

Institute for Christian Teaching
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**A STUDY OF STUDENTS' PHILOSOPHIES OF LIFE
WITH A VIEW TO INTRODUCING
BIBLE-BASED CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY**

by

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the basic assumptions that one group of students in a Philosophy of Education class held, identifies the common elements in the varied worldviews in the areas of metaphysics, epistemology and axiology, and then presents the approach used by the author to introduce Christian philosophy to the group as a whole. An alternative approach is briefly discussed and the paper concludes with the idea that it is necessary to depend on Biblical principles and the Holy Spirit when teaching philosophy of education.

1. Introduction

There are many philosophies and worldviews represented among students registered at Christian tertiary education institutions, particularly in south-east Asia. Each philosophy or worldview is based on certain assumptions which colour the way a person views reality, knowledge, truth and values. It is necessary to introduce these students to Christian philosophy in a way that they can relate to and hopefully be able to accept as their worldview and philosophy of living and doing.

This essay will explore some of the basic beliefs and assumptions that students claim as their own by looking at some of their statements of belief regarding basic philosophical issues taken from their personal philosophy of life statements. It could be considered a primary study of students' philosophies of life. This will be followed by an identification of common elements amongst these basic assumptions and worldviews and one possible method of introducing Christian philosophy that is non-judgemental and Bible-based. It is important to keep Peter's advice in mind of being "kind and respectful" (1 Peter 3:15, CEV) with those who differ from one's own perspective and beliefs regarding basic issues.

Dr H.M. Rasi defines worldview as "a mental framework through which we comprehend and interpret the world and life, and on which we anchor our values, make choices, and chart our destiny" (2009, PPT-slide 16, The 40th International Seminar on the Integration of Faith and Learning). This way of viewing the world has to address basic questions about who an individual is, where he/she comes from and are going, assumptions about the causes of problems, for example suffering, and how the problem/s can be solved. Only the metaphysical, epistemological and axiological assumptions and beliefs of students will be considered within the scope of this paper. Metaphysics "deals with the nature of reality" (Knight, 1998, p. 13), while epistemology

“studies the nature, sources, and validity of knowledge” (Knight, p.18), which would have an impact on a future teacher’s philosophy of education. Axiology looks at ethics, morality and aesthetics by asking, “What is of value?” (Knight, p. 26).

2. Students’ basic assumptions and worldviews

It might be assumed that students who choose to study at a Christian university (specifically a Seventh-day Adventist university) would mostly share a reasonably similar worldview and have somewhat similar presuppositions regarding basic life and philosophical questions. This is not always true. At one university in south-east Asia there is a significant diversity of worldviews and basic assumptions as will be seen from some of the samples from their philosophy of life statements in this section. These students all participated in the seminar-class Philosophical Foundations of Education at graduate level. Students’ names will be omitted and a letter and number will be assigned for each student, for example G1 or G2.

The students were all earning educational credits to qualify for a teacher’s license in Thailand. They all had at least a bachelor’s degree in a field other than education, for example physics, chemistry, nursing, business, political science, environmental science, forensic investigation (police-work), while a number of them had master’s degrees in a variety of subjects, for example theology, environmental science, et cetera, and at least two had done some work towards a doctoral degree. Except for one Thai, all the other students were foreigners in Thailand representing the following nationalities: American (USA), Australian, British, Irish, Filipino, Burmese (from Myanmar), and Indian. The age ranged from the late twenties to the middle fifties and most students were male (nearly two thirds). Except for the Indian student, all the others were employed full-time in either international or bilingual schools in Bangkok (international schools: English is the only medium of instruction apart from the mandatory Thai language classes; bilingual schools teach the subjects in both English and Thai to the same students) and had at least two years experience in teaching.

The worldviews of these students varied from theism (monotheism: one God; polytheism: many gods) to pantheism (god is in everything and everything is god) to post-modernism and other human-centred perspectives. The main objective for this class was that each student had to develop and formulate his/her own philosophy of life and of education. The students were provided with examples of a variety of styles in articulating these and were encouraged to be

original as long as they addressed the basic life questions and identified the assumptions on which their statements and verbalised beliefs were based. Although these philosophy statements were counted as being a part of the final examination, the actual guidelines (including the grading criteria) were provided to the students one month prior to the final examination with instructions to submit these on entering the class for the final examination. This allowed time for thoughtful reflection and coherent articulation of his/her own personal philosophies regarding life and education.

