American Cultural Captivity

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of ways in which American Christians are culturally captive: individualism, consumerism, racism, church growth values and globalization.

Cultural Captivity

Probe Ministries has dedicated itself to helping Christians be freed from cultural captivity. Therefore, I want to focus on how we as Americans are often captive to an American form of Christianity and thus are culturally captive.



Before we address the issue of cultural captivity, it might be worth mentioning how small American Christianity is compared to the rest of the world. Philip Jenkins reports that "the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward to Africa, Asia, and Latin America."{1}

We can put this in perspective by looking at what happened last century. In 1900, about eighty percent of the Christians in the world lived in Europe or North America. Now more than seventy percent live in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

A century ago, if you were to describe a typical Christian in the world, you would probably describe a Christian living in the middle of the United States. Today a typical Christian would be a mother in Zambia or a college student in South Korea.

Christianity has also become diverse. "More people pray and worship in more languages and with more differences in styles of worship in Christianity than any other religion."{2} Put simply, American Christianity is no longer the norm in the

world. Yet we as Americans often make the mistake of assuming that our Western values and assumptions should be the standard for the rest of the world.

Many of my observations come from insights in the book, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity*.{3} Soong-Chan Rah provides numerous examples of how the American church is captive to a white, Western view of the world and thus is culturally captive. Obviously, the church has been captive to materialism, but I will focus on some of his other descriptions of captivity, namely, individualism, consumerism, and racism.

It is worth noting that the phrase "captivity of the church" has been used in different contexts with varied meanings throughout church history. Martin Luther, for example, wrote the tract *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* in which he compared the Catholic Church's teaching on the sacraments to the captivity of the Israelites by the Babylonians.{4} R.C. Sproul has written about how many Christians are captive to the Pelagian view of the basic goodness of humanity instead of holding to the biblical view on original sin.{5} And Nancy Pearcey's book *Total Truth* was written as an attempt at "liberating Christianity from its cultural captivity."{6}

American Christians don't like to think of themselves as being culturally captive. But the truth is that they have to a significant extent been assimilated into American culture. While they rightly criticize many of the sins and failings of American society, they are more conformed to the culture than they would like to believe.

Individualism

One example of American cultural captivity that Rah uses in his book is American individualism. He is hardly the first person to talk about this. Many social commentators over the

last century have discussed and documented American's obsession with individualism which has created an individual-focused worldview.

On the positive side, the rugged individualism of Americans is responsible for the willingness to explore, build, and being willing to "go it alone" when circumstances required it. An individual willing to take a bold stand in the midst of theological heresy or cultural captivity is a good thing.

American individualism also has many negative sides. Christians should be aware of the impact of individualism on their theology. Rah says "the church is more likely to reflect the individualism of Western philosophy than the value of community found in Scripture. The individualistic philosophy that has shaped Western society, and consequently shaped the American church, reduces faith to a personal, private and individual faith."{7}

To put this in perspective, consider that most of the books of the New Testament were written to churches and communities of believers. Only a handful of books (such as Titus and Philemon) were written to individuals. Yet when most Americans read the New Testament, they focus on the individual aspects of the biblical truth rather than consider the larger corporate aspect being presented in Scripture.

Often our Bible study focuses on the individual and personal understanding of God's Word when so much of it applies to our relationship to the entire body of Christ. Often worship is self-focused and self-absorbed.

Ask a typical Christian about sin, and he or she is likely to describe it in personal terms. Sin certainly is personal, but it can also be corporate. But if you only have a personal, privatized faith, then you are also likely to see sin as merely a personal matter. Rah concludes: "Evangelical theology becomes exclusively an individual-driven theology instead of a

community-driven theology."{8}

Consumerism

Another example of American cultural captivity that Rah gives is consumerism. This is a topic that I have addressed before not only on radio but in my book *Making the Most of Your Money in Tough Times*.{10} Even secular commentators have noticed that American culture is infected with "affluenza."{11}

Rah says, "Materialism and consumerism reduce people to a commodity. An individual's worth in society is based upon what assets they bring and what possessions they own."{12}

How has consumerism affected the American church? First, it means that we have been willing to include materialistic values into our worldview and lifestyle. Often it is difficult to distinguish Christian values from the materialistic values of American society. Some commentators point out that many of our churches look more like shopping malls than like churches.

Second, consumerism affects our mindset and perspective about spiritual things. A consumer mindset sees the spiritual life as a consumable product only if it benefits the individual. Believers with a consumer mindset usually aren't living for eternity but for the here and now. Essentially they are so earthly minded, they are no heavenly good.

Third, consumerism affects the way we choose to fellowship with other believers. "American evangelicalism has created the unique phenomenon of church shopping—viewing church as yet another commodity and product to be evaluated and purchased. When a Christian family moves to a new city, how much of the standards by which they choose a church is based upon a shopping list of their personal tastes and wants rather than their commitment to a particular community or their desire to serve a particular neighborhood?"{13}

Finally, consumerism even affects the way we measure success. We should be measuring success by the standards of Scripture. Often, we measure it by the American consumer value system. Consider what many refer to as the ABCs of church growth. These are: attendance, building, and cash. Often the success of a church is measured in the same way a secular business would measure its success. The bottom line is often the number of attendees or the size of the church budget.

Jesus asked in Mark 8:36, "What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul?" A consumer mentality often chooses short-term solutions instead of eternal values despite the possibility of long-term negative consequences.

Racism

Another example of American cultural captivity that Rah gives is racism. Not only was this a chapter in this book, but he actually wrote another book on the subject of racial and ethnic issues.{14}

Let's begin by stating that the idea of race is actually artificial. As I pointed out in a previous radio program on Race and Racial Issues, both the Bible and modern science reject the idea of what today we call race. For example, the Bible teaches that God has made "from one blood every nation of men" (Acts 17:26). Here Paul is teaching the Athenians that they came from the same source in the creation as everyone else. We are all from one blood. In other words, there are no superior or inferior races. The Bible refers to people groups and nations, but does not label based upon skin color.

Race is also an imprecise scientific term. For example, people of every race can interbreed and produce fertile offspring. It turns out that the so-called differences in the races are not very great. A recent study of human genetic material of different races concluded that the DNA of any two people in

the world would differ by just 2/10ths of one percent.{15} And of this variation, only six percent can be linked to racial categories. The remaining ninety-four percent is "within race" variation. That is why "many scientists are now declaring that the concept of race has no basis in the biological sciences, more and more are concurring that race should be seen as a social invention."{16}

How have racial ideas and prejudice affected the church? It is tempting to say that this was merely a problem in the past and should be no concern for a country moving towards a post-racial society. Soong-Chan Rah disagrees: "We are quick to deal with the symptoms of sin in America, but oftentimes are unwilling to deal with the original sin of America: namely, the kidnapping of Africans to use as slave labor, and usurping of lands belonging to Native Americans and subsequent genocide of indigenous peoples."{17}

Race is an important issue not only in our past, but our future. Many church growth methods are based upon the idea of racial homogeneity. If it is true that the most segregated place in American culture is an American church at 11 AM on Sunday morning, perhaps we should pay more attention to race and racial issues.

Church Growth and Globalization

We can even see cultural captivity in the way we build our churches and the way we interact with the world. We can see the impact some of these ideas about race and racial issues have on church growth.

The popular church growth movement places a high priority on what is called the "homogeneous unit principle" in order to have substantial numerical growth within a congregation. Homogeneous churches tend to grow faster because church attendees are more comfortable with people with similar

racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

Racially and ethnically segregated churches are the natural result of such teaching. And not only are segregated churches unbiblical, they are impractical. America in the twenty-first century will be more diverse than any previous century. It will no longer be dominated by white, Eurocentric people.

Church growth principles also prioritize "an individualized, personal evangelism and salvation over the understanding of the power of the gospel to transform neighborhoods and communities. They also emphasize a modern, social science approach to ministry, focusing on a pragmatic planning process that leads to measurable success goals."{18}

Globalization is another challenge in the twenty-first century and can also illustrate how we spread our cultural captivity to the corners of the world. Globalization often means that one nation's values and mindset predominate. In this case, American Christian values (which often are not biblical) are spread and dominate other cultures.

Thomas Friedman says, "Culturally speaking, globalization is largely, though not entirely, the spread of Americanization—from Big Macs to iMacs to Mickey Mouse—on a global scale."{19} Globalization not only allows us to spread the influence of Coca-Cola, Starbucks, and McDonalds, but it also is the means by which American cultural captivity is spread to believers around the globe. Once these values are transmitted to the rest of the world, we will have a global Christianity that is just as culturally captive to American values as American Christians have been.

This is our challenge in the twenty-first century. American Christians cannot merely look at Christians in other countries and shake their heads about their captivity to their particular cultural values. We too must be aware of culture captivity in our midst and "see to it that no one takes you

captive through philosophy and empty deception" (Colossians 2:8). We have been assimilated into the American culture and should "not be conformed to this world" but instead should be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

Notes

1. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 2.
2. Ibid.
3. Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).
4. Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* trans. A.T.W. Steinhaeuser, Three Treaties (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1947).
5. R.C. Sproul, "The Pelagian Captivity of the Church," *Modern Reformation*, May/June 2001.
6. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005).
7. Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 30.
8. Ibid., 40.
9. Ibid., 43.
10. Kerby Anderson, *Making the Most of Your Money in Tough Times* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2009).
11. John DeGraaf, David Wann, and Thomas Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005).
12. Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 48.
13. Ibid., 55.
14. Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2010).
15. J. C. Gutin, "End of the Rainbow," *Discover*, November 1994, 71-75.
16. Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2007), xi.
17. Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*, 69.

