

# Elvis Is Dead. (Deal With It.)

## Elvis Lives

At least in the hearts of his fans.

And they are everywhere.

Twenty years after his death, our culture is still fascinated with the raven-haired, swivel-hipped entertainer. His songs fill the airwaves. His face graces postage stamps and velvet paintings in the U.S. and abroad. Thousands of the faithful annually trek to Graceland, his Memphis home, to pay homage to the king of rock and roll.

The National Association of Amateur Elvis Impersonators promotes the cause while the "Flying Elvi" (plural of "Elvis," get it?) jump from 13,000 feet. Featured in a hit movie, these Las Vegas daredevils combine skydiving with Elvis nostalgia. They're even available for Las Vegas weddings: "Why settle for just one Elvis look-alike," asks the ad, "when you can have the entire ten-Elvi team in attendance on your special day?" They "make terrific groomsmen as well as perfect Las Vegas-style witnesses."

Internet sites tout Elvis fan clubs and even Elvis baby food. A Santa Cruz, CA, mall displays a plaque commemorating an Elvis sighting. Former NFL coach Jerry Glanville often left two tickets for Elvis at the will call window on game days.

"Elvis is Greek" announced a college fraternity newsletter. Three members of Tau Kappa Epsilon at Arkansas State University discovered in a safe deposit box Elvis's signature on a membership scroll and photos from his honorary induction. "It's amazing what computers can do with photos," cracked one

cynic.

Even academics are into Elvis. The University of Mississippi has held International Conferences on Elvis Presley. Scholarly seminars included, "Civil Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr., and Elvis"; "Elvis, Faulkner, and Feminine Spirituality"; "Elvis: The Twinless Twins' Search for Spiritual Meaning (Elvis's twin brother died at birth), and "Elvis 'n' Jesus."

America. What a country!

## **Hound Dog?**

What is all this about, really? My own informal, nonscientific survey yielded fascinating analyses from many levels of society.

"It's a national joke," claims a San Diego housepainter.

"I gave my wife an Elvis Valentine's Day candy box," admits a Miami interior designer. "Our cat is named Elvis Presley," explains his wife. "He's fat with a black coat, white collar, and eyes that glaze over—Elvis in his later years." The husband quips, "The other day, we had an Elvis sighting—in a tree." (Was a hound dog responsible?)

A Sacramento van driver attributes today's craze to "all the lonely people who sit around and watch TV. "Besides," the driver says, "Elvis's grave wasn't marked right, and there's evidence he's not really buried there. I read it in the tabloids."

A California mayor feels people need to link up with something, to create a sense of belonging. "They could be seeking memories of better times," she reasons. "Some people wish he was still alive. My husband is an Elvis fan. He knows Elvis is dead, but he likes the music."

A southern California doctor wonders if fans may be bonding

with a romanticized part of their youth. He adds, "People who don't have God make a god out of all sorts of things."

Indeed. Deep reverence and even worship characterize many pilgrims to Graceland. Some hold candlelight ceremonies, offer flowers, and display icons.

One scholar at Mississippi's International Conference notes that "without looking at spirituality, you can't explain the Elvis phenomena...There's a tremendous force that brings people back to Graceland."[{1}](#)

## Are You Lonesome Tonight?

Elvis's August 16, 1977 death brought an unusual outpouring of grief—feelings of loneliness and despair. Those feelings, though perhaps not as intense now as when he died, are still very real in many people.

"I get so depressed," admits a Texas woman. "Anytime I've got anything bothering me, I can get in my car and turn on the stereo and listen to Elvis and just go into a world of my own. It's like he's right there singing directly to me...It's like he's always there to solve everything."[{2}](#) "I sit and talk to him," claims a New Jersey follower. "I feel he hears what I say to him and he gives me the will to go on when things are really bad...Somehow you talk to Elvis.. I know if anybody ever saw me, they would probably tell me I was crazy, but I do. I love him. I talk to him and I know he understands and I feel so much better after. I think I always will."[{3}](#) Some fringers actually believe Elvis is still alive. My informal survey encountered no actual Elvis spotters, though a few claimed they had seen the Energizer Bunny.

"I'm not a weirdo like that," you might say. "What's this craze got to do with me?"

Years of interacting with people on six continents have convinced me that nearly everyone is looking for happiness and

fulfillment in life. Some seek it through fame, success, wealth, or career. Others look to relationships, friends, or family.

Pursuits from sports to sex can be driven by the need to fill a void. Probably everyone has at least one “Elvis” in his or her life, a person or idea or team or goal or possession or practice to which they are devoted and from which they seek happiness.

Many feel a spiritual emptiness, a need to personally connect with something that represents greatness, something that will replace inner loneliness with friendship, fear with love, and desperation with hope.

Loneliness is rampant today. Broken marriages, fragile relationships, and general incivility have raised emotional armor over hurting hearts. Newspaper personal ad sections swell with pleas for companionship. Lonely singles and lonely marrieds search cyberspace for someone to connect with. Humans need belonging and acceptance.

Once I was in a motel room convalescing from surgery. My best friend had just deserted me. Some coworkers had betrayed me. The inner pain felt like the worst argument I’d ever had, multiplied by a trillion—like I was being reamed out by an emotional Roto-Rooter. Loneliness ran deep.

Then a close friend called to ask how I was doing. What a lift! Everyone needs friendship to counter loneliness.

## **Love Me Tender**

We also need love. Los Angeles psychiatrist William Glasser says everyone needs to love and be loved and to feel a sense of worth—both to themselves and to others. He says we each need to become involved with at least one other person who cares for us and for whom we care, someone who will accept us for what we are but tell us when we act irresponsibly. Without

“this essential person,” he writes, “we will not be able to fulfill our basic needs”<sup>{4}</sup>It’s nice to be accepted based on our looks, personality, or performance, but these criteria can also bring fear and pressure. What if my looks change or I don’t perform well? Will I still be loved?

To be loved unconditionally, to be accepted in spite of our faults, can bring peace and contentment and motivation to excel. “You are so special to me,” says a spouse “I want to please you,” feels the mate.

Human love is great but not perfect. People can disappoint us or give us wrong advice. Those you trust can show their selfish side, use you for their own ends, or discard you. Is there something better?

Besides friendship and love, we also need hope. A study showed that many of the 31,000 Allied soldiers imprisoned in Japan and Korea during the 1940s suffered from lack of hope. Although they were offered sufficient food, more than 8,000 died. Psychiatric researcher and editor Dr. Harold Wolff believed many of them died from despair. He wrote, “Hope, like faith and a purpose in life, is medicinal. This is not merely a statement of belief, but a conclusion proved by meticulously controlled scientific experiment.”<sup>{5}</sup>Ultimately, however, searches for hope based purely on human endeavor lead to emptiness. For most of us, there will always be someone faster, richer, more intelligent or articulate, better looking or more popular than we are. Our favorite teams will lose. Our heroes will show their faults. Even if you reach the top, what than? According to the latest statistics, the death rate in this nation is still 100 percent.

Oddly enough, some clues to solving our struggles with loneliness and our quest for love and hope may lie in one of the songs Elvis recorded. Few may realize that Elvis’s only Grammy Award for a single came for his 1967 recording of “How Great Thou Art,” a famous hymn. The lyrics, which likely

reflected his own spiritual roots, speak in “awesome wonder” of God’s creation of the universe as a majestic display of His power.

The God this song alludes to is described elsewhere as a friend of those in need. If we let Him in our lives, He promises to be there in our successes and in our failures, when others praise us and when they desert us, when things are going well and when we’re painfully lonely.

“How Great Thou Art” also tells how all this is possible. Because of God’s great love for us, He sent His Son here to die, to carry the burden of humanity’s injustices, selfishness, and wrongs.

God’s love is endless, and He offers us hope. When we tell Him our problems, unlike Elvis, He can do something about them And not only can we rely on Him for our needs today, but the Bible promises a new heaven and earth in the future, free from death, sorrow, crying, and pain.[{6}](#) Jesus Himself promised, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” John 5:24).

Friendship, love, and hope– from one who cannot fail us. Sounds great. But is it true?

## **Jesus Is Alive. Live with It!**

Jesus said the final test of the truth of His claims would be His resurrection. Historical records indicate that he was executed on a cross and declared dead. His body was wrapped like a mummy and placed in a solid-rock tomb. A huge stone sealed the tomb’s entrance where an elite Roman guard kept watch.

On the third day the stone had been rolled away and the body was missing but the grave clothes remained in place. Hundreds of people witnessed him walking around alive again. Cowards

became heroes as ten of His previously frightened disciples were martyred for their faith.

Some years ago, as a skeptic myself, I discovered that His resurrection is actually one of the best-attested facts of history.[\[7\]](#) It's all true!

If you're longing to link with someone great, He's the greatest. Since Jesus is alive, you, too, can know Him as a friend.

Elvis Presley is dead. Chances are, you might have hints that some of the "Elvises" in your life really have little or nothing lasting to offer. But Jesus is alive. Care to meet Him?

## Notes

1. Gregory Rumberg "I Know Your Elvis," *Contemporary Christian Music*, February 1997, p. 31.
2. Ralph Burns, "How Great Thou Art: Photographs from Graceland," California Museum of Photography, University of California Riverside Website.
3. Ibid.
4. William Glasser, M.D., *Reality Therapy*, New York: Harper & Row, 1965, p. 7.
5. "A Scientific Report on What Hope Does for Man" (New York State Heart Assembly, n.d.), quoted in S. I. McMillen, M.D., *None of These Diseases*, Old Tappan (NJ): Fleming H Revell, 1968, p. 110.
6. Revelation 21: 1,4.
7. See, for instance, Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, San Bernardino (CA): Campus Crusade for Christ. 1972.

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# Movies and Morals

The movie industry is spending billions of dollars to grab the undivided attention of the movie-going public. The majority of the film makers work very hard at increasing the technical quality of their movies so that you and your family will keep coming back for more. There is no doubt, statistically speaking, that these efforts have been very successful.

Movie theaters are doing better than ever. Oh, they are not the grandiose movie houses with giant chandeliers and ostentatious splendor that some of us can remember. The new movie theaters are big, unappealing buildings containing many small, very plain looking theater rooms. But, attendance is not a problem. In fact, we live in a country filled with the magic screen. Television, which we thought would bring down the movie theaters, has become an extension of the phenomenon through the vast market of video movies.

Statistics tell us that the average child spends many hours viewing movies, either in theaters or on video. Is it not reasonable to conclude that such media can affect his or her view of the world? In particular, can their understanding of ethical guidelines be affected? As is true with all media, movies contain someone's ideas about life. What do the producers, writers, and directors want to convey? Do their ethical perspectives align with those you want to teach your children? Unfortunately, the world of movies is too often a world apart from God.

What are we as parents and concerned adults to do? Well, for one thing we can try to use movies to help our kids learn the lessons they should be learning. There are lessons that can be gleaned from the vast library of video movies, but it will

take some effort on our part to know how to guide our children's viewing habits and to interact with them in the process. We must make the medium work to accomplish our goals, and make certain that what they are exposed to in movies is helping to develop healthy minds. Tragically, too many parents use movies as a babysitter for their children. Thus, such parents are often not aware of what their children are watching, yet in reality they should be watching films together so the family can discuss what they are viewing.

In this essay we will explore some ideas concerning how you can use movies to discuss ethics and morality with your older children. We will introduce some principles and guidelines that you can use in order to lead them to make good value judgments. This is very important because you can never assume that your children see the evil in certain situations, nor that they grasp the moral climate of a story. In fact, if they are not regularly hearing the wisdom a parent can provide, they may be buying into a deformed world view.

During our discussion we will use particular movies as examples. But many films can be used, even ones that show the dark side of life, as long as we are not exposing ourselves to material that we know in our conscience we should not be viewing. We will be dealing with films that for the most part work well with older children. Many of the films are also in book form, so reading the story would enhance the process. So, let's look at some ideas about how we might teach ethics while viewing movies.

## **Popular Films and Ethical Dilemmas**

As we seek to help our children glean ethical lessons from movies, they will, of necessity, come face-to-face with challenging ethical dilemmas. There is a certain amount of safety, however, in first encountering ethical tests in the realm of the imagination through movies or literature. This is especially true if a parent is actively participating and

helping the young person think through the alternatives.

Let's continue this thought by examining some scenes from *Jurassic Park*.<sup>(1)</sup> This film includes the very contemporary issue of bioethics. Genetic engineering can be used for both good and evil. The movie presents in vivid detail a type of dilemma frequently faced today; that is, If we have the ability to do something, does that mean we should go ahead and use that ability? Does capability = justifiability?

You may want to emphasize the hard-learned lessons of the scientists in this story and use the implications of biotechnology gone astray. Discuss with your children some of the rapidly growing medical procedures such as test tube babies, surrogate parents, genetic manipulation, and artificial insemination. Debate whether the Jurassic Park scientists merely proceeded in an irrational and irresponsible manner, or whether they were in fact trying to play the role of God, thus trespassing into an area they should have never invaded. Perhaps they were so caught up in the excitement of the possibilities that they never stopped to consider whether the "invasion" should have taken place.

Another area of ethical discussion is in the realm of computer ethics, a subject that may be of great interest to your child. The computer security design in Jurassic Park was out-dated and poorly conceived. It hinged upon one person, Dennis Nedry, who turned out to be the weak link in the whole system.<sup>(2)</sup> The design flaws allowed one person with a self-serving motive to shut down the whole system.

In his greed for greater wealth, Dennis, the core programmer, shut down the security system and jeopardized the whole project. In security systems, as in our legal system, we must develop a design on the basis of fallen human nature. All of us should realize that we are capable of the worst of evils. We must design safeguards into our security systems to protect against those who go astray. For example, even the President

of the United States can't begin an atomic attack without others being involved in the process. This is a safeguard for all of us.

A film such as this also gives you an opportunity to encourage your children to think beyond the exciting technology of the production. Dinosaurs that appear so real and frightening are one thing, but ideas implanted in the script are another.

For a deeper analysis of Jurassic Park you may want to read Probe's article, [The Worldview of Jurassic Park](#) by Dr. Ray Bohlin.

Another film that you may use with older children is *Class Action*(3), a story about a daughter's relationship with her father in the context of battles over personal and legal ethics. (Warning, it does have an "R" rating for language.) At stake in this film is the code of ethics of the California Bar Association. It shows that we may not evade responsibility just because we wish to do so. The film is based on the Ford Pinto gas tank case, and there are many interesting developments in the areas of legal, business, and engineering ethics.

Discuss the concept of cost-benefit analysis and what role, if any, it plays in ethical dialogue. In this type of analysis a company computes the cost of making the necessary changes to correct a situation against the cost of paying off the anticipated number of lawsuits that would arise if the problem is not corrected. Bottom line decisions are too often made based on money, rather than the effect on people's lives.

## **Ethical Struggles on the High Seas**

Now, let's investigate *Billy Budd*, a classic movie which seethes with ethical conflict. This powerful story is "a stark dramatization of man's fight between good and evil. The battle is fully realized in the personal and physical struggle

between Billy Budd, a young innocent sailor on a British man-of-war and his superior, the cold, cruel and often vicious Claggart. When Billy Budd's strong belief in goodness is threatened by Claggart's equally strong force of evil, the consequences for both individuals are tragic and lasting."(4) The film is based on Herman Melville's book of the same title.(5) Billy Budd, the popular deck hand, is convicted of murder and is sentenced to be hanged from the yardarm. In the process of his court martial, stimulating ethical questions are surfaced. But remember, this is a classic black and white film. Some children will have difficulty paying attention. You may want to develop in your children a taste for thought-provoking types of movies by first using more popular films, such as Jurassic Park. Then you may decide to explore the classics later.

Billy Budd is a good movie to watch with your older children. You may even want to hit the stop button from time to time during the dialogue. See if your children understand the dilemma that Captain Vere is experiencing as he struggles with the decision of Billy Budd's fate.

