



The Real World¹

Ted Ward

Do you realize that in this week when we're thinking specifically of the treatment of 52 Americans in the hands of a government in the other side of the world, that one of the ways to understand the problem is to recognize that Ayatollah Khomeini is as a person who has black-and-white worldview. Any kind of viciousness can occur in the name of good. As far as I'm concerned, the black-and-white worldview is not only the most to be concerned about, but it is the one that produces downright dangerous people.

Now what is the real world? I reject these other three worlds: the black-and-white world, the fantasy world, and the little, narrow world. What is the real world, and why do I recommend it?

First of all, the real world, though it has a lot of problems in it and many things that are hard to understand, is a very interesting world. It's a little like the difference between a photograph and a tapestry. A photograph has a kind of flatness to it whereas a tapestry has texture, has substantial reality, has inner weaving of forces and factors, and the closer you get to it, the more you're aware of all the subtleties and nuances, and the elegance with which it's all interrelated. It's an intriguing world.

Second, it's an intellectually challenging world; and I'm presupposing that you're in college not just because somebody said you ought to be, but because you have learned at this point that the good Lord made human beings with a mental capacity that is just a lot of fun to develop. It gives you a great sense of your own human worth of wholeness once you begin to develop it. The good Lord made you a thinking person, and it's elegant to be able to think.

Third, from a Christian perspective, especially, I recommend a real world point of view because it brings you in touch with the neediness of a world upon which you cannot turn your back. That capacity to identify with all people, in one way or another to feel with other people; the capacity to see things as they see them, and to recognize beneath it all the common needs of all humanity, it is a marvelous thing to appreciate.

Fourth, why do I recommend it? It's the world that God loves, the world that Jesus Christ entered into. We can be the people who love the real world that Jesus loved and enter into it as Jesus continues to love it. There are some hard realities we have to identify. Here are six categories of harsh reality with which we must cope today.

Shortages. In the First World, the World of the Free West, which includes the Western European nations that are non-communist, including North America (US and Canada), nations that have not only a rudimentary sense of freedom, but also have goods and services and are among the "have" nations. In other words, the First World is a world of "have" nations who are on the non-communist side of that dichotomy.

The Second World as it is used in international discussions consists of the "have" nations in the industrialized Eastern European communist zone. (The distinctions were made originally by people from the Third World, more specifically, by some Latin Americans who said, "This is the way we're viewing the world, as having three major groups of nations.") So we're talking about the First World as the democratic nations; the Second World as the communist nations, and the Third World as the nations who are not in the orbit of either of those two-nations; nations that are in the development process, or nations who are avoiding becoming aligned with one force or the other.

¹ Ted Ward. The Real World. Excerpted from a chapel address. Azusa Pacific College, January 28, 1981

Often there's a lot of trouble in the Third World, for example, Cuba completely aligns with the Second World. Where does that put it? In the developing Third World? In the Second World? These nomenclatures don't hold up completely. China is another example. How do you categorize China? Even though this language doesn't always work very well, we use it because it gives us terminology for nations that are in a state of development, but are not in command of their own resources.

In the Third World, the issue is not primarily oil. The issue is primarily food. I don't propose to run the risk of further jading you with a lot of statistics about what it is like to be hungry in the world today. That's a separate topic in and of itself and I think you ought to work on it. But I'm not here to give you horror stories. I can do it, but I'd rather give you some things that will help you conceptualize intellectually, and then as you think, some of this thinking begins to grip your heart.

Shortages are a real phenomenon. We have no way to deal with the problem of fossil fuel shortage in the world apart from fundamental change of lifestyle in the Western world. In the desperate alternatives for fuel, the Third World is turning to forest fuel. It is seriously projected that by the year 2000 forest fuel use will deplete the world's forests, as we know them today, to less than 50 percent of the acreage of forests in the world.

Environmental poisoning. Now that's one that we've only recently begun to talk and write about. I've placed this at number 2 because it's already beyond the point of doing much about it. We have buried things in the earth that are getting into our water supply. We have buried things in the oceans that are being traveled in the whole world, and the pollution is not just a question of smog in the LA basin, but poisoning in our water supplies, both oceanic and ground water.

Atomic accident probability. The probability of our having a serious, catastrophic atomic accident, not a war, within your lifetime is very close to 100 percent. We've had some close calls. We might say that our nation has been downright "lucky." We've had explosions in armament silos involving atomic energy. We've had Three Mile Island where great portions of a major populous state was placed on alert for relocation and refugee status.

The rich/poor gap. The gap between the poor and the not-poor is becoming a very serious problem. Brazil, for example, according to all the national statistics is on the way up in terms of its developing. But the poor are getting poorer. Another example from Haiti: a number of well-meaning people moved into Haiti and said, "These people are dirt poor. They're starving to death. Let's at least do something to get their rugs that they know how to make on the world market." It takes approximately 60 hours to make this rug, and the Haitians can sell it to the importer for \$20—which comes down to about 34-cents an hour per person! This industry was expanded by some loan funds and the industry was built up, and a lot of people then began to make these very beautiful rugs. They go to the world market through the importer, and the importer raises the price to \$40. The importer sells them to wholesalers who distributes them within nations in Western Europe and the US and by this time they sell to the retailer at \$80. The retailer takes a mark-up by adding 75 percent more, and they sell in stores in New York, Belgium, England, France for \$140, and they don't sell very well; they're too high priced—and the people in this particular industry are putting pressure on the Haitians to reduce their price to the importer by 50 percent! That's the world we live in—the world of the golden rule: Those who have the gold make the rules.

