

▸ 14. Is Jesus Christ Relevant Today?

from John Warwick Montgomery, “Sensible Christianity” [audio series]

Outline by Mary Kay Connolly (I.S.O.T., Spring 1991); ed. Scott L. Keith (Concordia Univ. Irvine, Fall 1996)

I. ▸ **The Attack on Enemy Territory (showing the sense in which Christ is the answer)**

- A. ▸ The central thing: positive evidence for the truth of the Gospel
- B. ▸ But often the non-Christian thinks his view is adequate.
 - 1. ▸ are certain fundamental difficulties with non-Christian positions which make it impossible for their adherents to succeed
 - 2. ▸ Francis Schaeffer and the “presuppositional approach”
 - a. ▸ must begin with a negative with non-Christian
 - i. ▸ First, show him that his position is inconsistent.
 - ii. ▸ Next, simply proclaim the Gospel to him.
- C. ▸ Why not “cut them off at the pass,” begin with irrefutable, evidence (“the positive”) for the truth of Christianity?
 - 1. ▸ We must remember that if we refute another’s viewpoint, we have *not* thereby established that our viewpoint is true.
 - a. ▸ One can conceive any number of world-views.
 - b. ▸ The only way above would be possible would be if we knew that there were only a fixed number of world-views (say 687), of which one and one only is true, then proceeded to refute 686 of them.
 - 2. ▸ But if you show that the Gospel is *true*, contradictory positions automatically fall.
 - 3. ▸ If the sceptic refuses to listen, then we can go to pointing out the illogical points of his position (“the negative”).

II. ▸ **Central purpose of this lecture: to expose the central difficulty in all non-Christian world-views**

- A. ▸ There is, in principle, no possibility of success in constructing a non-Christian world-view which can be known to be true.
 - 1. ▸ problem is *not* that the sceptic is “not trying hard enough”
 - 2. ▸ is built into the nature of things that, try as hard as he might, he *cannot* arrive at a satisfactory explanation
- B. ▸ Illustration of the underlying principle by reference to two major fields: (1) history, and, (2) ethics/law
 - 1. ▸ The non-Christian *cannot* get final solutions in either of these areas.
 - 2. ▸ The same problem would apply in other disciplines as well.
 - a. ▸ First example: the meaning of history
 - i. ▸ books: John Warwick Montgomery, *The Shape of the Past* and *Where Is History Going?*

- ii. ▶ back to 19th century, its understanding of the meaning of history
 - (1). ▶ progressivistic, confident view of life (someone even invented “a train that laid its own tracks!”)
 - (2). ▶ imagined that “understanding the whole universe” was just around the corner and that we would arrive at this understanding “under our own steam”
 - (3). ▶ Hegel’s “dialectical view” of the meaning of history
 - (a). ▶ history of the world is a history of *inevitable progress*, until we reach the final goal of “freedom”
 - (b). ▶ History consists of four world epochs (naturally, the “Germanic” epoch is the one that immediately precedes the ultimate fulfillment of history!)
 - (c). ▶ History “moves onward and upward” because ideas influence history and ideas operate “dialectically.”
 - (1). ▶ “thesis” (one idea)
 - (2). ▶ “antithesis” (its opposite)
 - (3). ▶ “synthesis” (an idea partaking of the positive elements of both); becomes new “thesis”
 - (d). ▶ History is the product of the continual refinement of ideas.
 - (e). ▶ final goal: “freedom” [whatever Hegel meant by *that?!*]
 - (4). ▶ Marx’s “materialistic view” of the meaning of history
 - (a). ▶ “I turned Hegel on his head!” (that is, instead of *ideas* being the fundamental thing, *material* things—specifically economic ones—are the key)
 - (b). ▶ upward movement of history is still inevitable, *but* is based on materialism, the economic factor
 - (1). ▶ economic theory of “surplus value”
 - (c). ▶ goal: a materialistic, classless society
 - (d). ▶ “dialectical materialism”
 - (1). ▶ “capitalists” (who control the means of production and make life difficult for those who do not control the means of production)
 - (2). ▶ “proletariat” (the workers; the only real wealth is in these people and their work)
 - (a). ▶ “You have nothing to lose but your chains!” (Marx)
 - (3). ▶ “revolution” (class warfare; see *The Communist Manifesto*)
 - (4). ▶ “temporary dictatorship of the proletariat” (will inevitably win the revolution)
 - (5). ▶ inevitably will give way to situation in which the state & law will disappear (these are present now for one reason and one reason only, *viz.*, to prevent the proletariat from rising in revolt)
- iii. ▶ Looking at all of this from perspective of today
 - (1). ▶ We are amazed at their naiveté.
 - (2). ▶ Hegel’s perspective

