians, Piper writes, "They have discovered a hundred times more joy and satisfaction in a life devoted to Christ and the gospel than in a life devoted to frivolous comforts and pleasures and worldly

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[37] Ibid., 187.

[38] John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 36.

[39] Aaron Rosales, Joey Fung, and Cameron Lee, "Clergy Well-being: The Role of Lived Values and Values Fit," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 49, no. 1 (2021): 54.

[40] Rosales, Fung, and Lee, "Clergy Well-being," 54.

[41] Piper, When I Don't Desire God, 37.

advancements. Suffering, disappointment, loss—yes. But all outweighed by the superior promise of all that God is for them in Jesus."[42] Increased satisfaction is a predominant benefit of an authentic walk with Jesus. In their article, "Religious Struggle and Life Satisfaction Among Adult Christians: Self-esteem as a Mediator", Malgorzata Szczesniak and Celina Timoszyk-Tomczak note, "The religious dimension of life represents an important source of human strength, meaning, and coping for many people. It may…increase life satisfaction."[43]

Group

The rate of divorce in a society is one measure of the cohesion of the family unit. The lower the divorce rate the more intact families exist. But that is not the only measure. Satisfaction as individuals that are married depends to a great deal on satisfaction in that marriage and in the family unit in general. The odds of being "very happy" increase by 545% if an individual is in a "very happy" marriage.[44] There are multiple measures of the "success" of a society. These include crime rate, average income, employment rate, and health care costs. A society that is flourishing will have positive indicators in many if not all of these areas. Dominant worldviews in a society impact the individuals and families in that society. That in turn impacts society at large and can be measured with these statistics.

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[42] Idem., The Dangerous Duty of Delight, 75.

[43] Małgorzata Szcześniak and Celina Timoszyk-Tomczak, "Religious Struggle and Life Satisfaction among Adult Christians: Self-Esteem as a Mediator," *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 6 (2020): 2833.

[44] Brad Wilcox, *Get Married* (New York: Broadside Books, 2024), 4.

Defending the Use of Pragmatism as a Validation of Truth

Biblical Direction

Many Christians have cringed when thinking of pragmatism as a supporting test of the usefulness of a worldview. However understandable, this is an unnecessary and frankly, unbiblical reaction. There are numerous examples in Scripture of the use of practicality to determine the validity of a truth claim or lifestyle choice. Several will be explored in depth.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses writes,

> And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deut 18:21–22)

Here the nation of Israel is given a very practical test to determine the validity of a prophet's claims. Do they come to pass or not? There can be no more practical test case against a prophet's words.

Jesus himself tells the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10. Jesus shares this teaching in response to a challenge from a lawyer on who a person's neighbor is since Jesus has given the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." Luke records in Luke 10:29 that the lawyer was seeking to "justify himself" and his behavior. Very pragmatic indeed! The Pharisees emphasized right believing and right living to an exact detail. In response, Jesus shares this parable:

> A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds,

> pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:30–37)

The religious leaders—the priests and Levites—said all the right things, and they lived exactly as the outward Law prescribed, but they missed the intent of the Law. The law of love demanded actions in keeping with sentiment. They missed out on both. In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus illustrates that the practical way to see if an individual loves his neighbor is to look at his actions.

The book of James is a veritable treatise on faith requiring works. Real faith produces real works. Works do not take the place of faith but are a result of it. If a person says one thing, and does another no one will listen to what he says because it does not really indicate what he believes. Of an active faith, James writes,

> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (Jas 1:22–25)

James concludes chapter one with a reminder that real religion is to look after widows and orphans (Jas. 1:27). Of this verse Burkle writes, "the definition of religion as visiting widows and orphans in their affliction has as much Biblical foundation as speaking in tongues."[45] At a doctrinal level, the pragmatism of a faith lived out is on par with a sign gift given to the early Church to authenticate the testimony of the apostles.

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[45] Burkle, "Toward a Christian Pragmatism," 580.

James continues in chapter two by expounding on an example of a Christian encountering someone in physical need. If faith is real, it moves the Christian to action. Action is the proof of faith. This is pragmatism as a negative test. If a person's faith doesn't move to actions the faith isn't real. James writes,

> What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (Jas 2:14–17)

James uses forceful language ("dead") to describe a faith that does not have works. The works are proof of faith. In this case, the means (works) do not justify the end (faith), but they do validate it.

Jesus teaches about pragmatism when Matthew records Jesus saying, "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them" (Matt 7:17–20). Jesus tells his followers to look at the fruits (the visible actions) of others to judge their words and their nature. Good actions come from a godly nature; bad actions come from a sin nature. A genuine Christian is not only fruitful but bears good fruit. Jesus' call to pragmatically evaluate another's heart by one's actions is a reminder of the biblical nature of practical living.

The apostle of love, John, writes about what genuine love is, "[m]y little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Love is action, not just talk. Pragmatism is judging an action by its ultimate outcome. John echoes James with his negative test of pragmatism. If love is not lived out, then it is not real love.

