

WAR OF THE WORLDS

Understanding Worldviews: Being an Effective Witness to a Multicultural Campus

by Bayard Taylor

If you're excited about what Jesus has done for you, most likely you're going to brighten when a conversation turns toward spiritual things. *All right! A chance to share my faith!* Yet more often than not we leave such conversations with a nagging sense that somehow things didn't go as well as we might have hoped. One moment we were talking about God and the next we were off on some odd tangent or enmeshed in a grotesque misunderstanding of God or Christian faith. Get burned enough times and the optimism of *All right! A chance to share my faith* is quickly replaced by the dread of *This can only end badly!*

This confusing and disheartening scenario is fairly typical on the university campus, where the marketplace of ideas is a multiplicity of conflicting “-isms,” religions, and philosophies. What are we to make of this jumble of ideas and chaos of diversity? And even if we manage to get some idea of what's going on, how do we minister without coming off as judgmental, hypocritical, narrow-minded, bigoted, hate-filled, homophobic, sexually repressed, rednecked, racist, warmongering, genocidal, capitalist, fascist. . . . Am I leaving anything out? Neocolonialistic?

Welcome to the campus of Postmodern U—a microcosm of worldviews. If you want to be an ambassador for Christ in this world, you need to know how to decode and interact with a wide assortment of viewpoints and worldviews, and that begins with the ability to identify them.

There Will Be Blood

Before we go any further, we need to realize that, in one sense, being misunderstood, misjudged, and maligned goes with the territory of following Christ. Jesus told us, in effect, “If they hate me, they'll hate you” (Mark 13:13; John 15:18). The other New Testament writers warned us about the fires of persecution (Acts 8:1; 11:19; 13:50; Romans 8:35; Galatians 6:12; 2 Timothy 3:12) and then went through those fires themselves.

A pastor in India once told me, “In India, you always need to be ready to preach, pray, or die for the gospel.” He said it with a smile on his face, but he wasn't kidding. And to a greater or lesser degree, what he said is true everywhere.

When Jesus died on the cross, he paid for our sins *and* he purchased the right for his people to proclaim the gospel in all the world—a right the church has called the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). To advance this Great Commission, God the Father and God the Son sent God the Holy Spirit to equip the church to take the gospel to the ends of the earth (John 14:26; 15:26). The gospel is the best possible news for all peoples and cultures everywhere, and everyone on the planet should have the opportunity to respond to it.

In another sense, though, if we're honest about history, we have to admit that Christians (or at least those wearing

the label) have brought reproach on the name of God by misusing the Bible. At least some of the anti-Christian sentiment we face is not without warrant. Eurocentric Christians, for example, have often confused the kingdom of God with Western culture. In the name of religion, the West has a legacy of religious wars, colonialist oppression, and anti-Semitism. And as I'm sure you've heard, the list goes on. (A fellow Californian who read an early draft of this essay urged me to mention that the early missionaries to the Hawaiian Islands even banned the islanders from surfing. Dude, that's, like, so uncool.)

As Christians, we need to have the humility and forthrightness to confess our sins and admit the transgressions of our forebearers honestly and fully. We lose credibility if we don't.

What We Have Here Is a Failure to Communicate

That said (and it did need to be said), I wonder how much of the disconnect we feel with unbelievers is a listening problem—an inability on our part to understand and empathize with where people are coming from. Maybe this story will shed some light on what I'm talking about.

At a Christian Conference for college students, I was sitting working on my laptop in the lobby of the hotel where we were staying. A girl from the conference came up to a guy sitting near me who was within earshot. She was—bless her heart—attempting to witness. The man was a secular Israeli Jew passing through for a business trip. He was an atheist.

It was quite an interesting encounter. The young woman did all of the standard things she had been trained to do, but it was mostly an exercise in missing the point because she couldn't/didn't correct her course and adjust for the fact that this guy was (a) a secular Jew and not a practicing one and (b) an atheist, which really confused her.

A little course in worldviews could have been very useful at that point. Unfortunately, this was not a part of her training.

As a credit to her sensitivities, however, there was a point in the conversation in which she really seemed to make inroads with this atheist (who was cordial but not afraid to speak his mind about the fact that she seemed not to hear what he was really saying to her) and that was when she offered to pray for him

and any requests he might have. That stopped him in his tracks; he had to really engage with what she was saying for a minute. He eventually came up with a request about the safety and welfare of his immediate family. She prayed. Who knows what happened on a spiritual plane?

God can use us whether we have it all together or not. But wouldn't it be better if we were able to really listen and find a way to hear what people were saying to us? Wouldn't it be better to comprehend where people were coming from and why they think the way they do?

The Men-from-Mars Perspective

To find that way, here's a thought experiment. Imagine space visitors coming to us from Mars on a fact-finding mission. These little green men (okay, and women, although I confess I don't know much about Martian sexuality) are curious and want to discover the key ideas that drive the various cultures here on earth.

Imagine also the following: (1) These visitors are able to come to earth without attracting attention to their technologically advanced saucerlike spacecrafts. (2) They can move around and blend into any surroundings without being seen, so they're able to study us without their behaviors influencing our behaviors. (3) They all have the Martian equivalents of Ph.D.'s in anthropology and ethnography and thus have completely freed themselves from their own cultural prejudices and baggage. (I'll admit this is going a long way to go to create a scenario of complete objectivity, but whatever.)

What would our Martians see?

I submit that at first our extraterrestrial visitors would marvel at the startling diversity and complexity of us humans. After a while, though, their analytical skills would kick in and they would start to discern some distinctive patterns. If they then began writing their reports to their superiors in English, they would soon be talking about the concept of *worldview* and how worldviews are the biggest clues to the earthlings' thinking and behaviors, even more important than whatever religions or philosophies they say they believe. A critical observation (and one making us very vulnerable should the aliens pursue conquest, colonization, and/or body snatching).

Our word *worldview* comes from the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who in 1768 coined the term as *Weltanschauung* (in

German *Welt* = “world” and *anschauung* = “view”). As the word itself suggests, a worldview is as a way of looking at the world. Your worldview is like the eyeglasses through which you view and interpret your experiences. Other phrases that capture the idea are “mental grid,” “frame of reference,” and “shared perceptions of what is real, true, and good.”