18. Ibid., 95.
19. Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 199), 8.

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A Preterist Responds to 'Four Views of Revelation'

I have just read Pat Zukeran's article "Four Views of Revelation." I believe he has done a rather good job in presenting the four different views as they are regarded by most scholars today. I do know that Probe is a general apologetics ministry and as such does not take an official stance on end time prophecy. However, as a former Probe intern and preterist who has done a great deal of research over the last several years on the first century fulfillment of end time prophecy, I am excited to share some of what I have learned by addressing some of these common objections to the preterist perspective raised by Pat in his article. It is my intention to use the objections raised in this article to illustrate just how formidable the preterist perspective perspective, when properly understood, can be in answering what is seen by C.S. Lewis and many other Christians as the greatest challenge to Christianity: the delay of the second coming of Christ.{1}

There are half a dozen verses in the Bible in which Jesus seems to explicitly promise to return within the lifetime of his generation. One such example is Matthew 24:34. In this chapter, Jesus promises that the temple will be destroyed, the abomination that causes desolation will be set up, and He will return on the clouds of heaven within that generation. The

temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. at the same time that the abomination that causes desolation was set up on the wing of the temple. But did Jesus return as he had promised? There are four major interpretations for the Book of Revelation. This is because there really seem to be only four conceivable ways to interpret this text. If that is true and the Bible and the Book of Revelation are entirely correct, then some variation of one of these views must be true.

Most Christian preterists, like myself, started out as dispensationalists or futurists because this default perspective requires the least amount of background knowledge and as such is by far the most popular view. Most people are simply not sufficiently interested in end time prophecy to research alternative perspectives. There is an immense amount of research and historical knowledge necessary in order to understand the Book of Revelation from a preterist perspective, and I believe this fact alone accounts for its undeserved obscurity as well as the great deal of diversity of interpretations of various verses in the Book of Revelation. This diversity of interpretations should not be construed as evidence against preterism as Mounce and others suggest since similar divergence in opinions is found in all other views of this book. Because of the wealth of historical sources that must be perused, preterist apologists each seem to grasp different aspects of Revelation better than others and as such there are a number of differing opinions on different verses; thus, many false and tenuous views and interpretations have been put forth throughout the last two thousand years. I believe the more one learns about first century Roman history, the more difficult this perspective is to deny while remaining intellectually honest. I would like to try to illustrate this belief by addressing some of the common objections to preterism raised by this article. I will begin with Matthew 24:27:

> *"[A]s lightning that comes from the east is visible even in*

> *the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:27).*

I would agree with Pat that tying this event to the advancement of Rome is a stretch and if true, a major weakness to the preterist view. In this verse, Jesus likens His return to a lightning bolt that is visible from great distances. Perhaps Jesus is describing a literal event linked with His return? After all, lightning often appears to originate from dark storm clouds and Jesus did say he was to come on the clouds of heaven at His second coming. The fullness of the miracle that is the second coming of Christ can be found in the writings of three different first century historians: Tacitus, Suetonius and Josephus. When most people think of the second coming they get an image of Jesus riding on the clouds of heaven. A detailed description of the second coming can be found in Revelation 19. Here Jesus is seen in the sky riding a white horse at the head of the armies of heaven. This event is actually recorded in the writings of both Josephus and Tacitus. Here a specter is witnessed in the sky over Israel which marked the start of the Jewish revolt in AD 66. In his history of the Jewish War, Josephus writes:

> *On the one and twentieth day of the month Artemisius, [Jyar,] a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared: I suppose the account of it would seem to be a fable, were it not related by those that saw it, and were not the events that followed it of so considerable a nature as to deserve such signals; for, before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running about among the clouds, and surrounding of cities.{2}*

In the above verse, an army is witnessed in the clouds over Israel. It is not a stretch to imagine Jesus at the head of this phantom army as God often appears to men in the presence of the heavenly host. According to the New Testament, Jesus

was expected to return in the presence of the holy angels. This fact is made clear in Mark 8:38 though this is certainly not the only verse.{3} In Deuteronomy 33:2, Moses revealed to the people that when God descended on Mount Sinai and Mount Paran he came with a myriad of his holy ones. Christ's return is modeled after this prestige. Like his father before him when he had descended on Mount Sinai, Christ also came on a cloud in the company of the heavenly host.

I believe the second coming of Jesus is described in a couple different verses in Revelation since the prophecies of Revelation frequently repeat themselves.{4} I believe the second coming is described again in Revelation 12:7. Here this angelic army is described fighting the armies of Satan. This war in heaven fits the chronology of the second coming nicely and is recorded in the writings of a first century secular historian, Tacitus:

In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armour. A sudden lightning flash from the clouds lit up the Temple. The doors of the holy place abruptly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to declare that gods were leaving it, and in the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure.{5}

In this event one can see the literal fulfillment of Matthew 24:27: "For just as lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be." Possibly linked with the appearance of the heavenly host in the sky, Tacitus records a flash of lightening striking the temple followed by what may be the departure of the seven angels from the temple with the seven trumpets and bowls. The subsequent fulfillment of these plagues spans the next several years, culminating with the seventh plague resulting in the fall of Jerusalem, the whore of Babylon.

The next objection concerns the abomination that causes desolation initiated by Titus:

> *Second, General Titus did not set up an "abomination of desolation" (Mt. 24:15) in the Jerusalem Temple. Rather, he destroyed the Temple and burned it to the ground. Thus, it appears the preterist is required to allegorize or stretch the metaphors and symbols in order to find fulfillment of the prophecies in the fall of Jerusalem.*

The abomination that causes desolation mentioned in Matthew 24:15 refers back to Daniel 9:27:

He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

Fitting the context of this chapter, the seven mentioned in the above verse refers to a seven year period. The Jewish War stretched across seven years and six months from the arrival of the Roman army in A.D. 66 to its conclusion at the fall of Masada. Between three and a half and four years after the start of the war, "in the middle of the seven," Titus set up the abomination that causes desolation. This event is recorded in *The Wars of the Jews*:

Upon the burning of the holy house itself, and of all the building roundabout it, [the Roman army] brought their ensigns to the temple, and set them over against its eastern gate; and there did they offer sacrifices to them, and there did they make Titus imperator, with great acclamations of joy.{6}

The Roman ensigns were symbolic images of Caesar and Rome, the beast of Revelation. Upon these ensigns were often hung a cast image of the reigning Caesar.{7} Therefore it is likely that the ensigns worshipped on the eastern wing of the temple contained an image of Caesar Vespasian, the beast whose wound had been healed.{8} These ensigns were objects of the cult and were often worshipped by the Roman army. This is one such

example. In an outward display of worship, the Roman army offered blasphemous sacrifices to these images of the beast on the wing of the temple, specifically its eastern gate. The fact that it was on the eastern gate is highly significant since the Messiah was to enter this gate in fulfillment of Ezekiel 44:2-3. As a side note, the entrance of a supernatural entity through this gate is recorded in Wars 6.5.3.293.{9} After this abominable act, the Romans destroyed the temple and went on a mass killing spree, hence Jesus' warning to flee in the following verses.{10} With the temple destroyed, all sacrifices and grain offerings had permanently come to an end in fulfillment of Daniel 9:27.

The third objection is about the identity of the 144,000:

> *Another example of allegorical interpretation by preterists is their interpretation of Revelation 7:4. John identifies a special group of prophets: the 144,000 from the "tribes of Israel." Preterist Hanegraaff states that this group represents the true bride of Christ and is referred to in Rev. 7:9 as the "great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people, and language." In other words, the 144,000 in verse 4, and the great multitude in verse 9 are the same people. This appears to go against the context of the chapter for several reasons. First, throughout the Bible the phrase "tribes of Israel" refers to literal Jews. Second, John says there are 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes of Israel. This is a strange way to describe the multitude of believers from all nations. Finally, the context shows John is speaking of two different groups: one on the earth (the 144,000 referenced in 7:1-3), and the great multitude in heaven before the throne (7:9). Here Hanegraaff appears to be allegorizing the text.*

I agree that Hank Hanagraaf is putting a square peg in a round hole by equating the 144,000 with the innumerable multitude from every nation, tribe and language before the heavenly

throne. The 144,000 are Jewish Christians. In my opinion, the 144,000 where the Jewish Christians referred to by Eusebius that fled to Pella before the war.{11} These Christians seem to fit the 144,000 well because they were preserved from the ravages of Israel's war with Rome. These saints then returned to Israel after the war with Rome.