Scientific Method

Robert Blystone in his journal article, "WWW: The Scientific Method", defines the steps of the scientific method as varying but notes that it includes the following: "a) define the problem, b) gather background information, c) form a hypothesis, d) make observations, e) test the hypothesis, and f) draw conclusions."[46] These are the general steps used in all scientific observations and experiments to further human knowledge. The same steps can be utilized to test worldviews. The scientific method can be applied to worldviews as well. It is a very practical way to test the validity of a worldview. A hypothesis is formed that states the worldview in the affirmative. An experiment is created to test the hypothesis. In this case, life itself is the experiment. A worldview is consistent if the actions called for by that worldview lead to the outcomes espoused by that worldview. Two different worldviews will be examined pragmatically: Christianity and secular atheism.

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[46] Robert V. Blystone and Kevin Blodgett, "WWW: The Scientific Method," *CBE— Life Sciences Education* 5, no. 1 (2006): 10.

CHAPTER 3: VALIDATING THE PRIMARY DOCTRINES OF PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY

Introduction

Understanding primitive Christianity is foundational to constructing a modern Christian worldview that is not reliant on a particular denomination or sectarian viewpoint. The doctrines, values, practices and experiences of the early Church—and more specifically of the life of Jesus—is the basis of a universal Christian worldview that can be used to contrast the values, practices, and experiences of secular humanism. Newman's writes the following five aspects that were foundational to the early Church in his article:

1. The early Church body was communal and egalitarian in its nature.[47]

2. It was simple in its worship practices, which were devoid of elaborate rituals and hierarchies.[48]

3. It placed an emphasis on moral and ethical teachings directly derived from Jesus' teachings and life.[49]

4. It fostered a strong sense of brotherhood and mutual support among believers.[50]

5. It focused on living out the teachings of Jesus in daily life rather than merely professing faith.[51]

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[47] Francis William Newman, "What was Primitive Christianity?" *Fraser's Magazine* 12, no. 68 (1875): 212–214.

[48] Newman, "What was Primitive Christianity?" 215-217.

[49] Ibid., 218–220.

[50] Ibid., 221–223.

[51] Ibid., 224–226.

These characteristics will be examined in detail by grouping them into the following areas: understanding foundational Church doctrine (including values and focus), examining early Christian behavior (including practices and experiences), and reviewing the embodied perfection of Jesus as a lived example of truth (including examples of his values, practices, and experiences).

Understanding Foundational Church Doctrines

Values

There can be no greater mark of Christianity than selfless love. Elwell defines the most common biblical term for "love", *agape*, as, "unmerited, self-giving love."[52] He explains that this noun/verb was "not prominent in prebiblical Greek."[53] New Testament writers used the term as they explored the Greek language trying to find a satisfactory definition for the kind of love God has for mankind and the love he expects his children to have for others. It is found in Jesus' teachings about the greatest commandments: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 22:37–40). Paul wrote to the Philippians about the selfless nature of Christian living, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil 2:3–4). Real Christian love

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[52] W. A. Elwell, "Love," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, eds W. A. Elwell and D. J. Treier (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 1312.

[53] Ibid.

demands the putting of others' interests before one's own. Peter writes, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'"(1 Pet 4:8). Peter adds the qualifier "above all things" to show the preeminence that love is supposed to have in the Christian life. Indeed, we would not know this kind of God-like love if it were not for the example of Jesus. John writes, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). John's statement brings out two main points. The first is that Jesus' example shows the world what sacrificial love is. It is the definition of love. The second is that his example serves as the bar for Christian love. Every believer owes a love debt to God, and it is to be repaid by loving one another.

A closely-related value of the early Church was forgiveness. Jesus' teaching on forgiveness is prompted by a question from Peter that Matthew records: "Then Peter came to Him and said, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven'" (Matt 18:21–22). Jesus was using hyperbole to demonstrate that forgiveness is unlimited. Paul reinforces this focus on forgiveness in several letters to churches. To the church in Ephesus, he writes, "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph 4:32). The reason to forgive one another is that "God in Christ forgave you." This establishes forgiveness as a value in the same way that love is an established value. By understanding the communicable attributes of God, the early Church was able to authentically live out the teachings of Jesus and mimic his life. Paul writes to the Colossians, "Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (Col 3:13). Again, Paul emphasizes that the example of Jesus

has created a standard to follow. "Even as Christ forgave you" provides a depth of gratitude that should pour out in forgiveness to others.

Focus

The primary focus of the early Church was Jesus. Christology was the foundational study on which all other doctrines were built. This is reflected early in the Church's formation in the book of Acts when Luke writes, "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42). It is worth noting the qualifiers in this verse. The teaching and preaching happened "daily." It was frequent. It happened "in every house." It was widespread. The teaching and preaching "did not cease." It was continual. Jesus and his nature and life were of the utmost importance to early Christians. This priority continues in the teaching of Paul when he writes to the church in Corinth, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Paul was well trained in spiritual matters, and he understood the Hebrew law and was able to debate philosophers (cf. Acts 17), but he did not hesitate to bring a message that was only and all about Jesus. To Paul, there was no more preeminent subject for the Church than Jesus. No doubt the early Church was full of people who may have seen Jesus teach or perform miracles. Explaining his life and teaching were critical to connecting their own lived experiences with Scripture and grounding their reality in God's truth. Not only was the life of Jesus first in focus, but Paul wanted to reassure the Colossians that faith in Jesus was sufficient when he wrote, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Col 2:9–10).

