UNDERSTANDING THE TIMES

A SURVEY OF COMPETING WORLDVIEWS

JEFF MYERS & DAVID A. NOEBEL
FOREWORD

The book you are holding has a very long story. It began when I was a junior in college and was asked to lead a study group on communism. From that day until now, my interest in the subject has led me to the conclusion that Marxism is a religious worldview. And like other worldviews, it competes for allegiance. This got me wondering: how does Christianity measure up to other competing worldviews? The answer took years to sort out. The first edition of Understanding the Times was the finished product of that sorting-out process.

It’s been over twenty-five years since those early copies of Understanding the Times embarked on their maiden voyages to the bookshelves and consciousness of faithful Christian readers all over the country. The original 900-page tome was a labor of love by the generous hearts of the Summit family. Shortly thereafter, partnerships were formed with Harvest House and the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) with hundreds of thousands of copies reaching laypeople and Christian students alike.

The impact and reception was far greater than anything we could have imagined.

In light of that history, I am deeply pleased with this revised and updated edition. Jeff and his team have completed a marvelous achievement that will take its rightful place in the long legacy of this book. Their efforts have ensured that there will be still more generations that understand the times (1 Chronicles 12:32).

David A. Noebel, Founder
Summit Ministries
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Battle of Ideas</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Christianity</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Islam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 27</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Secularism</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Marxism</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>New Spirituality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 75</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 99</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Postmodernism</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Theology</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 147</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 173</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 225</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 253</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Law</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 307</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 337</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 395</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 425</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 481</td>
<td></td>
<td>pg. 499</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work began as a work of trepidation: how do you take a classic work—and one of
the most popular texts on biblical worldview—and update it?

Thanks to the wisdom of teams, though, it turned into something that transformed those
who were part of it. From the Verdoorn family, who helped make it financially possible, to
Joey Amadee, whose tireless genius conceived and wrote every line of code for its brilliant
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David Knopp was our project manager, keeping the trains running on time with the aid
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The entire team has dedicated hours upon hours to help me craft the best edition of
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Our curriculum director, Roy Faletti, developed the relationships with schools that tested
the whole project with their students.

I would also like to thank our Vice President of Programs, Eric Smith, who kept the Sum-
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My long-time friend, John Stonestreet, participated in brainstorming sessions and high
level edits and helped me chart a course of accuracy while avoiding theological landmines.

Finally, I would like to thank the Myers children, who patiently listened to me read from
newly written chapters and then asked questions. May the understanding of what is between
these covers be part of your generation’s legacy.

Jeff Myers, President
Summit Ministries
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Secularism</th>
<th>Marxism</th>
<th>Postmodernism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theology</strong></td>
<td>Atheism</td>
<td>Atheism</td>
<td>Theological Suspicion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philosophy</strong></td>
<td>Materialism &amp; Naturalism</td>
<td>Dialectical Materialism</td>
<td>Anti-Realism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethics</strong></td>
<td>Moral Relativism or Utilitarianism</td>
<td>Proletariat Morality</td>
<td>Cultural Relativism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biology</strong></td>
<td>Neo-Darwinism</td>
<td>Punctuated Equilibrium</td>
<td>Anti-Essentialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychology</strong></td>
<td>Mind/Body Monism (Self-Actualization)</td>
<td>Mind/Body Monism (Classical Conditioning)</td>
<td>Decentered Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociology</strong></td>
<td>Personal Autonomy</td>
<td>Proletariat Society</td>
<td>Social Constructionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Law</strong></td>
<td>Legal Positivism</td>
<td>Proletariat Law</td>
<td>Critical Legal Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Politics</strong></td>
<td>Progressivism</td>
<td>Statism</td>
<td>Political Pessimism or Liberalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economics</strong></td>
<td>Economic Interventionism</td>
<td>Socialism</td>
<td>Economic Interventionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>History</strong></td>
<td>Social Progress</td>
<td>Historical Materialism</td>
<td>Historical Revisionism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW SPIRITUALITY</td>
<td>ISLAM</td>
<td>CHRISTIANITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantheism</td>
<td>Monotheism</td>
<td>Trinitarian Monotheism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Monism</td>
<td>Dualism</td>
<td>Dualism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma</td>
<td>Divine Command Theory</td>
<td>Agape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Evolution</td>
<td>Special Creation</td>
<td>Special Creation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind/Body Monism (Fourth Force)</td>
<td>Mind/Body Dualism (Unfallen)</td>
<td>Mind/Body Dualism (Fallen)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Consciousness</td>
<td>Ummah</td>
<td>Sphere Sovereignty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Law</td>
<td>Shariah Law</td>
<td>Natural Law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autarchy</td>
<td>Islamic Theocracy</td>
<td>Subsidiarity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Enlightened Production</td>
<td>Shariah Economics</td>
<td>Biblical Stewardship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary Godhood</td>
<td>Pan-Islam</td>
<td>Redemptive Narrative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. The Secret to Understanding the World of Ideas

To understand the world of ideas, we must figure out how tennis champs return opponents’ blazing fast serves and how chess masters memorize the position of every piece on the board.

If you’ve ever been on a tennis team, your coach probably told you to “keep your eye on the ball.” But that’s not good enough if you had to return a 150-mile-per-hour serve from former world champion tennis player Andy Roddick...
By the time you react to the serve, the ball is already past you. Yet those who played Roddick regularly returned such serves. How could they possibly do this?

Now think about how chess grand masters read the chess board. After just briefly seeing the board of a partially played chess game, they are able to remember the exact placement of the pieces. Do they have a photographic memory?

Maybe tennis and chess champions are just made differently from the rest of us. Maybe they’re more gifted. It would be somewhat of a relief if this were true, because we’d be off the hook for figuring out their secrets and applying them to our own lives. But it’s not that simple.

2. Champions Succeed by Mastering the World’s Patterns

Champions have learned to see things differently. This gives them a level of success the rest of us find amazing. Understanding how they do it is the key to successfully navigating our complicated, confusing, and contentious world. There are two keys to unlocking the mystery.

Key #1: We live in a rule-governed universe. Andy Roddick can’t serve the ball anywhere he likes. He has to make it land in a certain square on the court, or it doesn’t count. Similarly, pieces on a chess board cannot be moved wherever the player wishes. There are rules about what each piece can do. Life is like that too. There are rules. If we can understand how to make the world a better place.

Key #2: When the rules are followed or ignored, patterns emerge. Our friend David Wheaton played against Andy Roddick a few times and describes his serve as “unbelievably enormous.” David said, “If Roddick hits a 150-mph serve in the corner, there’s no way to touch it unless you’ve accurately guessed where it is going to hit.” Most of us would just stand there while the ball whizzed past. Experienced players don’t do this, obviously. They study the patterns of tennis serves. David told us,

Good returners “absorb” several things about a big server so they can learn or get a sense of where the serve might be going: they notice where the ball toss is, they notice where the server likes to serve on big points and where he’s been going on previous points, and maybe even where the server looks before he serves . . . just a lot of little things that gives the returner an idea of where the ball might go.¹

In other words, tennis serves reveal patterns. If you can observe and respond to those patterns, you have a shot at winning, or at least not getting completely crushed.

But what about the chess players? The myth of the photographic memory of chess grand masters evaporated when researchers ran a test in which they randomly placed the pieces on the board in a way they would never appear during an actual game. In this condition the memories of the baffled grand masters were almost as poor as the control group of non-chess players.²

It turns out that chess experts use their experience about how chess pieces move to make sense of the patterns of play. They divide the board into chunks and remember the position of the pieces in each chunk, which enables them to reproduce with incredible accuracy the
position of all of the pieces on the board. But they can only do this when the pieces are placed as they would be during an actual game. These chess grand masters aren’t memorizing the entire board; they are making sense of the patterns that emerge when the game is played according to the rules.

Of course, it takes a lot of practice to recognize patterns, whether in tennis or chess or anything else. Malcolm Gladwell refers to what he calls the “10,000-hour rule,” the number of hours of intensive concentration and practice it takes to master a subject. If you worked at it eight hours a day, it would take you three and a half years to get that kind of experience. There is no real shortcut to this rule, at least individually. However, if you have a wise mentor, someone who guides you, builds on your successes, and coaches you in avoiding mistakes, you can become an expert more quickly than other people, though it will still take concentrated effort.

Rules. Patterns. It doesn’t matter whether we’re playing a sport or a board game or shopping or just navigating through the streets to a friend’s house. We are constantly trying our hand at pattern recognition on the assumption that the world is a rule-based place.

Here’s a big question, though: are there patterns that extend to life’s big questions? If so, is it possible to discern patterns that reveal where we come from, what the good life looks like, how we should treat others, and what happens when we die? If there are patterns for such things, is it possible to figure out which patterns are good or bad, true or false, just or unjust?

Here’s an even bigger question if all of the above is possible: given the sheer volume of ideas in the world today, is it even possible to accomplish such a massive feat as figuring out the rules and patterns that answer life’s ultimate questions? This volume is designed to set you on the course to finding answers to these questions.

This chapter introduces a way of thinking about the world we think you will find compelling and helpful. We’ll discuss how ideas become persuasive and how to identify patterns of ideas so you can understand the world around you. We’ll examine six worldviews that influence just about everyone in the world today, and we’ll see how that influence manifests itself in the key academic disciplines operating in America’s institutions of higher learning.

So you know where we’re coming from, let’s look at the history of the ideas on which this book is based.

3. Where Understanding the Times Comes From

The book you are reading has a history stretching back more than fifty years. As a student at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, David Noebel attended a chapel service addressing the topic of communism. The speaker, an Australian medical doctor named Fred Schwarz, said communism was fast growing and persuasive because it was religious. It answered life’s ultimate questions, inspired ardor and devotion, and gave meaning to people’s lives. It had a means of winning and discipling converts, as well as a vision of spreading to the whole world.

Something clicked for Noebel. Maybe the battles of our age are not first and foremost military battles, but battles of ideas. And these ideas are compelling because they are religious. As a Christian preparing for ministry, Noebel thought Christians ought to understand the world of ideas in order to not be taken captive by deceptive philosophies. With these thoughts in mind, Noebel approached the speaker to ask a few questions. The college president noted
his interest and invited him to form a study group about communism. Noebel took up this
demand and came to see communism as a direct competitor to Christianity. Millions were
being misled, and millions of lives hung in the balance. And communism wasn’t the only
counterfeit worldview, he realized; many ideas were battling for the hearts and minds of
people, nations, and cultures.

Years later, in 1991, Noebel compiled his extensive knowledge about worldviews into
a 900-page book called Understanding the Times, one of the best-selling worldview texts of
all time. All together there are more than 600,000 copies in print. If you’ve heard the term
“worldview,” you’ve likely been influenced by Noebel or by someone he influenced.

Soon after the publication of Understanding the Times, Noebel asked Jeff Myers to de-
velop an accompanying curriculum featuring videos of Christian thinkers and in-depth
reading. More than a hundred thousand people have studied this curriculum. Occasionally
Understanding the Times has been revised and expanded to keep up with the emergence of
new ideas and the repackaging of old ones. You are holding the latest version, one which
updates the language, examples, sources, and structure of the original while maintaining its
core structure.6

But let’s go back to the idea of patterns. Do ideas, as well as tennis serves and chess moves,
flow in patterns? If so, is it possible to tell whether they are consistent with or different from
God’s pattern?

4. IDEAS FLOW IN COMPLEX PATTERNS

Imagine walking around a crowded room and then being asked to describe who and
what you saw. You might remember a few details, but a trained investigator or spy would
remember much more. He could describe the room with astounding detail. Why? Because
he’s trained in a way of seeing. He knows what to pay attention to and what to ignore. In the
movies and on television, such a person always looks like a genius who possesses a supernatural
awareness. In reality, understanding comes from discipline and training. J. Warner Wallace,
a highly-regarded cold-case detective, demonstrates in his book Cold Case Christianity how
detectives identify the details they see and go through a mental checklist to figure out which
details are clues and which are background noise.7

The Oxford English Dictionary defines an idea as “a thought or suggestion as to a pos-
sible course of action.”8 What we conceive, what we believe, and our general impressions
about the world are always based on something. If they are not based on an accurate un-
derstanding of truth, we’ll always be disoriented, unable to distinguish between genuine
clues and background noise. This is why it is important, as the sixteenth-century scientist
Johannes Kepler phrased it, to think God’s thoughts after him. God made the rules. To
bear his image well, we should try to understand them, discern the patterns they create,
and live differently as a result.

But it’s harder to pick out patterns when we have lots of information as opposed to when
our choices are simple. Let’s say you open the cupboard and find nothing to eat except a
packet of seafood-flavored noodles and a packet of chicken-flavored noodles. Noodles are
noodles, you tell yourself. Just pick one and eat it. If you’re at the Public Market in Emeryville,
California, though, there are seventeen different food stalls offering cuisine from all over the

THE BATTLE OF IDEAS - 4 -
world. Each of these restaurants offers about ten choices. It takes more thoughtfulness to decide when you have 170 choices as opposed to two.

The same is true with religion. Today, largely because of the internet, people have more information about religion—and everything else—than ever before. According to Domo, a company that helps other companies make sense of the internet, every passing minute 204,166,667 email messages are sent, YouTube users upload 48 hours of new video, Twitter users send over 100,000 tweets, and Instagram users share 3,600 new photos. By the time you read this, the numbers will be even higher. There is literally so much information on the internet that it distracts people from doing what they ought to do. The New York Times reports that the cost of interruptions to people’s workdays—looking at the latest video they’ve been forwarded or checking out someone’s Twitter feed—is around $650 billion dollars a year in lost productivity.

Some people try to manage the accelerating growth of information by multi-tasking. Ironically, those who constantly switch between tasks are actually less productive because each activity has its own rules and it takes time for the mind to switch from one set of rules to another. In the case of driving and texting, this literally kills people. The more than 3,000 texting-while-driving deaths each year prove that our capacity is not fast enough to switch between tasks.

In this world of ballooning information, if you are curious about some obscure religion, you can get answers in two or three clicks. No matter how remote the area in which they live, people from all over the world can access all of the world’s ideas, and do it with their smartphone while walking down the street. The problem, of course, is that the more information we have, the harder it is to figure out what to do with it all. Even utterly wrong ideas can boast a cool website, making them appear credible. Information’s growth is exponential; wisdom’s demise is precipitous.

So who can make their way in a world like this? Those capable of quickly figuring out the rules and recognizing the patterns of ideas. It’s true with tennis and chess, and it’s true with life’s ultimate questions. People with discernment can see the relationship between all of the pieces of information they are trying to process at any given moment. If they are thoughtful about spiritual things, this capacity will enable them to better understand God, the world, and their relationship to God and the world.

5. The World’s Patterns Are Different from God’s Pattern

What we understand about God and the world affects what we believe about everything else, including what kinds of arguments we find persuasive and how we justify our intended actions. That’s why the Apostle Paul in Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” To understand what God wants from
us we must identify the world’s patterns, refuse to conform to them, and be transformed into a God-pleasing pattern of living.

We call a pattern of ideas a **worldview**. A worldview answers fundamental questions such as *Why are we here? What is the meaning and purpose of life? Is there a difference between right and wrong? Is there a God?* We all develop ideas in our attempt to answer these questions, and our ideas naturally give rise to a system of beliefs that becomes the basis for our decisions and actions. Our worldview is like a map. It helps us know where we are, where we need to go, and the best route to get there.

Our worldview does not merely reflect what we think the world is like; it directs what we think the world should be like. In other words, our worldview not only describes reality, it prescribes how we act and respond to every aspect of life. Because our ideas do determine how we behave, the bottom line is that our ideas do have consequences.

This doesn’t mean that everyone is aware of his or her deeply held ideas. If we were to ask a person on the street about her philosophy of life, we would probably get a blank stare. But if we asked how life began, she would probably offer some sort of answer, even if the answer was not completely coherent. Still, her belief would impact the way she lived her life. It’s also often the case that people are unaware of where their deeply held beliefs come from. If we were to continue our street conversation by asking why she believes what she claims to believe, she might shrug and reply, “I don’t know, I just believe it.” Often people get their beliefs like they catch colds—by being around other people! And since ideas are everywhere—on television, in books and magazines, at the movies, and in conversation with friends and family—it’s easy to pick them up without considering whether they’re worth believing.

Regardless of where they come from, the ideas we embrace about the nature of reality lead to a set of core beliefs, which in turn form convictions about how we should live meaningfully. This “beefs up” our definition of “worldview.” A worldview is a **pattern of ideas but also a pattern of beliefs, convictions, and habits that help us make sense of God, the world, and our relationship to God and the world.**

Often people get their beliefs like they catch colds—by being around other people!

Of course, some Christians don’t act Christianly. There are also Muslims and Secularists whose lifestyles are inconsistent with what they believe. The Christian idea of sinful nature predicts this. Human actions fall short of human aspirations. For example, if a person embraces the idea of sexuality as an expression of love between a married man and woman he or she will probably believe in abstaining from sexual activity outside of marriage, a value of sexual purity and a conviction to safeguard it. This does not mean, however, that the person will never indulge in pornography in a moment of weakness. Such indulgence does not invalidate the person’s ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits, but it will produce guilt because the person knows pornography is harmful. On the other hand, a person with no existing
beliefs about love and marriage will still feel guilty but may not understand why. People who continue to indulge in pornography may end up in a habitual pattern shaped by the culture’s permissive stance rather than what God wants.

Ideas have consequences. They form our beliefs, shape our convictions, and solidify into habits.

There are hundreds of different worldviews. Is it possible to know which of them, if any, is actually true? If you look in the religion section of a bookstore you’ll see books on Christianity and Islam, of course, but also on Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, Vedantism, Jainism, Shintoism, and many others. Each religion attempts to explain what the world is like and how we should live. You’ll also notice books on “secularism” and “atheism” in the religion section. This might seem odd, but when you think about it, even atheists have a set of beliefs about the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe. They’re religious. Even people who don’t care about any of this are religious; their religion says the ultimate questions don’t matter. All worldviews are religious.

If everyone is religious we would expect their beliefs to lead to certain actions. C. S. Lewis put it this way:

“We are now getting to the point at which different beliefs about the universe lead to different behavior. Religion involves a series of statements about facts, which must be either true or false. If they are true, one set of conclusions will follow about the right sailing of the human fleet, if they are false, quite another set.”

Here’s where we are so far. All people try to make sense of the world by developing ideas. These ideas flow in patterns, which we call worldviews. People’s worldviews lead them to value certain things, which lead to particular convictions governing their behavior. These convictions solidify into habits that affect the way they—and others—live.

