Campus Christianity

Spiritual Wastelands 101

In the fall of my junior year in college, I had been a Christian for only a year. Since I had been involved in a Christian group on campus, however, I felt I had learned a great deal about my faith. As a science major I had completed most of my requirements for my degree, and I was looking forward to taking electives in my major of animal ecology. However, I still had a couple of hours in humanities to fulfill, not my most favorite subject. While I was looking for a humanities elective, I came across an English course entitled “Spiritual Wastelands.” I remember thinking to myself, “That looks interesting. I wonder what spiritual wastelands this course is about?” With my newfound interest in spiritual things, I decided to enroll.

On the first day of class, I was horrified the minute the instructor walked into the room. He wore an old Army fatigue jacket, a blue work shirt open to the middle of his hairy chest, ratty blue jeans, sandals, long tangled hair, and a beard. He punctuated his appearance with a leather necklace containing what looked like sharks’ teeth. To make it worse, he proceeded to go around the room and ask every student why he or she took this course. I don’t really reember what the other students said but when he got around to me, I sheepishly replied that I was a Christian and that I was interested in knowing what kind of spiritual wastelands he was going to talk about. Immediately, with a look of malevolent glee, he exploded: “You’re a *Christian*? I want to *hear* from *you*!”

Needless to say, if there had been a place to hide, I would have found it. As you may guess, the only spiritual wasteland he wanted to talk about was Christianity. I was like a babe who had been thrown to the wolves. Our class discussions, more

often than not, were two-sided: the instructor versus me. Hardly anyone else ever spoke up. To say that I found myself floundering like a fish out of water would be an understatement. Occasionally my questions and comments would hit the mark. But I am convinced, as I look back, that even that degree of success was purely the grace of God.

Since that time, I have spent twelve more years in the university environment as both an undergraduate and graduate student. I have learned a great deal about how a Christian student should relate to the academic community, and I would like to share with you four principles for effective Christian witnessing in that setting. I think you will also find that these principles will prove to be an effective guide in any sphere of life.

> ***Approach your studies from a Christian worldview.*** *We need to think Christianly. The only way to accomplish this is to be continually involved in the process of knowing God.*
>
> ***Realize that the job of the student is to learn****—not to preach. A teachable spirit is highly valued. This may seem obvious to you, but believe me, it isn't obvious to everyone.*
>
> ***Pursue excellence.*** *Every exam, every paper, every assignment must be pursued to the best of our ability, as unto the Lord.*
>
> ***Be faithful to the task****—leave the results (grades) to God. Do not get hung up on the world's definition of success.*

Think Christianly

All of our thoughts are to be Christ-centered, including those expressed in a university classroom. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:5 that "we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." All knowledge is to be encompassed by a Christian worldview. In other words, we should try to see all knowledge through the eyes of Jesus. This all sounds well

and good, but how do we do that?

The only way to think and see as Jesus does is to know Him. This brings us to the basics of the Christian life. There are numerous demands on the time of a student. There are always experiments to do, books to read, papers to write, exams to study for, assignments to turn in, classes to attend. This is doubly true for graduate students, who spend their entire time seemingly three steps behind where they are supposed to be. Let's not forget the demands of a girlfriend or boyfriend, family, exercise, and just plain having fun. How is one supposed to find time for regular personal devotions, worship on Sunday mornings, fellowship with other believers, and the study of God's Word? These activities can all take a serious bite out of the time the university demands from a student. But this is the only way to draw closer to God and to understand His ways.

By being faithful in spiritual things, we trust God to honor the time spent and to bring about His desired results in our academic pursuits despite our having less free time than most non- Christians. Christian campus groups can be of tremendous help in these matters through training, Bible studies, and fellowship with believers who are going through the same struggles you are.

For those times when trouble does arise in the classroom, and you feel that your faith is being challenged and you are confused, an enormous amount of assistance is available to you. The manager of your local Christian bookstore can be a great help in finding books that deal with your problem. Organizations such as Probe Ministries can also help steer you in the right direction with short essays, position papers, and bibliographies. Dedicated and highly educated Christians have addressed just about every intellectual attack on Christianity. There is no reason to feel like you have to do it on your own. That was my mistake in the "Spiritual Wastelands" course. It never even occurred to me to seek help.