- (a). ▶ second half of 19th century: everything (at least outwardly) looked like progress.
 - (1). ▶ Emile Coué (although he was literally a 20th century figure):
“Every day in every way, we are becoming better and better!”
- (b). ▶ Germany becoming a major national state after years of weakness
 - (1). ▶ Prussian military caste
 - (2). ▶ 1870-71: first German victory in Europe (over France)
 - (3). ▶ “Everything’s coming up German!”
- (3). ▶ from our perspective today
 - (a). ▶ German power was an ominous foreboding of totalitarianism.
 - (1). ▶ not “freedom,” but exactly the *opposite*: slavery & death
 - (b). ▶ Hegel thought from his own perspective, was a victim of his own time & perspective – as we all are!
 - (c). ▶ are many possibilities (other than inevitable progress), however?
 - (1). ▶ Why did everybody then think that the historical process necessarily “went up?” How did they know it wasn’t “going down?” How do we know it isn’t a matter of greater and greater refinement of evil?!
 - (2). ▶ example: 2 criminals in jail together
 - (a). ▶ “thesis”: Blow up a safe.
 - (b). ▶ “antithesis”: Use a machine gun.
 - (c). ▶ “synthesis”: Use both! (the best elements of two hideous ideas)
 - (3). ▶ But in the 19th century, *everybody thought “things were going up.”*
 - (d). ▶ Darwin’s *Origin of Species*
 - (1). ▶ *New York Times* (1860): Darwin is “just telling us what we already knew.”
 - (2). ▶ Marx recognized the value of Darwin’s work for his own.
 - (a). ▶ Marx needed a scientific, biological base for his progressivistic claim that history is pushing man upward.
 - (b). ▶ Marx wanted to dedicate *Das Kapital* to Darwin and wrote to him; Darwin was horrified, denied Marx.
- (4). ▶ Hegel’s & Marx’s naiveté understandable (was connected with their time).
 - (a). ▶ Today, we don’t see the need for revolution.
 - (1). ▶ organized, powerful labor unions
 - (2). ▶ antitrust laws
 - (3). ▶ blurring of line between capital & labor
- (5). ▶ Marx naïvé in his view of human nature
 - (a). ▶ like an old American western movie
 - (1). ▶ “bad guys” in black hats (cf. Marx’s “capitalists”)
 - (2). ▶ “good guys” in white hats (cf. Marx’s “proletariat”)
 - (3). ▶ “good guys” eliminate “bad guys,” all becomes fine

- (4). ▶ realize today that it isn't so easy to distinguish "good guys" and "bad guys"—nice as that might be
- (b). ▶ Djilas, *The New Class*
 - (1). ▶ argues that under Marxism you don't get a "classless society," but rather get a new class: bureaucrats who "grind down" on everyone else, i.e., workers
 - (2). ▶ is no way to "get rid of classes"; best we seem to be able to do is replace one class with another!
- (6). ▶ basic problem: the problem of *perspective*
 - (a). ▶ *Everyone limited* to his or her own position in history.
 - (b). ▶ No one is able to "see history as a whole."
 - (c). ▶ means that no one is able to provide a universal, necessitarian philosophy of history—no matter how hard they try
 - (d). ▶ example: Hegel's naiveté: history has *not* followed a single, straight line of progression
 - (1). ▶ some things, yes (toilets, a "positive")
 - (2). ▶ some things, no (art, a "negative")
 - (3). ▶ others, the same
- iv. ▶ The inadequacy of a "statistical" approach & the need for an "outside view"
 - (1). ▶ Even if history *had* progressed in straight-line fashion, that would prove nothing about the future or what lies "up ahead!"
 - (a). ▶ We don't know what proportion of history is still in the future.
 - (1). ▶ means there is no way to be sure that past history is an "adequate statistical sampling"
 - (2). ▶ need a random sample (e.g., stew)
 - (3). ▶ but can't do that with history
 - (4). ▶ is no necessity for the line to move "onward & upward"; it could go down-up-down-up-crash!
 - (2). ▶ The "outside view"
 - (a). ▶ would be a necessary condition in knowing the future that we could get a look "from the outside in"
 - (b). ▶ Only then would we have a sufficient perspective.
 - (c). ▶ But no human can do that; it would take a *God* to do it.
 - (1). ▶ by means of a letter postmarked "Eternity" and saying, "Dear Earthling, . . ." [or]
 - (2). ▶ by coming to earth in person and telling us what history means
 - (3). ▶ *Christianity affirms exactly these two things:*
 - (a). ▶ Scripture [and]
 - (b). ▶ Jesus Christ
 - (d). ▶ the problem of a fulcrum