6. Why Should We Care?

As people try to figure out the rules and patterns of the world, they diagnose what is wrong with the world and suggest prescriptions. As in medicine, a wrong diagnosis could mistreat a disease or leave a serious illness untreated. If everyone lived in isolated caves, the consequences of our actions wouldn’t affect others. But we aren’t isolated. We live in families, communities, cities, and countries. The consequences of bad beliefs can cause serious pain. Some ideas in history have led to death for millions. Nazism systematically exterminated 21 million people, not counting the tens of millions who died in battles initiated by the Nazi regime. Communist regimes slaughtered well over 100 million people in the twentieth century. As we will see in the chapter on Marxism in this volume, the slaughter continues to this day.
Every one of these deaths was in the service of an idea. Ideas have consequences, sometimes unspeakably tragic ones. Like a wildfire, these ideas began with a single flame and rapidly spread before a stunned and unprepared populace, engulfing millions. People thought Adolf Hitler was a pompous fool early in his career. Who could have predicted he would actually amass enough power to slaughter millions? Similarly, who could have imagined that a radical writer named Karl Marx, a man deeply unpopular even with his friends, would be capable of unleashing an idea—communism—that would destroy more people than any other idea in history?

Is it possible to understand ideas and their consequences? More important, is it possible to identify bad ideas in time to stop them before they can lay waste to the lives, hopes, and dreams of people? Fortunately, the answer is yes. To grasp the world of ideas we don't need to know everything about everything. In the following pages, we'll take an in-depth look at the pattern of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits that makes up the Christian worldview. We'll suggest that understanding Christianity as a worldview will help make sense of the world. Understanding other worldviews, other patterns, will confirm the essential truth of Christianity.

Here's a sports analogy: let's say you play against a team with sixty completely different plays. It would be hard to prepare for such a complex strategy. But if you know the team actually has six basic plays, each with ten variations, then by figuring out the six plays you can make better guesses about each variation and know how to counteract them.

In this book, we'll discover the six plays and the ten variations that worldview “teams” are running these days. Based on this, we'll form a mental model from which we can make more accurate guesses about how people all over the world see things. We will examine six dominant worldviews: Christianity, Secularism, Marxism, Islam, New Spirituality, and Postmodernism. Each of these six worldviews claims to present the truth. We'll examine each in ten key disciplines to see whether they are, in fact, true.

7. BUT FIRST, A WARNING

Before we analyze the six dominant worldviews, though, a warning is in order: proponents of many worldviews don't like it when you start poking their nests. This is especially true of academics. Questioning professors and authorities can anger them and make them want to attack. At Summit, we’ve been called every name in the book: “intolerant,” “bigoted,” “idiotic,” “fanatical,” “conspiracy-minded,” and, our favorite, “bloviating motormouth.”

Not all professors have chips on their shoulders. Still, if you embrace a Christian worldview, you should understand that you might be in someone's gun sights. For example, atheist philosopher Richard Rorty, one of the most famous professors of the twentieth century, once proclaimed:

The fundamentalist [by which he means Christian] parents of our fundamentalist students think that the entire “American liberal establishment” is engaged in a conspiracy. These parents have a point. When we American college teachers encounter religious fundamentalists, we do not consider the possibility of reformulating our own practices of justification so as to give more weight to the authority of the Christian scriptures. Instead, we do our best to convince these students of the benefits of
secularization. Rather, I think these students are lucky to find themselves under the benevolent *Herrschaft* [teaching] of people like me, and to have escaped the grip of their frightening, vicious, dangerous parents.17

Rorty is not condemning abusive parents. He’s condemning *Christian* parents who, by raising their kids according to a Christian worldview, are frightening, vicious, and dangerous.

Nowhere are the attacks more vicious than in the sciences. Several years ago Richard Sternberg, a Smithsonian scientist with two Ph.D.s in evolutionary biology, was fired as editor of a Smithsonian science journal for publishing an article written by Cambridge-educated scientist Stephen Meyer. The reason? Meyer’s article defended “intelligent design,” a scientific movement that suggests natural processes cannot in and of themselves explain the great complexity we encounter in the universe.

“They were saying I accepted money under the table, that I was a crypto-priest, that I was a sleeper cell operative for the creationists,” said Sternberg, who at the time was a Smithsonian research associate. “I was basically run out of there.”18

A *Washington Post* investigation revealed that Sternberg, who is not a creationist, was dismissed because of an orchestrated campaign by the National Center for Science Education (NCSE), a lobbying group fighting to keep criticism of naturalistic evolution out of public schools. In other words, the article Sternberg published was not attacked because of its arguments were poor, but because it had already been decided by these scientific elites that no questioning of naturalistic evolution was to be allowed.19

Apparently, refusing to believe that everything that exists evolved through random chance processes, as naturalistic evolutionists believe and teach in schools, is like refusing to wear clothes; it automatically disqualifies one from appearing in public. Sternberg’s firing led to a chilling, and even a freezing, of free speech among scientists. We have spoken with dozens of scientists who keep their reservations about evolution to themselves because speaking out might damage their careers.

If you live as we are suggesting in this book, you will probably come under attack as well. We’re going to prepare you to respond, not with returned name-calling or sarcasm, but with reasonable arguments. People who make their living mocking Christianity are actually barring access to a skeleton-full closet of disastrous ideas. But if you crack that closet door, they’re going to be ticked. Why? Because they have become so accustomed to the ideas they’ve picked up that they cannot imagine the world being any other way. Ideas persist in the thought stream as viruses enter the bloodstream. When we said earlier that people catch their ideas the way they catch colds, the research shows that this is not far from the truth.

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*Apparently, refusing to believe that everything that exists evolved through random chance processes, as naturalistic evolutionists believe and teach in schools, is like refusing to wear clothes; it automatically disqualifies one from appearing in public.*
8. Ideas Spread like Viruses

In the 1950s a professor at Yale University named William McGuire developed a theory about how people come to embrace the ideas they find compelling. His insights can help us understand how we and others might come to adopt good ideas and oppose bad ones.

McGuire theorized that ideas are actually very much like viruses, spreading from person to person. In our fallen and increasingly indiscriminate culture, bad ideas lamentably take root more easily than good ones. Thus, an effective leader must play a dangerous game: he must engage not only in building up good ideas, but also in rooting out bad ones. How is it possible to do this without being incurably infected by the very ideas he hopes to stand against?

Medical research in the mid-twentieth century demonstrated that a human body could develop immunity to a disease through the process of inoculation, introducing to the body a weakened form of a disease to give the body’s natural defense mechanism time to develop immunity to it.

Professor McGuire wondered whether the same theory would hold true for resisting bad ideas. To test his inoculation theory, McGuire exposed subjects to widely accepted claims such as “People should brush their teeth daily.” He then exposed them to counter-claims (e.g., “Brushing your teeth is bad for you”) after preparing test groups with varying levels of defense:

- **No preparation** (“Here’s an argument—see what you think.”)
- **Reinforcement of previous preparation** (“You know that brushing your teeth is good, right?”)
- **Warning of attack** (“You will be exposed to a persuasive argument that brushing your teeth is bad.”)
- **Inoculation** (“You will hear an argument stating that brushing your teeth wipes away saliva, which is the tooth’s natural protective agent.”)
- **Inoculation plus refutation** (“When you hear the argument that brushing your teeth is bad because it wipes away saliva, keep in mind that saliva cannot dislodge prepared foods from the teeth—only a brush can consistently do that.”)
- **Inoculation plus refutation plus preparation** (“You now know one argument you’ll hear to persuade you that brushing your teeth is bad, but you’ll be presented with several arguments and it will be up to you to think them through and refute them.”)

In the end, the most effective strategy for resisting counter-persuasion, as you might guess, was the last one: inoculation plus refutation plus preparation. The least effective strategy was reinforcement of previous preparation. In fact, more people in this test condition believed the false argument than those in the “no preparation” condition.

That people who have been equipped with the truth could so easily fall for falsehoods is a stunning result. To the extent this research applies to social and political beliefs, we can conclude the following: for people to believe a claim, they must be prepared to defend it.
against its challengers. Merely repeating a message over and over again—even with increasing fervency, emotion, and clever staging—is actually counter-productive, worse than no preparation at all.

The antidote to indoctrination is to tell the truth, expose people to the lies that would deceive them, show them how to refute those lies, and prepare them with the thinking skills necessary to continue resisting falsehoods. This begins by understanding the worldviews—the patterns of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits—that rule the world today. There are six: Christianity, Islam, New Spirituality, Secularism, Marxism, and Postmodernism. Let’s dig in.

9. THE SIX WORLDVIEWS

As we noted earlier, a “worldview” is a pattern of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits that help us make sense of God, the world, and our relationship to God and the world. If you know a worldview’s assumptions you can more accurately guess what its adherents believe and why.

There may be hundreds of worldviews operating today. Even some well-known ones, such as Judaism, are quite small, with around 13 million followers worldwide. But many bizarre and even humorous worldviews have attracted followers. As the London Telegraph recently reported, 176,632 people in England and Wales consider themselves, in their religious affiliation, to be Jedi warriors. Another 6,242 say they worship heavy metal music. Obviously we can’t cover every worldview that has attracted followers, so we’re going to look at six worldviews that make up the vast majority of the world’s population and are evangelistic (inviting everyone else to join them).

Christianity. More than two billion people in the world claim to be Christians, nearly a third of the world’s population. What they mean by “Christian,” of course, varies widely—some people claim to be Christians because their parents were Christian or because they live in a predominantly Christian country. Still, no one doubts that Christianity is a dominant influence in the world. Christianity goes back to the teachings of Jesus Christ, the Messiah prophesied for centuries among the Israelites in the Old Testament. Christians believe that God has revealed himself in the Bible as well as in nature, but especially in the person of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ was God incarnated as a human being, his life is the center of the human story.

Christianity has had a profound influence on the world. French philosopher Luc Ferry, a nonbeliever, claims that Christianity alone established the idea that, because we are made in the image of the creator, all human persons have rights. Famed British atheist
Bertrand Russell said something similar: “What the world needs is Christian love or compassion.” Whether or not Russell acknowledged it, such love and compassion result directly from following in the footsteps of Christ himself, the epitome of love and compassion.

The Christian worldview offers a narrative of all history. This narrative starts with the special creation of human beings by God, delves into the consequences of their fall from grace, and promises redemption through the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross and his subsequent resurrection.

**Islam.** Islam began September 24, 622 AD, when seventy muhajirun pledged loyalty to an Arabian trader from Mecca who had fled to Medina and began receiving special revelations from Allah. The trader’s name: Muhammad. His submission to God gave his religion its name; *Islam* means “submission.” Those who submit to Allah and his prophet Muhammad are called Muslims. Islam is based on a creed prayed aloud five times a day: “There is no God but Allah, and Mohammad is His Prophet.”

The Muslim holy book, the Quran, is believed by Muslims to be God’s full and final revelation. The Quran specifies five things a person must do to become a Muslim:

1. Repeat “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet,”
2. Pray the salat (ritual prayer) five times a day
3. Fast during the month of Ramadan
4. Give 1/40th of one’s income to the needy
5. If able, make a pilgrimage to Mecca.

According to Serge Trifkovic, “Islam is not a ‘mere’ religion; it is a complete way of life, an all-embracing social, political, and legal system that breeds a worldview peculiar to itself.” Islam has grown rapidly in the last few decades; 1.6 billion people in the world now claim to be adherents.

**New Spirituality.** What we term New Spirituality is perhaps the most difficult worldview to precisely define. You don’t have to sign, recite, or proclaim anything in particular to join, nor must you attend a church. Yet while unofficial in its dogma, the “new age” culture contains an extensive set of beliefs that, once understood, predict what people with those beliefs will value and how they will act.

New Spirituality is a free-flowing combination of Eastern religions, paganism, and pseudo-science that pops up in odd places. Some of the best-selling books of all time—by authors such as Deepak Chopra, Rhonda Byrne, Marilyn Ferguson, and Shakti Gawain—describe a world spiritual in nature but not governed by a personal, all-powerful God. Rather, the spirituality in the world is “consciousness,” an energy in which we all participate and can even learn to control. Talk show host Oprah Winfrey has admitted to holding many of these beliefs.

We will study New Spiritual belief not because it is deeply philosophical or consistent, but because some of its associated beliefs—karma, Gaia, being “one” with the environment, reincarnation, meditation, holistic health,
and so forth are a daily part of life for millions of Americans and have influenced academic areas such as psychology and medicine.

Secularism. Secularism comes from the Latin word *saecularis*, roughly meaning “of men,” “of this world,” or “of this time.” Secularists believe humans are the center of reality. They disdain the influence of those who believe in ideas of gods, an after-life, or anything beyond what we can sense. The primary identifying characteristic of Secularism is its *non-belief* in other worldviews. Ironically, though, Secularists do generally have an agreed-upon set of beliefs about the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe. So even though they view their beliefs as the *opposite* of religion, they are actually quite religious.

Interestingly, in the twentieth century several fairly well-known philosophers such as John Dewey and Julian Huxley, and later Paul Kurtz and Corliss Lamont, combined the term secular (“we are for the world”) and the term humanism (“we are for humans”) and developed a philosophy of Secular Humanism. Their manifesto, published in 1933 and updated in 1973 and 2000, led thousands of like-minded individuals to form a club called the American Humanist Association (AHA), whose motto is “Good without a god.” With no apparent sense of irony, the AHA operates as a tax-exempt organization based on the IRS section 501(c)3 *religious* non-profit exemption. Though its founders have passed away, the AHA still recruits members. Their dues support a publishing company and a monthly publication.

We’ll discuss Secularism and the Secular Humanist movement more in coming chapters, but it is sufficient for now to recognize Secularism as an umbrella term for a set of beliefs unquestioningly accepted by the vast majority of academics today. We use the term “Secularism” as a prediction, not a label: if someone accepts a Secularist viewpoint on disciplines like theology, philosophy, and ethics, we can predict fairly accurately what they believe about biology, psychology, and so forth.

Marxism. Some religious worldviews develop over hundreds or thousands of years, but others are made up whole cloth in a very short period of time. Such is the case with Marxism and its offshoots, Leninism, Maoism, Trotskyism, Fabian socialism, and the various socialist organizations that operate in the U.S. and around the world.

Marxism was invented by Karl Marx, a scholar determined to demonstrate that ownership of private property, the basis for capitalism, is the root of the world’s evils.

To Marx, history could be defined as a struggle between the haves (the owners) and the have-nots (the workers). If only the workers would rise up to overthrow the owners, they could form a worker’s paradise in which all wrongs are righted, all possessions shared, and all injustices brought to an end. The utopian state at the end of this long and bloody struggle is called communism. People who strive to bring about this state are called communists, and their Bible is *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx’s most famous and enduring work. Other such manifestos are still in print today, including the teachings of Chinese communist leader Mao Tse Tung and a book series published by Harvard University Press called *Empire*.
Some say it's pointless to include Marxism as a dominant worldview in this volume, but we disagree. Despite the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.), which dominated what is now called Russia, around 20 percent of the world's population still lives under the rule of communists. The largest communist country in the world today is China. In spite of its growing industry, China's communist rulers are still very much in control. And when we also consider countries operating on principles taught by Marx but not using the label “communist,” we are talking about a majority of the world's population living every day with the consequences of Marx's philosophies. As we will see, despite its clearly atheistic philosophy, Marxism has also made many inroads into the church. Some evangelicals involved in the so-called Christian Left are known to embrace key tenets of Marxism.

Postmodernism. People talk about postmodern art, postmodern architecture, and even postmodern ways of doing church without realizing that Postmodernism is a well-thought-out and deep philosophical worldview. The father of Postmodernism, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, had many disciples, including Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger, Jean-François Lyotard, and Richard Rorty. All are now dead, but their teachings strongly influence higher education to this day.

We will learn more about the complexities of Postmodernism throughout this volume. In short, though, we can say Postmodernism began as a reaction against modernism, the idea that science and human reason could solve humankind's most pressing problems. While science can be used for great good, Postmodernists understand it to be hopelessly corrupted by the quest for power. It was scientific “progress,” for example, that enabled the creation of weapons of mass destruction.

According to Postmodernists, the modern story of science and technology was one of many attempts to formulate what's called a “metanarrative,” or grand story of reality that claims universally valid, “God's-eye” view, pristine knowledge of the world. Postmodernists say metanarratives become so compelling that people stop questioning them, and it's precisely then that they become destructive and oppressive. Postmodernists are generally suspicious of all modern metanarratives because they are so often used as tools of oppression. Many Postmodernists engage in a process of examining exactly what causes people to fall under the spell of various metanarratives. This is called deconstruction. Deconstruction works on metanarratives similarly to someone revealing how a magic trick is done: in so revealing, people stop being deceived. Postmodernists believe “deconstructing” dominant metanarratives causes them to lose their stranglehold on people's minds.

We'll see, though, that Postmodernists have been carried away by their own ideas, calling everything into question—even the idea that we can even know reality itself!

So there you have it. Christianity, Islam, New Spirituality, Secularism, Marxism, and Postmodernism. By understanding these six worldviews we'll see how people come to grips with the rules of the world and form patterns they hope answer life's ultimate questions.

10. Ten Ways of Looking at the World

“What do you want to major in?” is probably the first question asked of any student on his or her way to college. For some, this strikes fear into the heart: “Am I supposed to know that already?” For others, it doesn't matter—they just want a diploma so they can more easily
qualify for a job. One thing most people never consider is this: the various academic departments aren't just places where professors stash what they know. They're actually different ways of thinking about the ultimate questions of life.

In an ideal world, each academic department—philosophy, psychology, law, and so forth—would combine their insights to form a “uni” (meaning “whole”) “versity” (meaning “body”) in which the parts come together to closely resemble the truth. In reality, though, various academic departments usually keep to themselves, using introductory and general education courses to persuade potential “majors” to study with their faculty for the remainder of their academic career.

Some academic departments—the “applied sciences”—focus on what you can do with the knowledge developed by the “pure sciences.” Applied sciences include engineering, medicine, business, and education. Many people say the applied sciences are most important because they're most needed in society, and hence most likely to lead to a paying job. Certainly we want young adults to be gainfully employed and to work hard toward the greater good. But it is unwise to rush into a career without first trying to understand the various ways of knowing; before you learn how to do, it's wise to learn how to know! Otherwise you might be stuck making a living without any sense of how to make a life.

In this study we will focus on ten basic disciplines, the seeds from which most things in academia grow: theology, philosophy, ethics, biology, psychology, sociology, economics, law, politics, and history. Here's a brief overview of each:

**Theology.** An “-ology” means “study of.” “Theos” means “God.” Theology is the study of God. Theology seeks to answer the question, “How did I and everything else get here?” When people see something beautiful and are asked, “How do you know it is beautiful?” they might point out a few details, but often they will say, “I don't know. It just is.” How is it that they really know? The theologian says knowing about God's nature and character is the key to figuring out what is most important in life.

**Philosophy.** “Philo” means “love”—love having to do with the nature of companionship. It is the root word for the name of the city of Philadelphia, which is nicknamed “the city of brotherly love.” “Sophia” is the Greek word for wisdom, so when you put “philo” and “sophia” together you get “love of wisdom.” The philosopher seeks to be wisdom's companion by answering questions like “What is real?” “How do I know anything?” To the philosopher, the good life consists of figuring out what the nature of reality is, how we know what we know, and how to accurately know about reality and knowledge.

**Ethics.** “Ethos” is the Greek word for “goodness.” Ethicists are not merely in search of a life that feels good, but in search of “the good life”—a life that actually is good. So ethics is the study that seeks to answer questions like, “How should I live?,” “What does it mean to live a good life?,” and, “If everyone lived the way I’m living, would it be good for us all?” Ethicists seek to understand the various ways that people act based on what they believe, and then how those actions enable them to pursue the good life.

