

"LIFE VIEWS"

COLOSINIANS 2:8

By Mike Burnham

Paul tells us to "beware" lest any man "spoil" you (that is, carry you off as his spoil; not take spoil from you). The present tense indicates a constant watchfulness on the part of the readers, because the danger was at hand, evidently by some false teacher whom they know. Beware lest you be proselytized or led into his way of thinking. The means of proselytizing is through philosophy, (which is a theory or so-called logical analysis of the principles underlying conduct, thought, knowledge, and the nature of the universe). The problem with most philosophies is that they are arrived at through strictly human reason, which is the measure of truth instead of God. These philosophies are not logical because of man's limitations and his depraved state. They are, as stated in our text, empty deceptions, fruitless, void of real truth. The history of philosophy, from Socrates and Plato to Kant and today, is a story of contradictory, discarded theories.

It is vain because it is "the tradition (the reasoning) of men". Paul is conscious of the supernatural origin of his own doctrine and the depraved minds which are the origin of men's doctrines. The "rudiments of the world" are the childish concepts which man attains without revelation. Truth is found only in Christ and without him there is no truth. Philosophy in itself is not bad. It is the love of and searching for wisdom or knowledge. We are told to seek wisdom and knowledge. It is also a principle to live by, a system of thought that guides our morals, actions, behaviour, and builds our character. But if the philosophy is not founded in Christ and the revealed word of God it is vain, empty deceit. Paul warned Timothy also about this (1 Tim. 6:20, 21).

One of the philosophies that plagued the church at Colosse and some other early churches was "gnosticism". They believed that salvation was attained through

having knowledge so they derived their system of belief by combining ideas derived from Greek philosophy, oriental mysticism, and ultimately, Christianity.

Two other systems of philosophies of Paul's time were stoicism and epicureanism (Acts 17:18). Stoicism said: live nobly and death cannot matter. Hold appetite in check. Become indifferent to changing conditions. Be not uplifted by good fortune nor cast down by adversity. Epicureanism said: all is uncertain. We don't know where we came from or where we are going. We only know that after a brief time we disappear from this scene, and it is vain to deny ourselves any present joy. "let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." these two philosophies are still with us today and we will look at them more fully later.

Philosophy is a difficult science. But philosophy through the complex strands of ideas shape our culture, our beliefs, arts, and customs. Because we are all missionaries, witnesses for Christ in this country of ours, we need to understand something about the society in which we are witnessing.

The United States, unlike where we find a uniform system of thought that everyone is required to embrace, is a melting pot of people and, therefore, of ideas. The result has been that many different beliefs and philosophies compete for acceptance within our society. When conflicting ideas are stirred up in the pot things tend to get confusing. We are exposed and influenced by a wide diversity of ideas. We get one set of ideas in church. Another in school. We learn one set of values watching "Dallas" or "Dynasty" and another from watching "Little House on the Prairie". All these perspectives bombard our brains and shape our thinking. The result is an inconsistent life, which we are often not aware of.

Our viewpoint comes from the melting pot. We get mixed up. Our pot has a dash of faith and a dash of skepticism. We are at once religious and secular. We are inconsistent and confused because we fail to understand where Christianity ends and paganism begins. Consequently, we traffic back and forth across the lines, making forays between darkness and light.

Socrates said; "the unexamined life is not worth living." to examine one's life is

to think about it. It is to evaluate. To evaluate requires examining values and value systems. We are told in 2 Cor. 13:5 to examine ourselves. Not whether we have faith, but whether we are in the faith. Is our character, beliefs and values conformable to Christ who is in us? We all have values. We all have some viewpoint about what life is all about. We are not all philosophers but we all have a philosophy, and this philosophy we all live out. How we live reveals our deepest convictions about life.

The purpose of this study is to help us think about prevailing viewpoints in our culture. To help us not to be intimidated and overwhelmed by all of these philosophical systems and to help us combat them in our society. We are going to look at and try to understand existentialism, humanism, pragmatism, positivism, pluralism (and its corollary, relativism) and hedonism. All are, to varying degrees, affecting the way Americans think and act today.

"Secularism"

No society or civilization can survive or function without some unifying system of thought. Some kind of glue is required in order for the different ideas to stick together. A unifying system of thought. Israel's unifying system was religion. Other civilizations have been unified by a common mythology. Others like Russia by a devotion to the state and a particular political philosophy.