A worldview seeks to answer the Big Questions in life, such as Who am I? Where did I come from? What’s most important in life? It’s a whole mountain of assumptions of which you may or may not be aware but upon which your conclusions are based.

Worldview is not the same as culture. Culture is the sum total of language, behaviors, social hierarchies, religion, customs, taboos, and punishments for acting outside social norms. In traditional cultures, everyone pretty much accepts one controlling worldview say Karma, or Communism. But in contemporary cultures, where people have significantly more lifestyle and belief options, you can have neighbors living side by side who share a similar culture (say, southern California suburban) but who have completely different worldviews.

A Beautiful Worldview Mind

The term *worldview*, and what is meant by it, is a mosh pit of confusion. It’s applied in numerous senses: cultural, political, economic, save-the-world cause, religious, philosophical, and artistic. Sometimes it’s spelled as two words: *world view*. Here we’ll spell it *worldview* and we’ll try to limit the worldview discussion to the Big Questions just mentioned, especially as they relate to the questions of spiritual reality (whether there is a God or gods or no god) and what it means to be human.

In the university and in life, no single worldview has a monopoly on the smart people. You’re always going to find people who are smarter than you are and who will passionately and eloquently promote their worldviews. Sharp wit and a high IQ do not make a person’s worldview true; they only mean that person can cleverly portray it.

But when you’re around people who are exceptionally bright, it’s easy to feel intimidated. In their company, remember that you don’t have to be a genius to hold to or defend a biblical worldview. You can trust that God is really, really smart and that he gives you his Holy Spirit for guidance and wisdom. You don’t have to have all the answers. Don’t feel threatened. Ask questions; see what you can learn. Don’t be fooled into thinking that intelligence is the main factor in discerning or knowing God’s truth. It’s not.

At Play at Leveling the Playing Fields of the Lord

Simply put, on the college campuses of the world, Christianity has an image problem. Christians are often put at a disadvantage, saddled with negative stereotypes that make Christian faith look dumb or untenable. Christians are accused of being religious, acting blindly on faith, not questioning their assumptions, and being narrow-minded. However, the truth is that every worldview, even atheism, is as reliant on faith, as guilty of assumptions, and as unwelcoming of contrary truth claims.

If you can get these five things all worldviews share under your belt, it really levels the playing field.

1. *Not everybody has a religion, but everybody has a worldview that acts almost exactly like a religion.*



Having a worldview is part of our common humanity; we can’t get away from it. Everybody has a worldview, whether we realize it or not, have thought it through, or can articulate it. People usually just assume that the way they look at the world is the right way.

So the big controversy is not between people who “think scientifically” and those who “need religion.” No matter whether people consider themselves religious or not, *all* people live *religiously* by their worldview assumptions.

2. *All worldviews begin with a set of assumptions that can only be taken “by faith.”*

No worldview is established by the sheer force of logic or unassailable proofs. For example, some people say confidently that there is no God or that God cannot be real. But how can they *know* that? To *know* there is no God you’d have to know everything in the universe, and you’d

have to be present everywhere in the universe to be able to know that God wasn’t hiding somewhere. To claim there is no God is not provable—it’s an article of faith.

An apparently less extreme position is to say that even if there were a God, we can’t ever know for sure that God exists. But again, how could any human being, limited as he or she is by space, time, and intellect, claim to know *for sure* that God can’t be known? It’s a ridiculously audacious claim!

Sometimes Christians fall into the trap of thinking that the truth of Christianity can be conclusively settled either by bomb-proof arguments or by miracles. It’s true that providing people reasons or evidences to believe in God (the study of apologetics) can help. It’s also true that when God does a miracle in front of your own eyes it can, well, open them. But somewhere in there faith has to happen, and faith is the decisive issue.



Worldview is the intellectual and cultural furniture in the room. We use it all the time and don't think much about it. Worldview is unseen, like the air we breathe.

So it's not just Christians or religious people who take things by faith while others rely only on reason and logic. *Everybody* has a faith starting point, even if that starting point is a set of assumptions about nonbelief.

3. *Worldview assumptions are rarely acknowledged openly, questioned, or challenged by those who hold them.*

Worldview is the intellectual and cultural furniture in the room. We use it all the time and don't think much about it. Worldview is unseen, like the air we breathe. It's under our noses, but we don't notice. It is the real Matrix, if you will.

Worldview assumptions pass under our radar screens, yet they control much of our life and behavior. As we think, so we do. And we act on what we truly believe not necessarily on what we say we believe.

For most people, worldview assumptions go so deep that they don't know how to respond when their assumptions are exposed or brought into question. There's a Zen story about two fish swimming in a fishbowl. One says to the other, "Say, what's it like to live in water?" The other fish was silenced—a Zen way of saying the question blew his mind. The fish's whole existence had been always and only in water. He had never considered an alternative.

The secular world acts as if it's mainly (or only) Christians who have unexamined assumptions or who are unwilling to question their assumptions. In fact, this is how most people operate no matter what their worldview is.

4. *No worldview is totally open-minded; every worldview forces some narrowing of the mind.*

If it's total open-mindedness you're after, you've got a problem because no worldview is (or can be) completely open-minded. All worldviews make truth claims that exclude other worldviews. It's what makes a worldview a worldview.

Some worldviews try to sidestep this issue. They condemn narrow-mindedness and at the same time say, "The Truth is that there is no truth." Their worldview assumption alone is seen as right; any viewpoints or worldviews that

disagree with their main assumption are obviously and horribly ignorant or wrong.

One of the surest indicators that you're in worldview conflict is when someone hints or says, "But that's absurd!" When someone says this, pay close attention to how that person's worldview assumptions are being revealed.

A hundred years ago, in our culture, most people believed that you could be neutral or objective regarding worldview and use reason to get to the ultimate truth of things. That's a myth. Everyone is biased, whether that bias comes from the influence of our culture, how we're brought up, our friends, or the sin that harasses and deceives us. Everyone has an angle, an axe to grind, an agenda to promote.

This principle resounds in college classrooms. Professors often project an aura of neutrality and objectivity on worldview issues, as if they were above bias and prejudice. But rest assured, professors have not escaped the human condition. They operate out of one worldview or another, whether they admit it publicly or not.