Closely related to the focus of Jesus is the focus on salvation. The early Church was focused on the right understanding of salvation and preaching and teaching it. Luke records

Peter's words in the book of Acts: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This focus aligns with the primary view of early Christians that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah). Salvation was through one name—the name of Jesus. Understanding the doctrine of salvation was the first building block placed on understanding who Jesus is. Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph 2:8–9). Paul emphasizes that the action is God's. It is God's grace. It is God's gift. Paul wants to make clear that Jesus saves us; we do not save ourselves. The Christian theologian R. C. Sproul wrote, "The grounds of your justification are the perfect works of Jesus Christ. We're saved by works, but they're not our own."[54] This was clearly in view for Paul when he writes to his protégé, Titus, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Many churches today struggle with articulating a clear position on many minor doctrines. They are drawn into debates and expending a great deal of energy on secondary issues. For the early Church, Jesus and salvation were central and intertwined. This provides a basis for a modern Christian worldview unencumbered by secondary issues.

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[54] Matt Smethurst, "40 Quotes from R.C. Sproul," accessed July 2, 2024, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/40-quotes-rc-sproul/.

Examining Early Christian Behavior

Practices

Working out of the values of the early Church are its practices. These practices are the values lived out and on display to the world as differentiators of behavior. Behavior and belief work together to provide a holistic picture of the early Church. Among these were sacrificial giving, evangelistic fervor, caring for widows and orphans, the equality of Jews and Gentiles, and the treatment of women with dignity.

Emanating out of the value of sacrificial love is the practice of sacrificial giving. Giving was and is an expression of love. Luke writes in Acts, "And the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common" (Acts 4:32). Each believer was willing to freely give of his own possessions to care for the needs of others. This is love lived out. This was not only present in the immediate aftermath of the birth of the Church but was also a common feature in the churches that Paul planted on his missionary journeys. He writes of the churches in Macedonia, "For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing" (2 Cor 8:3). The Philippian church was known as a sacrificial church. Here Paul commends them for giving beyond what they were able. They gave until it hurt. Paul not only commends the churches about their giving, but he writes to Timothy to tell him to warn the churches to "[c]ommand those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share" (1 Tim 6:17–18). There is an admonition to not trust the uncertain riches of this world but to be "ready to give, willing to

share." Paul not only taught about the sacrificial love that God has but also that God is a giver. Just as God is generous, he demands that his people are generous too.

This material, sacrificial giving extended to spiritual giving. Early Church members were incredibly evangelistic in their pursuits. This giving of spiritual life was a core practice and differentiator of these believers. Luke writes in Acts of the early converts, "And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42). Everywhere believers went they were giving words of life by sharing the Gospel. This was, in part, an act of obedience. Luke records Jesus commandment to the early Church in Acts, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Every believer is called to be a witness of Christ wherever he or she goes. Paul was an excellent example of this. Luke writes in Acts, speaking of Paul, "And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4). Paul made it his habit to witness and spread the Gospel wherever he went. His evangelism was not just focused on debating Old Testament laws with Jews but on reasoning with Greeks about philosophy too (Acts 17).

Once a new convert became a Christian, he was treated as a member of the family. This extended to special treatments for those who were most vulnerable—orphans and widows. William Weinrich, in his article "Evangelism in the Early Church", provides a statement attributed to a Roman Emperor when he writes,

> Perhaps a better testimony, because it was uttered by a pagan, came from the apostate Emperor Julian (c. 360). He recognized that the largest obstacle to his plan to renew the old pagan religions was the practiced love of the Christians: "Atheism [i.e., Christianity] has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as

well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them."[55]

Christians were known, even among pagans, as people who cared for widows and orphans. This extended to outside the early Church in caring for the vulnerable in society who were non-Christians. James defines what real religion looks like when he writes, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (Jas 1:27). Moral purity wasn't the first requirement to a pure religion; caring for orphans and widows was. Paul amplifies this when he instructs Timothy that the Church is to "[h]onor widows who are really widows" (1 Tim 5:3). Honor was due to those in need. It was an extension of sacrificial giving and a test, as these members of society had nothing to give in return for generosity. However, a believer was not to look to the Church first if he had a widow in his family. Believers were individually charged to care for them. Paul gives Timothy further instructions when he writes, "But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God" (1 Tim 5:4). This repayment was not just material—it was to sacrifice for one's parents as parents had sacrificed for their children.

Another area of early Church practice was the treatment of different groups inside the Church. The early Church was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. These groups came to the Church with radically different worldviews and a deep distrust of one another. Bengt Holmberg, in his article, "Jewish 'Versus' Christian Identity in the Early Church?", writes "Jews were careful not only about what they ate but also about with whom they ate—so careful that it was

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[55] William C. Weinrich, "Evangelism in the Early Church," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 45, no. 1-2 (1981): 73.

noted and criticized."[56] This led to issues outside the early Church on more than one occasion as the two groups became one and outsiders objected. Holmberg writes, "The starting point of the Antioch conflict is the fact that Christian Jews and non-Jews ate together."[57] Paul was very clear though in Church doctrine when he wrote to the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Identity was to be found in Christ, not in a person's ethnicity. There were not multiple classes in the early Church. All were just Christians. Paul speaks of this barrier dividing groups when he writes to the church in Ephesus, "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation" (Eph 2:14). He writes again to the Colossians with the same message of identity: "And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:10–11). The early Church was accepting of Jews, Gentiles, and peoples of all backgrounds. They found their new identity in Christ.