**Biology.** “Bios” means life. Biology is the study of life. Biology seeks to answer the question, “What does it mean to be alive?” When we see something alive, we know it is alive. But how do we know? Ask a group of children sometime, “If you had a robot, what would you have to change to bring it to life?” They might say, “It would have to have a heart.” “Why?” “To pump
blood.” “But there are lots of creatures that are alive that don’t have hearts.” Pressing the issue further with children would probably be cruel, but you get the point. Biologists study living things to assist us in understanding and making predictions about the natural world. If we see our predictions coming true, we can claim to know true things about the world. Biology is at the heart of the sciences because if we can figure out what makes something alive, then we can perhaps better understand our own aliveness.

**Psychology.** “Psyche” is the Greek word for “soul.” Psychology seeks to answer the question, “What makes me human?” Most people see human beings as different from other creatures, but what makes us unique? From observation we know most creatures are unreflective—they don’t contemplate or communicate about their plans for the future, nor do they appear to feel regret or shame over their past actions. Human beings do all these things and more. Is it possible to understand why people do what they do? Psychologists study the way animals and humans act in order to see if they can figure out something about human nature to help people who are struggling find a path to a better life.

**Sociology.** “Socios” is the Greek word from which we get our word “society.” Whereas the psychologist studies the individual self and its relationship to other selves, the sociologist suspects life will be better if we can answer the question, “How do we live in community with one another?” The differences between people, after all, are vast. To really understand how we can live together in community, we ought to have some insight into our various cultures, languages, religious beliefs, and historical challenges. These differences are complex and go back generations, sometimes even millennia. At the end of the day, sociologists hope that by understanding how societies develop and grow and relate to one another, we might learn to live in greater harmony.

**Law.** The word “law” comes from an Old English word “lagu,” the rules or ordinances by which we are governed. It’s the same word from which we get our words “legislate” and “legislature.” The study of law revolves around the question, “What constitutes just and orderly governance?” In order to live together in an orderly way, we need laws we all agree to follow. If even a few people were to decide not to stop at red lights, it would create uncertainty and chaos for everyone. To keep society from breaking down, then, we must have rules and a means of making people obey them. A society’s philosophy of law determines its level of thriving. Lawmakers and legal scholars must consider whether the law is punishing evildoing sufficiently while not harming the freedoms of the just and hardworking; and how, they must ask, does the law ensure fairness without being unfair to one group or another? Figure out the answers to these questions, legal scholars say, and we’ll all be better off.

**Politics.** “Polis” means “city.” Politics means the rule of a city. When people think of politics they often call to mind political commercials or people with big, fake smiles wearing suits and kissing babies, and they dismiss politics as being silly or pompous. But the study of politics really does matter. Politics answers the question, “What is the best way to organize community?” Everyone in the world lives in multiple political jurisdictions:

> “But what is liberty without wisdom and without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is folly, vice, and madness, without tuition or restraint.”

— Edmund Burke
neighboring areas, cities, counties, states, nations. By living where you live, you agree to abide
by the rules governing those jurisdictions. But who makes these rules? Who gets to pick the
rule makers? Properly conceived, politics offers a platform from which to encourage virtue,
and virtue is at the heart of good government. To those who think it is only about liberty,
the great British statesman Edmund Burke said: “But what is liberty without wisdom and
without virtue? It is the greatest of all possible evils; for it is folly, vice, and madness, without
tuition or restraint.”

**Economics.** In Latin, the word for economics means “the art of running a household.”
Economics answers the question, “How can individuals and the community be optimally
productive?” Let’s say you have a lawnmower, some gas, and a willingness to mow other
people’s lawns. One of your customers might say, “If you mow my lawn, I’ll give you some
fresh eggs from my chickens.” That’s fine, but what if you don’t want eggs? To make it possible
for your customer to get what she wants while giving you what you want, we use a means of
exchange called money, based on people’s agreement about the relative value of things com-
pared to other things. Economics becomes infinitely more complex, though, when people
want to *borrow* money to acquire very expensive things, or to capitalize a large enterprise.
How are these loans made? What rules govern complex transactions such as these? What,
if anything, should the various levels of government have to say about all this? Economists
try to make sense of this complexity so people can get what they want, which will help them
live better lives.

**History.** The study of history seeks to answer, “How did people in the past think and act
don theology, philosophy, ethics, biology, psychology, sociology, politics, law, and economics?
What happened in the past could help us understand what we should do now. How can we
repeat the good decisions and avoid repeating the bad ones? What counts as a good or bad
decision? But the historian’s task actually goes beyond these questions, because there are too
many facts to write about and someone must decide which facts are important and which ones
aren’t, which facts are included in the account and which facts are left out. People who think
America’s founders were bad people who mistreated others will tend to choose confirming
facts—such as some founders’ owning of slaves—in order to persuade others that America
ought to abandon its founders’ principles. Should our agendas drive our study of history? Is
it possible to select and interpret facts objectively? These are important questions, because if
history is told inaccurately it might lead people to make bad decisions—which in turn could
hinder human flourishing.

As you can see, each discipline approaches knowledge differently, but with the same
goal: to understand how to live meaningful lives, both individually and together. Many
more academic disciplines exist, of course, but we believe these ten to be properly basic; by
understanding something of these ten, we’ll be able to figure out what to do with the rest.

Before we go any further, though, we need to make an admission, without which the rest
of this book will not make any sense: we are biased.

**11. OUR BIAS: THE CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW EXPLAINS THINGS BEST**

In this book we hope to show a multitude of ways the Christian worldview best explains
the existence of the universe and all things related to it. In a systematic analysis of how each
worldview approaches the ten disciplines above, Christianity claims that an acknowledge-
ment of God’s nature and character, and the life and work of Christ, will reveal capital “T”
Truth (as opposed to isolated cultural or personal “truths”). As we will see, a robust Christian
perspective of each of the disciplines is clear and compelling.

**Theology.** The evidence compels us to believe in the existence of a personal and holy
God, a designed universe, and an earth prepared for human life. This evidence together
outweighs any argument for atheism (belief in no god), polytheism (belief in many gods),
or pantheism (belief in god as the universe). Theology begins with verse one of the Bible:
“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). According to John 1,
God’s creation was through the person of Jesus Christ, referred to by the Apostle Paul as “the
fullness of the Godhead” (Col. 2:9).

**Philosophy.** We will present the evidence that the notion of mind (*logos*) preceding
matter is superior to the atheistic stance of matter preceding mind. From the very first book
of the Bible we understand that God has created not only the world, but the entire universe.
Further, he made it possible for us to observe something of his revelation and to know that
our observations are meaningful. Other creatures know things in a manner of speaking, but
humans *know that we know*. We have a capacity to contemplate what is shown to us by our
Knowing Reveal. Christianity says we can know things because they have been ordered
such that our senses can perceive them, and this is because of Jesus Christ, who is the “Logos
[revealed knowledge] of God” (John 1:1).

**Ethics.** The concept that right and wrong can be objectively known based on the nature
and character of a personal, loving God is, we believe, superior both theoretically and prac-
tically to any concept of moral relativism or pragmatism. The Gospel of John says that Jesus
Christ is “the true Light” (John 1:9; 3:19–20). That is, he is the source of what is truly good.
In his light we can see what spiritual darkness previously hid from our view.

**Biology.** We argue that the concept of a living God creating life fits the evidence better
than spontaneous generation and macroevolution. We see the scientific side of God in the
beginning when he organizes each creature “according to its kind” (Gen. 1:21). Interestingly,
Jesus Christ is described throughout the New Testament of the Bible as “the life” (John 1:4;
11:25; Col. 1:16). When it comes to understanding life—physical as well as spiritual—we
believe the Christian worldview offers superior insight.

**Psychology.** Understanding human beings as possessing both bodies and souls, even
though we are sinful, imperfect, and in need of a Savior, far outweighs expecting humans,
as much of contemporary psychologists argue, to be guilt free and in control of their behav-
ior. Human life is different from other forms of life (Gen. 2:7). We intuitively understand
that something is wrong with us. What will make it right? A savior. And who, according to
Christianity, is that savior? Jesus Christ (Luke 1:46–47; Titus 2:13).

**Sociology.** The evidence demonstrates that society functions best when the institutions
of family, church, and state exercise their proper authority within their God-ordained spheres.
At its most basic level, society flourishes when it is built upon strong families composed of a
father, mother, and children. Sociology is hinted at in Genesis 1: God says to Adam and Eve,
“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,” (Gen. 1:28) and in Genesis 2, when the man
and woman become “one flesh.” Of all of the ways God could have revealed himself to the
world, he chose to do it through the one means all human beings could understand: he sent his Son, Jesus Christ (Luke 1:30–31; Isa. 9:6).  

**Law.** God hates the perversion of justice. This truth provides a firmer foundation than legal theories that prey on the innocent and let the guilty go free. In Genesis, God lays down rules to form the optimal conditions for human flourishing. When God rescued a culture of slaves even before he provided a permanent home for them, he gave them a law (the laws of Moses, the Torah). This fledgling nation came to be with law, not with land. Throughout Scripture, the Messiah, whom Christians believe is Jesus Christ, is characterized as a “law-giver” (Gen. 49:10; Isa. 9:7).  

**Politics.** Christians believe the idea that rights are a gift from God secured by government is more logically persuasive, morally appealing, and politically sound than any atheistic theory that maintains human rights are derived from the state. We see the beginning of political authority several places in Genesis, notably in Genesis 9:6, when cities are formed around the principle of preventing human bloodshed. Interestingly, among the names given to Jesus Christ throughout the Bible is a political title, King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16; 1 Tim. 6:15; Isa. 9:6; Luke 1:33).  

**Economics.** We will show that the concept of private property and using resources responsibly to glorify God is nobler than coercive government policies that destroy individual responsibility and incentives to work. God put Adam in the garden to work it and keep it. That’s economics. Throughout all of Scripture, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is described as the owner of all things (Ps. 24:1; 50:10–12; 1 Cor. 10:26), which says something about the principles of stewardship that undergird economic reality.  

**History.** The Bible’s promise of a future kingdom ushered in by Jesus Christ is far more hopeful than utopian schemes dreamed up by sinful, mortal humans. Genesis 3:15 describes an ongoing battle between good and evil, a battle won when the offspring of the woman (often thought of as the coming Messiah) crushes the work of the evil one. Correspondingly, Jesus is described as the “the Alpha and the Omega,” the beginning and the end of history (Rev. 1:8). History has a direction and a goal.  

Christians view these ten categories as sacred, not secular. They are imprinted in the created order. All ten disciplines are addressed in just the first few chapters of the Bible; they manifest and accent certain aspects of the created order. Further, God shows himself in the person of Jesus Christ in such a way as to underline the significance of each discipline. The integration of these various categories into society has come to be known as Western Civilization.  

In every discipline, we think the Christian worldview shines brighter. It better explains our place in the universe and is more realistic, more scientific, more intellectually satisfying, and more defensible. Best of all, it
is faithful to the one person with the greatest influence in heaven and on earth—Jesus Christ. But can we actually know Christianity to be true?

12. HOW CAN WE UNDERSTAND WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE?

We think the Christian worldview is true, but to make this claim we must have some concept of truth. Truth has two parts: understanding what is true with our minds (Rom. 12:2) as well as with our hearts (Heb. 4:12). The authors of Making Sense of Your World suggest four tests for evaluating whether or not a worldview is true at a mind and heart level:

1. Test of reason: Is it reasonable? Can it be logically stated and defended?
2. Test of the outer world: Is there some external, corroborating evidence to support it?
3. Test of the inner world: Does it adequately address the “victories, disappointments, blessings, crises, and relationships of our everyday world”?
4. Test of the real world: Are its consequences good or bad when applied in any given cultural context?

To say the Christian worldview is true is to say that it best describes the contours of the world as it actually exists. We’re not asking you to take our word for it: follow God, not us. If at any point you are confused, prayerfully seek God’s Word under the guidance of wise counselors with a determination to understand and obey every good thing you need to do God’s will.

Understanding the truth, though, is only the first part. We must also learn to communicate truth, “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you . . . with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet. 3:15). Critics say Christianity is irrational, unhistorical, and unscientific. Christianity is more than equal to these criticisms, but we must be trained to articulate how and why.

13. CAN’T WE ALL JUST GET ALONG?

In questioning the truth or falsehood of various worldviews, we risk a great deal. Whether we accept Christianity, Islam, Secularism, Marxism, New Spirituality, or Postmodernism, we accept a worldview that describes the others as hopelessly distorted. They cannot all depict things as they really are; their competing claims cannot all be true.

Some people in history have tried to get around the differences between worldviews by telling a parable. Perhaps you’ve heard it: Six blind men come into contact with an elephant. One handles the tail and exclaims that an elephant is like a rope. Another grasps a leg and describes the elephant as a tree trunk. A third feels the tusk and says the animal is similar to a spear, and so on. Since each feels only a small portion of the whole elephant, all six men give correspondingly different descriptions of their experience.

So no one is really right or wrong, you see—we’re all correct in our own way, with our limited knowledge—or so it seems at first glance. But how do we know the blind men are all touching the same elephant? The parable assumes that (1) each man can discern only part of the truth about the nature of the elephant, and (2) we know something the blind men don’t—there is a real elephant everyone is touching.
The first assumption says no one possesses complete knowledge; the second assumption says we know no one possesses complete knowledge because we know what the elephant (or reality) is really like. But there’s a contradiction here. On the one hand, the story claims that we—the blind men—have only limited knowledge. But if everyone is blind, no one can know the ultimate shape of the elephant. We need someone who is not blind, someone who knows all truth and communicates it accurately to us.

We will not claim in this book that non-Christian worldviews are completely false. We can find grains of truth in each. Secularism, for example, does not deny the existence of the physical universe and our ability to know it. Marxism accepts the significance and relevance of science. Postmodernism acknowledges the importance of texts and words. Islam acknowledges a created universe. New Spiritualists teach there is more to reality than matter. And all five non-Christian worldviews, to one extent or another, understand the importance of “saving” the human race.

However, a major dividing line separates non-Christian worldviews from Christianity: what do you do with Jesus Christ? Christianity views Jesus Christ as the true and living Way. He is the key to reality itself. Early Christians were known as members of The Way. All other major worldviews reject Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, and King. Some deny that he ever existed.

This is too big of a difference to overlook. Who is Jesus? Did Jesus Christ live on this earth two thousand years ago? Was he God in flesh? Did he come to earth to reveal God’s will for us and to save the human race from sin? These are important questions. As Paul points out, Christianity lives or dies on the answers: “And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor. 15:14).

14. Irreconcilable Differences

If Postmodernists, for example, are correct in their belief that no metanarrative can describe reality, then Christianity is doomed; Christianity depends on understanding real universal truths, such as all people having sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23); God loving the whole human race (John 3:16); and Christ dying for our sins (1 John 2:2). If these universal claims are false, then Christianity is implausible.

If the assumptions of Secularism and Marxism are correct, anyone proclaiming the existence of the supernatural is potentially dangerous. Secularists and Marxists understand this quite clearly. For instance, Marx viewed all religion as a drug that deluded its adherents—an “opiate of the masses.” Some Secularists even portray Christians as mentally imbalanced. James J. D. Luce, the assistant executive director of Fundamentalists Anonymous, says, “The fundamentalist experience can be a serious mental health hazard to perhaps millions of people.” His organization works to “heal” Christians of...
their “mental disorder”—their Christian worldview. Harvard's Edward O. Wilson takes this a step further, contrasting liberal theology with aggressive “fundamentalist religion,” which he describes as “one of the unmitigated evils of the world.”

On the other end of the spectrum, New Spiritualists reject the personal God of the Bible as a dangerous myth separating people into religious factions. They seek instead a “higher consciousness.” Best-selling New Spiritualist author Neale Donald Walsch claims that God revealed to him personally that “no path to God is more direct than any other path. No religion is the ‘one true religion.'” In an interview with Bill Moyers, filmmaker George Lucas said, “The conclusion I’ve come to is that all the religions are true.” Lucas and Walsch’s conviction is shared in the wider population, even among many Christians. According to George Barna, 63 percent of the teenagers surveyed agree that “Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Jews, and all other people pray to the same god, even though they use different names for their god.”

So, the claim continues, if we don’t have peace on earth yet, it is only because some wrongly persist in their exclusionist beliefs.

Either Christians correctly describe reality when they speak of a loving, wise, just, personal, creative God, or they are talking nonsense. The basic tenets of the Bible cannot blend well with the non-Christian claim that we are good enough to save ourselves. We say only one view fits the facts: Christianity. God, Creator of the universe, saw its importance, loved it, loved us, so that he sent his son to redeem it—and us.

Clearly, adherents of other worldviews strongly disagree with our conclusion that only Christianity fits the facts. Some of them are prepared to attempt to dismantle our arguments. So the battle for truth is on. What case can each worldview make for itself? That’s what we’ll discover next.

ENDNOTES

1. Personal e-mail correspondence between David Wheaton and Jeff Myers, January 14 and 15, 2013.
5. Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”
6. First published in 1991, Understanding the Times covered the Biblical Christian worldview, the Marxist-Leninist worldview, and the Secular Humanist worldview. An appendix briefly surveyed an emerging worldview called Cosmic Humanism. A later edition added Postmodernism and Islam to its consideration. The current edition examines the same six worldviews with the names slightly altered in some cases (such as with Secularism) to reflect the changes in terminology used by the proponents of those views. The biggest change is from Cosmic Humanism to New Spirituality. The term Cosmic Humanism was intended to be a more academic approach to what was then called the New Age Movement. The term never really gained traction. We use the term New Spirituality in this edition because we feel it better reflects both the content and the methods used by people searching for “higher consciousness” today, especially in the ways they incorporate insights from Eastern religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.
8. See definition of “idea” at oxforddictionaries.com.
10. How big is the internet? If each “byte” of data (the size of one letter or number) was the size of the largest bacteria (0.5 mm), the amount of data YouTube users upload each day would be about twenty-one terabytes, enough to wrap around the sun three times. http://blog.fliptop.com/blog/2011/05/18/how-much-data-is-on-the-internet/.


14. John Dewey, the father of modern education, helped to organize a group of philosophers into what he hoped would be a new worldview that replaced Christianity. He called it “Secular Humanism.” The word “secular” means which pertains to worldly things rather than religious things. And yet, Dewey was forthright about the fact that his new philosophy was, in fact, religious: “Here are all of the elements for a religious faith. . . . Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind.” John Dewey, A Common Faith (1934; repr., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 87.


19. Naturalistic evolution, as we will see in the Biology chapter of this volume, says nature is all there is and the complexity of all life evolved through random-chance processes starting from nothing. It is the view articulated by George Gaylord Simpson, a respected paleontologist: “Man is the result of a purposeless and natural process that did not have him in mind. He was not planned. He is a state of matter, a form of life, a sort of animal, and a species of the Order Primates, akin nearly or remotely to all of life and indeed to all that is material.” George Gaylord Simpson, The Meaning of Evolution (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971), 345.


