

A Brief History of the Divided Mind and Life

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Born in Northern Ireland to a wealthy Presbyterian family, Amy Carmichael (1867-1951) became one of the best-known missionaries of the first half of the twentieth century. Her ministry took her first to Japan, then to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), and finally to the Dohnavur province of India. By the time Carmichael arrived in India, the murder of widows through immolation had been legally banned as a result of the tenacious efforts of the pioneer British missionary William Carey. Yet, she was horrified to discover that ritual abortion and female infanticide was still commonly practiced. In addition, many of the young women she came to serve were still being systematically sold off as slaves to the nearby pagan temples and were being raised as cult prostitutes.

Within a few years of her arrival in India, Carmichael established a ministry to protect and shelter these girls. Although she had to suffer the persecution of various Hindu sects and the bureaucratic resistance of the British colonial government, she built an effective and dynamic ministry that was renowned for its courage and compassion. Incredibly, many of her fellow missionaries in India believed that her efforts to build an orphanage and school were “worldly activities” that distracted her from the “saving of souls.” To such accusations, she simply replied, “Souls are more or less firmly attached to bodies.”¹

The negative reaction of Amy Carmichael’s fellow missionaries towards her efforts to care for Indian women highlights a dispute that has torn the Church for over a century. Carmichael was part of the historic missionary movement that deployed hundreds of European and American missionaries to nearly every continent on earth. These missionaries succeeded in establishing millions of new churches. However, as this story illustrates, many of these missionaries believed that evangelism and “saving souls” should be the sole purpose of ministry. Efforts to offer assistance to the poor or to bring about social reform in line with biblical truth were viewed with suspicion. Such activities were seen as secular or worldly—activities that Christians should either avoid, or give low priority.

Many of these nineteenth and twentieth century missionaries were reacting against another nineteenth-century movement. Sometimes referred to as the “social gospel,” this movement abandoned the biblical teaching of human sinfulness and the need for spiritual redemption. Many of its adherents believed the Kingdom of God could be established on earth through human efforts—primarily in the form of government-sponsored programs and progressive social reforms. For those within this movement, evangelism (which they negatively referred to as “proselytizing”) was intrusive, insensitive, and ultimately unnecessary.

Amy Carmichael sought to practice a biblically balanced wholistic ministry, and in so doing, found herself in the midst of a great debate. On one side were those, like her fellow missionaries, who believed that evangelism alone should define the mission of the Church. Others no longer believed in the need for evangelism, arguing that humans were masters of their own destiny and

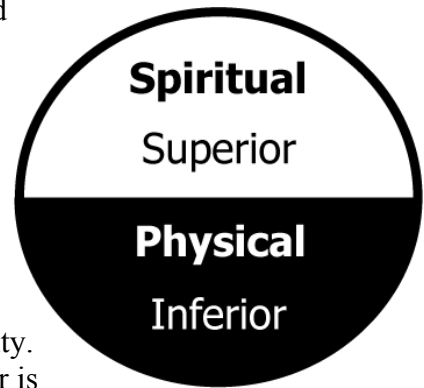
¹ George Grant, *The Micah Mandate* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House Publishing Company, 1995), p. 241.

that social reorganization held the key to establishing God’s Kingdom. The loser in this debate was the biblical vision of wholistic ministry that Amy Carmichael understood and practiced, and the ministry of the Church was gravely weakened. Fragmented, dichotomized, and ultimately unbiblical ministry efforts are still commonplace today—efforts which, in many cases, are unable to affect lasting transformation to people and nations.

An Ancient Heresy

The sacred-secular dichotomy that shapes the mindset of many Christians today is nearly as old as the church itself. Its roots can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy and to the ideas of Plato in particular. Plato divided creation into two self-existing and eternal parts: the spiritual was considered superior, while the material was inferior.

Plato’s worldview stands in direct opposition to the Hebrew worldview, which holds that nothing except God exists from all eternity. Physical matter is not eternal. It is created by God, who is spirit. And God, who is altogether good, righteous, and perfect, declares his creation to be good as well (Gen. 1:31). The Bible affirms a distinction between physical and spiritual aspects of reality. It does not, however, declare that one realm is good while the other is evil. The biblical worldview affirms that God is the Lord of all of creation, both physical and spiritual.



In the early church the blending of the Hebraic and Platonic (Greek) worldviews became known as the Gnostic heresy. Christians who fell within its grip struggled with the doctrine of the incarnation. How could a perfect, righteous God take on a disorderly, corrupt, physical body? Their belief system forced them to abandon this most central of all Christian doctrines; thus Gnosticism is rightly viewed as a heresy.

