

### James Sire

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.

### Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton

*Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (2005, Oxford University Press).

Tenants of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

### Interview with Christian Smith

**Michael Cromartie:** *You argue that "what legitimates the religion of most youth today is not that it is the life-transformative, transcendent truth, but that it instrumentally provides mental, psychological, emotional, and social benefits that teens find useful and valuable."*

**Christian Smith:** Yes, not only for the kids but also for their parents. The instrumental good has what you might call a public health justification. If I get my kid involved religiously, he will be less likely to do drugs, he'll get better grades, and will wear his or her seat belt. And I think a lot of parents are very interested in that, quite understandably.

In the United States we have a competitive religious economy. And I think a lot of religious organizations—consciously and unconsciously—make that instrumental pitch to families: we'll be good for you. Now it's an empirical fact that religious kids are doing better. There's nothing wrong with celebrating that. But when that becomes the key legitimation of what religion is all about, then that's a whole different matter.

Based on our findings, I suggest that the de facto religious faith of the majority of American teens is "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism." God exists. God created the world. God set up some kind of moral structure. God wants me to be nice. He wants me to be pleasant, wants me to get along with people. That's teen morality. The purpose of life is to be happy and feel good, and good people go to heaven. And nearly everyone's good.

**MC:** *The god of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, you write, "is primarily a divine Creator and Law giver. He designed the universe and establishes moral law and order. But this God is not Trinitarian; he did not speak through the Torah or the prophets of Israel, was never resurrected from the dead, and does not fill and transform people through his Spirit. This God is not demanding. He actually can't be, since his job is to solve our problems and make people feel good. In short, God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist."*

**CS:** Yes, there is very little particularity in this de facto faith. It's specifically designed, so to speak, to help people who are very different to get along with each other. You don't have to get too personally involved with this God. But when there is a problem—when you need him—he will solve it as soon as you snap your fingers or ring the bell. Many teens explain their faith in these terms: "you know, there is a god out there, and when I get in trouble I think about that." The rest of the time God's irrelevant. So the deism is qualified by the therapeutic.

### Benedict XVI (interview with Peter Seewald)

**PS:** *Today, in fact, truth is regarded as far too subjective a concept for us to find therein a universally valid standard. The distinction between genuine and fake seems to have been abolished. Everything is to some extent negotiable. Is that the relativism against which you were warning so urgently?*

**B XVI:** It is obvious that the concept of truth has become suspect. Of course it is correct that it has been much abused. Intolerance and cruelty have occurred in the name of truth. To that extent people are afraid when someone says, "This is the truth", or even "I have the truth." We never have it; at best it has us. No one will dispute that one must be careful and cautious in claiming the truth. But simply to dismiss it as unattainable is really destructive.

### Paul Froese and Christopher Bader (*America's Four Gods*, Oxford, 2010)

<http://www.thearda.com/whoisyourgod>

#### The Authoritative God

What distinguishes believers in an Authoritative God is their strong conviction that God judges human behavior and sometimes acts on that judgment. Indeed, they feel that God can become very angry and is capable of meting out punishment to those who are unfaithful or ungodly.



This judgment may be leveled on a large canvas via natural disasters or on a more personal scale through illness or misfortune. Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, this is the God of the Old Testament, who became incensed with the debaucheries of Sodom and Gomorrah and threatened to destroy both cities as Abraham begged for mercy.

Believers in an Authoritative God do not focus on the judgmental aspect of God's character to the exclusion of more caring or compassionate characteristics. They are just as likely to see God as a loving Being as those with other conceptions of God. The difference is that these believers, show a greater tendency to think that God is also willing to judge and punish, and that the bad and good things that happen to us are likely of His making. As such, Americans with this perspective often view human suffering as the result of Divine Justice.

Approximately 31% of Americans believe in an Authoritative God.

### **The Benevolent God**

Like believers in the Authoritative God, believers in a Benevolent God see His handiwork everywhere. But they are less likely to think that God judges and punishes human behavior. Instead, the Benevolent God is mainly a force of positive influence in the world and is less willing to condemn individuals. Believers in this God feel that whether sinners or saints, we are all are free to call on the Benevolent God to answer our prayers in times of need.

The issue of tragedy clearly reveals an important distinction between the Authoritative and Benevolent Gods. Two people with different images of God may see signs of divine intervention in the midst of the same event, yet interpret God's actions and motivations differently.. Someone with an Authoritative view of God is more likely to believe that God either caused a bad event to happen or allowed it to happen to teach someone a lesson. Someone with a Benevolent image of God is unlikely to see God's hand in the tragedy itself. Rather, evidence of God's presence is found in stories of amazing coincidences or apparent miracles that saved people in the midst of the disaster.