23. Ibid.


26. The call to prayer, the shahada, is an integral part of the salat: “Allahu Akbar; Ashadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah; Ha’iya ‘ala al-salat; Haiya ‘ala al-falah; Al-salat khayrun min al-nawm; Allahu Akbar; La ilaha illa Allah.” The English translation is “God is most great; I bear witness there is no God but God; I bear witness that which pertains to worldly things rather than religious things. And yet, Dewey was forthright about the fact that his new philosophy was, in fact, religious: “Here are all of the elements for a religious faith. . . . Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind.” John Dewey, A Common Faith (1934; repr., New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 87.


29. Since we will be speaking of “Postmodernism” as an identifiable pattern of ideas, we will capitalize all references to the term when in reference to it as a worldview.

30. The online etymology website, http://www.etymonline.com, says this about the word law: Law (n.), Old English lagu (plural laga, comb. form lag-) “law, ordinance, rule, regulation; district governed by the same laws,” from Old Norse *lagu “law,” collective plural of lag “layer, measure, stroke,” literally “something laid down or fixed,” from Proto-Germanic *lagan “put, lay” (see lay [v.]). Replaced Old English æ and gesetnes, which had the same sense development as law. Cf. also statute, from Latin statuere: German Gesetz “law;” from Old High German gisatziada; Lithuanian istatymas, from istatyti “set up, establish.” In physics, from 1660s. Law and order have been coupled since 1796.


32. John I:4: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men”; John II:25: “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live’”; Colossians 1:16: “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.”

33. Genesis 2:7: “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the
breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”

34. Luke 1:46–47: “And Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior’”; Titus 2:13: “Waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

35. Genesis 1:28: “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

36. Luke 1:30–31: “And the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus’”; Isaiah 9:6: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

37. Genesis 49:10: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples”; Isaiah 9:7: “Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.”

38. Genesis 9:6: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.”

39. Revelation 19:16: “On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords”; I Timothy 6:15: “Which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords”; Isaiah 9:6: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”; Luke 1:33: “And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

40. Psalm 24:1: “The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein”; Psalm 50:10–12: “For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine”; I Corinthians 10:26: “For the earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof.”

41. Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

42. Alvin J. Schmidt, How Christianity Changed the World (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

43. Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

44. Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”


46. John 14:6: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

47. Colossians 1:16: “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.”; Hebrews 1:1–3: “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”; John 1:1–3: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were created through him and for him.”

48. Acts 9:2: “And asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”

49. Romans 3:23: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

50. John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

51. 1 John 2:2: “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”


56. George Barna, Third Millennium Teens (Ventura, CA: The Barna Research Group, 1999), 48. It should be noted that of the teenagers surveyed, 70 percent were active in a church youth group and 82 percent identified themselves as Christians.
1. C. E. M. Joad and The Recovery of Belief

It’s easy to imagine C. S. Lewis, after an intense morning of writing *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, turning on the radio and hearing the voice of C. E. M. Joad on the BBC. Joad was a popular philosopher with a cheery red face and bristly beard who, for a time, was Britain’s most popular radio personality.

His program revolved around answering questions sent in by listeners, some serious (“What is the meaning of life?”), others not so serious (“How can a fly land upside-down on the ceiling?”). His answers often included subtle jabs at Christians. People loved it. Joad was a big deal . . . .
Bizarrely, Joad was caught trying to ride on trains without paying and was fired. Soon thereafter he was diagnosed with cancer. These devastating events led Joad back to the faith of his childhood and, shortly before his death, to his penning a stunning book called *The Recovery of Belief*. “It is because . . . the religious view of the universe seems to me to cover more of the facts of experience than any other that I have been gradually led to embrace it,” he said.1 “I now believe that the balance of reasonable considerations tells heavily in favor of the religious, even of the Christian view of the world.”2

While we don’t know every factor involved in Joad’s return to faith, we do know that he had read C. S. Lewis. Perhaps Joad found himself entranced with a mythical lion named Aslan, creator of an imaginary land called Narnia, who shed his own innocent blood to triumph over the White Witch and ransom the treacherous Edmund. Perhaps Joad saw something of Edmund in himself and something of Christ in Aslan. It’s just a story, but it rings true: we know ourselves as betrayers in need of saving.

2. Christianity: The Great Myth That Turned Out to Be True

The basics of the Christian worldview to which C. E. M. Joad returned are quite simple: there is a God; through Jesus Christ God created the world (Col. 1:16);3 human beings were made in God’s image but fell into sin; the fall of humanity brought sin and brokenness to the rest of creation; and God’s Son, Jesus Christ, paid for sin and bought redemption with his own life (Rom. 5:8).4 It is, as J. R. R. Tolkien once persuaded a reluctant C. S. Lewis, the great myth that became fact!

The Christian worldview is based squarely on the person of Jesus Christ. As John Stott said, “Christ is at the center of Christianity; all else is circumference.”5 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Other religions may offer advice on how to search for God, but Christianity turns that search on its head; God is the One getting in touch with us. He walked in the garden with Adam and Eve, dwelt in the temple, and revealed himself in Jesus Christ. He is called Emmanuel—God with us. He is the shepherd who searches for his lost sheep (Matt. 18:12).6 He is the master who did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life to ransom us from our captivity to sin (Mark 10:45).7

Nonbelievers find this story fantastical. Some think it’s too simplistic, others too complicated. Some find claims of miracles absurd, while others bristle at the very idea of supernatural authority. Those who have been hurt by those claiming to be Christians may carry emotional objections. If Christianity is true, though, those who live in unbelief have much to lose: not only do they misunderstand the world we live in, but they sit under God’s judgment (John 3:36).8 Doubtless many find this an unpopular teaching of Christianity, even unreasonable and out of touch.

But disliking parts of a worldview is not the same as disproving it; an idea’s complexity, simplicity, or unpopularity is not evidence that it is unreasonable. In this chapter we’ll dig
for the truth in the mysteries of theology, philosophy, science, and ethics in order to see whether Christianity fulfills its claim as the consummate answer to life's ultimate questions.

Christians believe God makes himself known in nature and in the Bible. These two forms of revelation establish a worldview—a pattern of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits—that leads to flourishing for ourselves and others.

Many people think they know what Christianity is all about; some have attended church all their lives and never grasped its essence. Christianity isn’t just a set of commands and inspirational sayings; it is a story that God is telling, a story that makes sense of all other stories.

3. The Christian Story

God is not only the beginning of the Christian story; his existence is the prelude. In philosophical terms, he’s the necessary condition for everything else. A story needs a storyteller who is outside the story, capable of telling it. No storyteller, no story.

The argument that demonstrates the universe was caused, and that the cause is sufficient for its effect, is called the cosmological argument for God’s existence. Some claim energy by itself was sufficient to cause our universe. But while the universe is full of energy, energy itself has never been shown to create information like the ordered information we see in human DNA. Also, energy doesn’t have a plan, but the universe seems ordered and purposeful. It’s reasonable, then, that whatever caused the universe must, according to a predetermined purpose, be capable of producing order. This is suspiciously close to how the Bible describes God.

But the Bible’s description of God goes beyond his necessary existence as designer. The Bible claims God is personal and has made himself known to his creation. Further, the Bible describes that God is active in his creation, specifically in overcoming humanity’s fall into sin and bringing subsequent rescue, or redemption, of what he made. Let’s take a look at these claims.

God is personal. Pure energy does not create; it explodes. The harnessing of energy to purposeful ends indicates the presence of someone with a plan who is doing the harnessing. The Genesis creation account describes God as this kind of designer. A God who desires purpose rather than randomness and who enacts his authority rather than permit chaos—such a God has the characteristics of a person.

The existence of humanity also suggests that God is personal. Natural causes and forces cannot explain why the world is populated with more than mere entities, but persons. Whatever—or Whoever—caused the universe must also be capable of causing persons. The existence of personhood in the universe suggests that the first cause must be personal as well.

To summarize where this brings us so far, the universe we experience suggests it was brought into existence by an intelligent, purposeful, personal designer.
Further, the way humans are created reveals something about the character of the God who created us. The biblical God creates humans in his own image and charges us with the task of stewarding his creation. The significant role of humanity in the world is unique to the biblical account.

In contrast to the biblical account, New Spirituality claims God is pure energy, or consciousness. In this view, god has no personality or will. God is a tool to be used, not a person to be known. As William E. Brown points out, in *Star Wars* Obi Wan Kenobi doesn’t tell Luke Skywalker “The force loves you” or “The force died for your sins.” He tells him to “use the force.” The metaphor is significant; we use things; we relate to persons.

The Bible says God’s characteristics are fully independent of our understanding or use of them. Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Romans 11:33 says, “How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!” Acts 17:24–25 says, “The God Who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.”

We cannot bend God to our expectations. We cannot program him to be predictable. In C. S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Mr. Beaver tries to describe Aslan, the Christ figure, to Lucy, who expresses trepidation about Aslan’s being a lion: “Is he safe?” she asks. “Course he isn’t safe,” says Mr. Beaver. “But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

**God has made himself known.** The word “revelation,” or “to reveal,” is from the Greek word *apokaluptō* and means “to uncover, to unveil, or to lay bare.” God doesn’t just reveal his plan; he reveals himself. He is transcendent (beyond and separate from the world) but also immanent (in the world). When God expressed his thoughts, the universe came into being (Gen. 1:1, John 1:1). His presence sustains the world (Col. 1:16–17). The universe speaks of God’s creativity and presence; it speaks the language of God.

That God expresses himself communicatively tells us he is relational. Relationship is not something God does, but something he is. God is trinity, one God made manifest in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This relationship in the godhead is closely tied to what God would have us do. Matthew 28:19 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” All three are critical to our mission in the world.

When people say they can’t believe in God because he has not shown himself, they are overlooking a critical fact: this is exactly what he has done. The problem is not a lack of visible evidence; the problem is an unwillingness to see. As Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote in her poem “Aurora Leigh,”

> Earth’s crammed with heaven,  
> And every common bush afire with God:  
> But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,  
> The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries,  
> And daub their natural faces unaware  
> More and more, from the first similitude.  

Like an artist, God is visible in his works, and especially in the person of Christ. Yet he is visible only if we have eyes to see (John 10:30; 14:7–8).
God has created. God created through *fiat*, a Latin word meaning “let it be.” What God wants, happens. What God says, goes. Even *nothing* became *something* when God told it to.

Many skeptics doubt whether human life has any special meaning. For a depressing example, attend Samuel Beckett’s play *Breath*. The curtain opens to a stage littered with trash. The audience hears a birth cry, then the sound of breathing, and then another cry. Twenty-five seconds after it opens, the curtain closes. The message: life begins with crying and ends with crying, and everything in between is garbage. Lest you think this is a prank, as of last count *The Breath* has been performed 1,314 times and attended by 85 million people, making it Beckett’s most-viewed play.18

Life is more than an “episode between two oblivions,”19 as Ernest Nagel memorably phrased it. We are more than, as an old song describes, “dust in the wind.”20 The biblical creation account uses the word “good” to describe creation’s value. Our English word “good” simply does not convey the goodness of this kind of good. The Hebrew word *tob* means good in every way possible: in potential, in beauty, in convenience, in joy, in fruitfulness, in economics, in wisdom, in sensuality, in happiness, and even in morality.21 God was pleased with creation’s goodness and called for it to flourish: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). It was not a micro-managed event; God unleashed creation with an expressed desire to see it *teem* with life.22

Humanity’s appearance receives special attention in the biblical creation narrative. Each step along the way God said, “Let there be . . . ”—and it was as he said. In verse 26, with human creation, the language changes abruptly. Instead of “Let there be,” the text says, “Let us make.” After creating humans and imbuing them with purpose, God says it is “very good.” In the Hebrew, the phrase is *meod tob.* It is almost impossible to exaggerate the resonant awesomeness this phrase is meant to convey. It literally means exceedingly, heartbreakingly, abundantly, richly, loudly, immeasurably good in a festive, generous, happy, intelligent, charming, splendid way. Those who view humans as a plague are not, from God’s perspective, wise and brave but stingy, small-minded and bitter—Scrooges on a cosmic level.23

It was not only their individual creation that was good—it was the goodness of their relationships with God, with one another, and with creation itself. Christians themselves often miss the true significance of God’s design. Lesslie Newbigin invested his life as a missionary and theologian in India. He relates a conversation with a Hindu friend who said:

> I can’t understand why you missionaries present the Bible to us in India as a book of religion. It is not a book of religion—and anyway we have plenty of books of religion in India. We don’t need any more! I find in your Bible a unique interpretation of universal history, the history of the whole of creation and the history of the human race. And therefore a unique interpretation of the human person as a responsible actor in history. That is unique. There is nothing else in the whole religious literature of the world to put alongside it.24

As human actors, part of our responsibility is to work. Genesis 2:15 says, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.” Work is not a product of the fall; it is very much woven into the fabric of God’s very good plan for us. We should work for the love of the work itself, “for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing,” as Dorothy Sayers says.25
Companionship is also part of God’s design. “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’” (Gen. 2:18). Relationship and work go together; “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil” (Eccl. 4:9). Spreading order across the chaos is a task so large and so joyful that it is a pity for it to be done alone. But it is not mere companionship described here. It is a marriage between a man and woman who delight in one another’s company, work side by side, and fulfill God’s commands for flourishing. Their names were Adam and Woman. (Woman’s name was subsequently changed to Eve, but that comes later.)

The Christian story of creation is this: a relational Creator made human beings in his image, releasing them to relate and create. This is the foundation of everything—of human rights, social order, marriage. It is, in short, the framework for the good life—for the individual and for all of civil society.

So what went wrong?

**Human beings are fallen.** Things function best according to their design. If we ignore God’s design for eating, our bodies function poorly. If we ignore creation’s balance, we overharvest and choke the life out of the earth. Ignoring design breaks faith with the designer. The theological term for this is *sin*. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. defines sin as “not only the breaking of law but also the breaking of a covenant with one’s savior. Sin is the smearing of a relationship, the grieving of one’s divine parent and benefactor, a betrayal of the partner to whom one is joined by a holy bond.”

Genesis 3:6 narrates the horrifying way our first parents ate of the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, intentionally breaking their relationship with God in order to pursue their own good, their own delight, and their own wisdom. Disobedience broke all of the key relationships in their lives. In shame they hid from the God with whom they had previously communed. Their unity with one another dissolved into squabbling and blame. The fruitfulness of nature at their touch was replaced with pain, frustration, deceit, and toil.

In the midst of this misery, it was an act of God’s mercy to not prolong their lives forever. Death mercifully came to Adam and Eve, but not before long life gave them a front row seat to the shriveling consequences wrought by their vandalism of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and sin’s consequent vandalism of the world. Saint Augustine used the Latin phrase *incurvatus in se* to describe the grisly way sin curves in on itself. Martin Luther explained:

> Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin being so deeply curved in on itself (*incurvatus in se*) that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them, as is plain in the works-righteous and hypocrites, or rather even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvily, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.
As we pursue everything for our own sakes, our perception of reality grows ever more at odds with what actually exists. We imagine ourselves to be free and beautiful, but in actuality we grow more hunched, pinched, and sickly each passing day. Try as we might to ignore the effects of sin in our lives, reality has a way of knocking on the back door when we refuse to meet it in the front.

One of the most embarrassing aspects of sin is the tendency to blame others rather than repent. The man blamed God for creating the woman and blamed the woman for giving him the fruit. The woman blamed the serpent for tempting her (Gen. 3:12–13). When we see sin as something others do to us, when we judge ourselves by our good intentions and impute bad motives to others, when we treat as evil that which prevents us from getting our way, we are witnessing the metastasizing of sin in our lives. Only one outcome is possible: “Sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:15).

Sin is not just out there; it is in here. It affects structures as well as persons—whole communities, indeed whole nations, fall in its wake. Sin never heals; it only corrupts. Sin attacks our humanity; frenzied, we cannibalize the humanity of others. The spiral is downward, always, and endless. We tremble at the destination but refuse to change course; we are addicts, dressing up like gods, wrecking relationships, sadistically bruising that which is fragile. The morning light finds us bloated and bleary, tearfully swearing, “Never again.” But self-destruction is our bent. Some bleed out through disastrous lifestyle choices; others suffocate on haughtiness and contempt. But no matter the means, we all die.

In the midst of this tragedy, still we hold certain graces in common. We bear God’s image yet. We help people and are helped by them. Crops grow. Sunsets remain beautiful. But we are thoroughly fallen; nothing is unaffected by our fallenness. Worse, we are absolutely fallen; nothing we can do for ourselves will fix our fallenness.

If the Christian story is true, we are badly in need of rescue. Who will help us?

**God redeems.** Some see God as a judge who, after a couple of millennia of contemplation, decides to punish his own Son for the sin of humanity. This picture falls far short of the full truth. In Scripture God reveals himself as the Redeemer buying back his wayward creation. We see his redemptive nature in the garden when he tells the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). God took a basic human kinesthetic act—standing on our feet—and transformed it, metaphorically, into a weapon to destroy slithering evil. The one who deceives at the beginning is crushed at the end (Rom. 16:20 and Rev. 12:9).

Consider too the Passover, God’s redemption of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. The centerpiece was a meal of preparation (Exod. 12), again a basic act, which Jesus repeated with his disciples (Mark 14). At the end of all things, Christianity says, the serpent who said “Take, eat” in the garden will be defeated by the Savior who said, “Take, eat” in the upper room. And, to put an exclamation point on it, Christ’s victory will be commemorated with the meal of meals, a wedding feast (Rev. 19:9).
The redemptive language in Scripture indicates that God cares about everydayness. We stand, walk, run, chew, swallow, and digest. These are not temporal activities only; at the end of all things lays the promise of a new earth as well as a new heaven. Eternity is not the escaping of the physical but the redemption of it. All things will be made new (Rev. 21:1–5).

The Christian story, then, is of a personal, relational God who created optimal conditions for human flourishing, against which humanity has rebelled and continues to rebel, and it’s a story of buying back the rebels in order to set things right again. As you can imagine, this story is viewed with immense suspicion by those who do not wish it to be true. So we must be prepared to answer the question, “How do we know this?”

4. General and Special Revelation: How God Makes Himself Known

Let’s review for a moment. Every one of us is on a journey. To complete this journey we need a map, a reliable guide showing where we are, where we are going, and the route between. If, for example, you are searching for a good school to attend you might identify successful people and inquire about where they got their training. When it comes to life’s ultimate questions, though, we need more than just quick advice. We need someone to bring the dark things to light. This is called revelation, a term we discussed earlier in some detail.

So what has been revealed? The famed American scientist Carl Sagan asserted that “the cosmos is all there is, all there ever was, and all there ever will be.” In his Cosmos film he rhapsodized, “It makes good sense to worship the sun and the stars because we are their children.” Compelling prose, to be sure, but terrible theology and even worse science. The evidence that life arose from nothing through random chance processes is not as clear cut as secular evangelists like Sagan would have you believe. There are, rather, very good reasons to believe in a God who makes himself known.