I could have represented my Lord in a much more credible way if I had only asked.

There are no shortcuts to living the Christian life. We cannot expect to emerge from the university with a truly Christian view of the world if we put our walk with the Lord on hold while we fill our heads with the knowledge of the world. Remember! We are to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. In order to do that, we must know Him; in order to know Him, we must spend time with Him. There were many times in my college career when higher priorities prevented me from spending the amount of time I felt necessary to prepare for an exam, paper, or presentation, but I always found God to be faithful.

During my doctoral studies, we moved into a new house and the boys were ages 4 and 2. The room they were going to share desperately needed repainting and we were having new bunk beds delivered on Monday, the same day of an important cell biology exam. The professor writing this exam was the one in whose lab I had hopes of working for my doctoral project. So I needed to do well.

The room was small and the beds were large, so they needed to be constructed inside the room. This meant the room had to be painted before the beds arrived. If I paint, I lose critical study time for an important exam. If I study, the room goes unpainted and I have an unhappy wife and a difficult task getting to it later. I chose to paint the room. I had a total of three hours of study time for the exam! I entered the exam free of tension knowing I did my best and it was in God’s hands. I had no idea how I did on the exam, but when the grades came out, I received the second highest grade in the class and the best exam score in my tenure as a graduate student! The professor was impressed enough to allow me to begin working in her lab.

Cultivate a Teachable Spirit

I have run across numerous professors whose only encounters with Christians were students who simply told them that they were wrong and the Bible was right. Most professors do not have much patience with this kind of approach. It is a great way to gain enemies and demonstrate how much you think you know, but it does not win anybody to Christ.

Some Christian students have the impression that when they hear error being presented in university classroom, it is their duty to call out the heavy artillery and blast away. This is not necessarily so. As a student, your job is to learn, not to teach. In my education, I reasoned that in order to be a *critic* of evolution, I needed to first be a *student* of evolution and demonstrate that I knew what I was talking about. Once professors realized I was serious about wanting to understand evolution, when I began to ask questions, they listened. In the end my professors and I often had to agree to disagree, but we all learned something in the process, and I built relationships that could grow and develop in the future.

The most effective tactic in the classroom is the art of asking questions. This approach accomplishes three things. First, you demonstrate that you are paying attention, which is somewhat of a rarity today. Second, you demonstrate that you are truly interested in what the instructor is talking about. All good teachers love students with teachable spirits, but not students who are so gullible as to believe unquestioningly everything they say. Third, as you become adept at asking just the right question that exposes the error of what is being taught, you allow the professor and other students to see for themselves the lack of wisdom or truth in the idea being discussed. Truth is truth, whether expressed by a believer or a pagan. However, non-Christians will believe other non-Christians much more readily than they will a fanatical Christian waving a Bible in his hand.

As a graduate student, I was in a class with faculty and other graduate students discussing a new discipline called sociobiology, the study of the biological basis for all social behaviors. One day we were discussing the purpose and meaning of life. In an evolutionary worldview, this can only mean survival and reproduction. Disturbed at how everyone was accepting this, I said, "We have just said that the only purpose in life is to survive and reproduce. If that is true, let me pose this hypothetical situation to you. Let's suppose I am dead and in the ground and the decomposers are doing their thing. Since you say there is no afterlife, this is it. It's over! What difference does it make to me now, whether I have reproduced or not?" After a long silence, a professor spoke up and said, "Well, I guess that ultimately, it doesn't matter at all." "But wait," I responded. "If the only purpose in life is to survive and reproduce, and ultimately—now you tell me—that doesn't matter either, then what's the point? Why go on living? Why stop at red lights? Who cares?!" After another long silence, the same professor spoke up and said, "*Well, I suppose that in the future, those that will be selected for will be those who know there is no purpose in life, but will live as if there is.*" What an amazing and depressing admission of the need to live a lie! That's exactly the point I wanted to make, but it sank in deeper when, through my **questions**, the ***professor*** said it and not me. When Jesus was found by His parents in the temple with the priests, He was listening and asking them questions—probably not for His benefit, but for theirs (Luke 2:46).

