

Living at the crossroads book review religion essay



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The book *Living at the Crossroads*, by Michael W. Goheen and Craig B. Bartholomew, provides insight into how to live a Christian life at a time in which the Christian worldview has been challenged by the tenets of what is called post-modernism. In this book, the term “worldview” is used to describe a belief system. That is, what an individual or group of individuals believes as to how and why the world functions, and what the goals of the world’s existence should be. In this way, the worldview of a social community is the way in which this group of people characteristically look outward upon the universe. Worldview is linked especially to the way people in a particular society, such as Christian society; see themselves in relation to God, humanity and the rest of the universe. Although there are different worldviews in our society today, the Christian worldview has come under increasing social pressure to change. This book provides Christians with a path towards understanding their role in society and to help us live faithfully as Christians at the crossroads.

Despite our place at the crossroads, Goheen and Bartholomew also demonstrate that Christians need to be able to remember their roots in faith. The role of the Lord Jesus Christ is to reclaim the whole world as His kingdom. This means that our faith in salvation can result in the restoration of the whole of God’s good creation on earth, and His works in Heaven. Goheen and Bartholomew tell their readers that the Gospel as it is recorded in Scripture can be seen to be as broad as creation. Since the gospel is about God’s rule over all of creation, all nations, and all of human life, therefore the mission of Jesus’ followers is also as wide as creation itself. We as Christians have therefore been engaged as witnesses to the gospel in all

of public life – business, economics, scholarship, politics, family, criminal justice, art, media – and every corner of human experience throughout the world.

The challenge, however, is that there are forces working against this role for Christians in our society today. Post-modernism, according to Goheen and Bartholomew, is a term used often in our society today. It is linked to the idea that relative truth is the prevailing issue of the day. Post-modernism says that moral and religious truth do not exist in any objective sense, that individual persons are the product of their cultures, and that we must, as a global society, reject any overarching explanation of what constitutes truth and reality. This means that the Bible should no longer be used as a guide for living our lives as Christians because of the fact that there are other people and cultures which prove that God could mean something different than what we believe. Because of this threat, God has commanded His people to organize themselves into distinct visible communities. The purpose is for giving visibility to His great Kingdom, making known the Gospel of that kingdom, and of gathering all His elect subjects. Each one of these distinctive organized communities are faithful to God represents an integral part of the visible church, and all together constitutes the universal visible church. As a whole, we need to understand our mission.

To achieve this goal, we also need to become aware of our own assumptions as Christians by reflecting on three parts of knowing the Bible, namely “(1) giving summary expression to the grand story; (2) lifting out the fundamental beliefs of that story; (3) articulating and explicating those beliefs. This is what worldview reflection is concerned to do” (Goheen and <https://assignbuster.com/living-at-the-crossroads-book-review-religion-essay/>

Bartholomew 26). By doing so, Goheen and Bartholomew state that this formula can be applied to their two narratives, the Biblical story and the Western story. This means that by looking at the story of humanity seen through the eyes of Christianity, and also seen through the eyes of Western culture, we can begin to understand what is happening at the crossroads. In understanding the differences between these two points of view, we can act to protect the Christian faith from a hostile worldview over the long term.

Goheen and Bartholomew make three distinctions between the Christian and the Western worldviews. The first distinction is that the Christian worldview is at first religious, while the Western worldview is linked to what is called rational thought. The idea of rationalism is linked to systems theory, in that there is a focus on evolution and the ways in which human society has changed over time. The Renaissance's secular humanism and the shift to a focus on science during the Enlightenment period acted to split apart the connection between the gospel and humanism. Over time, this led to a conversion of Western society from a faith in the church to a faith in reason, in that Western society believed that the world would be bettered through science and reason.

The second distinction between the Christian and the Western worldviews is that the Christian worldview is first a story, not a system. A Christian worldview demonstrates that there is a deeper meaning that can be reached through faith. As Goheen and Bartholomew write, "It certainly is true that Jesus' death is for us, but this is too narrow a version of the truth. In the biblical drama Jesus dies for the whole world, for every part of human life, for the whole nonhuman creation. The cross is an event whereby the course of

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cosmic history is settled" (56). This means that instead of focusing on the structure of society and the possibility of whether or not there is a God, like the Western worldview, the Christian worldview allows the faithful to discover meaning in life through the narrative of the Bible and its teachings.

The third distinction between the Christian and the Western worldviews is that the Christian worldview is first embodied, and then articulated, according to Goheen and Bartholomew. What this means is that we, as Christians, must first live a life of God before moving towards ministry. On an individual level in our walk with Christ, there really is only one goal: to be Christ-like. Ministry is only born out of our love for Christ and our desire to be transformed into His image. If there were no love for Christ, we would have nothing to give and would not have the staying power to finish the race. God is the Creator and Maker of all things and he so desires to manifest Himself and demonstrate how much he really loves us. As well, He is revealing Himself in new, fresh and exciting ways in these days we live in where we are presented with the challenges of living at the crossroads. It is only after understanding these ideas, however, that we as Christians can come together to articulate the work of God as a community.

Overall, this means that, as Goheen and Bartholomew note, the very core of human life is religious. This means that not only is we as human beings dependent on and related to God, but that our lives should incorporate a constant response to God and His will for humanity. It is not difficult to figure out how to accomplish this task. Goheen and Bartholomew write that " the Gospel is the message of the kingdom... The good news that Jesus announces and enacts, and that the church is commissioned to embody and

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make known, is the Gospel of the kingdom. We make a grave mistake if we ignore this, the central image of Jesus' proclamation and ministry" (2).

