

“USING THE FRAMEWORK APPROACH IN TEACHING MUSLIM BACKGROUND BELIEVERS”

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I. INTRODUCTION

For those who are acquainted with what I refer to as the biblical framework approach to following out the implications of, and teaching the Word of God in our contemporary situation, this paper will be a review and update on using the framework approach cross-culturally with Muslim background believers. For those unacquainted with the framework approach, it will be an introduction and illustration of its use. Necessarily much of this paper is autobiographical in order to describe the origin, rationale, and method involved.

II. ORIGIN AND RATIONALE OF THE METHOD

A. My Situation as a pastor in the 1970s: origin of the method.

1. 1970s culture (particularly in university towns) Intellectually and socially it was a time of turmoil. It was the days of the student rebellion against the status quo. The favorite target was the Vietnam War, which required philosophical and emotional maturity as well as personal responsibility to serve one's country that all too many young people, including those from Christian homes, lacked.¹

Now we know that what was going on in the late 60s and early 70s was the explosive manifestation of something called Critical Theory that began with European Marxists after World War I and continues today, especially on American university campuses in the various “studies” departments such as women's studies, gay studies, black studies, environmental studies, etc. What today is called “Political Correctness” is actually the

¹ The hippies created the cultural identity of the baby-boomer generation that profoundly influences too much of contemporary leadership in this country. For a fascinating account of the connection between the hippie and radical student culture of the late 60s and early 70s and today's leaders, see Robert H. Bork, Slouching Toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline (New York: Harper Collins, 1996). “It is important to understand what the Sixties turmoil was about, for *the youth culture that became manifest then is the modern liberal culture of today*. . . Vietnam was more an occasion for the outbreaks than their cause. The war at most intensified into hatred a contempt for American civilization that was already in place. . . Other countries that had no involvement in the Vietnamese war, notably France, Italy, and Germany, saw serious student rebellions” (page 17, emphasis supplied); Bork provides an eyewitness record of the rebellion first hand while on the faculty of Yale Law School. It was during that time, for example, that Hillary Clinton wrote her senior thesis at Wellesley College on the radical leftist Saul Alinsky, praising him along with Eugene Debs, the perennial Socialist candidate for president, for his ideals that would result in social revolution. The Clintons have done what many baby-boomers have done to hide their Marxist worldviews—they had Wellesley College sequester the thesis during the eight years of the Clinton presidency.

outgrowth of the last century's Marxism. I hope that the lessons I learned some 30 years ago will benefit those who are presently involved in pastoral and teaching ministries.

You can trace the movement by going to sources wholly outside our fundamental Bible circles such as the Encyclopedia Britannica.² According to such sources, after World War I and the Russian revolution, Marxists became frustrated that their eschatology of global proletarian revolt wasn't coming to pass. It's a long story, but some Marxists established what came to be known as the Frankfurt School in Germany³ where they translated Marxism from economic terms into cultural terms.

There they developed what is called Critical Theory, which is their cultural version of the old Marxist eschatology of revolt.⁴ Critical theory says the way to bring about the Marxist millennium is to endlessly criticize everything about Western culture and its capitalism. Create a premillennial "tribulation" by destroying every important cultural discipline or structure—history, jurisprudence, economics, family, marriage, and education. Never offer an alternative because living this side of the future perfect society no one, including Marxists, can know enough about this future society to describe it.⁵ All that is known (and believed religiously) is that by creating a tribulation, the kingdom can come. And to Marx they added Freud. One of their central spokesman, Herbert Marcuse, along with Eric Fromm replaced classical Marxist armed proletarian revolution with sexual perversity as key tool to bring down the culture.

Being Marxists and Jewish, they had to flee Germany when the Nazis took over after 1933. Where did they go? To New York City--Columbia University in particular—and to Hollywood. After the Nazis were defeated in 1945, most of them returned to Germany except Herbert Marcuse. It was his book Eros and Civilization that inspired the draft-dodging hippie movement to "make love, not war."

Although as young pastor I was unaware of most of the historical details of how the anti-establishment movement came to be, I did perceive the philosophical structure behind it, thanks largely to my training in the sciences at MIT⁶, the biblical teaching of Lt Col. R. B. Thieme, Jr., the theology and apologetics at Dallas Theological Seminary, and the lectures and early books of Francis Schaeffer. It was then that I thought of the framework approach to teaching the Word of God.

