

THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

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The School of Christ

“Where are you?” is perhaps one of the most penetrating questions found in the entire Bible (Gen.3:9). The passage shows two different entities: the Questioner Who is unchanging, eternal, all-powerful, and of infinite knowledge, and the subject being questioned is forever changing, temporal, and of limited power and knowledge. The question was asked at a great transitional point in the life of humankind in which all of creation became out of step with its divine purpose and original intent. God’s intention in creating man was so that man would live in perfect peace and harmony with his Creator. It was a relationship in which love was expressed from both sides as an act of free will. To test the stability of man’s devotion, a tree was placed in the garden, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The serpent whispered his subtle deceit in the ears of Eve, “Yeah, hath God said”? It was a rhetorical question intended to bring reproach and doubt against the Word of God. And it was intended to cause man to act independently from his Creator. It was only after Eve saw that the “tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat” (Gen 3:6).

Our ever-changing western culture is advancing in human knowledge at an all-time high. Buckminster Fuller, a mid-20th century systems theorist, estimated that human knowledge doubled every century prior to 1900. By World War 2 it doubled every 25 years. Today, it doubles nearly every year. And with the advancing of technology, it could soon double every 12 hours!

You would think that with all this “human advancement” most, if not all, of our problems would be solved. But it seems the opposite is true. In the midst of all this growing knowledge, we

would do well to ask ourselves “Where are we?” on the map of reality. Where are we and what is our disposition in relation to Ultimate Reality? Who gets to define who or what Ultimate Reality actually is? And who or what gets to set the moral standards of such reality? Culture, with all its scientific advancements, would seem to be the deciding factor, a guidepost, to determine “good” and “evil”. And so it would seem that where we are dispositionally to Ultimate Reality would be determined by where we are in relation to culture. But what standard determines whether or not culture itself is good or evil? To know for certain where we are in all of this we need some kind of guide to lead us into Truth and reality.

Thinkers such as Plato and his student Aristotle, as pictured above in Raphael’s *The School of Athens*, have attempted to answer tough questions as these. Plato (left), extending his hand upwards, demonstrates that ultimate truth is found beyond the material world in the form of ideas (“Forms”); this world is only a shadow of the real, but not the real itself. Aristotle (right), pointing downwards, demonstrates that ultimate truth is found in the empirical examination of the material world; truth is known through the senses. Plato reasons from the universal to the particulars (Inductive reasoning); Aristotle reasons from the particulars to the universal (Deductive reasoning). Both Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophical, political, and ethical ideas are major building blocks that helped structure western civilization. But have those contributions helped navigate through the floodwaters of the broken system of human knowledge? Or have they merely added to the rising tides of confusion and epistemological chaos? No matter what the contribution was, there is at least one major flaw of human knowledge that is inferred from *The School of Athens*. And that is found in what Plato and Aristotle

were *not* doing! More on that later.

By the 1st century A.D., Athens had lost its political independence to Rome. Yet it held strong to its cultural identity in the arts, religion, philosophy, and literature with the Areopagus serving as the highest court for such matters. It was an extremely religious city, so much so that many statues and altars were built in honor of their Greek gods. And just as in the days of old, when Plato and Aristotle taught in the city, the 1st century Athenians demonstrated their hunger for truth and reality through their philosophical endeavors and worship of stone altars, images, and man-made objects. In spite of the many centuries that have passed, the United States of America (being an outgrowth of the western civilization founded in Athens) also has many similarities to its Greek roots. We may not be worshipping the gods of Athena, Apollo, or Zeus. But in our 21st-century western culture, we have placed our trust and hopes in man-made idols of human knowledge and wisdom all the same. And much like those of Athens, we have placed our security and confidence in the works of our own hands and the ideas of our own finite minds, completely independent from the true and living God! It was to this culture that the apostle Paul spoke his message to:

¹⁶“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.¹⁷ Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.¹⁸ Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoics, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.¹⁹ And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?²⁰ For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.²¹ (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

²² Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.²³ For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To The Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.²⁴ God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;²⁵ Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;²⁶ And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;²⁷ That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:²⁸ For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.²⁹ Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.³⁰ And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:³¹ Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

³² And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.³³ So Paul departed from among them.³⁴ Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17:16-34).

It isn't that those of us in western civilization do not worship; we do! Our heart's natural propensity is to worship that which we find our identity in, which oftentimes is the very works of our own hands: man-made images, and ideas, formed and fashioned in our own image and likeness. Such idols and ideas, rooted in mere culture, become the standard and touchstone of Ultimate Reality to which we ignorantly worship. However, culture is neither the ultimate cause nor the origin of itself. Someone outside of culture is responsible for the creation of its life. This eternal Someone is the origin of all life and has set the bounds of culture's habitation so that all people everywhere may search and seek after the Lord

since He is not far from every one of us. The created order is not the Lord. But the Lord is revealing Himself thought-out all of creation (Psalms 19), so that we may seek out and find Him.