Consider some hints of what to look for. For example, the issue of peer pressure versus responsibility is apparent. Captain Vere was very concerned about what the crew would do when they heard about the verdict, because Billy Budd was very popular among the crew members. How often do we make decisions based more on what we fear our peers will think or do rather than on what we know is right?

This discussion may lead to a second example of great concern. To whom are we responsible? Captain Vere, as the commissioned captain of the vessel, was solely responsible for the ship and all the personnel on board. Yet he was not totally an independent agent; he was accountable to the fleet admiral. He knew the requirements of military law. There were demands of duty upon him.(6) The question that Captain Vere seemed to ignore was whether he had a responsibility to a power higher

than man, i.e., God. Was the captain's only choice to follow the letter of the law?

In following the letter of the law, Captain Vere made the right legal decision, but his decision showed a lack of moral courage. He knew he was executing a righteous man, although technically a guilty one. In the end it is Billy Budd who demonstrates the highest level of moral inspiration. About to be hanged, Billy Budd proclaims, "God bless Captain Vere!" This was a moment of great pathos that can stir moral outrage.

Billy Budd is a thought-provoking film that will be worth your time and concentration. Not only is it based on a great story; it also benefits from fine acting and production.

## **Carpe Diem, "Seize the Day"**

In the movie *Dead Poets Society*, John Keating, a prep school English teacher played by Robin Williams, challenges his students with these words: "Carpe Diem, lads! Seize the day. Make your lives extraordinary!"(7) In this bold statement he is telling his prep school students to seize the moment or enjoy the day, trusting as little as possible to the future.

One of the major questions in the film is, "What is the meaning of life?" First you should understand the background of these prep school boys. This is a very upper class school supported by rich, respectable parents. It's an institution that is very establishment-oriented. Keating, the inspired English teacher, seeks to instill in his boys a sense of passion for poetry and the arts that goes beyond just understanding it. But, he totally ignores the spiritual life beyond mere human feelings.

In discussing this film with your children you may want to point out the fallacy of a "Carpe Diem" philosophy of life. How does it contrast with the Christian perspective of our being strangers and pilgrims in this world with our hope set

on being with Christ for all eternity? What are the positive aspects of this philosophy? Here you might compare and contrast this approach to life with that of the book of Ecclesiastes. A "Carpe Diem" philosophy of life does encourage living life to the fullest, at least in the senses, but, who or what are these boys taught to rely upon? Themselves or God? Does this philosophy promote a full-orbed spiritual life?

Another fascinating film about human nature and ethics is Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors*.<sup>(8)</sup> The story contains Allen's existential philosophy. This worldview is even summarized in the closing narrative of the film. According to the existentialist, we must give meaning to an indifferent universe, and we define ourselves by the choices we make. Thus we are nothing but the sum total of our choices. The existentialist's only hope is that future generations may learn from our choices and have a greater understanding of life.

In spite of its existential point of view, the film does contain some excellent lessons on moral choices and the penalty of sin. Judah Rosenthal, played by Martin Landau, is a wealthy ophthalmologist, revered as a pillar of society. But he has a mistress and his world begins to crumble around him when she threatens to expose their affair. He eventually has her killed. While this story develops, we are able to observe the different moral reasoning between those who believe in a God who is there and cares, and those who live a life devoid of God. We see the contrast between those who believe in a moral structure to life, those who believe you only go around once, as well as those who believe "might makes right."

As you discuss this film, key in on the moral struggle Judah goes through after the tragic deed is done. The dining room vision he has when he returns to his childhood home is especially poignant. You will want to note that even though Judah's father is seeking to make a stand for God, his closing remark is a fallacy, even though it demonstrates great loyalty

to God. God is truth and defines truth. God will never stand opposed to the truth. In fact, we can only understand truth in the context of understanding God.

Our children are growing up in a world heavily influenced by existential thought. It is important in viewing this film to describe this non-biblical perspective of life.

## **Guidelines for Viewing Films**

We will conclude this essay with some guidelines and possible resources for more productive film viewing:

1. You may want to subscribe to a movie review newsletter such as *Movieguide: A Biblical Guide to Movies and Entertainment*, Good News Communications, Inc., P.O. Box 9952, Atlanta, GA 30319, or *Preview: Family Movie & TV Review*, PO Box 832567, Richardson, TX 75083-2567. Their website is [www.PreviewOnline.org](http://www.PreviewOnline.org).

2. Take note of the ratings and read a review as you attempt to determine if a movie conforms to the established non-Christian ethical standards of Hollywood. You may have had the experience of walking out of "PG" movies wondering why they held a "PG" instead of an "R" rating. Or perhaps you have seen "R" rated movies that were far less offensive than some "PG" offerings.

3. Before exposing yourself and your children to a film that may be questionable, you may want to talk with friends who have already seen it in order to discover what they recommend. But you should also exercise caution with these recommendations. Everyone's perspective is different, so don't rely on referrals alone.

4. Don't hesitate to walk out of a movie or to shut off a video that offends your conscience. Your mind and your time are far more important than the money invested. The more movies we see that we know we shouldn't, the more jaded we

become about what offends us. We become desensitized. For example, we may allow our children to see sex scenes that years ago would have been very troubling. Or we may find ourselves watching senseless violence and gore without being offended.

5. You may want to invest in books on how to analyze films, such as *The Art of Watching Films*, by Joseph M. Boggs.

6. Never go to a movie with the attitude of just shutting down your mind and being entertained. Always think as you watch. Be a good critic. It can be especially helpful to attend a film with someone who will discuss it with you afterwards.

7. Finally, think through what you want to learn from the film, such as the film's premise and how it relates to biblical truth. How are various roles portrayed? How accurate is the historical perspective? What part, if any, does religion play? How do you feel after watching the film? How are various ethnic and other groups of people depicted? Or was there redemptive value in the film?(9)

Above all, be involved with your children in what they are watching. Help them develop a sensitivity to the ethical dimension of their everyday lives. Train them to pay attention to the moral choices they make. Education begins in the home. There is no doubt about it, children are establishing some of their values from what they see in movies. We need to develop an interest so that we know what our children are watching. Then we can use opportunities to interact with them to discover what they are learning from what they watch. Help them begin to think God's thoughts after Him as they enter the world of movies.

## Notes

1. Jurassic Park, Disney, 1993.

2. For deeper study in this area you may want to refer to Mitch Kabby's

analysis in *Network World*. 10(30):89, 26 July 93.

3. *Class Action*, Fox Video, 1990.

4. *Billy Budd*, Key Video, a division of CBS/Fox Video, 1985.

5. Herman Melville, *Billy Budd and Other Tales* (New American Library, 1961).

6. For those who want to study ethical theory (for example, families involved in home schooling), this would be a good point to discuss the ethical teaching of Kant. His “categorical imperative” is based on a sense of duty. Through your actions you must treat individuals as an end in themselves, not only as a means. See Rex Patrick Stevens, *Kant On Moral Practice* (Atlanta: Mercer University Press, 1981).

7. *Dead Poets Society*, Touchstone Home Video, 1989.

8. *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, Orion Home Video, Orion Pictures Corp., 1989.

9. Lois Beck, “The Discerning Moviegoer: Watch What You Watch,” *The Bridge* (Messiah College, Mechanicsburg, Penn).

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## **Film and the Christian**

*How should a Christian view films? Todd Kappelman, a longtime film critic, calls us to exercise discernment in distinguishing between art and mere entertainment, without damaging our spiritual vitality.*

## **The Convergence of High and Low Culture**

An examination of the history of our century will reveal the

importance of viewing and studying film for any individuals who wish to understand themselves and their time and place. Film is essential because the distinction so many make between so called "high" and "low" culture has in fact disappeared (if it ever existed in the first place).

Approximately one hundred years ago the dawn of electronic technology, beginning with the invention of the radio, gave birth to mass media and communications. The increase in leisure time and wealth fostered the birth and development of an entertainment industry. The decline in the quality of education and the explosion in the popularity of television sealed the union between what was traditionally considered "high" art and popular culture. Western society is now defined more strictly by the image, the sound, and the moving picture than by the written word, which defined previous centuries. Seldom does anyone ask, "What have you read lately?" One is much more likely to hear the question, "What have you seen lately." We have become, for better or worse, a visually oriented society. Because literature is no longer the dominant form of expression, scriptwriters, directors, and actors do more to shape the culture which we live in than do the giants of literature or philosophy. We may be at the point in the development of Western culture that the Great Books series needs to be supplemented by a Great Films series.

The church as a body has a long standing and somewhat understandable tradition of suspicion concerning narrative fiction, the concepts of which apply here to our discussion of film. A brief examination of positions held by some Christians from the past regarding written fictional narratives may help us to understand the concern some have with involvement in fictional narratives as recorded on film.

*Alcuin*, an influential Christian leader of the ninth century was extremely concerned about the worldliness he saw in the church. One of the things that troubled him the most was the monks' fondness for fictional literature and stories about

heroes such as Beowulf and Ingeld. Writing to Higbald, Alcuin said: “Let the words of God be read aloud at the table in your refractory. The reader should be heard there, not the flute player; the Fathers of the Church, not the songs of the heathen. . . . What has Ingeld to do with Christ?”[\[1\]](#)

*Tertullian*, the father of Latin theology, writing six centuries earlier voiced a similar concern about Christians involved in secular matters when he said: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”[\[2\]](#) Specifically, Tertullian believed that the study of pagan philosophers was detrimental to the Christian faith and should be avoided at all costs.

*Paul*, the apostle, writing to the Church at Corinth, said: “What partnership does righteousness have with iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?”[\[3\]](#)

Conclusion: The objections raised against the arts, both past and present, do have merit and should not be dismissed too quickly. Christians have a right and a responsibility to make sure that entertainment and art are not used in a manner that is damaging to their spiritual welfare. It is often a difficult call. For example, many Christians objected to the work of Federico Fellini and Ingmar Bergman in the fifties and sixties, yet men such as Francis Schaeffer thought that it was necessary to pay attention to what these individuals were saying and why.

## **The Nature of Film and the Opportunity for Christians**

Properly understood film is a narrative medium, a kind of “visual book” with a beginning, middle, and ending that contains some degree of resolution. All film is not created equal; some movies are made with the express purpose of providing diversionary entertainment, while others represent the sincere efforts of artists to make works of art that

reflect human emotions and call people to a more reflective existence. This second category of film should be considered an art form and is therefore worthy of the same attention that any other art such as the ballet, sculpture, or painting receives.

Art is the embodiment of man's response to reality and his attempt to order his experience of that reality.<sup>{4}</sup> Man has always and will continue to express his hope and excitement, as well as his fears and reservations about life, death, and what it means to be human through the arts. He will seek to express his world through all available means, and presently that includes film. *Schindler's List*, a recent film by Steven Spielberg, is an excellent example of film's ability to express man's hopes and fears.

As a picture of reality, film is able to convey an enormous range of human experiences and emotions. The people one encounters in films are frequently like us whether they are Christian or not. Often the people we see in the better films are struggling with some of the most important questions in life. They are attempting to find meaning in what often appears to be a meaningless universe. These people are often a vehicle used by a director, producer, or writer to prompt us to ask the larger questions of ourselves.

Film is not and should not be required to be "uplifting" or "inspiring." Christians should remember that non-Christians also have struggles and wrestle with the meaning of life and their place and purpose in the universe. Christians and non-Christians will not and should not be expected to come to the same conclusions to the problems they face in the fictional universe of film. The Scriptures indicate that Christians and non-Christians are different, and this should be a point of celebration, not alarm, for the Christian audience.

T. S. Eliot, speaking about literature, but with much that can be applied to film, had this advice for the Christian:

Literary criticism should be completed from a definite ethical and theological standpoint... It is necessary for Christian readers [and film goes by extension], to scrutinize their reading, [again film by extension], especially of works of imagination, with explicit ethical and theological standards.[{5}](#)

Therefore, Christians should take their worldview with them when they attend and comment on any film. They should be cautious about pronouncing a film that does not conform with Christian beliefs or their particular notion of orthodoxy as unfit for consumption or undeserving of a right to exist as art.

Conclusion: The need for participation in film arises from not only the diversity of material with which the medium deals, but also from the plurality of possible interpretations concerning a given film. Christians have an opportunity to influence their culture by entering the arena of dialogue provided by film and contending for their positions and voicing their objections with sophistication, generosity, and a willingness to hear from those of opposing beliefs.

## **Some Concerns about Christian Participation in Cinema**[{6}](#)

Christians are often concerned about the content of certain films and the appropriateness of viewing particular pieces. This is a valid concern that should not be dismissed too quickly and certainly deserves a response from those who do view objectionable material. The two primary areas of concern leveled by the many detractors of contemporary culture as it pertains to film are found in the categories of gratuitous sex and violence. It is crucial that Christians understand the exact nature of sex and violence, gratuitous and otherwise, and how it may be employed in art. Taking only violence as the representative issue of these two concerns, we must ask

ourselves what, if any, redeeming value does it have, and can it be used and viewed under some circumstances?

We might turn to the use of gratuitous violence in literature in order to better understand the role of violence in film. If the former is understood and embraced (albeit with reservation), the latter may also be understood and embraced (again with caution) as a means of expression employed by a new image-driven culture.

The image of gratuitous violence in modernity has one of its first and most important articulations in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Recall that in the poem the sailor shoots an albatross for absolutely no reason and is condemned by his fellow sailors, who believed the bird was a good omen, to wear the dead body around his neck. The ship is ravaged by plague, and only the cursed mariner survives. After many days of soul searching on the ghost ship, the mariner pronounces a blessing upon all of creation and atones for his wrongs. A sister ship saves the man, and he begins to evangelistically tell his story to anyone who will listen.

Every time this poem is read in a class or other group there is invariably some person who is fixated on the act of violence and emphasizes it to the point of losing the meaning of the entire poem. The story is about a mariner who realizes the errors of his ways, repents, and comes to a restored relationship with creation and other men. For Coleridge, the act of violence thus becomes the vehicle for the turning of the character's soul from an infernal orientation to the paradisaical. Other authors have used similar methods. Dante, for example, repeats a similar pattern when he explored the spiritual realms in his poetic chronicle *The Divine Comedy*. First, he takes his readers through the harshness, pain, and misery of the Inferno before moving into Purgatory and finally into the bliss and joy of Paradise. Dostoyevsky composed four novels that begin with the heinous crime of Raskolnikov and

develop to the salvation of the Karamazov brothers.

Conclusion: The writers mentioned here and many serious, contemporary film makers often explore the darkness of the human condition. They don't do it simply to posture or exploit, but to see deeply and lay bare the problems and tensions. But, they also do it to look for answers, even the light of salvation/Salvation. The picture is not always pretty, and the very ugliness of the scene is often necessary to accurately portray the degree of depravity and the miracle of salvific turns in fiction. By virtue of their full acquaintance with the dark side of the human condition, when they propose solutions, these solutions appear to be viable and realistic.

## **Biblical Examples of Gratuitous Violence**

The prohibition against and objections to the use of violence in film may be understood better through an examination of the use of violence in the Bible.

One example found in Scriptures is in the thirteenth chapter of the book of Isaiah. In verses fifteen and sixteen the prophet is forecasting the particulars of the future Assyrian military invasion and the conditions the people of Israel and the surrounding countries will experience. He writes:

Whoever is captured will be thrust through; all who are caught will fall by the sword. Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives ravished (Isaiah 13:15-16).

The prophet is talking about the impaling of men by the conquering armies, the willful smashing of infants upon the rocks, and the raping of women. In an oral and textual based society, those who heard the words of Isaiah would have been able to imagine the horrors he described and would have made mental images of the scenes.

In an image-driven society if this scene were to be part of a movie, a scriptwriter and director would have actors and actresses play the parts, and the violence would be obvious to all. Recall the scene in The Ten Commandments where the Egyptian armies attempted to follow Moses across the Red Sea. One sees horses and soldiers trapped under tons of water. Their bodies go limp before they can get to the surface. And those who can make it to the top face certain death trying to swim back to shore. In spite of these, and other horrific scenes, this movie is often held to be a "Christian classic" and deemed to be a good family film by many.

