The Christian and the Arts

How should Christians glorify God in the ways we interact with the arts and express our artistic bent?

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Is there a legitimate place for the appreciation of art and beauty in our lives? What is the relationship of culture to our spiritual life? Are not art and the development of aesthetic tastes really a waste of time in the light of eternity? These are questions Christians often ask about the fine arts.

Unfortunately, the answers we often hear to such questions imply that Christianity can function quite nicely without an aesthetic dimension. At the heart of this mentality is Tertullian's (160-220 A.D.) classic statement, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? The Academy with the Church? We have no need for curiosity since Jesus Christ, nor inquiry since the evangel."

This bold assertion has led many to argue that the spiritual life is essential, but the cultural inconsequential. And today much of the Christian community seems inclined to approach aesthetics in the same hurried and superficial manner with which we live most of our lives. This attitude was vividly expressed recently in a cartoon portraying an American rushing into the Louvre in Paris. The caption read, "Where's the Mona Lisa? I'm double parked!"

Art and Aesthetics

What is aesthetics? Let us begin with a definition. Aesthetics is "The philosophy of beauty and art. It studies the nature of beauty and laws governing its expression, as in the fine arts, as well as principles of art criticism"{1}. Formally,

aesthetics is thus included in the study of philosophy. Ethical considerations to determine “good” and “bad” include the aesthetic dimension.

Thus, beauty can be contemplated, defined, and understood for itself. This critical process results in explaining why some artists, authors, and composers are great, some merely good, and others not worthwhile. Aesthetics therefore

> “. . .aims to solve the problem of beauty on a universal basis. If successful, it would presently furnish us with an explanation of the quality common to Greek temples, Gothic cathedrals, Renaissance paintings, and all good art from whatever place or time.”{2}

At the heart of aesthetics, then, is *human creativity* and its diverse cultural expressions. H. Richard Neibuhr has defined it as “the work of men’s minds and hands.” While nature (as God’s gift) provides the raw materials for human expression, culture is that which man produces in his earthly setting. It . . . “includes the totality and the life pattern—language, religion, literature (if any), machines and inventions, arts and crafts, architecture and decor, dress, laws, customs, marriage and family structures, government and institutions, plus the peculiar and characteristic ways of thinking and acting.”{3}

Aesthetic taste is interwoven all through the cultural fabric of a society and thus cannot be ignored. It is therefore inescapable—for society and for the individual. Human creativity will inevitably express itself and the results (works of art) will tell us something about its creators and the society from which they came. “Through art, we can know another’s view of the universe.”{4}

“As such, works of art are often more accurate than any other indication about the state of affairs at some remote but crucial juncture in the progress of humanity. . . . By

studying the visual arts from any society, we can usually tell what the people lived for and for what they might be willing to die."{5}

The term *art* can mean many different things. In the broadest sense, everything created by man is art and everything else is nature, created by God. However, art usually denotes *good* and *beautiful* things created by mankind (Note: A major point of debate in the field of aesthetics centers around the definition of these two terms). Even crafts and skills, such as carpentry or metal working have been considered by many as *arts*.

While the works of artisans of earlier eras have come to be viewed like fine art, the term *the arts,* however, has a narrower focus in this outline. We are here particularly concerned with those activities of mankind which are motivated by the creative urge, which go beyond immediate material usefulness in their purpose, and which express the uniqueness of being human. This more limited use of the term *art* includes music, dance, painting, sculpture, architecture, drama and literature. The *fine arts* is the study of those human activities and acts which produce and are considered works of art.

Aesthetics then is the study of human responses to things considered beautiful and meaningful. The arts is the study of human actions which attempt to arouse an aesthetic experience in others. A sunset over the mountains may evoke aesthetic response, but it is not considered a piece of art, because it is nature. A row of telephone poles with connecting power lines may have a beautiful appearance, but they are not art because they were not created with an artistic purpose in mind. It must be noted, however, that even those things originally made for non-artistic purposes can and have later come to be viewed as art objects (i.e., antiques).

While art may have the secondary result of earning a living

for the artist, it always has the primary purpose of creative expression for describably and indescribably human experiences and urges. The artist's purpose is to create a special kind of honesty and openness which springs from the soul and is hopefully understood by others in their inner being.

Aesthetics and the Bible

What does the Bible have to say about the arts? Happily, the Bible does not call upon Christians to stultify or look down upon the arts. In fact, the arts are *imperative* when considered from the biblical perspective. At the heart of this is the general mandate that whatever we do should be done to the glory of God. We are to offer Him the best that we have—intellectually, artistically, and spiritually.

Further, at the very center of Christianity stands the Incarnation ("the Word made flesh"), an event which identified God with the physical world and gave dignity to it. A real man died on a real cross and was laid in a real, rock-hard tomb. The Greek ideas of "other-worldly-ness" that fostered a tainted and debased view of nature (and hence aesthetics) find no place in biblical Christianity. The dichotomy between sacred and secular is thus an alien one to biblical faith. Paul's statement, "Unto the pure, all things are pure," (Tit. 1:15) includes the arts. While we may recognize that human creativity, like all other gifts bestowed upon us by god, may be misused, there is nothing inherently or more sinful about the arts than other areas of human activity.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is rich with examples which confirm the aesthetic dimension. In Exodus 20:4-5 and Leviticus 26:1, God makes it clear that He does not forbid the *making* of art, only the *worshipping* of art. Consider the use of these vehicles of artistic expression found throughout:

Architecture. God is concerned with architecture. In fact, Exodus 25 shows that God commanded beautiful architecture, along with other forms of art (metalwork, clothing design, tapestry, etc.) in the building of the Tabernacle. Similar instructions were given for the temple later constructed by King Solomon. Here we find something unique in history—art works designed and conceived by the infinite God, then transmitted to and executed by His human apprentices!

Apparently He delights in color, texture, and form. (We also see this vividly displayed in nature). The point is that God did not instruct men to build a purely *utilitarian* place where His chosen people could worship Him. As Francis Schaeffer said, "God simply wanted beauty in the Temple. God is interested in beauty."{6} And in Exodus 31, God even names the artists He wants to create this beauty, *commissioning* them to their craft for His glory.

Poetry is another evidence of God's love for beauty. A large portion of the Old Testament is poetry, and since God inspired the very words of Scripture, it logically follows that He inspired the poetical form in such passages. David, the man after God's own heart, composed many poems of praise to God, while under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Among the most prominent poetical books are: Psalms. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Poetry is also a significant element in the prophets and Job.

The genre of poetry varies with each author's intent. For example, the Song of Solomon is first and foremost a love poem picturing the beauty and glory of romantic, human love between a man and his mate. It is written in the form of lyric idyll, a popular literary device in the Ancient Near East. The fact that this story is often interpreted symbolically to reflect the love between Christ and His Church, or Jehovah and Israel, does not weaken the celebration of physical love recorded in the poem, nor destroy its literary form.

Drama was also used in Scripture at God's command. The Lord told Ezekiel to get a brick and draw a representation of Jerusalem on it. The Ezekiel "acted out" a siege of the city as a warning to the people. He had to prophesy against the house of Israel while lying on his left side. This went on for 390 days. Then he had to lie on his right side, and he carried out this drama by the express command of God to teach the people a lesson (Ezek. 4:1-6). The dramatic element is vivid in much of Christ's ministry as well. Cursing the fig tree, writing in the dirt with His finger, washing the feet of the disciples are dramatic actions which enhanced His spoken word.

Music and Dance are often found in the Bible in the context of rejoicing before God. In Exodus 15, the children of Israel celebrated God's Red Sea victory over the Egyptians with singing, dancing, and the playing of instruments. In 1 Chronicles 23:5, we find musicians in the temple, their instruments *specifically made* by King David for praising God. 2 Chronicles 29:25-26 says that David's command to have music in the temple was from God, "for the command was from the Lord through His prophets." And we must not forget that all of the lyrical poetry of the Psalms was first intended to be sung.

The New Testament

The New Testament abounds as well with evidence underscoring artistic imperatives. The most obvious is the example of *Jesus Himself.* First of all, He was by trade a carpenter, a skilled craftsman (Mark 6:3). Secondly, we encounter in Jesus a person who loved to be outdoors and one who was extremely attentive to His surroundings. His teachings are full of examples which reveal His sensitivity to the beauty all around: the fox, the bird nest, the lily, the sparrow and dove, the glowering skies, a bruised reed, a vine, a mustard seed. Jesus was also a master storyteller. He readily made use of his own culture setting to impart his message, and sometimes quite dramatically. Many of the parables were fictional stories abut they were nevertheless used as vehicles of communication to

teach spiritual truths. And certainly the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 includes the artistic gifts.

The apostle Paul also alludes to aesthetics in Philippians 4:8 when he exhorts believers to meditate and reflect upon pure, honest, lovely, good, virtuous and praiseworthy things. We are further told in Revelation 15:2-3 that art forms will even be present in heaven. So the arts have a place in both the earthly and heavenly spheres!

We should also remember that the *entire Bible* is not only revelation, it also is itself a work of art. In fact, it is many works of art—a veritable *library of great literature*. We have already mentioned poetry, but the Bible includes other literary forms as well. For example, large portions of it are narrative in style. Most of the Old Testament is either *historical narrative* or *prophetic narrative*. And the Gospels, (which recount the birth, life, teachings, death and resurrection of Christ), are *biographical narrative*. Even the personal letters of Paul and the other New Testament authors can quite properly be considered *epistolary* literature.

Aesthetics and Nature

The Bible makes it very clear that a companion volume, the book of Nature, has a distinct aesthetic dimension. Torrential waterfalls, majestic mountains, and blazing sunsets routinely evoke human aesthetic response as easily as can a vibrant symphony or a dazzling painting. The very fabric of the universe expresses God's presence with majestic beauty and grandeur. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows forth his handiwork." In fact, nature has been called the "aesthetics of the Infinite."

The brilliant photography of the twentieth century has revealed the limitless depths of beauty in nature. Through telescope or microscope, one can devote a lifetime to the study of some part of the universe—the skin, the eye, the sea,

the flora and fauna, the stars, the climate.

And since God's creation is multi-dimensional, an apple, for instance, can be viewed in different ways. It can be considered economically (how much it costs), nutritionally (its food value), chemically (what it's made of), or physically (its shape). But it may also be examined aesthetically: its taste, color, texture, smell, size, and shape. All of nature can be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities which find their source in God, their Creator.

Human Creativity

Wherever human culture is found, artistic expression of some form is also found. The painting on the wall of an ancient cave, or a medieval cathedral, or a modern dramatic production are all expressions of *human creativity,* given by God, the Creator.

Man in God's Image

In Genesis 1:26-27, for example, we read: "Then God said, Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over . . . all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' And God created man *in His own image, in the image of God He created him* male and female He created them" (Italics mine).

After creating man, God told man to subdue the earth and to rule over it. Adam was to cultivate and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15) which was described by God as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The implication of this is very important. God, the Creator, a lover of the beauty in His created world, invited Adam, one of His creatures, to share in the process of "creation" with Him. He has permitted humans to take the elements of His cosmos and create new arrangements with them. Perhaps this explains the reason why creating anything is so fulfilling to us. We can express a drive within which allows us to do something all

humans uniquely share with their Creator.

God has thus placed before the human race a banquet table rich with aesthetic delicacies. He has supplied the basic ingredients, inviting those made in His image to exercise their creative capacities to the fullest extent possible. We are privileged as no other creature to make and enjoy art.

It should be further noted that *art of all kinds is restricted to a distinctively human practice.* No animal practices art. It is true that instinctively or accidentally beautiful patterns are formed and observed throughout nature. But the spider's web, the honeycomb, the coral reef are *not conscious* attempts of animals to express their aesthetic inclinations. To the Christian, however, they surely represent God's efforts to express. Unlike the animals, man *consciously* creates. Francis Schaeffer has said of man:

> "[A]n art work has value as a creation because man is made in the image of God, and therefore man not only can love and think and feel emotion, but also has the capacity to create. Being in the image of the Creator, we are called upon to have creativity. We never find an animal, non-man, making a work of art. On the other hand, we never find men anywhere in the world or in any culture in the world who do not produce art. Creativity is a part of the distinction between man and non-man. All people are to some degree creative. Creativity is intrinsic to our mannishness."{7}

The Fall of Man

There is a dark side to this, however, because sin entered and affected all of human life. A bent and twisted nature has emerged, tainting every field of human endeavor or expression and consistently marring all results. The unfortunate truth is that divinely endowed creativity will always be accompanied in earthly life by the *reality and presence of sin expressed through a fallen race.* Man is Jekyl and Hyde: noble image-

bearer and morally crippled animal. His works of art are therefore bittersweet. Calvin acknowledged this tension when he said:

> "The human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its creator. If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only foundation of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to Him, not to reject or condemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver."{8}

Understanding this dichotomy allows Christians genuinely to appreciate something of the contribution of every artist, composer, or author. God is sovereign and dispenses artistic talents upon whom He will. While Scripture keeps us from emulating certain lifestyles of artists or condoning some of their ideological perspectives, we can nevertheless admire and appreciate their talent, which ultimately finds its source in God. This should and can be done without compromise and without hesitation.

The fact is that if God can speak through a burning bush or Baalam's ass, He can speak it through a hedonistic artist! The question can never be how worthy is the vessel, but rather, Has truth been expressed? God's truth is still sounding forth today—from the Bible, from nature, and even from a fallen humanity.

Because of the Fall, absolute beauty in the world is gone. But participation in the aesthetic dimension reminds us of the beauty that once was, and anticipates its future luster. With such beauty present today that can take one's breath away, even in this unredeemed world, one can by speculate about what likes ahead for those who love Him!

Characteristics of Good Art

We now turn to the question of the important ingredients of various art forms.

First, artistic truth includes not only the tangible, but also the *realm of the imaginative, the intangible.* Art therefore may or may not include the cognitive, the objective. Someone asked a Russian ballerina who had just finished an interpretive dance, "What did it mean? What were you trying to say?" The ballerina replied, "If I could have said it, I wouldn't have danced it!" There is then a communication of truth in art which is real, but may not be able to be reduced to and put neatly into words.

Great art is also always coupled with *the hard discipline of continual practice.* Great artist are the ones who, when observed in the practice of their art appear to be doing something simple and effortless. What is not visible are the bone weary hours of committed practice that preceding such artistic spontaneity and deftness.