In the famous painting by Raphael, *The School of Athens*, there are several things to note. First, this painting is only one of four by Raphael between 1508 and 1511 in the *Stanza della Segnatura* representing the four branches of human knowledge: theology, philosophy, law, and poetry. Directly across *The School of Athens* is *The Disputation of the Holy Sacrament* (pictured below). *The School of Athens* represents philosophy; *The Disputation of the Holy Sacrament* represents theology. Law and poetry are represented on the other two walls of the room. And contrary to the worldview of most cultures today, these four are not always mutually exclusive.

However, the main flaw of most cultures today is the same flaw displayed in Plato and Aristotle in *The School of Athens*. It isn't that their philosophies are opposed to theology, though some chaff did exist among the wheat. Plato and Aristotle stand representing their philosophies on one side of the wall. On the other side of the wall is the risen "Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3). The flaw is that much like culture today, Plato, Aristotle, and those in the days of the apostle Paul pursued the acquisition of knowledge, yet did not have their gaze cast upon the One Who gives meaning to all knowledge and virtue. They beheld not the glory of the Lord but beheld the glory of their own works. Jesus Christ is the wisdom of God summed up in One divine Person (1 Corinthians 1:24). For so many millennia man has striven to gain knowledge apart from dependence on Christ. Yet Paul, even after visiting the great philosophers of Athens, noted how the Greeks seek after wisdom, yet "the world by wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:21).

From the time of your birth to the time your body goes into the grave, there will be two unavoidable choices to make: the world's wisdom, and the wisdom of God. Will you be part of the School of Athens who set their gaze to behold the works of their own hands, or will you be part of the School of Christ who set their gaze to behold the glory of the Lord? What is the cross of Christ to you? Is it foolishness? Or is it the power and wisdom of God? There is no third alternative!

What God has done at the cross in the Person of Jesus Christ is to restore you back to your divine purpose and original intent. In Jesus Christ, God has paid the sin debt that you were held captive to. Life apart from the cross of Christ is a life of misdirected worship. Such a life will end in unrest, unfulfillment, and eternal damnation. You will constantly find your identity in things that were never your true purpose. But a life so identified in the cross of Christ is a life of correctly aimed worship where you find true rest, fulfillment, and eternal righteousness with the Father of all creation.

There are two choices before you: the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. To know Christ is to know Truth (Jn 14:6) and to know Truth is to be truly free (Jn. 8:32).

Where are you?

In the pages that follow, there are seven theological/philosophical articles:

- Worldview – Facts do not speak for themselves. All people have the same facts. But not everyone has the same worldview (a presuppositions lens) through which to correctly interpret the

facts.

- The Bible – What is the Bible? And how can we be sure that what we have today is what was originally penned by the first-century writers?
- Faith and Reason – The two are not as incompatible as most might think!
- Nature of Man – Is there more to man than mere physical body?
- Nature of Evil – Is it real? And if so, does it have a good purpose? Will it end? If God is good, why does He allow it?
- The Universe – Discover why an eternal universe is neither scientifically accurate nor logically possible.
- The Cross and the Crescent – If Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions, then what do we need to know about it and its compatibility with Christianity?

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Article #1

Worldview

A Theistic Perspective of the World

- I. What is a worldview?
 - A. A framework
 - 1. An interpreter of reality
 - 2. Defines meaning of life

- II. Some widely held worldviews
 - A. Deism
 - 1. Creation ex-nihilo
 - 2. A universe governed only by natural law
 - 3. Rejects supernatural acts within the world
 - B. Pantheism
 - 1. All is God
 - 2. Creation ex-Deo
 - 3. No Creator/creation distinction
 - C. Atheism
 - 1. Deny the existence of God
 - a. Reality of evil
 - b. The mind's power to deceive
 - c. Chance origins of the universe
 - 2. Creation ex-materia
 - D. Theism
 - 1. God both beyond and in the world
 - 2. Creation ex-nihilo
 - 3. Creator/creation distinction
 - 4. Supernatural acts both possible and actual

- III. An evaluation of views
 - A. Deism
 - B. Pantheism
 - C. Atheism

D. Theism

IV. The three theistic religions

A. Philosophical grounds of miracles

1. Judaism
 - a. Manuscript credibility
2. Christianity
 - a. Manuscript credibility
3. Islam
 - a. Manuscript credibility

WHAT IS A WORLDVIEW?

