

## SO MANY CHURCHES ... SO MANY RELIGIONS

The title for tonight's topic in our four-part series on relevant topics is "So Many Churches ... So Many Religions," and we might have included ... "So Many Worldviews". Regardless, of what church your parents made you go to, or which denomination you say you are affiliated with, you actually live your day-to-day life based on your worldview. By world-view I mean a framework of belief that sets forth in your mind why we are here, what we're supposed to be doing, and where we are all going when this is over. If you're like most people, you've probably never thought thru your world view ... you may have just caught it - like a cold. Most of us have this bunch of ideas we've collected from parents, friends, teachers, books we've read, movies we've seen - whatever. The point is ... the church on the corner or the religion you say you belong to may not provide the basis for your worldview. What you live and how you make your life decisions, will

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often be based on one of three worldviews. The three major worldviews are Atheism — which holds that God does not exist; Pantheism, which sees god as an impersonal life force; and Monotheism which believes in one Supreme Being — a personal God.

I'm going to define the primary philosophies which are Atheistic, Pantheistic or Monotheistic. Then I'll present what each view claims to be man's dilemma or problem. Finally, we'll consider the fallacies of each view & determine how livable each view is for us. After I stop talking we'll open things up for discussion — with so many people here we'll probably have a lot of ideas from each different view.

OK, first let's look at the three widespread beliefs which are Atheistic. Remember, this view is based on the premise that man stands alone — there is no God, so it's a Naturalistic view point. The three views are Optimistic Humanism

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## Pessimistic Humanism and Relativism.

Optimistic Humanism is the belief that man is good - he is great, capable of achieving whatever he strives to do and he is completely self-sufficient. I should note here that the Bible teaches that man is good too, he has dignity & value ... this is Christian Humanism ... however, what I'm describing now is Secular Humanism which says man is good & can exist outside of any need for God. Humanism is not a recent belief. It was found in Greek culture as early as 500 B.C. and it has flourished at different times thru-out history. For example during the Renaissance in the 1400's and the Enlightenment of the 1700's. Then with the Industrial Revolution & the tremendous advances in science & technology in the 1800's & early 1900's humanism came into its own. Writers of that time hailed the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as man's Golden Age. Julian Huxley said, "Today in the 20<sup>th</sup>

Century, man has reached the point in his evolutionary process where finally we've crossed over to when man can control his own destiny." The belief of the Optimistic Humanism is that man's only problem is ignorance, and the more man learns, the more he comes out of the dark ages of uncivilization & barbarism. The thought is, if you educate a man then because he is good - progress is inevitable. All you need is time for man to achieve a utopia of world peace, brotherly love and plenty for everyone. J.F. Kennedy summed up Optimistic Humanism when he said, "all man's problems are created by man, and all of his problems can be solved by man." Pretty idealistic & wonderful view, eh?

However, there are some problems with Optimistic Humanism which we need to consider. For one thing, History. History shoots some big holes in the hot air balloon of Optimism.

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It is painfully clear to us in the late 1980's that the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has not ushered in Utopia or some Golden Age and the prospects for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are not any better. We've seen two global wars, millions dying from famine, and a ruined ecology that has not only destroyed vast populations of animals but is threatening man as well. And all this when we are better educated and know more ~~about~~ than we ever did about people & technology. The Optimistic Humanist says education will help ignorant man, yet it is all too often the most educated people & countries that have just become more sophisticated in their inhumanity to man. In Germany before WWII you could find the most PhDs of anywhere in the world --- yet it was this highly educated & technologically advanced country that systematically exterminated 6 million Jews and 6 million other people. I'm not saying

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Education is evil but making man less ignorant did not make him more loving. Yet, the Optimistic Humanist tends to shove wars aside as an unfortunate by-product of progress... "We're learning and that one is the war to end all wars," they say. Besides, look how technology is improving man's life so wars won't be necessary. And man has invented awesome technology with computers, nuclear power, lasers etc. Many inventions have fought the ravages of disease and people are living longer than they used to... but most of our vaunted technology is just as capable of destroying man as it is of helping him. 50 years ago we did not have the capacity to end all life on this planet. "But wait!" the Optimistic Humanist argues, we're learning to teach man how to overcome his base instincts and occasional evil nature... with psychology we can teach man to use his knowledge and technology to benefit the world. Well,

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Psychology, has come a long way as a science and we've discovered a great deal about why people think they way they do ... but we don't have less mental & emotional disorders now ... if anything man's mental problems are becoming worse and it is often among our most educated that we have the most problems. The highest suicide rate is not in the under-educated, poor third-world countries but among the intellectuals of our culture. It is when confronted by these facts that Bertrand Russell, a dedicated Optimistic Humanist, had to confess, "It is in our own hearts that evil lies; man's nature is not basically good ... there are problems in the heart which need to be changed." Education & technology don't change the inner self ... they only make people more sophisticated in their self-centeredness.

So how does an Optimistic Humanist

live in the reality of today's world. It has to be with a lot of Blind Faith. Dr. Wall a Harvard biologist was on a television program and he said, "I hope people don't think science is just going to come up with some magic pill to solve all the world's problems because it won't happen — I am not sure how mankind will make it past the year 2000." And then the camera cuts to the man on the street who says, "What's going to solve the world's problems of war, famine, ecology upsets? Science of course ... they'll invent something." How unrealistic you say to live with that kind of Blind Faith ... so as a humanist who doesn't believe in God but sees man in trouble what other view can we turn to?

Pessimistic Humanism. This view was being preached in the 1800's by people who were contrary to the Optimists.



The Pessimistic Humanists believed if there isn't any God then man isn't necessarily good... he's just a fluke of nature... a

The Optimistic Humanist said, "Great there's no God... now man can get on with his life"

whereas the Pessimistic Humanist says "There is no God so man has no spiritual aspect... when he dies he is finished... there is no memory, no consciousness, it is as if nothing ever happened so life is meaningless."

One of the most famous Pessimistic Humanists, Jean Paul Sartre expressed it this way,

"Any finite point without an infinite reference point is meaningless and absurd."

The OP then said man is good but the Pessimist says, life is absurd because we are

finite and mortal and there is nothing infinite - no God. If life is absurd and

meaningless then the problem is "How to live" within the context of that view.

The Pessimistic Humanist say there are two choices