Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed

Dr. Bohlin explores the key points from this documentary from a Christian perspective. He looks at three of the scientists featured on the film who were persecuted for their willingness to consider intelligent design as an option. The film may become dated but the issue of an intelligent creator versus an impersonal, random cause of creation will continue on for many years.

A film was released in April 2008 starring Ben Stein. Titled *EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed*,{1} this film documents the dark underside of academia in America and around the world, exposing what happens when someone questions a ruling orthodoxy. In this case, that orthodoxy is Darwinian evolution.

Evolution is routinely trumpeted as the cornerstone of modern biology, indispensable even to modern medical research. Therefore, if someone questions Darwinian evolution and its reliance on unpredictable mutation and natural selection, you are questioning science itself. At least that's how the gatekeepers of science explain it.

Never mind that over seven hundred PhD trained scientists from around the world have openly signed a statement questioning the ability of Darwinism to account for the complexity of life. You'll find my name among them (www.dissentfromdarwin.org). We are usually dismissed as being misguided, uninformed or religiously motivated. We couldn't possibly have legitimate scientific objections to Darwinian evolution.

Many have refrained from signing that list because of the possible repercussions to their career. But isn't there

academic freedom in this country? Doesn’t science progress by always questioning and leaving even cherished theories open to reinterpretation? Isn’t science all about following the evidence wherever it leads? Well, in theory, yes. Practically, scientists are human, too, and often don’t like it when favorite ideas are reexamined.

The film *EXPELLED* explores the reality of what happens when evolutionary orthodoxy is questioned by vulnerable scientists who have yet to secure tenure.

In what follows, I will take a detailed look at just three of the scientists featured in the film. In each case I will reveal greater detail than the film is able to explore and provide resources for you to inquire further. Hopefully this will inspire you to learn more about this important issue and attend the film when it opens.

Let me briefly introduce the three scientists.

Richard Sternberg has a double PhD in evolutionary biology. As editor of a scientific journal, he oversaw the publication of an article promoting Intelligent Design and critical of evolution. As a result, he was harassed and falsely accused of improper peer review. He has been blacklisted.

Caroline Crocker taught introductory biology and made the mistake of including questions about evolution contained in science journals. She was accused of teaching creationism and eventually lost her job, and has been unable to find work ever since.

Finally, Guillermo Gonzalez, a well published astronomer, has been denied tenure because he supports Intelligent Design. Trust me, you’ll find it hard to believe what you read.

Richard von Sternberg

Richard von Sternberg was the managing editor of the biological journal, *The Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington,* or *PBSW*. Sternberg was employed by the National Institutes of Health in their National Center for Biotechnology Information. He was also a research associate at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History when he served as the journal's managing editor.

Sternberg was considered a rising scientist and theorist. His multiple appointments demonstrated great confidence in his research ability. By 2004 he had accumulated thirty scientific publications in peer-reviewed science journals and books.

His fall from grace was not for something he said or did, but for what he didn't do. As managing editor for *PBSW*, he did not reject outright an article submitted for publication that supported Intelligent Design as "perhaps the most causally adequate explanation" for the explosion of new, complex life forms during the Cambrian period. He "*mistakenly*" sent the paper out for peer review, and went along with reviewers recommendations for publication after extensive revisions were made.

When the article appeared in the journal's August 2004 edition, the journal and Sternberg were assailed for allowing the publication of this heresy. He was accused of not following proper peer-review procedure. If he had, certainly the paper would have been rejected. He was accused of acting as the editor himself when normal procedure was for the paper to be referred to an associate editor. If he had, surely the article would have been rejected. He was accused of choosing reviewers predisposed to support the ID perspective of the article. If he had chosen true scientists, surely they would have rejected the article.

I think you get the point. Any scientist worth their salt

would have rejected the article out of hand; Sternberg didn't and therefore was guilty of academic sin. Eventually, Sternberg claimed he was harassed by the Smithsonian where he currently worked. He claimed his office was changed, that he was denied access to museum specimens and collections, that his key was confiscated, and that he was subjected to a hostile work environment, all intended to get him to leave.{2}

The White House Office of Special Counsel was eventually called in to investigate, and although they eventually did not take the case because Sternberg was not actually a Smithsonian employee, they did issue a preliminary report documenting the inaccuracy of the charges against him and the accuracy of Sternberg's accusations.{3} He followed very standard and proper peer-review procedures and even got approval for the article from a member of the society's ruling council. You can bet that the editors of other journals were paying attention.

Caroline Crocker

Caroline Crocker, a PhD with degrees in pharmacology and microbiology, is a research scientist and former lecturer at George Mason University.{4}

As Crocker tells her story, she was an instructor at George Mason University, teaching introductory biology. One lecture was devoted to evolution, and she decided it was important for students to hear not just the evidence favoring evolution but published research that questioned certain elements of evolutionary theory. Crocker had come to this conviction not from any religious motivation but from her own research and convictions as a scientist.

The lecture was received very well with spirited discussion and she considered it a success. Days later she was called to her supervisor's office who accused her of teaching creationism. She denied this and claimed she never even used

the word and encouraged her supervisor to look up the lecture herself which was online, as were all her lecture notes. Later she was demoted to only teaching laboratories and eventually dismissed altogether.

Upon getting another teaching job at a local community college, she eventually learned she was targeted for dismissal again and left on her own. Eventually, she applied for other teaching positions and, though initially offered the job at one interview, she was later called and told there was no money for the position. Someone at the National Institutes of Health eventually told her to stop looking because she was blacklisted.{5}

A young lawyer at a local law firm eventually volunteered to take her case *pro bono* [without charge]. His firm agreed with his decision and filed an initial complaint with George Mason University. The complaint was later dropped and the lawyer mysteriously asked to clean out his office. He too has struggled since, trying to find employment.

George Mason denies any wrongdoing, of course, and maintains that academic freedom is honored at their university, but they offer few specifics on just why Crocker was terminated.

Crocker always received high marks from her students and was qualified and effective wherever she went. Suddenly after questioning Darwinism, her scientific career is over. There is another viewpoint, of course. P. Z. Meyer's, for example, defends the decision to let Crocker go at the end of her contract because questioning evolution shows she was incompetent.{6}

Guillermo Gonzalez

Guillermo Gonzalez is a planetary astronomer and associate professor at Iowa State University. Gonzalez has done research and taught at Iowa State for five years and has accumulated an

impressive record. He has accumulated over sixty peer-reviewed publications in various science and astronomy journals. In addition, he has presented over twenty papers at scientific conferences, and his work has been featured in such respected publications as *Science*, *Nature,* and *Scientific American*.{7}

Ordinarily, to become a tenured professor at a research institution there are specific requirements that must be met. The Astronomy Department at Iowa State requires a minimum of fifteen research papers. Gonzalez should have felt quite secure since he published nearly five times that many papers. He also co-authored an astronomy textbook through Cambridge University Press that he and others used at Iowa State. But his initial application for tenure was denied. The faculty senate indicated his application was denied because he didn't meet certain necessary requirements.