In a similar fashion, the early Church elevated the position of women. Elisabeth Wangermann, in her article, "Women in the Church", writes, "We can see its fruits in the early church, where women appear as persons in their own right, working, suffering, and dying for Christ along with the men in the Christian community."[58] This set the early Church apart in its approach. Again, identity was to be found in Christ. Paul's message to the Galatians extended

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[56] Bengt Holmberg, "Jewish 'Versus' Christian Identity in the Early Church?" *Revue Biblique* 105, no. 3 (1998): 399.

[57] Holmber, "Jewish 'Versus' Christian," 405.

[58] Elisabeth Wangermann, "Women in the Church," *Life of the Spirit* 17, no. 201 (1963): 481.

beyond the defining of classes by former religion or economic status and included gender.

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is neither male nor female*;

for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Unity and identity in the body of Christ were

unique features of the primitive Church. Paul reaffirms this when he writes to the Corinthians,

"Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the

Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are

from God" (1 Cor 11:11–12). Men and women are dependent on one another and ultimately on

God. Peter quotes from the Old Testament when he states in Acts, "And it shall come to pass in

the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your

daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams"

(Acts 2:17). Of note, is the fact that *both* sons *and* daughters shall prophesy. Men and women are

equal in Christ.

<div align="center">Experiences</div>

Born out of the values and practices of the early Church are its experiences. Many

believers in the early Church faced similar situations and had similar experiences. This included

persecution, being forced underground, and even giving their lives for their faith in Christ.

Joshua Massey, in his article "Planting the Church Underground", writes, "In July 64, followers

of The Way entered a severe period of persecution when Nero used them, according to the

Roman historian Tacitus, as a scapegoat to shift blame for the fires of Rome away from

himself."[59] This persecution of the early Church did not come as a surprise. Paul warned

Timothy, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim

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[59] Joshua Massey, "Planting the Church Underground in Muslim Contexts," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no 3 (July-Sept. 1996), 140.

3:12). The early Church was well acquainted with persecution and embraced it as a means of spreading the Gospel. Suffering was not something to be endured; it was used as a tool in God's hand to produce something greater in the lives of Christians. Peter wrote, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 Pet 4:12–13). Suffering was something to that led to communion with Christ and produced joy in the life of the Christian. John records Jesus telling his disciples, "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also" (John 15:20). Persecution was an expectation from the mouth of Jesus directly. This persecution at times drove the Church underground. Massey writes, "In A.D. 35, the church went underground after Stephen's martyrdom. Jewish leaders began going from house to house to drag followers of 'The Way' off to prison—they were not yet called 'Christians' until about six years later."[60] It was not always safe to gather publicly when Christians met, so they met in secret.

Many early Christians made the ultimate sacrifice by dying for their faith instead of recanting. Massey writes, "By the early second century, public profession of 'Christianity' was a capital offense. If a person was found to be a Christian, they were given the opportunity to renounce their faith—execution awaited those who would not deny their Lord. Martyrs would kneel blindfolded, awaiting decapitation by sword. Bishops and church leaders were brought to Rome for execution."[61] Primitive Christianity was under tremendous pressure and yet continued

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[60] Massey, "Planting the Church Underground", 140.

[61] Ibid.

to grow. Martyrdom spread the Gospel by dispersing the persecuted Church. Luke records the first martyr of the Church: "And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:59–60). After Stephen's death, many of those in Jerusalem were driven out to seek safety. The Church spread and the Gospel with it. The writer of the book of Hebrews records the persecution experienced by Old Testament saints, but it is an accurate description of the early Church as well. "They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb 11:37–38). This could have been very discouraging, but it had the opposite effect. John records a message from Jesus in book of Revelation: "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10). It was a warning of what was to come for them in their time but it applies equally to Christians at all times. Persecution, isolation and death may await any Christian living out an authentic life of following Jesus, but instead of being a discouragement to following Jesus, it is to act as a motivation. Christians can look to the early Church as an example of living out a life of values, practices, and experiences that mimicked Jesus'.

Reviewing the Embodied Perfection of Jesus as a Lived Example of Truth

Value Examples

The primitive Church had a working memory of the recently-departed Jesus as an example of a life lived out in true godliness. Christians are called to imitate Christ and live lives of Christlikeness. Jesus fully and perfectly embodied every principle he taught. Rigney and Piper

write, "The incarnation—the fullness of deity dwelling bodily in the person of Jesus of Nazareth—awakens us to the reality of the 'discarnation,' the living and active presence of the triune God, silent but sounding in every corner of the cosmos."[62] Holding both the transcendence and immanence of God in mind while reviewing the life of Jesus is helpful in understanding the human and divine nature that he holds simultaneously and in perfect union. There are many values that Jesus lived out but a few that are worth exploring in the context of defining primitive Christian priorities. Jesus continually taught about heart matters, and he always had in focus people and their needs.