America's "glue" is difficult to isolate because our culture is so diverse. Most analysts of American culture agree that our unity is no longer based on a religious system. Nor is mythology. Though we live in a society with an ever-accelerating growth of central government we are not (yet) totally statist. That leaves one option, philosophy. But which philosophy? Is there one dominant philosophy that can "include" humanism, pragmatism, existentialism, positivism, and pluralism as subheadings? An "umbrella" view that is broad enough to cover these other systems?

There is a current "ism" that has emerged to dominant the view of our culture. But before we look at it lets look at that little suffix "ism". Ism is a suffix added to the

root of a word. These three letters, when added to a root word, change the meaning of the term dramatically. It is one thing to be social, quite another to embrace socialism. It is one thing to be human, something else to adopt humanism. See how the following words are changed: national----nationalism, feminine----feminism, relative--relativism exhibition----exhibitionism, liberal----liberalism. As soon as we put the suffix on the word it changes the word into a system of thought, a way of looking at things.

The dominant ism of American culture, the ism reflected in the news media, the film industry, and the art world is "secularism". To understand what secularism is, we first have to look at its root, secular. It comes from a Latin word meaning "world". It refers to this world in this time. Its point of focus is "here and now". We go into the world and get us a secular job. In the Middle Ages the Catholics used to ordain a secular priesthood. Their responsibilities took them out of the church realm to minister in the world, I think they were called "friars".

When we add "ism" to secular we get a system of thought, a way of looking at things that governs how we live. For secularism, all life, every human value, every human activity must be understood in light of this present time. The secularist either flatly denies or remains utterly skeptical about the eternal. What matters is now and only now. This is where Christianity and secularism conflict. The biblical view has a long-term view of human life, life in eternity. The startling news is that we will get out of this world alive.

The secularist believes we must make our decisions, live our lives, make our plans, all within the arena of this time--the here and now. There may be no tomorrow. Pepsi calls ours "the now generation." "do it now!" "get it now!". Another commercial say, "you only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can get." the message that comes through is, "you'd better get it now because there is no tomorrow ultimately." life is to be consumed in the present. The meaning of our lives is summed up by the inscriptions on our tombstone: "born 1925, died 1985." we live between two points on a calendar. We have a beginning and an ending, with no

ultimate significance. Solomon in Ecclesiastes 8:9 concluded that without God man is left with nothing but to eat, drink, and be merry. What does a person think who has not God? Eccl. 2:14-17. The secularists of Jesus' day thought the same, Luke 12:16-21. In contrast, Jesus said: "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." God has a word for secularists and all ism's that fall under this heading in Ecclesiastics 11:9.

Life is an investment and the question that modern man has to answer is, "Am I going to invest my life for short-term benefits or for long-term gains?" every time we are faced with a moral decision, with the temptation to do something now that may have harmful after-effects, we are caught in the tension between two views, secularism and sacredness.

We are not to escape the secular, but secular'ism". The world is our dwelling place for the present. Jesus told us to go out into the world to be his witnesses (Matt. 28:19; Acts 1:8). We are not to embrace the view of secularism but to continue in the long-term view of eternity while not neglecting the now. A Christian view must be concerned with the temporal and the eternal.

Most people who accept secularism and who are thinking people, ultimately embrace a philosophy of despair. That despair will manifest itself in escapism through drugs, alcohol, and other forms of behavior that dull the senses from the message that is being proclaimed, "There is no tomorrow ultimately." you can see why people jump at anything that will seemingly relieve that despair, like eastern religions or the new age movement.

As we look at the different philosophies that make up secularism we will see that though different they all embrace one common point, the denial of the transcendent and the eternal.

The diagram illustrates our cultural situation:

Eternal Realm

Wall of skepticism

Secularism umbrella

humanism existentialism positivism pluralism

"existentialism"

In its most basic definition existentialism is a philosophy about human existence. It views man not so much in terms of his mind or his soul, but of his will, his feelings. Man is a creature of passion. He feels strongly. He cares about life. He cries, he sings, he yearns, he curses. It's his passion that makes him a man. It's what separates him from the animal world.

In the past when we wanted to know a person's views on a particular topic, we would pose the question like this: "what do you "think" about that?" now the question is usually stated differently: "what do you "feel" about that?" the accent has changed from thinking to feeling. Feelings become the new standard of human "truth". Our moral creed is "if it feels good, it is good." or "it can't be wrong when it feels so right."

