

Mission
for the
Third
Millennium

**Meeting the Challenges
to Christian Faith and Values**

by
Robert M. Bowman, Jr.
and
Kenneth D. Boa

Contents

Introduction: *Our Changing World*

Challenging What We Think:

How the Sciences Are Questioning the Christian Worldview

1. The Evolution Revolution: *Naturalism and the Question of Origins*
2. Psyched Out: *Scientism and the Question of Humanity*
3. The Way Things Ought to Be: *Postmodernism and the Question of Reality*

Challenging Who We Trust:

How the Religions Are Competing with the Christian Message

4. No God at All: *Western Humanism and the New Atheism*
5. No God but All: *Eastern Mysticism and the New Age Movement*
6. No God but Allah: *Muslim Radicalism and the New Islamic Sects*

Challenging Why We Believe:

How the Churches Are Redefining the Christian Faith

7. Letting Go: *Liberal Christianity Retreating from the Faith*
8. Starting Over: *Cultic Christianity Reinventing the Faith*

9. Holding On: *Biblical Christianity Remembering the Faith*

Challenging How We Choose:

How the Nations Are Repressing Christian Ethics

10. The Graying of Morality: *Relativism and the Law of Nature*

11. Christ and Cultures: *Multiculturalism and the Gospel of Christ*

12. Ethics as If God Mattered: *Secularism and the Word of God*

Challenging Where We Stand:

How the People Are Criticizing Christian Values

13. All Creatures Great and Small: *Abortion and the Meaning of Persons*

14. All About Eve: *Feminism and the Meaning of Equality*

15. All That Heaven Allows: *Homosexuality and the Meaning of Love*

Conclusion: *Our Challenging Mission*

Introduction:

Our Changing World

As we approach the beginning of the third millennium, the world seems to be changing quickly and indeed to be spinning out of control. While the threat of a superpower conflict has subsided, the world is still a very dangerous place. Not only have wars been causing havoc and tragedy in places like Bosnia and Rwanda, but the confident peace and security of America, the sole surviving superpower, has been shattered by such events as the bombings of the World Trade Center in New York and the federal building in Oklahoma City.

The world is also a very confusing place, with recent developments in science and culture calling almost everything into question that we once believed. Science itself seems to be suffering a breakdown of its consensus, if it ever had one. Scientists today appear to debate almost everything of cultural significance, from whether the unborn are persons from conception to whether miracles are possible. An increasing number of thinkers are declaring this a “postmodern world” — one in which no consensus is possible because

reality is however we perceive it, and one in which neither the Christian worldview nor the modern humanist worldview can any longer command assent.

Is there any place for the biblical, Christian worldview in this changing world? Do Christians have anything to say in response to the myriad challenges they face today to their faith and values? These are the questions we address in this book. We do not try to provide detailed, comprehensive explanations of the issues nor exhaustive, definitive answers to the questions. Instead, we offer a wide-ranging analysis of some of the most critical issues facing Christians today, from evolution to abortion, from the Muslims to the Mormons, from the New Age movement to the gay rights movement. Think of this book as a large-scale map showing the major political boundaries, longest rivers, highest mountain ranges, and largest cities, with smaller “insets” showing more detailed views of select areas. You will get a better view of the big picture, and from there can go on to examine the details with a street map for those local areas of special interest to you. At the end of the book we provide a list of readings that will serve as such “street maps” to go beyond the information provided here.

The most important question that needs to be answered is not *what* we should think about this or that subject — say, what we should think about the age of the universe or about women in pastoral ministry — but *how* we should think about all such questions. We do not pretend to know all the answers to all such questions, but we do believe that we know the way we should approach them. We are more interested and concerned to present and model a way of thinking about the issues than to convince you of the correctness of all of our opinions about these issues. For the greatest challenge facing Christians as we enter the

third millennium is not finding answers to specific questions or solutions to specific problems, but making clear to our culture that the Christian faith is relevant to all questions and all problems.

How, then, do we approach such diverse questions as why God allows evil and whether some people are born genetically predisposed to homosexuality? Our answer, briefly, is that a biblical worldview and biblical principles should be made the basis for seeking answers to these questions. This does not mean that answers to such questions can always be read straight out of the Bible, as if a simple quotation from the Bible can be produced that will allow us to say to any question we can pose, “Oh, well then, that’s the answer.” Obviously, with some questions the Bible will actually provide direct information or instruction (such as why God allows evil), but with other questions we will not find any direct consideration of the matter (such as whether some people are genetically predisposed to homosexuality). But where the Bible does not speak directly, it provides a framework of understanding within which we can fruitfully pursue answers to our questions. This framework is what we have been calling a *worldview*, the standard term for them, though actually worldviews might be better called reality-views. A worldview is a “map” (to return to that analogy) which we carry about in our minds, referring to it constantly even when we are not aware of its existence — which, for most of us, is most of the time.

