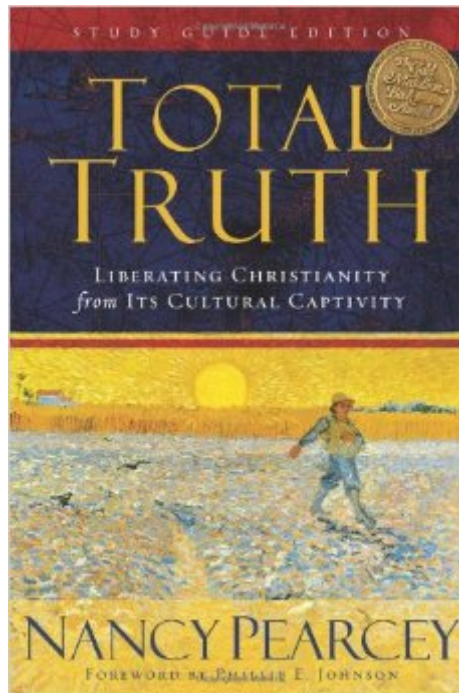


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# Total Truth (Study Guide Edition): Liberating Christianity From Its Cultural Captivity



## Synopsis

Does God belong in the public arena of politics, business, law, and education? Or is religion a private matter only-personally comforting but publicly irrelevant? In today's cultural etiquette, it is not considered polite to mix public and private, or sacred and secular. This division is the single most potent force keeping Christianity contained in the private sphere-stripping it of its power to challenge and redeem the whole of culture. In *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey offers a razor-sharp analysis of the public/private split, explaining how it hamstrings our efforts at both personal and cultural renewal. Ultimately it reflects a division in the concept of truth itself, which functions as a gatekeeper, ruling Christian principles out of bounds in the public arena. How can we unify our fragmented lives and recover spiritual power? With examples from the lives of real people, past and present, Pearcey teaches readers how to liberate Christianity from its cultural captivity. She walks readers through practical, hands-on steps for crafting a full-orbed Christian worldview. Finally, she makes a passionate case that Christianity is not just religious truth but truth about total reality. It is total truth. This new study guide edition is filled with fresh stories, examples, and illustrations. Based on questions and comments raised by readers of the book, it is ideal for individual or group study.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I have often lamented the overuse of the term "life-changing" amongst Christians. It is not unusual to hear people walk away from a particularly captivating sermon or conference saying "that changed my life!" The real measure and test of life change is time, for only in time will we really know what has made a significant impact on our lives. Having established that I do not use the term lightly, I

would like to suggest that Total Truth by Nancy Pearcey may just be a life-changing book. As believers we collectively spend millions of dollars and countless hours reading about Christian living - making our homes better, making our families better, making our lives better, discovering our purpose, rediscovering our masculine soul or our feminine soul and so on ad infinitum, ad nauseum. There are some who love to supplement with the study of theology or church history, and those are great pursuits. But if we buy so many books and read so much, why do we dedicate so little time to examining and studying worldview? I do not mean to indict the reader and clear my own name, for in all the reading I have done, this is the first book that deals predominantly with that topic. Total Truth is subtitled "Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity" and this is the task to which Pearcey dedicates the book. She shows how Christians have adopted a worldview that is bound and influenced by our culture, so that we now understand Christianity through a secular worldview. She teaches that the opposite needs to be true - that we need to see society through a distinctly Christian lens, allowing a Christian worldview to interpret all that we see, do and think. She says "This book will address [the hunger for a Christian worldview] and offers new direction for advancing the worldview movement. It will help you identify the secular/sacred divide that keeps your faith locked into the private sphere of 'religious truth.' It will walk you through practical, workable steps for crafting a Christian worldview in your own life and work. It will teach you how to apply a worldview grid to cut through the bewildering maze of ideas and ideologies we encounter in a postmodern world." (Page 17) In short, the purpose of the book is to help Christians free their faith from its cultural captivity and to see that Christianity is not merely religious truth, but is Total Truth - truth about the whole of reality. "The purpose of a worldview is to explain our experience of the world-and any philosophy can be judged by how well it succeeds in doing so. When Christianity is tested, we discover that it alone explains and makes sense of the most basic and universal human experiences." As a devotee of Francis Shaeffer, Pearcey borrows heavily from his writing and ideas. Most notably, she understands, as did Shaeffer, that Christians have mimicked the world in adopting a two-level worldview which she calls a fact/value split. It can be represented as follows:

| VALUES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Individual Preferences | ----- | FACTS | Binding on everyone |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------|-------|---------------------|
| In the upper level are values which are mere individual preferences and on the bottom level are facts which are binding on everyone. Facts represent knowledge drawn from and proven by science and in this way they are considered objective and rational. On the other hand, on the top level are values which are considered subjective and a product of tradition. Thus are not binding beyond the individual's conscience and are essentially irrational. They have little to say about reality. This split has pervaded all aspects of society. |                        |       |       |                     |