The fourth criticism of preterism has to do with a perceived lack of victory of good over evil:

> *Robert Mounce states,*
>
> > *The major problem with the preterist position is that the decisive victory portrayed in the latter chapters of the Apocalypse was never achieved. It is difficult to believe that John envisioned anything less than the complete overthrow of Satan, the final destruction of evil, and the eternal reign on God. If this is not to be, then either the Seer was essentially wrong in the major thrust of his message or his work was so helplessly ambiguous that its first recipients were all led astray.*

I absolutely agree with Mounce, the overthrow of Satan and the eternal reign of the Messiah is certainly presented in the seer's vision. However, this is primarily a heavenly event because God and his messiah rule earth **from** heaven since earth is merely God's footstool. Christ was not to reign eternally on earth, his throne, like that of his Father, is and was in heaven. Paul writes, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of **evil** in the **heavenly realms**."{12}The final casting out of Satan and his forces of evil from heaven is a consequence of the war in heaven mentioned in Revelation 12:7. Interestingly, this war was seen in the skies over Israel as mentioned by the Roman historian Tacitus, whom I have quoted above.{13} This war resulted in the destruction of heaven

prophesied in the Bible. One clear example of the anticipated destruction of heaven is found in 2 Peter 3:12: “That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire…” The prophet Isaiah looked ahead to the aftermath of this destruction in Isaiah 65:17: “See I will create a new heaven and a new earth.” The new Jerusalem mentioned in Revelation 21 and 22 is the new heaven and the new earth. The earthly Jerusalem had been destroyed after the war with Rome in the same way that the heavenly Jerusalem had been destroyed as a result of the war between Christ and His rival, Satan. The last two chapters of Revelation describe the rebuilding of the Jerusalem on earth in such a way as to mirror the Jerusalem that is in heaven after it was destroyed with all its grandeur and glory. The destruction of both the Jerusalem on earth and the Jerusalem in heaven would seem to be concurrent events evidenced by the war seen in the skies over Israel at the start of Israel’s war with Rome as well as the frequency in which these two events are linked in prophecy.

This great victory in heaven also has an earthly shadow. In the same way that the wicked angels were cast out of heaven at the return of Christ, the earthly victory attained at the end of the Jewish War resulted in the expulsion of the wicked out of Israel. Jerusalem with its temple on earth was to represent heaven symbolically and thus the inhabitants of this nation were expected to be righteous. In Deuteronomy 28, God promised to destroy and expel the inhabitants of Israel if they ever rejected him and his law. God made good on this promise a couple times throughout the Old Testament and the final culmination of this curse took place amidst the Jewish War with Rome and the subsequent Bar Kochba rebellion. Each and every curse mentioned in Deuteronomy 28, even as far as the return to slavery in Egypt, is recorded to have been fulfilled throughout the course of these two wars most of them several times over. The Bible is clear that the nation of Israel, especially its leadership, had become hopelessly corrupt. This is why Jesus was perpetually angry at the scribes, Pharisees

and teachers of the Law.

One of many prominent examples of Jesus' feelings about the Jewish leadership can be found in Matthew 23. But it was not just the Jewish leadership that had fallen away, a great percentage of the common people had rejected God as well. In Luke 11:29 Jesus laments, "This generation is a wicked generation." Jesus was not the only Jew to note the wickedness of his first century contemporaries. The author of *The Wars of the Jews* which outlines the fulfillment of much of the events detailed in the Book of Revelation, was also a first century Jew. The outstanding wickedness of first century Israelites is a recurrent theme throughout Josephus' account of the Jewish War. In this text, Josephus writes concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the perceived wickedness of its occupants, "Neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness that this was, from the beginning of the world."{14} Over the next 1000 years, until the first Crusade, Gentile Christians had migrated into Israel until Jerusalem had become 95% Christian. Christians were an overwhelming majority during this millennium—even after the Muslim conquest. During this 1000 year period, Israel had experienced unprecedented peace—much more so than any other time period in all of Israel's history. Few people know much about events in Israel during the first thousand years of the Common Era, and there is a good reason: virtually nothing bad ever happened.{15} The great victory achieved at the end of Revelation is the destruction and exile of the wicked people of Israel, the whore of Babylon, to make way for the new Jerusalem, a Jerusalem occupied by the faithful of God. This earthly victory of the saints is a shadow of the final victory illustrated at the end of Revelation which ultimately points to the aftermath of the destruction of heaven and the establishment of the New Jerusalem therein. There is a lot that can be said about this heavenly and earthly victory and everything else I have mentioned thus far. The rest of which

is far beyond my original intentions in writing this essay.

The last argument against preterism has to do with the fact that the majority of scholars believe that Revelation was written during Domitian's reign. This of course presents a problem to this view as virtually all predictions detailed in Revelation are believed to have already occurred before Domitian had become emperor. A detailed and compelling rebuttal of this commonly held view can be found in *Before Jerusalem Fell* by Kenneth Gentry. In this book, Dr. Gentry presents the multifaceted internal and external evidence in favor of an earlier date of composition: specifically during Nero's reign.

Reading through the works of Eusebius, Josephus, Tacitus, Cassius Dio and Suetonius one can find a multitude of recorded natural and supernatural events that fit the vast array of Biblical predictions concerning the end time like a glove. There are few instances in which the fulfillment of end time events is not recorded somewhere in the writings of the above mentioned historians and thus when properly informed there is really no need to "excessively allegorize."

My intention in commenting on the objections raised to the preterist perspective mentioned in this article was to illustrate the fact that there are compelling answers to perhaps any question that can be raised concerning the end of the age. I strongly believe the more one studies the Bible alongside first century Roman history, the more amazed one will be upon finding just how remarkably well the information found in these sources matches up with the detailed predictions concerning the end time. Because many of the predictions concerning the end of the age found in the Bible were written hundreds of years before their fulfillment, I see preterism as one of the greatest tools an informed Christian can use to defend the divine inspiration of the Bible. The delay of the second coming is seen by many as Christianity's Achilles heel. The fact that there are not just answers to

this dilemma, but extremely compelling ones is a testimony to the infallibility of the word of God, and it is my hope that someday in my lifetime good answers from the preterist perspective will be in every great apologetic tool kit.

Notes

1. www.preteristarchive.com/StudyArchive/t/theory_parousia-delay.html

2. Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* 6.5.3.

3. Luke 9:26; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; Jude 1:14; Revelation 19:11-14.

4. One example of this repetition is the seven trumpets and the seven plagues. When read side by side, these seven plagues and trumpets seem similar enough to suggest the possibility that they are actually describing the same tragedies. This view is solidified much further when examining their historical fulfillment over the latter half of the first century.

5. Tacitus, *The Histories* 5.13.

6. Wars 6.6.1.

7. Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* 3.48, 4.14; Tacitus, *The Histories* 4.62,1.41.

8. The beast of Revelation is a metaphor to describe an empire in the same way that the four beasts in Daniel 7 symbolized four great empires. The fourth beast was Rome. In Revelation 13, Rome is described in greater detail as a seven-headed dragon also known as a leviathan. The leviathan was a mythical seven-headed sea monster of ancient Canaanite lore. It is believed by some scholars that the myth of the leviathan may have given rise to the Greek myth of the hydra with its ability to grow back wounded heads. The seven heads of the

leviathan represent seven Caesars. The sixth Caesar, Nero, killed himself in the middle of the Jewish War with Rome by stabbing himself in the neck; thus, Nero represents the wounded head of the beast in Revelation 13:3. At his death, Nero had not named his successor which left a power vacuum that pitted the Roman elite against each other in an epic succession struggle that seemed almost certain to topple the empire. During the year after Nero's death, Rome was in the middle of two wars in addition to a three-way civil war which had left three dead Caesars in its wake. Ultimately control of the empire rested on Caesar Vespasian, the lead general of the Roman army during the Jewish War. Shortly after Vespasian rose to power, Jerusalem fell and peace resumed throughout the empire. Rome miraculously had not fallen and was seemingly stronger than ever; therefore, Vespasian represents the healing of the sixth head of the beast.

9. The eastern gate of the temple was to remain shut at all times. The only time it was to be opened was when the prince would enter it to offer sacrifices in the temple. According to *Wars*, the gate of the temple was seen to have opened on its own accord during Passover. Josephus suggests that at the sixth hour of the night, the eastern gate of the temple opened on its own and at the ninth hour a light shone round the altar and the temple. So bright was this light that it appeared to be daytime in the city of Jerusalem. There are several interesting things to note about this miracle: First, Passover was the holiday in which Jesus was crucified. Furthermore, according to Matthew 27:45, during the crucifixion darkness was over the land from the sixth hour to the ninth hour of the day. Here thirty-three years later on the anniversary of Jesus' crucifixion, the opposite occurs: the eastern gate of the temple opened on the sixth hour of the night and at the ninth hour Jerusalem was bathed in a mysterious light so bright that it appeared to be daytime in the middle of the night. In this miracle, we find the literal fulfillment of Zechariah 14:7.

10. Matt 24:16-22.

11. Eusebius, *The History of the Church* 3.5.

12. Ephesians 6:12.

13 Tacitus, *The Histories* 5.13.

14. Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* 5.10.5, 6.8.5.

15. Other than the Bar Kochba rebellion, a couple instances of Roman persecution of Christians, and one or two brief skirmishes, Israel was peaceful and prosperous. Israel and especially Jerusalem was very wealthy and the standard of living was exceedingly good.

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Dangerous Worldviews

Warm greetings from cold, cold Belarus, a country which is part of the former Soviet Union (between Poland and Russia). My husband and I are here this week to teach Christian worldview and apologetics to Christ-followers. One's worldview (and everyone has one, whether they know it or not) is comprised of a set of beliefs or presuppositions that are like a pair of glasses through which we interpret the world and our experiences in it.

