

REECE: PERSONAL WORLDVIEW STATEMENT

Andrews University

School of Education

Personal Worldview Statement of Steven D. Reece

Pursuant to the Requirement for LEAD636: Issues In Leadership Foundations and for the
Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership

by

Steven D. Reece

April 16, 2017

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Christian Theism: My Primary Worldview	3
Utilitarian Individualism.....	4
Consumerism	4
Existentialism and Postmodernism.....	5
Application to Practice.....	5
Micah 6:8.....	6
Worldview Triad: Faith, Hope, and Charity	6
Humility	7
Stewardship	7
Conclusion	8
References Cited	9

Introduction

My worldview and values have been greatly shaped by two primary cultures: American and Polish (Eastern European). I was born and raised in Texas, so much of my worldview was shaped by freedom, new horizons and wide open spaces. Education also has played a pivotal role in the shaping of my worldview. The “Protestant work ethic” has also been ingrained into me. Much of my worldview was called into question, when I began serving as a minister in Poland. It was at this time that I was challenged by having to make changes in how I thought and how I functioned in a world unlike the one I knew. My identity and how I saw the world was redefined greatly by my experience of learning to speak and think in a new language and culture. Many of my Polish friends call me today, a “hybrid,” meaning someone, who is a blended version of two cultures. I am at home in *both* cultures, more so, than I am in either. For this reason, I have become flexible in my worldview perspectives being anchored by Christian theism, while expressing utilitarian individualism, consumerism, existentialism, and postmodernism.

Christian Theism: My Primary Worldview

My primary worldview assumption is that “God is good,” which is seen in two dimensions of his character “through holiness and through love” (Sire, 2009, p. 30). Firstly, God’s holiness “emphasizes his righteousness” and secondly, his love is directed towards “self-sacrifice and the full extension of his favor to his people” (Sire, 2009, p. 30). Furthermore as Sire (2009) points out from these two aspects of God’s character, his person, we can conclude that “there is an absolute and personal standard of righteousness . . . and second, that there is hope for humanity” (p. 31). Consequently, Sire (2009) posits, that I should live out and understand my worldview in “an attitude of humility,” so that I will not be tempted by my own desire of power (p. 281).

Utilitarian Individualism

As I noted above, I hold to a Christian theistic worldview based on what I learned from my reading of Anderson (2014). From my reading in Wilkens and Sanford (2009), I may consider another dimension of my worldview, individualism, in which I see myself “as a type of story about who [I] should be” (p. 28). Robert Bellah, et. al., propose that American individualism has two forms: “utilitarian individualism” and “expressive individualism” (as cited in, Wilkens & Sanford, 2009, p. 28). Utilitarian individualism is orientated toward “personal achievement and material success,” while it pursues “the social good,” which flows automatically from “the individual pursuit of one’s own interests” (p. 28). On the other hand, expressive individualism “worships the freedom to express our uniqueness against constraints and conventions” (p. 28). Hence for me what is fundamentally true in utilitarian individualism is that I am an individual, who seeks to change the status quo “playing by the rules,” guidelines, and traditions of a given setting.

Consumerism

Although I do not inherently express consumerism or materialism as a worldview, it is to some degree latently present within my array of worldview perspectives. Essentially consumerism is a belief that people may find satisfaction “by accumulating wealth and everything that comes with it” (Wilkens & Sanford, 2009, p. 45). Nonetheless, Wilkens and Sanford (2009) deliberate one positive aspect of consumerism: men and women are stewards of God’s creation, meaning that they “act for the benefit of creation” and must use its resources “wisely and with a view to the concerns of the owner” (p. 58). Stewards own nothing and control nothing. Stewards are only servants that have in many ways more responsibility. A steward is a servant, who is entrusted with caring for something that does not belong to her or him (e.g., Luke

13:1-9). From the understanding that I am God's steward flows the idea of stewardship based on caring and being someone, who seeks reconciliation with the Jewish people.

Existentialism and Postmodernism

In Sire (2009), existentialism is in essence is an attempt “to transcend nihilism” and “is not a full-fledged worldview” (pp. 117-118). It has two expressions: atheistic existentialism and theistic existentialism. I express a few elements of theistic existentialism in my worldview. Martin Buber was a theistic existentialist and his concepts of *I-Thou* and *I-It* distinguishes “between the two ways a person relates to reality. The *I-It* reflects the exchange of a human being with objective reality, the *I-Thou* represents a relationship in which “a subject encounters a subject” (as cited in, Sire, 2009, p. 134). The latter is a personal encounter between subjects. I connect with existential theism at this point primarily. Harold Englund secondly distinguished between two aspects of Christianity: “depersonalized,” dead orthodoxy and “personalized . . . live theistic existentialism” (as cited in, Sire, 2009, p. 135). I relate to God as a person and not according to a set of propositional truths.

I embrace postmodernism because it explains my reaction to modernism and why I have broken with my Baptist-Christian tribe. “Modernism rejects cultural particularities and seeks to absorb unique practices in something that is more universal” (Wilkens & Sanford, 2009, p. 146). I see how postmodernism can offer me as a follower of Christ Jesus a useful tool for the “appraisal of modernism” (Wilkens & Sanford, 2009, p. 149).