Christians believe God has revealed himself in a general way through creation and in a personal way through his divine words and acts contained in the Bible, especially in the person of Jesus Christ. Millard Erickson defines the two forms of revelation this way: “On the one hand, general revelation is God’s communication of Himself to all persons, at all times, and in all places. Special revelation, on the other hand, involves God’s particular communications and manifestations which are available now only by consultation of certain sacred writings.” Let’s examine the Christian view of both, starting with general revelation.

5. General Revelation: Nature Speaks of God’s Design

The late Dallas Willard, one-time department chair and professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California, identifies the great philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, William of Occam, René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried von
Leibniz, John Locke, George Berkeley, Immanuel Kant, and Georg W. F. Hegel—as theists, in one form or another, even though their particular theistic beliefs differed from one another. Even David Hume, whom Secularists embrace as one of their own, declared, “The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion.”

Although it takes special revelation to show us the ultimate truths set down in Scripture and embodied in Jesus Christ, general revelation can bring us to a general knowledge of God because it gives insight into how he has communicated his nature and character in creation. Most times, the questions surrounding general revelation are phrased something like this: Did life come from a living, intelligent God who loves order and beauty, or did it arise randomly from inert matter?

People tend to believe in the most likely solution to a problem, so it is unsurprising to find most people agree that “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1) and “all things therein” (Acts 17:24 KJV). Justin Barrett, a senior researcher at the University of Oxford’s Centre for Anthropology and Mind, found in his research that children instinctively believe the world was created with purpose. They are predisposed to believe in a creator God.

If you find it difficult to believe in random particles assembling themselves into a fine-tuned universe, you are not alone. The English astronomer and mathematician Fred Hoyle, who coined the term “big bang” and served for years as a leading atheist spokesman, said there is a better chance of producing a Boeing 747 via a junkyard explosion than there is of arriving at life by accident. Further, Hoyle expresses skepticism about the chance development of DNA, noting that merely lining up the necessary enzymes by chance would consume 20 billion years. Three respected scientists—Charles Thaxton, Walter Bradley, and Roger Olsen—wrote in The Mystery of Life’s Origin that “the undirected flow of energy through a primordial atmosphere and ocean is at present a woefully inadequate explanation for the incredible complexity associated with even simple living systems, and is probably wrong.”

Christianity says a creator God, not a sequence of random cosmic accidents, is responsible for an orderly, beautiful, meaningful cosmos. The Bible says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). Evolutionist Paul Amos Moody affirms, “The more I study science the more I am impressed with the thought that this world and universe have a definite design—and a design suggests a designer. It may be possible to have design without a designer, a picture without an artist, but my mind is unable to conceive of such a situation.”

The universe is a product of design, Christianity says, and this is observable by everyone, whether or not that truth is suppressed by other commitments.
6. CAN GENERAL REVELATION LEAD PEOPLE TO GOD?

Of course, there are disagreements among Christians about origins issues. But when top scientists contradict atheist claims, it catches our attention. Robert Jastrow is one person whom atheists wished would have just been quiet. After completing a Ph.D. in theoretical physics from Columbia University, Jastrow became one of the first employees of NASA, chairing the committee that outlined the scientific goals of moon exploration. It was because of Jastrow’s extraordinary credentials and stellar career that the scientific community was so startled when he concluded:

At this moment it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries. 41

Sometimes insight about general revelation leads people to a personal relationship with God through Christ. Many discover God through the evidence of a structured universe or the purposeful nature of reality. As with renowned philosopher C. E. M. Joad, some come to believe in a personal God and in Jesus Christ as his appointed means of redemption. But general revelation does not necessarily lead people to faith. Biblically speaking, one divine purpose of general revelation is to remove people’s excuses for not believing in God. Recall Romans 1:19–20:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

C. S. Lewis frames this “excuse removal” like this:

Suppose there were no intelligence behind the universe. In that case nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. Thought is merely the by-product of some atoms within my skull. But if so, how can I trust my own thinking to be true? But if I can't trust my own thinking, of course, I can't trust the arguments leading to atheism, and therefore have no reason to be an atheist, or anything else. Unless I believe in God, I can't believe in thought; so I can never use thought to disbelieve in God. 42

Once the excuses are removed, we enter the domain of special revelation.

7. SPECIAL REVELATION: DIVINE COMMUNICATION THROUGH INSPIRED SCRIPTURE

General revelation is a necessary but insufficient means for revealing the Creator. The character of creation tells us what exists, but not why: Why am I here? Why is there something wrong with us? Why can't we fix ourselves? Christianity turns to the Bible as the opening of heaven’s door, showing us what God is like, what he wants us to do, and how we might be saved from our distress.
Christians view Scripture as the way God revealed himself over the course of 1,600 years in words written down by leaders, prophets, and sages. These writings are not ordinary. They express precisely what God wants to communicate. They are set apart. The biblical word for “set apart” is holy. We even call God’s revelation “the Holy Bible.” Christians also call the Bible “God’s Word” because it is, in a real sense, His “speech” (Matt. 4:4; John 17:17–20). The teachings and events recorded there are the most reliable basis for understanding all reality.

We use the term “divine inspiration” to describe the doctrine of how God’s words ended up in Scripture. This addresses how a mighty and intelligent God could have communicated his written message to us, rendered just so by his chosen human vessels. It’s a vitally important question. Those who claim to be Christians but yet deny the Bible’s divine inspiration are ignoring the Scripture’s own claim to be God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

In 2009, the acerbic atheist Christopher Hitchens was interviewed by a minister named Marilyn Sewell. Trying to exempt herself from Hitchens’s criticisms of Christianity, Sewell said, “I’m a liberal Christian, and I don’t take the stories from the scripture literally. I don’t believe in the doctrine of atonement—that Jesus died for our sins, for example. Do you make a distinction between fundamentalist faith and liberal religion?” Hitchens replied, “Well, I would say that if you don’t believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ and Messiah, and that He rose again from the dead and by His sacrifice our sins are forgiven, you’re really not in any meaningful sense a Christian.”

How interesting: an avowed atheist can see this simple truth and a self-proclaimed minister cannot. One would expect self-identified Christians to affirm the integrity of their holy book. Embarrassed by the Bible’s extraordinary claims, though, some think they can soften secularists’ criticisms by expressing skepticism or disbelief. As Christopher Hitchens shows, though, the effect is the opposite: secularists already see Christians as typically soft-headed. When Christians cave in to criticism, they just shrug and add one more descriptor: cowardly.

Christians need not be embarrassed about the Bible. There is intriguing evidence justifying the Christian’s belief in the divine inspiration of the Bible. For example, given that its books were authored by different men in very different circumstances over many centuries, the unity of teaching in the Bible is startling. Billions of lives have been changed by the Bible, and even nonbelievers accept the genius of its moral teachings. This cannot be claimed, truthfully, of any other book. British broadcaster Melvyn Bragg phrased it this way: “The Bible is one of the fundamental makers of the modern world. It has set free not only its readers and

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Special Revelation: God’s unique revelation about himself through the Scriptures (Psalm 19:7–11; 2 Timothy 3:14–17), miraculous events (e.g., dreams, visions, prophets, prophecy, etc.), and Jesus Christ (John 1:1–18).

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—Christopher Hitchens
its preachers but those who have used it as a springboard to achieve gains and enrichment in our world never before enjoyed by so many.”

In studying the Bible, the reader meets God’s most direct form of special revelation: the person of Jesus Christ. “In Jesus of Nazareth,” writes Carl F. H. Henry, “the divine source of revelation and the divine content of that revelation converge and coincide.” Christ’s teachings, actions, and most significantly his resurrection provide the cornerstone for special revelation and a solid foundation for Christian theism. The Holy Spirit too plays an important role in this dialogue. Henry explains: “Scripture itself is given so that the Holy Spirit may etch God’s Word upon the hearts of His followers in ongoing sanctification that anticipates the believer’s final, unerring conformity to the image of Jesus Christ, God’s incarnate Word.”

Our need to be conformed to the character of Christ is why Christians don’t just read the Bible once and set it aside, but study it as the living Word of God and seek constantly to apply its teachings. It’s a project from which a person never graduates until finally arriving in God’s presence and knowing the whole and complete truth (1 Cor. 13:12).

For all of these reasons, we need to understand what special revelation is all about. We’ll examine it by seeking to answer five questions:

• How are we to understand the Bible?
• What does the Bible say about humanity?
• What does the Bible say is wrong with us?
• What does the Bible say about how we should live?
• How are we to understand other worldviews based on the Bible?

How are we to understand the Bible? What Scripture means depends on God’s intention, not our interpretation. The Apostle Peter is clear: “no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Pet. 1:20–21).

What resources do we have to understand the Bible? The answers include careful study, listening to the Holy Spirit, and participation in the body of Christ. As Paul told Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). The analogy of craftsmanship is powerful. Take music, for example. There are many ways for an orchestra conductor to interpret the opening sequence of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. By playing the notes at a different pace or volume, the conductor brings out new understandings of the piece. But if the orchestra plays other notes, it is no longer performing Beethoven’s work. Similarly, if the musicians are poorly trained, the screeching violins and burping brass will destroy any credibility the conductor’s interpretation might otherwise have had.

Craftsmen know that long before the work of interpretation has any meaning, the strenuous work of understanding must be carried out. Interpretation (what the text means) precedes application (what the text means to me). The next time you’re in a Bible study and someone says, “Here’s what the text means to me,” be sure that person has thoroughly understood God’s intended meaning before you pay attention to his or her application.
What does the Bible say about humanity? The Christian worldview gives meaning to human existence right from the start when God declares, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Naturalistic worldviews rely on chance and time to explain birds capable of astronomical navigation and bees that communicate through dance. Christians credit an all-knowing God who ordered the universe into a beautiful symphony of light, life, sound, and color.

Saying “God did it” isn’t a copout. C. E. M. Joad’s conversion came about through recognizing that the Christian explanation of human nature better fits the facts of experience and allows a more comprehensible view of the world. He says his “changed view of the nature of man . . . led to a changed view of the nature of the world.”50 Why would a philosopher like Joad, and so many others through the ages, draw this conclusion? Because they understand the nature of thinking. The mind is not merely random chemical firings of synapses in the brain. If we understand, it’s because we were meant to.

Even Charles Darwin recognized the problem faced by adherents to atheistic, naturalistic explanations of mind: “With me, the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would anyone trust in the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?”51

“With me, the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man’s mind, which has been developed from the mind of lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would anyone trust in the convictions of a monkey’s mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?”

—Charles Darwin

The Bible never waxes romantic about human nature. Stories of revenge, genocide, false imprisonment, greed, lust, and murder among many other forms of evil fill its pages, putting the inhumanity of humans toward one another fully on display. As Joad says,

The Bible never waxes romantic about human nature. Stories of revenge, genocide, false imprisonment, greed, lust, and murder among many other forms of evil fill its pages, putting the inhumanity of humans toward one another fully on display.

Is it not obvious that human arrogance and love of power, that human brutality and cruelty, that, in a word, man’s inhumanity to man, are responsible for . . . [tragic events such as the Holocaust]; obvious,
too, that it is precisely these characteristics that have written their melancholy record upon every page of human history.

But here’s the hard news. If the moral code given in the Bible is a window through which we can discern evil and corruption in the world, it is also a mirror in which we see every detail of our own utter sinfulness (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10–23).

As R. C. Sproul is fond of saying, we are a lot more like Adolf Hitler than we are like Jesus Christ. When we ask ourselves whether our inclinations are good or evil and whether it is fair to blame society for our urge to steal, lust, or lie, we must face our own bent toward sin. G. K. Chesterton is right: our penchant for vice is ubiquitous. And the Bible is certainly right: our hearts are deceitful and desperately sick (Jer. 17:9). Even “our righteous acts are unclean” (Isa. 64:6) because we perform them out of a prideful belief in our own saving power. “Know thyself,” the ancient Greeks said. We do. It’s not pretty.

The distance between God and us is vast, and the implications of this for our lives are staggering. Carl F. H. Henry said,

Christianity declares that God is more than the ground and goal of the moral order. Unequivocally it lays stress on the reality of God’s judgment of history. It affirms, that is, the stark fact of moral disorder and rebellion: “the whole world lieth in wickedness” (1 John 5:19). By emphasizing the fact of sin and the shattered moral law of God, the dread significance of death, the wiles of Satan and the hosts of darkness, Christian ethics sheds light on the treacherous realities of making moral choices.

The reality of which Henry speaks, that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), is a unique aspect of the Christian ethical system. D. James Kennedy wrote,

When a person makes up his own ethical code he always makes up an ethical system which he thinks he has kept. In the law of God, we find a law which smashes our self-righteousness, eliminates all trust in our own goodness, and convinces us that we are sinners. The law of God leaves us with our hands over our mouths and our faces in the dust. We are humbled before God and convinced that we are guilty transgressors of his law.

Once we truly grapple with how corrupt we are, it is easier to see how hopeless we are without divine intervention. The vehicle carrying our hopes and dreams hasn’t just been in a fender-bender. It is wrecked. We must first wallow in our deadness in Adam before we glory in our aliveness in Christ (Rom. 5:12–21; Eph. 2:1). The Christian ethical code points to our sinful nature and introduces the only one who can save us, the man who has not transgressed, Jesus Christ. Put simply, “The law is given to convince us that we fail to keep it.”

When we realize this truth, we are driven for salvation to the one who has not failed.

What does the Bible say about how we should live? We cannot simply rely on Christ to save us while continuing in our sinful ways. Rather, once we embrace the ultimate sacrifice God made for us, we gain power through the Holy Spirit to adhere to his moral order. This does not mean it is easy to do what is morally right. As Lewis says, “There is nowhere this side of heaven where one can safely lay the reins on the horse’s neck. It will never be lawful simply to ‘be ourselves’ until ‘ourselves’ have become sons of God.”
In the power of the Holy Spirit we have the capacity to, as Paul instructs Christians, “let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good” (Rom. 12:9). Christian morality is founded on the conviction of an absolute moral order outside of, and yet somehow inscribed into, our very being. It flows like a river from the nature of the Creator through the nature of created things and into our minds and hearts. We cannot make it up. To quote Lewis again, “The human mind has no more power of inventing a new value than of imagining a new primary color, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in.”

According to a good deal of secular philosophies, we should treat all morals as relative to the situation or to the culture in which we were raised. In practice, even Secularists treat some abstract values (such as justice, love, and courage) as absolute. Secularists cringe at the Nazi holocaust, the abuse of child soldiers, and sex trafficking. The Christian worldview explains how we intuitively know these things are wrong: not because we’ve been raised in certain cultures or have had a certain kind of training but because moral truth actually exists for all people in all cultures at all times.

This moral understanding, according to the Apostle John, is “the true light, which enlightens everyone . . . coming into the world” (John 1:9). The Apostle Paul calls this “the work of the law written in their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness” (Rom. 2:15). This insight brings light into our ethical eyes, as we will see in the ethics chapter, so we can “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

Many who finally begin to reflect on the deeper things of life—“How did I get here? Why am I here? Where am I going?”—simply discover the Christian answers to these questions to be more complete, more robust. Even today the vast majority of people (one poll places the figure as high as 91 percent) believe in God, a fact Paul found to also be true in the Athens of his day (Acts 17:23).

When we understand God’s nature and character, and when we acknowledge Christ’s atoning sacrifice, the Christian worldview gains tremendous explanatory and transformative power:

- Putting Christian economics into practice results in prosperity for the greatest number of people, even while the interventionist welfare state seems to secure generational poverty.
- Putting Christian sociology into practice encourages strong families and guards against widespread drug use, crime, unemployment, poverty, and disease, whereas secular views of sexuality destroy the family, which holds society together.
- Putting Christian law into practice guarantees human rights as God-ordained, while its denial—in France for two centuries, in the Soviet Union for seventy years, and in the U.S. for the last half-century—has been a history of carnage.
- Putting Christian theology and philosophy into practice results in salvation of the soul (Matt. 16:26), enlightenment of the mind, and purpose in life.
8. How Are We to Understand Other Worldviews Based on the Bible?

Often the children’s game of tag features a “home base” to which one can cling in safety; resting in this neutral zone frees one from making decisions, from taking risks. But there is no neutral zone in the war of ideas. To reject one worldview is to automatically go over to another side. C. S. Lewis put it starkly in *Abolition of Man*: “Either we are rational spirit obliged forever to obey the absolute values of the Tao [moral order], or else we are mere nature to be kneaded and cut into new shapes for the pleasures of masters who must, by hypothesis, have no motive but their own natural impulses.”

The other five worldviews we will consider in this book, Islam, Secularism, Marxism, New Spirituality, and Postmodernism, all came about long after Christianity, so we can’t expect the Bible to address them specifically. But the other worldviews present in Bible times, some of which were much more popular than Christianity itself, were similar enough to give insight into modern perspectives. Christianity views non-Christian worldviews as based on “the basic principles of this world” and not upon Christ (Col. 2:8). In a word, they are foolish. It is foolish to say, “There is no God” (Ps. 14:1). It is foolish to scan the heavens and argue for chance and accident. It is foolish to examine the human body without an eye to design. It is foolish to experience the seasons of life and never sense the witness of God. It is foolish to listen to Handel’s *Messiah* and picture evolving monkeys making music.

As we draw this chapter to a close, let’s briefly examine the other five worldviews and see how the Christian worldview interacts with each.

**Islam.** As the numbers of adherents to Islam grow rapidly, Christians are faced with having to understand and grapple with the implications of a worldview that only a few short years ago most Americans saw as an exotic and distasteful set of beliefs held by people we don’t understand in parts of the world we don’t think much about. But with rapid immigration and a global economy, every Christian will encounter Islam as both a religion and as a political ideology.

For Christians especially, Islam presents a confusing dilemma. Muslims believe in one God. They acknowledge Jesus as a prophet. They believe in moral absolutes. And yet Muslims see Christians as blasphemers because they believe in the Trinity, a doctrine they say has led to secularization and corruption. In countries such as Nigeria where the Christian/Muslim divide is especially intense, some have embraced Chrislam, a synthetic religion combining elements of Christianity and Islam. But while Christians and Muslims must learn to live together, their beliefs are incompatible. Islam cannot answer the ultimate questions in life in a way that satisfies the tests of truth.

**Secularism and Marxism** are cousins. To both it is seen as misguided and possibly dangerous to stake much on belief in God as revealed in the Bible. Divine action is not needed to explain life’s existence, they insist. This *naturalism* reduces both Secularism and Marxism...
to one reliable way of knowing: scientism, the notion that reliable knowledge comes only from scientific inquiry and method. But explaining all of reality is a burden far too heavy for science to carry. Even Julian Huxley, one of the twentieth century’s leading evolutionists, recognized the limited nature of the scientific method:

Science has removed the obscuring veil of mystery from many phenomena, much to the benefit of the human race: but it confronts us with a basic and universal mystery—the mystery of existence in general, and of the existence of mind in particular. Why does the world exist? Why is the world-stuff what it is? Why does it have mental or subjective aspects as well as material or objective ones? We do not know. 

Even if science could go beyond how and reveal to us why we exist as we do, it has very little to say about things that make life worth living: we ponder, we laugh, we sing, we are capable of doing good, we feel guilt and sadness and empathy over our own wrongdoing and that of others, we create things, we reason our way to conclusions, and we are moved deeply by experiences of beauty and craftsmanship.