A second and even more disturbing example of gratuitous violence in the Bible is found in the twentieth chapter of Judges. Here a Levite and his concubine enter the house of an old man from the hill country of Ephraim to spend the night. While they are there, some wicked men in the city want to have homosexual relations with the Levite traveler and demand that the old man hand them over. The evil men take the man's concubine, rape and kill her, leaving her dead body in the doorway. The traveler is so distraught that he cuts his concubine into twelve pieces and sends the body parts back to his fellow Israelites. The Israelites then form a revenge party and go into battle with the Benjamites who will not turn over the evil men for punishment.

Again, if this story were to be translated into a visual medium the scenes of rape and later dismemberment of a body, even if they were filmed in standards from the forties or fifties, would be very disturbing.

Conclusion: The purpose of the violence in these examples may be that the details in each passage provide information which serves as a reason for a latter action. Or, the information provided shows us something about the nature of God and the way He deals with sin. If both these examples show a difficult, but necessary use of violence in telling a story, then perhaps violence may be used (portrayed) for redemptive

purposes in fictional mediums such as film. This is not an airtight argument, rather the issue is raised as a matter for consideration while keeping in mind that Christians should always avoid living a vicariously sinful life through any artistic medium.

## **Weaker Brother Considerations in Viewing Film**

Paul's great teaching concerning meat sacrificed to idols and the relationship of the stronger and weaker brothers to one another is laid out in 1 Corinthians 8. We should remember that Paul clearly puts the burden of responsibility on the stronger brother. It is this person who should have the interest of the weaker brother in mind.

Persons who exercise rampant Christian freedom when watching films that are objectionable to some others does not necessarily mean that they are strong Christians. It could indicate that these people are too weak to control their passions and are hiding behind the argument that they are a stronger brother. Do not urge others to participate in something that you, as a Christian, feel comfortable doing if they have reservations. You may inadvertently cause the other person to sin.

There are basically three positions related to Christians viewing film.

The first of these three is prohibition. This is the belief that films, and often television and other forms of entertainment, are inherently evil and detrimental to the Christian's spiritual well being. Persons who maintain this position avoid all film, regardless of the rating or reputed benefits, and urge others to do the same.

Abstinence is the second position. This is the belief that it is permissible for Christians to view films, but for personal

reasons this person does not choose to do so. This may be for reasons ranging from a concern for the use of time or no real desire to watch film, to avoidance because it may cause them or someone they are concerned about to stumble. Willingly abstaining from some or all films does not automatically make one a weaker brother, and this charge should be avoided! One should avoid labeling a fellow Christian "weaker" for choosing to abstain from participation in some behavior due to matters of conscience.

Moderation is the final position. This is the belief that it is permissible to watch films and that one may do so within a certain framework of moderation. This person willingly views some films but considers others to be inappropriate for Christians. There is a great deal of disagreement here about what a Christian can or cannot and should or should not watch. Although some of these disagreements are matters of principle and not of taste, Christian charity should be practiced whenever one is uncertain.

Conclusion: There is a valid history of concern about Christian involvement in the arts and fictional and imaginative literature. This issue extends to the medium of film and manifests similar concerns about film and Christians who view film. However, because film is one of the dominant mediums of cultural expression, film criticism is necessary. If Christians do not make their voices heard then others, often non-Christians, will dominate the discussion. All films contain the philosophical persuasions of the persons who contribute to their development, and it is the job of the Christian who participates in these arts to make insightful, fair, and well-informed evaluations of the work. Not everyone feels comfortable in viewing some (or any) films and the Christian should be especially mindful of the beliefs of others and always have the interest of fellow believers as well as non-believers in mind. While "film," the artistic expression of the cinematic medium has been the focus and not

“movies,” the entertainment based expression, much of what has been said of the former is applicable to the later.

## **Appendix**

Christians should be aware that the freedoms exercised in participation in the film arts are privileges and should not be practiced to the point of vicarious living through escape into fictitious worlds. In 1 Corinthians 10: 23-31 (and 6:12) the Apostle Paul writes that “everything is permissible, but not everything is constructive.”

He is addressing the issue of meat sacrificed to idols in chapter 10 and sexual purity in chapter 6. This may serve as a guide for Christians who are concerned about their involvement in film and a caution against construing what is written here as a license to watch anything and everything. The Apostle is very careful to distinguish between that which is permissible and that which is constructive, or expedient. What Paul means is that, in Christ, believers have freedoms which extend to all areas of life, but these freedoms have the potential to be exercised carelessly or without regard for others, and thus become sin. The guiding rule here is that Christians should seek the good of others and not their own desires. This would mean that anyone who is participating in film that is objectionable should have the interests of others, both believers and non-believers, in mind. We live in a fallen world and almost everything we touch we affect with our fallen nature, the arts notwithstanding. If we are to be active in redeeming the culture for the glory of God, then by necessity we must participate in the culture and be salt and light to a very dark and unsavory world. It is imperative that Christians who are active in their culture and interested in participating in the ever growing “culture wars,” remember Paul’s admonition in Philippians that we “work out our salvation daily with fear and trembling.” Anything less would be flirting with spiritual disaster and would not bring glory to God.

Parents concerned for the spiritual and psychological welfare of their children would do well to offer more than a list of prohibitions against what films can be viewed. As with anything that involves issues of Christian freedom, maturity in individual matters must be taken into account. The example of a young child's first BB gun may serve as an illustration. In some instances a child may be ready for the first air rifle at age twelve or thirteen. Other children may not be ready until they are eighteen, and some may best served if they never possess the gun in question. Parents should realize that film is a narrative medium which often contains complex philosophical ideas. To continue to absorb films at the current rate and not offer thoughtful criticism on what we are watching is equivalent to visiting museums and announcing that the Picasso or Rembrandt retrospective is "cool" or "stupid." If we are concerned parents, and wish to gain the respect of our children, we can and must do better than this.

## Notes

1. "Letter to Higbald," as quoted in Eleanor S. Duckett, *Alcuin, Friend of Charlemagne* (New York:Macmillan, 1951), 209.
2. Tertullian, *On the Against Heretics*, chap. 7.
3. Paul, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15.
4. John Dixon, Jr., *Nature and Grace in Art*, as quoted in Leland Ryken's *The Liberated Imagination*, p.23.
5. T. S. Eliot, *Religion and Literature*.
6. Much of the material for this section was first articulated by Jeff Hanson, my co-editor, in the March/April issue of *The Antithesis*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1995.

# Where Have All Our Heroes Gone?

We all want to look up to someone, somebody who models a lifestyle we admire. These people need not be perfect—we know that perfect people only exist in the comic books—but they should be individuals who have risen above the circumstances of life to accomplish something significant. And, we want our heroes to be above self promotion and climbing on the backs of others. But this is where the problem lies. In today's world of widespread self-centeredness, it is very difficult to find those heroes from whom we can gain a right perspective of the world about us.

Did I say that only comic book heroes are perfect? Even the comic characters are more flawed than we may want to admit. The comic books of today hardly resemble the comic books of the past. Today's comics are often full of violence, sexual themes, and grotesque imagery.

So where do we go to find heroes? What about our parents? Some of us were fortunate enough to have parents that we could look up to as role models in our lives. But, lamentably, many have grown up in homes that are not at all conducive to establishing healthy role models.

Author Steve Farrar, speaking at Probe's annual banquet this spring, related that when he was a student in grade school he didn't even know what the word "divorce" meant. None of his relatives were divorced, and the only way he came to find out what the word divorce meant was when one of his classmates used the word in referring to his parents. To Farrar's knowledge, no one else in that school had divorced parents. What kid entering grade school today doesn't know what the word divorce means? Divorce is epidemic in today's society, and it is rather difficult to see your parents as your heroes

when their breakup has caused you so much pain and confusion.

Well, there are always heroes from the world of sports. But have you kept up on "America's Team," the Dallas Cowboys? From a tobacco-chewing quarterback to drug-thug linemen, America's favorite team has become the brunt of numerous jokes based on the team members' legal and ethical problems. We could also pick on some prominent basketball and baseball players, as well as other sports figures, but I think the point is made that finding upstanding heroes, even in the realm of sports, has become difficult.

In all fairness, one must admit that there are some great athletes out there with solid, moral lives and radiant testimonies.

But what about movie stars? The movie industry can make a hero out of anyone. Since the movie makers have absolute control of the medium and can make their world of fantasy seem so real, heroes are "created" right before our eyes, but they are heroes of fantasy, constructs of the imagination. What this world needs is real heroes, not some fantasy that doesn't exist except in our minds and on the silver screen. Movies are wonderful teaching tools, however, and great lessons can be learned and our minds and hearts can be stimulated by the events and people portrayed. Sooner or later, though, if we seek to emulate the personalities of the silver screen, we will fall flat on our faces or be disillusioned when we see or hear of the actors' true lifestyles.

We need heroes that last, who walk on the earth, and yet have that something within them that carries them beyond the frustrations and failures of everyday life. Next, we will begin to look at some heroes who inspire our better nature and motivate us to stay focused and faithful.

# Heroes Worthy of Admiration

Please allow me to share with you the story of one athlete who is a hero worthy of admiration. His name is Josh Davis.

Josh, a student at the University of Texas at Austin, won three gold medals in the swimming relays at the Atlanta summer Olympics. I guess that qualifies him as a hero to every aspiring swimmer who wants to shoot for the gold, but for the rest of us it is not the gold medals that makes him a hero, but what he has done with them.

But let me back up and tell you about the transformation that took place in Josh's life leading up to the Olympics. This change in perspective enabled him to handle the pressure of the Olympics and the race for the gold in a way that makes him a model for a world so in need of true heroes.

As a young athlete back in high school, Josh excelled in his sport and was recruited by college swim teams. He chose the University of Texas where he continued to excel and became a BMOC—Big Man On Campus. His athletic gifts became his god. But he became aware of a nagging emptiness in his heart even with all the attention, affection, and acceptance he was receiving. At first he tried the world's way to fill the void by filling his life with women and alcohol, but found that was not the answer.

Josh finally overcame the emptiness in his life when he gave his life to Jesus Christ. No longer did he need to strive for love and acceptance through his performance, but found all that in the God who created him and loved him and accepted him unconditionally. [\[1\]](#)

Excited in his new-found faith, Josh began to witness to others on campus about his relationship with Jesus Christ. But his zeal exceeded his knowledge, and many challenges were thrown in his face about the validity of his Christian faith.

But instead of hiding his Christianity and bringing it out only in the presence of other Christians as so many do, Josh sought out the help of the Probe Study Center on the UT campus. There through the help of the center staff and the materials they were able to provide him, Josh was able to start a journey of knowledge and understanding to strengthen his faith. Whenever he came across a charge he couldn't answer, he would return to the Probe Center to find answers. His boldness in witnessing increased, and today he is an athlete with a message to the world, and he is excited about the position God has placed him in to reach out with the truth of God's word. Josh is invited to schools, clubs, and other organizations to tell about his experiences as a gold medal Olympian. He uses his gold medal status to bridge the gap to a greater reward, that of how we can all experience a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

This spring, Josh shared at the Probe annual banquet of the invaluable help the Probe Center was in his quest to become the kind of athlete God could use to implant in others a seed of the truth of the gospel message. It's not the gold medals that made Josh a real hero, it is how he has chosen to use them. He has chosen the courageous route by using his gold medals for the glory of God and the salvation of others.

## **“In Search of New Heroes”**

Some time ago the *Dallas Morning News* ran some articles on the search for heroes. One of the articles wasn't too encouraging. It told of teachers who no longer ask their students who their heroes are because many of the students have such a hard time coming up with someone they look up to or admire. Too often today, when you ask a kid who his heroes are, all he can think of is someone who has made it to the top with fancy cars and lots of money. The kids have no real picture of how these “heroes” made it to the top; all they know is that this individual has what they hope to have someday. What a sad

basis for the definition of a hero.

In his book, *Heroes of My Time*, the late Harrison Salisbury says, "We do not live in the age of heroes. This is not the era of Jefferson, Lincoln, or Commodore Perry. Nor even of Charles Lindbergh. The politicians of our day seldom remind us of Franklin D. or Eleanor Roosevelt. Athletes signing five-and-ten-million-dollar contracts do not resonate as did Babe Ruth."

Today, the media often tries to tell us who our heroes are and that means celebrities, athletes, and stars of the silver screen. These are not the heroes we need. Rabbi Jeffrey Leynor has said it so well when he stated, "The world doesn't run on Magic Johnson; it runs on all us little heroes." [\[2\]](#)

Fortunately, a more encouraging article was featured on the same page as the previous article. Titled "In Search of New Heroes," the article spoke of everyday heroes, ordinary people who became heroes by their unselfish acts of heroism, like Lucy Narvaiz who volunteers her skills to help Hispanics and American Indians learn to read and write, or Eleanor Poe who runs a clinic in the poorest section of El Paso. These people are not the showy, dramatic type of heroes, but they exhibit the quiet, often unnoticed kind of heroism of people who have the courage to do what needs to be done.

The an article is about the television series, "Unsung Heroes," and the heroes featured on the program were quiet, unassuming people who can't imagine why anyone would call them heroes. But these individuals have uncommon courage, and Janet Carroll, the producer, wanted the viewers to see that. David Walther, Janet's program director said, "When you sit down and look at it and see people doing these things, it makes you feel good. It makes you want to emulate or at least be a better person than what you are already." I couldn't have said it better myself. What a contrast to the normal fare we get from the media in shows like "Hard Copy," "Inside Edition,"

and “Hollywood Access”!

As we hear about these unsung heroes’ quiet resolve, it makes us stronger and more determined to do the right thing. We see their strength and the peace they have within themselves, and we begin to see the world in a better light.[\[3\]](#)

## Home Grown Heroes

Now I want to continue our discussion of heroes by looking at an excellent book called *Home Grown Heroes: How to Raise Courageous Kids*, by Tim Kimmel.[\[4\]](#)

In the foreword to this book, Brigadier General Joe Foss (retired), a recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor, says, “America needs a new generation of heroes . . . people who are ruled by a conscience that doesn’t take the Ten Commandments lightly who have a fundamental reverence for their Creator, and a respect for the people and things He has created.”

That’s what this book is about, being that kind of person, the unsung heroes of life who have uncommon courage. Specifically, it deals with the process of learning to add courage to our faith. Many people have faith, or at least they say that they do, but it does not seem to reveal itself in the outworking of their lives. The problem is the absence of courage and “courage is the muscle that faith uses to hold its ground.” So many people today do not seem to have the ability to courageously live out their faith. Now we are not talking about those instantaneous heroes who make the headlines because they happened to be at the right place at the right time people you typically read about in the newspapers or see on TV. I’m talking about those unsung heroes who daily make conscious decisions to respond courageously to life’s dilemmas. Webster’s Dictionary defines courage as: “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.” Courage is putting our faith in action,

adding sweat to our convictions, doing what is hard to do because we know it needs to be done.

Kimmel writes about the fact that God has placed a seed of courage in everyone. It's part of being made in His image. We need to water, cultivate, and pray over that seed so that it may grow within us. And remember, even if you've blown it many times, it is never too late to do what is right. Sometimes it is the courage to confront a person or situation that you know is not right. Often it is the courage to forgive when you want revenge. It may be the courage to turn off the TV when you know you shouldn't be watching it or to maintain your focus until you accomplish a specific goal.

What about building courage into the lives of those we love and feel responsible for? Courage is the core word in the word encouragement. Therefore when we encourage others we are helping to build courage into their lives. The more someone is encouraged when they try to do the right thing, the more courage will grow within them.

Kimmel reminds us that the lion's share of courageous living takes place in the daily grind, behind the lines, in the lonely places, among our allies, in our own hearts. Courage is the natural result of internal disciplines. Courageous living comes from daily, deliberate acts of resolve. Courage assumes there is a battle to be waged and won. To live a courageous lifestyle is a choice.