However, many suspected he was denied tenure for his support for Intelligent Design through his popular book and film *The Privileged Planet*. While having nothing to do with biological evolution, Gonzalez and his co-author Jay Richards maintain that our earth is not only uniquely suited for complex life but is also amazingly well-suited for intelligent life to observe the cosmos. This dual purpose seems to suggest design.

In denying Gonzalez's initial appeal, the university president specifically stated the denial had nothing to do with Intelligent Design. Gonzalez further appealed to the University Board of Regents. In the meantime, the Discovery Institute obtained internal university emails clearly indicating that the sole reason Gonzalez was denied tenure was due to his support of ID, despite the university's public denials. These emails also indicated that some of these university professors knew what they were doing was wrong and conspired to keep their deliberations secret.

Amazingly, the ISU Board of Regents refused to see this information or provide Gonzalez an opportunity to defend

himself before they voted. Not surprisingly, Gonzalez's final appeal was denied in early February 2008.

Be Prepared for *EXPELLED*

Probe Ministries highly recommends the film *EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed* as it highlights the harassment and persecution of PhD scientists at the highest levels of academia and exposes signs of ugly things to come in the culture at large.{8} Usually the scientific establishment tries to cover up these activities, but when exposed, they usually resort to saying that this level of harassment is deserved since a fundamental tenet of science is being challenged, and therefore these scientists don't deserve their positions. Academic freedom apparently only applies to disagreeing with details about evolution but not evolution itself.

These three stories are just the tip of the iceberg. These scenes are being played out around the world, and publicity is an important step in seeing justice done.

Now, let's be clear about something. Just because a few scientists and scientific institutions have behaved badly on behalf of evolutionary orthodoxy doesn't mean that evolution itself is suspect. But as I stated earlier, over seven hundred scientists have now signed a statement declaring their skepticism about Darwinian evolution as a comprehensive explanation of the complexity of life and the list is growing. The scientific underpinnings of Darwinian evolution have been unraveling for over fifty years. I've been personally involved in this revolution for over thirty years, long before Intelligent Design was even a recognized movement.

The *EXPELLED* documentary will certainly raise the visibility of this debate even further in the general public and hopefully within the church. But I have been quite surprised how many in the church are really unfamiliar with the

Intelligent Design movement and are even suspicious of the motives and beliefs of those involved.

In that light, Probe Ministries and EvanTell unveiled last summer, before *EXPELLED* was announced, a small group DVD based curriculum about the Intelligent Design movement, called *Redeeming Darwin*. Check out this material at Redeeming Darwin.{9} There are small group leader kits, self-study kits, and very inexpensive outreach kits meant to be handed out to people wanting to see for themselves. We are thrilled to have Josh McDowell's endorsement, and our curriculum is being recommended to church youth leaders by those promoting *EXPELLED*.

This spring and through the summer the rhetoric will be escalating, and many just won't understand what all the fuss is about. First, make plans to attend *EXPELLED* in a few weeks and take some skeptical friends with you. Then give your friends a copy of our *Discovering the Designer* DVD and invite them to join your small group in studying Redeeming Darwin to help answer the inevitable questions about ID and evolution. In addition, Redeeming Darwin will show you how to take a conversation about ID and evolution and use it to share the gospel. That's how you can "redeem Darwin."

Notes

1. streamingmoviesright.com/us/movie/expelled-no-intelligence-allowed/.
2. www.rsternberg.net/ (last accessed 2/12/08).
3. www.rsternberg.net/OSC_ltr.htm (last accessed 2/12/08). Sternberg used well-qualified reviewers for this paper and has steadfastly refused to identify them, which is normal protocol despite repeated attempts by evolutionists to find out who they were. None of them were "creationists" as has been suggested.
4. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/03/AR200

6020300822.html (last accessed 5/18/20).
5. www.christianpost.com/news/expelled-exposes-plight-of-darwin-doubters-30277 (last accessed 5/18/20).
6. scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2006/02/05/heck-yeahcaroline-crocker-shou (last accessed 5/18/20). Also be advised that PZ Meyers is not shy about using vulgar language.
7. To view a full list of online and print articles and to view Gonzalez's academic record, visit the Discovery Institute's section on Gonzalez at www.discovery.org/a/2939 (last accessed 5/18/20). See also post-darwinist.blogspot.com
8. streamingmoviesright.com/us/movie/expelled-no-intelligence-allowed/.
9. Also see www.probe.org and streamingmoviesright.com/us/movie/expelled-no-intelligence-allowed/.

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Your Money, Your Life or Your Wine

Could offering a cup of human kindness save your life sometime? It helped protect guests from a menacing gunman at a recent Washington, DC, dinner gathering.

Comedian Jack Benny had a famous skit in which an armed robber pointed a gun at Benny, whose comedy often poked fun at his own miserly show business persona. In the routine, Benny told

the robber to put the gun down. The robber persisted. “Your money or your life!” demanded the crook, irritated by the delay. “I’m thinking it over,” deadpanned Benny.{1}

Quick thinking helped save the DC dinner guests.

Give me your money!

The Washington Post reports{2} that some friends had enjoyed steak and shrimp at a DC home and were sitting on the back patio sipping wine around midnight. A hooded gunman slipped in through an open gate and held a pistol to a fourteen-year-old girl’s head. “Give me your money, or I’ll start shooting,” demanded the intruder.

The guests—including the girls parents—froze. Then one adult—Cristina “Cha Cha” Rowan—had an idea.

“We were just finishing dinner,” Rowan said to the uninvited guest. “Why don’t you have a glass of wine with us?”

The robber sipped their French wine and said, “Damn, that’s good wine.”

Michael Rabdau, the girl’s father, offered the man the glass. Rowan offered the bottle. The man—with hood down, by this point—sipped more wine and sampled some Camembert cheese. Then he stowed the gun in his pocket and admitted, “I think I may have come to the wrong house. I’m sorry. Can I get a hug?”

Rowan hugged the man. Then Rabdau, his wife and the other two guests each hugged him. The man asked for a group hug; the five adults complied. He left with the wine glass. There were no injuries, no theft. The stunned guests entered the house and stared at each other silently. Police came. Investigators discovered the empty and unbroken wine glass on the ground in a nearby alley.

“I was definitely expecting there would be some kind of

casualty," Rabdau recalled, according to the *Post*. "He was very aggressive at first; then it turned into a love fest. I don't know what it was."

"There was this degree of disbelief and terror at the same time," Rabdau observed. "Then it miraculously just changed. His whole emotional tone turned—like, we're one big happy family now. I thought: Was it the wine? Was it the cheese?" The entire encounter lasted about ten minutes. DC police chalked it up as strange but true.

Gentle Answers

An old Jewish proverb says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." {3} I suspect her friends are extremely grateful that Cha Cha Rowan had the presence of mind to offer a gentle reply to the intruder's demands.