Naturalists cannot account for these things, but they depend on them, just as you and I do, for meaning in life. To describe them as secondary, derivative, or mere reflections of material reality is inadequate. As Lewis pointed out, we ascribe meaning to our things, which is not a reasonable assumption if they proceed from a random universe. For casting such a wide net, worldviews based on naturalism catch very little.

**New spirituality.** New Spirituality’s view of God as impersonal consciousness is irreconcilable with the biblical concept of God as a personal, relational being who reveals himself generally in nature and specially through Scripture. When it comes to the nature of God and reality, the Christian worldview offers a confidence not found in New Spirituality. Hebrews 11:1 explains that biblical faith is based on confidence and assurance, not wishes or guesses. Based on the historical eyewitness accounts of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, Christians are confident of his claim to be “the way, the truth, and the life.” In contrast to the “all roads lead to God” notion, the map of Christianity shows only one road leading to God, the road passing through the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (John 8:31–32; John 14:6; Col. 2:2; 2 Pet. 1:16–18; and 1 John 5:20).

**Postmodernism.** Postmodernism considers truth to be particular to a person’s language, community of origin, and socially-constructed self. The Christian worldview, by contrast, claims the existence of an objective truth that can be known. This truth is universal in its scope and application—nearly everything about Christianity is. God created the whole universe and sin is a universal condition affecting every human being. Christ died to redeem the whole world. Christians are to love God with all their hearts and minds and their fellow human beings around the whole world. Christians may join Postmodernists in critiquing scientific materialism, the idea that only matter exists and that only science can reveal its nature, but they will find Postmodernism’s assertion that “all worldviews are local” unpersuasive.
9. Where Does Faith Come In?

Unfortunately, some Christians see faith as indefensible. Belief by its very nature is “beyond reason,” they say. These Christians point to Colossians 2:8, where Paul writes, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy.” People who use this verse as an anti-philosophical prooftext do so by omitting its ending, in which Paul describes the kind of philosophy he is warning against—philosophy “which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”

Paul did not see Christianity as beyond reason or inaccessible to those unfamiliar with localized Jewish traditions. In Acts 17, he confronted the vain and deceitful philosophies of the atheistic Epicureans and pantheistic Stoics—the professional Secularists and New Spiritualists of his day. He countered their ideas with Christian ideas, he reasoned with them, he preached to them, and he accented three truths many Christians would like to soft-peddle: the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 17:18), the creation of the universe by God (Acts 17:24), and the judgment to come (Acts 17:31).75

Of course, while Paul’s hearers understood creation and suspected him to be correct about judgment, they thought he was crazy in arguing for the resurrection of the dead. Even here Paul gave arguments, arguments expanded upon in our own day by scholars such as N. T. Wright and Gary Habermas. Josh McDowell says, “After more than seven hundred hours of studying this subject and thoroughly investigating its foundation, I have come to the conclusion that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men, or it is the most fantastic fact of history.”76 McDowell’s conclusion: this improbable and thrilling event actually happened. You can follow these arguments by reading Evidence That Demands a Verdict, N. T. Wright’s book The Resurrection of the Son of God, and Gary Habermas’s The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus.77

Once we have captured every idea and made it obedient to Christ, we should use these thoughts to:

- “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5);
- “walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col. 2:6–7);
- “see to it” that we are not taken captive “by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8); and
- be “zealous for what is good” without fear, “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks” for a reason for our hope, and to do so “with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience,” that puts slanderers to shame. Along with this, we must be willing to “suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil” (1 Pet. 3:13–17).78

We encourage you to consider these passages as a magnifying glass through which to examine every area of your life: the way you daily invest your time, energy, gifting, relationships, and creativity. If Christianity is so reasonable, though, why do so many people resist believing it?
10. IF CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE, WHY DOESN’T EVERYONE SEE IT?

Either a supreme mind has always existed and at specific points in time created matter and the universe, or matter is eternal and formed the universe by itself. There really aren’t any other viable options on the table at this point. Christian arguments are reasonable when it comes to seeing the universe as the product of design (general revelation), and the Bible as the most accurate description of the Designer and how we might come to know him through Jesus Christ (special revelation).

But why do so many people not see what Christians believe to be self-evidently true? The key may be found in John 1:1–5:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

We humans have two problems: the world is dark and we are blind. In the sense of general revelation, what is true about God is plainly seen. In special revelation, though, the Christian worldview must be believed to be understood. So how do we come to this belief? Christian interpretations vary, but an old hymn weaves together what most can agree on: “I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me. It was not I that found, O Savior true; no, I was found of thee.”

Without revelation to light the way, people cannot comprehend truth. They’ll invent counterfeit worldviews in an attempt to shed light on their own paths. We’ll take a look at each of these worldviews in turn, starting with one many people see as a close cousin of Christianity, Islam.

ENDNOTES
1 C. E. M. Joad, The Recovery of Belief (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), 16.
2 Ibid., 22.
3 Colossians 1:16: “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.”
4 Romans 5:8: “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
6 Matthew 18:12: “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?”
7 Mark 10:45: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
8 John 3:36: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”
10 Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”; John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
11 Colossians 1:16–17: “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”
12 For more information, see Francis Collins, The Language of God (New York: Free Press, 2007).
13 Malachi 2:10: “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?”; Matthew 23:9: “And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven”; John 14:9-10: “Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works’”; 1 Corinthians 8:6: “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist”; Ephesians 1:3: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places”; Ephesians 4:6: “One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”; Hebrews 1:3: “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and upholds the universe by the word of his power.”

14 John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”; John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth”; John 5:18: “This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God”; John 8:58: “Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am’”; John 10:30-33: “‘I and the Father are one.’ The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, ‘I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?’ The Jews answered him, ‘It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God’”; Colossians 2:9: “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily”; Philippians 2:5-8: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross”; Hebrews 1:8: “But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of our kingdom.’”

15 Matthew 28:19: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”; 2 Corinthians 3:16-18: “But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”; 2 Corinthians 13:14: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”; and Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you are called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”


17 John 10:30: “I and the Father are one”; John 14:7-8: “If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” The disciple Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”


20 Kerry Livgren, Dust in the Wind, recorded by Kansas, released on “Paradox,” January 16, 1978.


22 See Andy Crouch’s thought-provoking book Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).

23 See, for example, E. Calvin Beisner, “The Competing World Views of Environmentalism and Christianity,” The Cornwall Alliance, accessed March 26, 2014, http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/THECOM-1.PDF, in which E. Calvin Beisner reports a statement from Britain’s Prince Phillip that if he were to be reincarnated he would want to come back as a killer virus to lower human population to manageable levels.


27 Genesis 3:6: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.”

29 Genesis 3:12-13: “The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.’ Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’”

30 Romans 16:20: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” Revelation 12:9: “And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

31 Revelation 19:9: “And the angel said to me, ‘Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the true words of God.’”

32 Revelation 21:1-5: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’ And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”


34 Ibid.


36 Cited in J. P. Moreland and Kai Nielson, Does God Exist? The Great Debate (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 211. What can a naturalist do with mind, soul, altruism, creativity, rationality, conscience, song, and laughter?


43 Matthew 4:4: “But he answered, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’” John 17:17-20: “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.”

44 2 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”


48 Ibid., 2:15.

49 1 Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

50 Joad, Recovery of Belief, 46.


55 Joad, Recovery of Belief, 46.

56 Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”; Romans 3:10-23: As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one: no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside: together they have become worthless: no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to
it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

58 Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”
61 Romans 5:12–21: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”; Ephesians 2:1–9: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
62 Kennedy, Why I Believe, 90.
63 C. S. Lewis, God in the Dock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 286.
66 Acts 17:23: “For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”
67 Yes, carnage in the United States: 1.2 million unborn babies killed every year by abortion.
68 Matthew 16:26: “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?”
69 Lewis, Abolition of Man, 84.
70 Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”
71 Psalm 14:1: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.”
73 Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”
74 John 8:31–32: “So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’; John 14:6: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’”; Colossians 2:2: “that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ”; 2 Peter 1:16–18: “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,’ we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain”; 1 John 5:20: “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”
75 Act 17:18: “Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, ‘What does this babbler wish to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities’—because he was preaching
Jesus and the resurrection”: Act 17:24: “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man”; Acts 17:31: “because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

77 Ibid.
78 1 Peter 3:13-17: Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.
79 “I Sought the Lord,” text by anonymous, music by George Chadwick. Public domain.
1. September 11, 2001

September 11, 2001: 316 years to the day after Muslim invaders were turned away at the gates of Vienna.¹ The world watched in horror as four commercial airliners were mutated into flying missiles in the service of radical Islamist ideology. On each flight, hijackers used knives or box cutters, mace, and pepper spray to keep passengers at bay, threatening to detonate bombs if anyone tried to fight back. Little did the passengers suspect the planes themselves would become the bombs. At 8:14 a.m., American Airlines Flight 11, a nonstop flight to Los Angeles, was the first to be hijacked. Five armed men murdered several people...
on the flight before ramming the plane into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City thirty-two minutes later. United Airlines Flight 175, also bound for Los Angeles, was similarly hijacked at 8:45 a.m. Fifteen minutes later one brave passenger, Peter, risked a call to his father:

It’s getting bad, Dad—a stewardess was stabbed—They seem to have knives and Mace—They said they have a bomb—It’s getting very bad on the plane—Passengers are throwing up and getting sick—The plane is making jerky movements—I don’t think the pilot is flying the plane—I think we are going down—I think they intend to go to Chicago or someplace and fly into a building—Don’t worry, dad—if it happens, it’ll be very fast—My God, my God.2

As the phone connection abruptly ended at 9:03 a.m., Peter’s father witnessed Flight 175 crash into the World Trade Center South Tower, instantly immolating all on board and untold numbers in the building.

American Airlines Flight 77, departing from Washington, DC, and also intended for Los Angeles, was hijacked minutes before 9:00 a.m., and thirty minutes later crashed into the Pentagon. The passengers on United Airlines Flight 93, departing Newark for San Francisco, left twenty-five minutes behind schedule, so shortly after the hijackers gained control of the cockpit they phoned loved ones and heard of the other attacks. Recognizing the likely intentions of their own aircraft’s hijackers, they stormed the cockpit. Their efforts were in vain, however. United Flight 93 plowed into an empty field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at 580 miles per hour, about twenty minutes’ flying time from Washington, DC.3

In the course of one day, Americans became tragically aware that they had been asleep while a very powerful worldview emerged from a centuries-long slumber in a bid for global power. Shocked and angered, the nation was asking, “What kind of person would sacrifice his life in order to kill as many people as possible?” The answer was discovered almost immediately: the hijackers were all Saudi and Egyptian Muslim men. If all the terrorists were Muslim, Americans wondered, might any Muslim be a terrorist? Muslim Americans wondered if their neighbors would seek revenge on all Muslims, including those not prone to violence.

2. Radical versus Moderate Islam

Those who observed the events of September 11, 2001, especially those who lost loved ones, find it difficult to view Islam outside the prism of their experience. If we are to understand the worldview of Islam on its own terms, though, we need to seek to understand what Islam says about itself and not just rely on our visceral reactions.

Violent, radical Muslims who dream of the establishment of a global Islamic state and are willing to use violence to achieve this end, do exist. Most Muslims, though, simply want to engage in Muslim practice and raise their families according to Muslim traditions. They
hope for more people to convert to Islam, but they have little interest in establishing a global Islamic state if it is going to involve violence or the tearing down of the structures of democracy from which they have obtained personal benefit. Such Muslims are often called “moderates.” This is not to imply that they are less devout, but that they are eager to build economic ties with the West rather than destroy it.  

In any event, distinguishing between moderate and radical Muslims is not easy. An article in the respected *Foreign Policy* magazine by John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed summarized research done by the Gallup Corporation. The research revealed substantive errors in what Americans think about radical Islam: radicals are not more likely to attend religious services than moderates. They earn more money and stay in school longer than moderates, and they express more satisfaction with their financial situation. They are as likely as moderates to express admiration of the West’s technology, democracy, and freedom of speech.

The researchers write, “We find that Muslim radicals have more in common with their moderate brethren than is often assumed. If the West wants to reach the extremists, and empower the moderate Muslim majority, it must first recognize who it’s up against.” This astounding statement would be rejected out of hand were it not for the researchers’ credentials: Esposito is a respected professor of Islamic studies at Georgetown University, and Mogahed is one of the most influential Muslim women in the world.

The key difference between moderate and radical Muslims is this: radicals are more likely to believe that the West “threatens and attempts to control their way of life.” So how can we tell the difference between moderates and radicals? The Gallup Corporation asked Muslims in several countries whether they thought the attacks of 9/11 were justified (on a scale of one to five, with one being “totally unjustified” and five being “completely justified”). Those who answered “four” or “five” are defined as radical. Only seven percent of Muslims fit this designation, but with 1.6 billion Muslims in the world today, this means there could be as many as 112 million radical Muslims.

3. SHOULD WE BE AFRAID?

At 7:15 p.m. on November 4, 2004, Geert Wilders was surrounded by armed men wearing bulletproof vests and carrying machine guns. “You will have to leave at once,” they announced, shoving him into an armored car. The men told him he was in extreme danger of being assassinated and would have to stay in a safe house until further notice. Since that day, Wilders, a high-level political leader, hasn’t been home. He cannot go out in public without a bulletproof vest and a contingent of armed guards.

Word of these death threats against Wilders and a colleague, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, immediately reached the news media, which reported that “anti-Muslim politicians” had “gone into hiding.” Wilder’s crime: in a speech, he stated that “the existence of peaceful Muslims should not blind us to the fact that Islam is a violent ideology that should be rejected by Muslims and non-Muslims alike.”
Wilders was not in Afghanistan, or even Iraq, but the Netherlands. His example is discomfiting because it points to a substantial problem Westerners face: as Islam grows, more and more people are discovering Islam as an ideology—a worldview—that by its nature demands political control at the expense of democracy, freedom, and constitutional government. And yet we’re conflicted: we have Muslim neighbors who work hard, get along with others, and are peaceful, law-abiding citizens.

So which is it? Is Islam, as Wilders describes it, a violent ideology waiting to subvert the West, or a peaceful religion adhered to by more than a billion people? We think the question can only be answered by viewing Islam as a worldview, a pattern of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits. More than that though, we need to understand that Islam is a system of practices by which Muslims believe they demonstrate submission to Allah. By understanding Islam’s founding principles, sources of revelation, and key teachings as a complete worldview, we will perceive Islam more clearly and know how to respond biblically.

According to M. Zuhdi Jasser, a Muslim medical doctor and a U.S. Navy veteran, it is helpful to distinguish between two groups: Muslims and Islamists. Muslims are people who are “culturally” Islamic. Muslims were born into Muslim families or converted to Islam, and identify with Islamic culture and try to follow its practices. Muslims take Islam seriously, but they can get along with non-Muslims and can live comfortably in societies that are not Islamic in nature.

Islamists, sometimes called Islamic fundamentalists, are radicals who believe the literal application of the teachings of Muhammad and the full application of shariah law, the moral code of Islam outlined in the Quran and other teachings and rulings Muslims consider authoritative. Shariah law governs everything from diet and sexual practices to the punishment of crime. Many of its aspects are shockingly harsh, legitimizing slavery, advocating physical abuse of wives, demanding heavy taxation of Christians and Jews living in Muslim lands, and calling for the killing of Muslims who convert to another faith.

Muslims and Islamists seem to differ in their understanding of jihad. Jihad means to fight against non-Muslims, and it is clearly commanded in the Quran of all Muslims. Muslims see jihad as a battle to discipline themselves, or perhaps a call to defend themselves against those who attack Islam. Islamists, on the other hand, see jihad as it was historically seen,
as a conquest of nonbelieving nations.\textsuperscript{14} To the Muslim way of thinking, the world was originally Islamic, and every person born a Muslim. Those who are not now Muslims are in rebellion.

To Islamists, the use of force is justified against such rebellion. Usually this takes the form of forceful application of shariah law and strident education campaigns to win converts and inspire nominal Muslims to be more Islamist.

Some think there is a third category of Muslims: jihadis. According to Nabeel Quereshi, a convert from Islam to Christianity who upon graduation from medical school became an evangelist rather than a physician, jihadis are Islamists who have crossed the line into weaponizing their beliefs. By committing themselves to physical violence, jihadis have made themselves into a sort of army dedicated to destroying the West.\textsuperscript{15}

While Western Muslims say jihad is only for defensive purposes, jihadis include as legitimate “defense” anything that conquers the world’s resistance against Islam being a global civilization. They believe the use of physical force and terror in the pursuit of jihad is entirely called for, and “peace” with Islam will only occur when nonbelievers submit. While Islamists might not participate in overt violence, many tacitly approve of these techniques.\textsuperscript{16}

One difficulty in the Islamic faith is that jihad is required of all Muslims and always described in a warlike fashion. Would-be moderate Muslims are presented with a serious dilemma: do they participate in jihad by warring against their neighbors, ignore it, or explain it as a form of personal self-discipline that has nothing to do with warfare?\textsuperscript{17} Those in the group we’ve called “Muslim,” as opposed to Islamists and jihadis, mostly try to reinterpret the meaning of jihad as a form of personal discipline, or they just ignore the concept all together. In fact, as strongly as many Muslims feel about their Islamic identity, they simply do not follow through with Muslim practices. As Abdu Murray, a former Muslim and leader of Aletheia International, says, most Muslims simply do not adhere to many of the commands of Islamic scripture. “I can’t tell you how many Muslims are nominal at best,” he said. “They are [only] cultural Muslims. If it were a crime to be an orthodox Muslim, they couldn’t be convicted of it . . . . They hold their worldview with a varying degree of tightness.”\textsuperscript{18}

Because of the explicit aims of Islamists, many people dread Islam’s growth. Many Christians hold this view, as do adherents of other worldviews. Many Muslims are afraid as well; they disagree with radicalism but refuse to vocalize their true beliefs so as to not dishonor their families or undermine their religious leaders. Salman Rushdie, a Muslim novelist who has lived under threat of death for decades because he spoke out against radical Islam, said, “The trouble with fear is that it’s not susceptible to reason. You can say to people, ‘Here are seventy-two reasons not to be afraid’ and they’ll say, ‘Yeah, but I’m still scared.’”\textsuperscript{19}

Fear is one thing we must never give in to, and only one thing makes it go away: love. “Perfect loves casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).\textsuperscript{20} When we are filled with love, even tough love, we gain fortitude. Love can transform fear into moral courage; reason alone cannot.
From the standpoint of love we can see Islam as a worldview as diverse as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, or Hinduism, with factions, differing convictions, and various levels of commitment. We engage it with the gospel just as we engage other worldviews.

4. The History of Islam

Islam means “submission.” A Muslim is “one who submits” to Allah and also the principles of Islam as embodied in the ummah, the worldwide community of Muslims. The ummah is a very strong force for Muslims, binding together religious commands, ideology, and cultural practices, providing both a comforting sense of belonging and a reassuring hierarchy: children are subject to adults, women to men, the individual family to community leaders, and community leaders to the Islamic state. Individual identity and interests are subordinated. The ummah, though not a formal structure, exerts enormous power; it is something Muslims do not want to upset or disagree with or offend. To break away from it is to be alienated and lost.