The preceding comments have been attempts to whet your appetite about this book. Now I'll state it plainly: for a wonderful book that lays out steps to courageous living, please read *Home Grown Heroes* by Tim Kimmel. You'll be glad you did!

## **Spiritual Heroes**

Now I would like us to take a look at our spiritual heroes.

Let's start with the live ones.

It has been intriguing as we have observed the rise and fall of so many of our spiritual leaders. In Texas we have had our share with the likes of Rev. Robert Tilton and Rev. Walter Railey. Over in Louisiana it was Rev. Jimmy Swaggart. Probably the biggest headlines in the national news have been about Jim and Tammy Bakker of PTL fame, once popular televangelists. He went to prison for fraud and conspiracy. She was treated for drug dependency. But the story doesn't end there. While Jim spent his time in prison reflecting on his failures and sin before God, Tammy divorced him and sought to separate herself from the situation. She appears to have learned nothing from the experience and still tries to keep herself in the public spotlight by getting on TV shows and running her own ministry. Meanwhile Jim, after much reflection, comes out with a book of his confessions. He was humbled and seeks a fresh start on a new and different foundation. Now I don't know how being out of prison will stir up the old nature in Jim Bakker and how he will stand the test of time, but it does remind me of another man of national prominence who rose up out of the ashes of prison time to become a spiritual leader among us.

Chuck Colson was not a spiritual leader before his fall, but was known as Nixon's hatchet man. Then there was Watergate, his fall from power, his time in prison, his conversion to Christianity and his courageous road back in obedience to God. Chuck Colson is one of our heroes today, not because he lived a life without moral or ethical failure, but because he chose to accept God's grace and had the courage to admit his sin before God and man and build within himself, with the help of many others, the personal discipline needed to become a pilgrim for God in the journey of life.

Jim Bakker seems to have chosen the right path back. Only time will tell, but God may restore him to a place of spiritual leadership. Are you prepared to deal with that? If not, how do you deal with King David? He was an adulterer and a murderer

who repented of his sin and God restored him. Yes, there were dire consequences for his sin that did not go away, and there will be dire consequences for Jim Bakker that will never go away. There are probably some past sins in your life that have resulted in some consequences that don't go away. But are we willing to chose the courageous path that can lead us to be the heroes God wants us to be. We may only be heroes for our children, but is there anyone else for whom we would rather be a hero?

Heroes are made, not born. We have such a great spiritual lineage to learn from. Chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews tells us about spiritual heroes, men and women who put their confidence in God, like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Samson, Samuel, David, and Daniel. They were all far from perfect models, but they had the courage to not give up. God offers to each of us a journey of hope. May God bless your journey.

## Notes

1. *Path To Victory: A Sports New Testament With The Testimonies Of Athletes Who Are Winning In Life*, New International Version (Colorado Springs, Colo.: International Bible Society, 1993).

2. Leslie Barker, "Wanted: Heroes; Warning: The job ain't what it used to be." *Dallas Morning News*, Sunday, 12 September 1993, Section F.

3. Leslie Barker, "In Search of New Heroes: With credit cards and a dream, one woman creates a legacy for her daughter." *Dallas Morning News*, Sunday, 12 September 1993, Section F.

4. Tim Kimmel, *Home Grown Heroes: How to Raise Courageous Kids* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah Press, 1992).

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# When the Good Guys Don't Win

Pop! Pow! Gunfire crackled from the house next door. My neighbor John, high on marijuana, was shooting at his friend who crouched in fear behind a corner of the building. No one was injured and the arrival of police calmed John down.

*That's strange,* I thought to myself another sunny morning as I left my home to jog. *Why would my car windshield be covered with ice crystals? It's July.* As I drew nearer, I realized the "ice crystals" were broken glass, courtesy of some Fourth-of-July vandals.

Fear, confusion, anger, helplessness. Life can seem out of control when we are violated. Each nighttime creak could be an intruder. Were the walls thick enough to stop bullets should John's cannabis exploits resume? What did I do to deserve this?

An alleged rape victim feels cheated when the DA refuses to prosecute the accused perpetrators. A medical exam showed rape trauma; two reliable eyewitnesses saw her pushed partially clad down some stairs and heard her screams for help. "It seems to me that I am the one on trial," she complains in frustration. A rape is the only crime where the victims are treated with disrespect."[\[1\]](#) An African-American mother says she's paranoid that her well-behaved teenage son will be falsely suspected of being a criminal because of his race. Fear and fury drive her to nag him before he goes to the store: "Keep your hands out of your pockets. Don't reach under your shirt. If there's an itch, just live with it. In winter, keep your jacket open."[\[2\]](#)

# Terrorist Massacre

Members of a multi-racial Cape Town, South Africa, church were enjoying a beautiful duet when the front door burst open. Terrorists sprayed the congregation with automatic rifle fire and tossed in two grenades, leaving 11 dead and 53 wounded. Lorenzo Smith pulled his wife, Myrtle, to the floor and lay on top of her to protect her. The second grenade exploded 6 feet away, sending a piece of shrapnel into her left side near her heart but missing him entirely. She died en route to a hospital.

“You’re no longer working here,” the personnel chief informs the career employee. The stellar worker had ruffled feathers by challenging ethical and financial misconduct of several company officers. Instead of applauding his integrity, the company showed him the door. Whistle blowing can be lonely.

Palestinians find their homes bulldozed. Israeli shoppers are massacred by suicide bombers in a crowded marketplace. Rwandans are maimed and slaughtered in tribal violence.

Bad things sometimes (often?) happen to good or seemingly innocent people. What should be done? How can the victims cope?

First, recognize where the problem stems from.

## Why Suffering?

“Why is there suffering in the world?” ranked first in a national survey to determine the top 40 questions of life.<sup>{3}</sup> Many human efforts to alleviate suffering and achieve happiness have borne some fruit, but each also contains examples of failure. Consider a few:

*Psychology.* Many psychologists offer hope based purely on human resources. Still, sometimes even the best and brightest give up in despair. Legendary psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim,

who used his own survival of Nazi horrors to help heal others, eventually took his own life. Upon learning of his suicide, one colleague remarked, "It was as if the [psychological] profession itself had failed."[\[4\]](#)

*Marxism.* Pointing at class antagonism as the culprit, Marxism aimed to create a "New Man" in a harmonious society devoid of such antagonism. Instead, it created an elite "Rich Man" as party chiefs lived in luxury while the masses remained disillusioned. "Workers of the World, We Apologize," read the Moscow demonstrators' banner as the Soviet Union crumbled.[\[5\]](#) Today's Cubans eat lots of bananas and ride bicycles. North Koreans starve.

*Capitalism.* Is this political theory the answer? The market economy has raised standards of living, yet even nations like the United States boil with crime, racism, sexual discrimination and homelessness

Could we be missing the root of the problem? Could much human suffering be rooted in something deeper than flawed political systems or philosophical constructs? Could there be something wrong with the human heart?

## **Heart Disease?**

History is replete with confirming evidence A United Nations conference on the role of the university in the search for world peace ended early because "the delegates began quarreling too vociferously."[\[6\]](#) Various attempts to establish utopian societies with uniform equality have crumbled due to internal strife.

"Everybody thinks of changing humanity," noted Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, "but nobody thinks of changing himself."[\[7\]](#) Simon Bolivar, the great liberator of Latin America, admitted in his later years, "I was all my life a slave to my passions. The essence of liberty is precisely that

one can liberate oneself “[{8}](#)”

“We have met the enemy,” announced the comic strip character Pogo, “and he is us.”

If, then, we live in a flawed world with people determined to live out their own inner sicknesses, what can we do? How do we cope with the resulting, unjust suffering? “Seek justice” was a North Carolina woman’s strategy as she recently sued her husband’s lover for destroying her marriage, winning a million-dollar settlement. Sometimes the right cause prevails in court. Often, though, both sides end up bitter and poorer.

Are there any other solutions? Anything that works?

- **Choose to look out for others.** In a commencement address at Duke University, ABC News commentator Ted Koppel said: “Maimonedes and Jesus summed it up in almost identical words: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,’ ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’”[{9}](#) After Hurricane Andrew devastated parts of Miami, I returned to my hometown to help rebuild. I was amazed to discover that thousands of volunteers from around North America had come at their own expense to help the poor reconstruct their homes. Most were with Christian mission organizations, motivated as Good Samaritans by their love of God and love of people.
- **Lessen the pain by sharing it.** During a particularly trying episode in my own life, my best friend deserted me, some trusted co-workers betrayed me, and my health and finances suffered. Close friends and my faith helped me emerge wounded but growing. Building friendships takes time and effort. Initiating communication, offering to help another move or to carpool, listening to hurts, offering a compliment or word of encouragement . . . all can help build strong bonds. Giving often motivates others to respond in

kind. "Bearing one another's burdens" can make them lighter for both of you when you each need it.

- **Eliminate bitter roots.** Asking and/or granting forgiveness can help heal hearts. As Alabama governor, George Wallace preached "Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!" Two decades in a wheelchair gave him time to reflect on life, suffering and God. He eventually confessed his wrongs and asked forgiveness of his former racial and political enemies. South African Lorenzo Smith, who lost his wife to the grenade in church, turned and forgave his wife's murderers. "Bearing a grudge can corrode your soul," affirmed one wounded warrior. "If you nurse bitterness and refuse to forgive, it can keep you in bondage to your enemies. If you let it go and forgive regardless of your opponent's response you're free."

When the good guys don't win, you can curse the darkness. Or you can recognize the root problem and light a candle. May yours shine brightly.

## Notes

1. "Was it rape? Woman in G.T. case speaks out," *The Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), August 28, 1997, A12.
2. Deborah Mathis, "Stereotypes can leave Black mothers paranoid for sons," *The Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), August 27, 1997, A9.
3. What are the Top 40 Questions of Life?" advertisement by Thomas Nelson Publishers in *USA Today*, ca. late 1980s or 1990.
4. Celeste Fremon, "Love and Death," *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, January 27, 1991, pp. 17-21, 35.
5. *Newsweek*. November 20, 1989, p. 11.

6. *Miami News*. September 4, 1969.

7. *World Christian/U* February 1989, p. U8.

8. Selden Rodman, "The Conqueror's Descent," *National Review*. October 15, 1990, p. 88.

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# Computers and the Information Revolution

## The Impact of the Information Revolution

What has been the impact of the information revolution, and how should Christians respond? Those are the questions we will consider in this essay. Let's begin by considering how fast our world shifted to a computer-based society. At the end of World War 2, the first electronic digital computer ENIAC weighed thirty tons, had 18,000 vacuum tubes, and occupied a space as large as a boxcar. Less than forty years later, many hand-held calculators had comparable computing power for a few dollars. Today most people have a computer on their desk with more computing power than engineers could imagine just a few years ago.

The impact of computers on our society was probably best seen when in 1982 *Time* magazine picked the computer as its "Man of the Year," actually listing it as "Machine of the Year." It is

hard to imagine a picture of the Spirit of St. Louis or an Apollo lander on the magazine cover under a banner "Machine of the Year." This perhaps shows how influential the computer has become in our society.

The computer has become helpful in managing knowledge at a time when the amount of information is expanding exponentially. The information stored in the world's libraries and computers doubles every eight years. In a sense the computer age and the information age seem to go hand in hand.

The rapid development and deployment of computing power however has also raised some significant social and moral questions. People in this society need to think clearly about these issues, but often ignore them or become confused.

One key issue is computer crime. In a sense, computer fraud is merely a new field with old problems. Computer crimes are often nothing more than fraud, larceny, and embezzlement carried out by more sophisticated means. The crimes usually involve changing address, records, or files. In short, they are old-fashioned crimes using high technology.

Another concern arises from the centralization of information. Governmental agencies, banks, and businesses use computers to collect information on its citizens and customers. For example, it is estimated that the federal government has on average about fifteen files on each American. Nothing is inherently wrong with collecting information if the information can be kept confidential and is not used for immoral actions. Unfortunately this is often difficult to guarantee.

In an information-based society, the centralization of information can be as dangerous as the centralization of power. Given sinful man in a fallen world, we should be concerned about the collection and manipulation of vast amounts of personal information.

In the past, centralized information processing was used for persecution. When Adolf Hitler's Gestapo began rounding up millions of Jews, information about their religious affiliation was stored in shoe boxes. U.S. Census Bureau punch cards were used to round up Japanese Americans living on the West Coast at the beginning of World War II. Modern technology makes this task much easier.

Moreover, the problem is not limited to governmental agencies. Many banking systems, for example, utilize electronic funds-transfer systems. Plans to link these systems together into a national system could also provide a means of tracking the actions of citizens. A centralized banking network could fulfill nearly every information need a malevolent dictator might have. This is not to say that such a thing will happen, but it shows the challenges facing each of us due to the information revolution.

## **The Social Challenges of Computers**

One of the biggest challenges raised by the widespread use of computers is privacy and the confidentiality of computer records. Computer records can be abused like any other system. Reputations built up over a lifetime can be ruined by computer errors and often there is little recourse for the victim. Congress passed the 1974 Privacy Act which allows citizens to find out what records federal bureaucracies have on them and to correct any errors. But more legislation is needed than this particular act and Congress needs to consider legislation that applies to the information revolution.

The proliferation of computers has presented another set of social and moral concerns. In the recent past most of that information was centralized and required the expertise of the "high priests of FORTRAN" to utilize it. Now most people have access to information because of increasing numbers of personal computers and increased access to information through the Internet. This access to information will have many

interesting sociological ramifications, and it is also creating a set of troubling ethical questions. The proliferation of computers that can tie into other computers provides more opportunities for computerized crime.

The news media frequently carry reports about computer "hackers" who have been able to gain access to confidential computer systems and obtain or interfere with the data banks. Although these were supposed to be secure systems, enterprising computer hackers broke in anyway. In many cases this merely involved curious teenagers. Nevertheless, computer hacking has become a developing area of crime. Criminals might use computer access to forge documents, change records, and draft checks. They can even use computers for blackmail by holding files for ransom and threatening to destroy them if their demands are not met. Unless better methods of security are found, professional criminals will begin to crack computer security codes and gain quick access into sensitive files.

As with most technological breakthroughs, engineers have outrun lawmakers. Computer deployment has created a number of legal questions. First, there is the problem of establishing penalties of computer crime. Typically, intellectual property has a different status in our criminal justice system. Legal scholars should evaluate the notion that ideas and information need not be protected in the same way as property. Legislators need to enact computer information protection laws that will deter criminals, or even curious computer hackers, from breaking into confidential records.

A second legal problem arises from the question of jurisdiction. Telecommunications allows information to be shared across state and even national borders. Few federal statutes govern this area and less than half the states have laws dealing with information abuse.

Enforcement will also be a problem for several reasons. One reason is the previously stated problem of jurisdiction.

Another is that police departments rarely train their personnel in computer abuse and fraud. A third reason is lack of personnel. Computers are nearly as ubiquitous as telephones or photocopiers.

Computer fraud also raises questions about the role of insurance companies. How do companies insure an electronic asset? What value does computer information have? These questions also need to be addressed in the future.

Computers are a wonderful tool, but like any technology poses new challenges in the social and political arenas. I believe that Christians should be the forefront of these new technologies providing wise direction and moral guidelines. We need Christians in the fields of computer technology and electrical engineering who can wisely guide us into the 21st century.

## **Principles for Computer Ethics**

I would like to propose some principles for computer ethics. The first principle is that **one should never do with computers what he or she would consider immoral without them.** An act does not gain morality because a computer has made it easier to achieve. If it is unethical for someone to rummage through your desk, then it is equally unethical for that person to search your computer files. If it is illegal to violate copyright law and photocopy a book, then it is equally wrong to copy a disk of computer software.