Existentialism made its impact felt most heavily in America after World War 2. One of the places where existentialism took root was in artists' colonies like Greenwich Village, New York, with its "Beatnik" movement and the "Beat Generation." The message that came out of the village was that "there is no meaning to life, life is meaningless." Religious movements also sprang up that embraced existential principles. Zen Buddhism was one such movement. Zen is not pure Buddhism but an existential variety. A person is to discipline his mind so that he can come into touch with his inner self. He is to seek intuitive (the direct knowledge or awareness of

something without conscious attention or reasoning) understanding of a larger "awareness." yet this awareness yields the conclusion that life is irrational (contrary to reason, absurd).

In the film industry the existentialist viewpoint brought a noticeable shift in plots and storylines. It used to be that the drama and the agony of pain and death were followed by a happy ending. You could always tell who the good guy was because he wore a white hat and he won in the end. He was noble, virtuous, and idealistic. Hollywood picked up on the existentialist theme and began producing films of despair. The heroes began to wear black hats. He became an antihero. He was no longer noble, virtuous, and idealistic. He was just not as "bad" as the bad guy. The most obvious change in films came with respect to sex and violence. The passions of man were deromanticized. Sex changed from an essential and indispensable part of love to a base animal drive.

One last theme found in existentialism is that man is free to carve out his own destiny by being morally autonomous. (an irresistible force against an immovable object). He must learn to be a law unto himself. He must have the courage to "do his own thing". The "authentic man" looks into the pit of despair, into the void of nothingness, and sees life is hopeless and meaningless. Nevertheless, he chooses not to surrender to it by seeking the safety of the group and its conventional values and institutions. Instead, he has the courage to exercise his own absolute freedom. He takes sole responsibility for his actions. The courage for such decisions is a strange sort of courage and involves a severe tension because it involves an irreconcilable contradiction: life is meaningless, we must face life with courage, our courage is meaningless.

Here we see the contrast between pessimistic existentialism and Christianity. Christianity also features a call to courage. Many times Jesus said: "fear not!" here is the difference between the message of Jesus and that of the existentialism. Jesus said, "Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." The existentialist declares, "be of good cheer, the world has overcome us."

Jesus gives a "reason" for good cheer. His exhortation to joy was based on a real triumph, an ultimate victory he achieved over the forces of chaos. By contrast the existential cry to courage is based on nothing. It recognizes the ultimate triumph of chaos and clings to an irrational courage.

The youth counterculture of the sixties had two slogans that became popular: "Do your own thing!" and "Tell it like it is!" On the one hand there was a massive revolt against traditional values and a call to doing your own thing. There were no objective truths to obey. On the other hand they wanted the older generation to tell the objective truth, "tell it like it is!" the youth were angry with their elders for being hypocrites, for living contradictory lives. At the same time the young people were exalting the "virtue" of living contradictory lives. At the same time the young people were denying personal ethics by embracing the sexual revolution and the drug culture, they were screaming for a lofty social ethic with respect to civil rights and world peace. They wanted a world with love including "free love" with no responsibility; a world without killing, except for unborn babies, a world where the environment was pure of toxic substances, except for the ones they used on themselves.

"Humanism"

Humanism is "man centered". He is the ultimate being and the ultimate authority; all reality and life center upon man. All focus and emphasis is man centered. We can see where the tension between Christianity and humanism comes from. Christians are "Christ-centered. He is our focus and the emphasis on our lives.

In humanism it is not the character of God or the being of God that is the measure of life, morals, etc., man is the measure. It sees itself as a competitor to the church. In 1961 the supreme court of the United States defined humanism as a religion (Torcaso vs. Watkins).

Humanism is an ancient philosophy dating back to the Greeks before Christ. A significant development of humanism began in the 16th century when two intellectual giants debated the subject of humanism and biblical Christianity. Erasmus of Rotterdam and Martin Luther were the two men. Erasmus was considered the prince of renaissance humanism. It's interesting that even though Erasmus wrote essays critical of the Roman Catholic Church, he still remained a member of that church and included the importance of religion in his philosophical system. He was the one who promoted the movement to recover the ancient languages of the Bible. In fact, Erasmus the humanist was the single most important individual in the reconstruction of the Greek New Testament in his century. This work came to be known as the "textus receptus", which was the Greek text upon which the King James Version of the Bible was based. Earlier humanists tended to view religion as one aspect of the general growth and development of the human race. Religion has contributed certain values to the human race but they had no commitment to the absolute authority of the word of God in the life of the people.

We can say that the battle was won by Luther and the reformation as far as dominating the culture and influencing the shaping of men's ideas. But by the 17th century the tide began to turn. In the 18th century humanism began to prevail over the church.

