



Written by [Fr. James Thornton](#) on December 7, 2015

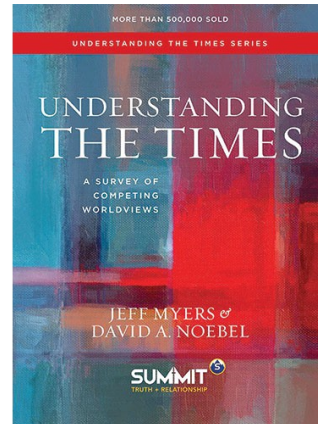
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## Controlling Culture's Currents

***Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews***, by Jeff Myers and David A. Noebel, Manitou Springs, Colorado: Summit Ministries, 2015 ed., 510 pages, hardcover.

*Understanding the Times* is an extremely impressive book that is intended to enlighten readers about the nature of the world in which we now live, from the standpoint of the ongoing battle of ideas. In this updated and expanded edition, the authors see the world as one in which six major worldviews contend with one another to win the hearts and minds of men: Secularism, Marxism, Postmodernism, New Spirituality (or "New Age"), Islam, and Christianity. There are indeed other worldviews, but these six are today the most active.



Having defined the six major competing worldviews, the authors examine each of them by dividing the principal characteristics of each worldview into 10 categories so the reader can clearly understand what these outlooks represent insofar as an individual person or a society is concerned, that is, what different ways of life they dictate or envision. Those 10 categories are as follows: theology, philosophy, ethics, biology, psychology, sociology, law, politics, economics, and history. The authors state that these are "ten ways of looking at the world."

*Theology* explains beliefs about God. *Philosophy*, coming from a Greek word meaning "love of wisdom," tells about one's view of reality. *Ethics* seeks to describe a person's behavior in accordance with his moral code. *Biology* has to do with one's view of life and how one believes life originated. *Psychology* is the study of man's mind, his inward self. *Sociology* is the study of human societies, since man is a social creature. Since man is a social creature, his actions must be governed by certain rules of conduct which we call *Laws*. *Politics* is the realm of governance including such things as the nature of government, how leaders and officials are chosen, and the limits, if any, on governmental power. Almost every man and woman is involved in *Economics*, since each person must run his household in accordance with certain procedures required in obtaining the necessities of life. That is true also on a much larger scale with communities and nations. *History* records the ways in which people in the past dealt with all of the other things we have just mentioned. Arranged in that fashion, the book makes it far less difficult to understand and compare the six outlooks on life and, since the interaction between these outlooks gives rise to much of the conflict in the world, the book helps us to comprehend the events of the world more clearly so that, should one or another triumph in some part of the world, the consequences can be anticipated.



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Now, having explained how this book is structured and the reasons it is so arranged, there is one other aspect of this work that must be understood. The authors make clear from the start that they have a bias, a bias that favors Christianity. And so, while they present fair and accurate explanations of the other worldviews, they believe that the Christian worldview is superior to the others. If nations or peoples reject the Christian worldview or drift away from it, their way of life tends to deteriorate in all of its aspects. That the authors believe that the Christian worldview is superior does not mean that they assert that any Christian society in history has ever achieved absolute perfection. There is no absolute perfection in this world.

Drawing on the information presented in the book, let us now consider how each of the six worldviews deals with one of the categories; ethics, which is the study of moral conduct, values, duties, and goodness. For each of the worldviews, I will present a brief overview mostly taken directly from the book. Please remember that the book itself gives a much more thorough analysis that is not possible within the constraints of this review.

Secularism is defined by the authors as “an atheistic and materialistic worldview that advocates for public society free from the influence of religion.” They “believe that all public considerations — education and government, primarily — must be based on materialism, the idea that only the physical world exists.” The Secularist views ethics in a variety of ways. Many Secularists believe in Moral Relativism, where morality is relative to the culture in which one lives. A variation on that theme is called Situation Ethics, in which the morality of an action is determined by the unique circumstances surrounding that action. The Secularist, say the authors, will also sometimes base his morality on Scientism, which holds that knowledge must be based solely on the scientific method and that people involved in science are more intelligent and, hence, more moral. The fallaciousness of that view is strikingly illustrated by the monstrous crimes committed under totalitarian regimes, led by men who were presumed to be superior in their intelligence, but who were anything but superior in their morals.