Yet, sadly, this same Gnostic view has continued to plague the church down through the centuries—and has experienced a marked revival over the past one hundred years. The fact that we must talk about “wholistic” ministry

today is a testimony to the fact that the Gnostic mindset is alive and well. What led to the reemergence of this ancient heresy, and what have been the consequences?

The Age of Reason

The roots of modern Gnosticism can be traced to eighteenth-century Europe and a period commonly referred to as the Age of Reason or the Enlightenment. The modern scientific method was perfected during this period, with remarkable results. Great mysteries of the inner workings

of the physical universe were being solved one by one with breathtaking speed. Modern science was born out of a biblical framework that affirmed creation as God's handiwork and thus worthy of exploration and study. Early scientists such as Francis Bacon, Johannes Kepler, and Sir Isaac Newton were devout Christians. They viewed their work as affirming and strengthening their biblical beliefs.

During the Enlightenment, however, an enchantment with the successes of science led to the belief that through unaided human reason man could understand the workings of the entire physical universe. Like Adam and Eve's first sin in the Garden of Eden, a prideful human confidence emerged. Man, through science and reason alone, could become like God and understand all reality.

The biblical worldview had been deeply influential in shaping European culture throughout the Middle Ages. But with the advent of the Enlightenment, it began to erode and was eventually dislodged from its prominent position. God was still the Creator and necessary "First Cause" of the universe, yet he was seen as uninvolved and irrelevant. The new worldview that was birthed during this period, known as deism, acknowledged a god who created but no longer played a role in the day-to-day functioning of the physical world. The god of deism is not lord or redeemer, because deism allows no role for the miraculous or for spiritual intervention. Prayer is unnecessary because god either cannot or will not intervene in human affairs. Many leading Enlightenment figures, including Voltaire, David Hume, and Thomas Jefferson, saw the universe as a huge, intricate machine, like a giant clock, with god serving as nothing more than the clockmaker. He made it, wound it up, and left it to run on its own.

The French Revolution (1789–1799) is emblematic of this shift in worldview. The revolutionaries sought more than political freedom; they sought to be free from God and from the narrowness and authority of the official state church.

As the Enlightenment wore on, the European mind claimed to have come of age. God was slowly banished as a superstitious holdover from the Dark Ages. "Enlightened" people had sufficient understanding of the natural world through reason and science. There was no need for spiritual reality, for gods, angels, or demons. Yet one significant problem remained. If God did not exist, how could one account for the existence of the physical universe? Every worldview, to be comprehensive, must have a creation story.

Darwin and the Rise of Naturalism

Charles Darwin, a famous British botanist, answered this question in 1859. In his classic, *The Origin of Species*, he presented a theory of ultimate origins that excluded a creator God. According to Darwin, living organisms were formed by accident and then evolved into the various creatures that exist today through an unguided process of mutation, "selection," and time. Darwin's origins theory gained acceptance in academic circles throughout Europe and America and continues to be taught in schools worldwide today.

Darwin, according to world-renowned British scientist Richard Dawkins, “made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.”² In other words, Darwin’s theory removed the need for belief in even the modest creator god of deism. As a consequence of Darwin’s theory, a new worldview shift was afoot. Deism was replaced by naturalism, which today has become the dominant worldview in the industrial West and in academic and urban centers worldwide. Naturalism (sometimes referred to as secularism, materialism, or scientism) rests on the belief that the



universe is composed of one substance and one substance only—physical matter. A spiritual or supernatural realm is either nonexistent or unknowable. The physical universe is a “closed system.” Every effect must have a natural cause. Indeed, everything can—and must—be explained through the impersonal workings, chance combinations, and interactions of matter.

In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, naturalism spread like wildfire throughout Europe, America, and around the world. It swept through universities and seminaries and came to dominate the natural sciences, law, business, and economics. As we shall see, it also had a profound and disastrous impact on the church.

Naturalism posits a strict division between facts and values. Facts are objective and publicly verifiable. Values, on the other hand, are subjective, personally constructed meanings. Science exists in the realm of fact, in the real world of the five senses—
sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. It is the world where men and women live, breathe, and exist. Religion, spiritual belief, and faith exist in the realm of the personal, subjective, and emotional. Humans learn what is true through human reason and scientific inquiry. The spiritual world is unreal or unknowable; it is the realm of subjective belief and religion; it is the realm of fantasy and make-believe. “At best,” explains one observer, “religion paints a coat of ‘value’ over the otherwise valueless ‘facts’ disclosed by science.”³ Because naturalism is the dominant worldview of the modern West, this mindset permeates nearly every area of modern life and thought.