Sometimes the psychological approach can deter disaster. Kindness and hospitality often can defuse tension and help open hearts and minds. Was the robber lonely? Feeling sad or rejected? Weary of his lifestyle? Hungry for acceptance and friendship? Rowan and her friends struck an emotional chord that resonated, apparently deeply.

Brute force and overwhelming arguments are common cultural responses to danger or opposition and, of course, theyre sometimes necessary. Most of us are glad Hitler was defeated and that legislators outlawed slavery. But could gentle answers improve any disputes—or families, marriages, workplaces, political relationships—that you've seen?

Notes

1. George Grow, "Funnyman Jack Benny Won Hearts Mainly by Making Fun of Himself," Voice of America News, 21 May 2005; at www.voanews.com/specialenglish/archive/2005-05/2005-05-21-voa1.cfm (accessed July 19, 2007).
2. Allison Klein, A Gate-Crasher's Change of Heart, Washington

Post, July 13, 2007; B01; at http://tinyurl.com/2q9mjc (accessed July 17, 2007).
3. Proverbs 15:1 NIV.

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Recommended Responses to The Golden Compass

The Golden Compass: Pointing In the Wrong Direction
Steve Cable
www.probe.org/the-golden-compass-pointing-in-the-wrong-direction
Probe staffer Steve Cable recommends Christian parents steer clear of The Golden Compass film based on Phillip Pullman's trilogy, His Dark Materials. It is openly anti-God from an avowed anti-Christian writer. Kids will not be able to handle it.

The Golden Compass: A Primer on Atheism
Russ Wise
http://www.christianinformation.org/article.asp?artID=117
Former Probe staff member Russ Wise examines this anti-Christian book and movie.

Kerby Anderson also recommends:

The Golden Compass Fraud
L. Brent Bozell III
http://www.cultureandmediainstitute.org/printer/2007/20071109161918.aspx

The upside-down world of Pullman's "Golden Compass"
Berit Kjos
http://www.crossroad.to/articles2/007/compass-pullman.htm

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Slavery, William Wilberforce and the Film "Amazing Grace"

The transatlantic trade in slavery was outlawed 200 years ago. This anniversary is marked by the release of Amazing Grace,em> a feature film about abolitionist William Wilberforce. Byron Barlowe argues that his life is an exemplar of how God can use faith, moral bravery along with biblical thinking and long-term action—even against tough odds—to transform culture for good.

You may have caught the buzz surrounding the film *Amazing Grace*, still in theaters nationwide at this writing. It premiered just in time to celebrate the anti-slavery campaign led by William Wilberforce, which outlawed{1} transatlantic slavery 200 years ago.

Culturally active Christians, especially, hail the film as a refreshingly well-done cinematic rendering of a historical hero that will be worth viewing and, if you're so inclined, owning. Wilberforce's story is an exemplar of how God can use faith, moral bravery along with biblical thinking and long-term action to transform culture for good.

Slavery then & now

The term “slavery” usually evokes images of forced-émigrés from Africa in the American South from the advent of the American colonies. Yet, slavery in some form is a feature of life in much of the world’s history and may be more rampant today than ever before. From indentured servants who willingly pledged submission to their masters to those bought and sold as property—as in the American and British systems—to those held in present-day fear and financial bondage right under our modern noses, slavery is simply a hard fact.

According to Probe writer Rusty Wright, the 18th Century British slave trade “was legal, lucrative, and brutal.”{2} Altering that reality was a life-cause for Wilberforce and his abolitionist brethren.

This was not always the sentiment among Christians, going back to the early Church. Although their ancient slavery was often more benign than in Wilberforce’s day, it surprises many to discover that such notables as Polycarp (Bishop of Smyrna), Clement of Alexandria, Athenagoras (Second Century Christian philosopher), and Origen held to slavery as a God-given right. Later Church luminaries such as St. Bonaventure agreed. Pope Paul III even granted the right of clergy to own slaves.{3}

Latin America’s pre-Columbian slave-based culture was prodigious, but how much does one hear of this or the claim that the Church ended it? Author Nancy Pearcey tells of a Mexican man [who] spoke from the audience at a recent conference:

> *My ancestors were the Aztecs. We were the biggest slave traders, and the slaves were used for human sacrifice—to make the sun rise each day! Our Aztec priests ripped out the beating hearts from living slaves who were sacrificed in our temples….*

> *I don't like it. I am not proud of it…. It is part of our history. We have to face up to it.*

Pointing out the unique ameliorative influence of the Christian faith as contrasted with Islam, he added:

> *And the slavery and human sacrifice in Mexico only stopped when Christianity came and brought it to an end. That is the fact of history. When are the Arabs going to face up to the facts of their own history, and to what is going on in many Muslim countries today? When are they going to rise up like the Christians to bring this slavery in their own countries to an end?{4}*

Using the film as a launching pad, present-day abolitionist groups continue a campaign to publicize and eradicate modern-day slavery. According to *World* magazine, "today 27 million people live on in captivity, their lives worth far less than any colonial era slave."{5} "About 17,000 are trafficked annually in the United States."{6}

Relative to the *chattel slaves* of Wilberforce's day, for which owners paid heavy prices and held title deeds, today's illegally held human "property" comes cheap—and blends in. Most are in debt bondage, some are contract laborers living under harsh conditions, and others are forced into marriage and prostitution. "Human trafficking, which ensnares 600,000 to 800,000 people a year, is the newest slave trade and the world's third-largest criminal business after drugs and arms dealing."{7}

Contemporary abolitionist, hands-on human rights campaigner, member of the British House of Lords and professed follower of Christ, the Baroness Caroline Cox points out that obliteration of the white slave trade lends hope to modern-day campaigns. "There have been many slaveries, but there has been only one abolition, which eventually shattered even the rooted and

ramified slave systems of the Old World."{8}

An "alliance of modern Wilberforces" includes "lawmakers, clergy, layers, bureaucrats, missionaries, social workers, and even reclusive Colorado billionaire Philip Anschutz," who bankrolled the film *Amazing Grace*.{9} They seek to repeat Wilberforce's success.

Opposition in Wilberforce's day

Wilberforce and his compatriots faced an entrenched pro-slavery culture. "…The entire worldview of the British Empire was what we today call social Darwinism. The rich and the powerful preyed on and abused the poor and the weak."{10}

The British royal family sanctioned slavery. The great military hero of the day, Admiral Lord Nelson, denounced "the damnable doctrine of Wilberforce and his hypocritical allies."{11}

Once again, the religious climate of the day tolerated institutionalized evil. In a chapter entitled "Slavery Abolished: A Christian Achievement" in his sweeping book *How Christianity Changed the World*, Alvin J. Schmidt writes, "A London church council decision of 1102, which had outlawed slavery and the slave trade{12}, was ignored." Schmidt continues regarding religious hypocrisy, that the "revival of slavery" in Wilberforce's time in Britain, Spain, Portugal and their colonies "…was lamentable because this time it was implemented by countries whose proponents of slavery commonly identified themselves as Christians, whereas during the African and Greco-Roman eras, slavery was the product of pagans."{13}

Most compellingly, Wilberforce's convictions put his own welfare at risk. Twice, West Indian sea captains threatened Wilberforce's life.{14} This campaign was not a casual *cause célèbre* to him.