In order to help our friends understand the importance of viewing reality accurately, which is only possible with a pair of glasses that consist of truths that align with what God has revealed in scripture, we brought along a prop. We brought a pair of goggles called "Drunk Busters" that give the wearer a dizzying approximation of what being drunk does to your

vision. State police and drivers' education programs use them to demonstrate why it's deadly to drink and drive.

We ask for a volunteer to first navigate a simple obstacle course of chairs, catch an object we toss to them, and pick up that object from the floor. No one has any trouble doing these things.

Then they put on the goggles. They usually say, "Whoa!" It's very disorienting.

Navigating their way around the chairs, catching the objects we toss, and picking up anything from the floor suddenly becomes not only difficult but comical to those watching. Nothing is where they think it is. Their eyes lie to them about reality. If they were behind the wheel of a car, they would be very dangerous.
Then we make the point that having the wrong worldview, the wrong set of beliefs and assumptions about reality, is also very dangerous.

It is dangerous eternally for a person to believe that God does not exist, or that God is anything other than what He has revealed Himself to be in His word and in His Son. It is equally disastrous for someone to believe in no God (atheism), and for someone to believe in a divine impersonal force that permeates everything (variations on pantheism).

But the wrong worldview can also be dangerous for Christians whose pair of glasses consists of a prescription with some truth and some error. The majority of American Christians who claim to be born again do not have a biblical worldview. What they believe differs from what the Bible says. For example, many believe in reincarnation. Many trust in astrology. Some believe that God is distant, angry, and doesn't particularly like us, that this "Gee-Oh-Dee" will begrudgingly let us into heaven only because Jesus died in our place. They don't understand that God is Father, Son and Spirit, Who have always

loved us and welcome us enthusiastically into the circle of Their divine love, fellowship, joy and camaraderie.

Some believers think that they put their trust in Christ to save them when they die, but Jesus has nothing to say about their life between salvation and death. So they live their lives depending on the surrounding culture to give them wisdom and instruction about how to be educated, how to choose a mate and be married, how to parent, what kind of job to get, how to spend their money and other resources, and where to find satisfaction in their lives while they wait for heaven. They miss what Paul meant by "Christ, who is our life" (Col. 3:4). The phrase "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27) is only an abstract concept unrelated to the way they live their lives: essentially, "Jesus is in my heart, and I keep Him stashed there till it's time to go to heaven."

It's dangerous to have the wrong worldview that misses the glorious truth that real life is only found in Jesus, that any love we give or receive comes from Jesus to and through us, that light comes from Jesus and all else is darkness. And it's far more tragic than bumping into an obstacle course or dropping a ball tossed to us.

How's your worldview? If your beliefs and the things you assume are not corrected and established by God's word, invite Him to change your prescription, and expect Him to joyfully start to transform your thinking!

Lord Jesus, transform me by renewing my mind (Romans 12:2). I don't even know what I don't know; I don't know what my blind spots are, and I don't know what I have wrong in my thinking. I invite You to change me from the inside out so I think like You!

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/dangerous_worldview on Feb.

Those are sexy worldview glasses you've got there.

Feb. 3, 2011

E's email is a response to the post "Glee-tastic!"

Ms. McKenzie

Don't think Glee's overt sexuality has no effect on you. It is shaping you episode by episode. You are not immune.

Hi E,

Thanks for writing. I appreciate where you're coming from. Of course you're right. Whatever I watch shapes me. The question is, am I simply resigned to being shaped passively? Or do I have the option to take a more active role? I want you to know that I do not underestimate the power of our culture to shape us. That's why I work at a worldview ministry. Worldview goes a long way. The healthy view of sex I have intentionally pursued through study and prayer and practice and fellowship makes the nonsense often shown on screen unattractive, uninteresting, and particularly sophomoric. (Speaking of a holistic biblical worldview on sex, let me recommend Lauren Winner's excellent book, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity*). Now, that being said, that does not mean that I am immune. I have to be careful (again: prayer, study, fellowship/community, repentance).

I also understand that not everyone has the same level of

freedom to interact with various aspects of our unbelieving society. Everyone is different. There are certain things which are particularly spiritually unsafe for me—I know it in my guts and bones; I just can't go there. But I also know that doesn't mean it's *as* dangerous for others as it is for me, and I don't begrudge others their freedom. Especially since it's so important to engage. Personal conviction derives from the way God has uniquely **created** us as individuals and how our singular personality and wiring is affected by the **Fall** – our particular tendencies, weaknesses, addictions, our circumstances, our personal history. The Apostle Paul calls us "ministers of reconciliation," those who bring back together what has been separated, which Romans tells us is people and all of creation, the combination of the two inevitably including what people create. The Church has, since its inception, chosen to reconcile, or **redeem** culture, generally, in five different ways (for more on this, see our article, "Christians and Culture"). And that's good. Diversity is good. Through it we better image God in all his vastness. Creation. Fall. Redemption. That is the framework we have for understanding the world; and because the Bible is true, it's also the most accurate understanding of the world. However, take out any part—creation, fall, redemption—and our vision is blurred.



Anyone who believes he or she is safe from the all the various temptations available in film is a fool. My colleague Todd wisely notes and advises, "Exercising rampant Christian freedom does not necessarily mean one is a strong Christian [referring to 1 Cor 8]. It could indicate that one is too weak

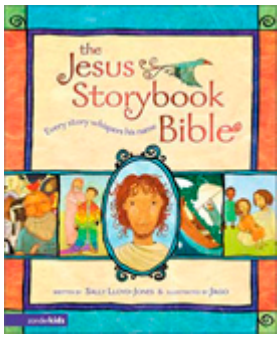
to control one's passions and is hiding behind the argument that they are a stronger brother." If we choose to watch TV or movies at all, we must approach them through a "framework of moderation," to use Todd's phrase, that addresses *our particular weaknesses*, for we are all of us the weaker brother somewhere. "Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments" (Ps 119:66).
There is a difference between conviction and legalism. One of those differences is the legalistic compulsion to impose one's personal convictions on others. It is possible to abstain from certain types of movies and shows, or even all movies and television, in a genuinely free way. I greatly admire my friends who abstain; who don't even have a TV. Together we add to the richness of each others' lives by bringing perspective to one another about who God is and how we relate to him. Together we present to the world a more complete picture. It is the diversity of the Body that most beautifully represents Christ to the world. It is vital to our Christian calling to live as much as we can in the tension between the pulls of legalism and libertinism. The ebb and flow of this kind of living is part of what in means to live the full, rich, abundant life of Christ.

With affection in our Lord Jesus,
Renea

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2011/02/03/those-are-sexy-worldview-glasses-youve-got-there/

Every Story Whispers His Name

May 1, 2009



I am so excited about this. It just came in the mail from Amazon, and I have been bringing it with me everywhere I go like show-and-tell because I am that pumped about it. Here's the thing; I started thinking about my first-graders and how I'd love to simply read a chapter book to them from week to week rather than individual stories. That got me to wondering if such a thing existed: a chapter-book version of the Bible. In my search, I stumbled across *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, which is pretty close. I love the byline: "Every story whispers his name." Every story in the Bible (even the Old Testament ones) whisper the name of Jesus.

Listen to this excerpt from the introduction: read it out loud; it was meant to be read aloud:

> No, the Bible isn't a book of rules, or a book of heroes. The Bible is most of all a Story. It's an adventure story about a young Hero who comes from a far country to win back his lost treasure. It's a love story about a brave Prince who leaves his palace, his throne – everything – to rescue the one he loves. It's like the most wonderful of fairy tales that has come true in real life!
>
> You see, the best thing about this Story is – it's true.
>
> There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them.
>
> It takes the whole Bible to tell this Story. And at the center of the Story, there is a baby. Every Story in the Bible whispers his name. He is like the missing piece in a puzzle – the piece that makes all the other pieces fit together, and suddenly you can see a beautiful picture.
>
> And this is no ordinary baby. This is the Child upon whom everything would depend. This is the Child who would one day

> – but wait. Our Story starts where all good stories start. Right at the very beginning. . .

I'm impressed by the style and the quality of the writing and the art in this Bible. I'm impressed by the author's use of punctuation and parallelism and alliteration to make the story come to life. I'm impressed by the way she introduces ideas like God's "Never Stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever Love," ideas like Home (and ontology), Good and Evil, and the Creation-Fall-Redemption narrative. Sally Lloyd-Jones acknowledges Tim Keller for giving her this "vocabulary of faith." I'm impressed by that too. It sounds a bit high-falutin' when it's described by how it has impressed me; but I promise you, it is not. It's a children's book that young children can read themselves and enjoy. But like any *good* children's literature, it's a good read for adults too.

Literally every story in this Bible from Genesis to Revelation hints at Jesus, speaks to the *Logos*, the Center of God's Story (and ours). This children's Bible is creative; it's fresh; it's intellectually ingenuous. It's what we've been waiting for.

The Jesus Storybook Bible isn't a replacement for your Children's NIV, but it's a good place to start, and a good supplement – for your personal Bible reading as well as your children's.

Check it out here where you can also enjoy video segments where the reading is done by the masterful David Suchet!

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2009/05/01/the-jesus-storybook-bible/

Should Christians Respect Obama?

Mar. 9, 2010

The email below titled "Should Christians Respect Obama?" was forwarded to me. Perhaps you've seen it too. (I have formatted the spacing to fit below; however, all emphases—bolds, italics, exclamation marks, words in all caps—are original.)

