

# Theology Matters

A Publication of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry

Vol 20 No 3 • May/June 2014

## A Vision for the 21st Century for Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry

by the Board of Directors of PFFM

*After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals. They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. Judges 2:10-12 (NIV)*

The days described in the Old Testament book of Judges have lessons for us today. The generation following Joshua had not been taught by their fathers about the works of the LORD and therefore the Israelites were easily seduced by the surrounding cultures into worshipping foreign gods. They appeased these pagan fertility gods through, among other things, cultic sexual practices and child sacrifice.

God intended the Church to be salt and light in transforming the culture. Instead, today the culture is pressing its values in on the church as it did in the Old

Testament. In some denominations like the PC(USA) there is little distinction between the General Assembly governing body's actions and the surrounding culture. In other more conservative denominations and independent churches, while their public pronouncements remain strong, individual believers are often influenced more by the culture around them than by the pronouncements of their church.

In the Old Testament, it was not the strength of the surrounding pagan nations that caused Israel to turn from the LORD. It was because the believers no longer knew the One in whom they believed. The cultural manifestations we're seeing today like abortion, sexual immorality, and euthanasia are the result of a loss of knowledge of the LORD in the Church. Fewer and fewer church members have sufficient knowledge of the doctrines of faith, derived from Scripture, which identify this LORD and what he has done. Instead, the

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doctrines that are taught, sometimes in the Church, often in the media, point to a counterfeit Christianity that denies the atonement and encourages people to re-imagine their own personal god.

Few Church members have been taught a Christian worldview as the framework of their decision-making. Thus many of them fall prey to the unbelieving cultural values around them.

Few church-goers are able to defend the “hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15) in the face of the caricatures made by a hostile media. This lack of faithful response undermines the faith of believers and prevents unbelievers from coming to a living faith.

Yet God has promised that when his people repent, he will bring healing to the land:

*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)*

### The Mission of Theology Matters

The mission of Theology Matters is to challenge, equip and support Christians as they renew the Church’s witness to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior. The focus of the mission is to restore the teaching of the doctrines of Christian faith from a Reformed perspective that describe who Jesus is and what he has done; to relate those doctrines to a Christian worldview; and to respond to the questions and caricatures of Christian faith raised by the culture and the false gospels arising inside the Church. As the Church’s witness is renewed and strengthened, individual lives will be transformed and those lives will be salt and light to restore the culture.

### The Vision of Theology Matters

*Theology Matters* will provide printed, online, and video materials enabling Christians and congregations to understand Christian doctrine, to make decisions from a Christian worldview perspective, and to respond to false gospels and cultural values. Christians will be equipped to give a thoughtful, credible, winsome reaffirmation of Reformed Christian teachings as true and redemptive for all individuals and for every society.

## Theology Matters’ Objectives in Addressing the Problem

Doctrine

Equip and encourage leaders of local congregations to understand and teach Christian doctrine effectively and persuasively and contrast it with the false gospels. Doctrine is drawn from Scripture and explained in the tradition of the great Reformed confessions of faith.

Apologetics

Equip and encourage local congregational leaders to practice and teach Christian apologetics, defending the truth of Christian claims and answering the questions that spiritual seekers, especially young adults, have about the Christian faith.

Christian Worldview

Equip and encourage local congregational leaders to apply a Christian worldview to public or controversial questions. Such questions include biblical authority, universalism, the atonement, the value of human life, the significance and practice of baptism in the Church, environmental stewardship, religious freedom, and the importance of the Christian tradition in western civilization.

Marriage

We discern a particular priority at this time to present and defend biblical teaching on marriage—a central institution of human society that is the target of attacks in both society and the Church. A biblical response to the culture’s confusion about marriage depends upon sound doctrine and a Christian worldview. In this and other questions, we point people toward both the special revelation in the Bible and the general revelation that we see in human history and contemporary social science.

## Specific Examples of Counterfeit Teachings

Many parts of the Church today are abandoning their calling to proclaim God's Good News to all people. Instead they put forth truncated gospels, or false gospels, that lack the power to transform and give new life to individuals and communities. In some cases, these false gospels even encourage the beliefs and trends that leave so many people lost and broken by sin.

These false gospels are characterized by:

- Interpreting the Scriptures as expressing merely personal, subjective, culturally conditioned perceptions of God, rather than as constituting God's authoritative Word to the Church and for all humankind;
- Reducing God to an object of human imagination, rather than the Sovereign who created and redeemed humans according to his own plan;
- Construing all truth as personal, subjective, and relative—"you have your truths, and I have mine"—rather than accepting the reality of the truth found in the general and special revelation of God that is available to all people;
- Minimizing the sinfulness of humankind, in favor of a message of self-esteem based on a contorted view of God's love, rather than giving full weight to biblical laws and admonitions exposing the pervasive corruption of the human heart;
- Being uncomfortable with the notion of Christ's death as an atonement for sin, dismissing that doctrine as an unworthy "child sacrifice" that God would never require and humans would never need, rather than recognizing the necessity of God becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ to fulfill Old Testament sacrificial imagery in his once-for-all atoning death on the cross;
- Affirming people's self-defined identities, rather than a call to repentance and transformation into a new identity in Christ;
- Promoting universalism, the assumption that all religious or ethical systems are equally valid paths to God, rather than acknowledging the uniqueness of Christ's saving work;
- Accepting a limited role for the Church, in which it imparts mainly private truths to its own members, rather than taking up the Church's responsibility to present public truths to the whole society;
- Offering a therapeutic emphasis on helping Church members fulfill their aspirations to live happy lives in a just society, rather than new lives in Christ's kingdom;
- Minimizing the conflict between Church and society by communicating messages intended to accommodate the Church to society and avoiding

messages that might offend its elites, rather than proclaiming the whole counsel of God for all people to honor God in all spheres of life.

## Specific Means to Achieve These Objectives

The 16-page publication, *Theology Matters*, is mailed five times a year to more than 15,000 individuals and churches in the United States and an additional 70 leaders around the world in places like Pakistan, India, Australia, China and Zimbabwe. Recent topics have included the five *solas* of the Reformation, Paul's teaching on sexuality in 1 Corinthians, two views of marriage, Reformed preaching, euthanasia, Christians in the Middle East, the Westminster Confession, the trustworthiness of Scripture and *The Confessions* of St. Augustine.

Emails on important issues of doctrine, apologetics, worldview, and marriage are sent out biweekly to more than 3600 Christian leaders. Recent emails have addressed topics such as a Christian view of history, the "progressive" myth of inevitability, the Supreme Court decisions on marriage, a proposed retranslation of the Heidelberg Catechism, and the movie *God's Not Dead*.