Wilberforce biographer Eric Metaxas states:

> *…The moral and social behavior of the entire culture…was hopelessly brutal, violent, selfish, and vulgar. He hoped to restore civility and Christian values to British society, because he knew that only then would the poor be lifted out of their misery.*

Wilberforce's Secret: learn to disagree agreeably{15}

It has been fashionable, on occasion, to lionize William Wilberforce to the point of exaggeration. However, we can legitimately extract godly, courageous and wise principles from his life's story.

Holding fast to a distinctively biblical worldview will often come smack into conflict with the most cherished societal sins of one's day. It was slavery then, you name the issue today: abortion, gluttony, gambling, pornography, human trafficking. Yet, many a well-meaning activist has fallen prey to a crass loss of civility in the long battle to turn the tide of public opinion and policy.

Metaxas contrasts:

> *Wilberforce understood the Scripture about being wise as serpents and gentle as doves. He was a very wise man who worked with those from other views to further the causes God had called him to. Because of the depth of his faith, Wilberforce was a genuinely humble man who treated his enemies with grace—and of course that had great practical results.*

Just as Cambridge professor Isaac Milner, his mentor to faith in Christ, had once stood against Wilberforce's skepticism

agreeably, so he learned to do politically. He was relevant, shrewd, yet genuine. “Wilberforce wasn’t full of pious platitudes. He really had the ability to translate the things of God in a way that people could really hear what he was saying,” Metaxas says.

Even privately, his actions forcefully, yet humbly, disagreed with prevailing cultural winds. Metaxas describes his serious conviction to spend significant time raising his six children, certainly uncommon for fathers in his day. One lasting result: “because of his fame [this] set the fashion with regard to family togetherness and being together on Sundays that lasted far into the 19th and even 20th centuries.”

The Christian worldview drove Wilberforce and his predecessors to oppose slavery and its effects

Wilberforce gained a reputation as a man of faith. Sir Walter Scott credited Wilberforce with being a spiritual leader among Parliamentarians. Biographer John Stoughton wrote that his effectiveness as speaker was greatest when he “appealed to the Christian consciences of Englishmen.”{16} Nonetheless, Wilberforce was his own biggest proponent of his need for grace.

The doctrines of *sola fide* (“by faith alone”) and *sola gratia* (“by grace alone”) formed the foundation of Wilberforce’s theology, or how he viewed God and His relation to the world. Metaxas relates, “He really knew that he was as wicked a sinner as the worst slave trader—without that sense of one’s own sinfulness, it’s very easy to become a moralizing Pharisee.”

Author and pastor John Piper writes:

> *…The doctrine of justification is essential to right*

> *living—and that includes political living…. [The "Nominal Christians" or Christians in name only, of Wilberforce's day] got things backward: First they strived for moral uplift, and then appealed to God for approval. That is not the Christian gospel. And it will not transform a nation. It would not sustain a politician through 11 parliamentary defeats over 20 years of vitriolic opposition.{17}*

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."{18} Sometimes it takes 20 years or much longer for the Spirit to move an entire culture! God is patient and works with our free wills, but accomplishes His purposes in the end.

Paul wrote several other times in Scripture regarding slavery. He told Philemon to treat his own slave as a brother. That is, lose the slave, gain a spiritual brother.

To the church in Galatia, Paul wrote that there was "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free…for you are all one in Christ Jesus."{19} The status of *slave* was subsumed under the category of *believer*, where all are equal. "…Given the culturally ingrained practice of slavery…in the ancient world, Paul's words were revolutionary. The Philemon and Galatians passages laid the groundwork for the abolition of slavery, then and for the future."{20}

Anti-Slavery positions were commonplace in the Early Church. Slaves worshiped and communed with Christians at the same altar. Christians often freed slaves, even redeemed the slaves of others{21} (much like contemporary believers who buy freedom for Sudanese slaves). This equal treatment of slaves sometimes set Christians up as targets of persecution.{22}

Christianity is no stranger to abolition throughout history. Schmidt writes:

> *…The effort to remove slavery, whether it was Wilberforce in*

> *Britain or the abolitionists in America, was not a new phenomenon in Christianity. Nor were the efforts of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the American civil rights laws of the 1960s to remove racial segregation new to the Christian ethic. They were merely efforts to restore Christian practices that were already in existence in Christianity's primal days.{23}*

The film *Blood Diamond* graphically portrays child soldiers brutally manipulated to do the killing for a rebel group in Africa, an actual contemporary tragedy. In the story's only bright spot, a gentle, fatherly African offers an apologetic for his work to rescue and rehabilitate boy warriors. The message is straightforward: do what you can in the moral morass, for "who knows which path leads to God?"

Wilberforce found the path—the Way, the Truth and the Life{24}—and it continues to light the way for people in bondage today. But it's only just begun, once again.

Notes

1. The 1807 Act of Parliament outlawed the trade in the British Empire. In fact, the trade continued among other nations and illegally among British outlaws.
2. "Amazing Grace Movie: Lessons for Today's Politicians," by Rusty Wright, www.probe.org/amazing-grace-movie-lessons-for-todays-politicians/, accessed 3-22-07.
3. "Slavery Abolished: A Christian Achievement," chapter 11, in *How Christianity Changed the World*, Alvin J. Schmidt, 276. Note: read further for examples of early Church Fathers and laypeople who opposed slavery and aided slaves.
4. From an email report entitled "Slavery and Its History," sent on behalf of author Nancey Pearcey to Phylogeny.net list 12/11/06.
5. *World*, Feb. 24, 2007, "Let my people go," by Priya Abraham,

www.worldmag.com/articles/12700, accessed 3-21-07.
6. “Free at Last: how Christians worldwide are sabotaging the modern slave trade,” Deann Alford, *Christianity Today*, March 2007, p. 32.
7. *World*, Abraham.
8. Ibid, “Whale of a man” (article sidebar). Quote from *This Immoral Trade: Slavery in the 21st Century* (Monarch Books, 2006), “a 175-page textbook, in a sense, featuring the history, the politics, the economics, and the present-day reality of forced servitude around the world” according to World. Co-written with Cox by John Marks, a human-rights advocate, researcher who advocates for slaves regularly with Cox.
9. Alford, *Christianity Today*, p 32.
10. “Doing good and helping the poor,” interview with Wilberforce biographer Eric Metaxas, *World*, Feb. 24, 2007: www.worldmag.com/articles/12703, accessed 3-22-07.
11. Wright, accessed 3-21-07.
12. “The legal force of the event is actually open to question. The Council of Westminster (a collection of nobles) held in London issued a decree: ‘Let no one hereafter presume to engage in that nefarious trade in which hitherto in England men were usually sold like brute animals.’ However, the Council had no legislative powers, and no Act of law was valid unless signed by the Monarch.” From Wikipedia entry, “History of Slavery,” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slave_trade#_note-2, accessed 3-23-07.
13. Schmidt, 276.
14. *World*, Metaxas interview, accessed 3-22-07
15. Ibid, entire section.
16. Schmidt, 277.
17. “Joy in the battle: Abolition and the roots of public justice,” John Piper, *World*, Feb. 24, 2007, www.worldmag.com/articles/12691, accessed 3-22-07.
18. 2 Corinthians 3:17
19. Galatians 3:28
20. Schmidt, 273.