> **Dr. David Barton is more of a historian than a Biblical speaker, but very famous for his knowledge of historical facts as well as Biblical truths.**
>
> **Dr. David Barton – on Obama**
> Respect the Office? Yes. Respect the Man in the Office? No, I am sorry to say. I have noted that many elected officials, both Democrats and Republicans, called upon America to unite behind Obama. Well, I want to make it clear to all who will listen that I AM NOT uniting behind Obama !
>
> I will respect the Office which he holds, and I will acknowledge his abilities as an orator and wordsmith and pray for him, BUT that is it. I have begun today to see what I can do to make sure that he is a one-term President !
>
> Why am I doing this ? It is because:
> – I do not share Obama's vision or value system for America ;
> – I do not share his Abortion beliefs;
> – I do not share his radical Marxist's concept of re-distributing wealth;
> – I do not share his stated views on raising taxes on those who make $150,000+ (the ceiling has been changed three times since August);
> – I do not share his view that America is Arrogant;
> – I do not share his view that America is not a Christian

Nation;
– I do not share his view that the military should be reduced by 25%;
– I do not share his view of amnesty and giving more to illegals than our American Citizens who need help;
– I do not share his views on homosexuality and his definition of marriage;
– I do not share his views that Radical Islam is our friend and Israel is our enemy who should give up any land;
– I do not share his spiritual beliefs (at least the ones he has made public);
– I do not share his beliefs on how to re-work the healthcare system in America ;
– I do not share his Strategic views of the Middle East ; and
– I certainly do not share his plan to sit down with terrorist regimes such as Iran .

Bottom line: my America is vastly different from Obama's, and I have a higher obligation to my Country and my GOD to do what is Right ! For eight (8) years, the Liberals in our Society, led by numerous entertainers who would have no platform and no real credibility but for their celebrity status, have attacked President Bush, his family, and his spiritual beliefs !

They have not moved toward the center in their beliefs and their philosophies, and they never came together nor compromised their personal beliefs for the betterment of our Country ! They have portrayed my America as a land where everything is tolerated except being intolerant ! They have been a vocal and irreverent minority for years ! They have mocked and attacked the very core values so important to the founding and growth of our Country ! They have made every effort to remove the name of GOD or Jesus Christ from our Society ! They have challenged capital punishment, the right to bear firearms, and the most basic principles of our

criminal code ! They have attacked one of the most fundamental of all Freedoms, the right of free speech !

Unite behind Obama? Never ! ! !

I am sure many of you who read this think that I am going overboard, but I refuse to retreat one more inch in favor of those whom I believe are the embodiment of Evil! PRESIDENT BUSH made many mistakes during his Presidency, and I am not sure how history will judge him. However, I believe that he weighed his decisions in light of the long established Judeo-Christian principles of our Founding Fathers!!! Majority rules in America , and I will honor the concept; however, I will fight with all of my power to be a voice in opposition to Obama and his "goals for America ." I am going to be a thorn in the side of those who, if left unchecked, will destroy our Country ! ! Any more compromise is more defeat ! I pray that the results of this election will wake up many who have sat on the sidelines and allowed the Socialist-Marxist anti-GOD crowd to slowly change so much of what has been good in America !

"Error of Opinion may be tolerated where Reason is left free to combat it." – Thomas Jefferson
GOD bless you and GOD bless our Country ! ! !
(Please, please, please, pass this on if you agree.)
Thanks for your time, be safe. "In GOD We Trust"
"If we ever forget that we're one nation under GOD, then we will be a nation gone under." – Ronald Reagan
I WANT THE AMERICA I GREW UP IN BACK…..

In GOD We Trust……..

Respectfully, I disagree. The person who wrote this email didn't say how to respect the office without respecting the person holding it. It may be possible to do so; however, I believe it is more important to respect people than positions. It sounds very noble to say, "I respect the office but not the

man.” It’s like saying, “I respect my boss’s position of authority over me, but I don’t respect my boss.” But in my experience, this attitude makes it very difficult to “do everything without complaining or arguing.” That habit derives only from love. And love is expressed by subordinates to their authorities largely through respect (Eph 5:21–6:8; note especially 5:33 and 6:5).

It is possible not to respect the positions the President holds and still respect the President as an Image-bearing human creation if nothing else. But this kind of generosity which derives from thinking Christianly (a Christian worldview) is not expressed in this email. The tone of this email conveys contempt, not respect. I’m particularly unnerved by the way the term “embodiment of Evil” was tossed out there. Calling liberals Satan incarnate is sensationalist at best and certainly doesn’t portray the high view of human dignity that Christianity gives us.

A few other side notes to consider when viewing email forwards like this one:

- It is highly unlikely that a PhD wrote an email in such broad strokes with such inflammatory language, not to mention so many exclamation points. (In fact, I would be cautious of anything with this many exclamation marks, whether it claims to be from a PhD or not because when every sentence is exclaiming, that’s a sign that the email is not trying to get you to think about the topic, but is only interested in goading an inordinately emotional reaction from you (as opposed to an emotionally passionate response tempered with thought-full-ness).)

- From Dad: “Dr. Barton’s website does not have a record of this document – so, I doubt that it is from him. I sent an e-mail inquiry to wallbuilders.com asking them to comment on its authenticity.” Thanks Dad!

• Thirdly, there are at least three of the President's views/positions that have been distorted and intentionally misrepresented in this email. Email forwards are notorious for this, and there is very little that is less Christian than bearing false witness.

• Finally, I just want to comment that it is okay for Christians to disagree about most of the items in that list. This email implies that a Christian nation (whatever that means anyway) would resemble the exact set of beliefs behind this email; it implies that any good Christian would agree with this email wholesale.

So, should Christians respect President Obama? We, more than anyone, should—especially if you dislike him and/or disagree with his basic platforms. It is easy to love people we like: people who are like us, people with whom we agree. But Christ demands we love those who are irritating to us.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/03/09/respect-obama/

Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale

Frederick Buechner is one of my favorite authors, probably top five. He's a brilliant storyteller, who, like Shakespeare, understands both the peasant and the prince and writes stories that all at once capture them both, stories that are magical yet earthy.

In *Telling the Truth*, a book about communicating the gospel of Christ, Buechner provides his readers several engaging (and true) stories to help illustrate what it means to tell the truth with our lives, including a very compelling story from the life of the famous (and infamous) 19th-century preacher Henry Ward Beecher. Later Buechner tells us the story of Jesus before Pilate, but as if it were happening in 1977. And it's real. What I mean is, it isn't cheesy. As I'm reading it I believe it could have happened in 1977 like I'm watching it happen on some old rerun. Buechner does this with several stories from the Scriptures, and I read these stories with fresh eyes and new perspective.

And this is part of telling the truth: making new metaphors and painting contemporary word pictures so that people who have ears to hear…. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Because the truth is silence before it is spoken, Buechner points out:

> *He [Pilate] says, "What is truth?" and by way of an answer, the man with the split lip doesn't say a blessed thing. Or else his not saying anything, that is the blessed thing. […]*
>
> *The one who hears the truth that is silence before it is a word is Pilate, and he hears it because he has asked to hear it, and he has asked to hear it—"What is truth?" he asks—because in a world of many truths and half-truths he is*

> *hungry for truth itself or, failing that, at least for the truth that there is no truth. We are all of us Pilate in our asking after truth, and when we come to church to ask it, the preacher would do well to answer us also with silence because the truth and the Gospel are one, and before the Gospel is a word, it too like truth is silence—not an ordinary silence, silence as nothing to hear, but silence that makes itself heard if you listen to it the way Pilate listens to the silence of the man with the split lip. The Gospel that is truth is good news, but before it is good news, let us say that it is just news. Let us say that it is the evening news, the television news, but with the sound turned off.*
>
> *Picture that then, the video without the audio, the news with, for the moment, no words to explain it or explain it away, no words to cushion or sharpen the shock of it, no definition given to dispose of it with….* {1}

We are all of us the preacher too—we do call ourselves evangelicals, after all—and we would all do well to reacquaint ourselves with the silence that is, the silence that speaks into the silence that isn't, the silence of the rocks crying out Jesus' gospel truth. So how do we listen to the pregnant silence? How do we grab hold of the gift of truth Jesus is offering *us* as he offered to Pilate when Pilate asked after it? One way we do this, Buechner tells us, is by listening to our lives. All of it {2}: the tragedy, the comedy, and the fairy tale. Your car that was stolen, your marital affair, your friend who betrayed you, the iPhone you own but can't afford, the self-righteousness you feel about someone else's affair, materialism, tax-collecting…that is the *tragedy*. And the *comedy* is that part which is both your wedding day and the day you fall in the toilet because he left the seat up, both "a kind of terrible funniness and of a happy end to all that is terrible". {3}

Finally, we must listen to our lives within the overarching

framework of *fairy tale*. Because the tragic and the comic isn't all that's there. The fairy tale is the spell lifted and the Beast becoming on the outside the handsome prince he had become on the inside; it's the beautiful step-sisters whose feet turned out to be too fat and ugly like the sisters were in their hearts; it is those moments in our lives when we give to the least of these in spite of ourselves because once upon a time we climbed up the tree a cold opportunist and climbed down a caring, and cared for, philanthropist.