This principle also applies in human relationships. Since nobody can be totally open-minded, the best any of us can do is try to be aware of our own worldview assumptions, to be honest with others about where we're coming from, and to be willing to respectfully listen to others' point of view. By doing so we can sharpen our own understanding, learn something new, and perhaps even make corrections.

In short, it's not just the Bible that demands allegiance to truth to the exclusion of other worldviews. All worldviews draw lines. All worldviews have "fundamentalist" exclusion factors working.

5. *Every worldview has strict and inflexible rules, or absolutes, that must never be broken.*

Normally when Christians speak of absolutes, they are speaking of moral absolutes such as "Thou shalt not steal"

(biblically speaking, the imperative "Thou shalt not" is a good indicator that a moral absolute is coming). When I talk about absolutes here, I'm talking about the foundational assumptions and internal logic that govern a particular worldview.

Absolutes—the strict, inflexible rules of each worldview—must be obeyed without fail. They are revealed in superstitions and daily rituals, in religious rulings or secular laws, in a general sense of moral propriety, in philosophical ideas, in discussions of what we can and can't "know," in definitions of important words, in taboos, or in mockery and ridicule. Absolutes are unmistakably present in *every* worldview.

And so it's not just Christian, Muslim, or Hindu fundamentalists who have strict, inflexible rules. No worldview is value- or rule-free. All worldviews expect their rules to be followed, period.

Cutting Through All the Blah, Blah, Blah

With so many worldviews, so many voices, so many answers, so much spiritual chatter in our world, the choices are dizzying. Each worldview says something it considers profoundly true about the way things are. How on earth can we cut through all the verbiage and make sense of all these competing claims?

Just trying to establish a beginning point presents problems. The idea of worldview, and the worldviews themselves, can be sliced and diced in many ways. Nobody approaches the task with perfect neutrality.

Even so, it might not be as hard as it seems. Despite the uncountable worldview possibilities, all the worldview variations from whatever country,

philosophy, or religion can be boiled down to just a few basic variations.

If that sounds too simplistic, that's okay. I'm *trying* to simplify. I admit that what I'm about to show you is just one way of looking at worldviews. It might not be the best way. But at least it's a start, something you can get your mind around.

Naming the Worldview Animals

We're going to take the thousands of worldview "animals" and sort them into six basic classifications. If you can master these six—and it's easy to do—you'll be able to go anywhere in the wild world and quickly know the general worldview you're dealing with.

Here's the beauty of this approach: If it walks like a duck and talks like a duck . . . it's not likely to be a rhinoceros. You don't have to know all the technical Latin and Greek names for things. Just learn the basic characteristics and you'll be good to go.

A little caveat: I realize that the (hopefully) clever nicknames I'm giving the other worldviews here could seem unfair and pejorative. If you feel that way, I understand where you're coming from, and that's okay. Instead of taking mine, you can use the academic names or make up your own names for them. The point is to find words that work for you—terms that you can remember, that trigger associations in your mind about the distinctives of that particular worldview, and that give you a way of talking about it with other people who may or may not have a philosophical or theological background. If you can put these big ideas on your own lips, even if they're not in the formal terminology, you'll gain confidence and understanding.

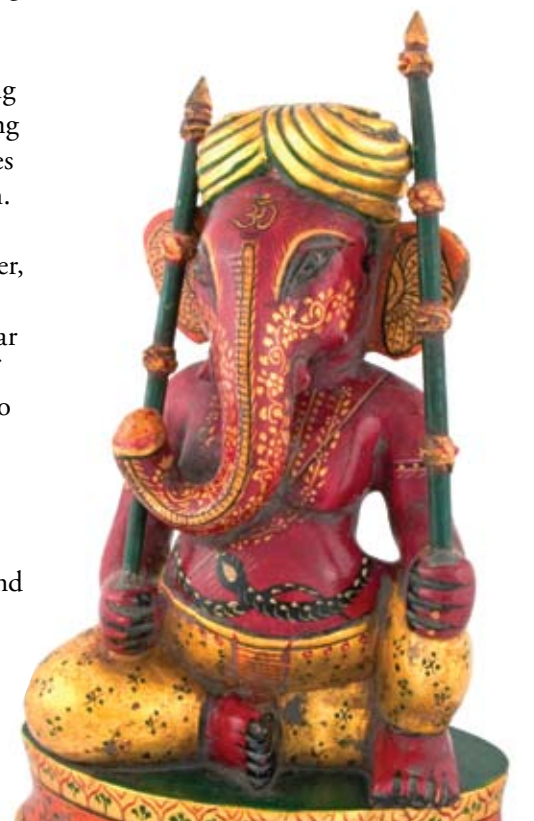
The Haunted Worldview

The Haunted Worldview is the deep

structure behind most ancient religions. There are two basic ideas. (1) All things around us (rocks, hills, rivers, trees, animals, weather, sun, moon . . . rhododendrons, etc.) are animated by spirit beings. (2) There are gods or spirits, some of whom have major powers, who at any time might appear in the world. As best as the ancients could tell, the world was full of moody, capricious spirits who could quickly ruin your life. Religion—sometimes worshiping and hoping for the best, sometimes sacrificing just to get the gods off your back—was what people used to cope.

In academia, this outlook is known as *polytheism*, *animism*, *spiritism*, *paganism*, and *neopaganism*. On your xBox, you might have come across it in *World of Warcraft* or *Final Fantasy*.