Matthew records Jesus teaching on the heart in the Sermon on the Mount, "But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly" (Matt 6:3–4). Although Jesus was teaching on good deeds, the application is clear. Good deeds are to be a matter between a person and God. This makes it an issue of the heart and not one of pride or the praise of others. Jesus taught frequently that what matters is what is on the inside. In rebuking the religious leaders, Matthew records that Jesus said, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matt 23:25–26). Jesus is teaching that what is on the inside is what eventually revealed on the outside. The outside is only a reflection of the heart. Jesus warns them to cleanse their hearts instead of focusing on the ceremonial cleansing of outward vessels. The Pharisees had missed the point of the Law as a shadow of something greater. The cleansing of vessels in the Law was an object lesson that the Pharisees

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[62] Rigney and Piper, *The Things of Earth*, 75.

misunderstood. On another occasion, Jesus taught, "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt 15:8–9). The Pharisees had added manmade rules to help control outward behavior, but Jesus redirects them to the heart issue. Matters of the heart are paramount with Jesus. There is a reason for this focus. Storms writes,

> But, in the long run, how effective in your fight against sin are prohibitions, threats and warnings? Do they really work? Do you find yourself more and more conformed to the image of Jesus as a result of their impact on your behavior? When you warn or threaten others who are being tempted, do they report back to you that they are sinning significantly less? Are they experiencing noticeable deliverance from bondage to sin and perversion? I doubt it.[63]

The focus on the heart allowed Jesus to apply spiritual correction to where it was needed and most effective. Unless a heart is changed, outward changes won't be lasting or impactful.

Jesus also had a deep burden for people. Matthew records of Jesus, "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matt 9:36). Jesus cared for the people and their needs. This was an area of contention that the Pharisees had with Jesus. They could not understand how Jesus could associate with such sinful people. This condescending attitude did not deter Jesus from constantly looking to the needs of the people. Matthew writes, "And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people" (Matt 9:35). Jesus had every right to take a place of prominence wherever he went, but he was always looking at how to bless others. Matthew notes that it was "all the cities and villages" and that Jesus was "teaching…preaching…healing." This extended even to children. "But Jesus called them to Him

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[63] Sam Storms, Pleasures Evermore: The Life-Changing Power of Enjoying God (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 22.

and said, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven'" (Matt 19:14).

Practice Examples

Jesus prioritizing the heart and elevating people were lived out in his practices. This included calling "unqualified" disciples and breaking cultural and religious taboos. For example, Mark records Jesus calling some of his first disciples: "And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.' They immediately left their nets and followed Him" (Mark 1:16–18). Fisherman would not have been the first choice of any other would-be teacher. This was only the beginning of calling people with unconventional professions to follow Jesus. Another example is when Luke records the calling of Matthew (Levi): "After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, 'Follow Me.' So he left all, rose up, and followed Him" (Luke 5:27–28). Levi was a tax collector for Rome. But Jesus saw beyond the exterior of the fishermen and the tax collector and looked to the heart. He called them and equipped them to carry out his mission to the world. Luke would later record an early Church incident involving Peter and John (another fisherman):

> Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand (Acts 4:1–4).

Jesus used the heart of these simple people to preach to thousands and grow the early Church in incredible ways. Jesus never called people because of outward appearances. He serves as a model for looking past the exterior and seeing the person's heart.

Jesus also elevated marginalized people groups by breaking cultural taboos. Women were relegated to a second-class status in the culture of that day. Wangermann writes, "Sons but not daughters are to be instructed in the Torah. But to be a good Jew was to keep the Torah; to keep it one had to know it; to know it one had to study it. And so women, kept in ignorance of it, were then despised for their ignorance, and no self-respecting Jew would be seen talking to a woman in public, even if she was a relative; a Rabbi seen talking to a woman would have caused grave scandal."[64] Jesus ignored this cultural taboo and frequently went out of his way to lift up women and reinforce their value and worth in the eyes of God. One example of this is Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well. John records,

> Now He had to go through Samaria. So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink" (John 4:4–7).

Not only was the person a Samaritan, with whom Jews would not associate, but she was a woman, and a woman of low moral character no less. Jesus went out of his way to meet her, talk to her, and eventually win her into the kingdom. For a rabbi and a teacher, this would have been unusual. That would not be the only time that Jesus broke a cultural taboo involving women. Luke records,

> And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil (Luke 7:37–38).

Jesus let an "unclean" woman who was a "sinner" touch him. This was another cultural taboo. Men not only did not speak to unfamiliar women, but they certainly did not let them touch them.

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[64] Wangermann, "Women in the Church," 481.

Jesus understood the woman's heart and that she was expressing deep gratitude and love for the many sins she had been forgiven. The Pharisees knew her reputation, but Jesus saw her heart cleansed of sins as he had washed them all away.

Jesus looked past the cultural norms to create relationships with those around him. This extended to not only women but those who were ceremonially unclean, such as lepers. No one would have anything to do with a leper. Luke records just one of several instances of Jesus interacting with lepers when Luke writes of Jesus, "Now it happened, as He went into a certain village, that ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off, lifted up their voices and said, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' So when He saw them, He said to them, 'Go, show yourselves to the priests.' And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed" (Luke 17:12–14). Jesus heard their cry and answered their prayers. Jesus went out of his way to show mercy to those whom society showed no mercy. Jesus broke cultural taboos to love people.