All art has intrinsic value. It doesn't have to *do* anything to have value. Once created, it has already "done" something. It does not have to be a *means* to an end, nor have any utilitarian benefit whatsoever. Even *bad art* has some value because as a creative work, it is still linked to God Himself, the Fountain of all creativity. The creative process, however expressed, is good because it is linked to the *Imago Dei* and shows that man, unique among God's creatures, has this gift. This is true even when the results of the creative gift (specific works of art) may be aesthetically poor or present the observer with unwholesome content and compromising situations.

But we would do well to remind ourselves at this point that God does not censor out all of the things in the Bible which are wrong or immoral. He "tells it like it is," including some

pretty detailed and sordid affairs! The discriminating Christian should therefore develop the capacity to distinguish poor aesthetics and immoral artistic statements from true creativity and craftsmanship¾dismissing and repudiating the former while fully appreciating and enjoying the latter. Christians, beyond all others, posses the proper framework to understand and appreciate all art in the right perspective. It is a pity that many have deprived themselves of the arts so severely from much that they could enjoy under the blessing and grace of God.

Artistic expression *always makes a statement.* It may be either *explicitly* or *implicitly* stated. Some artists explicitly admit their intent is to say something, to convey a message. Other artists resist, or even deny they are making a statement. But consciously or not, a statement is always being made, because each artist is subjectively involved and profoundly influenced by his/her cultural experience. Consciously or unconsciously, the cultural setting permeates every artistic contribution and each work tells us something about the artist and his era.

An unfortunate trend in recent years has been the increase in the number of artists who admit their primary desire is to say *something*. Art is not best served by an extreme focus on making a statement. The huge murals prominent in former communist lands were no doubt helpful politically, but they probably did not contribute much aesthetically. Even some Christian art falls into this trap. Long on statement, morality, and piety, it often falls short artistically (though sincerely offered and theologically sound), because it is cheaply and poorly done. Poetry and propaganda are not the same, from communist or Christian zealot.

Another characterization of modern statements is the *obsession of self.* Since the world has little meaning to many moderns, the narcissistic retreat into self is all that remains to be expressed. Thus the public is confronted today with many artists who simply portray their own personal psychological

and spiritual wanderings. In art of this type, extreme subjectivism is considered virtue rather than vice. The statement (personal to the extreme) overwhelms the art. Many of these statements seem to imply a desperate cry for help, for significance, for love. In such art feelings overwhelm for; confessional outpourings bring personal relief, but little effort is put forth or the thought necessary for the rigid mastery of technique and form. Perhaps that is why there is such a glut of mediocre art today! It simply doesn't take as much or as long to produce it.

But consider artists of earlier centuries, those who never even signed their names to their work. This was not because they were embarrassed by it. They simply lived in a culture where the art was more important than the artist. Today we are awed more by the artist or the virtuoso performer than we are by the art expressed. Much of the earlier work was dedicated to God; ours is mostly dedicated to the celebration of the artist. Critic Chad Walsh alludes to a modern exception in the writings of C. S. Lewis when he says that *Mere Christianity* "transcends itself and its author . . . it is as though all the brilliant writing is designed to create clear windows of perception, so that the reader will look *through* the language and not *at* it."{9} Great art possesses this transcendent durability.

Art forms and styles are constantly *changing through cultural influences.* The common mistake of many Christians today is to consider one form "godly" and another "ungodly." Many would dismiss the cubism of Duchamp or the surrealism of Dali as worthless, while holding everything from the brush of Rembrandt to be inspired. This attitude reveals nothing more than the personal aesthetic tastes of the one doing the evaluating.

Form and style must be considered in their historical and cultural contexts. A westerner would be hard pressed, if totally unfamiliar with the music of Japan, to distinguish

between a devout Buddhist hymn, a sensual love song, and a patriotic melody, even if he heard them in rapid sequence. But every Japanese could do so immediately because of familiarity with their own culture.

Aesthetic sense is therefore greatly conditioned by personal cultural experience. Just as a each child is born with the capacity to learn language, so each of us is born with an aesthetic sensibility which is influenced by the culture which surrounds us. To judge the art or music of Japan as inferior to American art or music is as senseless as suggesting the Japanese language is inferior to the English language. Difference or remoteness do not imply inferiority!

Truth can be expressed by non-believers, and error may be expressed by believers. When Paul delivered his famous Mars Hill address in Athens, he quoted from a pagan poet (Acts 17:28) to communicate a biblical truth. In this case, Paul used a secular source to communicate biblical truth because the statement affirmed the truth of revelation. On the other hand, error can be communicated in a biblical context. For example, in Exodus 32:2-4 we from Aaron fashioning a golden calf for the children of Israel to worship. This was a wrong use of art because it directly disobeyed God's command not to worship any image.

Evaluating Art

How should a Christian approach art in order to evaluate it? Is beauty simply "in the eye of the beholder?" Or are there guidelines from Scripture which will provide a framework for the evaluation and enjoyment of art?

Earlier, we mentioned a statement by Paul from Philippians 4. While the biblical context of this passage looks beyond aesthetics, in a categorical way we are given in the passage (by way of application) some criteria necessary for artistic analysis. Each concept Paul mentions in verse 8 can be used as

sort of a “key” to unlock the significance of the art we encounter and to genuinely appreciate it.

Truth. It is probably not by accident that Paul begins with *truth*. Obviously not every work of art contains a truth statement. But wherever and to what extent such a statement is being made, the Christian is compelled to ask, “Is this really true?” Does life genuinely operate in this fashion in the light of God’s revelation? And Christians must remember that truth is honestly facing the negatives as well as the positives of reality. Negative content has its place, even in a Christian approach to art. But Christian hope allows us to view these works in a different light. We sorrow, but not like those who have no hope. Ours is a sorrow of expectancy and ultimate triumph; there is one of total pessimism and despair.

Honor. A second aesthetic key has to do with the concept of honor and dignity. This can be tied back to what was said earlier about the nature of man created in God’s image. This gives a basis, for example, to reject the statement being made in the total life work of Francis Bacon (d. 1993). In many of his paintings this contemporary British artist presents us with solitary, decaying humans on large, depressing canvasses. Deterioration and hopeless despair are the hallmarks of his artistic expression. But if Christianity is true, these are inaccurate portrayals of man. They are half-truths. They leave out completely a dimension which is really true of him. Created in God’s image, he has honor and dignity—even though admittedly he is in the process of dying, aging, wasting away. The Christian is the only one capable of truly comprehending what is missing in Bacon’s work. Without a Christian base, we would have to look at the paintings and admit man’s “true” destiny, i.e., extinction, along with the rest of the cosmos. But as Christians we can and must resist this message, because it is a lie. The gospel gives real hope—to individuals and to history. These are missing from Bacon’s work and are the direct result of his distorted worldview.

Just. The third key to aesthetic comprehension has to do with the moral dimension. Not all art makes a moral statement. A Haydn symphony does not, nor does a portrait by Renoir. But where such a statement *is* being made, Christians must deal with it, not ignore it. We will also do well to remember that moral statements can often be stated powerfully in negative ways, too. Picasso's *Guernica* comes to mind. He was protesting the bombing by the Germans of a town by that name just prior to World War II. Protesting injustice is a cry for justice. Only the Christian is aware and sure of where it can ultimately be found.

Pure. This fourth key also touches on the moral—by contrasting that which is innocent, chaste, and pure from that which is sordid, impure, and worldly. An accurate application of the principle will help distinguish the one from the other. For instance, one need not be a professional drama critic to identify and appreciate the fresh, innocent love of Romeo and Juliet, nor to distinguish it from the erotic escapades of a Tom Jones. The same dynamic is at work when comparing Greek nudes and *Playboy* centerfolds. One is lofty, the other cheap. The difference is this concept of purity. It allows the Christian to look at two nudes and quite properly designate one "art" and the other "pornography." Possessing the mind of Christ, we have the equipment for identifying purity and impurity to a high degree.

Lovely. While the first four concepts have dealt with facets of artistic statements, the fifth focuses on sheer aesthetic beauty. "Whatsoever things are lovely," Paul says. A landscape makes no moral statement, but it can exhibit great beauty. The geometric designs of Mondrian may say nothing about justice, but they can definitely engage us aesthetically. The immensity and grandeur of a Gothic cathedral will inspire artistic awe in any sensitive breast, but they may do little else. Again, the Christian is equipped to appreciate a wide range of artistic mediums and expressions. If there is little to

evaluate morally and rationally, we are still free to appreciate what is beautiful in the art.

Good Report. In this concept, we have the opportunity to evaluate the life and character of the artist. What kind of a person is he? If a statement is being made, does the artist, composer, or author believe in that statement? Or was it to please a patron, a colleague, or a critic? Is there a discontinuity between the statement of the work and the statement being made through the personal life of its creator? For example, Handel's *Messiah* is a musical masterpiece, but he was no saint! Filippo Lippi used his own mistress as a model for Mary in this Madonna paintings. The "less than exemplary" lifestyle of a creative person may somewhat tarnish his artistic contribution, but it does not necessarily or totally obliterate it. Something of God's image always shines through in the creative process. The Christian can always give glory to God for that, even if a work of are has little else going for it. The greatest art is true, skillfully expressed, imaginative, and unencumbered by the personal and emotional hang-ups of its originators.

Excellence. This is a comparative term. It speaks of degrees, assuming that something else is not excellent. The focus is on quality. Quality can mean many things in the realm of art, but one sure sign of it is craftsmanship. *Technical mastery* is one of the essential ingredients which separates the great artist from the rank amateur. Obviously, the more one knows about technique and artistic skill, the better one is able to appreciate whether an individual artist, author, composer, or performer has what is necessary to produce great art. Many Christians have made unfortunate value judgments about art of all kinds. Through ignorance and naivete, superficial understanding of technique has been followed by smug rejection. This has erected barriers instead of bridges built to the artistic community, thus hindering a vital witness. We need to know *what* is great art and *why* it is considered such.

Excellence is also found in the *durability of art.* Great art lasts. If it has been around several hundred years, it probably has something going for it. It has "staying power." Christians should realize that some of the art of this century will not be around in the next. Much of it will pass off the scene. This is a good indication that it does not possess great aesthetic value; it is not excellent.

Praise. Here we are concerned with the impact or the effect of the art. Is *anything* praiseworthy? The crayola scribblings of a toddler are praiseworthy to some extent, but it does not elicit a strong aesthetic response. We are not gripped or overpowered by it. But great art has power and is therefore a forceful tool of communication. Francis Schaeffer has mentioned that the greater the art, the greater the impact. Does it please or displease? Inspire or depress? Does it influence thinking and behavior? Would it change a person? Would it change you. Herein lies the "two-edged-swordness" of art. It can elevate a culture to lofty heights and it can help bring a society to ruin. It is the *result* of culture, but it can also *influence* culture.

Conclusion

Paul undergirds this meaty verse with the final command, *think on these things.* Two very important propositions come forth with which we can conclude this section. First, he reminds us that *Christianity thrives on intelligence,* not ignorance—even in the aesthetic realm. Christians *need* their minds when confronting the artistic expressions of a culture. To the existentialist and the nihilist, the mind is an enemy, but to the Christian, it is a friend. Second, it is noteworthy that Paul has suggested such *a positive approach* to life and, by application, to art. He doesn't tell us that whatsoever things are false, dishonorable, unjust impure, ugly, of bad report, poorly crafted, and mediocre are to have the focus of our attention. Here again the *hope* of the Christian's approach to life in general rings clearly through. Our lives are not to be

lived in the minor key. We observe the despair, but we can see something more. God has made us more than conquerors!

Arts, Culture and the Christian

We now turn to two final areas of consideration in the way of suggested applications of what has been discussed.

Christ and Culture

At the beginning, we mentioned that aesthetics is related to culture, because in culture we find the expressions of human creativity. In his very fine book, *A Return to Christian Culture,* Richard Taylor points out that each of us is related to culture in two ways: we find ourselves *within* a cultural setting and we each *possess* a culture personally. That is, society has certain acceptable patterns to which individuals are expected to conform. When one does so, one is considered "cultured."

In the light of Romans 12:2 and other biblical passages, the challenge for the Christian is to resist being "poured into the mold of the world" without also throwing out legitimate aesthetic interests. At the individual level, a Christian should seek to bring his maximum efforts toward the ". . .development of the person, intellectually, aesthetically, socially to the full use of his powers, in compatibility with the recognized standards of excellence of his society."{10}

Culturally speaking, the same goal could be stated for Christian and non-Christian alike, but the Christian who wants to reflect the best in culture has his/her different motives. And some Christians can display the fruit of the Spirit, but be largely bereft of cultural and aesthetic sensibilities. D. L. Moody is said to have "butchered the King's English," but he was used mightily by God on two continents. This would suggest that cultural sophistication is not absolutely necessary for God to use a person for spiritual purposes, but

one could well ponder how many opportunities to minister have been lost because an individual has made a cultural *"faux pas."* The other side of the coin is that a person may have reached the pinnacle of social and aesthetic acceptability but have no spiritual impact on his surroundings whatsoever.

Three words are important to keep in mind while defining Christian responsibility in any culture. The first is *cooperation* with culture. The reason for this cooperation is that we might identify with our culture so it may be influenced for Jesus Christ. Jesus is a model for us here. He was not generally a non-conformist. He attended weddings and funerals, synagogues and feast. He was a practicing Jew. He generally did the culturally acceptable things. When He did not, it was for clear spiritual principles.

A second word is *persuasion*. The Bible portrays Christians as salt and light, the penetrating and purifying elements within a culture. Christianity is intended to have a sanctify influence on a culture, not be swallowed up by it in one compromise after another.

A third concept is *confrontation*. By carefully using Scripture, Christians can challenge and reject those elements and practices within a culture that are incompatible with biblical truth. There are times when Christians must confront society. Things such as polygamy, idolatry, sexual immorality, and racism should be challenged head-on by Christians.

How can accomplish this kind of impact? First by the *development of high personal, cultural, and aesthetic standards.* These include tact, courtesy, dress, and speech. In doing this, Christians need to avoid two extremes. The first is the tendency to try to "keep up with the Joneses." This becomes the "Cult of the Snob." A second extreme is to react against the Joneses and join the "Cult of the Slobs."

Second, Christians must employ all of life to proclaim a

Christian worldview. In a century dominated by darkness, despair, and dissonance, Christians can still offer a message and demeanor of hope. If being a Christian is a superior way of living, its benefits should be apparent to all.

Finally, Christians should be encouraged to *become involved in the arts.* This can be done first of all by learning to evaluate and appreciate the arts with greater skill. Generally, Christians can become involved in the arts in one of three ways.

Involvement in the Arts

One of the deep hopes for this paper is that it might instill in the reader a healthy desire to plunge more deeply into the arts and enjoy what is there with the freedom Christ has given. It might encourage us to remind ourselves that Paul lived in a X-rated culture similar to our own. Yet he and most of the other believers kept their spiritual equilibrium in such a setting and were used mightily by God in their culture.