² A sober warning of the seriousness of the PC movement is the address given at several Accuracy in Academia conferences by Bill Lind, entitled "The Origins of Political Correctness."

³ Another name for it was the Institute for Social Research.

⁴ Bible-believing pastors need to wake up to the need to feed their sheep strong doses of protective biblical eschatology to keep them from being deceived by its pagan perversions. *Everyone* has an eschatology—a biblical one, or a perversion thereof, and one's eschatology controls one's ethics and value judgments. Therefore, I deliberately use the familiar terms of biblical eschatology in my situational analysis here.

⁵ This epistemological limitation is inherent in all forms of unbelief which we would do well to expose as we teach the Word of God that *alone* provides objective truth including that of the future.

⁶ Although I didn't appreciate it at the time, as president of the campus Christian fellowship at MIT I regularly was called to the Dean of Students' office to answer charges that our on-campus witnessing, printed materials, and open discussion of biblical truths was "offensive" to certain segments of that community. Here was the earlier version of PC which we handled courteously but continued nonetheless to openly speak of our faith.

2. Raising four sons. On a more familiar and practical level, I wanted to be able at the evening dinner table to discuss biblical truths that would apply to my sons' experiences of the day. I wanted some method, which would train all four boys at their respective ages on the same material. And I wanted it designed such that the major training would be done in our home, not in the local church following the approach in Deuteronomy 6:7-9. The problem I discovered was that the Sunday School curricula of evangelical publishing houses wasn't "vertically integrated." One son would be learning one subject while the other would be learning a completely different subject. Moreover, the material confined itself to "spiritual" truths disconnected from their academics and exposure to the culture through peers and media. I found the usual educational practices in our Bible church movement produced a too fragmented approach toward the coherent revelation from God.

My wife and I soon discovered that other couples in the church were experiencing the same problem. So we worked on a very primitive set of materials to present the framework approach in a form that would work for families interested in training their children to think about biblical faith in a coherent and integrated fashion.⁷

B. Devising a structure: the rationale of the biblical framework

I saw then that folks in the Reformed camp achieved their integration through extensive creeds such as the Westminster Confession. By contrast many in our Bible church movement had (and still have) only fragmented pieces of biblical truth in spite of the fact that we have a very defined, exegetically derived theology.⁸

Moreover, I observed that exegetically based teaching must self-consciously connect its special revelational content with God's general revelation throughout all creation. An exegetical message about an Old Testament event in Israel's history, for example, mustn't be left in the minds of hearers as a quaint "Bible story" utterly disconnected from God's design of history in general; it carries dominant implications for historiography, archeology, and chronological methodology.⁹ To do so takes more maturity and courage than some Christian leaders and academics possess. A famous example is when John Whitcomb and Henry Morris ended nearly two centuries of evangelical apologetic

⁷ Rev. Jeremy Thomas is proposing that an up-to-date, well-edited set of such educational material be made available to interested churches through a project supported by a coalition of such churches.

⁸One result of this condition is that some of our brightest members too frequently defect to Reformed churches where their thirst for orderly thinking is fulfilled. Unfortunately, the kind of order they receive is a creedal order, not necessarily an orderly view directly of the Scripture. This difference in kind of order can be seen in the different ways Reformed and dispensational theology treat the covenant concept as I describe in my article, "A Meta-Hermeneutical Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theologies," Chafer Theological Seminary Journal 7 (April-June 2001): 59-80.

⁹ Failure to pursue the logical implications of the Word of God out into all disciplines results in those disciplines being dominated by pagan speculation which then mount very aggressive attacks back upon the trustworthiness of Scripture. Either the Word of God controls the interpretation of general revelation or perverse interpretations of general revelation will control the interpretation of special revelation as I illustrate in my article, "Dispensational Implications for Universal Historiography and Apologetics," Chafer Theological Seminary Journal 7 (July-September 2001): 34-61.

backsliding concerning the early chapters of the Genesis narrative with their book, The Genesis Flood, they faced massive opposition from fellow evangelicals who now faced the same academic peer pressure that Morris had faced as Chairman of the Civil Engineering Department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (now Virginia Tech). Most of them tried to escape the pressure by turning against Whitcomb, Morris, and those they convinced.¹⁰ The pastor and teacher who insist that special revelation interprets generation revelation may indeed stimulate spirited opposition but will soon discover that people will take the Word of God far more seriously in their personal lives.