In the 19th century another kind of cooperation between religion and humanism came into being. It can be seen in a theology that is called "liberalism." In this movement there was an attempt to reconstruct Christianity on a basis of naturalism. Its thrust was to extract from the New Testament anything that was of supernatural nature: miracles, the resurrection, the atonement of Jesus, the transfiguration, and the virgin birth, (especially the virgin birth). It was a clash between biblical, supernatural Christianity and those who wanted to reduce Christianity to its social and ethical aspects.

Here was the crisis: people came to the conclusion that the Bible did not come by divine revelation but simply reflects primitive man's self-understanding of his

religious experience and of his values. The Bible was seen as being interspersed with saga and legend and mythology.

An entire school of theologians came to the place of crisis. They no longer believed in the resurrection or a commitment to a supernatural God. What were they to do?

They began to control many educational institutions and there were thousands of churches that would follow them. All that was necessary for the church to survive the crisis was a "change of focus". Now the accent would be on man's condition in this world. As the focus shifted to man from personal, supernatural redemption from sin and alienation from God, the message changed to "the social gospel". Those who accepted this social gospel said, "we don't believe in the supernatural, but we still believe in the values and the ethics of the New Testament. The church still has a reason to exist. It still has a ministry to carry on.

Not everyone in the church accepted that view, of course. A fierce battle began as liberalism in the church brought on the so-called "modernist controversy". Humanists and liberals became allies because humanism of the 19th century still saw religion as valuable because it called men toward higher virtues.

Modern versions of humanism tend to be more militant regarding Christianity. The clearest statements of the tenets of modern humanism can be found in three brief documents, each about 12 to 20 pages long; "A Humanist Manifesto (1933), Humanist Manifesto (1973), and the Secular Humanist Declaration (1980). All three documents affirm key aspects of humanism. (1). The natural world is the only one we can know; the here-and-now is all there is; (2). Insight, intuition, and divine revelation must be tested by reason; truth is best discovered rationally; (3). Mankind is the only source of morals and value, and the highest human achievement is to improve the human condition; (4). The future will be better if people proceed ethically and rationally; (5). Democracy in all aspects of life is to be strived for, as a means of enhancing personal freedom.

You can see, particularly in the second and third, a spirit of hostility directed

against the Christian faith. Why this change from the earlier cooperative spirit?

Since the 19th century, various thinkers like John Dewey emerged and said that "Religion tends to hinder the evolutionary progress of man." It tends to make man conservative rather than progressive.

Humanism wants to keep much of the ethic of Christianity while rejecting the Christ of Christianity. The humanist rejects the foundation upon which his values are established. This prompted Francis Schaeffer to say, "the humanist has both feet firmly planted in midair."

Basically, the true humanist does not worship. The consistent modern humanist is atheistic. Those who still try to worship are often found in groups such as the Unitarian Church. Unitarianism is an example of humanistic philosophy blended with religious trappings. But humanists also worship in the mainline denominational churches. They have embraced humanism without being aware of it.

The irony of our culture is that humanism has become the dominant philosophy of intellectuals and the loudest critics of humanism have been the pessimistic existentialists. They consider humanism the ultimate of stupidity. Why?

Let's look at the central themes of humanism: man is a cosmic accident. He emerges from the slime by chance. He is a grown-up germ. He is moving steadily toward annihilation. Yet man is the creature of supreme dignity, the ultimate authority; all reality and life center upon man. He lives between two poles of meaninglessness. He comes from nothing; he goes to nothing. His origin is meaningless, his destiny is meaningless. Yet, somehow, between his origin and his destination he acquires supreme dignity. Where does he get it? Out of thin air.

Although humanism is intellectually untenable, it is emotionally attractive. To the thinking person, humanism gives no reason, ultimately, for ascribing value and values. Values become preferences rather than principles. The fear of Christians towards humanism is this: when preferences become ultimate, then whose preferences become ultimate? Historically, values based simply on preferences end in

some form of statism.

Another fear is that the principal vehicle for the broadcasting of humanist philosophy is the public school system. Christians, after decades, are beginning to wake up and see that our children are being taught one set of values in the home and in the church, while they get another philosophical system through public education. This is where the decisive battle lies in the struggle for the modern mind. The dominant influence on public school education in the us today is humanistic philosophy. Public school curricula are made up largely by secular (worldly) people with a secular perspective. Even Christian teachers are having less and less control over the content of what is being taught in the classroom. "The first creed of humanism was not uttered by a human, but by a serpent. His creed was, "you shall be as Gods".