Too often today Christians, like the Pharisees of old, are seeking to eliminate the leprous elements which touch their lives. With increasing isolation, they are focused more on what the diseases of society can do to them than how they might affect the diseased! Nowhere is this more critically experienced than in the arts. We mostly shy away from those contexts which disturb us. And there is today much in the arts to disturb us—be we creator, spectator (a form of participation) or performer.

Ugliness and decadence abound in every culture and generation. From this we cannot escape. But Jesus touched the leper. He made contact with the diseased one in need. As Christians, our focus should be not on what art brings to us, but rather what we can bring to the art! Therefore the development of imagination and a wholesome, expanded analysis of even the many negative contemporary works is possible when viewed in

the broad themes of humanity, life, and experience of a truly Christian worldview. Great art is more than a smiling landscape. Beauty and truth include terrible and ominous aspects as well, like a storm on the ocean, or the torn life of a prostitute.

Christians can also experience the arts as *participators and performers.* If each person is created in the image of God, some creativity is there to be personally expressed in every one of us. Learn what artistic talents you have. Discover how you can best express your creativity and then do so. Learn an instrument, write some poetry. Take part in a stage production. Your Christianity will not mean *less,* but more to you if you do.

A third area often overlooked must also be mentioned. I refer to those greatly gifted and talented Christians among us who should be encouraged to *consider the arts as a career.* A Christian influence in the arts is sorely needed today, and things will not improve as long as Christians are happy to allow the bulk of contemporary artistry to flow forth from those who have no personal relationship with the One who gave them their talents. The artistic environment is a tough place to live out your Christian faith, and the dangers are great, but to do so successfully will bring rich rewards and lasting fruit.

Gini Andrews, an acclaimed concert pianist and author, writes of the great need for Christians to excel in all the artistic fields and sounds a challenge for them to develop their gifts:

> “All the disciplines, music, painting, sculpture, theater, and writing, are in need of pioneers who seek a way to perform in a twentieth century manner; to show with quality work that there is an answer to the absurdity of life, to the threat of annihilation, to the mechanization of man, the message being sounded loud and clear by the non-Christian artist. . . . “If we are to present God’s message to

disillusioned, frenetic twentieth century people, it's going to take His creativity expressed in special ways. I hope that some of you in the creative fields will be challenged by the Almightiness of our Creator-God and will spend long hours before Him, saying, like Jacob, 'I will not go unless you bless me, until you show me how to speak out your wonder to the contemporary mind.'"{11}"

Here is expressed the unprecedented challenge and opportunity before the body of Christ today. May God enable us to seize it.

Notes

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6. Francis Schaeffer, *Art & the Bible.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 15.

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9. Chad Walsh. "The Literary Stature of C. S. Lewis," *Christianity Today*, June 8, 1979) p.22.

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Violence in the Schoolyard: Why?

America is becoming an increasingly dangerous place to live. Random violence. Drive-by shootings. Colombine. A twelve-year old boy kills his schoolmate with a pistol he has brought to school. Why? “Well, he ticked me off!” was the reply.

No remorse. . . No conscience.

Do you know what a “feral” hog is? We have some here in Texas – domesticated pigs which have escaped into the brushy Hill Country and live there as wild as their smaller, wild cousins, the Javelinas.

There have been feral children, too. Perhaps the most famous was a teenage boy spotted one day naked and loping up a hill on all fours in Aveyron, France. He was captured on July 25, 1799 and extensive attempts were made to “rehabilitate” and “domesticate” him. These ended largely in failure, including Herculean efforts to teach him to speak (he was mute when first found).

Anyone who has ever observed children suddenly transplanted into another culture are amazed at the way they take to the local language like “ducks to water!” Why? Because children from age one to seven or eight have an enormous capacity to learn – to absorb sights and sounds and smells and everything!

Children have a conscience, too. It is not yet fully formed by

way of specifics, but like the capacity to learn language, they possess the ideas of right and wrong. As they grow, through experience, parental guidance and discipline, school, church, etc., they come to embrace moral concepts as easily and automatically as they do linguistic ones.

Today we tend to be “politically correct” and to not push our personal, moral, and religious agendas off on others. We are hesitant to speak of right and wrong in public for fear of offending.

You see, it is assumed that we already know what is right and what is wrong. It is assumed that you know that. And that the children know. . .

But they don’t know. Their conscience must be educated, and this is the problem. Children are growing up in America as crippled morally as that wild boy in Averyon was, linguistically and socially. We have raised an entire generation of “morally feral” children!

I have a good friend of thirty-five years who sold his business and began to use his time in ministering to students at the large, state university in his city. He began to meet with students daily in the student center on campus. Jay was seminary trained and is one of the most effective personal workers I have ever known.

He told me recently that he asks the same question of almost every student: “If you knew God does exist, and it were possible for you to have a personal interview or conversation with Him, what would you ask Him?”

Jay said that SIXTY PERCENT of those have replied with something like, “Gee. . . Gosh! I’ve never thought about that. . . I don’t know what I’d ask Him. . . I guess nothing!”

What they have lots to say about, however, is that no one should be excluded, and everyone’s opinion is true because it

is “true to them.” This is practicing “tolerance.” And anyone who doesn’t hold this view is a bigot. They think it a crime of the highest order to exclude anyone on the basis of personal belief or lifestyle.

Actually, tolerance is a Christian virtue and should be practiced. But what does it really mean? It doesn’t mean that all lifestyles must be accepted. That is not tolerance, but rather, surrender – tacit acceptance of all behavior with no regard to standards of any kind.

What kind of “tolerance” did Jesus practice? We are told that He was *full* of grace and truth. And these two were always in perfect balance. We, however, tend toward the extremes of these – so full of grace that we compromise the Gospel, or so full of truth that no one can stand us!

Over and over again, we see Jesus “nudging” people toward truth: Nicodemus. The rich young ruler. The parables. The woman at the well. Pilate. Will Rogers is probably known best for his famous quote: “I never met a man I didn’t like.” It could be said of Jesus that He never met a person He didn’t love. He loved and accepted every person He met, including those whose behavior He could not condone. That’s tolerance. To the woman caught in the act of adultery He said, “Neither do I condemn you (grace); go and sin no more (truth)!”

Jesus pressed. He wanted people to understand truth so much that He was not afraid to offend them if it would help to accomplish that purpose.

And so must we upon occasion. Remember: Even God is not universally admired!

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Berkeley in the Sixties

In 1973, after serving with Campus Crusade for some twelve years, the Lord burdened my heart with a vision for a new kind of ministry.

At that time I had the responsibility for the oversight of several hundred campus staff in the southwestern U.S. As you know, these were turbulent times on campus. . .and especially so along the west coast.

I often found myself in some strange and scary places in those days:

- *Like speaking to 3,000 radicals from the free speech platform on the steps of Sproul Hall at Berkeley…*
- *Or dialoguing with Mario Savio and Bettina Apthecker (her father, Herbert, was the head of the Communist Party-U.S.A. at the time) about the claims of Jesus Christ…*
- *Or being present to observe Angela Davis and Stokeley Carmichael whip student audiences into a literal frenzy at U.C.L.A. and San Jose State…*
- *Or debating Madalyn Murray O'Hair at SMU on the existence of God…*
- *Or sharing the gospel with hippies and "druggies" on Telegraph Avenue, in the People's Park, and across the bay in Haight-Ashbury…*
- *Or trying to sleep while Timothy Leary and his entourage had a rousing, all-night LSD "Love-in" in the motel room next door to mine!*

Someone has said, "The best thing about the 'good old days' is that they're gone!" Most of us feel that way about the sixties. We are glad that the Black Panthers, the SDS, the Weathermen, Woodstock, "Hair," the Age of Aquarius, the student riots, the communes, the protest songs, the Vietnam War crisis, the long hair and buttons proclaiming "Make love,

not war," are with us no longer.

But after personally visiting (for ministry of some sort) over 170 campuses during the past 30 years, I am here to tell you that we are still losing the battle on the college campus in these days. There is actually more hostility toward Christianity and traditional values in 2003 than we faced in the late sixties!

Part of the reason is that the "new morality" of the counter-culture which startled so many of us in the sixties has become the "morality of personal preference" for most in the new millenium!

And many of those bright young radicals just got a haircut, slipped back into corporate America and academia to continue their revolution in more quiet, subtle, and dangerous ways.

WE DID NOT RE-ABSORB THEM; THEY ABSORBED US!

The truth is that today on many campuses, under the guise of "academic freedom," there is a doctrinal/political creed demanding such conformity that its opponents—be they faculty, university administrators, visiting lecturers, or students—are publicly ostracized, hooted down, and even attacked!

In reality, an inquisition of sorts is taking place right now across academia, and its high priests are dogmatic, unbending students and their mentors who insist upon having the curriculum and the world only as they desire it.

And they are committed to a policy of silencing, pushing aside, and even crushing any and all who would dare to oppose them.

In 1973 as I sought to minister to college students amidst the

foment described above, I came to a deep conviction that the battle on the campus, rather than being nearly over, had really just begun. And that is the primary reason we first began Probe Ministries. . . to make sure the Christian viewpoint would continue to have an honest hearing in the university arena, and to be sure it was available for serious consideration by searching students.

Many tens of thousands have had that opportunity on their campus, in their classrooms, and at their church since Probe's inception in 1973. And we have been able since to take the research and interaction gained from that crucible of ministry experience and share it with millions of others through conferences, literature, the media, and now, perhaps the most potent tool for world-wide impact, the Internet!

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

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Jimmy Williams Recalls Debate with Madalyn Murray O'Hair at SMU

Jimmy Williams, founder of Probe Ministries in Dallas, remembers vividly his encounter with Madalyn Murray OHair, her husband, and her son John Garth, in the Umphrey Lee Student Center of Southern Methodist University on March 28, 1966.

The president of the freshman class, Charlie Williams (no relation), was active in the student group of Campus Crusade

for Christ, which Jimmy directed at that time. Hearing of Mrs. OHairs visit to the campus, Jimmy recalls that Charlie invited her to enter into debate with me.

The debate, Jimmy remembers, was mostly a monologue with Mrs. OHair doing most of the talking. Her intimidation tactic was to shock listeners, using the f-word and a stream of other profanities, something we were not accustomed to hearing from a woman in those days. There is no question that she was a gifted and intelligent woman, but her demeanor was harsh and mean-spirited. I challenged her on a number of areas, but she quickly brushed them off with more four-letter words and continued with her agenda of things she apparently thought must be said to the group.

After the debate, refreshments were served, and we chatted with her husband and her son. I asked Mr. OHair if he shared his wifes beliefs, and he said he did not. Then I turned to John Garth, who must have been about ten years old, and asked him what he thought about all of this. He seemed to be a great kid. Looking somewhat confused, embarrassed, and sad, he replied, 'Well, Im not sure. I guess Im caught somewhere in the middle.' When I learned the news earlier this year that authorities had finally located the dismembered bodies of Mrs. O Hair, John Garth, and a daughter-in-law, it grieved me deeply, said Jimmy.

A couple of years ago I read a quote attributed to Mrs. OHair, who said that the one desire of her heart was to find someone in the world who really loved her. When I read it, I regretted I did not express to her that day in the student center that I did and Jesus did.

After serving with Campus Crusade at SMU eight years, Jimmy spent four years in California (1968-1972) overseeing the campus works of Campus Crusade throughout the southwest U.S. Grappling with issues among students during these turbulent years on the West Coast provided the main motivation to found

a new ministry (Probe Ministries) to address the spiritual needs and questions of university students. Jimmy moved back to Dallas and founded Probe Ministries in 1973, serving as its president for twenty-five years. He has personally visited 181 universities to minister and lecture throughout the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Europe, and Russia.

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Man in Search of Himself

A study of man's nature, origin, value and perfectibility raises significant, important questions. Is he the "measure of all things" and made just "a little lower than the angels"? Or has he been reduced to his biochemical components, the quintessence of dust itself? Is it even possible for a man to know "himself"? Is he the glory or the shame of the universe? Or both? Does he even belong here, or is he an interloper—the missing link between his primal ancestors and the really humane being of tomorrow? Is man different from animals and things? How so? And if so, how and why is he different? These are some of the questions considered in this essay, the answers to which create a great divide among people and how they view the reality we all share.

Difference in Degree or Kind?

First of all, if man is to be considered different or unique, how so? Is it a difference in *degree* or *kind*?

Difference in Degree

Some would argue today that man is only different in degree,

like the size of the angles in obtuse triangles are different from each other, or like the difference of molecular motions observed in hot and cold water, or the difference between 1 and 100. The concept of difference in degree *only* is at the heart of original Darwinian theory, which sees man as arising from non-man. According to this view, then, man is different only in degree, not kind, from animals, plants, and things.

Others would modify this view, suggesting that observable distinctions or kinds are really only apparent in the complexities of organic and inorganic development on the planet, and the passage from one qualitative state to another is synthesized with an underlying continuum of degrees which lead to threshold. For example, the link between liquid H_20 and gaseous H_20 is a change in temperature. Or the link between acidic solutions (colorless) and basic solutions (pink) is a color indicator, the change of pH. Lorenz and other ethnologists would view man in this light, an observable expression of the continuing processes of mutation and selection. The primatologists doing language studies with chimps and gorillas are conducting their research primarily under the same assumption.

Both of these views have some devastating consequences to man, who continues to resist their implications. The first view suggests that things and animals may assume what has up until now been considered exclusively "human" rights. Adler points this
out in by quoting John Lilly:

> *The day that communication is established the [dolphin] becomes a legal, ethical, moral and social problem. . .They have reached the level of humanness as it were! (Brackets mine)*[{1}]

Of robots, Adler cites a similar conclusion by Michael Scriven:

> *If it [a robot] is a person, of course it will have moral rights and hence political rights. (Brackets mine).{2}*

The mixed imagery of man, machines, and animals portrayed in the "bar scene" of *StarWars* was getting at the same thing, depicting a world where this distinction was removed. And such historians as Arnold Toynbee and Lynn White argue that this very exclusivity of man for rights now denied to animals and robots is that which has brought about an arbitrary and destructive dichotomy between man and the rest of nature:

> *Christianity, in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions, not only established a dualism of man and nature, but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.*
>
> *When the Greco-Roman world was converted to Christianity, the divinity was drained out of nature and concentrated on a single transcendent God. Man's greedy impulse to exploit nature used to be held in check by his awe, his pious worship of nature. Now monotheism, as enunciated in Genesis, has removed the age-old restraint.{3}*

Failure to remove this "dichotomy," they say, has caused men to live *above* nature and to exploit it for selfish ends. Their solution is to erase it and invite man to become "one" again with nature. Herein lies part of the present attractiveness of Eastern, monistic thought to the contemporary Western mind.