We are identifying or creating resources on issues of concern. We have produced a DVD series on "What's the Big Deal about Marriage?" and "The Best of Luke." We also offer DVDs by Dr. James Edwards, "Is Jesus the Only Savior" and "Jesus Christ: The Fulfillment of God's Promises." We would like to produce and/or identify other DVDs on a variety of topics and make them available to our readers.

## Past Accomplishments

*Theology Matters* has been in print for 19 years. During those years we related primarily to people inside the Presbyterian Church (USA), although our mailings have included Presbyterians of other affiliations, as well as some Lutherans and Methodists.

Our vision has been to respond theologically to issues before the church as well as issues facing individual Presbyterians. We have published outstanding articles on male versus female language for God, sexuality, marriage, abortion, euthanasia, intelligent design, the nature of the church, postmodernism, church discipline, preaching, the sacraments, tolerance, the Trinity, the World Council of Churches, and attitudes toward other world religions, to cite some examples.

In the past, the PC(USA) was the focus of our efforts to bring reform and the majority of readers were members of the PC(USA). Yet even as we worked, we knew that

the issues facing the PC(USA) were typical of many other churches, as our country moved from a Christian foundation to a more secular and postmodern one.

In the past 19 years, we successfully helped PC(USA) members reject ordination for those engaged in homosexual practice in 1996, 1997, and 2001. We played a major role in fending off attempts in 2008, 2010, and 2012 to have the PC(USA) redefine marriage as between any “two people.” We were instrumental in helping to produce and pass a minority report in 2010 that affirmed that marriage could only be between a man and a woman.

In 2010-2011, we also successfully equipped PC(USA) members to reject the proposed addition of the liberation theology-infused Belhar Confession to the PC(USA) *Book of Confessions*.

*Theology Matters* helped PC(USA) commissioners at their 2006 General Assembly avoid “adopting” a policy paper on the Trinity that likened the triune God to “an ark, a rainbow and a dove” or various other triads of invented names.

We have participated in the Association for Church Renewal (ACR), which brings together orthodox/conservative renewal groups in almost all the major “mainline” Protestant denominations. We are involved in the formation of a new ecumenical group that will include conservative evangelical denominations. The ACR and the new group represent significant parts of the expanded audience that *Theology Matters* hopes to reach.

## Future Plans and New Directions

*Theology Matters* is now intentionally broadening its mission to reach leaders in all Reformed churches as well as leaders in other Christian traditions.

Our early ministry sought to renew the PC(USA). Articles in *Theology Matters* focused on issues being debated and decided in the PC(USA). We measured our success in ministry often by the outcomes achieved at the General Assembly (GA) and through presbytery votes. These GA actions were important because they spoke the truth to church members and to the culture. Every time the PC(USA) General Assembly voted in accordance with the clear word of Scripture, because of its size with more than two million members, the news media reported the action and the culture heard a faithful word.

Yet even as we attempted to renew the PC(USA), we knew that the national level GA decisions would be

only temporary and easily changed if the hearts of the majority of people in the PC(USA) were not strengthened in doctrine, apologetics, and worldview. We knew, even as we provided resources to GA commissioners, that issues before them were a reflection of the culture. Sadly, too often the culture was far better at persuading people to accept its secular positions than the church was at teaching biblical truth. Statistics bear out that the percentage of Christians who now support same-sex marriage has risen sharply in recent years.

In the future we will select articles for *Theology Matters* based on issues arising from the culture that affect all Christians. So quotes in articles will likely not come from PC(USA) leaders but cultural leaders. Writers will no longer be limited to PC(USA) pastors and scholars. We will search out authors who are thinking most clearly about issues regardless of their denominational affiliation. We have already begun including articles by professors and pastors in other denominations. While we will continue to write from a Reformed perspective, some issues like marriage, religious liberty, and euthanasia transcend the Reformed perspective and deal with the fundamentals of Christian faith common to all traditions.

We are no longer as concerned about national level decisions by denominational bodies as we are about equipping Christians to understand the doctrines of their faith, to be able to defend their faith at the kitchen table, in the public square, and in an adult Sunday School class, and then to make thoughtful decisions from a Christian worldview.

To do this, we need to expand our readership; make *Theology Matters* available on CD and MP3 formats; create or identify good study tools for doctrine, apologetics and worldview; create a speakers bureau for conferences and congregations; aggressively seek to put articles in secular and Christian publications; provide teaching through social media; make *Theology Matters* available in the library of every Christian college and seminary.

The success we are seeking is to strengthen the whole Church of Jesus Christ and change the culture. That is a huge task and one that won't be accomplished quickly. We realize we are not the only instrument that God is using to accomplish his purposes. But we are one of the tools. A unique tool. Unique in that we offer our resources free to those who request them. Unique in that we dig deeper into the heart of issues from a theological perspective. Unique in that our focus is doctrine, apologetics and worldview. Unique in that it is the whole Church of Jesus Christ we seek to strengthen as its members are strengthened.

The culture can change. We should not assume the inevitability of any view that is contrary to Scripture. Theology Matters played a part in changing the culture's view of abortion and the sanctity of life. Certainly, many pro-life efforts and organizations played major roles in reversing the culture's attitude toward abortion. But we played our part in careful teaching of doctrine. Now a majority of people in the U.S. reject abortion and that percentage continues to grow among young people.

Right now there are states considering legalizing euthanasia. In the Netherlands it is now legal for a child to ask to be euthanized. That movement will soon reach the United States. Religious Freedom is facing significant challenges in this country. Environmentalism has become almost a religion.

Western civilization itself is threatened as the foundation of Western civilization, Christianity, is intentionally denounced in the public square. Marriage is in decline with 41 percent of children in this country being born without a married mother and father. That number soars to 70 percent in the African American community. The results of not being raised by a mother and father are increased poverty, unsuccessful outcomes in school, more mental health issues. Theology Matters!

Let us be clear. We are not abandoning the PC(USA). Every congregation, regardless of denominational affiliation, is facing challenges from the culture. We are expanding our vision to resource, encourage, and equip all Christians.

# The Reality of Truth

by Sue Cyre

Christian faith at its core is about an individual having a personal relationship with the living God for all eternity. This God has revealed himself in Scripture. Yet according to researchers, many church-going Christians do not know the God with whom they purport to have a relationship. They create a god from their own imagination. As far back as 2002, a Gallup survey found, "Americans, little aware of their own religious traditions, are practicing a do-it-yourself, 'whatever works' kind of religion, picking and choosing among beliefs and practices of various faith traditions."<sup>1</sup>

Although a foundational biblical teaching is that people are saved by faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone, a 2001 Barna survey found that a startling 73 percent of mainline Protestants believe they are saved by good works.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, "American Christianity is suffering theological collapse."<sup>3</sup>

The Church has been given the privilege and responsibility to guard the truth and entrust it to the next generation. Only the truths of Christian faith derived from Scripture point to Jesus Christ: the way, the truth and the life. The Church's calling is to teach the truth, defend the truth, and help men and women live into the truth.