2.1 Metaphysical Worldviews

“God is the ultimate reality” (G1) and “it is not difficult to find Him because He is just prayer away and I could talk with Him at anytime, and anywhere” (G1). This student obviously believes that there is a God and that it is possible to communicate with Him. She sees life as a gift from the creator and her life’s purpose is to reflect the glory of God. Student G2 believes in an all-powerful, personal Creator God who comprises three beings: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit and who created humans in His image with free will which “separates us from animals”. Student G3 has the following to say:

I am a theist, and believe in the Christian God, who is supreme or ultimate reality. My God is a holy, perfect, powerful, eternal, and good God, who is the Creator of heaven and earth, and an orderly Universe. He also created Man in His image out of dust and His breath, and man became a living soul. Also called a child of God, man is comprised of matter and ‘spirit’, this is two elements in one person. Man was originally created perfect with the freedom of choice but his disobedience resulted in sin, and separation from God. After sin, man became mortal, was no longer inherently good, and was born with a sinful nature. Reality is orderly, but ever since the Fall, sin has brought about some disorder. Reality is also fixed as there are still laws that govern matter/energy. I believe the Universe to be created by God, a Universe with order and built-in laws, and one with purpose and meaning. His attributes are clearly seen in the creation: earth and sky and all things have been created for God. Space and time which was created in the beginning will eventually com to an ending. My God is an unchanging God. Therefore, truth that is revealed in the Bible, is absolute and enduring – it is eternally and universally true irrespective of time and place.

Student G3 can be said to have a theocentric philosophy and reality, truth and humans are viewed from a Biblical perspective. One can clearly see the impact of the basic assumption that there is a God and that everything else flows forth from that premise. One could also say that this particular student views the world through orthodox, Bible-based Christian spectacles. Students

G4 to G 13 have similar worldviews, although at least two of these students believe that the soul is immortal (Roman Catholic backgrounds). These students hold theistic assumptions which influence their views of reality, namely the universe and humans are created and that reality can be known to a certain extent but not fully (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Student G14 believes in a Creator God, but from a deist perspective, where God creates the universe, people and laws and then leaves them to find their own way from there. Even though this student states that there is a Creator God he also does not discount the “accident theory” or arguments for evolution and claims to be a fence-sitter who leans towards a universe by design but does not accept this conclusively. The ambivalence of his stance might be attributed to the lack of belief in a truly personal God who cares about His creation and is always involved in what He has created.

Student G15 assumes that there is an everlasting Creator but says this Creator cannot be known but simultaneously claims that reason can connect a person with this Creator because the universe is orderly and humans are connected to this orderly universe through the Creator. He says “what humans perceive to be real is real as long as humans understand it to be that way”. This student does not appear to have a theistic or deistic worldview and fails to equate the Creator with a deity. Whereas the other students saw God as an absolute or ultimate reality this student never refers to the Creator he mentions in terms of characteristics associated with the Christian God. This impacts on his views of epistemology and values as well.

Student G16 holds to views that are both polytheistic (believes in the supreme god, Shiva, but also in Vishnu, Laxmi (money), Sarswati (education), Durga (power) and many more), as well as pantheistic, as all energy comes from God therefore everyone is a part of God. She believes that there is a continuous cycle of creation and destruction that is eternal. “Basic reality is physical energy along with spirituality (soul)”. This worldview has no beginning or end and ultimately good and evil are the same. This student has no frame of reference for having one personal Creator God who is the origin of all life and goodness or who cares enough about people to intervene in time, space and history.

The next student, G17, admits to a pantheistic approach where “God is the universe and therefore part of us” but the soul/spirit or life forces ceases to exist at death. To him being human “has no special meaning of itself” but must create its own meaning and responsibilities. He denies the existence of a transcendent Creator God because he says that religions focus on

differences and so create conflict, but does state that humans have a need to believe in something.