"Pragmatism"

Another philosophy that is influencing our culture is pragmatism. The pragmatist is not interested in ultimate truth, God, etc. He devotes himself to tackling specific problems. He is interested in solving problems affecting him now. He is only concerned with what brings results.

There is a point of confusion between Christianity and pragmatism. We use the term "pragmatic" as a synonym for the word "practical". The Christian wants to be practical. The pragmatist desires to be practical. The conflict between Christianity and pragmatism arises at the point of practicality. The issue focuses on the question, "what is ultimately practical?" that is, "what is practical in the long run." it is the question raised by Jesus in Matthew 16:26. To gain the whole world is practical. It "works" to our advantage to show the world as an asset on our balance sheet. Think of the money we could make from rental properties alone if we owned the whole

world. Everything looks good until we examine our liabilities. If the words "my soul" appear in the loss column there is not much joy in the profits. Sinners in hell have little interest in the Dow Jones Industrial Average. Gaining the whole world is a short-term matter; losing one's soul is a long-term problem. What seems practical at first glance may be extremely impractical in the final analysis.

Pragmatism has no room for a final analysis. It shares the skepticism of secularism about the realm of the eternal. The pragmatist is concerned about right now. Never mind the forever part. Oliver Wendell Holmes was one of the leading spokesmen in America for the philosophy of pragmatism. They said, "We can't know ultimate truth; we can't know ultimate values. We can't go to the other side of the wall so we are stuck by living here on this side. So, how do we know what is right? The answer is by experimentation. If it works it is good, it is truth. If religion works, helps you cope, helps you make it in this world, it is good, it is truth, for you. The problem arises when what works for me doesn't work for you. Which is true? Well, they are both true, says the pragmatist. But we still don't have ultimate truth.

Pragmatists are not concerned with justice either. They join a sister ism called utilitarianism, whose slogan is "the greatest good for the greatest number." this philosophy is the policy of our government. The most obvious example is the graduated income tax. The graduated income tax is in place because it works, not because it is just. It is useful, not equitable.

FDR's style was to say, "we have problems. We don't have time to sit around and think through all the long-range repercussions. We must act now. But quick solutions tend to leave us with new problems. President Shamir accused the Bush administration of being pragmatic on the news June 22, 1990. Our government is full of pragmatists. The pragmatist has a tendency to look at the next election. Never mind the next generation.

The Bible says truth is that which works, but that which works must be measured by the eternal norms of God. The real conflict between Christianity and pragmatism is the conflict between what is right and what is expedient. The principal

spokesman for pragmatism in the first century was a man by the name of Caiaphas, the supreme Rabbi of Jerusalem. What was his advice? "it is "expedient" for us that one man die for the good of the nation." (John 18:14). He did not ask if Jesus was guilty or innocent or whether this action was right or wrong. He was operating on a purely pragmatic basis.

It's easy to point our finger at others. If we want to see something disturbing, during one week we should write down every time we make an ethical decision on the basis of expediency. The pressure to do so is overwhelming. We start compromising and then compromise some more until we are an echo of everything that is around us.

"Positivism"

If we took a poll and asked, "what is positivism?" the majority of people would respond that it means "having a positive mental attitude." positivism, as a philosophy, has little to do with "positive thinking". Its teachers are not Norman Vincent Peale or Robert Schuller. The person usually associated with the founding of positivism as a philosophy is Auguste Comte. He lived during the first half of the 19th century. He sought to discover "laws" that he believed governed the development of a society. He wanted to see all of society transformed by a new kind of philosophy that he called the "dominance of scientific knowledge." He wanted to see a culture and a society established "scientifically" rather than philosophically or theologically.

Comte shared the skepticism of other earlier thinkers in that the whole realm of the eternal or transcendent is unknowable. We cannot get over the wall or around it so that man is left to understand himself and his world on this side of the barrier. The only absolute, he said, was that everything is relative. So Comte is absolutely saying that there are absolutely no absolutes except the absolute that there are absolutely no absolutes. Everything is relative.

In the 20th century a more sophisticated philosophy based on Comte's positivism emerged, called "logical positivism". In the 1920's a group of mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers got together in Vienna, Austria. They were convinced, from a scientific perspective, that debating the issue of the existence of God was a waste of time. They established what was called the "law of verification". This law, simply stated, is "no statement is meaningful unless it can be verified by the senses." We must be able to see it, hear it, taste it, touch it, smell it. In other words, "seeing is believing."

What logical positivism tried to do was establish the rules of verifying truth and meaning. Statements were regarded as being meaningful only if they could be verified by the senses. The statement "God exists" was judged meaningless because it was incapable (in their judgment) of being verified logically.