This article will explore doctrine, apologetics and worldview. Doctrine is the truth about reality. Doctrine describes reality as it really is including the truth about God and humanity. Doctrine is Scripture's interpretation of historical events. Apologetics defends doctrine's truth by responding to questions and refuting caricatures and misconceptions. The word, "apologetics" is from a Greek term referring to someone defending his position in a court case.<sup>4</sup> Our culture has condemned Christian truth. Apologetics is a defense of that truth.

Finally, a Christian worldview applies doctrine to the world in which we live. It answers questions about the origin of life, the purpose of life, what happens after death, and the nature of good and evil. All of these are based on doctrine, but they are related to our view of the world and our place in it.

## The Nature of Truth

The definition of "truth" is "being in accord with reality or fact."<sup>5</sup> Doctrine is the truth about reality. In science and mathematics, no one disputes the existence of truth. Most high school students have learned that a water molecule consists of two hydrogen atoms and one

oxygen atom. Some postmodern chemist may decide that he has the right to redefine water molecules to be something other than H<sub>2</sub>O, but he does so at his own peril. At some point he will be confronted by reality and his chemical house of cards will crumble.

In 1897 the Indiana state legislature decided to redefine the value of Pi ( $\pi$ ). Pi is the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter. It is an infinite decimal number that is often rounded to 3.14. Pi is the same for every circle, everywhere, always. Happily, before the Indiana legislature could approve the bill changing Pi, a mathematician testified that Pi is what it is and cannot be changed by legislative fiat.<sup>6</sup> It is a mathematical truth or doctrine that describes reality.

## Doctrine

### Doctrine Describes Truth

While the truth about Pi and water are discovered by observing nature, there are other truths revealed through historical events that are interpreted by Scripture. Christianity is anchored in the real world through these historical events. Christianity is not an intellectual or spiritual exercise that takes place in the human mind apart from the material world. It is God's interpretation of these historical events in Scripture that reveals reality as it really is, including God's nature and ours and how our world works. God's interpretation of historical events reveals the truth about the meaning and significance of reality.

As an example, look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On a particular day during the Jewish Passover around 30 A.D. the man Jesus was crucified outside of Jerusalem. After three days, Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to more than 500 people. Paul then interprets this historical event to reveal the truth about reality: "[I]f Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."<sup>7</sup>

Paul explains the implications of Christ's resurrection for understanding the truth about the world: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you are still in your sins."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, "If the dead are not raised, 'let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.'"<sup>9</sup> Paul is interpreting the resurrection as a necessary event in order for our sins to be forgiven. He is also saying that the resurrection shapes our worldview. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, then we will not be raised, and when we die there is just nothingness. Therefore, Paul concludes, if this life is all there is, there is no good and evil and we might as well live a gluttonous and debauched life if we think it will bring us pleasure. The historical reality of the resurrection of Christ yields doctrine that describes reality as it truly is, which then

culminates in a view of the world leading us to make decisions about how to live.

Christian faith says there is a reality. This reality is revealed in Scripture and expressed in a systematic way through doctrines. Doctrine describes who God is and what he has done, is doing, and will do. And it describes the nature of human beings. Doctrine explains the world in which we live, it gives life meaning, and it tells us what happens after we die.

Non-Christians may reject Christian doctrines, and some Christians may not know Christian doctrines about God and humankind, but they are living then in contradiction to reality. Christian doctrines that explain the truth about reality are true whether everyone or no one accepts them as true. Like H<sub>2</sub>O and Pi, they are no less true because someone refuses to believe they are true.

### Doctrine Is Wrongly Viewed As Out-Dated and Rigid

The Enlightenment philosophy, also called "modernism," which some date from 1789-1989 (the fall of the Bastille to the fall of the Berlin Wall), posits that truth can be discovered only by using reason to observe nature. This implies a closed universe in which the natural world is all that is real. It denies that a supernatural God exists or can intervene in the natural world. Therefore there can be no miracles, revelation, prophecy, resurrection, or God becoming flesh and dwelling among us. The Bible itself is no longer viewed as divinely inspired. Instead without supernatural intervention, the Bible is viewed merely as a human effort that recorded the culturally bound experience of its flawed, biased, sinful human authors.

Today we're living in a "postmodern" culture that believes there are truths outside of the natural world but they are created by individuals in their own mind without an objective referent in the natural world. The 1992 Supreme Court decision, *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*, voiced this postmodern belief that each individual has the right to define reality according to his/her own mind: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life."

According to the Supreme Court, which is reflecting postmodern assumptions, reality is whatever each individual wants it to be. Therefore, all truth is subjective and personal. Even gender is now touted as a personal construct that can be changed at will by the individual. It is no longer based on the objective reality of X and Y chromosomes. Instead a male with X Y chromosomes may simply declare publicly that he is a

she.<sup>10</sup> Of course this causes major dilemmas when a biologically male student declares that his gender is female. Can he use girls' bathrooms and play on the girls' school softball team?

This postmodern view of reality as a mind-game abhors Christian doctrine, which is an objective description of reality. So postmoderns view historic Christian doctrine as legalistic, rigid, narrow and perhaps worst of all—old. Rob Bell, in his popular new book, *What We Talk About When We Talk About God*, compares historic, biblical Christian doctrine to the Oldsmobile he drove in his youth. He opines that like his old Oldsmobile, historic biblical doctrine “feels like a step backward, to an earlier, less informed and enlightened time, one that we’ve thankfully left behind.”<sup>11</sup> After all, he concludes, “they don’t make Oldsmobiles anymore.”<sup>12</sup> Not only is the God described by historic biblical doctrine old, but according to Bell, “downright destructive.”<sup>13</sup>

Instead, Bell promotes a spirit god that holds atoms together. He posits that our spirit holds our atoms together and the big spirit holds all the world’s atoms together. To relate to this atom-holding god, one need only pay attention to the “reverence humming”<sup>14</sup> within oneself. Bell’s rationale for this new god is:

Things have changed. We have more information and technology than ever. We’re interacting with a far more diverse range of people than we used to. And the tribal God, the one that is the only one many have been exposed to—the one who’s always right (which means everybody else is wrong)—is increasingly perceived to be small, narrow, irrelevant, mean, and sometimes just not that intelligent.<sup>15</sup>

Sadly, some people accept Bell’s enthusiastic description of the new age god because it appeals to their desire to be autonomous and create their own reality. They want to be free and unfettered to seek their own hum that will be relevant for them and affirm their life and their decisions.