Through the Gospel, we can work our way towards salvation, which is the way that God will be able to reclaim His creation, namely the community of Christian faithful.

In this way, Goheen and Bartholomew demonstrate that those who do not serve God are in fact idolatrous. Western culture, with its focus on consumerism and post-structuralism, suffers from idolatry because of the fact that these people serve a leader other than God. Over the last fifty years, the development of consumerism via new methods of advertising, media, and cultural shifts has had an increasing impact on our society, and especially on those most vulnerable to influence, children. We are bombarded with images throughout the day, from television and Internet advertising to billboards and radio spots. We are encouraged to association consumption with cultural events and holidays that were formerly Christian holy days of prayer and contemplation. This intersection of consumer media in our lives has changed the ways in which we see the world, but it has also had a definitive impact on our personal habits and our spiritual health, which is why it is important to show the difference between the Western culture focus on consumer goods and the Christian focus on God's law. These changes in our global society have led to a shift towards an unhealthy move away from the message of God.

This means that we, as Christians, cannot allow those living under the Western culture have the final say on the agenda and interests of Christians today. Because of the fact that we are called to be faithful to God, we need

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to focus on God's word rather than that of those who live outside of the Christian faith. At the same time, Goheen and Bartholomew write that faithfulness to the Gospel can be very costly and that suffering can come to be the result of a missionary encounter with the idolatrous powers of society as whole. The move towards what is known as secular and rationalistic humanism in Europe and other northern regions of the world has only led to the dilution and destruction of Christianity. For this reason, the only way to ensure that Christianity is maintained is through faithfulness to the Gospel.

One of the most significant things that is pointed out by Goheen and Bartholomew is that the shift towards post-modernism and idolatry within traditionally Christian communities in Europe and other northern regions of the world has allowed for the rise of Islam. Part of the reason for this shift is due to the fact that Islam offers people a deep sense of community where religion and way of life are connected. Law is fundamentally important to the Muslim people and their community governance because it is treated as a way of being, rather than a legal or religious structure that is separate from other aspects of life and the Qur'an is its defining symbol of identity. As such, evaluation of and adherence to Islamic law has shaped the political, economic and social standards of Islamic Empires throughout history. The scope of Islam has changed because of the necessity of protecting its followers' right to practice the religion, and therefore the concept of uniting and increasing Muslim territory through Jihad, which is mentioned as the only acceptable form of warfare. In doing so, the Islamic world forced the home of Christianity to Rome, thus essentially Europeanizing the Christian faith. This

was a massive social shift, and signalled a new face of power within Europe and Asia.

At the present day, this shift is beginning to be felt on a larger scale. In order for Islamic communities to thrive and get along, they follow common rules by which they have agreed to operate, based on religious tradition alone. As noted by Goheen and Bartholomew, the Islamic political and legal system is seen as inseparable from other aspects of life, and it gives a world-view, a vision, and a set of values, and leaves enough room to work out details for different situations under the guidance of its religious leaders. The challenge is that Islam is becoming stronger because it has developed a culturalist reaction against Western cultural values. The Muslim viewpoint of the West is that it is against its own collectivist worldview, because in Western culture, individuals care nothing for those around them, and seek only for self-gratification. At the same time, Western culture is also perceived to be imposing its worldview on other societies, such as Islamic countries. The West is, in this way, linked to the idea of protecting the survival of the fittest, while Islam is linked to the idea of protecting the interests of its internal religious community.

For these reasons, Goheen and Bartholomew note that there needs to be a Christian empathy for the way in which Islam is responding to the individualist approach of Western communities. Islamic regions of the world are turning to fundamentalist practices as a way in which to balance out economic and social challenges between themselves and Western culture, and in this way restore order and justice to their communities. The fundamental challenge in the conflict between Muslim and Western thought

is therefore not so much who people are and what they believe in, but what they are perceived to be and what they represent for each other on a cultural basis. In this way, Goheen and Bartholomew suggest that Christians need to be aware of these social dynamics on a global basis, and find our own way of challenging the force of secularism which is damaging our culture. In this way, the resurgence of Islam becomes “ a prophetic challenge to Christians to recover the full dimensions of their faith” (Goheen and Bartholomew 124).

In the end, we, as Christians, need to follow the recommendations of Goheen and Bartholomew in order to develop a comprehensive approach to cultural engagement. First, we need to be able to recognize that because Jesus Christ is Creator and Redeemer of all things, our collective Christian approach to salvation can be both restorative and comprehensive. In moving toward a kingdom of God, the Church is called to witness to this comprehensive salvation. The Gospel is, in this way, the only means of transforming human life for the better.

If we do not work towards these goals in this way, Goheen and Bartholomew warn Christians that we will become a minority community in the world. Although, in remaining faithful, we may experience some degree of conflict and suffering as a community, we must understand that this will allow for restoration through God’s love. Our mission is linked to that of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Goheen and Bartholomew demonstrate that in order to complete this mission, we also need to make its goals clear to our young people who want to profess their faith through education. We must also incorporate our faith into every act or work that we do, through our

professions. This may be challenging because of the fact that, in the Western culture in which we live, the word of God may call forth opposition, conflict, and rejection. At the same time, this approach will ensure that God and his faithful will be able to work towards on the final day when the Lord returns in glory to help us all realize our eternal life with Him.