A worldview is a lens by which a person views and interprets the facts of reality. It's the framework one applies in order to understand concepts or ideas both within and beyond the universe. It will determine what you think about the idea of a range of subjects such as God, man, history, morality, and human destiny. In short, a worldview is how you view and interpret the world, and it is often influenced by one's own psychological, sociological, theological, moral, and/or metaphysical presuppositions. Everyone has a worldview, but not everyone has the same worldview, which is reflected in human attitudes and conduct. And since not everyone knows their worldview or the presuppositions that influence them, one would do well to apply the Delphic oracle to "know thyself" in order to know what they believe and why they believe it.

If your worldview includes an ultimate Creator, then you will view people as endowed with intrinsic sacred worth. If your worldview does not include the existence of an ultimate Creator, then you will not view people with sacred worth, for only a sacred Cause can create sacred effects. All aspects of life – how you treat

people, how you spend your time, and how you live your life – are all determined by your worldview. Many issues of reality could be discussed, but since the primary emphasis of this article is the philosophical and theological search for truth, the following will first examine defective frameworks of reality that cannot be held with consistency. Afterward will be the examination of an undeniable worldview and its religion(s) that are consistent with what we know of science, history, and correct philosophy.

SOME WIDELY HELD WORLDVIEWS

DEISM – is the worldview that views the universe as created by a God sometime in the past, but who no longer intervenes within it. Creation was ex-nihilo (out of nothing), but after creation, the universe was left to operate purely by natural law, much like a clock whose Winder walks away after winding up the clock. Since the supernatural is not active within the world, miracles (a supernatural act of God) do not occur in the world. And since miracles do not occur, then the occurrence of someone who rises from the dead is no more significant than any other historical event. It may be interpreted as an unusual event that has no justification of being called a miracle, or it just may be mere ideas of religious men that never actually occurred.

Apart from this rejection, deists affirm the signature of the divine embedded within creation (called natural revelation). The law of analogy, which says that all effects share at least some similarity with their causes, is a firmly held law in all science and philosophy. And if God is the cause of the universe, then we can expect to find some sort of revelation of Him in creation.

PANTHEISM – (pan=all, theism=God) is the worldview that perceives God to be the world and the world to be God. There are different kinds of pantheism, but most share a basic belief in monism (all reality is identical). Pantheists view God as infinite, and the entire universe is in some form a manifestation of God; God is dependent on creation to attain perfection. In the pantheistic view of things, God did not create ex-nihilo, but ex Deo (out of God). Deism views God as beyond the world, not in the world. But pantheism views God and the world as one identical being. All events in the world are a result of God's predetermined will. Both good and evil (as a non-real thing) flow from God as a necessary function of His will. But for a pantheist, evil is an illusion; there is no good/evil dichotomy (see Nature of Evil/evil as an illusion). An act or event referred to as "evil" is found only in the manifestations of God. Union with Brahman (Ultimate Reality) is achieved by meditation and when the soul is liberated from its limitations it reaches nirvana (a state of bliss).

For the pantheist God is necessary (cannot come into being or cease being), but so is everything else. Like deist, pantheists believe God is infinite; however, the former makes a Creator/creature distinction; the latter does not.

ATHEISM – (a=no, theism=God) is the worldview that denies the existence of God. Its view of reality sees the existence of God neither beyond the world, as deists do, nor in the world, as theists do. There are different forms of atheism, ranging from the belief that God once existed in the past (but not today) to the belief that God never has nor ever will exist in the present or the future. Some of the major objections to the existence of God are the reality of evil, the mind's imaginative power to project what it believes to be God, and the possibility of chance as the origins of the universe. In an atheistic worldview the world is created neither

ex-nihilo, nor ex-Deo, but ex-materia (out of preexisting material). However, “creation” through the atheistic lens is more like an eternal shaping and forming of the world by means of *natural* causality, rather than an instant miraculous act of *divine* causality. There is no objective moral standard of human conduct; all rules of life are left for society or culture to decide based on what works for society.

THEISM – is the worldview that sees the existence of God both beyond the world and within the world. God is not detached from the world, nor is God identical to the world. For the theist, God created the universe ex-nihilo (out of nothing). The universe was not created literally *from nothing*, since “nothing” doesn’t actually exist, but *out of nothing* (i.e. no preexisting material used in the creation process). There is a real distinction between God and creation. God is infinite, eternal, and unchanging; creation is finite, temporal, and changing. And because there is a real distinction, miracles are defined as a supernatural act of God interfering with the normal – yet not inviolable – operations of natural law. Theism doesn’t deny the reality of evil. But since there is a real Creator/creature distinction, evil is not a part of who God is.

