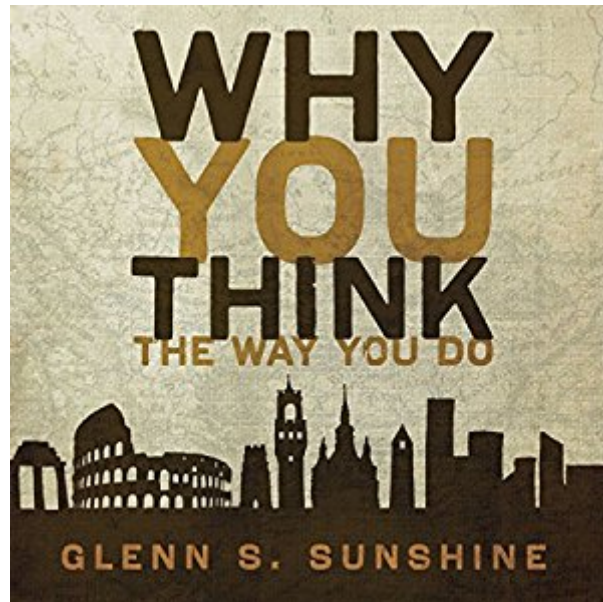


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Why You Think The Way You Do: The Story Of Western Worldviews From Rome To Home



Synopsis

This authoritative, accessible survey traces the development of the worldviews that underpin the Western world. It demonstrates how Christianity transformed pagan Roman culture into one that established virtually all the positive aspects of Western civilization. It uniquely discusses Western worldviews as a continuous narrative instead of simply cataloguing them.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

WYTTWYD is written with Dr. Sunshine's typical wit and in his usual concise style, a uniquely spare phrasing that carries the intent of the statement clearly and without resorting to academic jargon. He has produced a volume that is both refreshing in providing a clear understanding of the development of worldviews that carried Western civilization from Rome to home, and back again, I might add; and simultaneously a volume that is very disturbing in its implications because of the clarity of the arguments presented. After an introductory chapter defining worldview and the importance of the concept to an understanding of a culture, he begins with a thorough examination of the religions of the Roman Empire, and how they formed the worldviews of Rome. The resultant picture is hauntingly familiar as a precursor to the 21st Century. Subsequent chapters examine the gradual change in worldviews as a result of the Christianization of the Empire, the emergence of the Medieval period, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Modernity and finally the collapse of Modernity into Post-Modernity. The final chapter, Trajectories, clearly lays out the steps necessary for Christianity to repeat the transformation of a society in the 21st and following centuries as it did

in the 1st three. A valuable guide as a overview of the problems of our society and the needed solutions. However, Dr. Sunshine does not address the one significant difference between the 1st Century church and the 21st Century. The early church was counter-cultural from the very beginning with a powerful drive to proclaim the availability of the Kingdom of God and to live day by day in that Kingdom; the 12th Century church has assimilated with the culture, has lost its first love and seeks to maintain the status quo.

I picked this book up off the New Books display at the library because the subtitle caught my attention: The story of western worldviews from Rome to home. Thumbing through the table of contents and some of the chapters, I was intrigued by Sunshine's layout. He was discussing how worldview had shifted and evolved during major periods of world history: first the Romans, then medieval times, then the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and finally through modernity and postmodernity. I'll tell you now - Glenn's perspective and my perspective could not be further removed from one another. This does not make this a bad book. In fact, I enjoyed being challenged by some of the perspective in WYTTWYD. But I walked away from the book shaking my head. Sunshine's view of the evolution of culture in a nutshell is this: Roman culture was evil, Christianity saved it, slowly through the centuries Christian influence has waned, and in postmodernity we see a return to the evilness of Roman culture once again. The book is essentially a call for the Church to save culture once again, like it did back in Roman times. The author even goes so far as to say - twice! - that everything good in western culture was the result of Christianity. Literally no good part of western worldview came from outside the Church. That assertion is so laughable, the claim so bold, it amazes me Sunshine simply drops them into his paragraphs with no defense whatsoever. He simply believes it and expects his readers to do the same. Greek philosophy as well as Islamic thought from their golden age is discounted. The abuses of the Church during the medieval period are explained away.

The most unusual thing about this book is that, while it is written by a professor, about an academic topic, it is presented in a "popular" format. From the look and feel of the book, to its lack of bibliography and minimal footnotes, and most importantly to its easier prose and explanations, it's not what I expected at all! On the other hand, it does do something which very little contemporary thought does -- connect the dots from the beginning of the Western story to now. Sunshine explains what the Roman culture was like, how it was changed by Christian ideals, and finally how it is "changing back" as Christian influence wanes. The last chapter of the book ties this together very

well. Put all together it is a compelling story -- the great achievements of our civilization (most importantly the discovery of modern science, and human freedom) were because of Christian ideas and we are losing the foundation upon which they were built. This breaks not only the spell of Marxist anti-Western views of history, it also breaks the spell of pro-Western but anti-Christian versions of the story. Midway through the book, I was encouraged in realizing that thinkers like Sunshine and Rodney Stark who he draws on, are bringing our view of the past out of the captivity it was held in by the anti-Christian stream of the Enlightenment. This is actually what makes the best part of the book -- he casually explodes myth after myth by presenting facts that are not widely broadcast such as the fact that no scholar of the Middle Ages believed in the flat earth! The net it is present a different view of the past. The breadth of areas where Sunshine does this must have required a lot of work and insight -- it's too bad he doesn't document it and bring this up to a more academic level.

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