Student G18 also holds to a pantheistic approach and he says the following: “The gods of all religions are metaphors for Ultimate Reality/The Whole/Absolute Mind. God is simply Everything That Exists, in the physical universe as well as every other realm of reality”. There is no good or evil as defined in a Christian context, instead evil exists because we want it to because “The Whole wants to experience both negative and positive things in physical life”. “Humans are spiritual entities we could call Consciousness or Awareness that have chosen to enter the physical world and take on a body”. “Everything that exists is energy” and the difference between the physical and spiritual is simply the rate of vibration of this energy. According to this student, re-incarnation is choice that is exercised on the way to becoming more enlightened and eventually becoming one with the One who is All. Spiritual things cannot be expressed verbally as words are distorted products of human consciousness.

Student G19 sees reality as “something that can be experienced” and must be able to be proved. He, therefore, neither accepts or rejects the theory of creation or of evolution because neither can be proved conclusively. However, “if the universe is real, then it came to existence because of something that caused it to exist”. He believes that reality cannot exist independently of experience. This student also believes in the concept of karma, that is that all good actions have good consequences and bad actions have bad consequences.

Student G20 states that reality “is something that can be proven through experience”, it does not matter whether the experience is firsthand or second-hand. As to the origin of the universe, this cannot be proved but he feels that there is enough evidence to support the theory of evolution rather than that of creation. He has the following to say about the concept of God: “there was a God that did exist, and ... he was a great man. But I fall short in believing that he had the powers to do things beyond the scope of a human being”. Some would say that this is not belief in God, as the concept of God includes the characteristics of being transcendent, all-powerful, all-knowing, and omnipresent. He sees humans as unique even though they are descended from apes and that the environment plays a large role in shaping a person.

Student G21 says “we each construct our reality based on our experiences whether those are physical actions, verbal communication with others, visual observations or just a logical

progression of thought”. This student places emphasis on interactions and beliefs and that ‘reality’ as such does not matter.

Student G22 is an agnostic and he says “I see no evidence for the existence of a God or creator” and believes that it is not possible to know if there is a God or Prime Mover. He sees humans as “simply animals” who are the products of natural selection and that they too will eventually become extinct. “Matter is the basis for existence” and although the universe appears to be fixed and orderly it is ultimately unknowable. There is no purpose or meaning to life, so one should simply live the best way one can without harming oneself, others or the environment.

Student G23 states that “the existence of God is unknowable” and as such there is no evidence for His existence. The Universe is simple “matter in motion” and exists independently of the human mind or Divine Mind (if there is one). This student holds a humanist worldview “where humans live perfecting life on earth and appreciating the visible natural world” rather than looking for some better life in another world. Reality keeps changing and unfolding to show new realities.

Theistic		Pantheistic		Naturalistic	
7 males	6 females	3 males	1 female	3 males	1 female

Table 1 Graduate students’ Metaphysical Worldviews Summarised and Based on Gender

2.2 Epistemological Worldviews

Assumptions about the nature of truth and knowledge are important, particularly in education, as it affects what and how students are taught. Epistemological assumptions should be congruent with the metaphysical assumptions, for example if a person believes in the existence of an absolute, personal Creator God then a person would believe that there is a basis for absolute truth, but if one believes that there is no absolute Being/Mind then truth will be seen as relative and changeable.

Students G13 and G8 see Jesus as being the truth and the source of knowledge and that the Bible is a source of truth and knowledge. The first student says that she has experienced the fact that God keeps His promises and this is evidence for her that the Bible and Jesus are truth. Student G7 views the ultimate truth as coming from God and that it can be found in the Bible. Student G3 states that God does not change and that His truth, as revealed in the Bible, is therefore absolute and enduring regardless of time and space. She also says that “truth is

faithfulness to objective reality and verification by using the senses”. “Knowledge can be either subjective or objective” (G3), known through the senses, reason, revelation and even intuition. Student G2 believes that some truths are relative, while others (like the Bible) are absolute and student G9 concurs. On the other hand, student G1 believes that truth is universal and that the Bible is the ultimate source of truth. Student G12 accepts the following sources of truth: mathematics, revelation (Bible), history, the senses, reason, authority and intuition. He also says that not all knowledge is truth, so it is necessary to test knowledge rigorously to find whether it is true or not. Student G11 believes in truth that works (pragmatic) and that is validated by experience. Student G6 sees the Bible as a source of knowledge and thinks that reasoning and empirical knowledge is also important. Student G5 distinguishes between *a priori* truths which are absolute truths but not fully understandable for humans and experiential truths and knowledge which may be subjective and faulty and is “largely validated through its utility”. Student G4 believes in gaining knowledge through the senses, reason, and revelation with Jesus being the only source and definition of moral truth (John 14:6). He sees truth as being both subjective and objective depending on the situation, but that all truth should be tested with God’s truth.