Robert Bellah describes this radical individualism in his book, *Habits of the Heart*, when he introduces readers to Sheila. Sheila describes her beliefs as her “own little voice.” She says: “I believe in God. I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice.... It’s just trying to love yourself and be gentle with yourself....”<sup>16</sup>

There is little need for Christian doctrine when truth is found in internal voices and reverent hums. The result is that even church-going Christians know little of Christian doctrine. One poll found that while 85 percent

of those polled in Great Britain professed to be Christian, only 34 percent knew what happened on the first Easter Sunday.<sup>17</sup>

A 2008 Pew Research survey confirms that more than half of the members of *evangelical* Protestant churches (57 percent) say that many religions can lead to eternal life. In *mainline* Protestant churches the percentage of those that believe there is more than one way to be saved rises to 83 percent.<sup>18</sup>

Even more alarming, the Pew poll found that while 79 percent of members of *evangelical* Protestant churches believe God is a personal God, 13 percent believe God is an impersonal force and 7 percent either don’t know or state “other” when asked. In *mainline* Protestant churches 62 percent believe in a personal God; 26 percent believe God is an impersonal force and 8 percent either don’t know or state “other”.<sup>19</sup>

Clearly the centrality of Jesus’ death on the cross to Christian faith is meaningless to those who do not even believe in a personal God. And it is meaningless if there are other ways to be saved.

In 2011 Barna researchers studied why young adults were leaving the church. They concluded, “The problem arises from the inadequacy of preparing young Christians for life beyond youth group.”<sup>20</sup> The researchers conclude that it is not college that causes young people to reject Christian faith, rather, “It exposes the shallow-faith problem of many young adults.”<sup>21</sup>

It is likely that those who accept Bell’s new age God or other imagined gods have never been taught about the God of Scripture. Other people have rejected a caricature of Christian faith in favor of an imagined god. In either case, they have accepted the postmodern belief that reality is whatever they want it to be.

The same thing happened in the Old Testament. The people of Israel were easily seduced by the various gods of the surrounding pagan nations, because they “knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel.”

## Doctrine Teaches Us Who God Is

The Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds present some truths about reality:

- God, the Father, is creator;
- Jesus is God, of the same substance as God the Father;
- Jesus existed from the beginning;
- Jesus was born of a virgin;

- Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried;
- on the third day Jesus rose from the dead;
- Jesus ascended into heaven; Jesus will come again to judge the living and dead;
- the Holy Spirit, who is the third person of the Trinity, is equal with the Father and Son;
- there is a communion of saints,
- there is forgiveness of sins;
- there is a resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

Christian faith is not a humanly constructed set of “truths” that change over time or from situation to situation. Christian faith is not a set of personal beliefs unique for each individual and each circumstance. Christian faith describes reality as it truly is. Christian faith is based on what God has done in history beginning with creation, then through the descendants of Abraham, and finally through Jesus Christ.

### **Doctrine Leads To Worship**

Bell’s inner god does not lead a person to worship, unless it is to the worship of him or herself. Unlike Bell’s god, the God revealed in Scripture is personal and desires an eternal relationship with us. The God of Scripture speaks, loves, acts, forgives, makes promises, fulfills promises, leads, comforts, exhorts, challenges, disciplines, and protects.

Scripture tells us that “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). The God of Scripture raised Christ from the dead and assures us that we too shall be raised from the dead. The definitive answer to whether God is personal, and whether he loves us, is the cross.

Our response to who God is and what he has done is to worship, praise, and adore him.

### **Doctrine Leads To An Integrated Life**

The only way to live an integrated life is to live in accord with reality—in accord with truth. St. Augustine, fourth century bishop of Hippo, writes that the human heart is restless until it rests in Christ. We are built with an inner need to make sense of life and that can happen only when we live in accord with the truth about reality.

Scripture tells us that there will be many who reject the God of Scripture. But we have the privilege of telling people about this God. Yet as Church leaders, we’re often reticent to teach doctrine for fear we will appear either boring or intolerant of other opinions. But, the results are tragic. Dorothy Sayers, writer and

theologian, critiqued the British church 50 years ago. Her critique continues to speak to the American church today:

It is a lie to say that dogma does not matter; it matters enormously. It is fatal to let people suppose that Christianity is only a mode of feeling; it is vitally necessary to insist that it is first and foremost a rational explanation of the universe. It is hopeless to offer Christianity as a vaguely idealistic aspiration of a simple and consoling kind; it is, on the contrary, a hard, tough, exacting, and complex doctrine, steeped in a drastic and uncompromising realism. And it is fatal to imagine that everybody knows quite well what Christianity is and needs only a little encouragement to practice it. The brutal fact is that in this Christian country not one person in a hundred has the faintest notion what the Church teaches about God or man or society or the person of Jesus Christ.

Theologically, this country is at present in a state of utter chaos, established in the name of religious toleration, and rapidly degenerating into the flight from reason and the death of hope.... I shall and will affirm that the reason why the Churches are discredited today is not that they are too bigoted about theology, but that they have run away from theology.<sup>22</sup>

### **Apologetics**

It is not only necessary to teach doctrine today. It is also necessary to defend it against the caricatures and misconceptions that are prevalent in our culture.

The effect of the cultural caricatures can be seen in the way youth perceive Christian faith. A 2007 Barna survey found that among *non-Christians* aged 19-29 only 16 percent have a “good impression of Christianity.” The percentage drops even more when asked their view of evangelicals. Only 3 percent have a favorable view of evangelicals. The perception of young non-Christians is that Christianity is “judgmental,” “hypocritical,” and “old fashioned.”<sup>23</sup>

Paul tells young pastor Timothy to “guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us” (2 Tim 1:14). And Jude urges his readers, “to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men...have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ, our only Sovereign and Lord” (Jude 3-4). Christians have a responsibility to protect the Gospel that has been

entrusted to us because it is the truth about reality. It is not ours to change or modify. Our call is to guard it against false teachings.

### **Apologetics Courses Discontinued**

The editors of the book *Unapologetic Apologetics* observe that up until 1943 mainline seminaries like Princeton required those preparing for ministry to take courses in apologetics, where they learned to defend the truth revealed in Scripture.

By 1944, however, the apologetics requirement disappeared at Princeton, and now such courses hardly exist.<sup>24</sup> The likely reason for that disappearance is that relativism had become entrenched in seminaries with its fundamental tenet that there is absolutely no absolute truth about reality. If there is no absolute truth, there can be no defense of truth. Instead there is only each person's subjective view of truth that cannot be challenged and need not be defended.

The result is that today we are hesitant to defend biblical truth. We're told by the culture that whatever we believe is merely *our personal* truth. And we're told that defending *our* truth against those who disagree (false teachings) is mean-spirited and unfriendly. We are told that "debate" is bad because it produces winners and losers (true and false). So instead we're encouraged to "dialogue" where no one is right and no one is wrong and every belief is affirmed as equally true.