The Marxist view of morality is more straightforward, or perhaps I should say, more ruthlessly direct. To the Marxist, history is the record of an irresistible societal evolution in which mankind is ineluctably advancing from capitalism to socialism, and then on to communism. Whatever promotes that advance, in the Marxist view, is morally right; whatever hinders it is morally wrong. It is therefore apparent that according to this point of view even the most horrifying atrocities are morally “good,” if they serve to advance the cause of Marxism, that is, help move mankind from capitalism to socialism and then from socialism to communism.

New Spiritualists believe that, insofar as morality is concerned, one is bound only to follow one’s own understanding of truth, since there is no fixed truth. Morality does not come from God or from any other source outside of the individual. Each man or woman may thus create his own “reality,” his own “truth,” according to whatever feels right to that person. In practice, there is no real difference between the moral outlook of the Secularist and that of the New Spiritualist. In theory, however, the New Spiritualist will usually express his views of morality using mystical-sounding jargon.



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***Jeff Myers (left) and David Noebel (right)***

The advocates of Postmodernism will say that “every culture has its own set of moral standards and those standards evolve according to the dictates of the group. Abortion, for example, used to be viewed with revulsion and horror. Now it is widely accepted as distasteful but necessary.” According to traditional thought, morality is based on God’s law and so the moral code determines behavior. The Postmodernist inverts that, starting out with how one wants to behave, and then developing a theory to support that want. Moreover, in their opinion, no particular moral code is right at all times and in all places. Again, at the practical level, there is very little if any difference between Postmodernist morality and that of the Secularist. They are variations on the same theme, a theme in which God plays no part.

Muslims are required to believe that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger, to pray five times each day at prescribed times, to give alms, to fast during the month of Ramadan, and to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a lifetime. They are forbidden to drink wine (and according to some interpretations any alcoholic beverage), to eat pork or the flesh of certain other animals, to eat meat that has not been slaughtered according to Islamic regulations, and to gamble.

In addition to the foregoing, to govern their behavior, Muslims look first and foremost to their prophet Muhammad, at his life and acts. His acts, inspired by Allah according to Islamic teaching since he was the final prophet of God, determine right from wrong among conscientious Muslims. In other words, to know what is morally correct in a given situation, a Muslim looks to the example of Muhammad.

Christians believe in a God that is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. They believe that He created mankind in His own image. As man was originally created, he lived in perfect harmony with God. Man’s fall from grace in the Garden of Eden disrupted that life of harmony with God. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became incarnate and lived among us in order to end the disruption between God and man. That He did through His life, His death on the Cross, and His Resurrection. During his mission on Earth, Christ reiterated the 10 Commandments of God as the basic rule by which men must live. To those 10 He added two other commandments: A Christian must love God with his whole heart, with his whole soul, with his whole strength, and with his whole mind; and he must love his neighbor as himself. Those 12 commandments together form the foundation of Christian ethics.

Christians look also to Christ Himself as their exemplar. He is both God and man. He was and is without fault. Therefore, though Christians are imperfect creatures, they strive for perfection throughout the



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whole of their lives.

The preceding is but a very brief sample of how *Understanding the Times* explains the approach taken by the six competing worldviews in the 10 categories previously mentioned. Again, readers should remember that the book deals with all of this in great depth, while our review is by necessity only cursory.

The world has undergone immense change in the last 30 years. In the early 1980s, the question that concerned most Americans was this: Would the future be dominated by communist totalitarianism or would freedom prevail? Toward the end of the '80s, the Soviet system in Russia and Eastern Europe began to disintegrate (although the managers of that disintegration made certain that post-communist governments were still highly centralized and powerful). For a while the naïve believed that serious threats to our country and way of life no longer existed. However, what has emerged is a vastly more intricate world in which internal and external dangers to our freedoms and to our national existence have multiplied. *Understanding the Times* helps to untangle some of that complexity by bringing into sharp focus the precise nature of the worldviews that captivate so many millions today. Thus, the book is not only worth a careful reading, but after reading should remain a valuable reference resource.



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