Student G14 believes that humans can “be the manufacturers of truth” because they have the ability to choose and to “sift through truth as a recipient and a participant” and then decide what truth is while all possible sources of knowledge should be seen as complementing each other. This student applies the pragmatic theory when testing the validity of truth, namely that truth is what works and is based on experience.

Student G15 is somewhat contradictory in his basic assumptions by saying “truth cannot be known by humans ... until it is experienced” and it is always subjective even though it exists independently of human experience and that what humans believe to be truth can change with time. He accepts the senses, authority and reason as sources of knowledge. He argues that humans did not create the universe or living things so it is reasonable to accept an external Creator.

Student G19 argues that subjective knowledge that is “based on experience can be made objective by means of public test” and truth is ‘absolute’ only for as long as it works and is not independent of human experience. He will only rely on knowledge supported by practical

experiences. It would appear that this student sees all truth as being relative and knowledge is only reliable if one has experienced it oneself.

Student G18 sees Ultimate Reality as containing absolute truth, but humans will always see truth as being relative because Ultimate Reality cannot be described with language as words are always metaphorical. Knowledge can be gained through reason and the senses but a person's consciousness creates what we perceive and there is no adequate method to test for truth except through direct experience.

Another student, G17, poses the question "if I believe it [universe] is not fixed or permanent, does that make it dependent on me?" He views some truths as absolute because they have withstood the test of time, whilst other truths are relative and dependent on human experience. He cautions a person to be careful because the mind can distort and misrepresent what is perceived so one should be sceptical of reason and intuition and rather rely on authoritative knowledge where "truth is what works".

Student G16, who is polytheistic/pantheistic (Hindu), believes everything is relative and subject to change because reality itself is subject to a cycle of change and knowledge is composed of prior experience.

Student G22 has the following to say:

All knowledge is derived solely from human interaction with the environment. There is no single piece of knowledge that is so robust that we can consider it to be absolutely true. All knowledge is subjective and dependent on human experience.

He accepts the following sources of knowledge: the senses, reason, authority, to a lesser extent intuition and completely denies that of revelation. "Truth is what works". This epistemological worldview is compatible with his stance as an agnostic.

Student G20 sees truth changing with time and as being relative due to further truth coming to light through research. Truth can be subjective at times, for example art, while objective truth is true anywhere, for example two plus two equals four ($2 + 2 = 4$) but truth is not independent of human reason. This student sees experience and reason as being good sources of knowledge but sees revelation (for example the Bible) as being too far removed from reality with no 'proof' of its validity.

Student G23 sees truth as expanding, evolving and being revised and corrected as humans develop and it is therefore "not immutable". Knowledge can be gained, individually or

collectively, by means of observation and experimentation. “Science or reason as the source of truth and knowledge if disconnected from humanity is akin to severing the heart or head from the body”. It would appear that this student denies all truth and knowledge apart from humanity’s involvement and experience. As he is agnostic in terms of metaphysical assumptions, this would be a reasonable stance to take.

2.3 Axiological Worldviews

Life is a gift of God and should be lived on the basis of love founded on the example of Jesus Christ, says student G13. Student G10 claims the adage, “what we sow is what we reap” when dealing with issues of morality and ethics. A Buddhist and a Christian might agree on this point. Student G7 chooses the groups she becomes involved with based on their compatibility with her values which is Bible-based and honesty is seen as an integral value to decision-making. Student G3 identifies her predominant values as loving God with the whole heart, mind and soul, and one’s neighbour as oneself. She is somewhat contradictory in her assumptions when she says that “universal moral values exist, and it [they] varies according to each country, culture, community, and religion”. When something is universal it is present everywhere and would not change when the context changes. These are the views of some of the students who adhere to a Christian worldview.