We are all familiar with 1 Peter 3:15, which says, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." This verse is a double-edged sword that most of us sharpen only on one side or the other. Many are prepared to make a defense, but they leave destruction in their wakes, never exhibiting gentleness or reverence. Others are the most gentle and

reverent people you know, but are intimidated by tough questions and leave the impression that Christianity is for the weak and feeble-minded. The latter need to go back and read a few important passages:

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Colossians 2:8

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Acts 17

(The story of what happened when Paul boldly proclaimed the gospel in Thessalonica, Berea, and the Areopagus in Athens.)

Paul was a firm believer in the intellectual integrity of the gospel. The "staunch defender" needs to remember that Jesus told His disciples that the world would know that we are Christians by the love we have for one another (John 13:34-35) and that we are to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43-47). Paul exhorted the Romans not to repay evil with evil, but to repay evil with good and to leave vengeance to the Lord (Rom. 12:17-21). Finally, the writer of Proverbs tells us that a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up wrath (Prov. 15:1), and that the foolish man rages and laughs and always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back (Prov. 29:9,11).

Pursue Excellence

Nothing attracts the attention of those in the academic community as much as a job well done. There is no argument against excellence. In Colossians 3:17 Paul tells us, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” If we are to do everything in Jesus’ name, He deserves nothing less than the best that we can do. How many of our papers and exams would we be comfortable stamping with the words, “Performed by a disciple of Jesus Christ”? I think I would want to ask if I could have a little more time before I actually handed it in! Yet Paul admonishes us to hold to that standard in all that we do. This does not mean that every grade must be an A. Sometimes your best is a B or a C or even just getting the assignment done on time. The important thing is to try. It’s important to be able to tell yourself that, with the time, resources, and energy you had available to you, you did your best. The road to excellence is tough, exhausting, and even frightening. It is hard going. But our Lord deserves nothing less.

Ted Engstrom, in his book *The Pursuit of Excellence,* tells the story of a pastor who spent his spare time and weekends for months repairing and rebuilding a dilapidated small farm in a rural community. When he was nearly finished, a neighbor happened by who remarked, “Well, preacher, it looks like you and God really did some work here!” The pastor replied, “It’s interesting you should say that, Mr. Brown. But I’ve got to tell you—you should have seen this place when God had it all to Himself!”

It is certainly true that God is the source of all our strength, and all glory and honor for what we may accomplish is His. But, it is no less true that God has always chosen people to be His instruments—frail, mistake-prone, imperfect people. His servants have not exactly enjoyed a life of ease

while in His service. Striving for excellence is a basic form of Christian witness. We pay attention to people who always strive to do their best. In the classroom, people may not always agree with what you say, but if they know you as a person who works diligently and knows what you are talking about, they will give your words great respect. And, if there is enough of the Savior shining through you, your listeners will come back and want to know more.

I am reminded of the impact of four Hebrew youths in the Babylonian culture during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (whom you may recognize by their Babylonian names: Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego). They entered the prestigious secular institution, "Babylon University," and were immersed into an inherently hostile atmosphere. But Scripture says that

> *And as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams . . . And as for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm (Daniel 1:17, 20).*

You can be sure they were instructed in Babylonian literature and wisdom, not Hebrew, yet they excelled. If our God is indeed the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, then He can not only protect us as we enter the university, but He can also prosper us. Imagine the testimony for Jesus Christ if the best philosophers, the best doctors, the best poets and novelists, the best musicians, the best astrophysicists, and on and on, were all Christians. That would be a powerful witness!

As you pursue excellence, do not be deterred by mistakes. They are going to come, guaranteed. The pursuit of excellence is an attitude in the face of failure. Thomas Edison, the creator of

many inventions including the light bulb and the phonograph, was never discouraged by failed experiments. He simply reasoned that he now knew of one more way that his experiment was not going to work. Mistakes were his education. The wise man admits and learns from his mistakes, but the fool ignores them or covers them up. We all admire someone who freely admits a mistake and then works hard not to repeat it.