A second principle is to **treat information as something that has value.** People who use computers to obtain unauthorized information often do not realize they are doing something wrong. Since information is not a tangible object and can be shared, it does not seem to them like stealing since it does not deprive someone of something. Yet in an information-based society, information is a valuable asset. Stealing information should carry similar legal penalties as stealing tangible

objects.

A third principle is to remember that **computers are merely tools to be used, not technology to be worshiped**. God's mandate is to use technology wisely within His creation. Many commentators express concern that within an information society, people may be tempted to replace ethics with statistics.

Massive banks of computer data already exert a powerful influence on public policy. Christians must resist society's tendency to undermine the moral basis of right and wrong with facts and figures. Unfortunately, growing evidence indicates that the computer revolution has been a contributing factor in the change from a moral foundation to a statistical one. The adoption of consensus ethics ("51 percent make it right") and the overuse of cost-benefit analysis (a modernized form of utilitarianism) give evidence of this shift.

Fourth, **computers should not replace human intelligence**. In *The Society of Mind* Marvin Minsky, professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, says that "the mind, the soul, the self, are not a singly ghostly entity but a society of agents, deeply integrated, yet each one rather mindless on its own." He dreams of being able ultimately to reduce mind (and therefore human nature) to natural mechanism. Obviously this is not an empirical statement, but a metaphysical one that attempts to reduce everything (including mind) to matter.

The implications, however, are profound. Besides lowering humans to the material process, it begins to elevate machines to the human level. One article asked the question, Would an Intelligent Computer Have a "Right to Life?" Granting computer rights might be something society might consider since many are already willing to grant certain rights to animals.

In a sense the question is whether an intelligent computer

would have a soul and therefore access to fundamental human rights. As bizarre as the question may sound, it was no doubt inevitable. When seventeenth-century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz first described a thinking machine, he was careful to point out that this machine would not have a soul, fearful perhaps of reaction from the church. But this will be our challenge in the future: how to manage new computing power that will most likely outstrip human intelligence.

The Bible teaches that humans are more than bits and bytes, more than blood and bones. Created in the image of God, human beings have spiritual dimensions. They are more than complex computers. Computers should be used for what they do best: analyze discrete data with objective criteria. Computers are a wonderful tool, but they should not replace human intelligence and intuition.

## **Biblical Principles Concerning Technology**

I would like to present a set of biblical principles concerning technology in general and computer technology in particular.

In essence, technology is the systematic modification of the environment for human ends. Often it is a process or activity that extends or enhances a human function. A microscope, for example, extends man's visual perception. A tractor extends one's physical ability. A computer extends a person's ability to calculate. Technology also includes devices that make physical processes more efficient. The many chemical processes we use to make products fit this description of technology.

The biblical mandate for developing and using technology is stated in Genesis 1:28. God gave mankind dominion over the land, and we are obliged to use and manage these resources wisely in serving the Lord. God's ideal was not to have a world composed exclusively of primitive areas. Before the Fall (Gen. 2:15) Adam was to cultivate and keep the Garden of Eden.

After the Fall the same command pertains to the application of technology to this fallen world, a world that “groans” in travail (Rom. 8:22). Technology can benefit mankind in exercising proper dominion, and thus remove some of the effects of the Fall (such as curing disease, breeding livestock, or growing better crops).

Technology is neither good or evil. The worldview behind the particular technology determines its value. In the Old Testament, technology was used both for good (e.g., the building of the ark, Gen. 6) and for evil (e.g., the building of the Tower of Babel, Gen. 11). Therefore the focus should not be so much on the technology itself as on the philosophical motivation behind its use. There are a number of important principles that should be considered.

First, **technology should be seen as a tool, not as an end in itself.** There is nothing sacred about technology. Unfortunately Western culture tends to rely on it more than is appropriate. If a computer, for example, proves a particular point, people have a greater tendency to believe it than if the answer was a well-reasoned conclusion given by a person. If a machine can do the job, employers are prone to mechanize, even if human labor does a better or more creative job. Often our society unconsciously places machines over man. Humans become servants to machines rather than the other way around.

There is a tendency to look to science and engineering to solve problems that really may be due to human sinfulness (wars, prejudice, greed), the fallenness of the world (death, disease), or God’s curse on Adam (finite resources). In Western culture especially, we tend to believe that technology will save us from our problems and thus we use technology as a substitute for God. Christians must not fall into this trap, but instead must exhibit their ultimate dependence on God. Christians must also differentiate between problems that demand a technological solution and ones that can be remedied by a social or spiritual one.

As Christians we should see the value of technology but not be seduced into believing that more and better technology will solve social and moral problems. Computers and the Internet will tell us more about *how* people live, but they won't tell us *how to* live. Televisions, VCRs, and computers may enrich our lives, but they won't provide the direction we need in our lives. The answer is not more computers and more technology. The ultimate answer to our problems is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

A second principle is that **technology should be applied in different ways, according to specific instructions.** For example, there are distinctions between man and animal that, because we are created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27), call for different applications of medical science. Using artificial insemination to improve the genetic fitness of livestock does not justify using it on human beings. Christians should resist the idea that just because we can do something we should do it. Technological ability does not grant moral permission.

Many commentators, most notably E. F. Schumacher, have focused on the notion of appropriate technology. In Third World countries, for example, sophisticated energy-intensive and capital-intensive forms of agriculture may be inappropriate for the culture as it presently exists. Industrial advance often brings social disruption and increasing havoc to a society. Developing countries must use caution in choosing the appropriate steps to industrialize, lest they be greatly harmed in the process.

I believe we should resist the temptation to solve every problem with computers. Our society today seems bent to putting computers in every classroom and in every place of work. As helpful as computers may be, I believe we need to question this seemingly mindless attempt to fill our world with computers. They are a wonderful tool, but that is all they are. We must be careful not to substitute computers for basics like phonics, mathematics, logic, and wise business

practices.

Third, **ethics rather than technology must determine the direction of our society.** Jacques Ellul has expressed the concern that technology moves society instead of vice versa. Our society today seems all too motivated by a technological imperative in our culture. The technological ability to do something is not the same as a moral imperative to do it. Technology should not determine ethics.

Though scientists may possess the technological ability to be gods, they nevertheless lack the capacity to act like gods. Too often, man has tried to use technology to become God. He uses it to work out his own physical salvation, to enhance his own evolution, or even to attempt to create life. Christians who take seriously human fallenness will humbly admit that we often do not know enough about God's creation to use technology wisely. The reality of human sinfulness means that society should be careful to prevent the use of technology for greed and exploitation.

Technology's fruits can be both sweet and bitter. C.S. Lewis writes in *The Abolition of Man*, "From this point of view, what we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be power exercised by some men over men with Nature as its instrument. . . . There neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man's side. Each new power won by man is a power over man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car."

Christians must bring strong biblical critique to each technological advance and analyze its impact. Computers are a wonderful tool, but Christians should constantly evaluate their impact as we live through the information revolution.

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# Generation X – How They Fit in the Christian Community

Generation X! Are you familiar with this phrase? It is highly probable that you have heard or read the phrase at least once. What does it bring to your mind? Does it provoke fear, confusion, despair, misunderstandings, or is it just another in a long line of such expressions used to label youth? Generation X has quickly entered our vocabulary as an easily recognizable moniker for the children of another definable generation: the “baby boomers.” Thus this generation of teenagers also has come to be known as the “baby busters.” “Xers” and “busters” normally don’t elicit positive thoughts about our youth. Is this a legitimate response? Or are we maligning a significant portion of our population with such terms?

In 1991 a Canadian named Douglas Coupland published a novel entitled *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. Coupland’s book “is the first major work to take twentysomethings seriously, even if the book is humorous and fictional.”<sup>[1]</sup> Thus he is the originator of the phrase that presently describes a particular generation. But he is just one of many who have given thought to youth culture, both present and past.

## A Brief History of American Youth

It seems that youth have always received the attention of adults. Teenagers, as they have come to be called, have been analyzed, diagnosed, and reprimanded because older generations just don’t know what to make of them. “Juvenile delinquents,” “the beat generation,” “hippies,” “yuppies” and numerous other

titles have been used to describe certain generational distinctives. "The contemporary youth crisis is only the latest variation on centuries-old problems."[{2}](#) For example, in the 1730s in New England youth activities such as "night 'walking' and 'company-keeping,' also known as 'revels,' helped produce some of the highest premarital pregnancy rates in American history."[{3}](#) And during the early nineteenth century, student riots became a tradition on many campuses such as Brown, North Carolina, Princeton, Harvard, Yale, and Columbia. These riots included "boycotting classes, barricading college buildings, breaking windows, trashing the commons and/or chapel, setting fires around or to college buildings, beating faculty members, and whipping the president or trustees."[{4}](#) Such behavior—almost two hundred years ago—probably reminds us of what took place on many campuses during the Vietnam War years.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, youth became the focus of the burgeoning social sciences. "An intellectual enterprise struggled to redefine what 'youth' was or ought to be. That concept was labeled 'adolescence' and has prevailed ever since."[{5}](#) It is especially interesting to note that these early social scientists didn't discover adolescence, they invented it. "Adolescence was essentially a conception of behavior imposed on youth, rather than an empirical assessment of the way in which young people behaved."[{6}](#) This is important when we understand that the world view premises of the social scientists "came from Darwinian recapitulation theory: the individual life-course replicated the evolutionary progress of the entire race. Adolescence was a distinct 'stage' through which each person passed on the way from childhood (the 'primitive' stage) to adulthood (the 'civilized' stage). Adolescence therefore was transitional but essential, its traits dangerous but its labor vital for attaining maturity. Squelching it was just as bad as giving it free rein."[{7}](#) The fruit of such concepts can be seen in the "lifestyles" that are now so ingrained in our cultural fabric.

## The Web of Adolescence

What do the “lifestyles” of adults have to do with adolescents? “Since ‘lifestyle’ has come to define not just doing but their very being, adults have now become dependent on the very psychological experts who wove the web of adolescence in the first place. The classic youth tasks of ‘growth,’ ‘finding oneself,’ and preparing for one’s life-work have become the American life-work, even into the golden years’ of retirement.”<sup>{8}</sup> Thus the concerns we have for our youth are concerns we have for ourselves. The “web of adolescence” touches all of us. As George Barna has stated, “taking the time to have a positive impact [on our youth] is more than just ‘worth the effort’; it is a vital responsibility of every adult and a contribution to the future of our own existence.”<sup>{9}</sup> The importance of this cannot be overemphasized as we contemplate the sometimes-puzzling segment of our population called “Generation X.”

## Who Are These People?

What is a “Generation Xer” or a “baby buster”? What is the “doofus generation” or “the nowhere generation”? These phrases, and many others, may be used to characterize the present generation of youth. Not very encouraging phrases, are they? More frequently than not, adults always have evaluated youth in pessimistic terms. Even the ancient Greeks were frustrated with their youth.

Today the descriptions are especially derogatory. “Words used to describe them have included: whiny, cynical, angry, perplexed, tuned out, timid, searching, vegged out—the latest lost generation.”<sup>{10}</sup> Are these terms accurate, or do they reek of hyperbole? As is true with most generalizations of people, there is a measure of truth to them. But we make a grave mistake if we allow them to preclude us from a more complete consideration of this generation. As George Barna has

written: "You cannot conduct serious research among teenagers these days without concluding that, contrary to popular assumptions, there is substance to these young people."[{11}](#) Having served among and with youth of this generation for many years, I emphatically concur with Mr. Barna. Generation Xers consist of "41 million Americans born between 1965 and 1976 plus the 3 million more in that age group who have immigrated here."[{12}](#) Most of them are children of the "baby boomers," who comprise over 77 million of the population. This dramatic decrease in the number of births has left them with the "baby buster" label. Their parents have left a legacy that has produced a "birth dearth" and its accompanying social consequences. There are at least six contributors to this population decline.

First, the U.S. became the site for the world's highest divorce rate. Second, birth control became increasingly prominent with the introduction of the pill. Women began to experience more freedom in planning their lives. Third, a college education was more accessible for more people, especially for women who began to take more influential positions in the work force. Fourth, social change, including women's liberation, encouraged more women to consider careers other than being homemakers. Fifth, abortion reached a rate of over 1.5 million per year. Sixth, the economy led many women to work because they had to, or because they were the sole breadwinner.[{13}](#)

So we can see that this generation has entered a culture enmeshed in dramatic changes, especially regarding the family. These changes have produced certain characteristics, some positive, others negative, that are generally descriptive of contemporary youth.

## **How Do You Describe a "Buster"?**

How do you describe someone who is labeled as a "baby buster"? We may be tempted to answer this question in a despairing

tone, especially if we haven't taken time to see a clear picture of a "buster." Consider the following characteristics:

First, they are serious about life. For example, the quality of life issues they have inherited have challenged them to give consideration to critical decisions both for the present and future. Second, they are stressed out. School, family, peer pressure, sexuality, techno-stress, finances, crime, and even political correctness contribute to their stressful lives. Third, they are self-reliant. One indicator of this concerns religious faith; the baby buster believes he alone can make sense of it. Fourth, they are skeptical, which is often a defense against disappointment. Fifth, they are highly spiritual. This doesn't mean they are focusing on Christianity, but it does mean there is a realization that it is important to take spiritual understanding of some kind into daily life. Sixth, they are survivors. This is not apparent to adults who usually share a different worldview concerning progress and motivation. This generation is not "driven" as much as their predecessors. They are realistic, not idealistic.[{14}](#)

Do these characteristics match your perceptions? If not, it may be because this generation has received little public attention. And what attention it has received has leaned in a negative direction because of inaccurate observation. The baby busters' parents, the baby boomers, have been the focus of businesses, education, churches, and other institutions simply because of their massive numbers and their market potential. It's time to rectify this if we have the wisdom to see the impact busters will have in the not-too-distant future.

## **What About the Church and Busters?**

Let's survey a few other attributes of Generation X as we attempt to bring this group into sharper focus. These attributes should be especially important to those of us in the Christian community who desire to understand and relate to

our youth.

Because of “the loneliness and alienation of splintered family attachments” this generation’s strongest desires are acceptance and belonging.<sup>{15}</sup> Our churches need to become *accepting* places first and *expecting* places second. That is, our youth need to sense that they are not first *expected* to conform or perform. Rather, they are to sense that the church is a place where they can first find *acceptance*. My years of ministry among youth have led me to the conclusion that one of the consistent shortcomings of our churches is the proverbial “generation gap” that stubbornly *expects* youth to dress a certain way, talk a certain way, socialize in a certain way, etc., without *accepting* them in Christ’s way.

Another important attribute of this generation is how they learn. “They determine truth in a different way: not rationally, but relationally.”<sup>{16}</sup> Closely aligned with this is the observation that “interaction is their primary way of learning.”<sup>{17}</sup> In order for the church to respond, it may be necessary to do a great deal of “retooling” on the way we teach.

Lastly, busters are seeking purpose and meaning in life. Of course this search culminates in a relationship with the risen Jesus. It should be obvious that ultimately this is the most important contribution the church can offer. If we fail to respond to this, the greatest need of this generation or any other, surely we should repent and seek the Lord’s guidance.

## Listening to Busters

Let’s eavesdrop on a conversation taking place on a college campus between a Generation X student and a pastor:

**Pastor:** We have a special gathering of college students at our church each Sunday. It would be great to see you there.

**Student:** No, thanks. I’ve been to things like that before.

What's offered is too superficial. Besides, I don't trust institutions like churches.

