

Mapping the World of Our Mind—Part Two

World Views from Biblical Perspectives

The study of human nature has been—for much of human history—left to the scientist, the philosopher and to the cleric. Each has tried to discern what we are, how we are, and why we are, and yet not one of them has given us a means to explain the reason for our existence and the purpose of life.

Some years ago it was not uncommon to hear how some people, some who were disenchanted by what society had to offer, were out trying to “find themselves,” which is to say they were looking for some personal sense of purpose for their lives.

However, the unstated problem with this so-called journey to “self-actualization” was that if they “found” themselves, how would they know that it was “themselves” they had found.

Leaving us with the realization of how fragile our sense of purpose can be, particularly when the pursuit for life’s meaning is founded upon the assumption that the answers to questions about our existence can be found within ourselves, or that the guiding answers to explain our existence may somehow be discovered among others in the material world. A notion that clearly has its roots embedded in evolutionary thought and the reliance on the “revelatory” powers of personal psychoanalysis, which has only—by any reasonable view—fostered many false

ideas and hopes, and so we find even in modern times this idea of finding oneself has been side-tracked into the notion of “self-identifying” with imaginary ideas or people and objects around us to seemingly give purpose to our lives.

Notably, the idea of personal “identity,” and some people’s obsessive concern with it, is nothing more than a side avenue of the “finding-oneself” pursuit wherein people have taken thought about themselves in a psychoanalytic fashion—leading often to self-diagnosis—to try and explain why we are, who we are, and what we are in the absence of an instruction manual that would explain how we should use our mental mechanics to understand the purpose for humanity’s existence.

Simply, the concept of self-identification, like the idea of finding oneself, can be taken to the point where it is an admission that people do not want to believe in a creator God. Particularly when the “self” is used to explain who we are, what we are and why we are based on our own postulations, while refusing to look for something greater outside of ourselves—beyond the human capacity—to explain the meaning of life.

Yet, we discover that even those caught in the finding-oneself trap will sometimes appropriate points of Scripture in defense of their self-created conclusions in the hope that even religion would offer their quest some

nuance of validity, but such support is not actually found in the Bible.

When we reflect on this modern era, for example, we see that the pursuit for the meaning of life has been subject to human contemplation, and a clear example of this is the self-help movement that gained some popularity in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, which craftily carried forward this idea of looking within ourselves for life's answers under the guise of how to be successful in life. At times the authors of this genre of thought often borrowed verses from Scripture in an awkward manner to blur the lines between biblical teachings and self-seeking thought—to the demise of many Christian believers who could not discern the difference.

This has led, in Western civilization particularly, to a mental overcrowding and an ever-increasing desire to escape the pressures of daily living. Made plain to see in some people's obsession with sports, entertainment, politics, employment and so on—in the pursuit of happiness and fulfillment—to the point where the highest human calling may well be seen as achieving the personal status of being a celebrity.

We see similar problems now in other nations, cultures and societies that try to emulate Western ways.

However, given all this, we are brought to acknowledge an interesting point that psychology and science does indeed confirm for us, and that something is an important faculty about the nature of humanity that is compatible with the revelation of Scripture. Or, in other words, we could say that most

people are probably not aware that when science began to map the human mind, they were looking at something that would tell us more about the nature of God as they saw the nature of humankind reflected in this material world.

That is to say that in mapping the mind the science of psychology, for example, came face-to-face with the image of God.

But there was a problem.

Because human nature has become—or does become—so distorted with maladies and twisted wills, people are not able to accurately recognize and define the image of God that is to be found in humankind, nor do many people ever consider that we are in some ways a shadow of God. For it is recorded in the book of Genesis that Adam and Eve were both created in the image of God: “And God said, Let us make man in our image [resemblance], after our likeness [similar]: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Gen. 1:26-27). [Author's emphasis throughout.]

Now, some have assumed according to the Genesis account that humanity was made to look just like God in respect to the human form, and consequently it has been left to the imagination to describe what God may look like by having physical human features, but this is not what is being discussed in this part of Scripture. Because the context is one of

human nature and its capacity to have dominion in the earth, and by this context we know that this is not about having a physical material appearance that has some semblance to God.

Thus, we are brought to consider how we could bear the image of God.

The simplified conclusion is that we bear the image of God in that we are thinkers, and builders and preservers of thoughts, and we are beings who are able to take significant actions upon our thoughts in the material world—both good and bad—and it is in this way we are in the image of God, but we are not completely like God as we are all still subject to “the flesh” as stated by the Apostle Paul (Rom. 8:5-8). (It is in the image of God that we understand his singularity as a being and not as a triune God, because the Bible does confirm a multiplicity about the Creator, but not a plurality about God.)

Meaning that humankind astonishingly has similar but limited attributes of being creators like God, but we do not have the power of God or the qualities of God in terms of his knowledge and character and the ability to discern right and wrong, and as it is stated in Scripture no one will ever be exactly like God or be God.

Nevertheless, this human capacity established by being in the image of God is clearly manifest in the achievements of humankind compared to any other creature on earth, even to the point where humans attempt to create things in their own image. The most obvious example is the computer and the concept of artificial intelligence, which

allows computers to control other functions and take actions upon other things with amazing precision. They can, to some degree, even be made to resemble humans in appearance, but they cannot fully attain to the likeness of humankind. They are nothing more than agents in the service of humanity that are only a shadow of the human image.