This listening to life—our own lives and the lives of others, the darkness and joyousness and impossible possibility of transformation into newness that we all share—listening to all of it in the silence before we finally but restlessly fall asleep or start our car or pour our coffee; and then also listening to the rustling of our tossing and turning, the cranking of the engine, the brewing of our coffee…this listening enables us to tell the truth.

Coupled with this Buechner reminds us we must also listen to the artists of our time and the times before us:

> *There would be a strong argument for saying that much of the most powerful preaching of our time is the preaching of the poets, playwrights, novelists because it is often they better than the rest of us who speak with awful honesty about the absence of God in the world, and about the storm of his absence, both without and within, which, because it is unendurable, unlivable, drives us to look to the eye of the storm.* [{4}]

We would of course add the film writer / director. Fiction is such an important informer of the gospel, I cannot image how shallow my theology would be without it. Likewise, if I didn't discipline myself to listen to others, my theology would be shallow. And I recognize that some are gifted with a propensity for listening to nature, some to microbiology, some

to art, some to numbers, some to everyday chores. But we each of us regardless of which comes more naturally can grow through the Holy Spirit in our spiritual ability to listen. More importantly, we all must learn to lean on one another: he who has ears for music learns from she who has ears for engineering, for example—and she learns from him, too.

Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale is a small book divided into four chapters that brings us a refreshing look at sharing the gospel. It's refreshing because it is the whole, honest truth, not only about the world, but about our own hearts. "So if preachers or lecturers are going to say anything that really matters to anyone including themselves," Buechner, the ordained, "part-time novelist, Christian, pig" {5} knowingly tells us,

> *they must say it not just to the public part of us that considers interesting thoughts about the gospel and how to preach it, but to the private, inner part too, to the part of us all where our dreams come from, both our good dreams and our bad dreams, the inner part where thoughts mean less than images, elucidation less than evocation, where our concern is less with how the gospel is to be preached than with what the gospel is and what it is to us. They must address themselves to the fullness of who we are and the emptiness too, the emptiness where grace and peace belong but mostly are not, because terrible as well as wonderful things have happened to us all. {6}*

And so, Buechner being a gifted, contemplative listener to life and literature, uses everyday life to tell gospel history in fresh ways, and uses those stories together with the poetry of the prophets, the magic of familiar fairy tales, and the masterpieces of some of Buechner's favorite writers to tell the truth, which is the gospel, in hopes that his telling the truth will help us tell it too.

1. Buechner, Frederick, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale* (HarperCollins, NY, 1977), p. 14

2. Ibid, p. 34

3. Ibid. p. 6.

4. Ibid, p. 44.

5. Buechner, A film about writer and minister Frederick Buechner, directed by: Rob Collins (CustomFlix Studio, 2004) http://amzn.to/pTUeeD.

6. Buechner, *Telling the Truth*, p. 4.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/01/26/telling-the-truth/

To Live Is Christ: On Singleness and Waiting

Apr. 9, 2010

We live in the tension between contentment and craving. Whether you are married or single or widowed or divorced; dating, not dating, wanting to date, not wanting to date—for now, forever. If you are wondering about your sexuality or your sex-appeal, your marriage, the strength of your love or your hope. . . And if you can empathize with the faith-struggle of doubt and dashed or delayed dreams (because without empathy we are nothing but the annoying, repetitive clanging of construction in the city streets) . . . Angela Severson has bravely opened a vein to unleash the power that

only life-blood has for the healing and cleansing of telling the truth.

This poem is so very well done. I've never seen anything like it. It's holistic and honest and inspiring and right on the money. The single life and the married life illustrate and teach us about life with Christ and the character of God. The story of "This Life" is one that all too often gets marginalized and left untold, or told unwell—But, we're doing better. When both stories are told (and listened to), all lives (and theologies) are enriched.

This Life

We wait, we long for, we pine after, … we desire, we yearn. We wait.

I wait
I am thirteen
Puberty explodes like a rash, an epidemic.
My girlfriends hold hands with boys we only months ago snickered at, turned up our noses at, as though their very essence was a disease. Now the disease appears to be, that my girlfriends can't stop gawking over these same specimen. I decide to play along and choose my crushes. I crush my way through high school, waiting to be asked out. Waiting by locker stalls during break, waiting for a nudge in the hall, a simple "hey," a nod. I wait, standing pressed against the wall, through all the slow songs on Friday nights in the darkened gymnasiums. I wait for an invitation to senior prom. I wait.
Through this waiting, I feel like it is not working, meaning me.
Something is not working with me…my friends acquire boyfriends, hold hands, kiss, and I acquire journals, stashed by my bedside, full of wonderings and waiting.

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To be ready and available}

It is July.
I'm twenty-two.
My days of being a serial "crushest' are about to end.
I am standing in a parking lot surrounded by pigeons pecking at croissant crumbs. The aroma of Newman's fish-n-chips deep fat fryers heating up engulfs me. In the slant of the morning sun my current crush tells me, that he has a crush on me.
……finally! He likes me and I like him. So, this is what it's like to be loved, this is what I've been waiting for… this messy, dizzy, complicated, delicious, heart pounding love. We dance the dating dance for months and then on a quiet unexpected spring day he wants me to be his…asks me to be his, opens the door to the promise of forever and stamps soul-mate on my heart.

{Wait: as defined by Webster's: To stay in a place of expectation of}

I am twenty-six.
I am engaged to the same fellow.
I am still waiting.
I've waited through friends getting married, through showers and bridesmaids dresses, through banquets and bouquet tossing, through Martha Stewart Wedding Magazines and honeymoon trip photos. It is now my turn. I am next in line to run from the church doors dodging birdseed and blessings. However, love is delicate, as fragile as the blossoms of spring, opening in trust to the slanting sun and quick to close in the cool of the evening, so too was this promise, one that could not take hold, a love aborted, out of fear and wisdom, full of pain, and awe. Stunned with grief, the love in my heart shrinks, evaporates, dies and God becomes small, cruel and unkind.
Hope aborted.

For what do I wait?
Am I waiting for what I want, or what I need?

For that which I desire, or believe that I deserve?
Am I longing for wisdom? …opening myself to the God, who loves me into this deep-down empty sorrow…

{Romans Eight}
“In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”

I am 30 or 32 or somewhere in between.
I have dates that last 10 minutes or 2 years. I avoid answering calls from some and linger hours by the phone waiting for others. In and out of love, infatuation, intrigue…sometimes going through the motions, other times knowing he is.
….I’m into men, I’m tired of men. One day I’m free as a bird and content in my singleness, the next I am desperately pining away for every male that crosses my path, searching his finger for a wedding ring. I seize the day, travel over seas, take classes, switch careers, indulging in the delights and rewards of being single and still I wait. I watch my married friends build homes, families and history.

It is summer wedding season again. My cousin is getting married. I congratulate myself that I am actually excited about being there, really o.k with my place in life, o.k. that I don’t have a date for this wedding, feeling genuinely happy for the two tying the knot. At the reception, between sipping white wine and sampling stuffed mushrooms, she approaches me….that token distant relative, you know the one…she has known me since birth, and kept up on me through my parents Christmas cards…and she asks “So are you going to be next?” I politely answer that I am not currently dating anyone…and she replies, “Well, what is a pretty girl like you still doing single?” Deep in my heart I have to trust

that she means well, but the thoughts in my head and the words about to fly off my tongue feel like dragon fire. I want set blaze to her lovely over-sprayed doo. I smile and shrug, and pop another mushroom in my mouth to choke down my anger and my shame. “Yeah, what is wrong with me?” A moment ago I was confident in my singleness and now I feel other. I feel like a freak of nature, an alien, a misfit. I feel shaken.

{Hebrews 11/12}
“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised, they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth……They are longing for a better country- a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them……..Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our “God is a consuming fire.”

I am thirty-six.
I am single.
Singleness seems to be the new “have it all” lifestyle.
I decide to take a break in my day, a little escape from work.
I brew my cup of tea, add a dash of cream and sit back on the sofa with a magazine for some creative inspiration. I flip open into the middle and look down on the page. It is an advice column. The first question I glance at reads {Capital Q, semicolon} “Help, Please! What should I say to people who ask “why are you single?” It’s so rude, I can never think of a response. (yeah, I agree and can’t wait to hear the answer) {Capital A, semicolon} Shake your head, frown and say, “I loathe giving up all the fabulous sex” The answer hits me in the gut. I feel sad, disgusted, disappointed and angry. I’m appalled at the culture in which

I live and yet not surprised. What do you expect, Angela….this world is not going to encourage you in your singleness, at least in a moral sense. I've read that singleness is on the rise…more people are single now that ever before. I want to think, great, I'm not so different, not so alone, but there is a huge chasm that defines this single lifestyle. The chasm is sexuality. It is one thing to be single and living with someone, single and sleeping with someone, single and sleeping with anyone and a very different state to be single and abstinent.
Abstinent not because it feels good or is pious, but because it honors God. Choosing abstinence out of obedience and respect for the vulnerability of the human body and spirit. I am ashamed to admit that I often hide the truth that I am nearly forty and a virgin. In this culture being a virgin makes me feel small, prude, asexual. Some nights I lay in bed at night aching to be held, longing for sexual intimacy. Gravity pulls my bones toward the earth, my body fills hollow…..I lay one hand on my belly and the other over my breast, not with the intention of arousal, but to be held. It would be easy to deny my sexuality and I have. But tonight I want to acknowledge that my body was designed for sexual intimacy, and although that yearning is not being fulfilled, I am still a sensual creation.