- (1). ▶ Archimedes: “Give me a lever long enough and a place to rest it and I can move the world!”
 - (2). ▶ but can’t move it if you are in it or on it!
 - (3). ▶ early Christians “turned the world upside down”
 - (a). ▶ How were they able to do this?
 - (b). ▶ They had a “fulcrum outside the world,” a divine perspective
 - (c). ▶ is the only way you could understand history; otherwise, you cannot.
 - (4). ▶ Tower of Babel—a classic story of the attempt to understand by rising, storming upward
 - (a). ▶ human effort
 - (b). ▶ ended up losing the ability to communicate
 - (5). ▶ philosophers’ problem
 - (a). ▶ Philosophers try hard.
 - (b). ▶ but no assurance of getting answers (limited by own perspective, caught in the “human predicament” with all the rest of us)
 - (c). ▶ L. Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus*: “Any true ethic would have to be transcendental!”
- b. ▶ Second example: Ethics & law
- i. ▶ same theme applies: Unless you have an eternal perspective, you are “up the metaphysical creek!”
 - ii. ▶ 19th century had “outgrown God”
 - (1). ▶ “legal positivism” (or “legal realism”)
 - (a). ▶ “Laws simply reflect societies.”
 - (b). ▶ Oliver Wendel Holmes: “The law is what judges declare it to be.” (“judge-made law”)
 - (2). ▶ By the 19th century, people had gotten away from the notion of eternal/ absolute law – but that was O.K. because they still thought that “everything was progressing.”
 - iii. ▶ World wars refuted this.
 - (1). ▶ Nazi Germany’s legal system depersonalized Jews!
 - (a). ▶ Jew had *no* legal protection under the law.
 - (b). ▶ six million exterminated
 - (2). ▶ At the Nuremberg war crimes trials, the International Tribunal argued for fundamental laws above and beyond the laws of individual peoples.
 - (a). ▶ were used to try the individuals
 - (b). ▶ defense argued like moderns: that laws are simply products of a society and cannot be used to try nations
 - (c). ▶ defense argued in a way similar to the “legal relativism” of Hans Kelsen or H.L.A. Hart of Oxford: “Each nation has a right to its own laws.”
 - (1). ▶ is not one single moral or political system

- (2). ▶ All are valid, relative to societies.
- iv. ▶ “Higher Law”
 - (1). ▶ Jackson at Nuremberg: “It [the Tribunal] rises above the provincial and transient.”
 - (2). ▶ We must appeal to something more basic than a society.
 - (3). ▶ problem: Where do we get these transcendent moral & legal principles?
 - (4). ▶ defense counsel: “They are the prerogatives of the victors.”
 - (5). ▶ But where is the criticism for the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?
 - (a). ▶ one of the most hideous moral acts
 - (b). ▶ Was there another way?
- v. ▶ Question of the “proper legislator”
 - (1). ▶ What would it take to provide a “proper legislator?”
 - (2). ▶ Rousseau: need for a superior intelligence, independent but involved (gods)
 - (3). ▶ same problem as we saw in the philosophy of history (need a God who sees the whole picture)
 - (a). ▶ “It would take gods to give men laws!”
 - (b). ▶ would have to be able to look over whole centuries, would need some kind of eternal vantage-point
 - (c). ▶ would mean that laws & morals would necessarily have to come from above all cultures & societies (otherwise, all men will—because of sin—write laws in their own interests.)
- 3. ▶ The God of Revelation
 - a. ▶ Holy Scripture—God gives us moral laws.
 - b. ▶ Anyone who tries to find eternal law apart from God’s revelation has the same trouble (as a philosopher of history): trying to explain history without revelation.
 - i. ▶ The problem is *not* any lack of energy.
 - ii. ▶ This is, very simply, a *logical* problem.
- C. ▶ This principle can be applied to any other area.
 - 1. ▶ One cannot rise above his own limitations.
 - 2. ▶ An invasion from outer space would be needed to reveal meaning.
 - 3. ▶ Christ is the answer.
 - 4. ▶ Objection: “But isn’t this circular reasoning?”
 - a. ▶ You need revelation to understand history.
 - b. ▶ But you know a revelation only by examining history.
 - c. ▶ So you would need a prior revelation in order to check any claimed revelation.
 - 5. ▶ Answer: But this objection is *not a sound argument*.
 - a. ▶ True, apart from revelation, one cannot understand the totality of history and arrive at a general view of the whole.

- b. ▶ But one can still investigate particular events and arrive at a valid interpretation (e.g., Lincoln was shot at Ford's Theatre).
 - c. ▶ Similarly, one can investigate the death and resurrection of Christ.
 - d. ▶ Then, can interpret Christ's death through revelation, and then understand history "in the large."
- D. ▶ Summary [Reword?]
- 1. ▶ This method is of tremendous value with the non-Christian.
 - a. ▶ The non-Christian, too, is limited by his own perspective.
 - b. ▶ He is up against a problem he cannot solve.
 - c. ▶ The non-Christian's choices:
 - i. ▶ We live in an inexplicable world.
 - ii. ▶ We can investigate the evidence.
 - iii. ▶ It is worth the non-Christian's time to investigate the evidence.
 - d. ▶ The case for Christianity
 - i. ▶ Remember Socrates' "The unexamined life is not worth living."