For some examples, think Greek and Roman mythology, the Gilgamesh Epic, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, African pre-Islamic or pre-Christian tribal religions, the Aztecs, Mayas, and other pre-Columbian peoples,

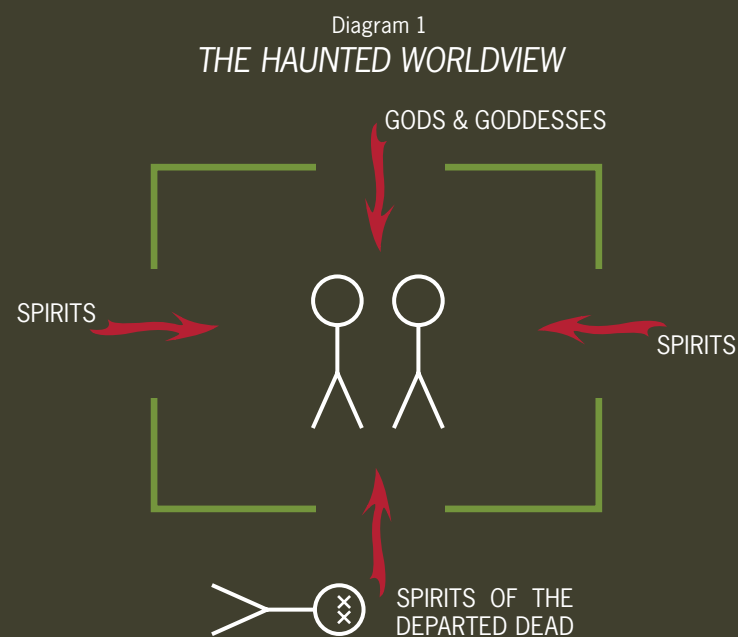




the Australian aborigines, and the religions in Europe and Asia before European expansion. For modern expressions, think Wicca, neopaganism, and witchcraft (spells and incantations to spirits to achieve certain effects).

In diagram 1, and the diagrams for the other worldviews, the stick figures in the center represent people like you and me—intelligent observers of their environment trying to figure things out. The rectangular box represents the physical world we experience every day. Notice the gaps: the material world surrounding has portals or windows into the supernatural, gates into the spiritual realm. Notice, too, that the figures have no arms or faces—this has no significance but does symbolize my inability to draw.

The figure lying down with X's in its eyes represents the brute fact of death. We empathize with the ancients because we experience the same thing—the loss of loved ones and the knowledge that we, too, will die. Like us, the ancients



wondered what goes on beyond the grave. They believed the dead went to a place in or under the earth, kind of like a cave, a prison house where people were punished or kept in a semicomatose state.

Here are some characteristic sayings or attitudes connected to the Haunted Worldview:

- It doesn't matter what you believe or what spiritual path you take, as long as you experience something powerful that works for you.
- You can get valid spiritual guidance from astrologers, fortunetellers, psychics, and mediums (those who seek to contact the departed dead).
- It is important to get in touch with the spirits in trees, rivers, hills, and sacred places.

The Biblical Worldview

The Biblical Worldview is God's self-revelation. It includes Christian faith, but it also includes God's revelation to the Jews prior to Christianity, since as the apostle Paul states in Romans 9—11, Christians have been grafted onto the root of Judaism.

The Biblical Worldview provides the core on which authentic Christian faith is based. This has been imperfectly perceived and somewhat diversely interpreted in Christian history, but it is well stated in the Apostles' Creed (Google this if you don't know it) and in the doctrine of the Trinity (the eternal God has always existed as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit).

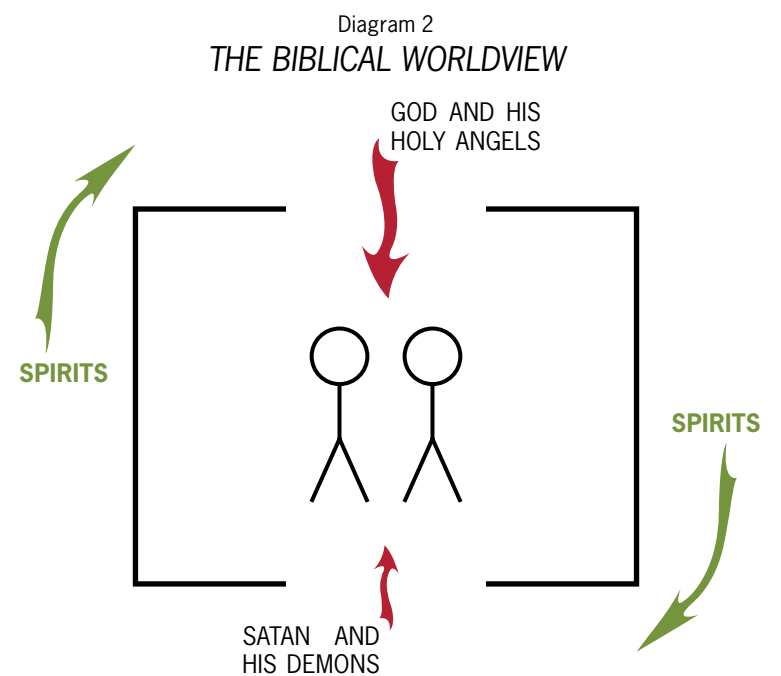
Both the Biblical and the Haunted worldviews assume the reality of the physical and supernatural worlds. However, the Haunted Worldview urges us to try to get in touch with spiritual powers, whoever they are, including the departed dead. The Biblical Worldview says, "Get away from that ouija board! There is only one true God and he alone deserves worship. Do not trust in those other spirits."

If you look at the Bible's own story of Israel, you find that for much of biblical history Israel's sin showed itself in a proclivity to drift back to worshipping the gods of polytheistic religions surrounding them (see 2 Kings 23:4-5, 7, 10, 13).

If you look at the Biblical Worldview illustration (diagram 2)

The Biblical Worldview says, "Get away from that ouija board! There is only one true God and he alone deserves worship. Do not trust in those other spirits."

it's similar to the Haunted Worldview, except that the nature spirits do not exist and the realm of the departed dead is off limits. God and Satan are enemies, but God is the sure winner and Satan the sure loser in this spiritual conflict (see Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 14:12-15; Luke 10:18; 1 John 3:8; and Revelation 12:9). Spiritual beings that lead us toward God are angels; spiritual beings that lead us away from God are demons. Satan and the demons—who as created beings cannot exist unless God permits them to exist—have much less power, authority, or scope of activity than God (hence the small arrow).



Where in history can the Biblical Worldview be found? Obviously, it is taught in the Old and New Testaments.

Here are some characteristic sayings or attitudes connected to the Biblical Worldview:

- "Have no other gods before me" (in the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:3).