Wars. Indecisive. Unwinnable. Terror-filled wars for all humanity. We have not gone beyond this harsh reality.

Ungovernable societies. The depravity of leadership itself, the chaos of moral values, the fear in society is making whole nations ungovernable.

Here are six of the themes that you need to think with, conceptual tools with which to think to apply to these realities: Nationalism, tribalism, socialism, communism, capitalism, and extremism.

Nationalism says “We’re proud to be who we are and we don’t intend to let anyone push us around anymore or exploit us.” And sort of nationalism isn’t all bad. It has been characteristic of Americans for years. It becomes an evil when it becomes extremism.

Tribalism says “Our ancient enemies have modern counterparts. We’ll identify them, close ranks as a family against them, and defend ourselves.” Unfortunately we can see tribalism in North American Christianity. I submit that is a defeatist posture for Christians. Tribalism, like nationalism, in its excess becomes an evil.

Socialism says that we all have a right to share equally in the good that comes from our resources and our efforts. Again, a lot better than some alternative things we could say, but if taken to extreme or excess, it becomes a means of controlling people.

Communism. Interestingly, socialism and communism ideologically have their roots in Christianity—roots of sharing, common concerns, etc.; but the problem is that the harsh reality of the world puts the authoritarian extremism of the sort we have in communism in command of socialism, and that combination becomes a form of extremism.

Capitalism says that the rights of ownership and the value of property are the major bases for advancing civilization. I submit that when we let our capitalism overcome our Christian values, we are in danger of syncretizing and perverting the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Extremism says “We are right.” It is making any position an uncompromising, self-seeking norm for all people and all situations. Extremism is dangerous. It usually takes on the appearance of a religion in the form of either a cult or a self-proclaimed adherence to an established religion, whether Christian or Islamic.

I wrote a statement just last week, on the day of the release of the hostages. I want to read this to you as an open letter to the faculty and the students of Michigan State University as it was published in the university newspaper. First, it suggests a stance with reference to where we are vis-a-vis Iran today, but more than that, it asks what the dangers are to us if we are not careful and fall into the same traps.

“After 444 days of anxious watching and waiting, it is now a matter of world-wide relief to see the last of the kidnaped Americans returned from unjustified imprisonment by an outlaw government. Some of my fellow citizens acting on the Christian principle of willingness to forgive have suggested that now is the time for ‘walking into a new day and putting this dark experience behind us.’ But no request for forgiveness has been heard from Iran, and none can be expected given the self-righteous dictatorship which has stifled the development of that dark nation. In contrast with the American habit of readily forgetting the lessons of history, I appeal instead for free people of the world to remember, to remind each other, and to tell the story to our children and our grandchildren, to reject compromises with extremists, and especially for now, to resist a false sense of normalcy until the people of Iran can purge themselves of the frightful reality of a government by religious bigotry. I urge with compassionate concern that Muslim folk everywhere join in a period of extended mourning for the tragedy that has blighted the world in the name of Islam. Further, I urge that they sensibly seek forgiveness of the world for the blight to the Islam caused by the Ayatollah Khomeini, and others in Iran and elsewhere who so falsely invoke the name of Allah. We can expect no truth, no honor, no compassion of persons who have allowed ideological extremism to corrupt and degrade their birthright of common humanity. Let religious people everywhere learn from this tragedy of political extremism in a name of God. ‘Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely,’ so warned Lord Acton in 1877. The conviction that one has grasped all of perfect truth similarly corrupts the human spirit. We all see through a glass darkly, regardless of the relative merits of any given source of truth. We live in a sin-blighted world. None of us is beyond the effects of that reality. History has demonstrated that the persons most to be feared are those who lose sight of their own fallibility.”

I urge that we be educated Christians, that we seek out information and come to grips with the real world. That we outgrow simplistic concepts and simplistic worldviews, and that through it all, we develop empathy—that capacity to feel with others, a Christian virtue. God created the world; sin has blighted the world. John 3:16 tells us that God, nevertheless, loved the world. Which world did God love? Which world? The fantasy world? The narrow, private world? The black-and-white world? Or the real world? Jesus in Luke 19 approached Jerusalem, saw the world in this city, and wept. His was no trivial fantasy; not a matter of good guys and bad guys, but a recognition of people in a condition of great need.

Shall we pray?

Father, help us to accept the hardest of all realities, the reality of human suffering, and help us to see that we have a role in its relief. May we be compassionate people, not private people May we be concerned, and not ignoring. May we honor our Lord Jesus Christ in our response to the real world. In his name we pray, Amen.