Jesus also broke religious taboos. In describing Jesus' healing of the paralytic man, Kim Papaioannou writes, "According to rabbinic tradition, the act of carrying the bed could constitute a Sabbath violation. However, in the gospel traditions, Jesus is not morally bound by rabbinic casuistry; if anything, His attitude is often antagonistic."[65] The emphasis of the teachers was on tradition, but Jesus' emphasis was on caring for people. Jesus frequently disregarded the rules the Pharisees made up for the Sabbath to prove his own lordship over the Sabbath and his care for the people. Mark records a Sabbath encounter Jesus had when he writes,

> Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the

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[65] Kim Papaioannou, "John 5:18: Jesus and Sabbath Law A Fresh Look at a Challenging Text," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 21, no. 1 (2009): 248.

showbread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?" And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:23–27).

Jesus reaffirmed that the original design of the Sabbath involved caring for people. The Sabbath was not meant to push people down with burdensome rules as the Pharisees had created. Rather, it was designed to give them rest and allow them time to worship and reflect on their relationship with their Creator. Another area where Jesus broke a religious taboo was his treatment of Gentiles. The Judaism of Jesus' day placed an emphasis on Israel holding a special place in their relationship with God, and everyone else was on the outside and was treated as inferior. Jesus never treated someone as inferior. Matthew records this account of Jesus with a Gentile woman:

> And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, help me!" But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour (Matt 15:22–28).

Jesus' words at first seem harsh, but ultimately Jesus fulfilled her request. Jesus cared for people who were not valued by the religious tradition of the day. Jesus valued all people. The religious rules of Jesus' day placed a high value on following traditions and manmade rules. Jesus discounted these and moved to the heart of the matter when Mark records him teaching the following:

> When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand: There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!" When He had entered a house away from the crowd, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable. So He said to them, "Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" (Mark 7:14–19).

Thus, Jesus demonstrates his values and his practices. Jesus valued people and looked past exterior rituals and to the hearts of people.

<div align="center">Experience Examples</div>

Jesus' experiences were aligned with his values and practices. One of these repetitive experiences is that of serving. Jesus was always serving the needs of others. John records Jesus telling his disciples, "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14–15). Jan van der Watt, in his article "The Meaning of Jesus Washing the Feet of His Disciples (John 13)," explains, "When guests arrived at a meal it was common for the host to supply water or something else for them to either wash their hands or their feet or to have them washed. The general rule was that a slave or person from a lower social stratification would be assigned to this task by the host."[66] Jesus was not assigned but chose this lowly task for himself to serve as an example of service. This was not the only object lesson Jesus had to teach the disciples about service. Matthew records,

> But Jesus called them [his disciples] to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:25–28).

Jesus called the disciples to a radical life of serving others, of putting others' needs before their own. This was his repeated experience and way of life. Luke writes of Jesus telling his disciples, "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table?

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[66] Jan van der Watt, "The Meaning of Jesus Washing the Feet of His Disciples (John 13)," *Neotestamentica* 51, no. 1 (2017): 29.

Yet I am among you as the One who serves" (Luke 22:27). Jesus set an example of serving. Part

of serving others is to see their needs and to meet them.

The New Testament records fourteen times that Jesus healed everyone present.[67] With

Jesus' emphasis on people and their needs, it is no wonder that he cared for their physical

wellbeing. Matthew records,

> And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them (Matt 4:23–24).

Jesus not only taught and preached, but he also healed. Matthew notes that Jesus healed "all

kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease." Everywhere Jesus found broken people he brought

healing. In his role as healer, Jesus restores function and use to that which was dysfunctional and

limited in use. Jesus brings wholeness to that which was in part. Luke writes of Jesus, "When the

sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him;

and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them" (Luke 4:40). Luke records that

"any" who were sick were healed, "every one of them." The reason for his healing is revealed by

Matthew: "So Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes

received sight, and they followed Him." (Matt. 20:34) Jesus healed because he had compassion

on the people. Jesus saw people. Jesus understood people.

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[67] See Matt 4:23–24; 8:16; 9:35; 12:15; 14:14, 36; 15:30–31; Mark 1:32–34; 3:10; Luke 4:40; 5:15; 6:17–19; 9:11; 9:42.

CHAPTER 4: EVALUATING THE BELIEFS OF A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

Introduction

Secular humanism, popular in Western, post-Christian culture, is a competing worldview that challenges primitive Christianity. Not all Christians profess the same doctrines, but not all humanists affirm the same beliefs. However, there are some universal beliefs that many humanists share that help define the movement in general. To help understand universal humanist beliefs, humanist values and focus will be examined. Humanist behavior will be explored by reviewing humanist practices and experiences. Humanist beliefs and behavior will define the humanist worldview. This worldview will be contrasted with the primitive Christian worldview in chapter 5.