**Pastor:** Well, I think you'll find this to be different.

**Student:** Who's in charge?

**Pastor:** Usually it's me and a group of others from the church.

**Student:** No students?

**Pastor:** Well, uh, no, not at the moment.

**Student:** How can you have a gathering for students and yet the students have nothing to do with what happens?

**Pastor:** That's a good question. I haven't really thought much about it.

**Student:** By the way, is there a good ethnic and cultural mix in the group?

**Pastor:** It's not as good as it could be.

**Student:** Why is that?

**Pastor:** I haven't really thought about that, either.

**Student:** Cliques. I've noticed that a lot of groups like yours are very "cliquish." Is that true at your church?

**Pastor:** We're trying to rid ourselves of that. But do you spend time with friends?

**Student:** Of course! But I don't put on a "show of acceptance."

**Pastor:** I appreciate that! We certainly don't want to do that! We sincerely want to share the truth with anyone.

**Student:** Truth? I don't think you can be so bold as to say there is any such thing.

**Pastor:** That's a good point. I can't claim truth, but Jesus can.

**Student:** I'm sure that's comforting for you, but it's too narrow for anyone to claim such a thing. We all choose our own paths.

**Pastor:** Jesus didn't have such a broad perspective.

**Student:** That may be, but he could have been wrong, you know. Look, I'm late for class. Maybe we can talk another time, as long as you'll listen and not preach to me.

**Pastor:** That sounds good. I'm here often. I'll look for you. Have a great day!

This fictitious encounter serves to illustrate how baby busters challenge us to find ways of communicating that transcend what may have been the norm just a few years ago.

## **New Rules**

George Barna has gleaned a set of "rules" that define and direct youth of the mid- and late-90s:

*Rule #1:* Personal relationships count. Institutions don't.

*Rule #2:* The process is more important than the product.

*Rule #3:* Aggressively pursue diversity among people.

*Rule #4:* Enjoying people and life opportunities is more important than productivity, profitability, or achievement.

*Rule #5:* Change is good.

*Rule #6:* The development of character is more crucial than achievement.

*Rule #7:* You can't always count on your family to be there for you, but it is your best hope for emotional support.

*Rule #8:* Each individual must assume responsibility for his or her own world.

*Rule #9:* Whenever necessary, gain control and use it wisely.

*Rule #10:* Don't waste time searching for absolutes. There are none.

*Rule #11:* One person can make a difference in the world but not much.

*Rule #12:* Life is hard and then we die; but because it's the only life we've got, we may as well endure it, enhance it, and enjoy it as best we can.

*Rule #13:* Spiritual truth may take many forms.

*Rule #14:* Express your rage.

*Rule #15:* Technology is our natural ally.[{18}](#)

Now let's consider how parents and other adults might best respond to these rules.

## **What Do They Hear From Us?**

Try to put yourself into the mind and body of a contemporary teenager for a moment. Imagine that you've been asked to share the kinds of things you hear most often from your parents or adult leaders. Your list may sound something like this:

- "Do as I say, not as I do."
- "I'm the adult. I'm right."
- "Because I said so, that's why."
- "You want to be *what*?"
- "This room's a pig sty."
- "Can't you do anything right?"
- "Where did you find him?"
- "You did *what*?"
- "Do you mind if we talk about something else?"

- “I’m kind of busy right now. Could you come back later?”

These statements sound rather overwhelming when taken together, don’t they? And yet too many of our youth hear similar phrases too frequently. As we conclude our series pertaining to the youth of Generation X, let’s focus on how we might better communicate and minister to them. In his book *Ten Mistakes Parents Make With Teenagers*, Jay Kesler has shared wise advice we should take to heart and consistently apply to our lives among youth.[\[19\]](#)

## **Advice to Parents and Other Adults**

- Be a consistent model. We can’t just preach to them and expect them to follow our advice if we don’t live what we say. Consistency is crucial in the eyes of a buster.
- Admit when you are wrong. Just because you are the adult and the one with authority doesn’t mean you can use your position as a “cop out” for mistakes. Youth will understand sincere repentance and will be encouraged to respond in kind.
- Give honest answers to honest questions. Youth like to ask questions. We need to see this as a positive sign and respond honestly.
- Let teenagers develop a personal identity. Too often youth bare the brunt of their parents’ expectations. In particular, parents will sometimes make the mistake of living through their children. Encourage them in their own legitimate endeavors.
- Major on the majors and minor on the minors. In my experience, adults will concentrate on things like appearance to the detriment of character. Our youth need to know that we know what is truly important.
- Communicate approval and acceptance. As we stated earlier in this essay, this generation is under too much stress. Let’s make encouragement our goal, not discouragement.
- When possible, approve their friends. This one can be especially difficult for many of us. Be sure to take time to

go beyond the surface and really know their friends.

- Give teens the right to fail. We can't protect them all their lives. Remind them that they can learn from mistakes.
- Discuss the uncomfortable. If they don't sense they can talk with you, they will seek someone else who may not share your convictions.
- Spend time with your teens. Do the kinds of things they like to do. Give them your concentration. They'll never forget it.

This generation of youth, and all those to come, need parents and adults who demonstrate these qualities. When youth receive this kind of attention, our churches will benefit, our schools will benefit, our families will benefit, and our country will benefit. And, most importantly, I believe the Lord will be pleased.

## Notes

1. William Dunn, *The Baby Bust: A Generation Comes of Age* (Ithaca, N.Y.: American Demographics Books, 1993), 112.
2. Quentin J. Schultze, ed., *Dancing in the Dark: Youth, Popular Culture, and the Electronic Media* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 14.
3. Ibid., 19.
4. Steven J. Novak, *The Rights of Youth: American Colleges and Student Revolt, 1798-1815* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1977), 17-25. Quoted in Schultze, *Dancing in the Dark*, 23.
5. Schultze, 33.
6. Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 243. Quoted in Schultze, *Dancing in the Dark*, 35.
7. Schultze, 35.
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9. George Barna, *Generation Next: What You Need to Know About Today's Youth* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal, 1995), 11.
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11. Barna, 18.
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15. Jan Johnson, "Getting the Gospel to the Baby Busters," *Moody Monthly* (May 1995): 50.
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## **Living in the New Dark Ages**

*Former Probe staffer Lou Whitworth reviews Charles Colson's important book, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages*. Colson argues that "new barbarians" are destroying our culture with individualism, relativism, and the new tolerance.*

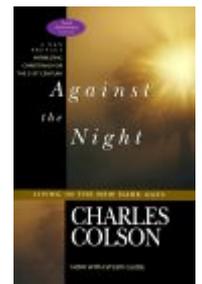
### **Is the Sun Setting On the West?**

*It was 146 B.C. In the waning hours of the day a Roman general, Scipio Africanus, climbed a hill overlooking the north African city of Carthage. For three years he had led his troops in a fierce siege against the city and its 700,000 inhabitants. He had lost legions to their cunning and endurance. With the Carthaginian army reduced to a handful of soldiers huddled inside the temple of their god Eshmun, the city was conquered. And with the enemy defeated, Scipio ordered his men to burn the city.(1)*

*Now, as the final day of his campaign drew to a close, Scipio Africanus stood on a hillside watching Carthage burn. His*

face, streaked with the sweat and dirt of battle, glowed with the fire of the setting sun and the flames of the city, but no smile of triumph crossed his lips. No gleam of victory shone from his eyes. Instead, as the Greek historian Polybius would later record, the Roman general “burst into tears, and stood long reflecting on the inevitable change which awaits cities, nations, and dynasties, one and all, as it does every one of us men.”

In the fading light of that dying city, Scipio saw the end of Rome itself. Just as Rome had destroyed others, so it would one day be destroyed. Scipio Africanus, the great conqueror and extender of empires, saw the inexorable truth: no matter how mighty it may be, no nation, no empire, no culture is immortal.



Thus begins Chuck Colson’s book, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages*, a sober yet inspirational book on facing the future as involved Christians. He returns to this scene frequently in the book as a reminder of the transitory nature of nations and cultures. The author, chairman of Prison Fellowship and ex-Watergate figure turned Christian evangelist, sets forth a warning for the church and for individual believers.

Just as the Roman general Scipio Africanus saw in the flames of the city of Carthage the future fall of Rome and its empire, Colson believes that we are likely witnessing in the crumbling of our society the demise of the American experiment and perhaps even the dissolution of Western civilization.

And just as the fall of Rome led into the Dark Ages, the

United States and the West are staggering and reeling from powerful destructive forces and trends that may lead us into a New Dark Ages. The imminent slide of the West is not inevitable, but likely unless current, destructive trends are corrected. The step-by-step dismantling of our Judeo-Christian heritage has led us to a slippery slope situation in which destructive tendencies unchecked lead to other unhealthy tendencies. For example, as expectations of common concern for others evaporates, even those who wish to retain that value become more cautious, reserved, and secretive out of self-defense, further unraveling the social fabric. Thus rampant individualism crushes to earth our more generous impulses and promotes more of the same. Other examples could be enumerated, but this illustrates the way one destructive, negative impulse can father a host of others. Soon the social fabric is in tatters, and impossible to mend peaceably. At this point the society is vulnerable both from within and from without.

## **The New Barbarism and Its Roots**

We face a crisis in Western culture, and it presents the greatest threat to civilization since the barbarians invaded Rome. Today in the West, and particularly in America, a new type of barbarian is present among us. They are not hairy Goths and Vandals, swilling fermented brew and ravishing maidens; they are not Huns and Visigoths storming our borders or scaling our city walls. No, this time the invaders have come from within.

We have bred them in our families and trained them in our classrooms. They inhabit our legislatures, our courts, our film studios, and our churches. Most of them are attractive and pleasant; their ideas are persuasive and subtle. Yet these men and women threaten our most cherished institutions and our very character as a people. They are the new barbarians.

How did this situation come to pass? The seeds of our possible destruction began in a seemingly harmless way. It began not in

sinister conspiracies in dark rooms but in the paneled libraries of philosophers, the study alcoves of the British museums, and the cafs of the world's universities. Powerful movements and turning points are rooted in the realm of ideas.

One such turning point occurred when Rene Descartes, looking for the one thing he could not doubt, came up with the statement *Cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." This postulate eventually led to a new premise for philosophical thought: man, rather than God, became the fixed point around which everything else revolved. Human reason became the foundation upon which a structure of knowledge could be built; and doubt became the highest intellectual virtue.

Two other men, John Stuart Mill (1806-73) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) contributed to this trend of man-based philosophy. Mill created a code of morality based on self-interest. He believed that only individuals and their particular interests were important, and those interests could be determined by whatever maximized their pleasure and minimized their pain. Thus the moral judgments are based on calculating what will multiply pleasure and minimize pain for the greatest number. This philosophy is called utilitarianism, one form of extreme individualism.

Another form of individualism was expressed by Rousseau who argued that the problems of the world were not caused by human nature but by civilization. If humanity could only be free, he believed, our natural virtues would be cultivated by nature. Human passions superseded the dictates of reason or God's commands. This philosophy could be called experimental individualism.

Mill and Rousseau were very different. Mill championed reason, success, and material gain; and Rousseau passion, experiences, and feelings. Yet their philosophies have *self* as a common denominator, and they have now melded together into radical individualism, the dominant philosophy of the new barbarians.

According to sociologist Robert Bellah, pervasive individualism is destroying the subtle ties that bind people together. This, in turn, is threatening the very stability of our social order as it strips away any sense of individual responsibility for the common good. When people care only for themselves, they are not easily motivated to care about their neighbors, community life devolves into the survival of the fittest, and the weak become prey for the strong.

## **The Darkness Increases and the New Barbarians Grow Stronger**

Today the prevailing attitude is one of relativism, i.e., the belief that there is no morally binding objective source of authority or truth above the individual. The fact that this view tosses aside 2,500 years of accumulated moral wisdom in the West, a rationally defensible natural law, and the moral law revealed by God in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures seems to bother very few.

Relativism and individualism need each other to survive. Rampant individualism promotes a competitive society in which conflicting claims rather than consensus is the norm because everyone is his or her own standard of "right" and "wrong" and of "rights" and "obligations." The marriage of extreme individualism and relativism, however, has produced a new conception of "tolerance."

The word *tolerance* sounds great, but this is really tolerance with a twist; it demands that everyone has a right to express his or her own views as long as those views do not contain any suggestion of absolutes that would compete with the prevailing standard of relativism.

Usually those who promote tolerance the loudest also proclaim that the motives of religious people are suspect and that, therefore, their views on any matter must be disqualified. Strangely, socialists, Nazis, sadomasochists, pedophiles,

spiritualists, or worshipers of Mother earth would not be excluded. Their right to free expression would be vigorously defended by the same cultural elite who are so easily offended when Christians or other religious people express their views.

But this paradoxical intolerance produces an even deeper consequence than silencing an unpopular point of view, for it completely transforms the nature of debate, public discussion, and consensus in society. Without root in some transcendent standard, ethical judgments become merely expressions of feelings or preference. "Murder is wrong" must be translated "I hate murder" or "I prefer that you not murder." Thus, moral claims are reduced to the level of opinion.

Opponents grow further and further apart, differing on a level so fundamental that they are unable even to communicate. When moral judgments are based on feelings alone, compromise becomes impossible. Politics can no longer be based on consensus, for consensus presupposes that competing moral claims can be evaluated according to some common standard. Politics is transformed into civil war, further evidence that the barbarians are winning.

Proponents of a public square sanitized of moral judgments purport that it assures neutrality among contending moral factions and guarantees certain basic civil rights. This sounds enlightened and eminently fair. In reality, however, it assures victory for one side of the debate and assures defeat of those with a moral structure based on a transcendent standard.

Historically, moral restraints deeply ingrained in the public consciousness provided the protective shield for individual rights and liberties. But in today's relativistic environment that shield can be easily penetrated. Whenever some previously unthinkable innovation is both technically possible and desirable to some segment of the population, it can be, and usually will be, adopted. The process is simple. First some

practice so offensive it can hardly be discussed is advocated by some expert. Shock gives way to outrage, then to debate, and when what was once a crime becomes a debate, that debate usually ushers the act into common practice. Thus decadence becomes accepted. History has proven it over and over.

## **Where Do We Go From Here?**

Questions arise in our minds: How bad is the situation? Is it too late to stop or reverse the downward trend? If it's too late, do we wait, preserve, and endure until the winds of history and God's purpose are at our backs?

When a culture is beset by both a loss of public and private values, the overall decline undermines society's primary institutional supports. God has ordained three institutions for the ordering of society: the family for the propagation of life, the state for the preservation of life, and the church for the proclamation of the gospel. These are not just voluntary associations that people can join or not as they see fit; they are organic sources of authority for restraining evil and humanizing society. They, and the closely related institution of education, have all been assaulted and penetrated by the new barbarians. The consequences are frightening.

### **The Family**

The family is under massive assault from many directions, and its devastation is obvious. Yet the family and the church are the only two institutions that can cultivate moral virtue, and of these the family is primary and foremost because "our very nature is acquired within families."<sup>(2)</sup> Unfortunately when radical individualism enters the family, it disrupts the transmission of manners and morals from one generation to the next. Once this happens it is nearly impossible to catch up later, and the result is generation after generation of rude, lawless, culturally retarded children.

## **The Church**

The new barbarians have penetrated our churches and tried to turn them into everything except what God intended them to be. Even strong biblical churches have not been immune to their influence. Yet only as the church maintains its distinctiveness from the culture is it able to affect culture. The church dare not look for “success” as portrayed in our culture; instead its watchword must be “faithfulness”; only then will the church be successful. The survival of the Western culture is inextricably linked to the dynamic of reform arising from the independent and pure exercise of religion from the moral impulse. That impulse can only come from our families and from our churches. The church must be free to be the church.

## **The Classroom**

The classroom has also been invaded by radical individualism and the secular ideas of the new barbarians. We must resist putting our young people under unbridled secularistic teaching, especially if it isn't balanced by adequate exposure to Christian principles and a Christian worldview.

## **The State/Politics**

Government has a worthy task to do, i.e., to protect life and to keep the peace, but it cannot develop character. To believe that it can do so is to invite tyranny. First, most people's needs and problems are far beyond the reach of government. Second, it is impossible to effect genuine political reform, much less moral reform, solely by legislation. Government, by its very nature, is limited in what it can accomplish. We need to be involved in politics, but we must do so with realistic expectations and without illusions.