- “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.’ . . . ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Matthew 22:37-39).
- God is good. He loves you.
- “He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

The What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get Worldview

This worldview says that the physical, material, natural world—what we experience with our five senses—is the only solid reality. According to this worldview, religious and spiritual explanations or doctrines are imaginary superstitions, illusions, or wishful thinking having nothing to do with what is real or knowable. As a shortcut, we’ll refer to this view with the unwieldy but usable acronym WYSIWYG, or “whizzy-wig.”

Academic names for this worldview include *naturalism* (the idea that nature is all there is), *materialism* (the belief that the material world is all there is), and *atheism* (the belief that there is no God). *Agnosticism* (the belief that we don’t know or can’t be sure there is a God) should also be included in this category because agnostics make daily decisions as if the WYSIWYG worldview were true.

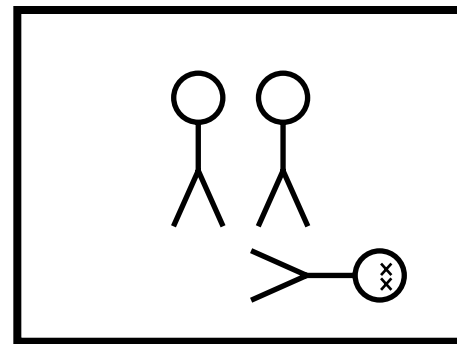
For decades the WYSIWYG worldview has been dominant in colleges and universities and among elite opinion makers.

As you look at the WYSIWYG worldview (diagram 3), the figures in the box represent people trying to make sense of their world. But this time the

box representing the physical, material, natural world is hemmed in by a solid line. The WYSIWYG worldview reduces *everything* to a closed system of physical causes and effects. Nothing real exists outside the box, neither gods, God, angels, demons, the souls of the departed dead, heaven, nor hell. This worldview is hermetically sealed against the supernatural. Even if God did a miracle in front of their eyes, these materialists would have to explain it away in naturalistic terms according to the strict, inflexible rules of their worldview—attributing the unexplainable to extra-terrestrials for example.

Notice what this worldview does to our humanity. We become mere cosmic accidents, here as a result of time, chance, and matter. When we die, that’s it. There’s no lasting meaning, purpose, or value to life.

Diagram 3
WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET



This worldview leads directly to moral relativism. Since any one person’s or culture’s perspective is as good as any other’s, there’s no way to say with compelling authority that anything is ever objectively right or wrong in all times and places. You can’t even say with authority that the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide was wrong. All we have are opinions, man-made laws, social norms, prejudices, and personal tastes and whims—any sense of universal morals, virtue, truth, or beauty are terminated.

Yet (and this is really important because it speaks to who were as human beings, marked by the image of God within us) even those who hold to this view and who believe in a Creator-free universe are often awestruck by the mystery of their existence and the world around them. They may sense that they are part of something greater than themselves that is unknowable. They may feel that life and time are incredibly valuable. They may feel that their actions have purpose because they affect those who live in the here and now and those who live on after they die. Although their worldview says there is no ultimate meaning, the image of God within them intensely yearns to give meaning to their lives.

Here are a few characteristic sayings or attitudes of the WYSIWYG worldview:

- There are absolutely no absolutes. Everything is relative.
- You can trust only what can be seen, felt, heard, tasted, or smelled through our five senses—that’s it.
- I believe in Science not religion.
- There is no Truth, only truths.
- Think globally. Act Locally. (Not really, but I felt like I should attribute this expression to someone.)

The Dueling-Yodas Worldview

In 1977, George Lucas released the first film in his *Star Wars* double trilogy. One of the heroes in *Star Wars* is the diminutive Yoda, a yogi-like master who knows the ways of the Force better than anyone else and who (for a Muppet) wields a mean light saber. Since this worldview’s nickname is in the plural, it might help to imagine a Yoda and an anti-Yoda spinning and parrying—Muppets locked in mortal combat.

Lucas intended to create a mythology for our time, an epic morality play on the battle between good and evil, on the effects of courage and compromise. To achieve his vision, Lucas introduced us to the Force, a mysterious power or energy divided between a Dark Side and an unnamed good side. In the course of the story these two sides of the Force weigh in like a teeter-totter tipping the fortunes of the protagonists.

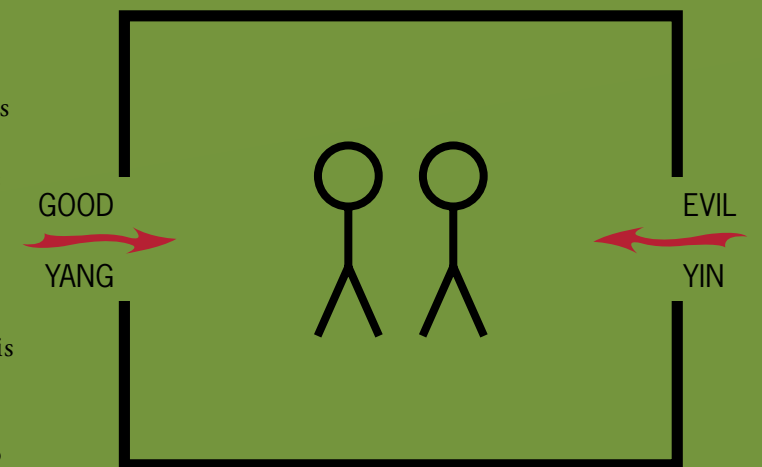
The technically correct name for this worldview is *cosmic dualism*—cosmic for vast, eternal principles; *dualism* for “two.” The chief historical example of cosmic dualism is Persian Zoroastrianism, in which the good god Ahura Mazda (or Ohrmazd) fought against the evil god Angra Maiynu (or Ahriman). Zoroastrianism was an ethical dualism because it focused on human choices. A different type of dualism is found in the Chinese religion of Taoism (also called Daoism),

which supposes an eternal, dynamic tension or balance between yin and yang.

Also, in the first four centuries after Christ, the religion of Manichaeism tried to solve the problem of evil (how can an all-powerful and good God allow suffering in the world?) by blending Christian and Zoroastrian ideas. As a result the Manichaeans rejected God’s omnipotence and elevated Satan’s status to that of an uncreated, self-existent entity equal in power to God.