21. Ibid, 274.
22. Ibid, 289.
23. Ibid, 290.
24. John 14:6

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Reflection on the Virginia Tech Shootings

We moved our household this weekend, so I had not heard anything about the shootings at Virginia Tech until that same night. Next morning, I began reading articles to bring myself up to speed. The situation hurts. It was a student at the university, not some outsider. The gunman was 23, only three years younger than me.

Another person from my generation lashing out in violence; this is not the first time it's happened. This situation brings to mind several other recent occurrences, both locally and nationally. On a personal level, I recently found out that a guy from my high school who also graduated from my alma mater, University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), committed suicide recently. He was 26, an accomplished musician, national merit scholar, and earned a computer science degree.

During my junior year at UTD, a friend of mine at a Christian university came home for Christmas. While she was in Dallas, she received word that her dormitory roommate had committed suicide. She was a bright girl with a promising future and was apparently from a Christian family.

A month after I had graduated UTD, a news report came out that

a student drugged, raped, and assaulted another student—during an exam study session.

Lastly, while reading about the Virginia Tech gunman's angst that finally snapped into a violent rage, I could not help but remember the Columbine shootings. That report came out my senior year in high school. The two teenage perpetrators were my age.

With all of these cases of violent crimes on campuses among young, educated people, I have to wonder, *What is wrong with my generation?* Why are these twenty-somethings breaking like this? Crime and violence are a part of the fallen world that we live in, but the inordinate amount of violent and sexual crimes on campuses is staggering.

My generation has received the most "information" from media than any other. We have seen the rise of technological advances that only Gene Rodenberry (*Star Trek*) could dream of. We have grown up thinking that every opportunity and possibility is at our fingertips (or at the click of a mouse). We have some of the fastest, most efficient cars, the biggest malls, and some of the best plastic surgery that money can buy. The nation is rich, and although material resources may not satisfy us in the long run, they sure feel good right now. We have medications for nearly everything, and beauty products for everything else. But apparently all of the riches, technology, beauty, and opportunities still leave us in despair—for some, despair to the point of death. Why? Is this an artifact for only this generation, or does the Bible speak to the despair plaguing us?

Consider the words of Solomon:

> *"I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself… I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in*

> *Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces… Also whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure… Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:4,7-8,10-11).*

Just as Solomon was blessed and lived in a time of education, materialism, and plenty, I think his hopelessness rings true of my generation as well. Compared to prior generations, we have it all, and yet it only fills us with despair that is really no different. There is a void that only God can fill. At the end of Ecclesiastes, Solomon concludes that the end of the matter is to fear the Lord and keep his commandments (12:13). In other words, when all is said and done, no amount of education, riches, or technology can compare to knowing the Lord through His Son Jesus Christ.

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Deadly College Shootings in U.S.

Some deadly shootings at U.S. colleges or universities, listed by number of fatalities:

April 16, 2007

A gunman kills 32 people in a dorm and a classroom building at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. The suspect then dies by gunshot himself.

Aug. 1, 1966

Charles Whitman points a rifle from the observation deck of the University of Texas at Austin’s Tower and begins shooting in a homicidal rampage that goes on for 96 minutes. Sixteen people are killed, 31 wounded.

July 12, 1976

Edward Charles Allaway, a custodian in the library of California State University, Fullerton, fatally shoots seven fellow employees and wounds two others. Mentally ill, Allaway believed his colleagues were pornographers and were forcing his estranged wife to appear in their movies. A judge found him innocent by reason of insanity in 1977 after a jury was unable to reach a verdict and he was committed to the state mental health system.

Nov. 1, 1991

Gang Lu, 28, a graduate student in physics from China, reportedly upset because he was passed over for an academic honor, opens fire in two buildings on the University of Iowa campus. Five University of Iowa employees killed, including four members of the physics department, one other person is wounded. The student fatally shoots himself.

May 4, 1970

Four students were killed and nine wounded by National Guard troops called in to quell anti-war protests on the campus of Kent State University in Ohio.

Oct. 28, 2002

Failing University of Arizona Nursing College student and Gulf War veteran Robert Flores, 40, walks into an instructor’s office and fatally shoots her. A few minutes later, armed with five guns, he enters one of his nursing classrooms and kills two more of his instructors before fatally shooting himself.

Sept. 2, 2006

Douglas W. Pennington, 49, kills himself and his two sons, Logan P. Pennington, 26, and Benjamin M. Pennington, 24, during a visit to the campus of Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, W.Va.

Jan. 16, 2002

Graduate student Peter Odighizuwa, 42, recently dismissed from Virginia's Appalachian School of Law, returns to campus and kills the dean, a professor and a student before being tackled by students. The attack also wounds three female students.

Aug. 15, 1996

Frederick Martin Davidson, 36, a graduate engineering student at San Diego State, is defending his thesis before a faculty committee when he pulls out a handgun and kills three professors.

Jan. 26, 1995

Former law student Wendell Williamson shoots two men to death and injures a police officer in Chapel Hill, N.C.

April 2, 2007

University of Washington researcher Rebecca Griego, 26, is shot to death in her office by former boyfriend Jonathan Rowan who then turned the gun on himself.

Aug. 28, 2000

James Easton Kelly, 36, a University of Arkansas graduate student recently dropped from a doctoral program after a decade of study and John Locke, 67, the English professor overseeing his coursework, are shot to death in an apparent murder-suicide.

Source: Associated Press

Accessed Apr. 17, 2007 © 2007 MSNBC.com

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18137414/

A Christian Response to the Horror at Virginia Tech

Many of us found ourselves glued to the television, watching videos of the events surrounding the mass murder in Blacksburg, Virginia. A day like all other days for thousands of college students, faculty, administrators, and all the rest that make up the mini-city of Virginia Tech University suddenly turned into a waking nightmare, the kind of experience that happens on TV but never really happens to us. Or so we think. I've been to the campus in Blacksburg; it isn't the kind of place one would imagine mass murder. But where *would* one expect such a thing, except in far away places like Iraq?

In such situations, our emotions typically take the lead since it takes awhile to get all the information that informs our thinking. What emotions do we experience? Shock? Fear, as we think about students of our own there or at similar campuses? Sadness for the loss of life, especially for such senseless loss? Another sense we have, sometimes not till after the initial shock has worn off, is moral outrage, a deep-seated sense that what happened was wrong: not in terms of economics or simply the proper functioning of an organization, but in terms of moral wrong. Deep down we know there is good and there is evil, and this event was evil.

But upon what do we base this sense? Before you just brush the question aside with the ubiquitous "Duh!" or ask incredulously, "What kind of question is *that*?!" pause a moment and give it some thought. Why is such a thing wrong?

