

# Christian First, Science Practitioner Second

---

Frank G. Cookingham; contact at [www.EvalFrank.com](http://www.EvalFrank.com)

Presentation to American Scientific Affiliation Conference at Azusa Pacific University, February 07 2015, Perry Lecture Hall Segerstrom Science Center 162 1:30 PM

SLIDE 1

SLIDE 2

Welcome; it's a privilege to be here with you.

SLIDE 3

In this session I am calling those of you who are science students in the broadest sense to formulate your Christian worldview throughout your student years. Christian first; scientist second.

SLIDE 4

I am also calling those who are science practitioners working in the lab or the classroom to encourage and enable students to continually examine scientific knowledge against their understanding of being a Christian first, science practitioner second.

I hope that the reasons why this is important to me will become apparent as I describe the concept of worldview, an example of a frame for a Christian worldview, and the concepts of "fact" and "faith" from the perspective of a Christian that practices science.

SLIDE 5

## **My credentials**

I am not a theologian nor am I a science practitioner in the ordinary sense. I evaluate Christian community development programs. How am I qualified to speak on these matters? Professional program evaluation involves applying social science concepts and research methods to determine the good, bad and ugly consequences of planning and implementing a program. I think it is fair to say that as a program evaluator I am an applied social science practitioner.

I became a Christian, a follower of Jesus, while in graduate school in 1968. My field of study was designing and implementing educational research during the War on Poverty. Philosophy of Science and Inferential Statistics were important areas of study for me. I became interested in program evaluation as the discipline developed in the social sciences; in 1985 I became a career program evaluator for a Christian humanitarian relief and development organization.

Scientific epistemology from a positivism perspective guided my evaluation work until I realized that positivism science has many limitations for evaluating community development programs as a Christian. Gradually I shifted toward science epistemology from a constructivist

perspective. A number of social scientists are making such a shift toward rigorous qualitative research approaches based on constructivist principles. More satisfactory descriptions and explanations of how we experience complex reality are emerging.

Then I realized that I needed to articulate my Christian worldview in detail and adapt my science epistemology to be consistent with that worldview. I had been trying to adapt my understanding of scripture to science epistemology, which is backwards. This happened relatively late in my career. I hope each of you becomes very serious about doing something similar now. Don't wait!

#### SLIDE 6

### What is a worldview?

#### SLIDE 7

Take a moment to jot down key phrases that you associate with "worldview." (Educational research shows that you are more apt to learn more about something when you start with your existing understanding of it, and then consider alternative understandings.) I will wait a minute as you collect your thoughts.

#### SLIDE 8

There are many definitions of "worldview." Moreland and Craig (2003, p.13) describe worldview as an ordered set of propositions about what one believes about life's most important questions. Worldview is the outcome of comprehensively blending ideas, images and beliefs about the things that really matter.

The web site ,[www.TestingWorldviews.com](http://www.TestingWorldviews.com), says that "a worldview is a person's set of assumptions about the basic makeup and nature of the world and universe. A fully developed worldview gives answers to the foundational questions of human existence.

More recently Poplin (2014, p.26) describes worldviews as "operating systems of the mind." Just as the operating system of a computer determines what the computer can and cannot do, a worldview determines the range of thoughts that a person accepts as plausible aspects of reality.

When you are watching TV news and suddenly exclaim; No way! Or That makes no sense! That is your worldview in action. As you process information your worldview filters it into categories like "of course that is true," "I don't know what that means," "that's impossible."

#### SLIDE 9

Just as computer operating systems can be improved with updates, worldviews can be adjusted to accommodate new information and experiences. This is why I am calling all of us to work on our worldviews now: with the great explosions of knowledge occurring, and the clashes of value systems becoming more destructive, we need to keep refining our worldview filters so that they keep us on our preferred path for living a fulfilling life.

SLIDE 10

***Common characteristics***

Poplin examines four global worldviews; the global monotheism worldview includes Christianity. She describes five characteristics of all worldviews (pp. 30-31):

1. "All worldviews begin with faith, a metaphysical belief that cannot be verified using scientific methods."

SLIDE 11

2. "Every non-Christian worldview holds within it some principles of the Judeo-Christian worldview." There is some overlap in the elements of the Judeo-Christian worldview with the elements of each of the other worldviews.