The problem with the law of verification was that it was too narrow. It was too restrictive. Statements like "I love you" cannot be verified by the senses, but people consider them meaningful.

Though philosophers have largely rejected the narrow law of verification it has made an enormous impact on our culture. A crisis of faith and science has emerged that has shaken our culture. Most people live with the slogan "seeing is believing." physicians have become the new high priests of the culture. Psychiatrists have become the new experts on morality. Ethics itself is being reduced to feelings. Guilt itself is becoming a crime.

We see this battle going on around us in the debates over evolution verses creationism in the public schools and in court decisions regarding abortion. Who decides when life begins? Life has lost its theological definition. Unborn babies are considered meaningless blobs of protoplasm.

Thomas was the original logical positivist, John 20:25. What philosophers don't realize is that faith in God is based on verifiable evidence. The entire ministry of Jesus was filled with evidence for the senses. Peter declared in 2 Peter 1:16: "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you the power and

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty." John wrote, "we "beheld" his glory." (John 1:14). And again "We have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life." 1 John 1:1. The Bible record of the existence of God appeal to the senses and so does creation itself. To trust God in matters of things unseen is not a matter of blind faith. It is reasonable faith based on a multitude of evidence. To not believe one as well attested to as God is to put to death intelligence. But, of course, dead people don't have senses.

"Pluralism and Relativism"

Printed on our coins (and I think at one time on our paper money) is the motto of the United States of America, "E Pluribus Unum"---"from the many, one." it calls attention to the dream of our forefathers, that people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds could come to this country from all nations of the world and form one nation. Out of that plurality and diversity of background unity was to emerge. The idea expressed in our constitution and in the declaration of independence was straightforward: we would have one nation under God. The original assumption of our forefathers was the conviction that there is a transcendent being; transcendent truths would be the basis by which all these various groups and ideas were to be unified.

In our present concept of pluralism, we have taken a significant step away from the original idea upon which this nation was founded. Originally, the idea meant to take from the diversity or the plurality and to bring them together into harmony. Now, modern man is saying that he is cut off from God, cut off from the transcendent point of unity. All we have left is plurality.

Let's distinguish between plurality and pluralism. To speak of a plurality is to say there are diverse ideas or peoples or backgrounds. However, as soon as we add

the suffix "ism" to the word "plural", we are now saying that plurality is all that there is. There is plurality but no unity; there is nothing that brings ultimate togetherness.

From time to time certain beliefs come into fashion that make drastic changes in the thinking of people. In the 19th century it was "evolution". History was suddenly interpreted in the light of the general scheme of evolution. Theology was examined through the lens of evolution. It also affected theories of politics, economics, and philosophy. All were influenced by evolution.

In the 20th century, the belief that replaced evolution was "relativity". We all are aware of the changes in our lives that have been brought about by the scientific revolution based on Einstein's theory of relativity. This is the atomic age. Our lives have been changed by the threat of nuclear war as well as by new possibilities of power from nuclear energy that exist as a result of Einstein's work.

From the viewpoint of science, relativity has to do with description of motion. Relativity in motion is defined or determined by various reference points.

There is a big jump, however, from relativity to "relativism". It is one thing to say that motion is relative to a reference point; it is another thing to say that "everything" is relative. Most of us have heard the statement, "everything is relative." this is a myth. If everything is relative to everything else, then there is no ultimate reference point. If everything is relative then the statement, "everything is relative," is also relative. It cannot be trusted as a fixed truth. All statements become relative. All truth becomes relative. All laws become relative. "Relative to what?" to other statements, which are also relative. We have infinite relatives with no ultimate reference point.

Consider relativity in ethics. If I don't like you and decide to murder you, is that good or bad? Neither. Or both. It's relative. For you and your family it may be considered bad. For me it's good since I've destroyed a personal enemy. In a relativistic law court why should a judge find me guilty? To call my act of murder "bad" would be an arbitrary (whim, impulse) judgment if everything is relative.

This is where modern secular man finds himself. He lives his life with no ultimate, fixed, and absolute reference point that can define his life or the meaning of his existence. The crisis of pluralism is that there is no ultimate point of reference. We can have values but no value, truths but no truth, purposes but no purpose. We have no fixed standards by which to measure or to judge values, truth, purpose or beauty.

"Pluralism in the Church"

Pluralism has not only been accepted as a working ideology in secular culture, but it has also been widely embraced in the church. You may have heard a congregation or a denomination proudly claim, "we are a pluralistic church." (non-denominational). This means that church welcomes all different kinds of theology and viewpoints.