Understanding Universal Humanist Beliefs

Humanist Values

One important humanist value is self-sufficiency.[68] Without a grounding in a metaphysical reality, a universal humanist view requires a complete dependency on the physical world and the normal senses used to perceive it. This physical dependency, in turn, leads to a drive for self-sufficiency or self-reliance. Donald Polkinghorne, in his chapter on "The Self and Humanistic Psychology", writes that "the founders of humanistic psychology held that the move to authenticity involved the development of concepts about the self that truly reflect people's tendency to actualize their human potential."[69] This focus on the authentic self involves a

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[68] Kirk J. Schneider, J. F. Pierson, and James F. T. Bugental, *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Theory, Research, and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2015), 4.

[69] Ibid., 91.

reflective approach to understanding how human beings relate to others and their environment.
Self-actualization becomes a worthy goal when a secular humanist is seeking to maximize
his/her value. The elevation of self-image is central to an understanding of self-reliance in a
secular humanist framework.[70]

Another key humanist value is ascribing to moral relativism. Graham Long, in his book,
Relativism and the Foundations of Liberalism, writes, "the relativism which I wish to examine is
roughly the idea that—about morality—truth, validity and justification are relative to people's
moral beliefs and values."[71] This view of moral relativism is necessary in humanistic thinking as
there is no metaphysical grounding for objective moral truth. Secular humanists must anchor any
moral truth to a specific cultural expression. This expression of truth is not universal or timeless
but localized and momentary. Graham writes, "[o]ne way of interpreting this claim is that culture
determines what is good or bad, that moral goodness and badness are reducible to cultural
norms."[72] These cultural norms may not—and indeed will not—be compatible with other
cultures. One needs only look to the antebellum American South for a cultural norm of chattel
slavery to understand that a cultural norm may not be accepted by other cultures or at other times
in the same culture. A secular humanist must admit to the validity of alternate views on the same
subject across cultures and times. Graham notes this when he writes, [m]etaethical relativism
claims centrally that concepts such as truth or justification are relative to standards, cultures or

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[70] Ibid., 673.

[71] Graham Long, *Relativism and the Foundations of Liberalism* (Luton: Andrews UK Ltd., 2004), 21.

[72] Ibid., 22.

frameworks that legitimately differ."[73] Far from a detraction, this is a value embraced by secular

humanism as a supposed form of "forward progress" in cultural progressions.

<div align="center">Humanist Focus</div>

Borne out of the humanist value of self-reliance is a focus on the self in general. The

elevation of self and the interplay of many selves that form society are central to secular

humanism. According to the third edition of the *Humanist Manifesto*, "[h]umanism is a

progressive philosophy of life that, without supernaturalism, affirms our ability and

responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of

humanity."[74] Of note is the emphasis of "personal fulfillment" first that then leads to "the greater

good of humanity." This emphasis on the self creates an inward focus that deals with challenges

in a very personal way. In this secular paradigm, it is difficult to imagine how broken individuals

ever progress outside a view of themselves to the larger society. Indeed, Christopher Lasch in his

book, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, writes,

"Plagued by anxiety, depression, vague discontents, a sense of inner emptiness, the

'psychological man' of the twentieth century seeks neither individual self-aggrandizement nor

spiritual transcendence but peace of mind, under conditions that increasingly militate against

it."[75] Finding peace while focusing on the self is elusive. This individual approach to self-

realization leads to variability in the "spiritual" approach that Stef Aupers explains:

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[73] Ibid.

[74] "Humanism and its Aspirations: Humanist Manifesto III, a Successor to the Humanist Manifesto of 1933 - American Humanist Association," accessed July 18, 2024, https://americanhumanist.org/what-is-humanism/manifesto3/.

[75] Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 13.

"Notwithstanding their further differences of opinion, defenders of secularization theory and New Age apologetics also agree on the fragmented character of contemporary spirituality."[76] It seems for the secular humanist who seeks an experience for the self that it is every person for himself. This leaves society with a plethora of individual approaches that have no cohesion except their scattered variability.

Another secular humanist focus is environmental care.[77] At first, this may seem at odds with a focus on the self, but it still is a way to direct attention to individual needs in the physical world. For a secular humanist who does not believe in the metaphysical, this physical world is all that there is. It is therefore imperative to care for it. Additionally, secular humanism does not place a high regard on human life versus other life on the planet. Returning to the *Humanist Manifesto*, "Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change. Humanists recognize nature as self-existing."[78] To humanists, evolutionary processes have, over time, just elevated humans in a physical way, not in any hierarchical way. Humans coexist with other life in a self-existing nature. Humans are dependent on other elements in the ecosystem that are deemed of equal value. Ironically, this can have a devaluing effect on all of humanity versus the value of individual lifeforms. Although humanism has a focus on the self, that focus is always mitigated by a focus on the equality of the other elements present in the environment, both living and non-living.

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[76] Stef Aupers and Dick Houtman, "The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition: The Spread of Post-Christian Spirituality in 14 Western Countries, 1981-2000," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 3 (2007): 306.

[77] "Humanism and its Aspirations: Humanist Manifesto III, a Successor to the Humanist Manifesto of 1933 - American Humanist Association."

[78] Ibid.

Examining Humanist Behavior

Humanist Practices

Social reform is a recurring theme in humanist practices. The *Humanist Manifesto* states, "Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence."[79] This may seem to be an odd practice given the subjective nature of morality for secular humanists. However, these lead to a broader view of a progressive social condition. Secular humanists have a focus on the present world and improving it because they do not acknowledge the metaphysical nature of life. The focus is on this physical life. Secular humanist practices involve a myopic view of societal improvements that highlight the visible improvements that are achievable now.

