

“Developing a Christian Mind: How to Get One and Keep It”

Bob Bullock

Session III

**“OUT OF OUR CHRISTIAN MINDS”
 (“DEFINING A CHRISTIAN MIND”)**

In 1963, an Englishman who had been a student of C.S. Lewis, by the name of Harry Blamires, wrote a book entitled, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?*¹ Blamires captured the attention of thinking Christians everywhere when he stated his thesis, “*There is no longer a Christian mind.*” What he meant was that any particular “Christian” way of thinking distinct from the self proclaimed ‘secular’ culture around us had been lost. The clear implication was that somewhere over the centuries, Christians had stopped thinking with a Biblical mindset and had begun to adhere to culture’s faddish models of thought, often without even realizing it. The now famous imagery of placing the proverbial frog in a pot of cold water on the stove so it completely misses the fact that the water is beginning to boil, comes to mind. Or perhaps it is more like the poor guy in a novel who awakens from a long nap to find that the world he had known before he fell asleep had changed beyond recognition.

In 1968, Francis Schaeffer wrote his insightful book, *Escape from Reason* in which he chronicled the twentieth century ‘modern’ mentality as living out the inheritance of the Enlightenment in creating a two story universe with grace and faith in the upper story and nature and rationality in the lower story.

grace & faith
nature & rationality

By the end of the 19th century, this left moderns in a precarious situation where reason functioned only in the lower story (proof by logic and reason of the scientific method which came through observation). Grace and faith and the upper story were placed in the category of values which were personal matters.² All of this left moderns who were religious with a sacred/secular divide where life became categorized into one or the other without the two ever having to meet in our thinking. It left the non religious with a journey that ultimately led to atheistic nihilism³ and existential pessimism and the now famous existential ‘Leap of Faith’ (faith without reason) to jump from the lower to the higher story.

Certainly not all Atheists are existential pessimists. Contemporary biologist Richard Dawkins says, “Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”⁴ In Dawkins’ mind, Darwin provides complete, comprehensive world view.

¹ Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* (London: SPCK, 1963) chapter 1.

² Francis Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968).

³ James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A World View Catalogue* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 77. Sire explains, “Nihilism is more of a feeling than a philosophy. It is a denial of the possibility of knowledge, a denial that anything is valuable. It proceeds from the absolute denial of everything—knowledge, ethics, beauty, reality... nothing has meaning. Everything is gratuitous, contingent”.

⁴ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: Norton, 1986).

Both the Enlightenment and the Renaissance opened the door for the rise of Humanism (which places man at the center of life) as opposed to theism (which places God at the center of our thinking and as our starting point for living). The difference this makes might best be understood in considering 'worldviews.' Having just read Richard Dawkins express the work of Darwin as his world view, we now turn to the humanists who captured the modernist way of looking at life.

The signers of the Humanist Manifesto I & II fit into the discussion at this point. Although there are admirable goals expressed for human achievement there is a significant devaluing of the place and role of religion and its values. For instance, Humanist Manifesto I (1933) states:

*"Humanism asserts that the nature of the universe depicted in modern science makes unacceptable any super-natural or cosmic guarantees of human values. Obviously humanism does not deny the possibility of realities as yet undiscovered, but it does insist that the way to determine the existence and value of any and all realities is by means of intelligent inquiry and by the assessment of their relation to human needs. Religion must formulate its hopes and plans in the light of the scientific spirit and method."*⁵

Likewise, the Humanist Manifest II continues in the same vein:

"We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is autonomous and situational, needing no theological or ideological sanction. Ethics stems from human need and interest. To deny this distorts the whole basis of life. Human life has meaning because we create and develop our futures. Happiness and the creative realization of human needs and desires, individually and in shared enjoyment, are continuous themes of humanism. We strive for the good life here and now. The goal is to pursue life's enrichment despite debasing forces of vulgarization, commercialization, bureaucratization, and dehumanization.