The thesis of this book is "the key to recovering joy and purpose

turned out to be a new understanding of Christianity as total truth - an insight that broke open the dam and poured the restoring waters of the gospel into the parched areas of life." The first step in recovering a Christian worldview is to understand the bifurcated worldview which is inherent in our postmodern world. Having understood that we have made false distinctions between secular and sacred, we can begin integrating our faith into every area of life so that we bear a consistent witness throughout. Politicians are beginning to come to the realization that politics is downstream from culture. In order to change the politics of our nations, we must first influence the culture, and to do that we must reclaim a Christian worldview. "Ordinary Christians working in business, industry, politics, factory work, and so on, are 'the Church's front-line troops' in the spiritual battle. Are we taking seriously our duty to support them in their warfare? The church is nothing less than a training ground for sending out laypeople who are equipped to speak the gospel to the world." That is the subject of the bulk of the book - training and sending laypeople who can share the Gospel with the world. Pearcey continually exposes those areas that have been polluted by a secular worldview and explains how Christians need to reclaim them. After Pearcey thoroughly deconstructed our society's postmodern worldview in the first few chapters of the book, I found I did not have as clear an idea as to how I could rebuild a Christian worldview. But perhaps this is because there are no easy answers - there is no happy W.O.R.L.D.V.I.E.W. acronym that will allow me to follow a 9-step program to worldview reconstruction. The key is to acknowledge the deficiency of holding a two-level worldview and by immersing myself in Scripture, allowing God to shape and mould me as He sees fit. A Christian worldview must necessarily flow from the study and application of God's Word. I need to understand and believe that Christian Truth is a unified whole, equally encompassing all of life. In reading books written by intellectuals, rather than pastors and teachers, I have often found that their theology is shaped more by the Catholic intellectuals of days past than by the Protestant theology. This is not the case for Pearcey. She strikes a good balance of praise and criticism in her presentation of Protestantism, generally defending the actions and motives of the Reformers and believers of history. Similarly she praises various Catholic scholars (such as Aquinas) for contributions they made, but is necessarily harsh when discussing their shortcomings. Throughout the book, the author maintains this important balance. It was wonderful to see that Pearcey presents significant, deep theology that clearly aligns with the Reformed understandings of the Scripture. I am in agreement with Al Mohler who said "Total Truth is one of the most promising books to emerge in evangelical publishing in many years. It belongs in every Christian home, and should quickly be put into the hands of every Christian young person. This important book should be part of the equipment for college or university study, and churches should use it as a textbook for Christian

worldview development." Pearcey has crafted a masterpiece that is intellectually stimulating but still accessible and practical. It will challenge, motivate and change. I give it my hearty recommendation.