This tells us that people do not innately possess the character likeness of their Creator, which implies that the creation was not complete for Adam and Eve when they chose to disobey God by stepping into the creative process and assuming to themselves the judgment of right and wrong. Consequently, they took upon themselves the development of their own character, while making themselves subject to the influence of an adversary—without the guidance, help and power of God. This is understood from the Creator’s own words who had determined to withhold eternal life from humankind because we are an unfinished creation, for God said: “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken” (Gen. 3:22-23).

Implying further that Adam and Eve had determined for themselves that in the use of the image of God—thinker, thought and mover—they would finish their own creation as they saw fit, rather than to accept the guidance of God.

So it has been with all of humanity since.

For we have the recorded history of humanity before us, and we are witnesses as well as recipients of that fateful decision in the Garden of Eden.

Leaving humanity to proceed forward with a self-righteous certainty about the explanation for our existence.

Now, the Apostle Paul also realized the amazing capacity of the human mind. Its ability exceeded explanation derived from simply understanding how the human brain functioned. Paul's comments show that he understood there was a "spirit" in man, and it is this spirit that imparts intellect and the capacity to think and create, and it is the possession of this spirit of humankind that allows us to be in the image of God (I Cor. 2:11).

Making us realize then that another spirit was required by gift to create in us the likeness of God, which Adam and Eve forfeited in the Garden of Eden.

Allowing us then to conclude that the image of God was created in humanity by having humankind function from the beginning as a thinker, and a builder of thoughts and a creator, but the righteous character that humans need in order to be given immortal life cannot be created instantaneously. Godly character is formed over time, as the will of humanity becomes willingly subject to God's will so that the Father can grant this immortal life to us through Jesus. Noting that the example is Jesus who came to be qualified of God to rule in the kingdom of God, and he has been given great power to intervene on behalf of the

Father in world affairs because he subjected himself to the will of God, and by consequence he works in our personal lives to qualify us to be in that same kingdom (Acts 2:14-33; Rom. 5:9; Heb. 5:8; 6:1).

So it is that humankind has discovered something about the image of God as they mapped the world of the human mind. From the materialistic point of view, they saw the image of God, but not the character qualities of God.

Understanding this helps to explain why we see the world set adrift upon a sea of varied notions and conclusions about their own existence, while also explaining why there is no innate moral compass in human nature. Which brings us to the paradox that is good and evil, and it is a paradox for humanity because people cannot explain the existence of good and evil, and by consequence they cannot explain the purpose of God in creating humanity to experience this futile existence (Rom. 8:20).

Now, in Western society, many people believe in many different things, but most find it difficult to believe all that is said in the Bible. It is, in general, contrary to what we have been taught to believe from our youth, even though some professing Christians believe that the moral foundation of Western civilized thought came from the Ten Commandments.

From a philosophical standpoint, these commandments can be viewed as the guidelines regulating human nature. They tell us what not to do, and by understanding the spiritual intent, they help us understand what

we ought to do, with the further understanding that human nature from the start pursues a course to learn, to interact, to grow, to develop and to shape itself.

The problem is that there is no built-in capacity to fully develop ourselves with the character that God intended for us to have, and so we find a law written in a book called the Bible that sets the parameters to guide human nature, but as we see in the world, human nature is in constant conflict with the law of God (Gen. 11:1-6).

It has been this way since the time of Adam and Eve.

So, today, we see from the mapping of the human mind that the world overall and the teachings of the Bible are set on a collision course with each other when it comes to explaining the purpose for our existence (Jer. 10:23). This is because the explanation of human nature is closely linked to the nature of God in theological circles, whereas science has generally set out to explain the nature of humanity in terms of the humanist point of view, and by doing so the scientific community has largely rejected the information in Scripture that explains the purpose for our creation (Rom. 1:22).

Noting also that evolutionary thought has subtly and almost imperceptibly become mixed with our everyday communication, particularly in Western media's careless matter-of-fact presentations, which influences people to accept that we are still on an evolutionary path, and consequently what the Bible would say about the purpose of life

receives little room in the psyche of the Western world.

Consequently, rather than to be like Jesus, people want to be like someone or something else, and the result has been—on a personal level—the perpetuation of family breakdown, racial strife, identity issues, and a host of other social disparities and ills, and on a national scale it has led to terrorism, war, poverty and so much more. All because people are always looking within themselves, or to each other, for the meaning of life, and so the image of God—thinker, thought and mover—creates in humanity a likeness of things imagined or a likeness of others and other things in the human character that is far from the likeness of God.

So much so that some people hysterically idolize other people, and they look to themselves and to others to determine who they are, what they are and why they are, and when it comes to faith in the word of God, even many professing Christians simply believe in the ideas that others have sold them. They also do not really look to the Bible for the explanation of their existence, and they don't really challenge the Bible to see if it contains the word of God, and if provoked over the issue they want someone else to prove it to them. Something that Scripture does not allow, because God left it to the individual to prove to himself or herself the validity of the Bible (Col 2:8).

Nevertheless, the Bible makes it clear that there is a purpose for our existence, and it is linked to our continuing creation to develop righteous character, which means that it is left

to the individual to challenge the validity of the Bible, and the explanation that it gives regarding the purpose for our existence. This is accomplished by living as God would have each person to live, and to fulfill the requirements for our reconciliation with God, and to be qualified through Jesus to inherit the kingdom of God (Rom. 2:13). 