It is, however, noteworthy that attempts to eliminate the dichotomy have brought about varying results in both East and West. In the West, the dignity and value of human life has generally lessened in importance during the past 100 years. This despairing theme has been a dominant force in art, music, drama, and literature of the twentieth century. One of the uncomfortable but inescapable by- products of technological advancement and the exactitudes of scientific measurement is

pointed out by Adler, who predicts a new (or old?) kind of dichotomy which divides human *from* human:

> *We can, therefore, imagine a future state of affairs in which a new global division of mankind replaces all the old parochial divisions based upon race, nationality, or ethnic groups—a division that separates the human elite at the top of the scale from the human scum at the bottom, a division based on the accurate scientific measurement of human ability and achievement and one, therefore, that is factually incontrovertible. At this future time, let the population pressures have reached that critical level at which emergency measures must be taken if human life is to endure and be endurable. Finish the picture by imagining that before this crisis occurs, a global monopoly of authorized force has passed into the hands of the elite—the mathematicians, the scientists, and the technologists, not only those whose technological skill has mechanized the organization of men in all large scale economical and political processes. The elite are then the de facto as well as the de jure rulers of the world. At that juncture, what would be wrong in principle with their decision to exterminate a large portion of mankind—the lower half, let us say—thus making room for their betters to live and breathe more comfortably?{4}*

Thus, Planet Earth becomes the private playground of the planned, the privileged, and the perfect!

The second view is equally unacceptable for two reasons, one of which is related to the material just stated. How can value and dignity originate from the Arbitrary? Is a liquid more valuable than a gas? This approach is a merely subjective, decision-making process which asserts that dignity and value exist on one side of the threshold and not on the other. Utilitarians would answer the question in teleological fashion, saying, “It all depends upon the context: what is happening, what is needed, and what is intended.”

Unhappily, the underlying assumption in this answer is an optimistic, flattering one which idealizes man and his intentions. History has not yet confirmed this. Man will not always do the good and right thing, even when he knows what it is. We will return to this issue later. Another consideration is that of the reversibility of this approach. With no compelling reason for advance, man could undergo a "devolutionary" process as easily as an "evolutionary" one.

Difference in Kind

A third possibility is that man is truly different from animals and things; he is different in *kind*. By definition, we mean that with respect to some property, two things differ in that one *has* the property and the other *lacks* it. A triangle and a square are different in kind, though both are geometric designs. The same can be said of the differences between a zero and a one, or man and non-man. In making this distinction, it is important to remember that "difference" does not imply "better" or "worse"; therefore other criteria are necessary before there would be legitimate reason to treat people better than things or animals. Are such criteria present? This is a crucial question.

It appears that in defining the question of man's place and purpose (if any) on the planet, one available option is to view man, along with animals, plants and things, as the accidental result of impersonal, cosmic processes. Under such an assumption, man therefore could not possess any superior claim to dignity and value. In fact, values in this line of reasoning must be relegated to the realm of *what is*, since there *is* nothing else. In true Sarterian fashion, man is condemned to be free—all is permitted and possible. The process is ultimately and totally arbitrary. "Ought" is only opinion, whether expressed publicly or privately by a majority or a minority. Thomas Huxley himself admitted that evolution

leads to “bad” ethics.{5}

Ethics built upon nature, it would seem, must ever face the difficulty of how to move from the *descriptive* to the *prescriptive* and still maintain its own consistency as a system. Konrad Lorenz attempted to answer this by asserting that human behavior traits and “values” are linked to human physiology, and they have simply been passed on because of their survival value.

An alternative answer to the above is that *all* things—plants, animals, and people—are valuable, not because they have so designated themselves to be, but because they are the true and real (though finite) expressions of an Infinite Creator. Their value has been assigned to them by a transcendent One. Man thus has worth and is different because his creator ascribed it to him. No one questions man’s “downward” relationship, his identification and similarities to animal, plant and thing. Granted, he shares his “finiteness” with them, and in varying degrees of complexity, his biochemical make-up.

But is this man’s *only* relationship? Is it possible that man’s differences, dissimilarities, and dignity can never find adequate explanations “downward” but might find their source in a second “upward” relationship? This would be the main difference between the Monist (materialism) and the Dualist (theism/transcendence). Both have their philosophical and theological difficulties. The monist must find his solution within the box he has created by his position (the *cosmos*, observable reality, and nothing beyond).

The dualist claims there *is* something outside the box, but human reason and sense perception cannot tell you much (if anything) about it. Both positions are faced with a dilemma of sorts. It would seem that the criteria to establish special, human value is not possible within the framework of monism, and would only be possible in dualism if the “Transcendent One,” the Creator, through self-disclosure (revelation), had

made this human value assessment known to us.

The Uniqueness of Man

If we grant the assumption that man is different in kind—qualitatively different, in what ways is he so? The late Francis Schaeffer often used a term to describe this difference: the "mannishness" of man. This uniqueness falls into several areas, including the anatomical, physiological, cultural, psychological, and moral.

Physical

Anatomically, man's erectness is unique. There is no observed evolution between primates and man. Primates don't have feet; they literally have four hands. Primates also lack a circulatory system which would support an erect animal. Man, on the other hand, possesses knees that lock. His head is balanced on his shoulders. His spine is curved in four places for comfort in a wide variety of positions. His arms are short and his legs are long. Primates have the opposite proportions.

Man's erectness has therefore freed him, but not to the extent that it explains his dominance over the entire animal kingdom. In fact, man has dominated in ways totally unrelated to nature's way of achieving dominance. Man is basically defenseless. He has no dependable instincts (by comparison), no sharp teeth, claws, camouflage or wings. He is physically weak. A 120-pound monkey is three to five times as strong as a man.{6}

Jose Delgado points out that even man's brain cannot explain his dominance. His brain is large, but whales and elephants have larger brains. Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon had larger brains. Whale brains are more convoluted than human ones. Monkeys are very intelligent, but they demonstrate little ability to dominate any intra-species animal.{7}

Other physiological uniquenesses include man's eating habits. He can eat nearly every type of food and is nourished by it. He is only 20% efficient and hence eats four times as much as is needed. He is also in a class by himself with respect to thermoregulation. In the cold, his body applies vaso-constriction, tightens skeletal muscles, shivers, and withdraws surface fluids. In the heat, man is truly unique in his thermogenic sweat glands over his body. The hypothalamus responds to a .01% rise in blood temperature. Horses, on the other hand, sweat only in response to stress and adrenalin in the blood. And primates (nearest to man?) are poor thermoregulators.

Man is also susceptible to disease and slow to heal. He is unique in that his tight skin demands sutures when cut. As a sexual being, he can breed anytime and for a variety of reasons. Ovulation and heat do not necessarily coincide. He interbreeds easily with all members of his species. He is also unique in his nakedness and his "wasp" waist.{8}

Cultural

Culturally, man is global in his habitat. The adaptability explained above is largely responsible for this. He makes tools and fire; he uses language with concepts. He is creative, a maker of art. From the dawn of his history, he appears to have been religious. He is a social creature. His young are long in maturing, thus calling for high, enduring family commitment. The male is (or can be) a part of the family.

Psychological

Philosophers, biologists, and psychologists all have to come to grips with the problems involved in trying to explain all

that we observe about man in terms of just physical origins and causes. To encompass the entire realm of the human powers of reasoning, the complicated strata of human emotions, the apparent use of "free will," as well as the more irrational elements of human behavior within a purely physical explanation seems heroic, to say the least. Recent attempts to eliminate all distinctions between humans and higher animals, and therefore hoping to explain man entirely in terms of what is physical or animal, are far from conclusive.

A major effort has been made to demonstrate, for example, that the use of language, long considered man's exclusive and ultimate claim to distinction within the animal kingdom, is now possible among the primates.{9} Chimps have been taught the American Sign Language for the Deaf and are reported to be using sentences and grammar as they put "sign" blocks in proper order, or punch out the correct order of signs on a computer keyboard.

What is being demonstrated thus far by these language studies is not language, but signaling behavior. . .the proper response to a physical stimulus. Many animals, including pigeons, dogs, cats, horses, rats, etc., use this behavior. Whales and dolphins are known to possess communicative abilities superior to monkeys (are whales a nearer relative to man?). But all of these animals fail to use actual concepts, which are the true test of language and grammar. While a chimp can learn "triangular" as a concept, there is still a physical stimulus to which the animal can relate. A true concept like "political science" can only be learned by man. Grammatical structure in chimps or the playing of a complicated song on a little piano by a pigeon are examples of chaining sequences, or shaping behavior by operant condition *a la* B.F. Skinner. The animal need not understand or grasp the pattern in order to use it. Further, chimps who have been given the tools of communication progress to a limit, and no farther. In other words, a chimp may be taught to communicate to some extent,

but once trained, he has very little to say!{10}

In the area of man's emotions, studies have tried to show that emotions are totally produced by what is happening psychochemically in the body. But some research demonstrates that other factors enter in and affect the emotions. Drug studies with adrenalin produced different (joyful or sad) emotional states in subjects who experienced the same drug states, but different (euphoric or melancholic) social contexts. Human mental states, to some extent, apparently transcend physical states.{11}

Physiological models of brain function stress the idea that parts of the brain give rise to and control bodily motions, thoughts, and emotional states. Experiments where rats are eating out of control, or raging bulls are stopped dead in their tracks by brain manipulation, are used to demonstrate the absence of free choice, or self-control among animals or humans.{12}

Skinner felt that the environment "pushed the buttons" on man's computer brain. In either case, man's will is not to be considered to in any sense "free." When the buttons are pushed (from within or without), man and beast will behave accordingly and predictively.

And yet, even in the animal experiments, one wonders if the conclusions are accurate. How can the purely "mechanical" nature of even an animal's mental state be measured? A viewing of the film shows that when the bull charged Delgado in the bull ring, the electric jolt to the implanted electrodes in its head stopped the animal in its tracks, and it appeared to be stunned as if shot. The bull then wheeled around in bewilderment and pain; it did not turn into "Ferdinand" and begin to sniff the flowers!

Brain research with respect to human will is even more conclusive. Brain mechanisms apparently influence, but do not

exclusively determine, human behavior, since moral and social factors have been known to overrule brain damage or brain control. A woman who experienced a damaged hypothalamus gained nearly 100 pounds after her accident, but one day she looked in the mirror and did not like what she saw. She went on a diet and lost the weight.{13}

Another woman suffering with epilepsy was able to override her emotions and her desire to get up and attack her doctor when he stimulated her amygdula with a brain probe. Other factors came to bear on her aggressive tendencies and modified her response. She admitted she felt like it, but she didn't do it!{14}

These two cases indicate that there are elements present within the human brain which transcend and sometimes do override what the physical parts command or demand. Human behavior can never be reduced and totally explained by physical brain function. Something more is present and inexplicable.

Moral

We now come to an assessment of the moral nature of man. There seem to be three basic positions offered to explain human moral notions or inclinations. And all three accept that man has this unique capacity. . .to distinguish right from wrong. The first is one that views man as **morally neutral at birth**. This was John Locke's view, that man enters the world morally ignorant with a "blank tablet." And therefore man's personality and his moral notions are shaped exclusively by his personal experiences and his environment.

J. B. Watson, the father of behaviorism, embraced this view when he said,

> *Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own*

> *specific world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggar man and thief.{15}*

In "ink blotter" fashion, then, this view sees man's personality development as extremely malleable, and capable of being shaped dramatically by environmental forces. We do not here deny the strong force that environment can and does play in shaping a human being. But the question must be asked, however: Can *all* personality development be traced to environmental factors? Is there no genetic contribution whatsoever beyond that of providing the "empty tablet?" And how "blank" is blank? Doesn't it seem that though a conscience must be educated as to specifics of moral behavior, the "tablet" already possesses a moral capacity to comprehend and differentiate moral alternatives? These questions constitute and remain major criticisms of behaviorist theory.

A second view of man presupposes man as essentially good, or on his way to *being* good. In the 19th century, Tennyson spoke to this issue when he wrote:

> *Move upward, working out the beast,*
> *And let the ape and tiger die.{16}*

It is well to remember that this view of Tennyson's was not inspired by Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, because it would not be written until ten years after Tennyson wrote these words in his poem, "In Memoriam." He, like many others, was caught up in the optimistic tide of the Industrial Revolution. His contemporary, Herbert Spencer, sounded a similar note when he said,

> *"The inference that as advancement has been hitherto the rule, it will be the rule, it will be the rule henceforth, may be called a plausible speculation. But when it is shown*

> *that this advancement is due to the working of a universal law; and in virtue of that law it must continue until the state we call perfection is reached, then the advent of such a state is removed out of the region of probability into that of certainty. . .*
>
> *As surely as a blacksmith's arm grows large and the skin of a laborer's hand becomes thick; . . .as surely as passion grows by indulgence and diminishes when restrained; . . .so surely must the things we call evil and immorality disappear; so surely must man become perfect." (emphasis mine)*{17}

This spirit of optimism for an improving moral future was reinforced a little later by Darwin and others. With confidence about the progress of tomorrow, Darwin said:

> *Hence we may look with some confidence to a secure future of equally inappreciable length. And as Natural Selection [notice capital letters] works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental environments will tend to progress towards perfection. (comment mine)*{18}

H.G. Wells looked to the future with the same optimism when he wrote in his *Short History of the World*:

> *Can we doubt that presently our race will more than realize our boldest imaginations. . .in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden that we have known, going on from strength to strength in an ever widening circle of adventure and achievement? What man has done, the little triumphs of his present state. . .form but the prelude to the things that man has yet to do.*{19}

Two world wars and accompanying aftermath shook Wells, the Huxleys, C.E.M. Joad, Bertrand Russell, and many others to the core. Optimism turned to discouragement and then to disillusionment. Wells would later write:

> *Quite apart from any bodily depression, the spectacle of evil in the world—the wanton destruction of homes, the ruthless hounding of decent folk into exile, the bombings of open cities, the cold blooded massacres and mutilations of children and defenseless gentlefolk, the rapes and filthy humiliations and, above all, the return of deliberate and organized torture, mental torment, and fear to a world from which such things had seemed well nigh banished. . .has come near to breaking my heart.{20}*

Ironically, many leading humanistic psychologists (including such notables as Karl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, Eric Fromm, Rollo May) who watched thirty or forty more years of the twentieth century pass by with Koreas and Vietnams, iron and bamboo curtains, cold and hot wars, famines, atrocities, etc., still do not recognize, admit, nor share Well's perspective, but rather have chosen to ignore the lessons of those years. This galaxy of individuals would still tenaciously hold to the basic conviction that man is **essentially and basically good.** Maslow, considered to be the father of Humanistic Psychology, wrote these words just before the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and the Vietnam War. Speaking of human nature he said:

> *Since this inner nature is good or neutral rather than bad, it is best to bring it out, to encourage it rather than suppress it. If it is permitted to guide our life, we grow healthy, fruitful and happy.{21}*

And yet Maslow, with all his optimism, at the same time was forced to acknowledge a apparent weakness in man to demonstrate his goodness and how it might be brought into life experience consistently:

> *There are certainly good and strong and successful men in the world. . .But it also remains true that there are so few of them, even though there could be so many more, and that they*

> *are often badly treated by their fellows. So this, too, must be studied, this fear of human goodness and greatness, this lack of knowledge of how to be good and strong, this inability to turn one's anger into productive activities, this fear of feeling virtuous, self-loving, respect-worthy.{22}*

This brings us to the third view concerning man's moral nature, which sees him as **possessing some innate and ever-present propensity to self-centeredness and pride**. Plato early on recognized the presence and power of evil in human beings when he said: "There is a dangerous, wild, and lawless kind of desire in everyone, even the few of us who *appear* moderate." (emphasis mine){23} Aristotle admitted the same when he observed that most people did not pursue the good:

> *Their nature is to obey by fear, rather than by right shame; and they do not abstain from the bad because it is wrong, but because of the possible punishment. They live by emotion and pursue those pleasures that are related to emotion, and the means to these pleasures.{24}*

The entire Bible and all of the Church Fathers certainly take this view, although man's cruelty is juxtaposed with a nobility which he is deemed to possess, and which is asserted to have resulted from being created in God's image (*Imago Dei*). It is this second concept of nobility and goodness which provides a possible explanation for all those things mentioned above which distinguish and set man apart from all other animals, plants and things. Worship, rational thought, language, moral notions, and creativity are all components stemming from his upward link, not his supposed evolutionary past.