"Tolerance" has been redefined from *treating respectfully* an individual who holds a belief that is false, to *affirming as true* a belief that is false.

### **Paul Engaged the False Ideas**

When Paul encountered other "truths" in Athens, Corinth and Ephesus, he engaged the false ideas. In Acts 17-19, Paul does not just "proclaim" the Gospel to the Gentiles as an equal alternative to pagan "truths." Instead the text says:

- "he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (18:4);
- "he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews." (18:19);
- "he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." (18:28);
- In Ephesus "Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God." (19:8)

Paul's world was much like our own. It was filled with humanly constructed idols. Paul enters Athens and is "greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols." Paul does not proclaim the Gospel as one more alternative view of reality. He engages the idolatry. The text says "he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there." The intellectuals gathered in the market place to debate ideas. In lieu of books and videos, this was the forum for ideas. Out of a broken heart and love for those caught in the web of idol worship, Paul reasons, argues, persuades, debates.

Pastors generally love preaching the Gospel. It is glorious Good News and it's exhilarating to proclaim it. But our church members are listening to the market place. Their children are coming home from college having been taught that the Bible is filled with contradictions and errors. Their neighbors watched the episode of the popular TV show, *West Wing*, in which Martin Sheen, playing the U. S. President, mocks Christians as rigid, judgmental and out-of-date. Our parishioners and their friends read the recent Supreme Court ruling<sup>25</sup> that claimed the Defense of Marriage Act, which limits marriage to the union of a man and a woman "demean[s]," "injure[s]," "disparage[s]," and "humiliate[s]" those in state-sanctioned same-sex marriages.

### **Reasons To Engage the False Teachings**

The PC(USA) *Book of Order* says that "no opinion can either be more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon a level, and represents it as of no consequence what a man's opinions are." (F-3.0104)

We must engage the false teachings so that:

- 1) people may learn to discern between truth and error and not be led astray;
- 2) those unbelievers who are searching for truth might find it in Jesus Christ
- 3) the faith of the people might be strengthened by the truth;
- 4) our preaching and teaching is careful and nuanced so that we do not unwittingly provide fertile ground for error to take root.

The first reason to engage the false teachings prevalent in the culture, and sometimes the Church, is to "inoculate"<sup>26</sup> members. These false teachings are often portrayed as "inclusive," "fair," "just," "life-affirming," and "loving." If Christian leaders do not engage the teachings to show that they are not these things, then Christians may accept them as true and their faith is

undermined. We cannot “quarantine” members from these ideas since they appear everywhere in the culture through books, TV, movies, talk-shows, and even news programs. Since we cannot protect members from hearing these false ideas, we must teach people to analyze and refute them.

The second reason to engage the false ideas is to help unbelievers come to a saving faith. Everyone believes something about themselves, the world, God, right and wrong. But only Christian faith is able to answer life’s deepest questions with consistency and hope. We must engage the false ideas in order to bring people to faith. People will not give up false beliefs unless we can show that they are false. We must argue persuasively that only faith in Jesus Christ as he is attested to by Scripture can give meaning and purpose to life.

The third reason to engage false teachings is because only then can it be shown that not all beliefs are equally true. If we fail to engage the false teachings, we imply that Christian faith is a personal, private choice for some, but others make different equally valid choices. Yet private “truth” is no truth at all.

Lesslie Newbigin makes the observation that had the early church, which also lived in a pluralistic culture, made Christian faith a matter of private, personal concern alone, there would have been no martyrs. Early disciples were martyred precisely because they refused to reduce Christian faith to a private choice. Newbigin writes:

For the modern church to accept this status [Christian faith as a private truth for some] is to do exactly what the early church refused to do and what the Bible forbids us to do. It is, in effect, to deny the kingship of Christ over all of life—public and private. It is to deny that Christ is simply and finally, the truth by which all other claims to truth are to be tested. It is to abandon its calling.<sup>27</sup>

The fourth reason that Christian leaders must engage the false ideas is so that their proclamation of the Gospel is careful and nuanced. Like Satan in the Garden of Eden, false ideas are often subtle, sometimes minor, distortions of truth that lead to very different gods.

## **We Are Called To Struggle Against False Teachings**

The author of Hebrews reminds us that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who ran their race of faith and therefore we should “run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” The author continues, “In your struggle against sin, you have not

yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (Heb 12:4). We often interpret that to mean the struggle against our own sin, but the passage is talking about Christ’s struggle against the sin he encountered. We are to “fix our eyes on Jesus” who “endured such opposition from sinful men.”

Peter reminds those persecuted for speaking the truth, “Always be ready to *make your defense* to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15). The Greek word used here for “make your defense” is *απολογία* (apologetics). Are we ready to make that defense?

## **Christian Worldview**

There is something wrong with the world. Reading any day’s newspaper makes clear that there is something very wrong. The news is filled with death, suffering, war, evil. Much of it is a report of what individuals do to one another. Why is there so much hatred and evil? Other reports are of natural disasters that sometimes kill tens of thousands of people. What’s wrong with the world?

Each person answers the question of the origin and nature of good and evil depending on his worldview. A person with a materialistic worldview would say it is just because that’s the way the natural world is. It’s the norm. A Marxist would say it is because not everyone has enough material goods to be happy and the remedy is a better economic system that provides enough for all. A Christian worldview says that evil exists because all of creation, including humanity, is fallen into sin and therefore falls short of the glory of God. The remedy is redemption through Christ.

The following discussion of worldview is not exhaustive. Much can be said about worldview. Many excellent books have been written on the topic. The following discussion is merely an attempt to show how worldviews affect our thinking and decision-making and the importance of teaching and preaching in a way that helps people understand why only a Christian worldview based on a truthful view of reality leads to an integrated life filled with joy and hope.

One author defines “worldview” as “a set of presuppositions...which we hold...about the basic make-up of our world.”<sup>28</sup> Everyone has a worldview. Everyone has beliefs about how the world works and their place in it. Yet stunningly in a 2009 study, Barna researchers found that only 9 percent of all Americans have a Christian worldview. Even more disturbing is

that researchers found that only 19 percent of born again Christians have a Christian worldview.<sup>29</sup>

James Sire lays out the seven basic worldview questions<sup>30</sup> which every person has answered for himself/herself:

- “What is really real?” Is there a supernatural God? Is the material world the only thing that is real?
- “What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?” Is it chaotic, malevolent, autonomous?
- “What is a human being?” Are human beings machines governed by cause and effect? Are they gods? Are they just evolved apes and no different from animals?
- “What happens to a person at death?” Is there just nothingness? Do human beings at death merge into the great energy force of the cosmos? Is there judgment?
- “Why is it possible to know anything at all?”
- “How do we know what is right and wrong?” Are right and wrong simply evolving cultural norms? Is there an external standard? If there is an external standard where does it come from?
- “What is the meaning of human history?” Is human history cyclic? Is human history moving toward a consummation? Does human history support an evolving race with superior moral values?