After all, if we push a Darwinian, naturalistic worldview to the limit, we might think ourselves justified in seeing this kind of horror as really no different from animals attacking and killing each other. Keep in mind that the Nazis were able to carry out their slaughter because they had relegated Jews to a lower level in the evolutionary chain.

The first point I want to make is that *Christianity explains our moral outrage*. It's explained by the fact that we are created in God's image and have in us a sense of moral right and wrong. The apostle Paul wrote that "the requirements of the law are written on [our] hearts," that our "consciences [are] also bearing witness, and [our] thoughts now accusing, now even defending [us]" (Romans 2:15). God is the standard of moral right and wrong, and we reflect that knowledge in ourselves. Of course, we can deaden that knowledge; a conscience can be trained to ignore promptings to do good.

Have you seen someone get angry (or maybe you got angry yourself) when a person who commits such an evil act commits suicide immediately afterwards? Oh, I know: some people ultimately want the person to die himself. But there's something about being denied to express our moral outrage *at* the person. We want justice for the crime committed, and we don't always want it to be a quick and dirty justice. Frankly, we'd like the person to suffer and know what he's suffering for.

How do we explain our desire for justice? What I described above is more a desire for vengeance. However, we do want justice. We want the person to face up to the charges, to hear the condemnation (consider the trials where families of victims get to speak their minds to the accused). We want him to know he did wrong and to know he's going to suffer the consequences, and then we want justice meted out.

Along the same lines that Christianity explains moral outrage, it also *explains our desire for justice*. We know some things

are morally wrong and are deserving of punishment. And we want to make a strong enough impression on the guilty that he (or observers of the case) doesn't do it again. God is *very* interested in justice. A quick search in the New International Version lists almost one hundred twenty instances of the word "justice" in the Old Testament. The psalmist writes, "The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love" (33:5). "Truth is nowhere to be found," God said through Isaiah, "and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice" (Isa. 59:15). And, "Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow" (1:15-17).

This isn't just an Old Testament concern. In the New Testament we have this promise: "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

A question comes naturally to mind. If God is so interested in justice, why doesn't He fulfill it now? This is an extremely important question. However, it's one I'm going to forego for now (search Probe's Web site for articles on the problem of evil; Sue Bohlin's article "The Value of Suffering" is a good start). The long and short of it is that we don't know just what God is up to. We can hazard some guesses. C. S. Lewis said that suffering is God's "megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Let's say we *can't* give an answer to the question, Why is evil allowed? What then? If that's the primary criterion for accepting a particular religion or philosophy as true, we will be able to accept none, not even secularism!

What, then? Where does that leave us? Christianity does have

an answer to that: *Christianity offers hope*. Even in the worst of situations, the person who has received the grace of God in salvation has the hope of a future in which death has no place. This isn't "hope" as in cross-your-fingers hope, like, "I sure hope the game doesn't get rained out this weekend." In the New Testament, hope is presented as the assurance of the future. We have the hope of eternal life—of that life which has no room for death—by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The apostle Peter wrote, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). Jesus proved that He had broken the hold of death through His own death on the cross by breaking free from the tomb and appearing live to hundreds of people. Because He rose and conquered death, we who trust in Him will, too.

Hope is a fundamental ingredient of Christianity. Faith enables us to say "yes" today to what we know we should do; hope enables us to say "yes" to the future, because it rests in the hands of the God Who loves us. One of my favorite verses in Scripture is in Romans. Paul wrote: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (15:13). This is God's desire for us, to live in the (sure) hope that our future is secure in Him.

One more thing. Christianity isn't just some set of religious dogmas and practices that keeps some of us off the streets on Sunday mornings! *Christianity provides a way of life that minimizes such tragedies.* It provides both the framework within which we order our lives *and* the ability to do it by the power of the Holy Spirit living in us. Blaise Pascal held out the value of Christian morality as an enticement to see if Christianity is true. Even if it isn't true, he said, look at the kind of life it calls us to lead! Thomas Jefferson, who so rejected the miraculous in the Bible that he edited out of the

New Testament all such things, recognized a high level of morality in its pages. And when you ask people who the best exemplars of goodness have been in history, Jesus is typically on the list, even the lists of those who don't believe He is the divine Son of God.

The point is that built into Christianity is a structure of life that prohibits people hurting each other. Of course, this isn't to suggest that Christians never do wrong! But it *is* to say that we have more than just pragmatic reasons for doing right. We do right to honor God, to honor people, because we believe in moral right and wrong. Sometimes we do the right thing—only because it's the right thing to do, regardless of the rewards! However, I would be dishonest if I didn't note that there *does* lie in our future many blessings for obedient lives.

But Christianity goes beyond simply providing a moral code. It also provides the power to follow it! The Holy Spirit somehow resides in us (one of the mysteries of the faith!), and He transforms us, changes us through a number of ways into the image of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:5-17; 12:1,2; Gal. 5:16-26).

To sum up: Christianity explains our moral outrage at the mass murders at Virginia Tech this week. It explains our desire for justice, and guarantees that it will be carried out eventually. It offers real hope, hope that is sure, for those who suffer. And it provides a way for people to live with one another without having a reason to give in to such evil impulses.

It's likely that some people will read this who aren't Christians. If you're one of them, I'd like to ask you to consider thoughtfully what I've said about Christianity, but also consider what *you* believe. You may be an adherent of another religion or philosophy, or you may simply be a secularist who believes in God but believes He doesn't really have much to do with our lives. My question is this: If you

agree that the issues I've raised are important, how does your belief system answer them? If it *does* answer them, do the answers seem plausible? Is there good reason to believe them? If not, maybe the whole belief system needs to be evaluated.

If you'd like to know more about a Christian understanding of these issues, hunt around on our Web site for other articles. Or send us an e-mail. You can even use the old-fashioned method of calling on the phone!

We'd love to hear from you.

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Virginia Tech Massacre: Coping with Grief

As the world joins Virginia Tech in mourning a terrible massacre, I've found myself experiencing poignant memories of an earlier visit to that campus when students also struggled with recent death. Though that tragedy was smaller in scope, grief and confusion abounded then as now.

Several months before my evening lecture at Virginia Tech, I had recommended that my hosts have me speak on love, sex, and dating . . . nearly always a popular campus draw. But they preferred I speak on death and dying: *One Minute After Death*. Reluctantly, I agreed; they publicized accordingly. Though they didn't claim clairvoyance, their selection proved providential.

A few days before my presentation, three Tech students died tragically in separate incidents involving suicide and a fire. The campus buzzed with concern about death and dying. The

lecture venue was packed; the atmosphere electric.

Death's Shuddering Finality

I told the audience of similar sadness: The spring of my sophomore year at Duke, the student living in the room next to me was struck and killed by lightning. For some time after Mike's death, our fraternity was in a state of shock. My friends wrestled with questions like, "What's life all about?" "What does it mean if it can be snuffed out in an instant?" "Is there life after death?"