On through history we find other leading thinkers echoing this third view: Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* saw man as self-centered, competitive, stubborn, forgiving of himself and

condemning others:

> *For all men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses, that is their passions and self-love through which every little payment appeareth a great grievance; but are destitute. . .of those prospective glasses. . .to see afar off the miseries that hang over them. (emphasis mine)*{25}

Karl Marx shared the same perspective in describing "egoistic" man:

> *Thus, none of the so-called rights of man goes beyond egoistic man as he is in civil society, namely an individual withdrawn behind his private interest and whims separated from the community.*{26}

Sigmund Freud also acknowledged man's aggressive tendencies:

> *I adopt the standpoint. . .that the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man, and I return to my view that it constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization. (emphasis mine)*{27}

B.F. Skinner denies any "innate" disposition, but he does speak about the future with foreboding unless great environmental changes are made:

> *It is now widely recognized that great changes must be made in the American way of life. Not only can we not face the rest of the world while consuming and polluting as we do, we cannot for long face ourselves while acknowledging the violence and chaos in which we live. The choice is clear: either we do nothing and allow a miserable and probably catastrophic future to overtake us, or we use our knowledge about human behavior to create a social environment in which we shall live productive and creative lives and do so without jeopardizing the chances that those who follow us will be*

able to do the same.{28}

Skinner's contemporary, ethologist Konrad Lorenz, ignores possible solutions for the future through environmental changes, and simply acknowledges the fact that man's "inherited aggressive tendencies" are yet to be brought under control. To Lorenz, man is not finished; he's still under construction.{29}

We have considered the three major views concerning man's moral nature: man as (1) neutral, (2) basically good, and (3) morally flawed or deficient. In the light of our discussion and abundant observations of man's behavior—both past and present—the third view appears to be the most accurate.

To those who seek to address this issue, both its causes and proposed solutions vary greatly. They do, however cluster around several key ideas:

First, the evolutionists, like Lorenz above, argue that humans have had **insufficient time** to eliminate the primal aggressions from our evolutionary past. To them, it is a vestigial problem. Darwin, Lorenz, and much of humanistic psychology would fall into this category. Geneticists could also fit here, some of whom would perhaps like to help by speeding the process along.

One question that comes to my mind is if man is a part of Nature, as the evolutionist insists, then how has it come about that a method which is so successful in dealing with one part of Nature—the world *outside* of man—has failed so miserably in dealing with the other part of Nature—that which lies *within* him?

Second, a large group holds to the premise that a **proper environment** is the answer to man's moral ills. Plato would create his *Republic*. Hobbes would argue for a *Commonwealth*, Karl Marx a "classless" society, and Skinner would alter the

environment through beneficent “planners.” It might be well to remember that chuck roast sitting out on the counter *decays*. But what happens when it is placed in the freezer? It still decays, but at a much slower rate. Environment may check, or even improve certain behaviors, but there is growing evidence that, like the bacteria within the meat, man’s basic moral problem is internal.

A third view would focus on **education** of some sort. Beginning with the Greek thinkers and up to Freud and Maslow, there are those who say man should be actively involved in the pursuit of the good—knowledge and self-understanding. The assumption is that if a man *knows* or is shown what is good, he will *do* it. At this juncture, man unfortunately and negatively displays his uniqueness from animals. Where animals readily alter their behavior through simple “trial and error” methods, man will persist in repeating all kinds of behaviors detrimental to himself and others!

The point of agreement with each of these three views is that man’s moral deficiency is the result of something lacking. The evolutionist says *time* is lacking. Behaviorists say a *proper environment* is lacking; the educators say that *knowledge* is lacking. But the crux of rightly assessing the moral nature of man is not what is lacking, but what is present and persistent about his behavior over the millenia. The Fall of man was down.{30}

In this regard, John Hallowell comments on Reinhold Niebuhr’s insights:

> *One of America’s most astute thinkers, Reinhold Niebuhr, has recalled to our consciousness a fact which both liberalism and Marxism have ignored with almost fatal consequences to our civilization. Evil, he points out, is something real, not an appearance only, and the proper name for it is sin. Its locus is not in institutions, which are but a reflection of human purposes, but in human nature itself. It is pride,*

> *self-righteousness, greed, envy, hatred and sloth that are the real evils and the ones from which social evils spring. When man is thwarted in his attempts to realize justice it is because he is thwarted by his own sinful predisposition. The recognition of this inherent predisposition to sin helps to explain why the best laid plans of men never quite succeed (emphasis mine).{31}*

Every academic discipline has a name for this problem of man:

> ***Biology** calls it "primitive instinct" or "primal aggression"*
>
> ***History** calls it "class struggle"*
> ***Humanities** calls it "human weakness" or "hubris"*
> ***Sociology** calls it "cultural lag"*
> ***Psychology** calls it "emotional behavior"*
> ***Philosophy** calls it "irrational thinking"*
> ***The Bible** calls it **sin**.*

The teachings of Jesus Christ underscore the truth of this internal flaw in man:

Do you not see that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach and is eliminated. . .That which proceeds out of a man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of man, proceed the evil thoughts and fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from *within* and defiles the man.{32}

While largely unpopular at present, until society again comes to accept and embrace this assessment by the Founder of Christianity as the most accurate and true picture of human nature, no real progress can be made toward the building of a

really “Great” society, much less a Global Community devoid of malice. And by their very nature, methodology, and presuppositions, science and philosophy will never recognize this truth, even when their own findings point in this direction, for they will not accept what God has revealed nor can they discover the truth by their own methods of inquiry.

Fifty years ago, from the decks of the great battleship, *U.S.S. Missouri*, General Douglas MacArthur accepted the unconditional surrender of the Japanese with these words:

> *We’ve had our last chance. If we will not devise some greater and more equitable system, Armageddon will be at our door. The problem is basically theological, and involves the spiritual recandescence and improvement of human character, that will synchronize with our matchless advances in science, art, literature, and all the cultural and material developments of the past 2,000 years. It must be of the spirit, if we are to save the flesh (emphasis mine).{33}*

MacArthur’s prescription for humanity’s future was essentially a religious one.

And at the dawn of the 21st century, little progress has been made. We live in a much more unstable and troubled world today than existed sixty years ago even when Hitler and the Japanese were at the pinnacle of their power.

When one observes what is happening throughout the world right now, one must conclude that, in spite of great technological and economic advances, three fourths of the planet is still functioning at the Medieval Level:

- Ethnic Cleansing (a euphemism for genocide).
- Poverty and Famine.
- Governmental corruption and Moral Failure.
- IRS Quota Incentives.
- Ecclesiastical Corruption and Moral Failure.

- Conquest.
- Human Rights abuses, particularly of Women and Children.
- Child and Spousal Abuse.
- Gun Control.
- Lawlessness and Crime.
- Sexual deviants and predators.
- Serial Killers.
- Pornography.
- Prostitution.
- Slavery (Yes, it still exists).
- Corrupt Judicial and Prison Systems.
- Unprincipled, Capricious Juries.
- Drug Traffic.
- Environmental and Ecological Abuse and Corruption.
- Endangered Species.
- Global Warming.
- Weapons of Mass Destruction for Sale!
- Deforestation.
- Over-fishing/depletion of Marine Life.
- Aids and other Killer viruses.
- Reality of Chemical warfare.
- Terrorism—at home and abroad.
- Nuclear Reactors.
- Waste Products.
- Contamination.
- Teen Pregnancy.
- Slaughter of the Innocents.
- Babies for Sale!
- Fetal Tissue and Organs for Sale!
- Sperm Banks of the Rich and Famous for Sale!
- Divorces outnumber Marriages.
- Disintegration of Healthy Family Systems.
- Welfare Mothers.
- AWOL Dads.
- Drive-by shootings and Road Rage.
- Juvenile Killers.
- Teen Suicide.

- Race motivated Crimes.
- Patriot Groups.
- Ku Klux Klan.
- Skinheads.
- Cult Groups.
- Goddess Worship.
- Witchcraft.
- A Media which panders to the baser elements of humanity: Increased Nudity, Sex, Violence, and Filthy Language.
- Same for Advertisements.
- Dearth of Role Models—in Politics, Sports, Music, and Film.
- Ditto Dads, Moms, Brothers, Sisters, Uncles, Aunts, andGrandparents.

Reflecting on the above reminds me of an observation made by someone. The person commented that it was easier for him to believe in the existence of the Devil than to believe that God exists!

The Raging Planet. It would be comforting if we could say that the above behaviors did not include the United States of America. But that is not the case. While the U.S. does not face many of the severe problems and abuses which plague much of the globe, she does, in numerous ways, contribute to the moral instability of the rest of the world. Admired and hated at the same time, America continually sends a mixed message to her neighbors. She has been both a blessing and a curse to the rest of the world, and it is not yet apparent which path she will ultimately choose.

But what *can* be said, in spite of the above, is that she and her citizens are still impacted by the Judeo-Christian heritage which the colonists brought with them from the other side of the Atlantic. The moral and spiritual mindset which they owned as part of their very lives, laid the foundation stones upon which they intended to, and did live in this new land. We today are still being impacted and conditioned by the

values they brought with them. By nature, we still largely think and behave within the framework they left us. This was a legacy of honesty, integrity, hard work, individualism, fair play, dependability, and personal freedom.

Much of this behavior is still evident in America. But what is slipping away, the crucial ingredient that makes it all work, is the spiritual dimension in American life. MacArthur said "It must be of the *spirit* if we are to save the flesh." Jesus said, "All these evil things proceed from *within* and defile the man."

A young father was reading the newspaper and came across a map of the world. He decided to have some fun with his small son. Taking scissors, he cut out the various countries of the world and said to his son, "Bobby, here's a puzzle for you. Take these pieces and put the world back together." The father resumed his reading of the morning paper, and, surprisingly, in less than a minute, the little boy came back and said, "Daddy, come look! I've put the world back together!" The father was amazed that his little son could have accomplished this task so quickly. He asked, "Good for you, Bobby. How did you do it so fast?" The little boy said, "Well, I turned the pieces over and on the back was the picture of a man. I put the *man* together, and the world was right!"

Perhaps we should try it. Nothing else has worked.

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Where's the Glory?

School is out. Frenetic shoppers jam stores and freeways. Lines are long and tempers short. Freshly cut trees from Home Depot are hustled into dens, as ornament boxes reappear from the attic. Families gather again for the annual ritual of tree trimming as the scent of cider fills the air.

Telephone circuits and AOL are loaded with users greeting loved ones, discussing gifts and travel plans. Beachwear and ski outfits are purchased; muscles are limbered up for the physical ordeals ahead. Giving and receiving fits, having fun, eating, drinking, sporting events, parties, being together

with family and friends . . . these contemporary “sugar plums” dance in our heads.

But, . . .**“Where’s the glory?”** It is glory that makes the difference, and unless God somehow appears in our midst, something is missing in our celebration of Christmas. Biblical history reveals to us a chain of events through time when God has done just that—He has showed up—and when He did, somehow things were different, as His creatures sensed a measure of the **presence** of the **glory of God**. Consider this:

Glory in the Mount. Moses encountered it at Sinai in the burning bush and on the Holy Mount. The Israelites followed it out of bondage, manifesting itself as bright cloud (by day) and pillar of fire (by night). Levites and Prophets observed its awesome presence within both Tabernacle and Temple until national disobedience and spiritual decadence forced its withdrawal for four hundred years. During that time the glory of Sinai was replaced by pagan, Gentile rule: Babylon, Persia, Greece, Syria, and finally the crushing boot of Rome.

Glory in the Manger. Amidst this darkness, the glory returned once more . . . first glimpsed upon the innocent, lovely face of a newborn named, **“Immanuel**,**“** which means, *“God with us.”* The countenance of this Child was like no other—irresistibly inviting and warm, yet mustering forth from those who beheld Him an urge to worship, to remove one’s shoes as if on Holy ground. Never had the divine Presence been stronger, and those who had eyes to see, beheld the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Glory in the Messenger. This glory of the Only Begotten from the bosom of the Father was never intended in the divine plan for just a handful of first century devotees. It was meant to radiate out from the heart and soul of every follower of the Way—from *then* until *now*. Through the promise of a Comforter, each of the faithful would possess Treasure inside an earthen vessel: Christ within, the hope of glory—for time AND

eternity. That glory means little unless someone is there to notice it, to behold it, to ponder it. And today there is no holy mountain, no temple, no Messiah in the flesh to manifest God's glory.