Approximately 24% of Americans believe in a Benevolent God.

### **The Critical God**

Believers in a Critical God imagine a God that is judgmental of humans, but rarely acts on Earth, perhaps reserving final judgment for the afterlife.

Ethnic minorities, the poor, and the exploited often believe in a Critical God. Perhaps because those in need may not see the blessings of God in the here and now, they take comfort in the idea that God's displeasure will be felt in another life.

The Critical God appears to hold a special place in the hearts of those who are the most in need of help yet are denied assistance.

Approximately 16% of Americans believe in a Critical God.

### **The Distant God**

Believers in a Distant God view God as a cosmic force that set the laws of nature in motion and, as such, the Distant God does not really "do" things in the world or hold clear opinions about our activities or world events. In fact, believers in a Distant God may not conceive of God as an entity with human characteristics and are loathe to refer to God as a "he." When describing God, they are likely to reference objects in the natural world, like a beautiful day, a mountaintop, or a rainbow rather than a human-like figure. These believers feel that images of God in human terms are simply inadequate and represent naïve or ignorant attempts to know the unknowable.

In addition, a Distant God does not require offerings or praise and is not something that responds in a direct sense to our personal wants and desires. Nevertheless, believers in a Distant God may still be regular churchgoers and may still draw genuine inspiration and strength from the idea that a greater power exists and is essentially a force for good in the universe. How this good is realized is much more abstract than it is for believers in an Authoritative, Benevolent, or Critical God. They rarely speak of miracles or judgments in afterlife. Instead, the calming effects of meditation, contemplation and the beauty of nature are ways in which believers in a Distant God tap the positive force guiding the universe.

Approximately 24% of Americans believe in a Distant God.

### **Eric Miller (reviewing *Desiring the Kingdom* by James K.A. Smith)**

For Smith, worldview-centered education reflects a continued understanding of human beings as primarily rational creatures, moved and animated mainly by ideas. From this assumption has come a particular form of education—very much in line with the secular academy—that elevates the classroom and privileges fact, argument, and belief. To those who espouse this view, Smith poses one fundamental question in the form of a thought experiment: "What if education wasn't first and foremost about what we know, but about what we love?"

If educating is indeed about properly ordering our loves, as Smith (following Augustine) believes, then formation rather than information should become the primary end of our institutions. This presents a colossal problem for a professorate that's had its formation in the modern academy, and the modern world at large. Today's academic disciplines weren't exactly designed to get to the heart—quite the opposite, in fact. The very notion of "research," whether done by chemists or anthropologists, centers on cultivating detachment and "objectivity"; "thought," of course, requires freedom from emotion: this was the modern confidence, indeed, the modern creed.

But what has it turned out? Several generations of students-turned-professionals who have learned to love success and excellence, who climb corporate ladders with ease, and who are very good at shopping (in all forms). These are the kinds of loves that direct us away from our deepest ends; this is mis-education—missed education. And Christian institutions, Smith charges, have been complicit in this destructive, demonic project. "Could it be the case that learning a Christian perspective doesn't actually touch my desire, and that while I

might be able to think about the world from a Christian perspective, at the end of the day I love not the kingdom of God but rather the kingdom of the market?"

The kingdom of God requires a better shape and end. So what kind of schooling must we have? Smith urges an elemental shift in form from the "Christian university" to the "ecclesial college," the latter distinguished above all by an anthropology that understands that it's not the cognitive processing of information that fundamentally shapes our identities, but rather what and whom we worship. We are homo liturgicus: "desiring, imaginative animals," in Smith's formulation. "Humans are not primarily or for the most part thinkers, or even believers," he insists. "Instead, human persons—fundamentally and primordially—are lovers." And if churches are the places designed expressly to help us learn to love God, then it only follows that Christian colleges must be "intimately linked to the church and thus an extension of its practices."

**“Worldview in Medicine” Questions:**

- Where did I/do people come from? What is the purpose, if any, of humanity?
- Where am I going after death? How do I come to terms with death? What, if anything, happens after a person's brain and heart stop working?
- How does my worldview make sense of suffering? Is there any purpose to it?
- How can I possibly believe in justice in this world? Is there hope for a world of justice and peace?
- What can I know and what are the proper sources of knowledge—scientific method, history, personal experience, etc? To what authority do you appeal or submit to in your understanding of the nature of things?
- What should I believe and what must I do? What is the proper outworking of your worldview in thought and action, and how would you apply it in patient doctor interaction (such as in setting goals for health, disease, etc)?