



*This Religion column is a regular feature written for the Gallup Independent by Gallup area residents, representing different faith communities, who share their ideas about bringing a spiritual perspective into our daily lives and community issues. For information about contributing a guest column, contact Elizabeth Hardin-Burrola at The Independent: (505) 863-6811 ext. 218 or lizreligion01@yahoo.com.*

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## A New Word

Actually, it is not all that new—it has been thrown around for a couple of decades, but it has not yet penetrated the parlance of enough of us common folks. May I try to help the cause?

The word up for discussion is “**worldview.**” My old college dictionary doesn’t list it. My computer says simply “not found.” But, oh, what an important and helpful word it is!

Actually, in my religious tradition we used a longer version for decades—“world and life view” which in turn was taken from the German word *Weltanschauung*, which translated means “a way of looking at the world.” In my undergraduate work at Calvin College, back in the 60’s, world and life view was often the heart of the classroom discussion, whether it be that of the poet or politician. But shortening it to one word is an improvement—and I am arguing for its regular usage!

We occasionally hear the term worldview in this current political season, most often to describe George Bush. It is used with a hint of negativity—that his worldview prompted our Iraqi involvement, or his religious views influence his worldview, and that is seen by some as unacceptable.

Does John Kerry, Ralph Nader, Gov. Richardson or President Shirley have a worldview? Of course. Every living human being has one, though most folks do not know it and, if they do, are lousy at articulating it.

Best described, one’s worldview addresses “first things” or the deepest questions of life: Who are we? Where did we come from? What is the purpose of life? What happens when we die? It is a comprehensive framework for one’s basic beliefs. It is cosmic, but also practical. It even influences whether or not we are going to buy potato chips at Albertsons. Our worldview shapes our values.

There are two serious errors related to a proper understanding of worldviews. First, many people, particularly secularists, think that only religious people have a worldview. And since worldview is equated with religion, and because America believes in the separation of church and state, they are often quite insistent that “religious” worldviews should be kept private. On the other hand, their “secular,” “enlightened” worldviews may be spouted anywhere.

Thus actor Christopher Reeve told a student group at Yale regarding stem cell research, “When matters of public policy are debated, *no religions should have a seat at the table.*”



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What arrogance! Reeve needs to understand that it is possible to separate church and state, but it is impossible to separate worldview (religion) from politics. His worldview and values deserve to be heard, and so do mine.

The second error happens within the religious community itself. They have been hammered so long about dividing the sacred and secular, the private and public, value and fact that they actually see the world this way. They try not to allow their faith to affect how they do business, play sports, or vote. Religious faith for these folks is personal, private, partitioned from the public square.

I see too many of my fellow Christians in this boat, with a marginalized faith too weak and flabby to influence their decisions about how to manage their money or how to educate their kids. We all run the risk of being drowned by contemporary western culture which is so often at odds with authentic Christianity.

Let me quickly note that it is easier to proclaim a “worldview” than to live out a consistent “world-do,” to borrow from the venerable Rev. Rolf Veenstra, former pastor of Rehoboth church. Thus, some humility is in order as we wrestle with our worldviews and lifestyles. But wrestle we must!

At Rehoboth Christian School, every senior takes a course called Worldviews. It is vital to their preparation for the world which they are about to enter. Come to think of it, it is a course we should offer in the evenings for adults. Anybody interested?

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