

Meeting the Challenges of the 21st Century

The challenge of changing views toward truth: How the culture sees world views and value systems

Intro: In my lesson on political correctness I suggested that the challenge of political correctness is rooted in how people determine truth or what principles they value. Today let's delve deeper into the topic of how the culture sees world views and value systems.

We can look around and see that people's viewpoints have changed a lot on many moral issues. We can see that we as Christians are becoming more of a minority on those things. But what we often miss is the systematic connections, and the fact that all these changes in moral thinking and values are a piece of whole view.

If we take the big picture, view we can see that the changes in our culture were predictable in view of the changing attitudes toward the existence of God and the concept of divine revelation. It is all centered in what people think is the ultimate reality.

The Rise of the Secularist World View

For centuries in our western culture people believed that the ultimate reality was God; and that the true God was the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition. However all that was to be turned on its head by the rise of the Enlightenment and the exploration of our world by science.

At first scientists worked out of a theist world view that saw God as creator of all things and sought to discover the principles by which the universe functioned. God's existence gave nature predictability. Many of the great early scientists were believers in God who considered science as the exploration of a world created by God as the ultimate reality.

But with the growing understanding of our world, many scientists began to dismiss the need for a theistic world view. Instead they believed that everything could be explained ultimately by the scientific method.

Darwin's theory of evolution gave to them a reasonable explanation of how all life began and evolved into the human species.

Later scientists proposed the possibility that the expanding universe pointed to a time when nothing existed; and that the universe was self-existing.

These ideas were popularized in statements like this one by Carl Sagan: "The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." The ultimate reality was not God, but the physical universe itself.

Thus, the first principle of the secularist world view—Matter/energy is the ultimate reality.

That conclusion would have profound implications for how we understand human beings.

The implications for how we understand ourselves

The philosophical shift from theism to atheism (or secularism) radically changed how we see ourselves as humans.

The affirmation that matter is the ultimate reality resulted in a new way of seeing man—not as the creation of God dependent upon Him for salvation; but rather the product of evolution whose evolved intelligence gave him the power to shape and even “save” himself. *Man stands alone in the universe, a unique product of a long, unconscious, impersonal, material process with unique understanding and potentialities. These he owes to no one but himself, and it is to himself that he is responsible. He is not the creature of uncontrollable and undeterminable forces, but is his own master. He can and must decide and manage his own destiny* (George Simpson, Harvard University, 1953, p. 155).

All this was given powerful expression in the Humanist Manifesto II of 1973:

[H]umans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves” (Humanist Manifesto II, 1973).

Thus the second principle of the secularist world view—man is autonomous and self-actualizing. We are accountable only to ourselves and are each capable of creating our own future; and together we can forge a collective consensus of the direction in which humanity should go with the consulting God.

Of course this second step had logical implications for how we define moral values and truth.

The implications for how we define moral values and truth

If we are the product of impersonal forces that have shaped us into intelligent beings it is no longer necessary for people to conform to an absolute value system given by the Creator. Instead each person was “free” to determine his own moral choices.

Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted by modern science makes unacceptable any supernatural or cosmic guarantees of human values. (Humanist Manifesto I)

We must now be prepared to abandon the god hypothesis and its corollaries like divine revelation or unchanging truths, and to change over from a supernatural to a naturalistic view of human destiny” (Julian Huxley).

“Absolute truth belongs only to one class of humans—the class of absolute fools.” (Ashley Montagu, Princeton University)

Thus the third principle of the secularist world view—all moral values are relative, not absolute.

Thus it is clearly affirmed that right and wrong are no longer to be defined by God through revelation, but self-determined, based the individual and social choice.

And that would have profound implications for our social structure.

The implications for our social structure

Of course, all recognize that the principle of moral relativism taken its logical end would lead to moral disorder and chaos. In a word, what is there to stop people's exercise of personal freedom to the extent that the fabric of society is torn apart and everything falls into anarchy? Our founding fathers recognized this long ago and wanted Christianity to flourish as a protection against this.

John Witherspoon: "A republic once equally poised must either preserve its virtue or lose its liberty."

Thus, there had to be some "form" or moral structure to balance the freedom of choice.

But what is that form, if it is not God?

Is it what most people believe is right?

Is it what the most powerful want?

Is it what an elite group of intellectuals determine is right?

The truth is, any of these answers are possible once God is taken out of the question; and that ought to make us very concerned.

Moral relativism can easily resolve into a tyranny in which a select few dictate "truth" to all others.

We have seen that happen again and again in our culture. In 1973 a handful of men on the US Supreme Court ruled that the taking of life in the womb was a woman's choice and that all laws forbidding it were thereby made void.

Recently again we saw the same in the redefinition of marriage, abrogating all laws seeking to define marriage as a union of a man and a woman.

The principle at work in both cases is the definition of what constitutes "inalienable rights"—i.e. what the Creator has granted to all human beings.

In the first case the inalienable right of the person in the womb to live and be born is removed by the choice of the mother.

In the second case, there is no inalienable right for two people of the same sex to enter into a marital relationship with one another.

The fourth principle of the secularist world view—human law abrogates and replaces divine law.

How We Can Meet the Challenge

We must develop a coherent and systematic understanding of truth.

When we engage in discussions with our neighbors, it is not just a matter of agreeing or disagreeing with someone on one or two points. It is a matter of seeing the whole picture and the logical implications of a modes of thought, that carried out, can cost us everything!
The existence of God is not a truth; it is the truth from which flows all other truth.

We must familiarize ourselves with the evidence for God's existence and share it with all people around us.

We do not have to speak with the sophistication of a PhD to affirm common sense principles of creation. We simply need to affirm to thinking people the concepts of causation and design.

"For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God." (Hebrews 3:4, NASB)

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." (Romans 1:20, NASB)

We must proclaim the true nature of man.

We must affirm our accountability to God as creator and His right to determine our purpose, our destiny, and the meaning of our lives.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:26, NASB)

When God made the first human pair He didn't say. Welcome to the world; now what do you guys want to do? Instead he blessed them by commanding them:

"And God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" (Genesis 1:28, NASB)

We must speak the truth as God has revealed it on all moral matters.

We must live out these principles in a way that shows that God's way is demonstrably superior.

"Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:7–10, NASB)

We must proclaim Scriptural morality to a world gagging on forbidden fruit.

"And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret." (Ephesians 5:11–12, NASB)

We must affirm that God's word supersedes all human opinion.

*Humans and governments may certainly speak and act contrary to the will of God; but we must have the spirit of the apostles:
“But Peter and the apostles answered and said, “We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29, NASB)
The moral authority of the Lord supersedes all human opinions. As citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we must abide by the commands of the king.*

Conclusion: The challenge of modern political correctness is rooted in how the world sees truth and values. Let us be prepared to meet that challenge with faith in the existence of God, with appreciation for our uniqueness as His creation, with respect for the authority of God, and with obedience to the will of God.