

Two types of people in the world? “Us” versus “Them”? I also believe there are two types of people in the world: those who believe there are two types of people in the world, and those who don’t.

— Tony Hendra, *Father Joe: The Man Who Saved My Soul*, 2004

What you have made me see is as plain as the sky, but I never saw it before. Yet it has happened every day. One goes into the forest to pick food and already the thought of one fruit rather than another has grown up in one’s mind. Then, it may be, one finds a different fruit and not the fruit one thought of. One joy was expected and another is given. But this I had never noticed before—that the very moment of the finding there is in the mind a kind of thrusting back, or setting aside. The picture of the fruit you have *not* found is still, for a moment, before you. And if you wished—if it were possible to wish—you could keep it there. You could send your soul after the good you had expected, instead of turning it to the good you had got. You could refuse the real good; you could make the real fruit taste insipid by thinking of the other.

— C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra*, 1944

Fundamentalist Christianity in America: *Misuse of Christian Doctrine*

I. The Nature of Evil

Fundamentalist Christian: the world is a battleground, pitting Absolute Good against Absolute Evil, and Evil seems to be getting the upper hand.

II. The Nature of God

Fundamentalist Christian: the escalating carnage in the Middle East fulfills biblical prophecy, pitting the forces of our righteous Judeo-Christian God against the evil God of Islam.

III. The Nature of Prayer

Fundamentalist Christian: Christians have been promised an abundant life. They should pray for what they want, even for material wealth, because they deserve it.

Notes

- I. *The Nature of Evil*: The belief in absolute Evil, equal in power to Good, is a very old heresy known as *Manichaeism*. The Manichaeistic belief was named after the prophet Mani, born about 215 c.e. Manichaeists believed in this Good versus Evil dualism, as well as in gnostic ideas of salvation through acquiring special knowledge of spiritual truths. Saint Augustine was a Manichaean for a few years, but converted to Christianity.

The term *Manichaeism* (or *Manicheism*) now is often used to refer to extreme dualism in fundamentalist Christianity, or to describe any religion with a similar concept of struggle between good and evil.

Orthodox belief also holds that Evil (or Satan) cannot be *creative*, and in particular cannot create life. Orthodoxy holds that Satan himself is a created being, not at all equal in power with God.

The German poet Goethe, in two plays — the relatively simple *Faust I*, written early in his life and the long and subtle *Faust II*, finished near the end of his life — continued the theme from *Job* of a wager or bet between God and the Devil. The main character, Faust, constantly strives for greater things, and seeks help from the Devil. Goethe says that the temptations and machinations of the Devil actually strengthen faith and end up doing good in the long run. One can read a similar message into *Job*.

Many Christians do not believe in the “Devil” as an actual being, but feel that humans can stray from good because of their own flawed nature, without prompting from an external demon. Again *Job* (as well as Goethe) can be read metaphorically this way.

II. *The Nature of God:* It is hard to argue with anyone who feels that Muslims are worshipping a *different* God. These people put forward the idea that this is an American God, who is on our side.

III. *The Nature of Prayer:* The abundant life we are guaranteed as Christians is not material wealth, but the abundance of creation, “amazing” grace that is ours for free. Even in the face of poverty and pain and trials, we have God’s *abundant* love and grace and blessing, starting with the blessing of life itself.

Christians are of course enjoined to follow the model of the Lord’s Prayer, which does include asking for necessities (“our daily bread”), but focuses on *Praise, Guidance, Obedience, Forgiveness, and Thankfulness*.

Final Prayer from the Prayer Book:

For the Human Family

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.