An evangelical Christian who works on Capitol Hill once told me that God put him there just so he could share the gospel with his colleagues. Sadly, he's not alone in thinking that God cares only about saving souls, and is uninterested in the legislative battles raging in Congress, much less the renewing the culture through the arts, academia, and entertainment. True, most orthodox Christians think that God hates abortion and is not so thrilled about same-sex marriage. But beyond those "culture-war" issues, many of them have no idea that their faith has implications for all public policies, from welfare to transportation to taxation. They are privately spiritual, but publicly agnostic. Nancy Pearcey's new book, *Total Truth*, was written to shake them up. Her central thesis is that Christianity is not just religious truth, but truth about all of reality. It is a comprehensive worldview. As such, it is meant to straighten out God's creation which has been twisted by sin. This, Pearcey says, includes not just the Great Commission to bring others to faith, but a cultural commission to bring health to every aspect of human experience, from network television and Broadway plays to biology and astronomy. Unfortunately, too many American evangelicals have bought into the lie that it is "true for me" or true about a slice of reality, but not true for everybody and true for explaining the world. Pearcey seeks to uproot the historic anti-intellectual tendencies of American evangelicalism that have contributed to its banishment from the public square. She traces the long tradition in American evangelicalism of emphasizing the spiritual dimension and denigrating the intellect. Some early American evangelicals like Geroge Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards managed to make Christianity a passionate, personal experience without compromising the life of the mind. Sadly, much of evangelicalism quickly devolved to a privatized faith that transformed one's personal life but was indifferent if not hostile to rigorous thought. Even as evangelicals gained hearts, they surrendered their minds to secularism. As Darwinism gained traction in academia, Christians further retreated to the realm of personal values. In the end, they were left with a "two-realm theory of truth" in which the upper story holds the private/spiritual/nonrational/noncognitive dimension, and the lower story the public/scientific/rational/verifiable. The upper story became "true for me," and the "lower story" simply fact. Challenging this bifurcation of reality is step one in liberating Christianity to shape every aspect of culture, argues Pearcey. Step two is challenging the philosophical naturalism that masquerades as science. Pearcey has spent years writing about the philosophical underpinnings of Darwinian macro-evolution. Her rigorous logic makes clear that until Christians challenge the

naturalism that begins with the assumption the universe is closed and there is no God, they will fight a losing battle for the soul of the culture. That may explain why Americans are among the most religious people on the planet, yet whose cultural elites in academia, media, and entertainment are among the most secular. She closes the book by showing that true spirituality is rooted in a comprehensive Christian worldview. If Christianity really is the total truth about the world, then it is logical that the life of the spirit not be relegated to a private, mystical experience, but is necessarily open to facts, reason, evidence and wed to one's everyday activities. Pearcey skillfully explains difficult concepts in plain language. Her formal education in theology and philosophy - in Germany, Canada, the U.S. -- combined with her conversational writing style, make her otherwise dense subject matter easily digestible. Perhaps this is so because she's a homeschooling mom. Or maybe because she's a former atheist who wrote a paper on "Why I'm not a Christian" when she was still in her teens and long before she learned of Bertrand Russell. Her grappling with philosophy has not been esoteric but a lived experience of great personal consequence. Pearcey's work reflects the life and thought of her mentor, the late Francis Schaeffer, who hosted seekers at his chalet in the Swiss Alps in the 1960s and 1970s. After rejecting the faith of her parents and embracing the despair of nihilism and the drug culture, Pearcey was won over by Schaeffer's rigorous intellect and his passionate conviction that Christianity was meant to renew every part of the culture. But if you're looking for a simple redux of Schaeffer's work, look elsewhere. Pearcey advances well beyond Schaeffer, both in the maturity of her thought and in her original work with source documents. *Total Truth* is written with evangelicals in mind, but it should be read by orthodox Christians of whatever theological stripe who want to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the American religious tradition, dominated as it has been by evangelicals. It will help them see more clearly the flawed view of knowledge that has relegated Christianity to the private sphere and muted its witness in what seems to be a pervasively religious population. The issue is not the number of Christians, but their ability to let their religious convictions shape their view of the world. For when Christianity is no longer just an affair of the heart but a total picture of the world as it actually is, its power is unleashed to transform culture from top to bottom.

If there is one thing that Nancy Pearcey has done in *Total Truth*, it is her homework. Extensively referenced to current and historical sources, this work is an excellent gateway into the study of worldview and the development of a Biblical worldview for all of reality. Perhaps the most important aspect of *Total Truth*, however, is a logical and comprehensible guide to worldview analysis. For those who live or work in hostile intellectual territory, like myself, it is a critical aid to understanding

the epistemological underpinnings of worldviews that compete with Christianity for our minds and the minds of those close to us. Pearcey also provides considerable information regarding how the worldview thought has changed throughout the course of history. For the seeker interested in how Christians see the world, the book is a comparative analysis in worldview opposed to the prevailing worldviews of the secular world. It is also quite useful for those interested in apologetics, as Pearcey devotes a substantial portion of the work solely to explaining her search for God, and how the logical inconsistencies of other worldviews forced her (even against her will!) to accept that Christianity was the only logical way to explain reality. Anyone interested in integrating their view of the world with Scripture would find this book a good read. It has been very helpful to me personally, so I highly recommend Total Truth.

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