Thus what I call the biblical framework methodology arose several decades ago to cope with early crosscurrents of what today have become culturally dominant views of the baby-boomer generation in America. It seeks to communicate biblical truths as a “package deal”, a network of information given by God the Creator through historical and publicly available revelation. It seeks not to add “religious truths” on top of the natural man’s undisturbed foundation of suppressed and perverted truth. Instead, it seeks an “extreme makeover” that totally upends and replaces pagan thought with unrestrained acceptance of the Word of God in every area of life. In short, it is one way to stimulate a clear sense of biblical repentance.

Instead of appealing to abstract “truth tests” that the apostate mind imagines to exist, it deliberately anchors truth and logic under the authority of the Word of God. Rational coherence and empirical correspondence only make sense if one first accepts the omniscient Creator whose rational plan organizes both man and nature with man as the ordained interpreter of nature. Instead of appealing to what the natural man imagines to be socially derived ethics, it presents God’s individual revealed commands as the only valid ethical source. I think that this approach is as relevant and perhaps more relevant today that it was some thirty years ago.

¹⁰Their book, The Genesis Flood, is generally acknowledged as the trigger for modern creationism which has since spread throughout the world and led to creation science research communities such as the Creation Research Society, the Institute for Creation Research, and the International Conferences on Creation as well as numerous popular creationist educational organizations such as Answers in Genesis. However, when it was written in 1961, no publisher within the fundamental dispensational camp would publish it. Rousas J. Rushdoony, a postmillennial Reformed critic of secular American culture who recognized its importance immediately, paved the way for its publication by the Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company. Although many evangelical leaders and scholars opposed it, none of them ever engaged their exegetically based arguments as I reported in my seminary thesis, “A Calm Appraisal of The Genesis Flood,” (Dallas Theological Seminary Th.M. thesis, 1968). Today, happily, critical parts of their work have been scientifically validated including the genre of the Genesis narrative. See the technical report Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth—Volume II (ed. Larry Vardiman et al; El Cajon, CA: Institute for Creation Research, 2005). , A similar fate greeted Jay Adams when he carried out the implications of biblical psychology with his seminal work, Competent to Counsel (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970) which triggered a revolution in Christian counseling that replaced Freudian and other secular interpretative approaches to counseling with biblical doctrine.

III. EXPLANATION OF THE METHOD

A. The Framework Approach presents a network of major biblical events with associated doctrine.

Since every time we teach the Word of God in this world we are at the edge of a spiritual battle line between Christ and the god of this world, our teaching needs to present whatever particular truth we teach as part of a “package deal” that totally collides with the thought patterns of the cosmos. Slide one shows what happens when we teach truth as bits and pieces, as separate fragments, as Bible stories disconnected from each other. It gets swallowed up as a piece of food does by an amoeba. Slide two shows the proper approach in which each truth is positioned to reinforce the other truths. Or we could think of a modern coordinated air strike package in which each aircraft protects the others as in slide three. Team sports provide other examples.

Notice here that we're arguing for the interlocking framework to be at the level of historical biblical revelation—the events and the biblical interpretation of the events—not at the level of a creed per se.¹¹ By making historical events the elements in the framework rather than creedal propositions, more effective learning occurs. The human mind apparently learns primarily through pattern recognition so that by seeing the relationships between events as God pedagogically administers history, the Bible is communicated as a package deal. By grasping the patterns of actual historic events and their associated doctrines, we also learn that special revelation must control our view of general revelation. At least a partial “vaccination” occurs against spiritually toxic worldviews. Slides four through eight show key events in the flow of biblical history together with systematic theological content that can easily be pictured by those events.

B. The Framework Approach utilizes convergence of well-established disciplines.

Every properly trained pastor and teacher is well aware of the disciplines of exegesis, biblical and systematic theology, apologetics, homiletics, and, more recently, worldview. *The framework replaces none of these disciplines and does not substitute for any of them.* Instead, the framework utilizes parts of all of them working together. Slide nine illustrates.

