

**Book Report:
The Universe Next Door**

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Book Report: The Universe Next Door by James W. Sire

Introduction

People are different; plain and simple. With this basic understanding it is easy to look around just about anywhere and gaze into the sea of people viewing all the diverse characteristics and walk away with a deep appreciation for the vastness of the diversity. One of the most important characteristics to consider is that aspect of how people think. This dynamic that includes all the influences, internal and external, of how people think can be summed up in the term worldview.

Worldviews are an extremely important issue when considering the effective spread of the Gospel. Understanding the worldview of the peoples that are intended to be reached is paramount in breaking through barriers and even using the contextual ideals of the people to ones advantage in the evangelistic effort. James W. Sire writes in the Universe Next Door to help in this process. This volume records many different worldviews aiding the Christian in communicating the Gospel in a contextually effective manner.

Synopsis of Contents

Sire relates that worldviews can be expressed in seven basic questions. These include; 1. What is prime reality-

the really real? 2. What is the nature of external reality? 3. What is a human being? 4. What happens to a person at death? 5. Why is it possible to know anything at all? 6. How do we know what is right and wrong? 7. What is the meaning of human history? The answers to these questions within a people group, culture, or subculture reveal that basic tenants of the held worldview. There are many sub-questions that follow these questions in determining how people evaluate their surroundings and live their life.

Sire in the following chapters dissects some of the predominant worldviews. These would include: Christian Theism, Deism, Naturalism, Nihilism, Existentialism, Eastern Pantheistic Monism, The New Age, and Post-modernism. Christian Theism includes ideas such as; God is infinite and personal, God is transcendent, God is omniscient, God is sovereign, God is good, and God is creator. Deism includes ideas such as a transcendent God created all that is but left and is not involved or personal in any fashion. Naturalism includes ideas such as that matter exists externally and is all there is. God does not exist. Secular humanism was spawned from this set of ideas and was summed up in the humanist manifesto. Nihilism is more of a feeling than a philosophy where nihilists deny the existence of anything at all. Existentialism at its most

basic level expresses the ideals of the atheist. The cosmos is composed solely of matter, but to human beings reality appears in two forms, subjective and objective. In Eastern Pantheistic Monism states that the soul of each and every human being is the soul of the cosmos. Everything is god and god is everything. The New Age movement takes ideas from Eastern Pantheism but waters down the level of commitment to make it more palpable to the Western mind. It is the "Diet Coke" of Eastern thought where a less painful method is employed to achieve meaning. Lastly Post-Modernism is difficult to grip because the ideals of post-modernism lie in the indefinite. Post-Modernism is used by so many people to focus on many different facets of cultural and intellectual life that it remains fuzzy in some of its core tenants. The primary casualty of this train of thought is the death of truth where truth lies solely in the subjective "eye of the beholder." Simply put, there is not truth.

Reader's Analysis

For anyone in any sort of ministry, the effort to know how people think is a truly valuable tool to be utilized regularly and masterfully. Just like Paul at Mars Hill in Athens, the icons, thought processes, and values of people need to be understood in order to effectively reach all

people groups. Sire does an effectual job of wading through these worldviews writing in a fashion which can be understood. The explanation of the New Age and Post-Modern worldviews can be especially helpful in dealing with the Western mind. These seem to be the most predominant worldviews rooted in western culture and society.

Sire does a excellent job of explaining each of these views in a way that is knowledgeable while still relating what he deems to be the truth; Christian Theism. In some places he is blatant and in others he is more subtle. In his conclusion he sums up why Christian Theism is the worldview that is truth and that this worldview is the only one which leads to true meaning in life. Sire relates; "To be a Christian theist is not just to have an intellectual worldview; it is to be personally committed to the infinite-personal Lord of the universe. And it leads to and examined life that is well worth living."

Conclusion

The overriding theme that can be gathered from this text is to realize the necessity for the Gospel to reach every corner of the world, but maybe more importantly than geographic exploration is the exploration of the mind and the ways in which people think. Within any given culture there can be so many way and fashions of thinking. As it

has been mentioned previously it is the duty of the Christian to be in the world but not of the world ministering effectively to all people. The Apostle Paul had a firm grip on this concept in his letter to the Corinthian Church 9:19-23:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (NASB)