Our culture is indeed threatened, but the situation is not irreversible if we model the family before the world and let the church be the church.

## A Flame in the Night

This is an important work, one that every Christian would benefit from reading. Though Colson's subject—the ethical, moral, and spiritual decline that many observers forecast for our immediate future—is bleak, the work isn't morose or gloomy. His focus is on opportunities and possibilities before us regardless of what the future holds. In the book's last section, he calls for the church and for individual Christians to be lights in the darkness by cultivating the moral imagination and presenting to the world a compelling vision of the good. He outlines three steps in that process.

First, we must reassert a sense of shared destiny as an antidote to radical individualism. We are born, live, and die in the context of communities. Rich, meaningful life is found in communities of worship, self-government, and shared values. We are not ennobled by relentless competition, endless self-promotion, and maximum autonomy, nor are these tendencies ultimately rewarding. On the other hand, commitment, friendship, and civic cooperation are both personally and corporately satisfying.

Second, we must adopt a strong, balanced view of the inherent dignity of human life. All the traditional restraints on inhumanity seem to be crumbling at once in our courts, in our laboratories, in our operating rooms, in our legislatures. The very idea of an essential dignity of human life seems a quaint anachronism today. As Christians we must be unequivocally and unapologetically pro-life. We cannot disdain the unborn, the young, the infirm, the handicapped, or the elderly. We cannot concede any ground here.

Third, we must recover respect for tradition and history. We must reject the faddish movements of the moment and look to the established lessons from the past. The moral imagination (our power to perceive ethical truth<sup>[3]</sup>) values reason and recognizes truth. It asserts that the world can be both

understood and transformed through the carefully constructed restraints of civilized behavior and institutions. It assumes that to approach the world without consideration of the ideas of earlier times is an act of hubris in essence, claiming the ability to create the world anew, dependent on nothing but our own pitiful intelligence.

In contrast to such an attitude, the moral imagination begins with awe, reverence, and appreciation for order within creation. It sees the value of tradition, revelation, family, and community and responds with duty, commitment, and obligation. But the moral imagination is more than rational. It is poetic, stirring long atrophied faculties for nobility, compassion, and virtue.

Imagination is expressed through symbols, allegories, fables, and literary illustrations. Winston Churchill revived the moral imagination of the dispirited British people in his speeches when he depicted the threat from Hitler not as just another war, but as a sacrificial, moral campaign against a force so evil that compromise or defeat would bring about a New Dark Ages. British backbones were stiffened and British hearts were ennobled because Churchill was able to unite rational, emotional, and artistic ideas into a common vision.

Western civilization and the church are currently engaged in a war of ideas with new barbarians. Whether we have the will to be victorious will depend in large measure on the strength and power of our moral imagination. Charles Colson's book, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages*, can give us guidance in this crucial task.

## **Notes**

1. This essay is in large measure a condensation of several chapters of the author's work; consequently, quotations and paraphrase may exist side by side unmarked. Therefore, for accuracy in quoting, please consult the book: Charles Colson,

with Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant, 1989).

2. Russell Kirk, *The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things Are Written on the Sky* (Washington:Regnery Gateway, 1987), 24.

3. For fuller discussion see Russell Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations of Abnormity in Literature and Politics* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969), 119.

### **For Further Reading**

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# Culture and the Bible

*This is not a Christian culture. We are living in an environment that challenges us to continually evaluate what it means to live the Christian life. So how do we respond? The answer begins with the Bible. Our view of culture must include biblical insights. In this essay we will strive to investigate selected passages of Scripture pertaining to culture.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## **The Golden Calf and the Tabernacle: Judging Culture**

Chapters 31-39 of Exodus provide a unique perspective of culture and God's involvement with it. On one hand the work of man was blessed through the artistry of Bezalel, Oholiab, and other skilled artisans as they cooperated to build the tabernacle (35-39). On the other hand, the work of man in the form of the golden calf was rejected by God (31-34). This contrast serves to suggest a guideline with which we can begin to judge culture.

Chapter 31:1-11 contains God's initial instructions to Moses concerning the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Two important artisans, Bezalel and Oholiab, are recognized by God as being especially gifted for this work. These men were skilled, (1) creative people who were able to contribute significantly to the religious/cultural life of the nation of Israel. But at this point in the narrative the scene changes dramatically.

While Moses was on the mountain with God, the people became impatient and decided to make a god, an idol. This prompted an enraged response from both God and Moses. The end result was tragic: three thousand were slain as a result of their idolatry.

Then the attention of the people was directed toward the building of the tabernacle. Chapters 35-39 contain detailed accounts from God pertaining to the tabernacle, and the subsequent work of the skilled artisans, including Bezalel and Oholiab. The finished product was blessed (39:42-43).

In this brief survey of a portion of Israel's history we have seen two responses to the work of man's hands: one negative, the other positive. The people fashioned a piece of art, an idol; the response was negative on the part of God and Moses. The people fashioned another piece of art, the tabernacle; the response was positive and worthy of the blessing of both God and Moses. Why the difference in judgment? The answer is deceptively simple: the intent of the art was evaluated. And it was not a matter of one being "secular" and the other "sacred." Art, the cultural product, was not the problem. "Just as art can be used in the name of the true God, as shown in the gifts of Bezalel, so it can be used in an idolatrous way, supplanting the place of God and thereby distorting its own nature."(2)

Art is certainly a vital element of culture. As a result, we should take the lessons of Exodus 31-39 to heart. Our evaluation of culture should include an awareness of intent without being overly sensitive to form. If not, we begin to assign evil incorrectly. As Carl F.H. Henry says, "The world is evil only as a fallen world. It is not evil intrinsically."(3)

These insights have focused on certain observers of cultural objects as seen in art: God, Moses, and the people of Israel. In the first case God and Moses saw the golden calf from one perspective, the people of Israel from another. In the second case all were in agreement as they observed the tabernacle. The people's perception changed; they agreed with God's intent and aesthetic judgement. The lesson is that our cultural life is subject to God.

## Entering the Fray

How do you react when you're out of your comfort zone: your surroundings, friends, and family? Do you cringe and disengage yourself? Or do you boldly make the best of the new locality?

The first chapter of Daniel tells of four young men who were transported to a culture other than their own by a conquering nation, Babylonia. Their response to this condition provides us with insights concerning how we should relate to the culture that surrounds us. Daniel, of course, proves to be the central figure among the four. He is the focus of our attention.

Several facets of this chapter should be noted. First, Daniel and his friends were chosen by the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, to serve in his court. They were chosen because of their "intelligence in every branch of wisdom ... understanding ... discerning knowledge ... and ability for serving in the king's court" (v. 4). Second, they were taught "the literature and language of the Chaldeans" (v. 4). Third, Daniel "made up his mind" that he would not partake of the Babylonian food and drink (v. 8). Fourth, "God granted Daniel favor and compassion" with his superiors even though he and his friends would not partake of the food (v. 9-16). Fifth, "God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom" (v. 17). Sixth, the king found Daniel and his friends to be "ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm" (v. 20).

This synopsis provides us with several important observations. First, evidently there was no attempt on the part of Daniel and his friends to totally separate themselves from the culture, in particular the educational system of that culture. This was a typical response among the ancient Jews. These young men were capable of interacting with an ungodly culture without being contaminated by it. Evangelicals are often paranoid as they live within what is deemed an unchristian

culture. Perhaps a lesson can be learned from Daniel concerning a proper response. Of course such a response should be based on wisdom and discernment. That leads us to our second observation.

Second, even though Daniel and his companions learned from the culture, they did so by practicing discernment. They obviously compared what they learned of Babylonian thought with what they already understood from God's point of view. The Law of God was something with which they were well acquainted. Edward Young's comments on v. 17 clarify this: "The knowledge and intelligence which God gave to them ... was of a discerning kind, that they might know and possess the ability to accept what was true and to reject what was false in their instruction." (4) Such perception is greatly needed among evangelicals. A separatist, isolationist mentality creates moral and spiritual vacuums throughout our culture. We should replace those vacuums with ideas that are spawned in the minds of Godly thinkers and doers.

Third, God approved of their condition within the culture and even gave them what was needed to influence it (v. 17).

Evangelicals may be directed by God to enter a foreign culture that may not share their worldview. Or, they may be directed to enter the culture that surrounds them, which, as with contemporary western culture, can be devoid of the overt influence of a Christian worldview. If so, they should do so with an understanding that the Lord will protect and provide. And He will demonstrate His power through them as the surrounding culture responds.

## **The World in the New Testament**

*In* and *of*: two simple words that can stimulate a lot of thought when it comes to what the Bible says about culture, or the world. After all, we are to be in the world but not of it. Let's see what the New Testament has to say.

The terms *kosmos* and *aion*, both of which are generally translated "world," are employed numerous times in the New Testament. A survey of *kosmos* will provide important insights. George Eldon Ladd presents usages of the word:(5)

First, the world can refer to "both the entire created order (Jn. 17:5, 24) and the earth in particular (Jn. 11:9; 16:21; 21:25)."(6) This means "there is no trace of the idea that there is anything evil about the world."(7) Second, "kosmos can designate not only the world but also those who inhabit the world: mankind (12:19; 18:20; 7:4; 14:22)."(8) Third, "the most interesting use of kosmos ... is found in the sayings where the world – mankind – is the object of God's love and salvation."(9)

But men, in addition to being the objects of God's love, are seen "as sinful, rebellious, and alienated from God, as fallen humanity. The kosmos is characterized by wickedness (7:7), and does not know God (17:25) nor his emissary, Christ (1:10)."(10) "Again and again ... the world is presented as something hostile to God."(11) But Ladd reminds us that "what makes the kosmos evil is not something intrinsic to it, but the fact that it has turned away from its creator and has become enslaved to evil powers."(12)

So what is the Christian's responsibility in this evil, rebellious world? "The disciples' reaction is not to be one of withdrawal from the world, but of living in the world, motivated by the love of God rather than the love of the world."(13) "So his followers are not to find their security and satisfaction on the human level as does the world, but in devotion to the redemptive purpose of God" (17:17, 19).(14)

The apostle Paul related that "worldliness" consists of worshipping the creature rather than the creator (Rom. 1:25), of finding one's pride and glory on the human and created level rather than in God. The world is sinful only insofar as it exalts itself above God and refuses to humble itself and

acknowledge its creative Lord.”(15) The world is seen as it should be seen when we first worship its creator.

This summary of *kosmos* contributes several points that can be applied to our survey. First, the world is hostile toward God; this includes the rebellion of mankind. Second, this hostility was not part of the original created order; the world was created good. Third, this world is also the object of God’s redemptive love and Christ’s sacrifice. Fourth, the world is not to be seen as an end in itself. We are always to view culture in the light of eternity. Fifth, we are to be about the business of transforming the world. “We are not to follow the world’s lead but to cut across it and rise above it to a higher calling and style.”(16) Or, as Ronald Allen says: “Ours is a world of lechery and war. It is also a world of the good, the beautiful, and the lovely. Eschew lechery; embrace the lovely— and live for the praise of God in the only world we have!”(17)

We are in need of a balance that does not reject beauty, but at the same time recognizes the ugly. Our theology should entail both. The world needs to see this.

## **Corinthians and Culture**

“You’re a Corinthian!” If you had heard that exclamation in New Testament times you would know that the person who said it was very upset. To call someone a Corinthian was insulting. Even non-Christians recognized that Corinth was one of the most immoral cities in the known world.

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians contains many indications of this. The believers in Corinth were faced with a culture which resembled ours in several ways. It was diverse ethnically, religiously, and philosophically. It was a center of wealth, literature, and the arts. And it was infamous for its blatant sexual immorality. How would Paul advise believers to respond to life in such a city?

That question can be answered by concentrating on several principles that can be discovered in Paul's letter. We will highlight only a few of these by focusing on certain terms.

Liberty is a foundational term for Christians entering the culture, but it can be misunderstood easily. This is because some act as if it implies total freedom. But "The believer's life is one of Christian liberty in grace." (18) Paul wrote, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything" (6:12, 10:23). It must be remembered, though, that this liberty is given to glorify God. A liberty that condones sin is another form of slavery. Thus, "Whether ... you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (10:31). In addition, we must be aware of how our liberty is observed by non-believers. Again Paul wrote, "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God" (10:32).

Conscience is another term that figures prominently in how we enter the culture. We must be very sensitive to what it means to defile the conscience. There must be a sensitivity to what tempts us. "The believer who cannot visit the world without making it his home has no right to visit at his weak points."<sup>19</sup> As a result, we need to cultivate the discipline that is needed to respond to the ways the Spirit speaks through our conscience.

Yet another term is brother. In particular, we should be aware of becoming a "stumbling block" to the person Paul calls a "weaker brother." This does not mean that we disregard what has been said about liberty. "A Christian need not allow his liberty to be curtailed by somebody else. But he is obliged to take care that that other person does not fall into sin and if he would hurt that other person's conscience he has not fulfilled that obligation." (20) This requires a special sensitivity to others, which is a hallmark of the Christian life.

On many occasions the Probe staff has experienced the challenge of applying these principles. For example, some of us speak frequently in a club in an area of Dallas, Texas called "Deep Ellum." The particular club in which we teach includes a bar, concert stage, and other things normally associated with such a place. Some refer to the clientele as "Generation Xers" who are often nonconformists. We can use our liberty to minister in the club, but we must do so with a keen awareness of the principles we have discussed. When we enter that culture, which is so different from what we normally experience, we must do so by applying the wisdom found in God's Word to the Corinthians.

## **Encountering the World**

How do you get a hearing when you have something to say? In particular, how do you share the truth of God in ungodly surroundings?

Paul's encounter with Athenian culture (Acts 17:16-34) is illustrative of the manner in which we can dialogue with contemporary culture. His interaction exhibits an ability to communicate with a diversity of the population, from those in the marketplace to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. And he exhibits an understanding of the culture, including its literature and art. Paul was relating a model for how we can relate our faith effectively. That is, we must communicate with language and examples that can be understood by our audience.

Verse 16 says that Paul's "spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols." We should note that the verb translated "provoked" here is the Greek word from which we derive the term paroxysm. Paul was highly irritated. In addition, we should note that the verb is imperfect passive, implying that his agitation was a logical result of his Christian conscience and that it was continuous. The idolatry which permeated Athenian culture stimulated this

dramatic response. Application: the idolatry of contemporary culture should bring no less a response from us. Materialism, Individualism, Relativism, and Secularism are examples of ideologies that have become idols in our culture.

Verses 17 and 18 refer to several societal groups: Jews, God-fearing Gentiles, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, as well as the general population, namely "those who happened to be present." Evidently Paul was able to converse with any segment of the population. Application: as alert, thinking, sensitive, concerned, discerning Christians we are challenged to confront our culture in all of its variety and pluralism. It is easier to converse with those who are like-minded, but that is not our only responsibility.

In verse 18 some of the philosophers call Paul an "idle babbler" (i.e., one who makes his living by picking up scraps). Application: we should realize that the Christian worldview, in particular the basic tenets of the gospel, will often elicit scorn from a culture that is too often foreign to Christian truth. This should not hinder us from sharing the truth.

The narrative of verses 19-31 indicates that Paul knew enough about Athenian culture to converse with it on the highest intellectual level. He was acutely aware of the "points of understanding" between him and his audience. He was also acutely aware of the "points of disagreement" and did not hesitate to stress them. He had enough knowledge of their literary expressions to quote their spokesmen (i.e., their poets), even though this does not necessarily mean Paul had a thorough knowledge of them. And he called them to repentance. Application: we need to "stretch" ourselves more intellectually so that we can duplicate Paul's experience more frequently. The most influential seats in our culture are too often left to those who are devoid of Christian thought. Such a condition is in urgent need of change.

Paul experienced three reactions in Athens (vv. 32-34). First, "some began to sneer" (v. 32). They expressed contempt. Second, some said "We shall hear you again concerning this" (v. 32). Third, "some men joined him and believed" (v. 34). We should not be surprised when God's message is rejected; we should be prepared when people want to hear more; and we can rejoice when the message falls on fertile soil and bears the fruit of a changed life.