{Psalms 139}
"You hem me in – behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me."

{Martin Luther}
"This life, therefore, is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness;
not health, but healing;
not being, but becoming;
not rest, but exercise.
We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it.

The process is not yet finished, but it is going on.
This is not the end, but it is the road.
All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified.”

I am thirty-eight.
There are days when I feel content knowing that I am growing in wisdom, I am awaiting the Kingdom. That my singleness is just part of my journey here, it is the color of my life. Our stories all get colored in, mine just happens to be green at the moment.
Perhaps I’ll meet someone and get married and then I’ll get to add some purple and red, but today it’s green. I feel blessed with my greenness, alive and grateful. I love my career. I have rich, beautiful friends, and family….. my daily needs are always met, and still there is this tension. I’m driving home from Eugene, marveling over the spring grass, the baby lambs, the sinking sun…the beauty is intoxicating and warm tears roll down my cheeks. I’ve just come from holding my new godson. His sweet newborn smell, his fragile breath, his parents (my beloved friends) and his sisters (my other two god children) all nestled in unison. This is a family. In this moment I am so grateful to be a part of it, but now I must travel north on I-5 towards home, alone. These tears are full of sorrow and joy, so bittersweet. In my heart I hold the hope that I may one day receive the blessing of a family like this earth but I know that this earth in all it’s beauty, is broken, so that for which I was made, I may not receive. There are bigger promises, larger hopes…to that I must cling.

{Hebrews 11}
“none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.”

{Wait: as defined by Webster’s: To look forward expectantly, to hold back expectantly.
To remain neglected or to remain in readiness.}

Today, as I write this, it is hard to wait.
I squirm. I writhe.
My skin crawls. The discomfort is visceral. Anything would feel better than here. The loneliness penetrates and all I see around me is what I don't have. I hike through Forest Park and I see love and families. I see holding hands and holding hearts. I see couples with babies and couples with dogs and couples melting into one another, sharing food, laughter, words and breath. I cry out "God, spare me from this loneliness, this waiting. I want my feelings to change. I feel guilty for not being satisfied with what I have in this moment. My head knows the gospel's truth.
The God of the Universe cares for me, loves me to the core, is for me,….and he has promised me life.
Not this life, but the everlasting kind.
The one without pain and suffering, hungering and squirming. A promise that is more than I can conceive, contain, or deserve. His grace covers the reality that my heart, at this moment, does not feel any better with this knowledge. I feel small and fragile, achy, and tired. Right now I am marred then I shall be perfect, right now I am broken, then I shall be fixed. I cry out for redemption.

{Deuteronomy 31}
"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

What is it that I wait for? For what do I long? Is it Connection? Wholeness? Safety? Love?
I wait with myself, with my family, my friends,
I wait with my neighbor, the clerk at the grocery store, the lady next to me on the bus.
I wait with those across the country, across the sea, across the world, in places I know nothing of, filled with people waiting….
They wait for things that I have. They wait for warm food in their bellies and water on their lips, they wait to see their sick child healed, or the miracle of their bodies

restored, they wait for a soft place to lay down at night, and the demon voices in their heads be stilled. The wait for the terror to stop and the monsters slain. We all wait.
We wait for hope, for freedom, for comfort
We wait for love.
Deep, deep love that will never fail. A love that will fill us.
We wait for Christ.

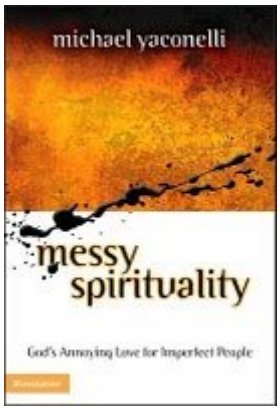
{Romans 8}
"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angel nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Angela Severson
http://www.imagodeiwomen.com/2010/03/this-life.html

This blog post originally appeared at
http://reneamac.com/2010/04/09/to-live-is-christ/

Messy Spirituality: God's Annoying Love for Imperfect People

Jun. 9, 2009



Messy Spirituality is about exactly that. It's a story of and a guide to rightly rejecting neat, sanitized spirituality, breaking out of the plastic shrinkwrap of systemitized religion, and embracing abundant life with all its messes, failures, complexities, questions, joys, triumphs, tensions, paradoxes… which requires us to embrace grace. It requires the sometimes desperate acknowledgment of our constant need of grace, which turns us into people of Grace—the people we're all supposed to be from Eden, people of God.

Romans 12:2 warns against allowing the world to squeeze us into a particular pattern, a box that doesn't let the Light in and keeps us from real living. Yaconelli recognizes that we're not only in danger of the world trying to make us into what the world wants us to be: well-meaning Christians and churches often squeeze everybody into one-size-fits-all patterns of spirituality. This small book says big things about what it means to be spiritual and to walk with God.

Messy Spirituality derives from Yaconelli's own journey from legalism to liberty and the years of experience he has as a pastor of a small fellowship full of misfits. Jesus calls us to live faith-full lives. But too often we live fear-full lives. We're called to be radically different (as opposed to merely civilly different). Yaconelli helps us think through these things, and he does so with patience and humility, humor, earthy-ness, wisdom, and love.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2009/06/09/messy-spirituality/

Into the Void: The Coming Transhuman Transformation

In the TV show *The Six Million Dollar Man*, Lee Majors played Steven Austin, a crippled astronaut who was rehabilitated through bionic technology that gave him superhuman strength and powers. The show, like so much science fiction, presents us with the dream that technology will enhance all our facilities from sight to memory, hearing to strength, and lengthen our life span to boot. The bionic man represents a fictional forerunner of the transhuman transformation. The Transhumanist school believes that technology will not only enhance the human condition, but eventually conquer death and grant us immortality. Human enhancement technology performs wonders in allowing the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the sick to be well, but even immortality is out of the reach of technology. In striving to enhance our physical existence we may lose our souls in the process.

In his famous book, *The Abolition of Man* published in the 1940s, C. S. Lewis wrote that modern society is one step away from "the void"{1}—"post-humanity,"{2} a state of existence from which there will be no return. Lewis argues that when we step outside of what he calls the Tao{3}, we lose all sense of value for human life that has always governed civilization. What Lewis calls the Tao, we might call Natural Law or Traditional Morality—that internal moral understanding of right and wrong which God has written on the hearts of all people (Romans 2), the *Logos* by which all things were created (John 1, see especially verse 4).{4}

In leaving traditional spiritual values behind, Lewis argues, modern technological civilization has reduced human value to only what is natural, and we have lost our spiritual quality. Modern society has striven to conquer nature and largely succeeded, but at a great cost—with each new conquest, more

losses in human dignity, more of the human spark extinguished. Lewis offers the example of eugenics from his time in the 1930's and 40's.{5} Eugenics is now a debunked science of racial manipulation and something we know was practiced with particular ferocity in Nazi Germany.{6} But the driving philosophy of manipulating nature and humanity into something new and final remains prominent. Lewis underestimated the truth of his own prophecy. He thought that maybe in 10,000 years the final leap will be taken when mankind will solidify itself into some kind of inert power structure dominated by science and technology.{7}

However, the 21st century may prove to be the era of posthumanity that Lewis foresaw in his time. The current movement of transhumanism, or human enhancement, asserts that humanity will eventually achieve a new form as a species through its adaption to modern computer technology and genetic engineering in order to reach a higher evolutionary condition. Our present state is not final. Transhumanism derives from Darwinian doctrine regarding the evolution of our species. Evolutionary forces demand that a species adapt to its environment or become extinct. On this view, many species experience a pseudo–extinction in which their adaptation gives way to another kind of species leaving its old form behind. Many evolutionists believe this happened to the dinosaurs on their way to becoming modern birds and that humanity faces the same transformation on its way up a higher evolutionary path.{8} Primates evolved into humans so humans will eventually evolve into something higher (posthuman).

Metaman

Our present condition will give way to the cyborg (which is short for cybernetic organism) as we join our bodies and minds to technological progress. Transhumanists believe that because Artificial Intelligence (computing power) advances at such a rapid pace, it will eventually exceed human intelligence and

humanity will need to employ genetic engineering to modify our bodies to keep pace or become extinct. Therefore, the cyborg condition represents humanity's inevitable destiny.

The two predominant pillars in transhumanism revolve around Artificial Intelligence (AI) and genetic engineering. One represents a biological change through manipulating genes. The other presents the merging of human intelligence with AI. The biological position (through use of genetic engineering) claims that through transference of genes between species, we eradicate the differences and create a global superorganism that encompasses both kinds of life—the natural and the artificial. Biophysicist Gregory Stock states that once humanity begins to tamper with its genetic code, and the codes of all other plants and animal species, that "the definition of 'human' begins to drift."{9} Through genetic engineering we will transform the human condition by merging humanity with the rest of nature, thereby creating a planetary superorganism. A superorganism operates like a bee hive or an anthill as a collection of individual organisms united as a living creature. Stock calls this Metaman, the joining of all biological creatures with machines, making one giant planetary life form. This superorganism encompasses the entire globe.