Student G15 views moral behaviour as “behaving in a way that best meets the needs of the larger community of which we are a part”. This would imply that one’s actions are dependent on whatever the community sees as being correct or acceptable and that moral values would be relative rather than absolute. Student G14 thinks that a person should adhere to the same values in all situations, namely honesty, integrity and compassion.

An agnostic student, G23, believes in living “an affirmative and caring life” and that there is always cause and effect to deal with. Humans are guided by reason and he sees humankind as “essentially flexible, not depraved and can be educated and socialised to have capable minds and act with goodwill, as self interest is not a law of nature”. Student G20 believes that one’s actions affect those around oneself and this must be taken into consideration when making decisions. Student G22 has a pragmatic approach and says the ultimate test of morals is whether or not it is good for society as a whole, as well as being good for the “health of

the planetary ecosystem” and views “the Christian concept of moral superiority over the ‘beasts of the field’” as “mildly repugnant”. These students have a human frame of reference for values, morals and ethics, which implies that these are relative and not absolute. Student G19 agrees with the idea of something being judged good or bad by the degree to which it works and is acceptable to society and depending on the situation.

Student G16 thinks of ethics in terms of the norms of society for “good and bad conduct” that should be adhered to and then goes on to say that she believes in not hurting anyone, loving oneself and respecting others. On the other hand, student G18 has the following point of view: “there’s really no such thing as absolute ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, because The Whole desires evil in the bipolar physical world in order to experience it” and it is acceptable to choose what is ‘wrong’ if one chooses to experience it. A person can therefore do what he/she wants with no accountability or consequences.

3 Common Elements Identified Among Students’ Worldviews

The students’ assumptions and beliefs can be broadly classified as theistic, pantheistic (McCallum (2009) would separate pantheism and polytheism into different categories) and naturalistic/humanistic. The basic assumptions falling under the theistic category are as follows:

- A basic belief in an infinite, personal Creator God who does not change
- The universe came into existence by means of an act of creation
- Humans were created in the image of God
- Humans were given the freedom to choose their course of action
- Humans were ‘good’ until a choice was exercised and sin or evil entered the world
- Humans are comprised of both matter (dust) and spirit (breath of God) which united in the form of a living being/soul
- Reality can be known in part, both subjectively and objectively
- Truth can be known, usually through revelation (the Bible) or in relationship with a person, Jesus Christ, who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6)
- Knowledge may come from various sources, namely revelation, reason, the senses, authority and intuition
- Values reflect the importance of love towards God and fellow humans
- Morals are universal and absolute
- Humans are accountable for their actions.

Basic assumptions falling within the pantheistic worldview are:

- There is One who is All or All is the One; nature or the universe is God and God is the universe
- There is no definitive act of creation and no creator

- Life and death is a continuous cycle
- Humans are a part of the universe and the universe/nature is a part of humans
- Reality is not knowable
- There is no absolute truth or truth cannot be known, everything is relative and changeable
- Knowledge is subjective rather than objective
- Values are relative, not absolute, and vary according to time, space, culture, gender and status
- There is no accountability for actions, although good actions may have good consequences and bad actions may have bad consequences.

The last category deals with assumptions that are naturalistic/humanistic in nature and can be summarised as follows:

- There is no transcendent, infinite God or Creator; if there is such a Being, He is not knowable
- The theory of evolution is accepted as the only explanation for the origin of life
- Humans are animals who are in the process of evolving into better humans
- Matter/energy is real and can be empirically verified
- There are no absolute truths, everything is relative and changeable: truth is what works
- Knowledge and 'truth' is constructed by humans either individually or collectively
- Sources of knowledge are human senses, human reason, human intuition and revelation is discounted as unverifiable
- There are no universal values or morals, these are defined by groups and are always situational (situational ethics)
- There is no accountability for actions, except to the group to which one belongs

4. Presenting Christian Philosophy to Students with Varied Worldviews

As can be seen from the preceding sections, these students hold widely disparate worldviews regarding reality, the concept of God, the nature and origin of humans and the nature of truth, knowledge and values. How would one go about introducing Christian philosophy to a group of students who range from Bible-based, orthodox, evangelical Christians to pantheists and/or polytheists to humanists who are agnostic and deny the possibility of revelation or of knowing whether or not an infinite, personal God exists? What follows is one way of doing this.