Another secular humanist practice is a reliance on pure reason. The *Humanist Manifesto* states, "The lifestance of Humanism—guided by reason, inspired by compassion, and informed by experience—encourages us to live life well and fully."[80] A reliance on reason is a hallmark of the universal humanist worldview. Without an acknowledgment of the metaphysical, the humanist is again only left with what is available for sensory input in the current physical world. The reliance on reason leads to an embrace of scientific rigor. Truth is allegedly discerned by the scientific method. Returning to the *Humanist Manifesto*, "Knowledge of the world is derived by observation, experimentation, and rational analysis. Humanists find that science is the best method for determining this knowledge as well as for solving problems and developing

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[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid.

beneficial technologies."[81] Where theists ground their understanding of the universe by starting with the metaphysical, secular humanists ground their understanding with what they can comprehend with their reason.

<div align="center">Humanist Experiences</div>

Not surprisingly, a focus on the self can lead to an experience of isolation and loneliness. Jean-Paul Sartre in his book, *Existentialism is Humanism*, writes of humanists, "[W]e base our doctrine on pure subjectivity—that is, on the Cartesian / think—on the very moment in which man fully comprehends his isolation, rendering us incapable of reestablishing solidarity with those who exist outside of the self, and who are inaccessible to us through the cogito."[82] Sartre appeals to the Cartesian axiom of *cogito ergo sum*, "I think therefore I am." The only thing a person can be certain of is his existence as he understands his contemplation. Sartre properly notes that this is a point of extreme isolation. A secular humanist who can only be sure of his existence is left utterly to himself. He is alone. No one else can enter this space with him. A secular humanist worldview disconnects an individual from the community by removing the metaphysical underpinnings that relate the human experience beyond an individual and extend it to others.

Another common humanist experience is a struggle with existentialism. Without a metaphysical grounding, contemplating one's existence can lead to a spiral of thoughts. It is interesting to note that Sartre wrote that for many humanists "existence precedes essence."[83]

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, ed. John Kulka, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 18.

[83] Ibid., 20.

Where theists would see a design and therefore essence preceding existence, secular humanists promote the concept that existence comes first, and that the individual then derives essence. Individuals provide their meaning to life. They exist first and then they define their essence. This, again, provides for an environment that tends towards individuality and isolation. A secular humanist worldview leads to a consistent reevaluation of the meaning of existence. If an individual must create his meaning, then it is only natural that it would lead to a constant redefining of the meaning based on the circumstances of life.

Universal secular humanist beliefs and behavior define a worldview centered on self and focused on the present, physical world. Without a metaphysical underpinning the humanist is left in isolation both in the present reality of the human experience and in a historical framework devoid of design or purpose. These positions stand in stark contrast with the outcomes achieved by embracing primitive Christian beliefs and behaviors.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The beliefs and behaviors of primitive Christianity contrast with those of secular humanism. Christianity provides a place to build and grow a community for the benefit of all its members. Christianity promotes selfless love while secular humanism promotes self. The selfless love of Christianity puts the needs of others before self. Secular humanism puts the needs of self before the needs of others. This leads to an introspective analysis that isolates the individual. Like sacrificial love, Christianity emphasizes sacrificial giving while humanism promotes self-sufficiency. The sacrificial giving of Christianity elevates the welfare of others and creates a community. The self-sufficiency of secular humanism creates a barrier to giving and obtaining true help in an individual's time of need. Christianity promotes forgiving others to foster community while secular humanism leads to isolation and loneliness. Christianity promotes social reform by elevating the oppressed and marginalized. At the same time, secular humanism attempts social reform by pulling down those who are viewed as "oppressors" and by creating a victim class.

Christianity defines its primary doctrines based on the teachings of Jesus with a focus on the means of eternal salvation while secular humanism leads to existential struggles. The primary doctrines of Christianity provide spiritual light and stability to the intrinsic value of the individual. Secular humanism leads to existential struggles that devalue the individual and cause recurring doubts. Christianity instills an evangelistic fervor concerned with the spiritual well-being of other people while secular humanism focuses on non-human elements of the environment. Christianity elevates individuals and promotes their value. Christianity claims moral objectivity from God, which, when espoused, leads to persecution and martyrdom versus secular humanism, which denies moral objectivity in favor of moral relativism that makes no

ultimate personal demands. Christianity makes objective moral demands of its adherents but

provides a fulfilling life experience in exchange. Secular humanism makes no objective demands

and provides no eternal benefits.

Utilizing the tools of pragmatism to compare the primitive Christian worldview with that

of modern, secular humanism leads to a singular outcome. Leading a life consistent with the

primitive Christian worldview increases happiness, satisfaction, and fulfillment. These outcomes

validate the truth claims of Christianity and provide a reasonable basis for any individual to

decide to choose Christianity over secular humanism. The superior Christian worldview

generates community and fosters connections with others. It provides for the needs of the less

fortunate and lifts the marginalized. Christianity provides for the needs of this physical world

and prioritizes a person's spiritual needs.

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