Naturalism Impacts the Church

As deism, Darwinism, and eventually naturalism gained cultural supremacy, the church in the West was slowly pushed toward the margins of society. To retain a degree of social and cultural influence, many mainline Christian denominations attempted to accommodate these new belief

² Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: NY: Norton, 1986), p. 6.

³ John F. Haught, “The Darwinian Struggle: Catholics, Pay Attention,” *Commonwealth*, September 24, 1999, pp. 14-16.

systems, with disastrous consequences. They suppressed the distinctively supernatural, spiritual elements of the biblical worldview. New schools of theology were created to modernize Christian belief so the church could keep pace with changing times. One observer notes, “Contemporary theologians . . . [were] subject to the temptation to understand the Christian faith in light of the dogmas of the Enlightenment, rather than the Enlightenment in the light of the . . . Christian faith.”⁴

One modernizing theologian was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Influenced by naturalism’s belief that God is either unknowable or unreal, Schleiermacher did not base Christian faith on historically verifiable realities such as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Instead, he rooted Christian faith in subjective human belief. Faith in Christ became a matter of personal experience, rooted in emotional need. It was not a response to an objectively real God who exists and has communicated to mankind reliably through the Bible.⁵ Schleiermacher’s “Christianity” was little more than a spiritualized version of naturalism, in which science claims the sole authority to describe reality. In this worldview, spiritual belief is considered subjective and is “real” only if an individual believes it to be. Schleiermacher and his fellow theologians formed the beginning of a movement that drastically impacted seminaries and theological schools throughout the West. In time, as students graduated from these schools, they carried these new theological assumptions into church pulpits throughout Europe and America.

The Social Gospel

With God safely locked away in the realm of subjective belief, modern man became a master of his own destiny. For Christians, this meant that God’s kingdom could now be realized here on earth through human efforts and knowledge alone. New theologies rejected the biblical doctrine of the Fall and human sinfulness and depravity. Consequently, they downplayed the need for evangelism, repentance, and salvation.

One well-known nineteenth-century American newspaperman, Horace Greeley, spoke for many when he wrote, “The heart of man is not depraved . . . his passions do not prompt to wrong doing, and do not therefore by their actions, produce evil.” According to Greeley, “Evil flows only from social repression or subversion. Give [people] full scope, free play, a perfect and complete development, and universal happiness must be the result. . . . Create a new form of Society in which this shall be possible . . . then you will have the perfect Society; then you will have ‘the Kingdom of Heaven.’”⁶

The movement that was given birth from these beliefs came to be known as the “social gospel.” As Greeley indicated, a core tenant of the movement was the belief that evil was created by the way a society was organized, not by anything innately evil within man.

⁴ John H. Leith, *Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), p. 36.

⁵ Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), p. 7.

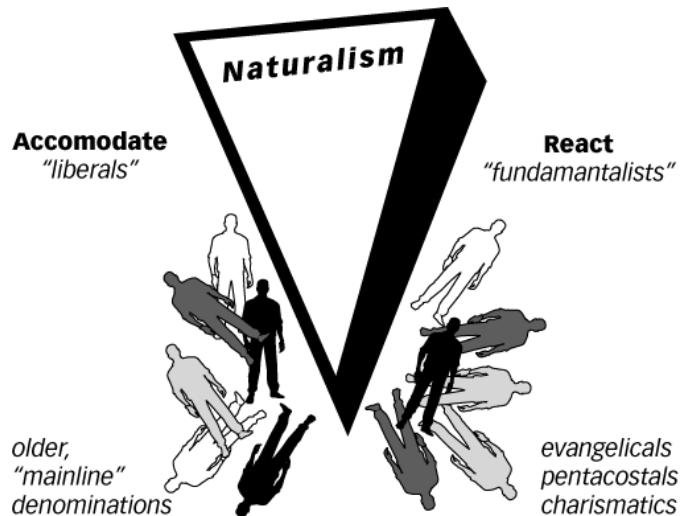
⁶ New York Courier and Enquirer, April 16, 1874, and March 5, 1874, quoted in Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992), p. 54.

The Reaction of the Fundamentalists

Such beliefs amounted to heresy in the minds of more orthodox believers, who saw such theological liberalism as directly opposed to the Bible. A countermovement known as fundamentalism was birthed. It sought to rescue the church by emphasizing the spiritual fundamentals of Scripture. It upheld the authority of the Bible as God's supernatural revelation, the incarnation of God in Jesus, and Jesus' atoning death on the cross for human sin.