The diagram of the bipolar worldview of the Dueling-Yodas (diagram 4) shows a box representing the physical world, with figures inside, and again my figures have no arms or faces. Unlike the What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get world (which rejects any transcultural moral absolutes) the Dueling-Yodas world can be seen as a moral universe, a battlefield for the constant duel between good and evil (or a tug-of-war between the forces of yin and yang). The good and evil principles may be conceived of as personal (a good god versus an evil god) or impersonal (a good force versus an evil force). Each human being must choose which side to follow; to be moral, a person must master his or her passions and make the right choices.

Diagram 4
THE DUELING YODAS WORLDVIEW



Here are some sayings and attitudes from the Dueling-Yodas Worldview:

- Two dogs are fighting within me. The one that wins is the one I feed the most (possible Native American origin).
- Train yourself to be indifferent to pleasure or pain (Stoicism).
- Humankind is caught in a no-win situation (Cynicism).



you are essentially no different from a blade of grass or that cockroach over there. All are equally God or a part of God.

Omnipresent Supergalactic Oneness

The 1995 comedy *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* opens with a parody. The head monk of an ashram somewhere in the Himalayas gets rid of Jim Carrey’s character (Ace Ventura) by telling him that he had achieved his meditation goal of “omnipresent supergalactic oneness.” The parody here is based upon the widely held belief in Hinduism and forms of Buddhism that all is one and that everything is spirit. Not to be mistaken for a distinct and personal God, whom Carrey plays in *Bruce Almighty*.

Academic names for this worldview are *pantheism* (the belief that all is God or all is spirit), *holism* (the belief that everything is connected because it is all part of the One), and *monism* (the belief that everything is one).

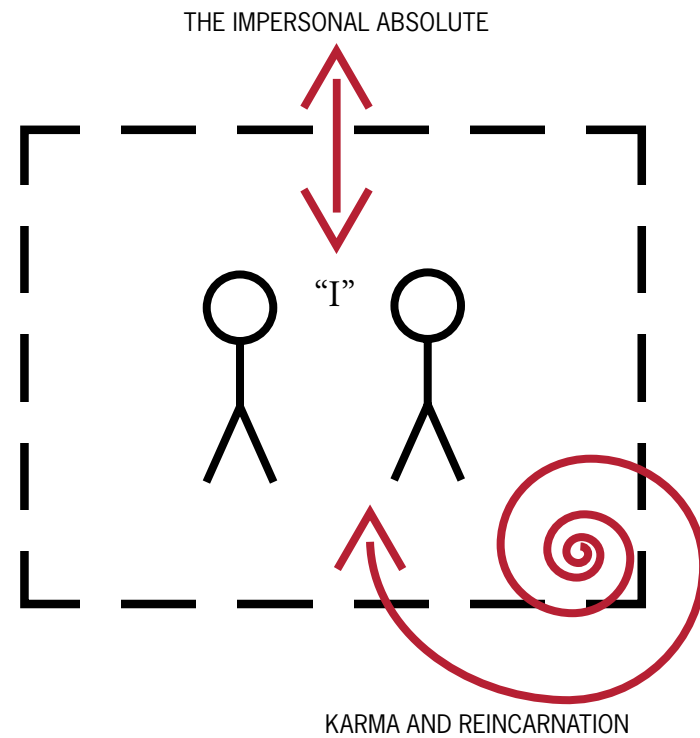
The basic monistic idea is that God and you are one. The basic biblical idea is that God alone is God and you’re not him.

Note that in the diagram (diagram 5) the lines of the box are hash marks. This represents the idea of this worldview that the physical world is only apparently real and its essence is spirit or mind. In this worldview the barrier between the physical and the spiritual is illusory. Your mind is supposed to create its own reality—the only reality that matters.

The large “I” between the stick figures represents the pantheistic idea that we are all divine, or at least we are all *part* of God. All you have to do is look within yourself to find “God.” Since according to Omnipresent Supergalactic Oneness *everything is God*, you are essentially no different from a blade of grass or that cockroach over there. All are equally God or a part of God.

The spiral swirl represents this worldview’s belief about what happens when we die: the soul is “born again” (recycled) in a new body, to live thousands or millions of lives on its way to eventual (and guaranteed) union with the One. Not every monist believes in karma and reincarnation, but on the whole this belief is characteristic among monists and pantheists.

Diagram 5
OMNIPRESENT SUPERGALACTIC ONENESS



Here are some typical sayings and attitudes of Omnipresent Supergalactic Oneness:

- You can do anything if you just believe in yourself.
- The “Christ” is already within you; you just need to realize it.
- All spiritual paths lead to the same destination.
- What goes around comes around (referring to karma and reincarnation).

Designer Religion

A lot of people today do not consider themselves to be a part of any organized religion or thought-out philosophy. They like to pull from various traditions and come up with a religion of their own. It’s known by various names: *religious syncretism*, *the New Age movement*, *the Age of Aquarius*, *new religions*, and *a new religious consciousness*. I call it Designer Religion.

As the absence of a diagram 6 illustrates, this worldview is whatever you want it to be. Here you can worship an earthworm, believe your dog embodies the departed soul of Abraham



Lincoln and still attend a church service on Sunday. Designer Religionists cobble together different religions, philosophies, and whims into personally customized spiritualities. The result is full of different kinds of religious, scientific, pseudoscientific, psychological, philosophical, and spiritual babble that may be incompatible with each other. It’s like going to a cafeteria with an all-you-can-eat buffet and being offered dishes like Sweet-and-Sour Kraut and Egg-Foo Schnitzel.

Designer Religion is actually not a separate worldview category but a faux worldview because, as a matter of fact, if you’re into Designer Religion, you cannot avoid “camping” in the Haunted, the Dueling-Yodas, or the Omnipresent Supergalactic worldview. As you bring in diverse ideas and spiritual practices, you’re basically making them fit into your main preferred worldview.

One big attraction of Designer Religion, aside from the benefit of being able to think of oneself as rather creative

and cosmopolitan, is *no guilt*. Since you are customizing your own religion to suit yourself, there are no more outside constraints—you can do whatever you want.

Here are some characteristic sayings and attitudes of this pseudo worldview:

- I’m not into organized religion.
- I’m spiritual, not religious.
- Whatever works for you.
- As long as it doesn’t hurt anybody . . .

