

James Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic World View Catalog*

Chapter Two:

A Universe Charged with the Grandeur of God:

Christian Theism

I. Introduction:

- Christian theism dominated the West up to the seventeenth century.
- Quarrels among theists were intramural (faith and reason, universals, freedom vs. determinism, etc).
- Most all agreed with what can be called a 'mere Christianity': triune personal God who is maker of heaven and earth, knowledge of God via divine revelation, human beings are God's unique creation, salvation in Jesus Christ, second coming, heaven and hell, etc.
- There was the Christianization of the presuppositional basis of life for the greater part of Western history.
- Contrast "Baby John" and "Baby Jane" (22)

II. The Essential Tenets of Christian Theism

A. Ultimate reality or being: God is infinite and personal (Triune), transcendent and immanent, omniscient, sovereign and good.

1. God is infinite (beyond measure, unlimited): I AM WHO I AM (Exod. 3: 14)
2. God is personal (self-reflection, self-determination)
3. God is Triune (One substance, three persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit)

"Within the one essence or substance of the Godhead we have to distinguish three 'persons' who are neither three gods on the one side, not three parts or modes of God on the other, but coequally and coeternally God."
4. God is transcendent (beyond us and our world)
5. God is immanent (He is with us)

6. God is omniscient (all-knowing; Psa. 139)
7. God is sovereign (Rules over all)
8. God is good (holiness or absolute righteousness and justice, and love or self-sacrifice and favor)

B. External reality: God created the cosmos *ex nihilo* to operate with a uniformity of natural causes in an open system.

1. God created the cosmos (universe or world) *ex nihilo* (= out of nothing, that is, not out of Himself, or out of some pre-existing matter, but simply by His spoken Word).
2. A uniformity of natural causes in an open system (= orderly but not determined).

a. The universe is orderly and designed, a “cosmos, not a chaos”.

Is. 45:18 For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens
He is the God who formed the earth and made it, He
established it and did not create it a waste place, But formed
it to be inhabited, "I am the Lord, and there is none else. Is.
45:19 "I have not spoken in secret, In some dark land; I did
not say to the offspring of Jacob, 'Seek Me in a waste place';
I, the Lord, speak righteousness Declaring things that are
upright.

b. The universe is open to God's and humanity's activity

Human beings as responsible moral agents make
fundamental choices that have real consequences; each
person has 'historical power' to shape culture and determine
the course of life).

C. Humanity: Human beings are created in the image of God and thus possess personality, self-transcendence, intelligence, morality, gregariousness and creativity.

1. The image of God (Gen. 1: 26-27)

Gen. 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make **man in Our image, according to Our likeness**; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Gen. 1:27 And **God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him**; male and female He created them. Gen. 1:28 And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

2. Personality (self-conscious, self-determination)
3. Self-transcendence (significant actions)
4. Intelligence (knowledge, reason)
5. Morality (right and wrong)
6. Gregariousness (community, esp. as male and female)
7. Creativity (imagination; Sir Phillip Sydney: To honor human creativity is to honor God, for He is the "heavenly Maker of that maker").

D. Knowledge: Human beings can know the world around them and God himself because God has built into them the capacity to do so and because he takes an active role in communicating with them.

1. Human intelligence is grounded in divine intelligence, esp. in the Logos (John 1: 1-3)
2. General revelation (through nature—Ps. 19: 1-2; Rom. 1: 19-20)

Ps. 19:1 The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Ps. 19:2 Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.

Rom. 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.
3. Special revelation (through Christ and the Bible—Exod. 3: 1-17; Deut. 6: 4-8; Psa. 119; Heb. 1: 1-3; John 1: 14; 2 Tim. 3: 16)

a. Christ

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

b. Bible

2 Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 2 Tim. 3:17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

E. Sin and redemption: Human beings were created good, but through the Fall the image of God became defaced, though not so ruined as not to be capable of restoration; through the work of Christ, God redeemed humanity and began the process of restoring people to goodness, though any given person may choose to reject that redemption.

1. Creation is very good (Gen. 1: 31)
2. Fall (sin produced autonomy and independence, alienation from God, others, nature, self)
3. Redemption via the work of Jesus Christ (Christ's life, death and resurrection providing forgiveness, eternal life; received by grace through faith)
 - a. Restoration (of the defaced image of God)
 - b. Rejection (no one is forced to receive salvation)
4. Glorification which is perfect healing and peace with God

F. Death: For each person death is either the gate to life with God and his people or the gate to eternal separation from the only thing that will ultimately fulfill human aspirations.

1. Personal extinction?
2. Reincarnation?
3. Transformed existence in heaven or hell (= the Christian view)
 - a. Heaven (with God and his people forever in a glorified state-- Rev. 4-5, 21-22)
 - b. Hell (eternally separated from God in loneliness apart from love)

G. K. Chesterton: Hell is a monument to human freedom.

G. Ethics is transcendent and is based on the character of God as good (holy and loving).

1. Human beings are moral creatures and live in subservience to moral ideals and laws that are more than cultural conventions.
2. The character of God is the standard of human morality revealed to us in moral absolutes in the Bible (10 Cs, Sermon on the Mount, St. Paul's epistles).
3. Jesus Christ is the only perfect embodiment of the moral life

H. History is linear, a meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God's purposes for humanity.

1. History is linear (it has a beginning—creation, middle—Christ's first coming, and end—Christ's second coming; history is heading toward consummation and is not circular or cyclical)
2. History is teleological and has meaning (because God is behind all events—Heb. 1: 3; Rom. 8: 28)
3. History is a form of revelation (*Heilsgeschichte*) in which God does mighty deeds and makes Himself known.

III. Conclusion:

Christian theism is a complete worldview in terms of reality, the world, humanity, knowledge, salvation, ethics, and history.

The greatness of God is the central tenet of Christian theism.

The world is “charged with the grandeur of God” (G. M. Hopkins) for there are “God adumbrations in many daily forms” (Saul Bellow).

The proper response is to love, obey and praise God through Jesus Christ.