The Bible describes the church as a body. It is made up of diverse parts. Yet in this diversity is unity. We have one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There is an essential unity in truth. Certain truths cannot be negotiated.

Pluralism suggests more than just diverse opinions in the church. It allows contradictory views of Christ, of God, and of the very essence of the Christian faith. It considers them all to be right. Once a church embraces pluralism it is saying, "it doesn't matter whether we agree on the essential points of the Christian faith, because it's all relative."

"Relativism and Abortion"

Abortion is tearing this country apart politically, economically, socially, and in every other way. The issue today is over the question of abortion on demand. On one side are those who oppose abortion called "pro-life". On the other is a group of equally committed people in favor of abortion on demand, called "pro-abortion". In the middle is a mass of people called "pro-choice". Usually, on a legislative level, the difference in our society is determined by this middle group. They say, "I personally would not choose to have an abortion, but I believe every woman has the right to make that choice for herself." On a practical, legal or legislative level, there is no

difference between pro-choice and pro-abortion. A pro-choice vote is a pro-abortion vote. A vast number of mainline Christian churches have gone on record adopting this pro-choice position.

The issue goes deeper than that, however. The question we must face is, does anybody ever have a right to do that which is wrong? When we ask this question we must ask, what kind of right? Legally, we have a right to be wrong. I may disagree with you but you have a right to your view under the law. But does God ever give us a moral right to be wrong? Behind the philosophy of pro-choice is the idea that everybody has the moral right to choose for themselves to have or not to have an abortion.

Who gives one the right to an abortion? Where does that moral right come from? Is it a right that is given to us by our creator? Does God give us the right to choose abortion? Does nature give you the right? Who provides the right? The concept upon which pro-choice build their argument has no foundation. Before we claim a right, we should be able to state where that right came from.

If you want to have an abortion, you have the right, say the pluralists, because morality is relative in a pluralistic society. They say that all views are equally valid. Is that is the case, then we are saying that every view has as much validity as its contradictory view, in which case truth is dead? Truths are not true, values have no values, purposes have no purpose. Confucianism and Christianity can't both be right at the same time because they conflict. Buddhism and Judaism can both be wrong, but they can't both be right on the ultimate issues in which they differ.

Pluralism and relativism have no possibility of being true because, from the beginning, the very possibility of truth itself is eliminated. If everything is true, then nothing is true. The word truth is now empty of meaning. Man cannot continually live in intellectual chaos. Something has to step in to bring unity. A vacuum is forming in our culture and it is "up for grabs". Some form of statism may fill that vacuum to bring unity. The state becomes the goal of life, the reason to live. The only way the state can provide unity for our countries plurality is to become absolute.

You say, "how can this happen?" by going to the same schools, by learning the same things, by saying the same words. Look at the nation of China, a uniformity by enforced unity. We may say that that is the very opposite of pluralism. No, that is the "result" of pluralism. That is the result of transcendent unity. The God whom we worship is a God who brings unity, but at the same time preserves diversity. God has said one body, one lord, one faith, one baptism---but a diversity of gifts and talents, a diversity of personality.

"Hedonism"

Hedonism has as its basic principle the belief that the good and the evil are defined in terms of pleasure and pain. Man's ultimate purpose for living is to be found in enjoying pleasure and avoiding pain. The hedonist's constant goal in life is to pursue those things which increase pleasure and decrease pain.

Hedonism is not new. Historically, we could trace it to the Greek culture, to the school of the Cyrenaic in the late 4th century BC. We have seen their philosophy of life portrayed in the movies in scenes of Roman orgies in which people indulged themselves in wine, women, and song with reckless abandon.

The Epicureans represented the second stage of hedonism. They were more sophisticated. Today we often use the term "Epicurean" to describe a person with exquisite taste, one who can identify the finest wines, but who is not himself a drunkard. He is knowledgeable about the finest clothes and appreciates the finer things of life, a person who is devoted to his creature comforts because he seeks to enjoy life by pursuing a sophisticated level of pleasure.

The Epicureans adopted a more refined variety of hedonism because they learned early the problem with the Cyrenaic hedonism, the problem of excess. This problem has been referred to as the "hedonistic paradox": if the hedonist fails to achieve the measure of pleasure he seeks, he experiences frustration. Frustration is

painful. The more we seek pleasure and the more we fail to achieve it, the more pain we introduce into our lives. On the other hand, if we achieve all the pleasure we seek we become satiated and bored. Boredom is the counterpart of frustration; it is also painful to the pleasure seeker. The paradox is: if we achieve what we are searching for, we lose, if we don't achieve what we are searching for, we lose. The result of hedonism is the exact opposite of its goal. Its only fruit is ultimate pain.