The following must be remembered when dealing with people who have other worldviews:

In the beginning was the one who is called the Word. The Word was with God and was truly God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. And with this Word, God created all things. Nothing was made without the Word. Everything that was created

received its life from him, and *his life gave light to everyone* (italics supplied). The light keeps shining in the dark, and darkness has never put it out [understood it]” (John 1:1 – 5, CEV).

Everyone has light to a greater or lesser degree, no one is completely in the dark unless they choose to reject what light they have (Job 24:13 – 17).

The approach finally used by this teacher was arrived at after much prayer and thought. First it was necessary to approach the Christian philosophy in much the same way as the other philosophies already discussed by providing a historical, social, political, economic and cultural context for the origin and rise of this philosophy.

Secondly, it was essential to provide reliable, valid, verifiable evidence for regarding the Bible, a revelation, as a source of knowledge and framework for this philosophy, because a number of the students discounted revelation as a source of knowledge. They all accepted that Christianity has its philosophical roots in the Bible and so agreed that it would be reasonable to use it for this particular situation. The validity and reliability of this source of knowledge is also supported by reasonable evidence, namely:

- a) The internal cohesion and coherence of Biblical teaching about topics of concern to people, for example creation, nature of man, and so forth, despite the fact that there were more than 40 biblical writers spanning a period of approximately 1600 years; also the unity of theme and symbolism (Ball, 2007);
- b) Archaeological support for information about people, places and times as mentioned in the Bible (Ball, 2007);
- c) Secular historians’ accounts dealing with Biblical events confirm or support the biblical accounts (Ball, 2007);
- d) There are thousands of ancient manuscripts for both the Old and New Testaments, more than for any other ancient document and some are dated to within 100 years of the original (Ball, 2007);
- e) Unconditional prophecies predicting the future, for example Daniel 2 and 7 (Ball, 2007)
- f) There are about 60 major Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament and all were fulfilled in the New Testament. Chance of any eight prophecies being fulfilled in the life of one person is 1 in 10^{17} (Ball, 2007);
- g) Biblical diet and longevity (Genesis 1:29, 3:18; Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14: 3 – 21; see also Genesis 5, 11:10 – 26, Genesis 8:20, 9:3, 4)
- h) The earth is round (Isaiah 40:22; Proverbs 8:27)
- i) Ocean currents or “paths in the sea” (Psalm 8:8)
- j) Personal experience (Psalm 34:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22). Do not rely on others regarding Biblical knowledge and truth (Acts 17:11)
- k) Using reason and logic (Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 32:9) to verify information, to argue from cause to effect to enhance faith.

- l) Use philosophers' three tests of truth to test the Bible: the correspondence theory ("truth is faithfulness to objective reality" or "fact"), the coherence theory ("consistency or harmony of all one's judgments"), and the pragmatic theory ("truth is what works") (Knight, 1998, pp. 23 – 24).

Due to the fact that a number of students placed a great emphasis on the role of personal experience in validating truth and acquiring knowledge, the author related her own personal experiences in doubting the Bible, searching for truth and validation of revelation, and evidence for the existence of a personal, infinite God who is very involved in the lives of people. Since these students claimed that personal experience and 'truth is whatever works', it would be difficult to argue away a person's personal experience with God and the Bible because they would then be denying their own assumptions and beliefs.

The next step was to show the students how to find specific references in the Bible using the table of contents, then chapters and verses. They were then divided into groups and provided with a group-work assignment listing the basic philosophical questions and Bible references to look up answers for themselves and read what the Bible says. The group members could then discuss what the verse/s said, decide what the answer is and write it down. This allowed people to discuss the basic life questions and see what the Bible says without interpretation by another person. This exercise stimulated discussion and triggered thought even amongst the most antagonistic 'anti-Christian' students. It allowed the Bible to speak for itself rather than through a person or book with an own agenda.