## Conclusion

We have seen that Scripture is not silent regarding culture. It contains much by way of example and precept, and we have only begun the investigation. There is more to be done. With this expectation in mind, what have we discovered from the Bible at this stage?

First, in some measure God "is responsible for the presence of culture, for he created human beings in such a way that they are culture-producing beings." (21) Second, God holds us responsible for cultural stewardship. Third, we should not fear the surrounding culture; instead, we should strive to contribute to it through God-given creativity, and transform it through dialogue and proclamation. Fourth, we should practice discernment while living within culture. Fifth, the products of culture should be judged on the basis of intent, not form. Or, to simply further:

We advance the theory that God's basic attitude toward culture is that which the apostle Paul articulates in I Corinthians 9:19-22. That is, he views human culture primarily as a vehicle to be used by him and his people for Christian purposes, rather than as an enemy to be combatted or shunned. (22)

Let us use the vehicle for the glory of God!

Notes

1. The word "skill," which is frequently employed to describe artisans in these chapters (NASB), is from the Hebrew word *hakam*, meaning "wise." One of its main synonyms is *bin*, basically meaning "discernment". Thus, the skillful person is one who, in the minds of the Israelites, was also "wise" and "discerning" in his artistry.
2. Gene Edward Veith, *The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 31.
3. Carl F.H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 420.
4. Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 48-49.
5. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974). In particular, see chapters 17 and 29.
6. *Ibid.*, 225.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, 226.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Everett F. Harrison, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Carl F.H. Henry, eds. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), s.v. "World, Worldliness," by Everett F. Harrison.
12. Ladd, 226.
13. *Ibid.*, 227.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 400.
16. R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1985), 209.
17. Ronald B. Allen, *The Majesty of Man: The Dignity of Being Human* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1984), 191.
18. Henry, 420.
19. *Ibid.*, 428.
20. F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 243.

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# Teen Drug Abuse

A Nine Inch Nails album *The Downward Spiral* features a song "My Self Destruct" with the lyrics: "I am the needle in your vein and I control you, I am the high you can't sustain and I control you." Another song, "Hurt," explores drugs as a means of escape with lyrics like, "The needle tears a hole, the old familiar sting, try to kill it all away."

Five Dodge City, Kansas teenagers, high on marijuana, killed a stranger for no obvious reason. Three West Palm Beach, Florida teenagers mixed beer, rum, marijuana and cocaine. They then kidnapped and set ablaze a tourist from Brooklyn.

Nearly everywhere we look, the consequences of drug abuse can be seen. Violent street gangs, family violence, train crashes, the spread of AIDS, and babies born with cocaine dependency all testify to the pervasive influence of drugs in our world.

The statistics are staggering. The average age of first alcohol use is 12 and the average age of first drug use is 13. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 93 percent of all teenagers have some experience with alcohol by the end of their senior year of high school and 6 percent drink daily. Almost two-thirds of all American young people try illicit drugs before they finish high school. One out of sixteen seniors smokes marijuana daily and 20 percent have done so for at least a month sometime in their lives. A recent poll found that adolescents listed drugs as the most important problem facing people their age, followed by crime and violence in school and social pressures.

Drugs have changed the social landscape of America. Street gangs spring up nearly overnight looking for the enormous profits drugs can bring. Organized crime is also involved in

setting up franchises that would make McDonald's envious. But these are not hamburgers. In the world of drugs, homicidally vicious gangs compete for market share with murderous results. Many gang members outgun the police with their weapons of choice: semi-automatic pistols, AK-47s, and Uzis. Drug dealers have also gone high tech using cellular phones and computers to keep track of deals, while their teenage runners wear phone beepers in school.

The Parents' Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE) reports that children who abuse illicit drugs are significantly more likely to carry a gun to school, take part in gang activities, think of suicide, threaten harm to others, and get in trouble with the police than children who abstain.

One survey released by the University of Colorado shows that the problem of drug use is not just outside the church. The study involved nearly 14,000 junior high and high school youth and compared churched young people with unchurched young people and found very little difference. For example, 88 percent of the unchurched young people reported drinking beer as compared to 80 percent of churched young people. When asked how many had tried marijuana, 47 percent of the unchurched young people had done so compared to 38 percent of the churched youth. For amphetamines and barbiturates, 28 percent of the unchurched had tried them while 22 percent of the church young people had tried them. And for cocaine use, the percentage was 14 percent for unchurched youths and 11 percent for churched youths.

Fighting drugs often seems futile. When drug dealers are arrested, they are often released prematurely because court dockets are overloaded. Plea bargaining and paroles are standard fare as the revolving doors of justice spin faster. As the casualties mount in this war against drugs, some commentators have begun to suggest that the best solution is to legalize drugs. But you don't win a war by surrendering. If drugs were legalized, addiction would increase, health costs

would increase, and government would once again capitulate to societal pressures and shirk its responsibility to establish moral law.

But if legalization is not the answer, then something must be done about the abuse of drugs like alcohol, cocaine, marijuana, heroin, and PCP. Just the medical cost of drug abuse was estimated by the National Center for Health Statistics to be nearly \$60 billion, and the medical bill for alcohol was nearly \$100 billion.

## **How to Fight the Drug Battle**

Society must fight America's drug epidemic on five major fronts. The first battlefield is at the border. Federal agents must patrol the 8426 miles of deeply indented Florida coastline and a 2067 mile border with Mexico. This is a formidable task, but vast distances are not the only problem.

The smugglers they are up against have almost unlimited funds and some of the best equipment available. Fortunately, the federal interdiction forces (namely Customs, DEA, and INS) are improving their capability. Customs forces have been given an increase in officers and all are getting more sophisticated equipment.

The second battlefield is law enforcement at home. Police must crack down with more arrests, more convictions, longer sentences, and more seizures of drug dealers' assets. Unfortunately, law enforcement successes pale when compared to the volume of drug traffic. Even the most effective crackdowns seem to do little more than move drugs from one location to another.

An effective weapon on this battlefield is a 1984 law that makes it easier to seize the assets of drug dealers before conviction. In some cities, police have even confiscated the cars of suburbanites who drive into the city to buy crack.

But attempts to deter drug dealing have been limited by flaws in the criminal justice system. A lack of jail cells prevents significant prosecution of drug dealers. And even if this problem were alleviated, the shortage of judges would still result in the quick release of drug pushers.

A third battlefield is drug testing. Many government and business organizations are implementing testing on a routine basis in order to reduce the demand for drugs.

The theory is simple. Drug testing is a greater deterrent to drug use than the remote possibility of going to jail. People who know they will have to pass a urine test in order to get a job are going to be much less likely to dabble in drugs. In 1980, 27 percent of some 20,000 military personnel admitted to using drugs in the previous 30 days. Five years later when drug testing was implemented, the proportion dropped to 9 percent.

But drug testing is not without its opponents. Civil libertarians feel this deterrent is not worth the loss of personal privacy. Some unions believe that random testing in the workplace would violate the Fourth Amendment's prohibition against unreasonable searches. A fourth battleground is drug treatment. Those who are addicted to drugs need help. But the major question is, Who should provide the treatment and who should foot the bill? Private hospital programs are now a \$4 billion-a-year business with a daily cost of as much as \$500 per bed per day. This is clearly out of the reach of many addicts who do not have employers or insurance companies who can pick up the costs.

A fifth battleground is education. Teaching children the dangers of drugs can be an important step in helping them to learn to say no to drugs. The National Institute on Drug Abuse estimates that 72 percent of the nation's elementary and secondary-school children are being given some kind of drug education.

# Should We Legalize Drugs?

Those weary of the war on drugs have suggested that we should decriminalize drugs. Former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders suggested we study the impact of legalizing drugs. For years, an alliance of liberals and libertarians have promoted the idea that legalizing drugs would reduce drug costs and drug crimes in this country. But would it? Let's look at some of the arguments for drug legalization.

## **1. Legalization will take the profit out of the drug business.**

As surprising as it may sound, relatively few drug dealers actually earn huge sums of money. Most in the crack business are low-level runners who make very little money. Many crack dealers smoke more crack than they sell. Drug cartels are the ones making the big profits.

Would legalizing drugs really affect large drug dealers or drug cartels in any appreciable way? Drug cartels would still control price and supply even if drugs were legalized in this country. If government set the price for legalized drugs, criminals could undercut the price and supply whatever the government did not supply.

Addicts would not be significantly affected by legalization. Does anyone seriously believe that their behavior would change just because they are now using legal drugs instead of illegal drugs? They would still use theft and prostitution to support their habits.

Proponents also argue that legalizing drugs would reduce the cost of drugs and thus reduce the supply of drugs flowing to this country. Recent history suggests that just the opposite will take place. When cocaine first hit the United States, it was expensive and difficult to obtain. But when more was dumped into this country and readily available in less expensive vials of crack, drug addiction rose and drug-related

crimes rose.

## **2. Drug legalization will reduce drug use.**

Proponents argue that legalizing drugs will make them less appealing they will no longer be “forbidden fruit.” However, logic and social statistics suggest that decriminalizing drugs will actually increase drug use.

Those arguing for the legalization of drugs often point to Prohibition as a failed social experiment. But was it? When Prohibition was in effect, alcohol consumption declined by 30 to 50 percent and death from cirrhosis of the liver fell dramatically. One study found that suicides and drug-related arrests also declined by 50 percent. After the repeal of the 18th amendment in 1933, alcoholism rose. So did alcohol-related crimes and accidents. If anything, Prohibition proves the point. Decriminalization increases drug use.

Comparing alcohol and drugs actually strengthens the argument against legalization since many drugs are even more addictive than alcohol. Consider, for example, the difference between alcohol and cocaine. Alcohol has an addiction rate of approximately 10 percent, while cocaine has an addiction rate as high as 75 percent.

Many drugs are actually “gateway drugs” to other drugs. A 1992 article in *The Journal of Primary Prevention* found that marijuana is essentially a “necessary” condition for the occurrence of cocaine use. Other research shows that involvement with illicit drugs is a developmental phenomenon, age correlates with use, and cigarette and alcohol use precedes marijuana use.

Dr. Robert DuPont, former head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, argues that the potential market for legal drugs can be compared to the number of Americans who now use alcohol

(140 million persons). If his analysis is correct, then approximately 50 million Americans would eventually use cocaine if it were a legal drug.

But the real question is not, Which is worse: alcohol or drugs? The question is whether we can accept both legalized alcohol and legalized drugs. Legalized alcohol currently leads to 100,000 deaths/year and costs us \$99 billion/year. We don't need to legalize drugs too.

### **3. Legalizing drugs will reduce social costs.**

"We are losing the war on drugs," say drug legalization proponents, "so let's cut the costs of drug enforcement by decriminalizing drugs."

Currently the U.S. spends \$11 billion/year to combat drug-related crime. If drugs were made legal, some crime-fighting costs might drop but many social costs would certainly increase: other forms of crime (to support habits), drug-related accidents, and welfare costs.

Statistics from states that have decriminalized marijuana demonstrate this concern. In California, within the first six months of decriminalization, arrests for driving under the influence of drugs rose 46 percent for adults and 71.4 percent for juveniles. The use of marijuana doubled in Alaska and Oregon when it was decriminalized in those states.

Crime would certainly increase. Justice Department figures show that approximately one-third of inmates used drugs prior to committing their crimes.

And juvenile crime would no doubt increase as well. A 1990 study published in the Journal of Drug Issues found a strong association between the severity of the crime and the type of substance used the more intoxicating the substance, the more serious the incident.

Meanwhile, worker productivity would decrease and student productivity would decrease.

The Drug Enforcement Administration estimates that drug decriminalization will cost society more than alcohol and tobacco combined, perhaps \$140-210 billion a year in lost productivity and job-related accidents.

Government services would no doubt have to be expanded to pay for additional drug education and treatment for those addicted to legal drugs. And child protective services would no doubt have to expand to deal with child abuse. Patrick Murphy, a court-appointed lawyer for 31,000 abused and neglected children in Chicago, says that more than 80 percent of the cases of physical and sexual abuse of children now involve drugs. Legalizing drugs will not reduce these crimes; it would make the problem worse.

And is it accurate to say we are losing the war on drugs? Drug use in this country was on the decline in the 1980s due to a strong anti-drug campaign. Casual cocaine use, for example, dropped from 12 million in 1985 to 6 million in 1991. You don't win a war by surrender. Legalizing drugs in this country would constitute surrender in the drug war at a time when we have substantial evidence we can win this battle on a number of fronts.

#### **4. Government should not dictate moral policy on drugs.**

Libertarians who promote drug legalization value personal freedom. They believe that government should not dictate morals and fear that our civil liberties may be threatened by a tougher policy against drugs.

The true threat to our freedoms comes from the drug cartels in foreign countries, drug lords in this country, and drug dealers in our streets. Legalizing drugs would send the wrong message to society. Those involved in drug use eventually see that drugs ultimately lead to prison or death, so they begin

to seek help.

Obviously some people are going to use drugs whether they are legal or illegal. Keeping drugs illegal maintains criminal sanctions that persuade most people their life is best lived without drugs. Legalization, on the other hand, removes the incentive to stay away from drugs and increases drug use.

William Bennett has said, "I didn't have to become drug czar to be opposed to legalized marijuana. As Secretary of Education I realized that, given the state of American education, the last thing we needed was a policy that made widely available a substance that impairs memory, concentration, and attention span. Why in God's name foster the use of a drug that makes you stupid?"

## **Biblical Perspective**

Some people may believe that the Bible has little to say about drugs, but this is not so. First, the Bible has a great deal to say about the most common and most abused drug: alcohol. Ephesians 5:18 admonishes Christians not to be drunk with wine. In many places in Scripture drunkenness is called a sin (Deut. 21:20-21, Amos 6:1, 1 Cor.6:9-10, Gal. 5:19-20). The Bible also warns of the dangers of drinking alcohol in Proverbs 20:1, Isaiah 5:11, Habakkuk 2:15-16. If the Bible warns of the danger of alcohol, then by implication it is also warning of the dangers of taking other kinds of drugs.

Second, drugs were an integral part of many ancient near East societies. For example, the pagan cultures surrounding the nation of Israel used drugs as part of their religious ceremonies. Both the Old Testament and New Testament condemn sorcery and witchcraft. The word translated "sorcery" comes from the Greek word from which we get the English words "pharmacy" and "pharmaceutical." In ancient time, drugs were prepared by a witch or shaman.

Drugs were used to enter into the spiritual world by inducing an altered state of consciousness that allowed demons to take over the mind of the user. In that day, drug use was tied to sorcery. In our day, many use drugs merely for so-called "recreational" purposes, but we cannot discount the occult connection.

Galatians 5:19-21 says: "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft [which includes the use of drugs]; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." The word witchcraft here is also translated "sorcery" and refers to the use of drugs. The Apostle Paul calls witchcraft that was associated with drug use a sin. The non-medical use of drugs is considered one of the acts of a sinful nature. Using drugs, whether to "get a high" or to tap into the occult, is one of the acts of a sinful nature where users demonstrate their depraved and carnal nature.

The psychic effects of drugs should not be discounted. A questionnaire designed by Charles Tate and sent to users of marijuana documented some disturbing findings. In his article in *Psychology Today* he noted that one fourth of the marijuana users who responded to his questionnaire reported that they were taken over and controlled by an evil person or power during their drug induced experience. And over half of those questioned said they have experienced religious or "spiritual" sensations in which they meet spiritual beings.

Many proponents of the drug culture have linked drug use to spiritual values. During the 1960s, Timothy Leary and Alan Watts referred to the "religious" and "mystical" experience gained through the use of LSD (along with other drugs) as a prime reason for taking drugs.

No doubt drugs are dangerous, not only to our body but to our spirit. As Christians, we must warn our children and our society of the dangers of drugs.

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