AN EVALUATION OF VIEWS

DEISM – Deism has many positive contributions to the investigation of theological endeavors. But as a system, it suffers from an unjustifiable rejection of miracles. If a miracle is described as an irregular event with unnatural origins that cannot be repeated, and with a low degree of probability, then there’s at least one miracle that the deists do believe in – the creation of the

universe. For deists, the creation of the universe, with all its laws of nature, is *ex-nihilo* (out of nothing), not *ex-materia*. The origin of the universe is an event that was irregular, unnatural, unrepeatable, and with a low degree of probability. And if creation is at least one miracle, then there are no grounds for believing other miracles can't occur.

PANTHEISM – Pantheism also suffers from its own inability to affirm its central teachings. If all being, including humans, is infinite, then how is it that the majority of humankind still thinks in terms of finitude? Non-pantheists seem to have lost their way and need to become aware of their infinite nature. However, the very nature of infinity implies never “coming to be” or ceasing to be. It's impossible for an infinite being to “become aware” of anything; it forever knows everything already. But if a being can change in its understanding, then that being is finite since “change” implies finitude; if a being is infinite, it experiences no change. Neither can an infinite being attain perfection. If it must attain perfection, then there must be something superior outside of it to which it is dependent for its change. But if it's dependent on something outside of it, then it is not God, for by definition God is not dependent on anyone or anything. The pantheist seems to be clearly aware of his infinite nature and would readily affirm that all who don't believe that humankind is infinite is being deceived. But on what grounds can we justify this deception? There seems to be no justifiable reason – neither philosophical, logical, nor scientific – for assuming that all reality is One infinite Being.

ATHEISM – For atheists, if there were such an all-powerful and all-good God, then He would be able and willing to end evil. But evil has not ended, thus no such God exists. But the fact of evil is not necessarily proof that God doesn't exist, nor does it prove that if there is a God He is neither all-powerful nor all good.

If there is such a God, then we would expect Him to have such depth of wisdom beyond our finite minds. His power and goodness would be the very means that are used in the process of bringing ultimate defeat of evil in the future. The fact that evil has not ended yet does not prove that no God exists. Nor does the fact that some people need, or long for, a divine Protector (or “crutch”) prove that God is a mere projection of the human imagination. On the same grounds, one could equally assume that the idea that God is only a projection of the human imagination is *itself* a mere projection of the human imagination. The only way to prove that God does not exist beyond the human imagination is to pass beyond the boundaries of human imagination and examine every square inch of reality to find there is no God. But in order to do this, one would have to have infinite knowledge of all things. And if one has infinite knowledge, then he would be God and ends up proving the very thing the atheist attempts to deny. Even Richard Dawkins, the famous atheist, has said that he can only be 99.99% sure that God does not exist, realizing that 100% certainty is equated with omniscience. And finally, some have figured that the odds of the universe to have originated by mere chance, apart from a divine creative act, are 1:10^{14,999,999,905}. In spite of such a low degree of probability, some still put their faith in it. However, David Hume, the 18th century agnostic, says that the wise man should always base his belief on the highest degree of probability (which is characteristic of natural law). Of course, Hume said this in order to build a case against miracles, which occur with a low degree of probability. But when it comes to the origins of the universe, the atheist would have us believe the lower degrees of probability, since it’s always possible no matter how low the odds are (if true, destroys Richard Dawkins’ argument). And when it comes to miraculous occurrences within the world, the atheists

say we should deny them because miracles (as opposed to natural law) are based on low degrees of probability. However, there seems to be no justifiable reason why we should believe the lower over the higher in one case, but believe the higher over the lower in another case.

THEISM – Theism is the one worldview that explains the facts as we see them. We live in a time-bound universe; time is an undeniable part of our existence. And all things that are time-bound experience change; all things that experience change are composed of parts; all things that are composed of parts are limited; all things that are limited are caused to exist by another; all things that are caused to exist by another are finite; all things that are finite are dependent on its existence by something outside of it; all things that are dependent on its existence by something outside of it are created. Therefore, all things that are time-bound are created. The universe is time-bound. Thus, the universe is created. Being a created thing, it cannot go into the past infinitely, since limited things are not infinite; only things that are timeless are infinite. Therefore the universe is dependent on its existence on something or Someone that's infinite since no finite thing can account for its own existence. Even the second law of thermodynamics supports the temporality of the universe. This law says that the amount of usable energy in the universe is tending towards disorder, which would indicate a finite, temporal, and changing creation, which is in accord with the type of universe assumed in a theistic worldview. The universe is not eternal. It had a beginning point having optimal usable energy but then tended toward less optimal energy. This infinite something or Someone that began the whole creation process, in a theistic worldview, is called God. And if God is the Creator of the universe, then there is no reason to deny His present activity

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