Others have identified the worldview questions more simply as: Where did I come from (origin)? Where am I going after death (destiny)? What is good and evil (morality)? What is my purpose in life (meaning)?

Historic, biblical Christian faith has one answer to these questions. Other worldviews have different answers. The following discussion is based largely on material from James Sire’s *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalogue*. I strongly recommend his book as a beginning text to understand worldview.

A Christian worldview, called Christian theism, based on Scripture’s revelation and expressed in doctrines, posits that there is a supernatural God—a God separate from creation and greater than it but who is free to act within the material world. This God reveals to us in Scripture that reality includes a spiritual realm; that God created all that exists out of nothing; that the material world is under his rule and authority; that human beings are made in his image; that all creation is fallen as a result of human sin. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s only begotten Son, those who believe on his name are redeemed from their sin, given a new nature, and spend eternity with God. Right and wrong are defined by God, who is perfect good. History is a record of God fulfilling his purposes in human

history. It is linear as it moves toward its final consummation when Christ returns and all creation bows before him.

## Naturalism

Unlike a Christian worldview, a materialistic or naturalistic worldview limits reality to the material world. Carl Sagan in his book *Cosmos* voiced this materialistic view when he proclaimed, “The cosmos is all there is, all there was, and all there ever will be.”

There are subcategories to the naturalistic world view but common to them all is that there is no supernatural God who intervenes in the natural world. A human being is just a product of nature and therefore is no different from other animals found in nature. At death the human being ceases to exist. Right and wrong are fluid depending on circumstances and desired outcomes. Human history is evolving in a way similar to biological evolution. Therefore what is happening today is better than what happened yesterday or 1000 years ago.

The universe is a closed system that operates on cause and effect, even if sometimes we cannot identify the particular cause and effect. Human beings are complex machines governed by the same laws that operate in the universe. History is linear but has no purpose or plan. Ethics are humanly constructed based on human experience. They are situational and individualistic.<sup>31</sup>

Marxism is based on a materialistic worldview. Marx’s worldview can be described as “dialectical materialism” or “historical materialism.” For Marx economic forces move history forward. As people struggle to fulfill material needs, economic systems evolve and change. Sire summarizes Marx’s goal: “Greed, competition and envy all arise because of social divisions and poverty; an ideal society will eliminate these evils.”<sup>32</sup>

## Deism

Deism stands between naturalism and theism. Deism claims a supernatural God created all that exists but no longer intervenes in his creation. This God is transcendent but not immanent. The material world is like a finely tuned clock and God is the clockmaker. The only knowledge of God that it is possible to have is that which comes through observation of the natural world. The world is not fallen. Sire explains, “The god who was discovered by the deists was an architect, but not a lover or a judge or anything personal. He was not one who acted in history. He simply had left the world alone.”<sup>33</sup> Humanity was locked in a closed system of cause and effect evidenced in the natural world.

Since the natural world is not fallen and distorted by sin, whatever “is” is what “ought” to be. In other words, whatever occurs in the natural world is normal. Therefore there is no good and evil.

## **Nihilism**

“Nihilism”, concludes Sire, “is the natural child of naturalism.”<sup>34</sup> Cultures and people within those cultures have conflicting moral values. As I write this, Russia has invaded Crimea. If there are no external standards, how can we conclude Russia’s action is wrong? Why is its action any better or worse than the U.S. sending troops into Afghanistan? What is the standard for measuring the rightness or wrongness of an action? If the natural world is all that exists, there is no standard.

Sire says it this way:

Naturalism places us as human beings in an ethically relative box. For us to know what values within that box are true values, we need a measure imposed from outside the box. We need a moral plumb line by which we can evaluate the conflicting moral values we observe in ourselves and others. But there is nothing outside the box. There is no moral plumb line, no ultimate, non-changing standard of value. Ergo: ethical nihilism.<sup>35</sup>

## **Existentialism**

Existentialism, according to Sire, is an attempt to transcend the nothingness and despair of nihilism. “Atheistic existentialism is a parasite on naturalism; theistic existentialism is a parasite on theism.”<sup>36</sup> Existentialism is about finding meaning within ourselves, within our own experience. This is perhaps the most important worldview for today’s Christians to understand because it is having such a profound impact on the Church.

The atheistic existentialist divides the world into the objective (material world) and the subjective (the inner world of the mind). According to this worldview, we have no control over the material world but we have complete control over our own mind. Each person is free to become whatever kind of person he or she wants to be. All people are free to determine their own nature and destiny (including gender!). Sire explains, “We can think, will, imagine, dream, project visions, consider, ponder, invent. Each of us is king of our own subjective world.”<sup>37</sup> We create value for ourselves. We decide right and wrong for ourselves. Whatever we choose to do is what is good.

Theistic existentialism is also concerned with the inner subjective world. While biblical theism begins with

God, theistic existentialism begins with the individual. Meaning does not begin with the objective world. Meaning is in the mind of the individual. Sire writes, “Meaning is created in the subjective world, but it has no objective referent.”<sup>38</sup>

Biblical theism rests on the accuracy of the biblical revelation. Theistic existentialism distrusts the accuracy of the biblical record. Since theistic existentialism is a byproduct of naturalism, it regards with suspicion all accounts of prophecy and miracles, including the resurrection. Therefore, Sire writes, “The facts the Bible recorded were not important; what was important were its examples of the good life and its timeless truths of morality.”<sup>39</sup> Sire continues, “If objective truth could not be found, no matter. Real truth is poetically contained in the ‘story,’ the narrative.”<sup>40</sup> Without confidence in objective historical events, biblical events are recast as myth. So, for example, the Fall of Adam and Eve is not a historical event but represents each person’s rebellion against God after having been born innocent. It is “a mythological description of a universal experience of the race.”<sup>41</sup>

Jesus may or may not have been physically raised from the dead. The importance of the resurrection is not in the factual event but that it represents the new life the disciples experienced as the “spirit” of Jesus lived in them.

The historical facts on which Christian doctrine rests are of little importance. “Their meaning is not in their facticity but in what they indicate about human nature and our relationship to God.”<sup>42</sup>

## **Pantheism**

A pantheistic worldview is another variation on naturalism. In a pantheistic worldview, god is identical with nature. Everything in the material world is infused with divinity. In a panentheistic worldview, nature is divine but the divine also extends beyond the natural world.