SLIDE 12

3. There are principles held by each non-Christian worldview that are outside the Christian worldview.

SLIDE 13

4. "There are principles of Judeo-Christianity that lie outside the purview of believers in these other three [non-Christian] worldviews."

SLIDE 14

Principles 2-4 describe a simple Venn diagram. Finally,

SLIDE 15

5. "None of these [four global] worldviews is more progressive or modern than the other. They have all existed ever since recorded history."

These principles imply that you may move back and forth between worldviews as you do work to make your preferred worldview more explicit. As a Christian in science you need to identify and resolve potential conflicts in your understanding between essential features of a Christian worldview and essential features of science epistemology. Other worldviews are competing for your allegiance: heed the wisdom of the apostle Paul:

SLIDE 16

"Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect."  
Romans 12:2, NRSV

SLIDE 17

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit , according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.” Colossians 2:8, NRSV

SLIDE 18

The ASA web site has helpful material about worldview. A worldview is a theory of the world, used for living in the world. A world view is a mental model of reality — a framework of ideas & attitudes about the world, ourselves, and life, a comprehensive system of beliefs — with answers for a wide range of questions (ASA, <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/education/views/index.html>)

If you have not explored this site I encourage you to do so. The content is excellent and the screened links to resources take you to other sites with excellent content.

These few examples of definitions illustrate the fundamental nature of any worldview. The Christian worldview is grounded in Scripture integrated with key elements of relevant fields of study.

SLIDE 19

See the resources list [handout] for other materials relevant for clarifying your Christian worldview as a science practitioner.

SLIDE 20

SLIDE 21

### **Christian worldview frame**

Nancy Pearcey (2005, pp.44-49) describes a frame for building a Christian worldview. A frame is an outline of elements that will be addressed by the detailed content. Her frame is based on three turning points in biblical history plus the way forward. The worldview must be balanced across the frame to be biblically authentic; no component can be emphasized less than the other components.

SLIDE 22

Letting the frame soak into your consciousness day after day will change your approach to learning about and practicing science. Your practice will become more holistic, more satisfying to your heart, mind and soul. Your practice will be aligned better with God’s purpose for your life.

[READ the first principles on the next page slowly.]

SLIDE 23

SLIDE 24

SLIDE 25



## Frame for a Christian Worldview

Nancy Pearcey, (2005), *Total Truth*

Turning Points in Biblical History	First Principles [FGC synopsis]
<p>Creation</p> <p>“All created reality comes from the hand of God and was originally and intrinsically good (p.95).”</p>	<p>“God is the sole source of the entire created order (p.45)”</p> <p>“There is no philosophically or spiritually neutral subject matter (p.45).”</p>
<p>Fall</p> <p>“All is marred and corrupted by sin (p.95).”</p>	<p>“All parts of creation – including our minds – are caught up in a great rebellion against the Creator (p.45).”</p> <p>“The Fall did not destroy our original calling, but only made it more difficult. Our work is now marked by sorrow and hard labor (p.48).”</p> <p>“A Christian approach to any field [of knowledge, including evaluation FGC] needs to be both critical and constructive. We cannot borrow from the results of secular scholarship as though they were spiritually neutral territory discovered by people whose minds are completely open and objective – that is, as though the Fall had never happened (p.46).”</p>
<p>Redemption</p> <p>“All is capable of being redeemed, restored, and transformed by God’s grace (p.95).”</p>	<p>God redeems the whole person by giving new direction to our thoughts, emotions, wills and habits (p.46).</p> <p>“Redemption consists primarily in casting out our mental idols and turning back to the true God (p.46).”</p> <p>“When we are redeemed our entire outlook on life is re-centered on God and re-built on [God’s] revealed truth (p.46).”</p>
<p>Restoration triggered by Redemption</p>	<p>When we are redeemed we resume the task assigned to us: develop the social world and harness the natural world. We creatively use our gifts and talents to “develop the powers and potentials that God originally built into the creation (p.47).”</p> <p>We build things that are “beautiful and useful while fighting the forces of evil and sin that oppress and distort the creation (p.49).”</p>

SLIDE 27

## Including science epistemology in your Christian worldview

As science students you will learn much in your classes and labs about how to search out truth as a scientist working in a particular discipline. If your curriculum does not include a class in philosophy of science or epistemology, I strongly encourage you to study science epistemology on your own or in a small group. Ask your professors for recommended reading. The list of resources [handout] includes materials that I have found helpful.