Note: Islam claims to be the true version of monotheism. And if you look at it superficially, Islam does appear to be a little like the monotheism of the Old and New Testaments. However, Islam rejects so many key affirmations of the Biblical Worldview that it cannot properly be included in that worldview, though it borrows much from it. We therefore

need to place Islam here, as a Designer Religion, that is, as a version—and distortion—of the Biblical Worldview.

A Six-Pack Is All You Need

That's it—six are all you need. And the great thing about this six-pack of worldviews is this: you don't have to spend years studying religion and philosophy to know where people are coming from. Now you can unlock the secrets of every philosophy, religion, or worldview perspective that comes your way! No matter what the situation, you'll be able to start breaking things down.

In every new class, you'll be thinking, *What is this teacher's worldview?* For the books you'll read, you'll be wondering, *What worldview is this author trying to get across?* When you see a film, you'll wonder, *What worldview is this movie promoting?* When you listen to music, you'll ask yourself, *Which worldview is this group fronting for?* When you watch or read or listen to the media, your antennae will be out: *Which worldview?* And when you're talking to your friends or co-workers, you will have a much better idea of what they're talking about.

In the marketplace of ideas, one of the most powerful things we can do for the gospel is to bring these worldview assumptions into the light of day, point out that they are in fact assumptions and not settled facts, set those assumptions side by side with God's truth and the basic assertions of the Biblical Worldview, and then let the Holy Spirit do his work in people's minds and hearts.

In fact, *only in the Biblical Worldview does it make sense to say:*

- that God is not silent or indifferent to us but has communicated clearly to us through nature, the history and prophets of Israel, the promise of the Messiah and fulfillment in Christ, the giving of the Holy Spirit, the Bible, and the church
- that we are created in God's image and therefore we (men and women of whatever caste, tribe, or social standing) have innate dignity, value, and worth
- that social justice is important because it is important to God
- that God *loves you* and proved it by sending his Son to die for you on the cross to purchase forgiveness for your sins and eternal salvation
- that because God has forgiven us in Christ we have the power to forgive others
- that our lives have ultimate meaning and purpose
- that God guarantees that Truth exists and is knowable by us (at least in part)

- that God can wipe away our tears and we can have victory over death through Christ's resurrection

These are not idle talking points. They speak powerfully to our deepest needs as human beings. Small wonder that wherever in the world the gospel is preached—even where there is great persecution—people respond. Compared to the alternatives, the Biblical Worldview has no comparisons.

The Image Is Everything

To maintain that the Biblical Worldview is the best for explaining our humanity and our place in the universe does not mean that everything about the other worldviews is wrong. In fact, there are some significant areas of agreement between the Biblical and the other worldviews. These areas of agreement are based upon the fact that all of us were created by God.

Despite all the differences in culture, language, history, and ethnicities, we all share a common human experience rooted in the fact that each of us is created in God's image. That image of God in each of us produces a yearning for truth, goodness, justice, nobility, worth, belonging, and many other basic things. When we tap into the image of God in ourselves and in other people, when we can relate to them as one human being to another, God can work through us in amazing ways.

Quiz Show

A benefit of understanding the major worldviews is that it makes at least some of those perennially difficult questions, whether from hard skeptics or honest inquirers (or ourselves), easier to respond to.

Let's take just one example. One of the Big Questions that comes up in spiritual conversations is, how could a good God allow such massive suffering in the world? The further development of the question is this: because of innocent suffering, God cannot be both all good and all powerful. You have to give up something. Either God has to get weaker or God must become less good.

Now, if the only resources you have to answer this question are from within the Biblical Worldview, it's a hard question. But let's compare how the problem of innocent suffering plays out in the other worldviews.

In naturalism, some innocents may suffer, but it has nothing to do with God. It's just their dumb, bad luck.

In paganism, innocents suffer because wittingly or unwittingly they got on the gods' bad side. Again, they're plain out of luck.

In pantheism, with karma and reincarnation, there is no possibility of innocent suffering. Your suffering in this life is exactly proportionate to your wrongdoing in your previous life or lives. You're getting exactly what you deserve, no more and no less.

In cosmic dualism, suffering is an illusion; the real evil is the unenlightened way you perceive the world.

Within Designer Religion, you're making things up according to one of the other spiritual camps, so no new insight can be forthcoming from that perspective.

So the *only* reason that innocent suffering is a problem within the Biblical Worldview is the tension between these two equally important ideas: God's loving goodness and God's great power. Within this context, we can see that the biblical answer affirms that there is such a thing as innocent suffering. It's not that we bring it all on ourselves or that it's not real or that it's all in our mind but that most suffering comes about because God loves us enough to give us moral freedom and real choices on how we are going to act. Nor does God watch from afar, aloof from our suffering, but has participated in it by becoming a man and becoming vulnerable to human sin, to the point of suffering on the cross for us. The

biblical answer doesn't whitewash the problem and provides a much more satisfying intellectual framework for grappling with evil than any of the other worldviews.

How to Talk to Absolutely Anybody

Once you've internalized these worldview concepts, you'll be able to engage in spiritual conversations with a great deal more confidence. You'll be ready to apply the following principles in sharing your faith.