Our springtime happiness became gloom. A memorial service and personal interaction helped us process our grief. I vividly recall a classmate driving Mike's ashes home to Oklahoma at the end of the term. Death had a shuddering finality.

Now, in the recent massacre's immediate aftermath, stories both heartrending and inspiring are emerging. Rescue workers removing bodies from Norris Hall, where the bulk of the killings occurred, encountered cellphones ringing, likely parents or friends trying to contact missing students. Parents wandered the campus that first evening seeking to learn their children's fate.

During the siege, engineering professor Liviu Librescu, an Israeli Holocaust survivor, blocked a door with his body, sacrificing his life so students could flee.{1}

God and Evil?

As mourners process their anguish, it's only natural to wonder where God is in all this. Virginia Governor Tim Kaine, who once served as a volunteer missionary, noted at the campus convocation that even Jesus, in his dark hour on the cross, cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"{2} He encouraged grieving students to embrace their community to help everyone process their pain.

The late William Sloane Coffin gained fame as a controversial peace and civil rights activist during the Vietnam War. He also served as chaplain of Yale University and had a helpful take on the question of God and suffering.

"Almost every square inch of the Earth's surface is soaked with the tears and blood of the innocent," Coffin told *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, "and it's not God's doing. It's our doing. That's human malpractice. Don't chalk it up to God."

"When [people] see the innocent suffering," continued Coffin, "every time they lift their eyes to heaven and say, 'God, how could you let this happen?' it's well to remember that exactly at that moment God is asking exactly the same question of us: 'How could you let this happen?'"{3}

The problem of evil has many complex facets, but the horror in Blacksburg resulted from human action. Students and faculty face considerable healing. President Bush reminded them, "People who have never met you are praying for you…. In times like this, we can find comfort in the grace and guidance of a loving God…. 'Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'"{4} Sound counsel for a grieving campus community.

Notes

1. Laurie Copans, "Holocaust Survivor Killed in Virginia Shootings," Associated Press, April 17, 2007; on ABC News at http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=3048967&page=1, accessed April 18, 2007. See also Richard T. Cooper and Valerie Reitman, "Virginia Tech professor gave his life to save students," Los Angeles Times, April 18, 2007; http://tinyurl.com/2lnomg, accessed April 18, 2007.
2. Matthew 27:46, quoted here from the more contemporary language of the New Living Translation. Kaine appeared to be quoting from the King James Version. Audio of Governor Kaine's April 17, 2007, Virginia Tech convocation speech is at

http://www.vbdems.org/, accessed April 18, 2007.
3. “Profile: William Sloane Coffin,” Religion & Ethics Newsweekly interview with Bob Abernathy, Episode no. 752, originally broadcast August 27, 2004; rebroadcast in 2007; http://tinyurl.com/2vdr6t, accessed April 18, 2007.
4. Text of the president’s April 17, 2007 speech at the Virginia Tech memorial convocation is at http://tinyurl.com/2t6txa, accessed April 18, 2007. The third sentence in the Bush quotation here is from Romans 12:21.

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Paris Hilton and What We Want

Paris Hilton. Paris Hilton. Paris Hilton. Paris Hilton. Paris Hilton.

Please excuse the repetition, but I want this article to score highly in Google searches.

You see, *Google Zeitgeist*, the mega-search engine’s report on its most popular search topics, says the heiress scored number one on 2006 Google News searches. The report presents a glimpse of the “spirit of the times,” giving clues to websurfers’ interests.

In news (yes, I said “news,” not “entertainment”) searches, Paris beat Orlando Bloom, cancer, and Hurricane Katrina. Borat and Hezbollah topped “Who is” searches. Among U.S. searches for “Scandal,” the Duke Lacrosse episode took three of the first four slots.

What else do people want to know about? Google’s top-ten lists in various categories include MySpace, Nicole Kidman, Tom Cruise, Britney Spears, Paul McCartney, Pamela Anderson,

Reggie Bush, and Clay Aiken.

Why do celebrities and entertainment rank so high? Perhaps it's the desire to connect with something larger than ourselves. Maybe boredom explains some celebrity obsession. And don't rule out diversion.

For some—maybe many—daily life ranges from harried to overwhelming: soured relationships, job conflict, financial pressure, health distress. Diverting focus can ease your troubled mind, at least temporarily.

Of course, everyone needs mental and emotional breaks. Diversion can be a healthy coping mechanism—until it becomes obsessive. Then it can lead to denying reality, perhaps obscuring genuine wants and needs.

Suppose we had a mind/heart/soul reader to discover what people really want once their basic physical needs are met. What would we find? Psychologist Abraham Maslow's renowned hierarchy of basic needs includes safety, love, esteem and self-actualization.{1] Perhaps our soul reader would detect desires for acceptance, thriving personal friendships, peace of mind, health, security.

Maslow also realized that several profound fears—including the fear of death—trouble humanity.{2} Our soul reader might find that people also want an answer to death.

Anthropologist Ernest Becker argued in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Denial of Death*,{3} that much human behavior can be explained by a deep desire to deny death's reality, to repress "the terror of death." No wonder. Which would you enjoy more, right this minute: contemplating your own death and its aftermath . . . or reading, exercising, web- or channel surfing, conversing, partying, working, shopping, etc.?

If we don't have a solution to fear of death, we can invent

ways to avoid thinking about it. Alas, attractive and even worthwhile pursuits can become enslaving. Amassing the most "toys"; rat-race schedules; obsession with career, job, education, sports or even friends can insulate people from facing their own mortality.

The biblical book of Hebrews presents a similar analysis of the human dilemma, reasoning that people "have lived all their lives as slaves to the fear of dying." {4} It claims that Jesus died to "deliver" people from this slavery so they might connect with God in time and eternity.

It seems morbid to always be thinking about your own death. But could avoiding it altogether constitute unhealthy denial? Could excessive focus on certain pursuits become risky diversion from life's real issues, like personal meaning, personal worth, fulfilling relationships, and what Sigmund Freud called "the painful riddle of death"?{5}

Could obsession with Paris Hilton and her *Google Zeitgeist* pals conceal deep longings, insecurities and fears in individual websurfers and in society at large?

As the esteemed British philosopher and rocker Sir Mick Jagger famously counseled, "You can't always get what you want. But if you try sometime . . . you just might find you get what you need." {6} A friendly question for my fellow websurfers: Is what you want, what you need?

Notes

1. A. H. Maslow (1943), "A Theory of Human Motivation"; Originally Published in *Psychological Review*, 50, 370-396; at http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm, accessed December 28, 2006.
2. Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (Penguin Books Limited, ©1964 by Kappa Delta Pi and ©1970 [preface] The Viking Press), Appendix A, "Religious Aspects of Peak-Experiences," items 8 & 14; at

http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/maslowa.htm, accessed December 28, 2006.
3. Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997; original copyright was 1973).
4. Hebrews 2:15 NLT.
5. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961 edition; James Strachey translator and editor; original work was published in 1928) 19.
6. Mick Jagger and Keith Richards (songwriters), "You Can't Always Get What You Want." Lyrics at http://rollingstones.com/discog/index.php?v=so&a=1&id=124; accessed December 28, 2006.