The discussion and group-work was followed-up by a presentation of Christian philosophy using a Bible-based approach with appropriate references provided for each point made. The God-man, Jesus Christ, was introduced as the founder of Christianity with a brief overview of His life and work. The life-events emphasized were those predicted hundreds and even more than a thousand years previously by writers of the Old Testament books. The concepts of reality, truth, knowledge and values were presented from a Biblical perspective and students were allowed to draw their own conclusions regarding the information and points of view presented. The presentation ended with a discussion as to the influence of Christian philosophy on education by looking at how 'Christian' Christian schools are in reality and practice and the philosophy of education of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in particular. The author was questioned regarding her own experience with Christian educational institutions and some very difficult issues were addressed honestly, but always biblically and prayerfully, while

keeping in mind that a number of students had had very negative experiences with Christianity and Christian education.

Francis A. Schaeffer (1990) claims that the biggest problem for a Christian in dealing with people of other worldviews is the idea of how knowledge and truth is approached (p. 6). A Bible-based Christian worldview sees truth as absolute and unchanging because God is the truth (John 14:6) and He does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17), while many people today view truth as changing and dependent on humans who are changeable. Some would even say that there is no such thing as truth, for example Friederich Nietzsche (Knight, 1998, p. 87). Others “sees consensus between different subjects [people] as the ultimate criterion to judge knowledge. ‘Truth’ or ‘reality’ will be accorded only to those constructions on which most people of a social group agree” (Heylighen, cited by Murphy, 1997, para. 6). Schaeffer says that in the past it was possible, at least in the western world, for Christians and those with other points of view to have discussions based on the same basic assumptions, namely that truth does not change and the antithesis of truth would be falsehood. But many people today work from the presupposition that truth does not exist or, at the very least, cannot be known, and they see all knowledge as subjective and constructed by humans alone. Schaeffer’s approach to this was to ask questions like “Where die personality come from in the universe? Where did appreciation of beauty, the possibility of saying ‘it is right’, ‘it is wrong’, come from?” (Schaeffer, 1992, p. 140). Francis Schaeffer had people examine their basic assumptions about life-questions and issues and then, in discussions, lead them to see the ultimate conclusions based on these assumptions.

Another approach to introducing Christian philosophy to students with other worldviews in the areas of truth, knowledge, reality and morality would be to either have discussions similar to those led by Dr Schaeffer or to give the students tasks and assignments that would lead to an examination of the ultimate consequences of believing and acting on their basic assumptions. For example, ask students to list seven to ten values anchored in their worldviews and then how these would operate in certain situations, like cheating, ‘borrowing’ things without a person’s knowledge or consent, constructing assessments and grading them, and so forth. How would a person teach when all knowledge is subjective and truth cannot be known? If there is no truth, can a person still use ‘true’ and ‘false’ test items in a test or examination?

5. Conclusion

A person's basic assumptions about the existence/non-existence of God, the origin of the world and humanity, the validity of a source of knowledge, the concept of truth, and the existence of absolutes versus all things being relative has a definite impact on one's worldview. This must be taken into consideration when teaching a potentially controversial philosophy such as Christianity. If the teacher speaks of "the truth", he/she must understand that some of the students do not accept the concept of "truth". This may not only cause misunderstandings to occur, but the teacher may come across as judgmental and exclusive with only one "right" truth. It is necessary to meet the students at their point of reference and then develop a framework that takes the students' worldviews into consideration.

Jesus met the people where they were, physically, mentally and spiritually. He did not overwhelm them with doctrines, but rather built relationships and then gradually opened the truth to them up to a point that they could accept. Seed can be sown but it is the Father and Holy Spirit that enables the seed to take root and to grow (John 14:26, 16:8). It is very easy to use Christian clichés and rhetoric but many students, particularly of other worldviews, would find these meaningless or interpret the words with meanings from their own frame of reference.

The experience of teaching these students was an eye-opener for the author and once again demonstrated the need to depend on God for wisdom and guidance to reach all the students and not just the ones who share a similar worldview. The presence and blessing of the Holy Spirit was evident as there was no antagonism, but rather a spirit of enquiry and interest and a number of students thanked the teacher for the way in which Christian philosophy was presented and indicated that they had been given food for thought.

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