We’re seeing this in the Church as an adaptation of theistic existentialism. Truth is found in our own experience, in our own mind and heart without any external, objective referent. In pantheism, this little inner voice becomes god. Not only does truth flow from within the individual, but it is now “god’s truth”. This is one of the areas where biblical truth is distorted. Scripture does talk about us being filled with the Holy Spirit. But, that does not mean that anything an individual thinks or believes is of God. It does not mean that we should bow to the divine in one another as attendees did at the Re-Imagining Conference in 1993.

## Effects of Differing Worldviews

It is in applying worldview beliefs that we make decisions. All decisions are impacted by our worldview, but the following are some illustrations of the most obvious.

- 1) The nature of human beings impacts our decision-making especially concerning care for the unborn and for those at the end of life. Understanding that human beings are created by God in his image should inform our discussions of genetic engineering and stem cell research.
- 2) Whether we understand as Christians that we have a stewardship responsibility over the natural world or whether we worship the natural world depends on our worldview.
- 3) Whether sexual acts are governed by passions and desires common to the natural world or whether they should be governed by God's revelation of the proper role for sexual relationships depends on one's worldview.
- 4) Whether one's view of Scripture is that it is a revelation from God in which God's Spirit worked through men to speak, or whether we view Scripture as a human effort that reflects the biases and sins of the human authors, depends on one's worldview.

What is the role of suffering? How does the existence or absence of eternal judgment impact us? What is of greatest importance and value to us? What is the meaning and purpose of life? Every decision we make flows out of our view of the world and our role in it. Either we will make those decisions based on a Christian worldview revealed in Scripture, or we will use another worldview.

A Christian worldview based on Christian doctrine tells us what is wrong with the world and how it can be remedied (sin and salvation); what happens after we die (eternal life in God's presence); the meaning and purpose of life (to glorify God and enjoy him forever); the nature of human beings (created in the image of God but fallen into sin and then redeemed). Its basic components are: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. Biblical doctrines in these areas ought to inform our decision-making on moral and ethical questions.

Dorothy Sayers saw clearly the link between doctrine or dogma and worldview. She writes that World War II was a war of doctrines—Christendom vs. heathendom “standing face-to-face as they have not done in Europe since the days of Charlemagne.” The war, she says, “is a violent and irreconcilable quarrel about the nature of

God and the nature of man and the ultimate nature of the universe; it is a war of dogma.”<sup>43</sup>

She explains that while Christians continued to live according to ethics that flowed from Christian doctrine, they had severed the ethics from the doctrine. Christians, she said, act as if ethics are universal and anyone that departs from them is merely “naughty” and will soon return to the commonly accepted moral behavior. She explains how this led Christians to completely misinterpret Germany's motives:

The rulers of Germany have seen quite clearly that dogma and ethics are inextricably bound together. Having renounced the dogma, they have renounced the ethics as well—and from their point of view they are perfectly right. They have adopted an entirely different dogma, whose ethical scheme has no value for peace or truth, mercy or justice, faith or freedom; and they see no reason why they should practice a set of virtues incompatible with their dogma.

We have been very slow to understand this. We persist in thinking that Germany “really” believes those things to be right that we believe to be right, and is only very naughty in her behavior. That is a thing we find quite familiar. We often do wrong things, knowing them to be wrong. For a long time we kept on imagining that if we granted certain German demands that seemed fairly reasonable, she would stop being naughty and behave according to our ideas of what is right and proper. We still go on scolding Germany for disregarding the standard of European ethics, as though that standard was something which she still acknowledged. It is only with great difficulty that we can bring ourselves to grasp the fact that there is no failure in Germany to live up to her own standards of right conduct. It is something much more terrifying and tremendous; it is that what we believe to be evil, Germany believes to be good. It is a direct repudiation of the basic Christian dogma on which our Mediterranean civilization, such as it is, is grounded.<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

Doctrine or theology matters! Doctrine describes reality as it really is. Defending Christian doctrine is not about trying to impose our beliefs on the world as if we want to win some imaginary game or seek some imaginary power. Defending Christian doctrine is so that people might come to know and love the God who has reached out to us in a love so deep and so powerful that he entered creation and died, in order that we might be glorified and dwell with him forever.

Helping people to understand a Christian worldview that flows out of Christian doctrine allows people to live in accordance with the truth about reality and find their joy and fulfillment in Christ. *Theology Matters!*

<sup>1</sup>James R. Edwards, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-barna-update/53-religious-beliefs-vary-widely-by-denomination#.UzSJ\\_bShHHs](https://www.barna.org/barna-update/5-barna-update/53-religious-beliefs-vary-widely-by-denomination#.UzSJ_bShHHs)

<sup>3</sup> Edwards, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup>James Sire, *Primer on Apologetics* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2006), p. 15

<sup>5</sup>[www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/truth](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/truth)

<sup>6</sup>[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indiana\\_Pi\\_Bill](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indiana_Pi_Bill)

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:14

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:17

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:32

<sup>10</sup>[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/12/california-transgender-students-bill-\\_n\\_3745337.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/12/california-transgender-students-bill-_n_3745337.html)

<sup>11</sup> Rob Bell, *What We Talk About When We Talk About God* (HarperOne, 2013), p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, (HarperOne, 2013), p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Colson, *The Body*, (Word: Dallas, 1992), p. 234.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 4

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 5

<sup>20</sup> [www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts#.UzSPd7ShHHs](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts#.UzSPd7ShHHs)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 1949), p. 31-32.

<sup>23</sup> [www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity#.UzSQLShHHs](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity#.UzSQLShHHs)

<sup>24</sup> William A. Dembski, Jay Wesley Richards, ed., *Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), p. 11

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/12pdf/12-307\\_6j37.pdf](http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/12pdf/12-307_6j37.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Dembski, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 102.

<sup>28</sup> James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, (Downers Grove: IVP 1988) p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> [www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years#.UzSGyLShHHs](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years#.UzSGyLShHHs)

<sup>30</sup> Sire, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>43</sup> Sayers, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Sayers, p. 28-29.

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*Rev. Sue Cyre is executive director of Theology Matters and editor of the publication Theology Matters.*

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## Dear Friend of *Theology Matters*,

Your partnership with us has made an important difference. But the work isn't finished! *Theology Matters'* ministry is expanding beyond the Presbyterian Church (USA) and it is also expanding in content!

For the past 20 years we have focused on renewing the PC(USA). Our Board of Directors was comprised exclusively of PC(USA) pastors and lay people. **That is changing.** Now our Board has Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) and Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO) pastors and lay people as well.

For the past 20 years we relied mainly on PC(USA) authors. **That is changing.** We are now searching for the best writers regardless of their denominational affiliation.

For the past 20 years we geared our articles to issues being addressed by the PC(USA) at its General Assemblies. **That is changing.** Our articles now will address issues arising from the culture that every congregation and every Christian is facing.