The understanding that the Bible provides a worldview and teaches a variety of principles but does not provide direct answers to every question we might ask leads to an important conclusion about how we go about seeking and articulating answers. If every question had a straightforward answer in a biblical reference or two, we could take those

answers and dogmatically insist that everyone accept those answers. On the other hand, if the Bible never answered any of our most basic questions and provided no insight or guidance for pursuing answers to all our questions, then we would have to admit that we were essentially on our own and that our answers were not necessarily any better than anyone else's. But we face neither of these alternatives. As Christians, we confess that God has revealed himself and his will for the human race in the Bible. We do have answers, and this gives us a basis for confidence in confronting our culture with those answers. At the same time, because not everything is spelled out in Scripture and there are many questions that cannot be directly or certainly answered from the Bible, we must be cautious and humbly admit that we do not have all of the answers and that some of our answers may be less reliable than others.

In short, a worldview approach to applying biblical teaching to contemporary cultural issues and problems requires a balance of confidence and caution, boldness and humility. Where God's word is clear, we cannot afford to be cloudy. But where God's word calls upon us to make use of the gifts of reason and our senses to pursue matters beyond the immediate concern of the biblical revelation, we cannot short-circuit that process by concocting simplistic answers and trying to justify them on the basis of a dubious application of the biblical text.

Before going any further, it will be helpful to give a concise statement of what we mean by the biblical worldview. Perhaps the simplest definition is that the biblical worldview has three cornerstone affirmations: monotheism, incarnationalism, and evangelicalism. *Monotheism* affirms that there is one God who created the world, who

made human beings to be creatures who could relate personally both to other creatures in the physical world of which they are a part and to the God who made them, and who holds human beings accountable for their willful breaking of these relationships.

Incarnationalism affirms that this God, who revealed himself to us in Scripture, revealed himself supremely by becoming human uniquely in Jesus of Nazareth, who as the Son revealed the Father who sent him and the Spirit whom he sent after he died and rose again to restore our relationship with God. *Evangelicalism* (used here in a broader sense than usual) affirms that through faith in Jesus as our great God and Savior we enjoy that restored relationship with God and begin to learn again how to honor God in our relations with one another and with his creation. These affirmations are fundamental to the biblical, Christian worldview.

One other premise of the method or approach that we take to the controversial issues in our culture should be explained at the outset. It is possible to respond to each new challenge or difficult issue arising in our culture that poses questions for Christian faith and values by rejecting and condemning outright anything that is strange, unfamiliar, or contrary to traditional opinions. And many Christians do just that. The problem with this approach is that it positions the Christian in a retreatist and reactionary stance. We seem to be falling back from engaging the culture with the truth of God's word, trying to find a secure bunker from which to defend the gospel. What we should be doing is advancing, carrying the flag forward, and meeting the challenges squarely. For example, it may seem safer to dismiss out of hand all scientific theories that challenge traditional interpretations of the Bible, but in the long run it means that fewer and fewer Christians will make contributions to science

and we will have capitulated the sciences to non-Christian worldviews. Arguably we have already done so in some quarters of the church, at least to a great extent.

On the other hand, it is also possible to respond to each new challenging question or idea or cultural development by trying to incorporate it into the Christian faith without asking hard questions about whether it will really fit. Again, many people inside the Christian church are doing just that. The result is that Christianity in such circles appears very trendy, but at the expense of truth. It may seem that in order to make Christianity relevant we must accept whatever trend-setting scientists or scholars tell us is so, but in the long run that will make God's revelation captive to human rationalization and we will have surrendered the Christian faith to non-Christian speculations. Again, arguably this has also been done in some quarters in the church.

The course we attempt to chart is to avoid both a reactionary antagonism toward the intellectual and cultural developments of our day, and an accommodation of the Christian message to the spirit of the times. Our goal is to seek to make a faithful response that acknowledges the church's responsibility to continue changing and growing in its own understanding of the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ. We have much to learn, both from God's word in Scripture and from God's world. And God's world includes both nature and people — including non-Christian people. It is the most difficult course, but it is the only one that will get us all the way downstream with our boat intact. This means, as a practical matter, taking what critics of orthodox Christianity say with utmost seriousness — while not yielding ground on those basic principles which Scripture clearly teaches and which have formed the essential framework of belief for the church throughout its history.

It would be arrogant for us to claim that we have sailed this course successfully ourselves around every bend and past every rock. We are learning ourselves, and with this book taking part in a great conversation among God's people to which we also invite those who do not know our God. We will be grateful to God if this book helps others find their bearings and encourages them to take part in the ongoing mission of the church as we enter the third millennium.