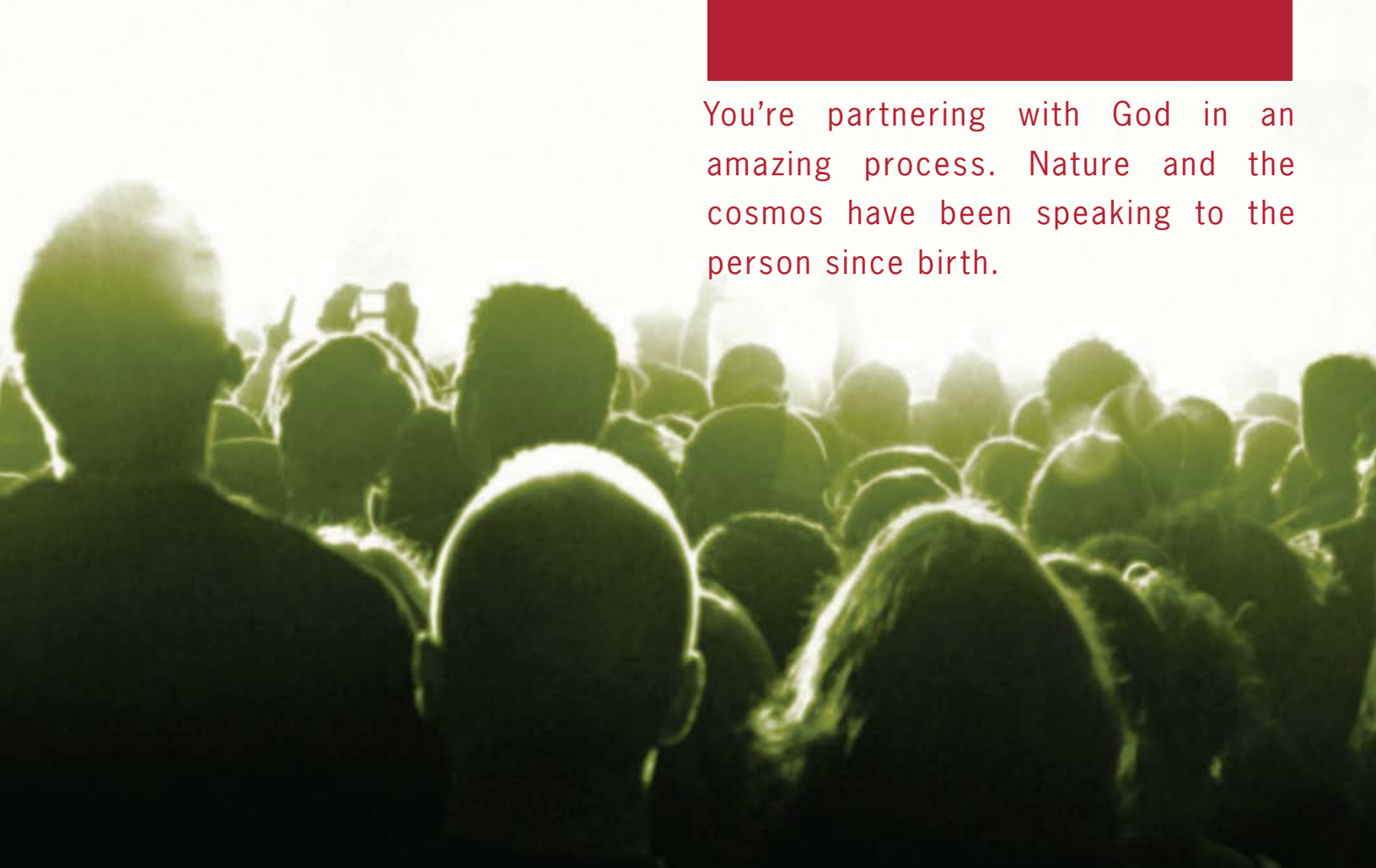
- Realize that we are all made up of stories that are important to God. By showing interest in others' stories, we're entering into the Great Conversation about what's real and important. We're also honoring others and God's image in them.
- Learn the art of conversation as gentle, genuine curiosity in others. And learn the value of small talk. Small talk creates space in conversation to share the big hope within you (1 Peter 3:15).
- Becoming a fascinating person means getting other people to talk about what interests them! If we have the right attitude, we can learn something from just about anyone.
- In conversations, be alert to the worldview opinions people have—however and whenever those opinions are expressed. The objective is not to stock an arsenal of winning arguments to blow falsehoods out of the water or impress others with our great insights; it's to concentrate on honest and other-centered engagement. Let your knowledge of worldviews facilitate genuine conversations.
- Don't freak out if people act like non-Christians. Don't be threatened by disagreements or

misinformation about Christian faith. Don't take professions of religiousness at face value, as if that's the end of the story. And never be ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16-17) because, in the marketplace of worldviews, there's absolutely *nothing* to be ashamed of!

- Finally, do pray for people and for God's wisdom in talking to people. Do listen and try to enter into genuine back-and-forth conversation. Do offer to pray for others when they share a need in their life, as you're led by the Holy Spirit. Do know how to introduce someone to Christ in a simple and understandable way. And do give the person time to process the message of the gospel—not everybody comes to Christ at the same pace or on the same timetable.

The basic idea is that in any evangelistic encounter it's not just about you trying





You're partnering with God in an amazing process. Nature and the cosmos have been speaking to the person since birth.

to convince another person to accept the gospel. Rather, you're partnering with God in an amazing process. Nature and the cosmos have been speaking to the person since birth (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:20). God's Word, sharper than any two-edged sword, has been revealing hearts and motives (Hebrews 4:12). Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God, is the most powerful and attractive person in all of history (1 Corinthians 1:24). God uses circumstances and other people to show us our need for him.

In short, at all times God has already been at work through his Holy Spirit:

- giving us spiritual hunger and drawing us to himself (John 12:32)
- showing us our need for forgiveness (John 16:8-11)
- opening our hearts to receive the gospel (Acts 14:27; 16:14)
- enabling us to be born again (John 1:12)
- adopting us as sons and daughters into God's family (Galatians 4:5),
- regenerating our spirits (Titus 3:5)
- giving us the desire to serve God (2 Thessalonians 1:11)
- empowering us (Acts 1:8)
- helping us to pray (Romans 8:26)

And God's doing these things not just for us but for others, too.

God's Holy Spirit is the ultimate persuader and enabler. Therefore, an essential part of decoding a person's worldview is depending on the Holy Spirit. When we do that, we can trust that God is using us as we talk with confidence to absolutely anybody.

Bayard Taylor spent four years on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ at Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois). He's participated in several short-term cross-cultural missions projects (Chicago's inner city, Poland, India, a country in the Middle East, and Albania); earned a master of divinity degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; and served a stint as a biblical and theological editor for a Christian publishing house. The author of *Blah, Blah, Blah: Making Sense of the World's Spiritual Chatter* (Bethany House) and the accompanying website blahblahbook.com, he's taught worldviews for CRU movements at Brown University, the University of Kentucky, and the Great Lakes Region winter conference—and he's available to come speak at your campus. He can be contacted at bayard@bayardtayloronline.com.



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