Application to Practice

. . . What the lives of the Prophets sought to convey: that morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings, that indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible (Heschel, 2001, par. 6).

One difficult issue that I have encountered in my work in caring for and restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland is indifference. It is not an “indifference to evil” that Rabbi Abraham Heschel has in mind; nevertheless, it is apathy or a lack of concern. I find indifference among Jews of Polish or European origins and Christians. Heschel is saying that “the task of man[kind] is to be a voice” for those who have no voice. I therefore conclude that I am to be the voice of the Jews, who were exterminated during the Shoah, as they have no voice. Consequently, I ask: Where is the concern? Who cares?

Micah 6:8

Being concerned for what God is concerned is what compels me to do what I do in leadership. I see that Micah 6:8 has become for me the key outflow of God’s holiness and love in my life. In Micah 6:8, I think that God has encoded the moral standard and behavior pattern for humanity. This pattern is characterized by acting justly, loving mercy and walking humbly before God. What does Micah 6:8 and other aspects of my worldview look like when they are applied to my life and my practice? In referring to Micah 6:8, Telushkin (2006) says that God does not require from us sacrifices or religious rituals; “rather, God’s most significant demands are justice, compassion, and humility” (p. 14).

Worldview Triad: Faith, Hope, and Charity

Related to Micah 6:8, I have encountered the work of Dr. Thom Wolf. Several years ago, I read one of his papers, in which he introduced an interesting term, he called the “J-shaped spiritual capital” (Wolf, 2010, p. 8), which grew out of the work of Theodore Malloch, a research professor at Yale University. Wolf writes that Malloch “argues that historically, the spiritual capital of Protestant business persons focuses on the three virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

That Jesus-shaped *worshipview*, says Malloch, yields a *worldview* triad of leadership discipline (faith), social compassion (charity), and persevering justice (hope)” (Wolf, 2010). Consequently Wolf further concludes that “Malloch and others see the 1990s impoverishment and implosion of the Communist empire . . . as West-wide indicators that it is time for Western societies to retrieve, restate, and revitalize the J-shaped spiritual capital of the West” (Wolf, 2010, p. 8).

Humility

I am learning to live out my Christian worldview in humility. I do not have all the answers. I strive to lead ethically in the quest of what I believe God has given me and those that I lead to do. Oftentimes, leaders do not realize and admit their limitations. I do. Academically, Morris, Brotheridge and Urbanski “argue that true humility strikes a balance between having an overly low and having an overly high opinion of the self” (as cited in, Johnson, 2012, p. 88). Rabbi Joseph Telushkin (2006) mirrors this definition of humility and says that humility is “not regarding ourselves as more important than other people” and he adds, “It implies judging ourselves not in comparison with others but in light of our capabilities” (p. 212). Paul says it this way: “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment” (Romans 12:3).

Stewardship

I am a steward, who cares for what God has entrusted me by leading others through utilizing servant and transformational leadership theories, in order to interact with Jews and others in the liminal space of a Jewish cemetery. I cannot unpack all of this sentence, but I would like to focus on one relevant aspect, which is stewardship and its influence on my work. I have learned that great leadership requires great servanthood. Servanthood means that we lead as a

servant or what is known as servant-leadership. Greenleaf simply said that a servant-leader “*is* servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 23). Greenleaf reminds us that in leading and serving within institutions, we as leaders must remain focused on those, whom we serve. What this means to me is that leadership is a “sacred trust.” It is a function that is entrusted to me by God and by those, whom I lead.

Conclusion

Wilkins and Sanford (2009) conclude that my theistic Christian worldview should be focused on knowing God, which is deeper than knowing the facts about God. My relationship with God and my knowledge of him should change me, transform me literally reshaping, “the rearrangement of [my] identity, convictions, ethics, and actions” (p. 184). I believe that this latter consideration is a key conceptual link for me and my work because my work is about transformation, literally redemption, or as Wilkins and Sanford (2009) consider that redemption contains within it “the basic idea of restoration” (p. 196). My life’s work is to restore the broken relationship between Jew and Christian “to a new condition” (Wilkins & Sanford, 2009, p. 196). What will this “new condition” look like? I do not know. What I am learning however at this point is that the work of restoration is a process and not a product.

References Cited

- Anderson, J. N. (2014). *What's your worldview?: An interactive approach to life's big questions*. Wheaton: Crossway.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (2002). Essentials of servant-leadership. In L. C. Spears & M. Lawrence (Eds.), *Focus on leadership: Servant-leadership for the twenty-first century* (pp. 19-25): J Wiley & Sons.
- Heschel, A. J. (2001, September 8, 2001). The reasons for my involvement in the Peace Movement. Retrieved from <https://theshalomcenter.org/node/61>
- Johnson, C. E. (2012). *Meeting the ethical challenges of leadership: Casting light or shadow*. United States of America: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Sire, J. W. (2009). *The universe next door: A basic worldview catalog* (5th ed.). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.
- Telushkin, J. (2006). *A Jewish code of ethics: You shall be holy* (1 ed. Vol. 1). New York: Bell Tower (Crown Publishing Group).
- Wilkens, S., & Sanford, M. L. (2009). *Hidden worldviews: Eight cultural stories that shape our lives*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic.
- Wolf, T. (2010). *Social change and development: A research template* (pp. 18). New Delhi, India: University Institute.