Exegesis produces understanding of what transpired in history. Biblical theology articulates the primary and secondary information content of such revelation. Systematic theology assembles the results of biblical theology into a coherent description to set over against the philosophies of this world polemically. Apologetics engages current attacks of this world upon biblical faith. Worldview studies develop awareness of the

¹¹ I do not mean to disparage creedal statements of biblical faith. They are very important documents that provide stability and unity to Christian organizations. In the next few years they may well provide a key legal defense against the creeping tyranny against Christianity in this nation. My point is that they are by nature-derived documents—not the primary Word of God. Moreover, they are propositions that do not contain the imaginative content of the biblical storied events. Picturing a historical event engages more of the mind than a sentence expressing doctrine without such an associated pattern.

dimensions of human thought—that as slide ten states, you can't say anything about anything without saying something about everything. Everyone has a worldview; not everyone is self-conscious of it.

C. The Framework Approach is wholly flexible

Since the framework approach is a method rather than a subject, it doesn't have to be explicitly taught. A pastor and teacher can teach a doctrinal topic, say, something about sanctification, and utilize the framework approach in a various creative ways. One could illustrate some principles of spiritual struggle with the "hero stories" of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel compared with pagan counterparts from the Iliad and Odyssey. Such comparisons would sharpen understanding of the difference faith in the plan of a redeeming Creator makes from living in a universe governed by blind Fate and a squabbling pantheon of deities. Hearers would then have imaginative pictures of the difference between biblical sanctification and pagan heroics of self-improvement schemes. The framework with its network of creation, fall, and events from Israel's history lies in the background but at the same time provides strong structure to the lesson.

In another venue a pastor and teacher might choose to do exegesis of the book of Acts. Encounters with Roman authorities garnished with tidbits of contemporary Roman political order could be linked to the institution of civil authority and punishment and why capital punishment and war can be very legitimate functions today that deserve support from Bible-believing Christians.

Depending upon study time, congregational situations, and availability of material the pastor and teacher can do any number of teaching approaches but in each one the hearers *walk away understanding that the specific truths discussed are part of a unified whole that applies to every area of their lives.*

IV. A BIBLICAL PRECEDENT

The writers and editors of the books of the Bible did not only use the framework approach, but it emerges on the surface in places like Joshua 24, Psalm 78, Acts 7 and 17. One little example occurs in Deuteronomy 26 in which it was used by every believer who brought a first-fruit offering to the Lord as a vehicle to express his thanks:

"You shall answer and say before the LORD your God: 'My father was a Syrian, about ready to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. Then we cried out to the LORD God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the land which you, O LORD, have given me.'"
(26:5-10)

Think about the implications of just these few verses. The background rests upon the call of Abraham and God's contract with him to accomplish specific things in history. History, including superpowers like Egypt, is controlled by divine language not by

squabbling gods and goddesses or some sort of chaos theory. Humans interact with the God of the universe through conversational prayer and can thereby “influence” historical outcomes of not merely individual life events but events of great nations. Geophysical phenomena do not conform to imagined natural law models but manifest personal control by the Creator. Agricultural and botanical processes express divine programming. Against this total picture of the universe at utter odds with these folks’ contemporary Egyptian and Mesopotamian paganism, the believer in faith grounded upon a complete repentance from such viewpoints gives thanks as one individual standing before his Maker, Savior, and Judge.

V. THE FRAMEWORK APPROACH IN TEACHING MUSLIM BACKGROUND BELIEVERS—A REPORT FROM THE FIELD

As we’ve come to realize more than ever before, Islam confronts the world with forceful, persistent, and warlike faith. Muslims will not be convinced by western secularism of either the modernist or post-modernist kind. In fact, it can be argued that western secularism with its cultural debauchery has been one of the stimulants to increased jihadism. Islam as a biblical counterfeit suppresses key biblical truths. Those Muslims, therefore, that come to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior must renew their minds especially at several critical points.

We will now hear from an elder in my home church, Mr. Jik Yousefi, an Iranian who grew up in the Islamic culture of Iran. Mr. Yousefi trained himself in the biblical framework approach and currently is a visiting teacher using that methodology in a church in Washington, DC made up of Muslim background believers. He will report to you on his experiences in confronting Islamic “baggage” with the Word of God.