Where then *is* the Glory? Where can it be noticed and pondered today? An early Christian of the second century tells us: *"In my brother's face I behold the Lord."*

May it be so for you and me . . . this year.

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The Muses

Picture yourself back at the university in a graduate comparative literature class.

Your humanities professor enters the room and announces, "You know, as we begin this course unit on 'ritual,' I believe we would do well to invoke the gods." He continues, "You may not be aware of this, but when we call upon the Muses, they really answer . . . *they come to us*."

"All of our human rituals can be traced back to our evolutionary heritage and the mating dances of birds and mammals. It is part of nature's survival machinery. For example, the male bird who best performed the mating dance was obviously more likely to attract a mate to assure its own survival and pass on its genes to its progeny."

The professor elaborates, "All of what we call our aesthetic and religious aspirations can actually be traced to, and are deeply imbedded in, these biological imperatives of our ancestors. Through evolution they are part of the deep lexicon

which we inherited from our first parents."

"And so," says the professor, "I would like first to invoke the goat-footed god named Pan, who assures us of fertility and thus, the perpetuation of our species, *homo–sapiens*."

"Secondly, I would like to invoke the Islamic-Judaic-Christian God of Silence, who reminds us that He cannot be touched, but by invoking Him we confirm the reality of our own existence in the universe *as compared to His silence*" (italics mine).

"Let us read this poetry in a spirit of prayer," says the prof. He then reads the invocations, and the majority of the students smile their approval, seeming to enjoy the exercise.

In a later session of the same class, one of the students chose as a project the reenactment of a pagan Greek sacrificial rite, with the class participating on a voluntary basis. With a processional, songs, imaginary bull and meal offerings, the student "priest" clothed in some strange garments was able to create an atmosphere in that class that literally sent chills up and down my back!

Yes, these things actually occurred in one of my own graduate classes at a university right here in Dallas some time ago!

We call this "Higher Education."

These mystical, new age ideas that espouse the reality of some transcendent "something," like "The Force" in Star Wars, are capturing the hearts and minds of our children and grandchildren as we speak.

University student minds are increasingly inclined to believe that "Something" does exist out there beyond their own physical existence; and they also in increasing numbers believe it is personally beneficial to *make contact* with that "Something":

to give them strength;

to show them right and wrong;
to help them solve their problems and make decisions.

Those of us who are Christians know better. Some indefinable force is not what they need, but rather the Lord Jesus Christ, who claimed to be the Truth and gave us His Word so that we might understand and live that truth. He is the only God who can help these young men and women choose the right path as they stand at the threshold of their adult lives.

That is why I have now given forty years of my life to find ways to impact university students, to give them biblical perspectives on life and to strengthen their discernment in evaluating ideas. The corridors of "higher learning" are filled with many gullible, media-brainwashed youngsters who stand for nothing and fall for anything that sounds good to them.

Frankly, there are easier places to minister. We often are met with hostility and contempt when we go to the campus to represent a reasoned, Christian point of view.

But we at Probe Ministries are compelled to persevere. And we continue to go there, because we know that the university world is as much a fountainhead for error as it is for truth. And it is definitely strategic as we look to the future. Abraham Lincoln perhaps captured this best when he said, "The philosophy of the classroom in one generation will become the philosophy of the government in the next."

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Rights and Wrongs

Probe's founder, Jimmy Williams, discusses the true source of ethics.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

During a recent meeting of college educators at Harvard University, Cornell President Frank Rhodes rose to address the issue of reforms, suggesting that it was time for universities to pay "real and sustained attention to students' intellectual and moral well-being." Immediately there were gasps, even catcalls. One indignant student stood to demand of Rhodes, "Who is going to do the instructing? Whose morality are we going to follow?" The audience applauded thunderously, believing that the young man had settled the issue by posing an unanswerable question. Rhodes sat down, unable or unwilling to respond.

This interchange between university president and college student hits at the most basic question in formulating any and every system of ethics, namely that of identifying the *basis* for determining the standards we humans designate as "right" or "wrong."

What is ethics?

Ethics comes from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning, "what ought to be," or, "a place of refuge," such as a cave, solid and absolute. The dictionary defines ethics as

(1) the study of standards of conduct and moral judgment, or

(2) the system or code of morals of a particular philosopher, religion, group, etc.
Dr. Albert Schweitzer defined ethics as "the name we give for our concern for good behavior."

Human Ethical Universality

No human lives without the ethical dimension. Statements like, “That’s not fair,” or “You promised,” reveal the common ethical assumptions humans have come to expect of one another. This is not to say that each human always acts responsibly toward his fellows. In every culture we find individuals who choose to ignore the commonly held standards; they choose to rape, to steal, to kill. Breaking established standards is therefore a *relative* issue; that is, some do, and some don’t. But an *absolute* is also involved: no one likes to be raped, robbed, or murdered.

OPTIONS FOR VALUES

One can say that every ethical value involves some standard of behavior, and every standard is defined in a *prescriptive* manner. Ethical standards are expressed in terms of “ought” and “should,” or “ought not” and “should not.” They transcend the language of *description*, speaking not only of “what is,” but rather “what should be.” Where do we find such standards? What kinds of foundational possibilities are available to us upon which to build an ethical system? The options are as follows:

The Natural Ethic (Nature)

> “All nature is but art, unknown to thee;
> All chance, direction which thou canst not see;
> All discord, harmony not understood;
> All partial evil, universal good;
> And, spite of pride, in erring reason’s spite,
> One truth is clear, *whatever is, is right.*“

Alexander Pope
Definition: “Oughts” are derived from what “is.”

Mortimer Adler called this an attempt “to get conclusions in

the imperative mood from premises entirely in the indicative mood." This view presupposes the origination of value is found in the facts, the observation of nature.

"What is ethically right is related *in some way* to what is materially true" (G. G. Simpson). Example: A man runs a red light. He cannot draw a conclusion of whether or not to run the red light without having an earlier presupposition or standard in place concerning that ethical choice: "One shouldn't run red lights."

Implications:

To have true moral values, people must get them from somewhere other than the actual world of description.

This view destroys the very concepts of good and evil, because "what is" contains both. To speak of good and evil becomes nonsensical. Charles Manson said, "If God is one, what is bad?" Baudelaire lamented, "If God exists he is the Devil."

This view does not answer the question of predatorial/survival life in nature. All that we call "human" would be destroyed if people practiced this natural ethic consistently and universally.

Not many hold this view seriously. T. H. Huxley admitted that though evolution is "true," it leads to bad ethics. Even evolutionists choose not to live in such a world. Instead, they philosophically smuggle Christian ethics arbitrarily into their system and hold it *romantically* upon their naturalistic base.

If we are to have ethics, we must find them outside the natural realm.

The Consensus Ethic (Majority Rule)

Definition: Whatever a cultural group approves of is deemed

right; whatever the group disapproves of is wrong. In America, we find the most popular expression of cultural relativism demonstrated in the opinion poll (e.g., the Clinton Scandal).

Implications:

The grand result of the Kinsey Report on American sexual ethics in the 1950's was that people bought the idea that if a *majority* of citizens accepted something as right or wrong, it was.

Cultural relativism claims to be based on a scientific view of morals. Admittedly, statistical analysis of human behavior is the true and proper task of sociologists. But within the discipline, unfortunately, there is, by design, or by inference, a strong tendency to make value judgments about the results of research. Sociology exists *only* to tell us *what* people are doing, not what they *should* be doing. True values must be found somewhere else.

Ethics by majority may actually have little to do with morality. A society can become corrupt. In New Guinea, for example, the tribe of Papuans have a 100 per cent majority in their view on the virtue of cannibalism. Does their unanimous consent on this issue make it moral? By such reasoning, if 51% of the German people assented to the extermination of Jewry by Hitler and his henchmen, then their actions were "right," and other cultures should have withheld any criticism of German sovereignty in their own internal affairs.

Cultural relativism is really "status-quoism," providing no strong motive for social change. It is also capricious over time. For example, in 1859, slavery in the United States was socially acceptable and abortion was illegal. Today, the reverse is true.

Those who prefer this ethical foundation must face one very dangerous fact: **If there is no standard by which society can be judged and held accountable, then society becomes the**

judge. When that happens, no one is safe—minorities, the unborn, the elderly, the handicapped, and perhaps even the blond-headed or the left-handed!

The Arbitrary Ethic (Power)

A teenager complains to her mother, "Why can't I go out tonight?" Mom replies, "Because I say so!" No reason is given, other than that of the mother imposing her will on her daughter. This is the arbitrary, *de facto* use of power: "Might makes right."

Definition: An individual or elitist group sets itself up as arbiter of values and uses the necessary force to maintain these values. Democratic consensus rules from below; arbitrary absolutists rule from above.

Critique:

The arbiter can be a dictator, a parliament, a supreme court, a political party, or any elite configuration which has the wherewithal to impose its will upon the populace.

What is enforced is based solely upon what the arbiter decides will be enforced. Emperor worship of the Roman Caesars brought persecution to Jews and Christians who refused to practice it. Plato's Republic would be governed by its philosopher kings. The Catholic Inquisitors summarily tortured and executed unrepentant heretics. B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two* utopia would be carefully managed by beneficent planners through total environmental control and behavior modification. Soviet Russia was ruthlessly governed by an all-powerful Central Committee and its KGB enforcers.

It is important to remember that such arbiters can make something *legal* but not *moral.* The 1972 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion is the most pertinent contemporary example. The judges, choosing to ignore medical, legal, and religious precedents on the true humanity of the unborn, made

an arbitrary, pragmatic decision. This ruling was legal, but not necessarily moral.

The great flaw in this approach is that it presupposes great trust in those who govern. History has not confirmed the wisdom of placing such confidence in those who wield absolute power. The balancing of power in the U.S. Constitution between the various branches of government reflects the wariness of its Framers to give undue authority to any sole federal entity.

“Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” It leads to despotism, tyranny, and bondage.

The True Absolute (Transcendence)

> “There are two ways in which the human machine goes wrong. One is when human individuals drift apart from one another, or else collide with one another and do one another damage, by cheating or bullying. The other is when things go wrong inside the individual when the different parts of him (his different faculties and desires and so on) either drift apart or interfere with one another. You can get the idea . . . if you think of us as a fleet of ships sailing in formation. The voyage will be a success only, in the first place, if the ships do not collide and get in one another’s way; and secondly, if each ship is seaworthy and has her engines in good order. As a matter of fact, you cannot have either of these two things without the other. If the ships keep on having collisions they will not remain seaworthy very long. On the other hand, if their steering gears are out of order they will not be able to avoid collisions. “But there is one thing we have not yet taken into account. We have not asked where the fleet is trying to get to. . . . And however well the fleet sailed, its voyage would be a failure if it were meant to reach New York and actually arrived at Calcutta.

> "Morality, then, seems to be concerned with three things. Firstly, with fair play and harmony between individuals. Secondly, with what might be called tidying up or harmonizing the thing inside each individual. Thirdly, with the general purpose of human life as a whole: what man was made for? What course the whole fleet ought to be on? . . ." (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

Definition: C. S. Lewis has here identified the "three parts of morality," the first two of which humans are well acquainted with: internal moral deficiencies and conflict with others through ethical choices. It is the *third* part for which all humans desperately need and long, namely, some *objective* standard to which all humans must adhere. Such a standard necessarily *transcends* the world of description. It presupposes that God exists and has spoken, or *revealed* such standards. The true absolute contends that the Creator of man AND nature has given such values that are commensurate with the way He made us and appropriate to people's problems and aspirations.

Example: The Ten Commandments provide the boundaries for the definition of humanness; any act contrary to this true absolute is a violation of our humanity. Further, these standards are not merely *external* principles, but rather the very essence of the nature and character of God.

Implications:

Some things are **right**; some are **wrong**, and objectively so. This ethical system is based on *normative* principles rather than subjective, *utilitarian* ones.

It also provides a basis for conviction: what was right yesterday will be right today. The individual is protected against the *whole* of society—wicked kings, pragmatic judges, corrupt politicians, and decadent populace.

There is also a true and legitimate motive for fighting evil,

an objective basis for social change.

ETHICAL SYSTEMS BUILT ON THE ABOVE

Natural Ethic

1. Behaviorism

All of our actions are the result of either our genetic make-up (see Probe articles "Human Nature" and "Sociobiology: Evolution, Genes and Morality") or our environment.

Premises:

This system presupposes that nothing exists beyond the material realm.

What is called **mind** is reduced to physical and chemical reactions.

We cannot act upon the world; rather, the world acts upon us.

Critique:

There can be no human responsibility for actions.

And yet, behaviorists themselves appeal to a standard of justice when wronged.

Contrary to the contention of the behaviorists, there *are* both philosophical reasons and scientific evidence to support the belief that we do possess an immaterial substance.

2. Darwinism

3. Marxism

Humanistic Systems

1. Cultural Relativism, consensus (See above)

2. Arbitrary Absolute (See Above)

3. Situation Ethics

This system seeks to use the rules whenever they are useful, but it discards them if they happen to conflict with *love.* Joseph Fletcher is the chief proponent.

Premises:

The sole arbiter of morality in any situation is love; it is the *only* absolute, according to Fletcher.

Love should be defined in utilitarian terms. William James said, “What works is right.” Actions should be judged by whether or not they contribute to the greatest good for the greatest number (lifeboat ethics).

The end justifies the means.

Critique:

Everyone may have a different opinion of what is loving or unloving in a given situation. If “love” is an absolute, humanity has a very difficult time in applying it to real life. Thus, morality is reduced to a matter of personal preference: “It all depends upon your point of view.”

If morality is based on the consequences, we have to be able to predict with accuracy these consequences if we want to know whether or not we are acting morally. In short, one would have to BE God in order to always do the loving thing ahead of time.

4. Emotive Ethics

In this view nothing is literally right or wrong; these terms are simply expressions of personal emotion and as such are neither true nor false.

Premises:

When we speak of good or evil, these remain simply expressions of our own subjective feelings about what we have encountered or experienced.

We can **des**cribe, but we cannot **pre**scribe.

Thus, all actions are morally neutral.

Critique:

The most an emotivist can say is, "I don't *like* other ethical theories. I *like* my own opinion on this issue."

Emotivists cannot verify their assumption that the only meaningful utterances are statements of factual or personal observation and preference. Some other meaningful system for true moral acts may exist beyond their experience and myopic world view.

5. Hedonism

Hedonists, like emotivists, are individually directed along the lines of their personal choices and desires. The hedonist (or Epicurean), however has a goal in mind: the pursuit of pleasure. Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) believed that there were two primary choices in life—to experience either pain or pleasure. His philosophy is based on avoiding the former at all costs and relentlessly pursuing the latter with no consideration given to the consequences upon others. This, "If it feels good, do it," mentality fits well today in a society which stresses that the individual (me) is most important.