Transhumanism presupposes that no distinction exists between humanity, nature or machines. Metaman includes humanity, all it creates, and also the natural world. It acknowledges humanity's key role in the creation of farms and cities, but includes all natural elements, such as forests, jungles and weather. Metaman includes humanity and goes beyond it.{10} Stock envisions a greater role for genetic engineering in redefining biological life as different species are crossed. Humanity may now control the direction of its evolution and that of the entire planet.

Stock states that through "conscious design" humanity has replaced the evolutionary process.{11} This leads us to Post–Darwinism where people have supplanted the natural order

with their own technological modification of humanity and the entire ecological system. “Life, having evolved a being that internalizes the process of natural selection, has finally transcended that process.”{12} Humanity may now, through the agency of technological progress, seize direction of its development and guide it to wherever it wants itself to go. No other species has ever controlled its own destiny as we do.

The Singularity

A second transhumanist belief argues for the arrival of an eventual technological threshold that will be reached through the advancement of Artificial Intelligence. The argument goes like this: because AI develops at a rapid pace it will achieve equality with the human brain and eventually surpass it. Estimates as to when this will happen range from the 2020’s to 2045. The evolutionary process will reach a crescendo sometime in the 21st century in an event transhumanists call “the Singularity.”{13} There will be a sudden transformation of consciousness and loss of all distinction, or Singularity, between humanity and its creations, or the absence of boundaries between the natural and artificial world. Singularity watchers expect that this event will mark the ultimate merging of humans and machines. Renowned inventor and AI prophet Ray Kurzweil states, “The Singularity will allow us to transcend these limitations of our biological bodies and brains. . . . There will be no distinction, post–Singularity, between human and machine. . . .”{14}As the fictional CEO and mastermind behind a cutting edge AI company in the year 2088 crowed, “My goal is for us to end death as we know it on earth within 50 years—for the essence of every person to live perpetually in an uploaded state. . . . The transhuman age has dawned.”{15}

Both of these positions, one emanating from genetic engineering that seeks to enhance the body, the other from Artificial Intelligence that seeks to supersede and even

supplant the need for bodies, argue for the eventual replacement of humanity with biological–machine hybrids. Metaman and Singularity systems are direct heirs of the modern idea of progress. They present the dawning of a technological Millennium, but they also share a long history dating back into medieval Christendom. In the early Church, technology, or the "mechanical arts," was never considered as a means to salvation or Edenic restoration. Historian David Noble argues that from Charlemagne to the early Early Modern period technology became associated with transcendence as the means of restoring the lost divine image or *imago dei*.{16}

Theologian Ernst Benz argues similarly that the Modern technological project was founded on a theological notion in which humanity believed itself to be the fellow worker with God in establishing His kingdom on earth through reversing the effects of the Fall.{17} We are fellow workers with God; however, this position overemphasized humanity's role in restoration to the point of becoming a works–based salvation of creation.

Despite the apparent secularity of the super science behind all the technological wonders of our time, the notions of modern progress and transhumanism remain grounded in an aberrant form of Christian theology. Noble summarizes this well when he states, "For modern technology and modern faith are neither complements nor opposites, nor do they represent succeeding stages of human development. They are merged, and always have been, the technological enterprise being, at the same time, an essentially religious endeavor."{18} The theology behind Modern technological progress remains rooted in Medieval and Early Modern notions of earthly redemption when the "useful arts,"{19} which ranged anywhere from improved agricultural methods to windmills, were invested with redemptive qualities and humanity began to assume an elevated status over nature. "In theological terms, this exalted stance vis-à-vis nature represented a forceful reassertion of an

early core Christian belief in the possibility of mankind's recovery of its original God–likeness, the 'image–likeness of man to God' from Genesis (1:26), which had been impaired by sin and forfeited with the Fall."{20} Technology becomes the means of restoring the original divine image. Technological development was expected to reverse the effects of the Fall and restore original perfection. This theology also serves as the impetus behind Millennial thought which believes technology helps humanity recover from the Fall and leads to an earthly paradise. Transhumanism extends this Millennial belief into the twenty–first century.

Redeeming Technology

We are faced with the problem of how to redeem all the advances of technology such as human enhancement without losing ourselves in the process. Idolatry preoccupies our central concern with technology. Biblically speaking, idolatry exalts the work of humanity, including individual human beings, over God; we commit idolatry when we serve the creature rather than the Creator. "Professing to be wise, [we] became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four–footed animals and crawling creatures" (Rom. 1:22-23). Theologian Paul Tillich offers a keen and insightful definition of idolatry when he states, "Idolatry is the elevation of a preliminary concern to ultimacy. Something essentially partial is boosted into universality, and something essentially finite is given infinite existence."{21} Transhumanism presents us with a spiritualization of technology believed to grant us immortality through shedding our bodies and adopting machine ones or through genetic engineering that will prolong bodily life indefinitely. Our Modern age defines technology as a source of material redemption by placing finite technical means into a divine position, thus committing idolatry.

In seeking to reconcile technology with a biblical theology we have three possible approaches. *Technophobia* represents the first position. This view contends that we should fear technological innovation and attempt to destroy it. The Unabomber Manifesto offers the most radical, pessimistic and violent expression of this position, arguing for a violent attack against the elites of technological civilization such as computer scientists in an effort to return society to primitive and natural conditions in hopes of escaping the kind of future transhumanists expect.{22} However, the entire tenor of our times moves in the opposite direction, that of *technophilism*, or the inordinate love for technology. Transhumanism optimistically believes that through technological innovation we will restore our God–like image. A third position asserts a mediating role between over–zealous optimism and radical morose pessimism. {23}

Technocriticism

Technocriticism offers the only viable theological position. By understanding technology as a modern form of idolatry we are able to place it in a proper perspective. Technocriticism does not accept the advances of innovation and all the benefits new technology offers without critical dialogue and reflection. Technocriticism warns us that with every new invention a price must be paid. Progress is not free. With the invention of the automobile came air pollution, traffic and accidents. Computers make data more accessible, but we also suffer from information overload and a free–flow of harmful material. Cell phones enhance communication, but also operate as an electric leash, making inaccessibility virtually impossible. Examples of the negative effects of any technology can be multiplied if we cared enough to think through all the implications of progress. Technocriticism does not allow us the luxury of remaining blissfully unaware of the possible negative consequences and limitations of new inventions. This approach is essential because it demonstrates the fallibility

of all technological progress and removes its divine status.

Technocriticism humanizes technology. We assert nothing more than the idea that technology expresses human nature. Technology is us! Technology suffers the same faults and failures that plague human nature. Technology is not a means of restoring our lost divine image or reasserting our rightful place over nature. This amounts to a works–based salvation and leads to dangerous utopian and millennial delusions that amount to one group imposing its grandiose vision of the perfect society on the rest. Such ideologies include Marxism, Technological Utopianism and now Transhumanism. We are restored to the divine "image of His Son" by grace through faith alone (Rom. 8:29). Technology, serving as an extension of ourselves, means that what we create will bear our likeness, both as the image-bearers of God and in sinful human identity. It contains both positive and negative consequences that only patient wisdom can sort through.

Through criticism we limit the hold technology has on our minds and free ourselves from its demands. We use technology but do not ascribe salvific powers of redemption to it. A critical approach becomes even more crucial the further we advance in the fields of genetic engineering and AI. We do not know where these fields will lead and an uncritical approach that accepts them simply because it is possible to do so appears dangerous. We live under the delusion that technology frees us, but as Lewis warns, "At the moment, then, of Man's victory over Nature, we find the whole human race subjected to some individual men, and those individuals subjected to that in themselves which is purely 'natural'–to their irrational impulses."{24} The famous science–fiction writer Frank Herbert echoes Lewis's sentiments in his epic novel *Dune*: "Once men turned their thinking over to machines in the hope that this would set them free. But that only permitted other men with machines to enslave them."{25} Genetic engineering or merging humanity with AI only exchanges one condition for another. We

will not reach the glorified condition transhumanists anticipate. A responsible critical approach will ask, Into whose image are we transforming?

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 77.
2. Ibid., 86.
3. Lewis, of course, did not originate this ancient Chinese concept but rather applied it to universally accessible principles.
4. Ibid., 56.
5. Ibid., 72
6. See *Darwin's Racists: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* by Sharon Sebastian and Raymond G. Bohlin, Ph.D. Though the German Nazis acted out this hideous ideology to an extreme, eugenics was actually first promulgated in the United States, Germany and Scandinavia around the turn of the 20th Century.
7. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 71.
8. See Dr. Ray Bohlin's article PBS Evolution Series, especially the section entitled "'Great Transformations' and 'Extinction'."
9. Gregory Stock, *Metaman: The Merging of Humans and Machines into a Global Superorganism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 165.
10. Ibid., 20.
11. Ibid., 228.
12. Ibid., 231.
13. Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near* (New York: Penguin, 2005).
14. Ibid., 9.
15. David Gregory, *The Last Christian*, (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2010), 102.
16. David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 9.
17. Ernst Benz, *Evolution and Christian Hope: Man's Concept of*

the Future from Early Fathers to Teilhard de Chardin trans., Heinz G. Frank (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 124-125.
18. Noble, *The Religion of Technology*, 4, 5.
19. Ibid.,14.
20. Ibid.
21. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Reason and Revelation Being and God*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 13.
22. FC, *The Unabomber Manifesto: Industrial Society and Its Future* (Berkeley, CA: Jolly Roger Press, 1995).
23. See Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 5.
24. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 79, 80.
25. Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: Ace, 1965), 11.

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