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A Little Kramer in All of Us?

Comedian Michael Richards—"Kramer" on TV's *Seinfeld*—saw his racist tirade at African-American hecklers ignite a firestorm. Mel Gibson, whose earlier anti-Semitic rant made headlines, said he felt compassion for Richards.{1}

Lots of people have dark sides. Maybe everyone. Maybe you.

I do.

Remember Susan Hawk? Her infamous diatribe against another CBS *Survivor* contestant declared if she found her "laying there dying of thirst, I would not give you a drink of water. I would let the vultures take you and do whatever they want with you."{2}

Richards—like Gibson—apologized profusely. Prominent African-American comic Paul Mooney says Richards told him privately, "He didn't know he had that ugliness in him."{3}

I can identify with Richards' surprise at his darker inner impulses. My own failing was private rather than public, differing in degree but not in kind. It taught me valuable lessons.

Growing up in the US South, I learned from my parents and educators to be tolerant and accepting in a culture that often was not. Racism still makes my blood boil. I've sought to promote racial sensitivity.

One summer during university, I joined several hundred students—most of us Caucasian—for a South Central Los Angeles outreach project. We spent a weekend living in local residents' homes, attending their churches, and meeting people in the community.

A friend and I enjoyed wonderful hospitality from a lovely couple. Sunday morning, their breakfast table displayed a mountain of delicious food. Our gracious hostess wanted to make sure our appetites were completely satisfied. It was then, eying that bountiful spread, that it hit me.

I realized that for the first time in my life, I was living in Black persons' home, sitting at "their" table, eating "their" food, using "their" utensils. Something inside me reacted negatively. The strange feeling was not anger or hatred, more like mild aversion. Not powerful, not dramatic, certainly not expressed. But neither was it rational or pleasant or honorable or at all appropriate. It horrified and shamed me, especially since I had recently become a follower of Jesus.

The feeling only lasted a few moments. But it taught me important lessons about prejudice. Much as I might wish to deny it, I had inner emotions that, if expressed, could cause terrible pain. I who prided myself on racial openness had to deal with inner bigotry. How intense must such impulses be in those who are less accepting? Maybe similar inner battles—large or small&edash;go on inside many people. I

became deeply impressed that efforts at social harmony should not neglect the importance of changing human hearts.

Holocaust survivor Yehiel Dinur testified during the trial of Adolph Eichmann, the Nazi leader responsible for killing millions of Jews. When he saw Eichmann in the courtroom, he sobbed and collapsed to the floor. Dinur later explained, "I was afraid about myself. I saw that I am capable to do this. . . . Exactly like he. . . . Eichmann is in all of us."{4}

Jeremiah, an ancient Jewish sage, wrote, "The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?"{5} A prescription from one of Jesus' friends helped me overcome my inner struggles that morning in South Central: "If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth. But if we confess our sins to [God], he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong."{6}

Notes

1. "Mel Gibson Feels Michael Richards' Pain," Associated Press, November 29, 2006; AOL Entertainment News: http://tinyurl.com/vh2nf, accessed December 3, 2006.

2. Tim Cuprisin, "Susan Hawk stays afloat on 'Survivor' celebrity," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* January 23, 2001; http://www2.jsonline.com/enter/tvradio/jan01/survive23012201.asp, accessed December 3, 2006.

3. "Paul Mooney Cites Richards in N-Word Ban," Associated Press November 29, 2006, http://tinyurl.com/5pxnxy, accessed December 3, 2006.

4. Charles W. Colson, "The Enduring Revolution," excerpts of his 1993 Templeton Address; http://www.gcts.edu/communications/contact/fall04/article03.php, accessed December 3, 2006.

5. Jeremiah 17:9 NLT.

6. 1 John 1:8-9 NLT.

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Superman Returns: Superhero Still Needed?

Does the world still need a superhero?

Watch out, bad guys, as *Superman Returns* . . . fighting movie villains, rescuing the imperiled, desiring Lois Lane (now a single mom), saving the world.

The guy is everywhere. Superman's promotional ties include Burger King, Duracell, got milk?, even a dating website. NBA star Shaquille O'Neal has a Superman logo tattooed on his arm. Archvillain Lex Luthor hacked Superman's website, linking to his own MySpace.com webpage. Marketers work every angle.

Why has the Superman story remained so popular? What is it about the Man of Steel that captures the public imagination?

In the 1930's, the Great Depression had the world slumping. Fascist and Nazi menaces haunted Europe. Two Cleveland teenagers dreamed up a hero who would rescue the troubled, inspire hope, and set things right. The story was born.

In the new film, *Daily Planet* editor Perry White instructs his staff to cover everything they can about Superman's return. He especially wants to know, "Does he still stand for truth, justice, all that stuff?"

He does, and that’s one reason Superman’s appeal endures. Some probably many want to identify with someone bigger than themselves who embodies what’s honorable, a hero to admire or emulate.

Look, up in the sky!

Lots of people need rescuing these days from crime on the streets and in the boardrooms, troubled relationships, terrorism, war, disease, nuclear threats. Superman has power. He cares for distressed people. And he’s humble.

Plain, ordinary Clark Kent could be everyhuman. His mild mannered disguise hides phenomenal abilities. Ever dream of your peers, your foes, or the world glimpsing the real you, the one with more to offer than ever gets appreciated?

My childhood heroes included Superman, the Lone Ranger, and Zorro. I wore their costumes as I watched their television programs. Their struggles for good energized my youthful imagination.

Of course, not everyone believes the world needs saving. The new Lois Lane says, “The world doesn’t need a savior; neither do I.” Superman tells her, “But every day I hear people crying for one.”

Superman’s biological father, JorEl (voiced by the late Marlon Brando), prepared counsel for his child, KalEl, whom he launched into space as their planet, Krypton, exploded. Of earthlings: “They can be a great people, KalEl. They wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. For this reason above all their capacity for good I have sent them you . . . my only son.”

My only son . . .

Spiritual parallels have not been lost on media observers. *Rolling Stone* feels Brando’s words “establish . . . (Superman)

as a Christ figure.” Jesus, of course, referred to himself as God’s “only Son” sent to rescue the world: “I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the darkness.”

Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster were Jewish. “El” is a Hebrew word for “God.” The biblical Moses’ mother hid him in a basket in the Nile River to save his life.

Superman Returns director Bryan Singer, who is Jewish, acknowledges that biblical imagery both messianic and Mosaic have influenced the Superman saga. An adopted only child, picked on in youth, Singer says he’s often felt like an outcast.

How does Superman inspire him? “I think most people do believe in that kind of integrity and virtue,” Singer observed in a documentary. “They want to see goodness. People have a deep need to believe that it exists out there.”

Superhero a real one still needed.

Anyone out there “still stand for truth, justice, all that stuff?” Anyone qualify as “the Light of the world”?

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