For most of the past 20 years our main focus was publishing *Theology Matters*. **That is changing.** We've already added a bi-weekly email update. We also hope to offer you more videos on important topics, as well as, more teaching resources, and more articles on our website and in other publications, all of which deal with doctrine, apologetics and worldview. And we want to continue to offer these resources at no cost!

**Please understand that we are not abandoning the PC(USA). Rather, we are expanding our ministry.** The issues the PC(USA) faces on a national level at its General Assemblies are the same issues affecting every Christian in every congregation regardless of denomination because our congregations are not isolated from the culture.

## **An example of how culture is impacting youth**

Let me give you one example of the way the culture is influencing young people, even Christian young people. On the new TV show on Fox Business, “The Independents,” the millennial panel engaged Ryan T. Anderson, a Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, on the topic of marriage. Anderson defended marriage as the union of a man and a woman.

Anderson challenged the panel that unless marriage is the union of a man and a woman designed for procreation, there is no logical reason to limit the number of people in a marriage to two. Panel member Lisa Kennedy Montgomery immediately agreed and said she had no problem with polygamy. Montgomery then observed, “Even if my husband was a woman, I would love her.”

If people in your congregation or their young adult children watched “The Independents,” could they defend the biblical view of marriage against the panel’s arguments? Could they do so without referring to Scripture? Anderson realizes that in the secular media quotes from Scripture won’t be heard—even sometimes by Christian youth. However, since all truth is God’s truth, there are ways that we can make biblical arguments without quoting Scripture. *Theology Matters* can help congregations defend biblical faith, even sometimes using social science data and logical reasoning as Anderson did. That is why we published an article by Ryan Anderson entitled “What is Marriage?” in the May/June 2012 issue of *Theology Matters*. It is on our website at [www.theologymatters.com](http://www.theologymatters.com) under marriage resources.

### ***Theology Matters* helps congregations respond to the culture**

Congregations cannot isolate themselves from the prevailing cultural arguments. We cannot allow the false thinking promoted by the culture to stand uncontested as if it is a valid choice for some people. Out of our great love for our children and neighbors, congregations must engage the false teachings and demonstrate their emptiness and harm. *Theology Matters* can help you do that.

Since the Church began, there has been a need to defend the truth with sound argument and persuasive reasoning. Scripture tells us that the “church of the living God [is] the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). The Church of Jesus Christ both holds up truth and rests on the foundation of truth. The Church is called to be salt and light to the culture. *Theology Matters’* goal is to help congregations hold up that truth.

There are four areas in which *Theology Matters* helps to encourage and resource congregations to defend the truth against the culture’s false teachings:

1. *Theology Matters* supports congregations as they teach about the LORD and what he has done and who we are as human beings created in his image. That’s doctrine. Doctrine is the truth about reality. Doctrine is not boring or out-dated. Doctrine is about God loving us so much that he entered his creation and allowed sinners to put him to death on a cross. Doctrine is about God’s sacrifice that changed our world from the inside out. (See *Theology Matters’* issues on the confessions, authority of Scripture, the essential tenets, sexuality, baptism, the centrality of Christ, the solas, and more on our website under “topics.”)
2. *Theology Matters* equips and encourages congregations as they engage the false teachings to defend the truth and show the emptiness of false teachings taught 24/7 by the media. That’s apologetics—a defense of the truth. It’s not just pointing to Scripture but also showing how the truth of Scripture is visible in the world around us. We can’t look at the world and determine truth because the world is corrupted by sin. But we can study Scripture and then see how its truths are visible in the world often through scientific and social science data. (See the May/June 1999 issue of *Theology Matters* on Intelligent Design on our website under “topics.”)
3. *Theology Matters* resources congregations as they help members understand how a Christian worldview is dramatically different from a secular view. Based on doctrine that describes the truth about reality, a Christian worldview helps us to make decisions and frame debates. How we view the world and our place in it makes a tremendous difference in our decision-making. (See issues of *Theology Matters* on euthanasia, abortion, worldview and more.)
4. *Theology Matters* resources congregations as they teach about marriage as the union of a man and woman. Marriage is the focal point of most recent public debates, and it is the intersection of doctrine, apologetics, and worldview. How our churches and the culture view marriage impacts future generations of children and

The Rev. Dr. Kari McClellan is President of Presbyterians for Faith, Family and Ministry (PFFM). Rev. Susan Cyre is Executive Director and Editor of *Theology Matters*™. The Board of Directors of PFFM includes 10 people, clergy and lay, women and men. PFFM is working to restore the strength and integrity of the church's witness to Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior, by helping Presbyterians develop a consistent Reformed Christian worldview. *Theology Matters* is sent free to anyone who requests it. Please donate today to this vital ministry. **We can be contacted at [540-898-4244](tel:540-898-4244); [www.theologymatters.com](http://www.theologymatters.com), and [suecyre@theologymatters.com](mailto:suecyre@theologymatters.com)**

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whether they will be cared for by a married mother and father. Marriage also impacts religious freedom and even the role of government. (See all of the resources on marriage and sexuality on our website, including the article by Ryan Anderson.)

### *Theology Matters* has some immediate needs

You have generously supported us for many years. We're grateful for your partnership. There are great opportunities before us. **Greater than ever before. Will you help us with some special efforts in the coming months?**

- We will have a table at the Evangelical Presbyterian Church General Assembly in Knoxville to acquaint pastors and lay people with our resources –especially our video series on marriage, “What’s the Big Deal About Marriage?” This video series presents a careful study of Scripture on marriage and then demonstrates from social science data where we are today and finally what the church can say and do to help restore marriage.
- We will also help send Alan Wisdom, our expert on marriage, to the PC(USA) General Assembly to help equip commissioners who want to defeat attempts to redefine marriage. Even before the assembly, Alan will help equip commissioners on the subject of marriage.
- Postage rates have again increased, raising our mailing costs significantly.
- In the coming months we want to expand our mailing list, create or identify more video resources for use in churches, set-up a speakers bureau on various topics available to congregations, link into social media, and write more for our website and various other publications.

**Please support us so that we can support you and your congregation in facing the challenges of the 21st century.** The Church cannot be relevant in the 21st century by changing its message or omitting parts of it to bring it more in-line with popular beliefs. Nor can the Church refuse to hear the voice of the culture that is having such a profound impact on all people including Church members.

The Church is the pillar and foundation of the truth. That whole truth brings life: life abundant and eternal. *Theology Matters* seeks to help the Church recover her voice of truth in a way that is salt and light to the culture. **Please support *Theology Matters* as we resource and encourage congregations and every Christian.**

**Please send your donation to:  
Theology Matters  
P. O. Box 3940  
Fredericksburg, VA 22402**

You can also donate through our website at [www.theologymatters.com](http://www.theologymatters.com)

Serving Christ with you,



Sue Cyre  
Executive Director