*Reason and intelligence are the most effective instruments that humankind possesses. There is no substitute: neither faith nor passion suffices in itself."*⁶

The idea that each of us has a mental map from which we derive 'a worldview'⁷ grows out of "philosophical idealism which developed the idea that cultures are complex wholes, where certain outlooks on life, or spirit of the age, is expressed across the board—in art literature, and social institutions as well as in formal philosophy."⁸ In answering the question, "What is a world view?" James W. Sire states: "A world view is

⁵ Humanist Manifestos I and II, edited by Paul Kurtz (Buffalo: Prometheus Books 1973) 8.

⁶ Humanist Manifestos I and II, 17.

⁷ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004) 23. 'Worldview' is a translation of the German word *Weltanschauung*, which means way of looking at the world (*Welt* = world; *schauen* = to look).

⁸ Percy, 25.

a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic make up of our world.”⁹ Sire challenges us to think deeply when he says: “I am convinced that for a person to be fully conscious intellectually he should not only be able to detect the world views of others, but be aware of his own—why it is his and why in the light of so many options he thinks it is true.”¹⁰ In the end, he cautions us,

“To accept Christian theism only as an intellectual construct is not to accept it fully. There is a deeply personal dimension in grasping and living within this world view, for it involves acknowledging our own individual dependence upon God as his creatures, our own individual reliance on God for restoration to fellowship with him. And it means accepting Christ as both Liberator from bondage and Lord of our future.

To be a Christian theist is not just to have an intellectual world view; it is to be personally committed to the infinite-personal Lord of the Universe. And it leads to an examined life that is well worth living.”¹¹

Just about the time that some of us had figured out Modernism, it began to give way to Postmodernism and a brand new day began. The late Stanley J. Grenz writes: “Postmodernism represents a rejection of the Enlightenment project and the foundational assumptions upon which it was built.” Actually Modernism had been under attack since Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), but came under “full front assault” in the 1970s with the rise of deconstruction as a literary theory, which influenced a new movement in philosophy.¹² We will examine Postmodernism in later sessions as we think together about recovering a Christian mind.

If the mantra of secularism is: ‘the cosmos is all that is’ and cry of humanism is the serpents lie in the Garden: “**You will be like God**” (Genesis 3:5) then the experience of Nebuchadnezzar is instructive (Daniel, Chapter 4). So just how do we make a serious start on “Developing a Christian Mind?” Having established what Christian world view might look like, the next step is with God’s help, to begin some serious spiritual formation. To begin with, let’s ask ourselves, “Just what would it be mean if we were to live the words of the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Roman Church: “**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind? Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.**” (Epistle to the Romans 12:2, NIV)

Or as Eugene Peterson paraphrases it: “**Don’t become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly**

⁹ Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A World View Catalogue*, 17. “A well rounded world view basic answers to each of the following questions: 1) What is the prime reality—the really real?; 2) Who is man?; 3) What happens to man at death?; 4) What is the basis of morality?; 5) What is the meaning of human history?”

¹⁰ Sire, Introduction.

¹¹ Sire, 213-214.

¹² Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1996) 5.

respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings out the best of you, develops well informed maturity in you.”
(Romans 12:2, Eugene Peterson, *The Message*)

Then keeping the goal in mind, let's consider the Apostle's statement in II Corinthians 3:18: *“We who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”*

One of the most thoughtful scholarly pastors of our day, John R.W. Stott, asks this question of us:

“Has God created us rational beings, and shall we deny our humanity which he has given us? Has God spoken to us, and shall we not listen to his words? Has God renewed our mind through Christ, and shall we not think with it?”¹³

In *How Shall We Then Live?*, Francis Schaeffer states:

“As Christians we are not only to know the right world view...but consciously to act upon that world view so as to influence society in all its parts and facets across the whole spectrum of life, as much as we can to the extent of our individual and collective abilities.”¹⁴

It seems most fitting that since we began this session with the thinking of Harry Blamires, that we conclude it with his challenge to us—about being *“transformed by the renewing of our minds”* ...

“There is nothing in our experience, however trivial, worldly, or even evil, which cannot be thought about Christianly. There is likewise nothing in our experience, however sacred, which cannot be thought about secularly...”¹⁵

¹³ John R.W. Stott, *Your Mind Matters: The Place of the Mind in the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 26.

¹⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Shall We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976), 252.

¹⁵ Blamires, 45.