The Epicureans also understood the price tag of pleasure. Part of the hedonistic paradox is that the momentary enjoyment of pleasure may have painful consequences. If you indulged in too much wine, the result would not be exquisite enjoyment of fine-tasting wine, but the awful hangover of the next day. Like-wise, if you overindulged in sexual activities, the odds were greatly increased that you would add venereal disease to your future misery.

Overindulgence has its price, no matter what it is in this world. Recognizing the price paid for pleasure, the Epicureans tried to create a more balanced enjoyment of pleasure and pain. For example, they believed that one should keep pleasure at a moderate level; just a little bit of adultery or fornication is enough to spice up life.

Another philosophy of hedonism of that time was the Stoic philosophy. Where the Epicureans tried to achieve peace of mind by seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, by changing the state of affairs as well as the events that affected their lives, the Stoics sought peace of mind by adopting a philosophy they called "imperturbability." that means you don't let anything bother you. You adopt a "stoical attitude" toward all things. You do not get emotionally involved, you do not get your hopes up, nor do you let your hopes down, but you maintain an emotional state of equilibrium where nothing bothers you. You adopt a detached feeling toward those things over which you have no control.

According to the Stoics, we cannot change things. "que sera, sera" ("whatever will be, will be") was originally the song of the Stoics. They said, "The only thing that I have control over in my life is how I inwardly react to circumstance. Paul met both Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Acts 17:16-21.

We may think of Hugh Hefner of "Playboy" who ascribes to the hedonistic philosophy, but in reality, we all have a little of the hedonist in us. We experience pleasure and we like it. We experience pain and we don't like it. What the hedonist does is to affix the suffix "ism" which transforms pleasure into a philosophy of ultimates. Pleasure becomes the ultimate criterion of value, so that truth and goodness are determined by what produces pleasure.

The Bible presents a very different view. Christ tells us from the beginning that a committed relationship with him will involve pain. Jesus performed his duty which was good and true, but which was also painful. The hedonists would declare Christ a fool. In their eyes, he voluntarily accepted unnecessary pain.

To put things in balance, Christianity does not call us to seek suffering, or to pursue pain, or to flee from that which is pleasant. There is no sin in enjoying the pleasant and being free from pain, but there are times when the Christian must choose the road that results in pain. Because of this, we do not consider hedonism as the highest good. We believe that the ultimate good will bring us the maximum pleasure and the minimum of pain. From a Christian perspective, the location of maximum pain is in the pit of hell and the optimum abode of pleasure is in the kingdom of God.

Pleasure is defined differently by the Christian than by the hedonist. Hedonism tends to see pleasure strictly on the level of sensual feeling, and it is restricted to physical dimensions. The sensuous has become so exaggerated in our culture that we talk about "feeling" ideas instead of "thinking" ideas, about "feeling" thoughts instead of "thinking" thoughts.

Hedonism has produced a system of ethics which, in turn, produces a certain behavioural pattern of morality. A popular saying of our culture is "if it feels good, it is good." goodness is determined by feeling. Popular music communicates the message that the final test of what is right is the feeling test. The sexual revolution did not just happen. There are cultural and philosophical reasons for these changes.

Hedonism is at its root a philosophy of despair. It reflects a deep-seated sense of hopelessness. If my life has no eternal significance, then why not grab whatever pleasure I can squeeze out of my brief time on earth? If death is ultimate and life is meaningless, we need an escape. Drugs, sex, gourmet meals all offer at least a brief respite from constant despair. The final creed of the hedonist is "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."

We were created for God. Just as fish are in despair out of water, so the human soul is in despair when it is outside of fellowship with God. The goal of man is God. He is the fountain of peace, the wellspring of joy. We were created for happiness, not gloom, for hope, not despair.

Americans are guaranteed the "inalienable right to the pursuit of happiness." there is a great difference, however, between pursuing happiness and seeking pleasure. We often confuse them.

Sin destroys happiness. By sinning we violate God's holiness. We injure our relationship with him. But sin is pleasurable. If sin offered no pleasure it would have little attraction for us. The enticement of sin is for the short-term feeling of pleasure. Pleasure is pleasant. Happiness is also pleasant. But though all happiness is pleasurable, not all pleasure yields happiness. Happiness is a particular type of pleasure. It endures. It yields the true fruit of joy, a joy that lasts forever.