Today Islam is a major world religion, boasting a membership of nearly one-fourth of the world’s population. The majority of Muslims are not Arabs. The largest Muslim populations in the world reside in Indonesia, followed by Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. Nearly half of the world’s Muslim population lives in these four countries.

The founder of Islam was Muhammad. According to the Islamic narrative, he was born around AD 570 in Mecca, in modern day Saudi Arabia. The city’s culture at that time was characterized by polytheism, the belief in many deities, and animism, the belief that various spirits inhabit the plants, animals, and other objects in the world. As a merchant, Muhammad also regularly encountered the monotheism of Jews and Christians.

When he was around forty years of age, Muhammad became troubled by a series of visions he thought were demonic. One of his wives, Khadija, persuaded him to think that the visions were from God. In AD 610, according to Muslim tradition, Muhammad claimed to have been visited by the angel Gabriel and commissioned to be a prophet of God. He spent the next several years transmitting the message orally into what Muslims consider the most pure understanding of God, the holy Quran.

The message Muhammad said God gave him was simple and elegant: there is one God who made all things, to whom all people must submit, and there will be a day of judgment in which all humans will be judged according to their deeds, both good and evil. Muhammad believed Islam to be the final, all-encompassing religion God was giving mankind. The dictation of the Quran continued for twenty-three years until Muhammad’s death in AD 632.

By the early seventh century, Mecca was a trading center of great religious, economic, and political power on the Arabian Peninsula. It boasted the Kaba (a large, black, boxlike
building) that contained 360 tribal deities, including statues of Mary and Jesus, placed there by various tribes on their regular pilgrimages to the city. According to the Muslim tradition, Muhammad proclaimed these tribal gods to be an offense to God, igniting a controversy that threatened the wealthy city’s stability. At first Muhammad expressed reluctance to confront Mecca’s leaders, but he overcame his bashfulness through subsequent visions. Inevitably, Muhammad’s teaching led to a clash with Meccan leaders. In AD 622, Muhammad fled to Medina (then called Yathrib), an event known as Hijra to Muslims, the migration that began the Muslim era and begins the Islamic calendar.

From Medina, Muhammad’s followers, known today as Muslims, began raiding merchant caravans to gain wealth. Early victories like the one at the Battle of Badr in AD 624, in which 324 Muslims were said to have defeated a Meccan force three times their number, added to the perception that Islam was indeed God’s will. Two years later, Muslims repelled a Meccan attack on Medina in the Battle of Ahzab. The following year Muhammad agreed to a treaty with Meccan leaders permitting him to enter the city as a pilgrim. On January 11, 629, Muhammad and about 10,000 warriors captured Mecca and cleansed the Kaba of its idols. Today Mecca is Islam’s most holy place.

Muhammad and his followers continued to spread Islam by conquering the surrounding areas. Within 100 years of its founding, Islam had subjugated parts of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa through military conquest. Literally tens of millions, including Christians, were taken into slavery or killed. American president Teddy Roosevelt, in his 1916 book Fear God and Take Your Own Part, wrote, “Wherever the Mohammedans have had a complete sway, wherever the Christians have been unable to resist them by the sword, Christianity has ultimately disappeared.”

When Muhammad died in AD 632, three Caliphs (“successors”) took his place. Later, Ali ibn Talib, Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law, took power. The murder of Ali in 661 is the root of a conflict that rages still. Those who insisted the successor should be elected by popular vote became the Sunni Muslims. Currently about 80 percent of Muslims worldwide hold to Sunni Islam. The Shiite (“faction”) Muslims, however, believed the successor should be someone from the bloodline of Muhammad, a family member or descendant.

Shiite Islam is a powerful force among Muslims, especially following the 1979 revolution when the Ayatollah (“sign of Allah”) Khomeini gained control of the country of Iran. Shiites remain a majority in Iran, and significant communities of Shiites persist in Iraq and other countries. While agreeing that no prophets succeed Muhammad, Shiites have leaders, called imams, they believe are gifted by God to guide Muslims. (Sunnis also have imams, but they are more lay leaders.) Sunnis and Shiites agree on the importance of the Quran but acknowledge differing collections of Muhammad’s sayings and teachings.
**Sufi Islam**: a branch of Islam that arose as a protest to the worldliness invading the Muslim faith, this faction believes that Allah has a personal and mystical nature.

*Sufi Islam* rose in protest to the worldliness overtaking Islam in its early days, when the wealth and power gained through military conquest seemed to compromise religious commitment. Sufism gradually gained attention through the writings of the famous Sufi scholar Al-Ghazali, who spread spiritual renewal among the Muslim people. In contrast to the majority Muslim belief that Allah reveals only his will but not his personal nature, Sufism advocates a personal experience and oneness with Allah that sometimes borders on pantheism. The result is a lively, less legalistic form of Islam. Sufism has been and continues to be fascinating to many Westerners. This is especially true with the writings of its famous poets such as Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273).

Islam also has many smaller offshoots. While orthodox Islam holds that Muhammad was the final prophet in a long succession of prophets, some groups claim that other prophets since Muhammad have come. The Baha'i World Faith was established in 1844 and boasts the prophet Bahauallah. The Nation of Islam (aka The Black Muslims) is a racially motivated offshoot of Islam founded by Elijah Muhammad (d. 1975), considered by his followers to be a modern-day prophet. Both the Nation of Islam and Baha’i are rejected by mainstream Islam.

5. **Islam Is A Worldview**

Irshad Manji is one of a kind: a Canadian woman and lesbian activist, raised Muslim and still claiming an Islamic faith, Manji is the object of scorn among Muslims and a curiosity to everyone else. Sassy and vulnerable in her writing and speaking, Manji readily admits her weaknesses and inconsistencies and vigorously expresses the weaknesses and inconsistencies of Islam itself. For Manji, the problem of Islam is its limits on individual freedom—the only force, she believes, that would move the world beyond the religious conflict of our age. She identifies three problems preventing Islam from coexisting peacefully with Christianity and Secularism:

1. **Uniformity.** To maintain unity, Muslim leaders demand uniformity. “Thinking differently instigates the crumbling of empire.”
2. **Suppression of disagreement.** Discussing problems openly is seen as a display of weakness. “Debate brings out fissures. Fissures divide. Thus, debate amounts to division.”
3. **Elimination of critical thought.** Thinking differently is dangerous, says Manji. When leaders settled on particular interpretations of Muhammad’s teachings, “the very idea of innovation became criminalized.”

Manji insists she is not advocating the diminishment of Islamic community. “I’m arguing for individuality—not individualism,” she says. Most Muslims, though, see that as a distinction without a difference. They have refused to rally to her point of view.

Manji and those who agree with her are right about at least one thing: unthinking allegiance is the temptation of every worldview, even those that claim to value free thought. When people allow others to think for them, they essentially set those others up as idols. The
Bible, on the other hand, repeatedly emphasizes loving God with one’s mind, being prepared to give an answer, and not being deceived by wrong philosophies.

While Muslim scholars may debate about whether there is room for different interpretations of Muhammad’s teachings, Islam is nevertheless best understood as a comprehensive worldview. Salam Azzan, the Secretary General of the Islamic Council of Europe, explains:

Islam does not divide life into domains of the spiritual and the secular. It spiritualizes the entire existence of man and produces a social movement to reconstruct human life in the light of principles revealed by God. Prayer and worship in Islam are means to prepare man to fulfill this mission. Islam aims at changing life and producing a new man and a new society, both committed to God and the welfare of mankind. That is why Islam is not a religion in the limited sense of the word; rather it is a complete code of life and a culture-producing factor.25

Urbain Vermeulen, former president of the European Union of Arabists and Islamicists, states simply, “In Islam you can’t eat à la carte, you have to take the whole menu.”26 So what is the whole menu? Let’s have a look at what Islam teaches about God, the Bible, Jesus, salvation, and judgment.

6. Basic Aspects of the Islamic Worldview

Islam, like Christianity, has an overarching story explaining all of life and the world. Islam’s story is very different from Christianity’s, however. On the surface are many commonalities between Islam, Christianity, and Old Testament Judaism: one sovereign creator God who is maximally powerful, who interacts with his creation, who has spoken to humanity through messengers, and who has inscripturated his message in holy books. Despite these initial similarities, however, the worldview proposed by Islam is very different from Christianity and Judaism.

What Islam teaches about the nature of God. Many think Islam’s God is named Allah, while the God of Christianity is Yawheh. However, “Allah” is the Arabic word for God, not the name of God. Arabic-speaking Christians also use the word Allah to refer to God. Still, this does not mean that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. As we shall see, the attributes of Allah and the nature of his revelation differ significantly from the witness of the Old and New Testaments. If the biblical witness is accurate, then Muslims either worship the one true God falsely or they worship another god altogether. There is much debate in the Christian community about this, and it is not our goal to settle the debate in this text. For the sake of clarity in this chapter, we’ll refer to “God” and distinguish between Muslim and Christian understandings.

According to Islam, God is eternal and self-existent. He created everything and set the universe in order. When God spoke, the Quran says, the world was created. “To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: when He decreeth a matter, He saith to it: ‘Be,’ and it is” (Quran 2:117). God is viewed as sovereign over humans and history. Like Christians,
Muslims ponder how God can be all powerful, while allowing humans to have a will and exercise human responsibility. Aside from the Sufis, however, Muslims traditionally view God as utterly transcendent. He relates to people only through the prophets and authoritative teachings. Unlike Christianity, Islam does not see humans as made in God's image. God does not share his attributes or nature with anyone or anything else.

Muslims strongly reject the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and deny the deity of Jesus Christ. The idea of one God in three persons is viewed as shirk (the sin of polytheism, the worship of many gods). The Quran denounces the Trinity in no uncertain terms: “They do blaspheme who say ‘God is one of three in a Trinity,’ for there is no god except One God. If they desist not from their word [of blasphemy], verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them” (Quran 5:75–76). As we will see in the Theology chapter, the denial of this doctrine makes a big difference in the Islamic understanding of how God relates to his creation, especially humanity.

What Islam teaches about the Bible. Muslims believe God communicated his will to human beings primarily through a series of prophets, twenty-five of whom are named in the Quran. These include biblical prophets of the Old and New Testaments who originally taught Islam, Muslims say, a fact they believe is lost today because of the corruption of scripture over time. While God gave special books to Moses, David, Jesus, and Muhammad, Muslims believe the Quran, God's communication with Muhammad, is the only authoritative and uncorrupted scripture preserved without error.

Muslims believe that Islam not only supersedes Christianity, but it is, in fact, the fulfillment of Christianity. Christian scholars obviously reject this claim. If one religion is to fulfill another, they say, there must be significant continuity between the two. But the path of Islam differs substantially from the trajectory of the Christian message. In response, Islam rejects the reliability of the Old and New Testaments on which Christian scholars base their conclusions.

What Islam teaches about Jesus. Muslims acknowledge the virgin birth of Jesus and his miraculous acts, but deny his claim to be God incarnate, his death on a cross as an atoning sacrifice for sin, and his resurrection on the third day. While the following passage contains some ambiguities (e.g., whether it denies that the Jews were those who killed Jesus or whether Jesus did not die on the cross), most Muslims interpret it to say that Jesus was not crucified at all:

They that said (in boast), “We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God”; but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for a surety they killed him not: nay, God raised him up unto Himself; and God is Exalted in Power, Wise. (Surah 4 in the Quran, vv. 157–58)

This denial, of course, makes any claim of Islam being a continuation of the Christian faith impossible. The center of the Christian message was the atoning work of Jesus Christ.
in his life, death, and especially, according to the apostle Paul (who is viewed by Muslims as the great corrupter of Christianity), his resurrection:

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:8)

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:3–4)

And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. (1 Cor. 15:14–17)

Clearly, to deny Jesus's death on the cross is to renounce the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this sense, Islam does not fulfill the Christian faith. Rather, it attempts to replace it.

What Islam teaches about salvation. Because Islam rejects the claim of Jesus's death on the cross, Muslims understand salvation very differently. As the late Syracuse University sociology professor Hammuda Abdalati asserts, “The Muslim cannot entertain the dramatic story of Jesus's death upon the cross just to do away with all human sins once and for all.” Abdalati explains why Muslims cannot accept the truth of Jesus's sacrifice:

The Muslim does not believe in the crucifixion of Jesus by his enemies because the basis of this doctrine of crucifixion is contrary to Divine mercy and justice as much as it is to human logic and dignity. Such a disbelief in the doctrine does not in any way lessen the Muslim's belief in Jesus as a distinguished prophet of God. On the contrary, by rejecting this doctrine the Muslim accepts Jesus but only with more esteem and higher respect, and looks upon his original message as an essential part of Islam.27

Muslims argue for the superiority of their view of Jesus, but in so doing they deny Jesus’s death on the cross—which is at the core of the Christian faith—and thus renounce the gospel of Jesus Christ. Clearly, there is no reconciling these two views.

What Islam teaches about judgment. Muslims embrace the creation account in Genesis but deny the significance of the fall. This puts Islam on an entirely different theological trajectory. The biblical understanding is that Adam and Eve’s rebellion put all of creation under a curse. The ground is cursed (Gen. 3:17)28 and has been “groaning” ever since (Rom. 8:19–23)29. Muslims reject “the Christian view that God in fact ‘cursed’ the ground (Gen. 3:14–24),” writes Badru Kateregga. “All that God tells man in relation to the ground after the descent of Adam to earth is as quoted: ‘Therein Ye shall live and therein Ye shall die, and therein Ye shall be brought forth [in the resurrection]’” (Quran 7:25).30
To reject the doctrine of the fall means that Muslims also reject the biblical teaching of a humanity captive to evil and destined, without a redeemer, to behave corruptly in all their actions. To become a Muslim does not require redemption in the sense of being “made new,” as Christianity teaches (2 Cor. 5, for example). It is not about what is in your heart, Muslims say, but what is in your actions; change comes from the outside in, not the inside out.

Denying the fall carries many implications, including political ones. Due to their understanding of the fall of humanity, Christians distrust the ability of political authority to further God’s will—since politicians, like everyone else, are fallen. Muslims disagree. They see political authority, when under the control of Islam, as capable of advancing God’s agenda.

Muslims also have a very different view of who will be saved and who will perish in the final judgment. According to the Quran, each person’s good deeds will be weighed in a balance to determine who goes to paradise and who goes to hell:

> And the weighing on that day [Day of Resurrection] will be the true [weighing]. So as for those whose scale [of good deeds] will be heavy, they will be the successful [by entering Paradise]. And as for those whose scale will be light, they are those who will lose their own selves [by entering Hell] because they denied and rejected Our Ayat [proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations]. (Quran 7:8–9)

Although this passage refers to the balance of righteous deeds, Muslims still see God’s mercy as central to salvation. Muhammad reportedly said, “None of you would get into Paradise because of his good deeds alone, and he would not be rescued from Fire, not even I, but because of the Mercy of Allah.”

In the end, it comes down to whether Jesus is the savior. He is not, Abdalati says: “Each person must bear his own burden and be responsible for his own actions, because no one can expiate for another’s sin.” There is no assurance of salvation in Islam, save one thing: being martyred in the cause of jihad. We’ll deal with this provision, and its effect on the world today, shortly.

Meanwhile, let’s take a look at how Islam grapples with general and special revelation. What are its sources of revelation, what do these sources tell us about humanity, what’s wrong with humanity, and what course of action should govern our lives?

7. General Revelation: The Law Known to All

Khurshid Ahmad says, “The basic Islamic concept is that the entire universe was created by God, whom Islam calls Allah and who is the Lord and Sovereign of the Universe. He is the Lord of the universe which He alone sustains.” Muslims, like Christians, believe creation belongs to God; we humans are stewards of it. Abdalati explains, “The actual and real owner of things is God alone of Whom any proprietor is simply an appointed agent, a mere trustee.” In the economics chapter we will term this “stewardship” of one’s property and resources.

By proclaiming the existence of a supernatural God, however, Muslims find themselves in the same place as Christians, having to explain how to know something about the supernatural when our tools of understanding seem to work only inside of nature. Muslims
wrestle, as Christians do, with questions such as: Did the universe have a beginning, or has it always existed? Was the beginning caused or uncaused? Is the agent of cause personal or impersonal?

The “Kalam cosmological argument” for the existence of God was developed by Islamic philosophers to answer these questions. It is both commended and employed by Christian philosophers today. Kalam is the Arabic word for “discourse,” and cosmology is the study of the order, structure, and design of the universe. Today, the most popular form of the Kalam cosmological argument is this:

- Everything that begins has a cause
- The universe began
- The universe was caused

Norman Geisler says, “The Kalam argument is a horizontal (linear) form of the cosmological argument. The universe is not eternal, so it must have had a Cause. That Cause must be considered God. This argument has a long and venerable history among such Islamic philosophers as Alfarabi, Al Ghazali, and Avicenna.”

As is true with the Christian worldview, philosophical arguments about God can only take us so far; they demonstrate the reasonableness of a first cause or prime mover, but they do not tell us specifically what God is like. For that we need special revelation.

**8. Special Revelation: Where Muslims Turn for Direction**

Like other worldviews, Islam proposes answers to life’s ultimate questions, and it claims sources of knowledge in support of its answers. Let’s apply to Islam the same five questions we applied to Christianity to see if we can figure out how Islam grapples with the nature of what really exists and how we should live:

- On what sources of revelation does Islam draw?
- What does Islam say about humanity?
- What does Islam say is wrong with us?
- What does Islam say about how we should live?
- How are we to understand other worldviews based on Islam?

**On what sources of revelation does Islam draw?** Muslims believe God graciously sent messengers to every nation to teach submission and warn people against false religious teachings and practices (Quran 16:36; 35:24). Moses and Jesus are considered prophets of Islam, as well as Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob (3:67; 61:6; 2:136). Muslims are expected to honor these prophets and their respective books (4:136). As we noted earlier, religions predating Muhammad are understood by Muslims as having been originally Islamic, and their prophets Muslims (15:10).

Muhammad is seen as the successor of the prophets of old (Quran 61:6). Many Muslims even believe the Bible contains prophecies about him, most significantly Deuteronomy 18:15–18 and John 14:16. While other prophets were for a certain time and place, Muhammad is
considered to be the one prophet for all humankind (Quran 7:158; 34:28) as well as the final prophet (33:40). A well-known Hadith says, “Allah’s Apostle said, ‘My similitude in comparison with the other prophets before me, is that of a man who has built a house nicely and beautifully, except for a place of one brick in a corner. The people go about it and wonder at its beauty, but say: “Would that this brick be put in its place!” So I am that brick, and I am the last of the Prophets.”

As the seal of the prophets, Muhammad’s teachings, embodied in the Quran (from the verb qara’a, “to read” or “to recite”), are viewed as the incomparable, infallible, and final revelation from God (Quran 17:88–89), confirming all previous revelations (10:37; 46:12).