6. Pantheism

The ethical system which flows out of pantheism and new age thinking is similar to both emotivism and hedonism, and is really more *humanistic* than *theistic.* While Christian theism is God-centered, and naturalism is man-centered, pantheism is world-centered. But the focus is still upon man, and the world becomes god. In pantheism, man and nature become one, and

together become the only “god” which exists. Man thus becomes his own god; he *is* god, or at least a part of god. Ethics becomes, then, those choices which keep one in harmony with the “cosmic oneness,” and salvation comes from looking *within* to maintain that harmony. This process, like all Eastern Mysticism, tends to blur reality and the ethical distinctions of “right” and “wrong.”

Inadequate Absolutes: The Moral Dilemma

In summary, there are two reasons why man, acting autonomously, cannot establish a valid and satisfying moral theory on either naturalistic or humanistic moral theory.

The scientific method is limited.

Science can collect facts, but these pieces of information cannot tell us what we *ought* to do. It ignores the very real possibility that something real exists beyond the natural world, and it is thus doomed to look *within* its own self-defined “closed system” for an adequate ethical base. Unfortunately, none honestly exists, philosophically, except the natural law of nature, “red in tooth and claw.”

Relativism is always self-contradictory.

Although relativism disclaims the existence of absolutes, it must assume the existence of an absolute by which other theories can be judged. The problem today is that society has abandoned belief in a transcendent, absolute truth, a morally binding source of authority that is above our rights as individuals. To modern man, then, there is no absolute other than perhaps the belief that “there are no absolutes,” which is itself a contradiction.

It assumes there are no intrinsic values, yet it must assume that intrinsic values exist whenever it gives guidance in making moral decisions.

If ends and means are relative, regardless of the ethical system preferred, ones own point of reference must also be in flux.

FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICAL ABSOLUTES

1. It is based on an authority higher than man (Creator God) and *revelation*, rather than human experience, both individually or collectively.

2. The absolute standard for morality is God Himself, and every moral action must be judged in the light of His nature.

3. Man is not simply an animal, but a unique, moral being created in the image of God.

4. God's moral revelation has intrinsic value; it is *normative* rather than *utilitarian*. If the above is true, a homeless person possesses the same God-given worth as the president of the United States.

5. Scripture is accepted as morally authoritative, the Word of God, being derived from God.

6. In the Scriptures, law and love are harmonized, and obedience to God's laws is not legalism.

7. God's moral revelation was given for the benefit of humankind.

8. These moral principles are timeless, having historical continuity, and humans—individually or collectively—experience the common grace of God whenever and wherever they are adhered to.

9. True Christian morality deals with intentions, as well as actions, seeks the glory of God instead of pleasure and self-gratification, and encourages service to others, rather than

serving self.

God alone knows all the goals, determines all morality, and allows us to "play the game." But he does not allow us to make the rules. Modern and postmodern man, seemingly loosed from such transcendent restrictions, has chosen to make up his own. The folly of such a reference point for life is everywhere apparent.

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The Stable

As the Christmas season again draws near, our hearts and minds reflect once more upon that unusual, but wondrous night in tiny Bethlehem where God joined Himself to the stream of a struggling humanity. He had come on a solemn mission: to lay a pathway of life and freedom for the fallen ones whom He called His brothers. And on that humble bed of straw a tiny heart beat strong and sure in the breast of a perfect human being: *Yeshua* the *Messiah.*

All recorded about this Incarnation event has symbolic or prophetic meaning. Consider the straw filled manger itself. A crude, but appropriate cradle for this baby King of Kings. In John 6:58 Jesus said, "This is the **Bread** which came down out of heaven—he who eats this bread shall live forever."

The *stable* was a **place of life**; a source of nourishment for hungry ones. And so it is with our Lord. No matter how long we have been Christians, nor how much we know about the Bible, we are still continually dependent upon Christ alone who can fill the hungry, thirsty places in our lives. He said, "Let him **keep on coming** and let him **keep on drinking** (John 7:37)."

The *swaddling cloth* wrapped around our tiny Lord suggests the stable was also a **place of death.** Jesus' battered corpse would one day be wrapped again in cloth like this and placed in a rich man's tomb. And thus the shadow of the Cross was always there, even at the beginning of His life in the midst of this humble and happy scene. One day the death, only here suggested, would come with agonizing force upon this man who took our place and became the Author and Protector of our faith. He is the one "who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2)."

This brings us to the visits of the *shepherds* and the *wise men.* These were men of extremely different lifestyles, representing all humanity—from simple, country folk to sophisticated knowledge seekers. They all came and bowed down, because the stable was also a **place of worship.** The affluent and able wise men laid their lavish gifts before the Holy Babe. The poor shepherds could place only themselves before Him. But God received them all, for *all* were *truly* wise. Anyone who kneels to honor, worship, and serve this unique Person demonstrates true wisdom.

As we enjoy this Christmas Season with family and friends, let us remember that the **Gift** *on* the Tree is what gives significant to the gifts *under* the tree.

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The Most Important Decision

of Your Life

Probe's founder, Jimmy Williams, shares how to know God and go to heaven when you die.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

I have come to share a message that changed my life. I was not a bad boy—but not a good boy either. I went to church with my parents and was baptized when I was 12.

If you had asked me if I were a Christian, I would have said yes. But for twenty-one years God was just a formal idea to me rather than a personal friend. I professed Christianity, but I lived my life as a practical atheist.

At the University, I studied music. I loved to sing, especially the tenor arias from the great operas. As I neared my final year, I was having success with my career goals, but my heart was empty. I felt that something was missing from my life. I did not know at the time that, as the empty stomach calls for food, I was suffering from spiritual hunger.

Pascal, the great French physicist eloquently expressed this hunger when he said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ."

Augustine, the great theologian and bishop speaks of the same hunger: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

I thought I had many unsolvable problems then, but I soon discovered that solving my spiritual hunger helped many of my other problems to vanish.

I met a fellow student, an athlete, who had the radiance of a

Christian on his face. A simple conversation with him changed the entire direction of my life that day in September, 1959.

He told me that just as there are physical laws in the universe, so are there spiritual laws which govern our relationship with God. They are called “laws” because they are universally true. For example, we do not break the law of gravity. . . it breaks us. Jump off a high building and we discover the truth about the law of gravity.

So what are these spiritual laws? I will share with you the four my friend related to me that day. And like the law of gravity, they are true, whether we believe them or not.

I. God loves us and has a purpose for our lives.

Jesus tells us in John 10:10, “I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly.” That is one of the reasons He came to make our lives rich and full of purpose.

Everything in this room has a purpose—the microphone, the piano, the stage, the chairs, the sound system, the lectern. What is man’s purpose? What is your purpose? This is an important question.

Why is it that most people are not experiencing the abundant life Jesus promised? The second law tells us:

II. Man is sinful and separated from God; thus, he cannot know and experience God’s love and plan for his life.

The Bible tells us in Romans 3:23 that “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” God has given us standards to live by in such things as the Ten Commandments. And James tells us that “if a man keeps the whole law (the Ten

Commandments) but offends in **one** place, he is guilty of all."

I am not saying that every person is as bad as he/she could be; I am saying that every person has fallen short of the mark, has failed to meet what God has required. And what God requires of us in our personal standard of behavior and righteousness is as unattainable as throwing a rock and trying to hit the North Pole.

Humans have tried to address this problem of personal, moral failure in various ways. Some, in the face of some 4000 years of documented history which records horrific, bloody, and unending incidents of man's inhumanity to man, some have actually persisted in the belief that man is basically **good**.

Others, more realistic and honest about man's tendency toward selfishness and evil, have attempted to explain the reason man displays such destructive behavior. Here are three explanations widely held across the world:

(1) Some suggest that man's moral failure is **biological;** that it is simply the vestigial remains of aggression from our primitive, animal, evolutionary past.

(2) Others argue that mans moral flaw is basically **sociological**, that man lacks the proper environment necessary for upright behavior.

(3) Still others insist that the human problem is essentially **intellectual**, and if people knew more, they would understand what was right, and they would do it. Curiously, in the United States, over 35,000 laws and statutes exist simply to try and enforce the Ten Commandments! We *do* know what is right, but we choose often not to do it!

These three theories have one thing in common: each one approaches the human moral condition from the standpoint of what man lacks.

The **biologist** tells us that more time is needed for man to work out and eliminate the remnants of his primitive aggression. Tennyson optimistically hopes for this in his poem, *In Memoriam*: "Moving ever upward, outward, let the ape and tiger die."

The **sociologist** tells us that what humans basically need is aproper or better environment, and if they had it, human behavior would improve. Modern America is a vivid and tragic example that abundance will not make people good.

Others suggest that man's lack is **information**, and therefore education is the answer. We lack sufficient time; we lack a proper environment; we lack the necessary information.

But our real dilemma is not what is *lacking,* but what is *present!* And every academic discipline has to allow for and explain what it is:

> Biology calls it primitive instinct;
> Philosophy calls it irrational thinking;
> Psychology calls it emotional weakness;
> Sociology calls it cultural lag;
> History calls it class struggle;
> Humanities calls it the human flaw, or *hubris;*
> The Bible calls it sin.

Jesus speaks of this presence in Mark 7:15-23 as something which comes from within man, something which issues forth from his inner life:

> *"Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man. . . .Are you too so uncomprehending? Do you not see that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated? . . .That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from* ***within****, out of the*

> *heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts and immorality, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."*

Albert Einstein echoes this when he said, "It is not the explosive power of the atom which I fear: but rather the explosive power for evil in the heart of man which I greatly fear."

"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23).

And if this sinful condition were not bad enough, we learn from the Bible that there are consequences for our sin: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

What is the meaning of death? Death always means separation. *Physical death* is a separation of the soul/spirit from the body. People who are present when someone dies can actually observe the moment when this takes place.

Spiritual death is also a separation, from God Himself. Man's sin keeps him separated from the one he seeks to know. Mahatma Ghandi, the great Hindu teacher, speaks of this separation when he says in his autobiography, "O wretched man that I am! It is a constant source of torture to me that I am separated from the One I know to be my very life and being, and I know it is my sin that hides Him from me!"

T.S. Eliot expresses this same despair when he says:

> "We are the hollow men,
> We are the stuffed men,
> Head piece filled with straw.
> No head—No heart.

Life does not end with a bang,
But with a whimper.”

Feelings of this separation, this alienation, have prompted men through the ages to try and find a way to bridge this gap, this estrangement, from God. And historically, all of these attempts originate with man, and reflect his own efforts to reach God by trying to be good, trying to keep the Ten Commandments or the Golden Rule, or by observing some religious practice.

The problem with these approaches is that one never knows when he or she has been good enough or done enough! Karl Marx said that “Religion is the opiate of the people,” meaning that it appeared to be something necessary and helpful for humans, whether true or not. And many people console themselves by attending church, trying to be basically good and decent, and drugging themselves into believing God will accept them for making such efforts. Marx believed these naïve human inclinations should be eliminated.

Actually, the teachings of Jesus agree with Marx on this point. Jesus taught that religion is the enemy of Christianity, because religion represents man’s best attempts to reach up and find God. And it is interesting to note that in Jesus’ day He was most critical of the self-righteous, religious people He encountered: the “good” ones.

He said, “Those who are well do not need a physician.” (Matthew 9:12) When does someone go to the doctor? When well, or sick? What Jesus was implying is that the notion that one’s good deeds or relatively good life were already sufficient to bridge the gap between himself and his God, then what Christ came to accomplish through His sacrificial death on the cross is totally negated and unnecessary. In other words, He was saying, If you have drugged yourself into believing that your own good works have secured your salvation, then He, the Great Physician, can do nothing for you.

This is what Paul was getting at in Ephesians 2, 8-9 when he said: “For by grace have you been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”

The Ten Commandments were never given by God with the expectation that man would keep them flawlessly. They were given as a guide, a teaching tool. Or, in medical terminology, the commandments parallel the purpose of an X-ray machine, which can only *reveal* the condition of the broken bone within a human body. It identifies the problem but can provide no solution for knitting the bone back together.

This is what Jesus was trying to say to the Pharisees, to recognize the true spiritual condition of their lives, in that as good and righteous as they tried to be, they were still hopelessly short of the mark which God required. A gospel preacher once pointed out that it was not difficult to get people saved, but it was extremely difficult to get them *lost!* We must first honestly face our true spiritual condition.

Once we have come to grips with this fact of our own personal sin and failure before God and accept it as true of ourselves, we are ready to consider the third spiritual law:

III. Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for man’s sin; through Him we can know and experience God’s love and purpose for our lives.

The second spiritual law reveals to us the bad news about man’s condition. This third law now gives us the *euaggelion,* the gospel, the good news from God:

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8)

We have established that “religion” is defined as man’s best

efforts to reach up and find God. Christianity is unique and exactly the opposite and is defined as God's only effort to reach down and find man. Religion is spelled "**Do.**" Christianity is spelled "**Done!"**

Jesus stated the purpose of His divine mission in John 6:38-40:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. . . And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. . .For this is the will of My Father, that every one who beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life: and I myself will raise him up on the last day."

John the disciple, an eyewitness, recounts to us the last words Christ uttered on the cross: "When Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit" (9:30). "Mission accomplished!" "Done!"

It is for this reason that Jesus had told his disciples, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father except by me." (John 14:6) He claimed to be the One who, by His Incarnation and death, had come from heaven to build a bridge made of Himself, which could alone completely span the spiritual chasm between sinful human beings and a holy God.

The exclusiveness of this statement by Christ offends many. It is too narrow, they say. But honestly, some things in life *are* narrow. I have always appreciated a narrow-minded pilot, for example, who insists in landing his plane on the runway!

One of most beautiful cities in America is San Francisco, California. You may know that at the opening into the vast San Francisco Bay there stands a gigantic, rust-red suspension bridge called the Golden Gate Bridge. It allows people and cars to get back and forth from the city on the South to the

picturesque little seaside village, Sausalito, and the Napa Valley on the North. People have a choice if they want to get to Sausalito: they can take the bridge, or they can swim in the cold Pacific with its treacherous currents flowing in and out of the Bay. Everyone decides to trust the Bridge.

This bridge is also narrow. And since it was built in the 1930s, no one has ever petitioned the city of San Francisco to put up another bridge alongside the Golden Gate so people can get to Sausalito. It is not necessary, not needed. Now the real question is whether Jesus' claim to be the bridge, the only bridge, which gives access to God, is true.