Naturalism, the enemy of fundamentalism, divided reality into two categories—facts and values—with science and reason claiming the sole capacity to determine truth. Reacting against this, fundamentalists unintentionally borrowed from the ancient Gnostic heresy. Science and reason were looked upon as worldly and secular—things that Christians should avoid. Faith was pitted against reason, the spiritual against the secular. The spiritual realm—the realm of God, the Bible,

evangelism, church attendance, “fulltime Christian service,” and prayer—was seen as good. The physical or material realm was seen as lower and “worldly.” Science, human reason, politics, economics, and social action, all dominated by naturalism, were branded as secular—things to be avoided.



Impact on the World Missions Movement

The fundamentalist movement had a striking impact on global missions. At the time of the fundamentalist reaction to naturalism, hundreds of thousands of Christian missionaries were deployed from Europe and America to the farthest corners of the globe. These missionaries went with great zeal and made incredible sacrifices for the cause of Christ. Yet many were infected with a Gnostic mindset, which they passed on to indigenous believers through the churches they planted. The missionaries associated any missionary activity outside of evangelism and church planting with the Social Gospel movement. Liberal theologians taught that the kingdom of God could be achieved here and now through social action and enlightened government programs. In reaction, fundamentalist and evangelical missionaries taught that the kingdom of God was a strictly spiritual reality, important only in the afterlife.

Separating Social Action from Gospel Proclamation

To the liberal church, humans were masters of their destiny. Human wisdom, expressed through modern science, technology, and enlightened government policy, was sufficient to solve the social, political, and economic problems facing the world. God's role in human affairs was peripheral, limited, and largely irrelevant. Mankind was given responsibility by God to impact society and to conform the social order to the teachings of Christ.

The combination of theological liberalism and social universalism in the United States gave rise to massive government programs after World War II. These programs set out to eliminate poverty at home and abroad. New social policies and large government bureaucracies were created to dispense aid to the poor. It was not long, however, before it became evident that the programs were not succeeding.

The tiny island nation of Haiti provides a sobering case study. Since 1970 thousands of international governmental and nongovernmental aid programs and billions of U.S. dollars have been directed toward healing the economic, social, and spiritual wounds of Haiti's nearly ten million inhabitants. Yet, despite this massive and sustained effort, Haiti remains the most impoverished and broken nation in the Western Hemisphere.

The domestic "war on poverty" in the United States failed just as miserably. Between 1960 and 1990 billions of U.S. dollars were dispensed through welfare programs to people living in poverty. The number of people who lived below the government-established poverty line actually increased during this time period. Because of this, the American welfare system was completely overhauled in the 1990s.

Why did these well-intentioned efforts failed so miserably? Because they ignored the clear biblical teaching that we are a broken people and race. Our best knowledge, resources, and technology will not heal our brokenness. We will remain broken if our efforts do not comply with God's revelation of how we should live—in all areas of life. While the Bible affirms that human reason and the development of resources have a role in our healing, they must be combined with the understanding that humans are sinful and that complete, supernatural healing is available only through the cross of Jesus. Without that understanding, the best intentioned efforts are destined to fail.

Separating Gospel Proclamation from Social Action

While the liberal church was busily working to usher in the kingdom of God through social programs based on human wisdom, the evangelicals were busily ignoring or downplaying the physical needs of the poor and focusing almost exclusively on evangelism and church planting.

For many, "loving God" was viewed as spiritual work and "loving your neighbor" was something that happened in the secular, material world. Over the course of time, this unbiblical dichotomy led many to believe that "God's redemptive work takes place only in the spiritual realm, while the rest of the physical world is seemingly left to the Devil."⁷ If evangelicals did minister to physical needs, it was often as "bait," a means to the greater goal of evangelism.