Muslims believe the words of the Quran are the literal words of God, which were dictated word for word to the prophet Muhammad over a period of twenty-three years through the angel Jibril (Gabriel). Muslims believe the previous revelations were textually corrupted. The Quran is the culmination of God’s revelation to humanity and kept incorruptible by God, inscribed on a tablet in heaven (Quran 85:21–22): “We have, without doubt, sent down the Message [the Quran]; and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption]” (15:9).

Khurshid Ahmad claims the following about the Quran:

The Quran is the revealed book of God which has been in existence for the last fourteen hundred years and the Word of God is available in its original form. Detailed accounts of the life of the Prophet of Islam and his teachings are available in their pristine purity. There has not been an iota of change in this unique historic record.

When you think of the Quran, keep in mind that Muslims believe it to be the best and most beautiful book on earth. There is no equal, and nothing surpasses it in content or quality. To disrespect the Quran is a grave insult to Muslims, the most heinous act a person could commit.

The other major source for Islamic theology today is the Hadith. The Hadith is composed of traditions of the teachings, rulings, and actions of Muhammad and his early and chief companions. These traditions include the Sunnah, descriptions of Muhammad’s exemplary actions.

Muslims believe these two sources are authoritative, providing lenses through which Muslims apply God’s revelation to all of life.

What does Islam say about humanity? The biblical message is that we are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27) and that despite the fall, we continue to bear that image (James 3:9). Being made in God’s image distinguishes humans from all other creatures, including angels. The Islamic perspective is radically different. Badru Kateregga says,

The Christian witness, that man is created in the “image and likeness of God,” is not the same as the Muslim witness. Although God breathed into man his spirit, as both Christians and Muslims believe, for Islam the only divine qualities entrusted to humans as a result of God’s breath were those of knowledge, will, and power of action. If people use these divine qualities rightly in understanding God and
following his law strictly, then he has nothing to fear in the present or the future, and no sorrow for the past.\textsuperscript{44}

Muslims acknowledge humans as God’s “vice regents” on earth but reject the \textit{imago Dei} (“image of God”). Muslims see humans as slaves of God, not his sons and daughters.

**What does Islam say is wrong with us?** When Allah created the world, Muslims say, Adam and Eve were actually Muslim. Adam was even a prophet of Islam. Although Adam and Eve disobeyed Allah’s original prohibition and ate from the forbidden tree, their mistake (not sin) was quickly forgiven. And though their action resulted in the world not being as it should be (with humans rebelling against God), Allah has sent Islam to offer humanity a way back to its pristine state.

Muslims believe every human being is born a Muslim in a state of submission to Allah. But from very young ages, we are led astray to worship false gods or to deny God altogether. It was up to the prophets of Allah to speak to the nations and correct these errors of belief and practice.

Because the world was created in submission to Allah and every human being is born a Muslim, to refuse to become a Muslim is rebellion against Allah. It is the obligation of Muslims to battle rebellion against God through jihad. \textit{jihad} has two facets. First, it is the battle against temptation and sin for the sake of developing virtue and self-control. In other words, it can imply battling one’s own rebellion. The second facet is the battle against any and all who oppose Islam.

Some call this second aspect of jihad “holy war.” As the famous Arab historian Ibn Khaldun (1333–1406) said, “In the Muslim community, the holy war is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the [Muslim] mission and [the obligation to] convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or force.”\textsuperscript{45} Fighting against non-Muslims is viewed not as an act of aggression but an act of restoration—the offering of Allah’s mercy to those willing to end their rebellious ways.

To the more radical Muslims, the Islamists, \textit{peace} occurs when non-Muslims cease rebelling. The vision of Islamists, then, is that one day Islam will establish peace by quashing such rebellion at a global level. If Islamists seem dismissive when accused of aggression, it is because they view \textit{jihad} as merely a response to aggressive unbelief. They think, “You are the ones in rebellion against Allah. We are helping you be restored to him, as he commands, and as is best for you.” Western Muslims take pains to assure Westerners that Islam is a religion of peace, but we must be careful to recognize that Islamists do not hold this view, nor do the extremist Islamists we have called jihadis, who are eager to use physical violence to complete Muhammad’s mission.

To the Islamist mind, any nation that refuses to permit Muslims to live as they please and to adopt and propagate Islam must be forced into submission for its own good and for the glory of God. Islam is \textit{Dar ul Islam} (“house of peace”), and those nations that refuse Islam are considered \textit{Dar ul Harb} (“house of war”). Because there is no official leader to issue a call to jihad, jihadis often take it upon themselves to fight the West when and how they can. To these Islamists, the refusal to allow shariah law is a great offense and one that must be fought against.
In areas dominated by Islam, there is a provision called *dhimmitude* in which Christians and Jews (“people of the Book”) may live in peace without converting to Islam. As dhimmis, though, Christians and Jews are officially second-class citizens and are often harassed, persecuted, oppressed, and sometimes killed.

*Dhimmis* must pay the *jizyah* (the tax upon unbelievers), a burden so onerous that sometimes non-Muslims can do little more than live as slaves.

**What does Islam say about how we should live?** According to Islam, more important than what you believe is what you do. Adherents have only five basic requirements, possibly six, to which they must conform. As they do so, their individual actions are subsumed into the community, creating a collective mindset and generating a way of life unique from all other religions in the world.

The first pillar of Islam is the *shahada*, the confession of faith: *There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet.* If a person pronounces this confession with sincerity of mind and heart, then he or she is a Muslim. Under this pillar all other obligations are subsumed, for to believe in God and Muhammad as his prophet is to obey the Quran and follow the example of Muhammad’s life.

The second pillar is *salat*, or prayer. Muslims are expected to engage in prayer five times a day, facing Mecca. On Friday, Muslim men (and, in some cases, women) are expected to meet at a mosque to engage in noon prayer. Prayer provides a daily rhythm to Muslim life. Muslims hope to please God by remembering him constantly with regulated prayer. Muslims also hope that systematic praying will help them avoid temptations to immorality. The mosque is central to Islamic life. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the prime minister of Turkey, describes their purposes in martial terms: “The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers.”

The third pillar is *sawm*, fasting during Ramadan. This involves refraining from food, smoking, and sexual relations during daylight hours, though these may be enjoyed after sundown. These periods of fasting are to encourage and enable Muslims to develop self-control, to discourage bad habits, and to refocus their minds toward personal spiritual progress.
The fourth pillar is zakat, almsgiving. Muslims are expected to give 2.5 percent of their annual capital to the poor, either directly or through Muslim charitable organizations. Giving to the poor is intended to achieve a generous lifestyle and a sense of caring for the Muslim community, especially those lacking physical and financial means.

The fifth pillar is a pilgrimage called hajj. All Muslims are expected to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetime if their finances and health permit. During their pilgrimage, Muslims don white garments and remove all indicators of status or class. This practice is intended to help Muslims recognize that before God they are all equal. Racial, gender, and economic differences are muted as masses of Muslims from many nations bow together to worship Allah.

Those Muslims we are referring to as Islamists would add jihad, the principle of compelling non-Muslims to cease their rebellion against God, as the sixth pillar. Jihad is seen as the most self-sacrificing action Islamists can undertake. Indeed, Islamists who die in jihad are guaranteed entrance into Paradise, where men have access to scores of perpetual virgins. Women, however, are not told what awaits them.47

These pillars encompass the basic moral obligations for Muslims. Obey them and you are considered to be faithfully submitted to Allah. But there is also the matter of law. The Quran specifies “prohibitions on certain foods (pork, carrion, wine, animals slaughtered in pagan ceremonies), a number of legal rules concerning family law (marriage, divorce, and inheritance), criminal law (the hudud crimes, including penalties of highway robbery, illicit sexual activity, slander, and wine-drinking), rules about witnesses, and commercial regulation including the ban on riba (interest) and forms of contracts.”48 This law is called “shariah.”

Because the Quran does not address all questions of law, Muslim legal scholars also turn to a second source, the Sunnah, to discern the shape of shariah. This body of material contains many more legal rulings and examples than the Quran. A fundamental difficulty is that many of the Hadith present conflicting or contradictory rulings arising from different places and times. Because much of the historical context is unrecorded, examples and rulings are left open to debate.49

In addition to the Quran and the Sunnah, a third source for shariah is the communal consensus, called ijma’, expressed among Muslim jurists of the first three centuries of Islam. An example of shariah arising from this source is male circumcision, a practice not commanded in the Quran. In some areas, the practice of female “circumcision” (really female genital mutilation, often including a removal of the clitoris, either partially or in its entirety) is seen as demanded by shariah as well. This illustrates how local customs sometimes rise to the level of shariah in Muslim communities.
The fourth source for shariah arises from legal reasoning needed to address situations otherwise unaddressed in the Quran and the Hadith. But not all Muslims support this approach to legal rulings, which has given rise to various legal traditions. One of the more pronounced differences regards the consumption of alcohol. Ruthven notes, “While some jurists would argue that only fermented products of the date-palm and vine are prohibited, others, basing their judgments on the qiyas, would insist that all alcoholic drinks are forbidden, since the effective cause or common denominator (‘illa) behind the prohibition was the same in each case.”

The greatest headache for Muslim legal scholars concerning life in the modern world is the principle of “abrogation,” which states that later passages in the Quran overrule (thus abrogate) earlier passages. It is a significant question because the peaceful, merciful nature of Allah presented in the first part of the Quran disappears in the second part, replaced by a version of Allah with a noticeable sense of revenge and bloodlust. If later passages supersede earlier ones, we can expect adherents to become more aggressive and violent the more doctrinally sensitive they become.

The greatest source of disagreement among Muslim sects is their respective interpretations of shariah law. Muslims themselves disagree about its application because the Quran does not speak to all (or even many) legal issues. In addition, many of its statements are ambiguous and addressed to specific historical situations. Ruthven comments, “As for the specific injunctions about the Muslims’ struggles against and relationship with the non-Muslims, these varied according to situations and were too specific to be termed ‘laws’ in the strict sense.”

While Ruthven seems to downplay the grip shariah law has on Muslims, throughout Islamic history many Muslims have read such commands as normative, especially as they are applied to help non-Muslims cease their rebellion against God. Modern Muslims, especially those educated in the West, see the difficulty but, perhaps out of fear or a desire to not disturb Muslim unity, often remain silent.

To illustrate the threatening nature of shariah law, consider the case of Youcef Nadarkhani, an Iranian Christian pastor who, first in 2006 and then again in 2009, was arrested for converting to Christianity. He faced possible execution but was freed only through international pressure sparked by extensive media coverage. His attorney, Mohammed Ali Dadkhah, jailed in a brutal prison for advocating Nadarkhani’s case and other human rights cases, was not released.

9. **HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND OTHER WORLDVIEWS BASED ON ISLAM?**

In contrast to a biblical Christian view of the nature of humanity, the Muslim community cannot, within its religion, find a sound basis for individual freedom. Adherence is demanded, those who leave it are in danger of their lives, those who choose not to belong are in danger of subjugation or death, and basic human rights are violated as a matter of course.

On the one hand, there is a tradition of tolerance in Islam. Abul Ala Maududi, a prominent Pakistani Muslim scholar, states, “[A]ll non-Muslims will have the freedom of conscience, opinion, expression, and association as the one enjoyed by Muslims themselves,
subject to the same limitations as are imposed by law on Muslims. On the other hand, Samuel Shahid writes,

Maududi's views are not accepted by most Islamic schools of law, especially in regard to freedom of expression like criticism of Islam and the government. Even in a country like Pakistan, the homeland of Maududi, it is illegal to criticize the government or the head of state. Many political prisoners are confined to jails in Pakistan and most other Islamic countries. Through the course of history, except in rare cases, not even Muslims have been given freedom to criticize Islam without being persecuted or sentenced to death. It is far less likely for a Zimmi [dhimmi Christian or Jew living in Muslim-dominated lands] to get away with criticizing Islam."

The oppression of dhimmis commanded by the Quran is a severe tax, or jizyah. “All taxes on trade and transport paid by Muslims were generally doubled for dhimmis,” observes Bat Ye’or. “In addition, the population—but particularly the dhimmi communities—was subject to ruinous extortions designed to cover the financing of incessant wars.” Because Muslims have often been at war, non-Muslims who dare to remain in Muslim lands are fleeced to finance Muslim aggression (or, more rarely, defense). Most troubling is how these non-Muslims are treated when they cannot pay the jizyah. Churches have been destroyed, people have been dispossessed from their houses, and children have been taken and sold into slavery, not to mention personal atrocities such as dismemberment, torture, and death.

There was a time when Muslims embraced adherents of other monotheistic faiths (such as Jews and Christians), but this came to an end with the finished work of Muhammad and the full revelation of the Quran. Now only Muslims are accepted by God: “If anyone desires a religion other than Islam, never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost [all spiritual good]” (Quran 3:85).

Except in the Ahmadiyyah tradition and possibly in Baha’i, there is not a Muslim tradition of a state of peace in which Muslims leave everyone else alone. Non-Muslims must be made to submit, and even Jews and Christians are considered to be in rebellion until they do so. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, said: “All Jews are not the same. The good ones become Muslims, the bad ones do not.”

Several Muslim legal scholars have explored the possibility of adjusting the Quran to fit more with modern times, but these efforts are viewed with disdain by most Muslim authorities. Because Muhammad was the final prophet and the Quran God’s final revelation, Muslims reject all claims to new divine revelation or inspired prophets. Thus they are highly critical of groups branching off of Islam, such as the Baha’i, the Ahmadiyyah, and the Nation of Islam (i.e., “Black Muslims”), which assert prophetic continuation past Muhammad.
The conflict between Islam and other worldviews, then, will likely continue as long as Islam continues to grow as a force in the modern world. And given that Muslim families typically have significantly more children per family than non-Muslim families, this is practically guaranteed. This alarming reality concerns many people in the world. One worldview, Secularism, sees both Islam and Christianity as dangerous because they aim to take over the world. If they do, any hope of building a society based on science and reason will be dashed. As we will see in the next chapter, the notion that all deity-based worldviews must be put in their place is in the motivating force of the Secularist worldview.

ENDNOTES

1 Muslim Ottoman Turks had, for almost two hundred years, attempted to conquer the city of Vienna, Austria. The success of Muslim armies continued nearly unabated from the time of Muhammad until 1529, when the armies of Suleiman the Magnificent failed to breach the city with his massive army. Subsequent Muslim armies continued attempting to attack the city until 1683, when the king of Poland, Jan III Sobieski, and his massive cavalry, decisively defeated the Ottoman army.


3 Ibid., 14.


5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.


9 Wilders is labeled a “far right-wing” politician, his enemies threaten him publicly, a popular rap song fantasized about killing him, and in a supreme irony, he has been put on trial for "hate crimes." Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel said he learned from the Nazis that when people say they want to kill you, believe them. Wilders takes that message seriously, he says. As a result he is, in essence, a prisoner in his own land.


11 When we quote from the Quran in this book, we will use primarily the translation of A. Yusuf Ali. It is an older translation (sounding much like the King James Version of the Bible) but one that is well respected and widely known. See Abdullah Yusuf Ali, The Holy Qur’an: Text, Translation, and Commentary (Washington, DC: The American International Printing Company, 1946). In some quotations from Ali’s translation, we have taken the liberty of smoothing out the text, removing unnecessary punctuation and poetic capitalization of letters.


14 A detailed history of Islamic conquest is available in William J. Federer, What Every American Needs to Know about the Qur'an: A History of Islam and the United States (St. Louis, MO: Amerisearch, 2011).

15 From personal conversations with Nabeel Quereshi, MD, May 2013.

16 Ahmad ibn Naqib Al-Misri points out that “it is offensive to conduct a military expedition against hostile non-Muslims without the caliph’s permission.” But he further notes that if there is no caliph (Muslim head of a country), no permission is required. Muslims may then wage war as they see fit. Ahmad ibn Naqib Al-Misri, Reliance of the Traveller trans. Nuh Ha Mim Keller. 602.

17 Mark Gabriel, who grew up as a devout Muslim in Egypt, earned a doctorate in Islamic studies, and even taught at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the most prestigious Islamic university in the world, devotes chapter 13 of his book...
Jesus and Muhammad (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2004) to interpreting and explaining the Quranic references to jihad and explaining how it is impossible to logically describe it as merely spiritual struggle. See especially pages 126–27.


20 1 John 4:18: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”

21 Wilders, Marked for Death, 113.

22 Theodore Roosevelt, Fear God and Take Your Own Part (George H. Doran Company, 1916), quoted in Wilders, Marked for Death, 41.

23 Manji, Allah, Liberty and Love, 46.

24 Ibid., 49.

25 Ibid., 5–6.


27 Hammuda Abdalati, Islam in Focus (Indianapolis, IN: Amana Publications, 1975), 17.

28 Genesis 3:17: And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

29 Romans 8:19-23: For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.


32 Abdalati, Islam in Focus, 16.

33 In folk Islam, the faithful who die during the pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj, also attain a guarantee of paradise.


35 Abdalati, Islam in Focus, 128.


37 Deuteronomy 18:15-18: The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ And the Lord said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among your brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.; John 14:16: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper.”


39 Ahmad, Islam, 43.


41 Faslur Rahman, Islam, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979): “The difference between the two is that whereas a Hadith as such is a mere report . . . the Sunna is the very same report when it acquires a normative quality and becomes a practical principle for the Muslim” (45); “this authority of Muhammad refers to the verbal and performative behavior of the Prophet outside the Quran” (50); and “to his Companions his life was a religious paradigm and as such normative” (52).

42 Genesis 1:26–27: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

43 James 3:9: “With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.”

44 Katerregga and Shenk, Islam and Christianity, 5350.
The notion of opposition varies among Muslims. Some attempt to limit it to actual aggression, primarily of a military variety, and thus view jihad as exclusively defensive in posture. The history of Islam relegates this perspective to a minority view—in its early years, Islam spread through conquest. Many contemporary Muslims understand “defense” as the response needed against anything or anyone who would seek to inhibit Islam from becoming a global civilization. Additionally, since Muslims believe that the world originally was Islamic, and that every person is born a Muslim, they can easily move toward holding any and all non-Muslims as inherently in opposition to Islam.

Ibid., 76.
Ibid., 79.
Ibid: “But, further, it had to be set out as to which specific command was earlier in time and which later.” This briefly describes the Islamic teaching on “abrogation,” i.e., the more recent commands or rulings supersede those earlier and remain obligatory.
Ibid., 69: “But still the strictly legislative portion of the Quran is relatively quite small. Besides the detailed pronouncement on the law of inheritance and laying down punishments for crimes such as theft and adultery, which are not defined legally, there is little in it that is, properly speaking, legislative.”
Ibid.
Wilders, Marked for Death, 68.
Ibid.
See the discussion in Stuart Robinson, Mosques and Miracles: Revealing Islam and God’s Grace, 2nd ed. (Upper Mt. Gravatt, Australia: City Harvest Publications, 2004), 202. Robinson records that even as recent as 1997 almost fifty Christians were killed, several in a Sunday school class, apparently because they failed to pay jizyah.
See Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Qur’anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Important note: many English translations of the Quran include a parenthetical notation (submission to God) in this quotation, to soften its impact, but such a notation is not made in the Arabic original.