There is a story recounted about a certain man who operated a drawbridge over a large river which he raised and lowered, allowing the boats to pass through. One day he brought his small son with him to the drawbridge. Late in the morning a large boat approached filled with people. As he was raising the drawbridge to let the big ship pass, his little son fell directly on to the great gear wheel. Horror-stricken, the man was faced with the decision of imperiling the many lives of those on the swift, oncoming craft, or saving his son. Moments later, the crushing of the little son's body in the machinery was accompanied by the tears and the crushed heart of a father who sacrificed his beloved child for the lives of the strangers on the boat.

That is the significance of the Cross. Jesus' life for ours. He is our substitute, our bridge, and access to God. He died so we might live. He was separated from God the Father ("My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?") so we might not have to be. . . for an eternity.

> "All we like sheep have gone astray,
> Each of us has turned to his own way;
> But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.
> He was oppressed and He was afflicted,

> Yet He did not open his mouth.
> Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
> And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
> So He did not open His mouth. . . .
> He was cut off out of the land of the living,
> For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due. . .
> Although He had done no violence
> Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.
> But it pleased the Lord
> To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
> If His soul would render Himself as a guilt offering. . .
> By His knowledge the Righteous One,
> My Servant, will justify the many,
> As He will bear their iniquities."
> —Isaiah 53

What this means to you and to me is that if we were the only two people who ever lived on planet earth, Christ would still have come and do what He did just for the two of us. That is how much He loves us. He had you and me specifically in mind as He carried that cross up the *Via Dolorosa* on that day in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. And on that Cross He took your place and mine and bore our Hell so that we might have the chance at Heaven.

Now it is most important to make something crystal clear. I want to pose a question. If the above things are really true, how many people did Jesus die for? We find the answer in John 3:16: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

We learn from this that Christ died for the world. His death is sufficient for every human being who ever lived on the planet.

But we must ask a second question: Does that fact that Christ

died for *all* mean that everyone is a Christian? Obviously not. His death is *sufficient* for everyone, but it is only *efficient* for certain ones. Which ones? The fourth and final spiritual law tells us:

IV. We must personally receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior into our lives in order to become a Christian.

John 1:12 and 13 tell us that "As many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, to those who believe on His name. . who were born not of blood (through inheritance), nor of the will of the flesh (human will power), nor of the will of man (priestly pronouncement), but of God (the new birth)."

The Bible speaks of receiving Christ as similar to receiving a gift. We have seen this mentioned in Romans 6:23 and Ephesians 2:8,9 above. This "gift" concept marks out an approach to God that is diametrically opposed to any and all religious systems based on human effort we have already discussed.

The "spirit" of gift-giving is one of **grace.** How does one accept a gift? The appropriate response is "Thank you." If you were to try to give money in exchange for a gift given you, the other person would be highly insulted and offended. The graciousness of the gift-giver would be spoiled by such a response. Grace is God's unmerited, undeserved favor.

We cannot earn this gift.

We do not deserve this gift.

We can only say "Thank you."

What God has so graciously provided for our salvation is so unlike the way humans think about such things, that no human would ever have thought up such a solution to the fallen,

human condition.

And so we humans have a choice with respect to our personal salvation. We can continue our own religious efforts with the uncertain hope of being acceptable to God when we die, or we can accept the free gift of God, His Son's death on our behalf. And when you come to think about it, if God intended for man to achieve his own salvation through self-effort, then He made a terrible mistake: He let His own Son die on the Cross, which was evidently (along this line of reasoning) not really necessary! Salvation through self-effort negates the very significance of the Cross and Christ's death on our behalf.

Now how do we receive this gift? We do it by exercising faith through the exercise of our will. It is a personal faith decision one makes on the basis of the facts stated above.

The experience goes by many names: conversion, being saved, being born again. Let's look at Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in John chapter three. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, the group Jesus was so often critical of because of their self-righteousness. But Nicodemus is drawn to Jesus and comes to see Him. He says, "Rabbi, we know that you have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these miracles that you do unless God is with Him." Jesus said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus took Him literally: "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can He?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of . . . the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Here Jesus contrasts physical birth with spiritual birth. Physical birth is an event. It happens at a moment in time

and, we each celebrate the occasion once a year on our birthdays. Likewise, spiritual birth is an event, one that can occur at any time and any place when a person understands what Christ did and reaches out to personally receive the Gift He offers: “But as many as received Him, to those He gave the authority to become the children of God, to those who believe *on* His name (John 1:12).” Observe the verbs in this verse. It is our part to believe that what Christ did for us is true, then to receive Him into our lives as our Savior, and become a child of God. This is done by an exercise of our will, which actively decides to abandon all self effort to reach and attain a righteousness acceptable to God, but rather to reach out to Him in faith and receive the Gift which He offers us. And notices the verse states that we are to believe *ON*, not *IN*. Believing in something does not necessarily call for trust. Believing on something does. This is the true nature of faith. To “believe *on*” means to “*count on*.”

The story is told of a great trapeze artist at the circus. Up on the high wire, he would ride back and forth across on a bicycle with a long pole. Then he would do it again with his attendant sitting on his shoulders. After that He asked the audience if they believed he could carry one of them across. The entire audience loudly exclaimed they believed he could. He looked at a particular man on the front row and asked if he believed, and he said “yes.” Then the trapeze artist said, “Climb up the ladder, get on my shoulders, and Ill take you across.” If the man responds and *entrusts himself* to the man on the bicycle, he is demonstrating the equivalent of the biblical faith called for by one who desires to become a Christian and to be born into the family of God.

It is important to understand the nature of faith in our lives. Faith is something that we employ all the time. Faith that a chair will hold us up; faith the on-coming driver will stay in his lane; faith the plane will land safely. Everyone has faith—atheist, agnostic, Christian. The real issue is not

having faith, in large or small quantities, but rather to have a *worthy object* for our faith. If you walked out on a frozen pond, which would you prefer, a little faith in a sheet of ice two-feet thick, or a lot of faith in an inch of ice? Faith is important, but the *object* of our faith is all-important.

To believe on Christ is to trust Him and Him alone to make us presentable and acceptable to God. We decide that He is the most reliable object of our faith and we are saying that when we stand before God, we are not trusting in our own merits to attain eternal life, but rather in the merits of our Substitute, the spotless Lamb of God who stands there with us, our Savior and our Redeemer.

Revelation 3:20 gives us a picture of how this spiritual birth occurs: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine (fellowship) with him, and he with Me."

Picture Jesus standing at the door of your life, your will, seeking entrance. He is a gentleman. He will never force His way into our lives. But we learn here that if we open the door of our life to Him and receive Him as our Savior, He will respond.

If I were to come to your home and knock on the door, you would have essentially three responses: (1) you could tell me to go away, (2) you could ignore me and play like you were not at home, (3) or you could invite me in.

The same is true of Jesus. He waits to be invited. He treats each person with integrity and will not come where He is not invited or wanted. It is our choice. But if we *do* open the door (that's our part), He *will* come in (thats His part). And Jesus doesn't lie. If we open, He will come.

We do this through prayer. The specific words we use are not important, but rather the attitude of the heart. Here is a short prayer which contains the major elements of receiving

Christ:

“Lord Jesus, I reach out to you at this time in my life to claim the gift you have offered me. I confess I have sinned and fallen short of what you require of me. I thank you for dying on the Cross for my sins, and I thank you for your forgiveness. I open the door of my heart and life and invite you to come into me, and make me the kind of person you want me to be. I trust you now as my personal Savior and from this day forward I *trust in you alone* to make me presentable and acceptable before God when I must give account of myself and my life. Thank you for coming into my life, and I know you are there now, because you promised that if I opened the door, you would come in. Amen.”

If you prayed this prayer right now, and it expressed the desire of your heart, then where is Christ? He is now inside you. Before, He was on the outside looking in. Now, He is on the inside looking out. The word “Christian” means “Christ *in* one.” That is why the body is called the temple of God. A temple is a place where God dwells.

How do you know he is there? We are back to the question of faith. Above, we spoke of exercising faith and trust that Christ’s death on the Cross for us is true and that we are called upon to respond by believing *on* it. To answer this question, we must exercise faith again.

Let’s say I came to your home and knocked. You opened the door, invited me in, and we went into the living room and sat down to chat. And let’s say after a time, you got up, went to the door, opened it and said to me, “Come on in, Jim!” You did this several times, while I remained on the sofa in the living room! This would not only be silly; it would be clear evidence that you did not *really* believe I was already in your home!

So it is with Christ. Faith is when you stop saying “please” to God and you start saying “thank you.” Unless you trust in

faith that, regardless of how you *feel*, Christ was true to His Word and actually entered when you invited Him, you can never get on with you new life in Christ, because you keep "going to the door" in uncertainty, not truly believing He did what He said He would do. And so once you have invited Him into your life, *believe that He is there,* and begin to trust that by saying, "Lord, thank you for coming into my life and making me a child of God and a member of your family."

Perhaps this train illustration will help to understand the difference between fact, faith, and feeling. The *engine* of the train represents the facts . . .the truths about Christ's death and its implications to us. The *coal car* represents faith. . .the energy needed to make these facts a reality to us. The *caboose* represents our feelings . . .which may vary every day and every moment depending on our circumstances, emotions, and state of mind.

The train will run with or without the caboose, and one would never think of trying to pull a train with the caboose! So it is with our life in Christ. This decision we have made concerning our salvation has nothing to do with how we *feel* at any particular time.

If someone were to ask me if I were married, I wouldn't respond by saying, "Well, I feel married today," or "I'm working at being married," or "I think I'm married," or "I hope I am." And yet these are the very kinds of statements we often hear when we ask someone if they are Christians. In fact, these responses are a strong indication that the person does not really understand what Christ did for them, and He is probably still "standing outside" knocking at their door. This may be the case for many just simply because they lack the proper information and no one has ever clearly explained how they can become Christians.

Let's ask another question: Is it presumptuous to assume that when I die I will go to heaven?

“And the witness is that that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know (not “hope”) that you have (present tense; not “*will* have”) eternal life.” (I John 5:11-13).

What we learn here is that a Christian receives eternal life not at death, but at the Second Birth. To receive Christ and “have the Son” is also to have eternal life as a **present possession.** No Christ, no eternal life. Possess Christ and also possess eternal life. We can see why this would be so. At our physical birth, our parents gave us the only kind of life they possessed—human life. When we place our faith in Christ and are born spiritually into the family of God, He gives us the only kind of life *He* possesses—eternal life.

That is why the apostle Paul could say with confidence, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). And that is why Jesus could say to the believing thief on the cross, “Truly I say to you, *today* you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

As a non-Christian, it always made me angry if someone said with confidence, that they knew they would go to heaven when they died. That is because I had assumed that what they implied is that they had done enough “good things” already to merit heaven. But that wasn’t their reasoning at all. They were simply giving testimony to the fact that they had received the gift of eternal life promised them when they recognized the futility of their own religious efforts and turned to Christ and received Him into their lives as the Bible instructed them to do.

To not have this certainty in the Christian life is to live out one’s days motivated by fear. God does not intend this for His children, and plainly states it over and over again, that

our lives are to be lived out with a motivation of love and gratitude for what God has done for us. We want to live for Christ. Our good works become, not a means of gaining our salvation, but the results of having been forgiven and a desire to please our Heavenly Father out of grateful hearts which have received mercy.

Where does one go and what does one do after he/she is born again?

Newborn babies need a lot of care. Birth is followed by a process of growth and development and time. When this natural development in a little baby fails to proceed as intended, we consider it sad, a tragedy. In the spiritual realm, the new birth goes through a similar process. New Christians need a proper environment so they can begin to grow spiritually and mature in their Christian faith. Here are several suggestions to speed your growth along:

• **Begin to read the Bible.** Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Jesus is saying here that if we want to obtain a word from God, we must go where He has revealed Himself. He has done so in the Scriptures, not Shakespeare or the morning paper. Peter says, “Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that you may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2).

The Bible is a big book. In fact it’s 66 books! Many people get bogged down by starting in Genesis. They quickly get bogged down in the “begats” and abandon Bible reading in despair. What kind of nourishment do little babies begin with? Milk. Then pablum. Then baby food. Then finally meat.

Start with the Gospel of John. It is the baby food section. Get a Bible that you feel free to mark up so you can underline things which are meaningful to you. Read the Bible like you eat fish. When you come upon a bone, something indigestible,

don’t choke on it. If you don’t understand it, say “Father, I don’t understand this, but I trust that as I grow, I will come to understand it. It’s probably meat I can’t digest yet.” Mark Twain observed, “It’s not the things about the Bible that I don’t understand that bother me; it’s the things about the Bible that I *do* understand that bother me.” There is plenty that we do understand even as young Christians to feed our souls. It is through the Bible that you let God talk to you.

• **Make prayer a habit.** This is how we talk to God. Prayer can happen at any time and any place, not just on Sunday. It can be long or short, eloquent or plain, important or trivial, and with or without “thee” and “thou.” It can be done with eyes open or shut, standing, kneeling, or lying down. It is talking to a Person, your Heavenly Father. He promises never to leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5), and therefore is accessible to you 24 hours a day everyday. Prayer can involve:
(1) *confession of sin*, as it occurs, with assurance that “If we confess (agree with God concerning) our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).
(2) *praise and thanksgiving,*
(3) *intercession* (asking for others), and
(4) *petitions* of any kind which may burden one’s heart. Paul says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6,7).

• **Fellowship with other Christians**. Seek out the encouragement that comes from being and sharing with other Christians. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.” A hot coal removed from the fire and placed apart from the others quickly dies out, but left in proximity

to other coals it burns brighter and longer. Christianity was never intended to be a solo affair. It is best served by a community of believers who mutually strengthen, support and challenge one another to “run a good race” (Hebrews 12:1,2).

• **Baptism.** Our Lord left us only two ordinances to faithfully observe: baptism and communion. Therefore, in obedience to the Lord’s command, every new believer should soon arrange to express his/her faith commitment to Christ—in His death, burial, and resurrection—by a personal, visual rite of public baptism. (“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” [Matthew 28:19].)

• **Share Christ with others.** Jesus told the first disciples, “Follow me and I will make you to become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). If you know of a good bargain somewhere, you tend to want to tell your friends. One sign of being a Christian, is that you have a strong desire that others might know what you have discovered yourself. . .that God loves them and wants them to know Him. But notice this is a *process.* No one is a “natural” born fisherman. It takes time and skill to catch fish. Learning how to share effectively with others is a learned experience as well. Study the life of our Lord and see how He dealt with people. Read the book of Acts and observe how Paul and others were effective in helping others clarified their own spiritual experience and joined the family of God.

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