To illustrate how you can incorporate science epistemology in your Christian worldview, consider the concepts of “fact” and “faith” ([www.EvalFran.com](http://www.EvalFran.com), Role of Worldview in Evaluation Work, pp.12-13).

### SLIDE 28

#### **Fact**

A fact is a piece of information that we have to reckon with, whether we like it or not. It is a piece of information about our experience that is accepted as true within the tradition we have adopted.

The significance of a fact depends upon the story within which the fact is placed. The scientist calls the story theory, or the set of relationships among selected facts that describes or explains selected experiences in the world. The theologian calls the story theology, or the unfolding (unfinished) activity of God in the world.

Every story has a beginning that is accepted as the beginning. A theory has fundamental assumptions that influence the meaning given to a fact. A theology has fundamental assumptions that influence the meaning given to a fact.

Facts are as essential to the theologian as they are to the scientist.

### SLIDE 29

#### **Faith**

All knowing begins with an act of faith.

### SLIDE 30

We accept the tools we are using to expand our knowledge -- that is an act of faith.

### SLIDE 31

We accept some set of assumptions as a starting point for discourse -- that is an act of faith.

### SLIDE 32

We accept guidance from those in the tradition we recognize as teachers or experts -- that is an act of faith.

Our acts of knowing are more useful when we rigorously identify and describe our starting points (assumptions) and the tools we are using. We make progress by doubting, then dialoguing with informed others, and then perhaps revising our beliefs.

Faith is just as essential to the scientist as it is to the theologian. The presence of faith is not what distinguishes between the two as they deepen their knowledge. Their differences are in the content of their faith.

SLIDE 33

**Final word**

Don't rely solely on assigned reading in classes for becoming a Christian that practices science. Explore other materials you find in your libraries; learn how to surf the net as a critical thinker; talk with classmates and professors about their experiences in formulating their Christian worldview while they learn about God's wondrous creation through science.

Thank you for your attention. We have time for comments.

## References

Lewis, C. S., 1960, *Mere Christianity: What One Must Believe to be a Christian* (Macmillan paperback edition), Macmillan.

“I was not writing to expound something I could call ‘my religion,’ but to expound ‘mere’ Christianity, which is what it is and was what it was long before I was born and whether I like it or not (p. 7).”

Moreland, J. P. & Craig, William Lane, 2003, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, InterVarsity Press Academic.

This text is an articulation of what the authors believe to be the most plausible stance a Christian can take on various questions. Four chapters address issues in the philosophy of science, including approaches to causality.

Packer, J. I., 1973, *Knowing God*, Inter-Varsity Press.

Per the author, “the conviction behind the book is that ignorance of God – both of his ways and of the practice of communion with him – lies at the root of much of the church’s weakness today. Two unhappy trends seem to have produced this state of affairs (pp. 12-13).”

- “Christian minds have been conformed to the modern spirit: the spirit, that is, that spawns great thoughts of man and leaves room for only small thoughts of God.”
- “Christian minds have been confused by the modern skepticism.”

Pearcey, Nancy, 2004/2005, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, Crossway Books.

Analysis of secularist strategies to keep Christian worldview from influencing culture. Provides guidance in developing a fully Christian worldview.

Poplin, Mary, 2014, *Is Reality Secular? Testing the Assumptions of Four Global Worldviews*, InterVarsity Press.

The book describes author’s personal journey to an evolving Judeo-Christian worldview. Describes essential features of material naturalism, secular humanism, pantheism, and Judeo-Christianity as global worldviews.

Stott, John R. W., *Basic Christianity* (second edition), 1971, Inter-Varsity Press.

Author investigates the claim that God is in Jesus Christ. There are three converging streams of evidence: claims of Christ, character of Christ, and Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

[www.TestingWorldviews.com](http://www.TestingWorldviews.com)

“The Purpose of this Web Site is to help you test and choose a worldview which is logically consistent and not self-contradictory, but best accounts for the most facts of reality, history, science and human experience.”