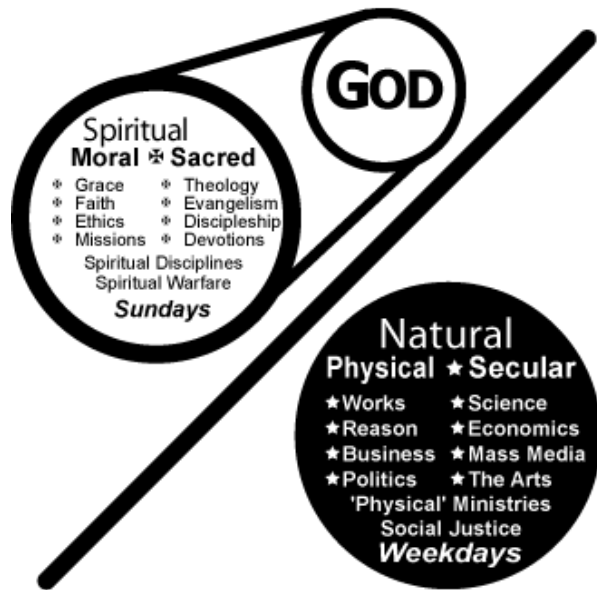
Fundamentalists were using the "lifeboat" metaphor long before it was adopted by the recent secularist lifeboaters. In *Modern Revivalism: From Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham*, William McLoughlin reports this quote by Dwight L. Moody: "I look upon this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can.'"

⁷ Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 6.

⁸Moody, a devout Christian, was used by God to accomplish great things. Yet such statements reflect an unbiblical dichotomy that places God’s interest in saving human souls ahead of his interest in redeeming the rest of creation. Evangelism is central to biblical ministry, but it is only the starting point of the process. The end goal is making disciples of all nations. This narrow, spiritual-only mindset led to a proliferation of churches around the world today that are characterized by superficiality. Many of these churches are numerically strong but culturally impotent and marginalized, making little or no impact on their surrounding society.

Consequences for Churches Today

Many contemporary Christians, because of this divided mindset, live compartmentalized lifestyles. They live in a “spiritual world” when they are involved with the church, in Bible study or prayer. The rest of the time, particularly in their vocational lives, they live in the “secular world.” This compartmentalization riddles our conversations. For example, it is not uncommon to hear Christians speak about leaving their secular jobs and entering “full-time Christian service,” presumably in a church, Christian organization, or the mission field. From this perspective, Christians who are not in full-time Christian service and are working in the secular world are second-class citizens. Believing this, they operate according to the value system of secular culture. The sad result is that God is no longer honored as Lord of all, and the influence of Christians with a biblical worldview is removed from the marketplace.



When Christians adopt the divided mindset instead of the worldview of the Bible, they lose their desire to engage the culture and therefore do not obey Christ’s command to “make disciples of all nations.” Filling the earth with the knowledge of the Lord (Isa. 11:9) is reduced to filling my heart with the knowledge of the Lord. When the church has this divided mindset, Christians no longer shape media, education, politics, or art. They no longer disciple the nations; rather, they are disciplined by the nations. They allow the prevailing trends, beliefs, and practices of the secular world to set the agenda.

We see evidence of this in churches around the world that reflect the priorities and values of the surrounding culture. In America, for example, psychology has replaced theology as the defining language in many evangelical churches, and worship is designed to help church attendees feel good about themselves rather than to magnify the character and works of God. The churches are

⁸ William McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: From Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York, NY: Ronald Press, 1959), p. 257.

often measured by the size of their buildings or the number of attendees rather than by how well they manifest the nature and character of God in a broken world or by their impact on society.

With a divided mindset, much of the church today has a muddled understanding of its mission in the world. The comprehensive nature of God’s “big agenda”—the redemption of all things that were broken at the Fall—has been lost. Never has there been a time in history when there have been more churches and more professing Christians who are making less of an impact on their surrounding cultures.

Change Is in the Air!

Yet by God’s grace this is changing. New ways of thinking are emerging to replace the weak, Gnostic theology of the preceding generation. We find evidence of this through the influential teaching of John Stott and the Lausanne Movement, which has labored mightily to show that there can be no real dichotomy between faith and good works.

Further evidence is seen through the rise of Christian relief and development. Prior to the 1950s there were virtually no evangelical relief and development organizations. Today World Vision, World Relief, World Concern, Food for the Hungry, and other similar groups provide compassionate aid to millions of people in some of the poorest nations on earth. Many churches also are rethinking their mission to the world and, in the process, rediscovering Christ’s teachings on the kingdom of God as a vision for comprehensive transformation.

We are living at a *kairos* moment in church history—a pivotal time where old paradigms are giving way and new ones are emerging. God is the Lord of history. He is actively at work in each generation and in every nation to accomplish his grand purpose of advancing his rule and reign on earth—His promise of extending the blessing of Abraham to every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Gen. 12:3). This purpose won’t be fully realized on this side of Christ’s return, yet it nevertheless provides present hope for substantial healing in all areas through the finished work of Christ.

This reading is drawn from chapter five, and the appendix of *Beyond the Sacred-Secular Divide: A Call to a Wholistic Life and Ministry*, pp. 69-71; 97-108.

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