Strive for Faithfulness, Not Success

As students in the university learn to approach their studies from a Christian worldview, as they grow to appreciate their place as people who are there to learn and not necessarily to confront, and as they begin to pursue excellence in everything they do, it is tempting for them to believe that God will bless whatever they set out to accomplish. Their primary focus becomes whether or not all of their efforts are successful. It can become depressing if they do not see the kind of results they expected God to bring about.

Soon after Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work among the poor in Calcutta, she was asked by a reporter in New York City how she could dedicate herself so completely to her work when there was no real hope of success. It was obvious she was not going to eliminate hunger, poverty, disease, and all the other ills of that densely populated city in India. In other words, he asked, if you can't really make a dent in the conditions these people live in, why bother? Her reply was simple, yet profound; she said, "God has not called us to success, but to faithfulness." How many times have we heard in witnessing seminars that our job is to share the gospel and leave the results to God? What I hear Mother Teresa saying is that our responsibility is the same in everything we do.

Oswald Chambers, in his timeless devotional book *My Utmost for His Highest,* caused me to recall Mother Teresa and reflect on my own expectations. He said,

> *Notice God's unutterable waste of saints, according to the judgment of the world. God plants His saints in the most useless places. We say—God intends me to be here because I am so useful. Jesus never estimated His life along the line of the greatest use. God puts His saints where they will glorify Him, and we are no judges at all of where that is. (August 10)*

The main point here is that we should be faithful to the task God has given to us rather than worry about whether or not we are achieving the results we think God should be interested in. When we begin thinking that "God is wasting my time and His," we have probably stepped over the line. I spent five and a half years in the laboratory on doctoral experiments in molecular biology, experiments that never accomplished what I had planned. The most frustrating aspect was that these experiments did not result in work that was publishable in the scientific literature, which is the ultimate goal of any scientist. I had a great deal of confidence when I started this difficult research problem that the Lord and I would work it out. Well, we didn't. I never dreamed how much Mother Teresa's words concerning the value of faithfulness over success would be lived out in my own life. It has been a hard, hard lesson. And I don't believe I have a complete answer as to why God chose to deal with me in this way. Scientific publications seemed not just desirable but necessary in my future career; yet God is sovereign and He apparently has other plans. During those years, I learned a great deal about living the Christian life in the midst of difficult circumstances. I can only pray that I will not forget what was so painful to learn.

Conclusion

In summary, orient your studies according to a Christian world view. Your main job as a student is to learn and to develop the skill of asking questions, and to keep the boxing gloves

at home. Pursue excellence and remain faithful to the task to which God has called you, and leave the results to Him.

Suggested Reading

Oswald Chambers. *My Utmost for His Highest.* Westwood, NJ: Barbour and Company, 1963.

Ted Engstrom. *The Pursuit of Excellence.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982.

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Not a Threat: The Contributions of Christianity to Western Society

Rick Wade provides a solid argument for the beneficial contributions of Christianity to Western culture in the areas of science,
human freedom, morality, and healthcare.

What If You'd Never Been Born?

Do you remember this scene in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life?*

GEORGE (cont'd): Look, who are you?

CLARENCE (patiently): I told you, George. I'm your guardian angel. [George, still looking at him, goes up to him and pokes

his arm. It’s flesh.]

GEORGE: Yeah, yeah, I know. You told me that. What else are you? What . . . are you a hypnotist?

CLARENCE: No, of course not.

GEORGE: Well then, why am I seeing all these strange things?

CLARENCE: Don’t you understand, George? It’s because you were not born.

GEORGE: Then if I wasn’t born, who am I?

CLARENCE: You’re nobody. You have no identity. [George rapidly searches his pockets for identification, but without success.]

GEORGE: What do you mean, no identity? My name’s George Bailey.

CLARENCE: There is no George Bailey. You have no papers, no cards, no driver’s license, no 4-F card, no insurance policy . . . (he says these things as George searches for them) [George looks in his watch pocket.]

CLARENCE (cont’d): They’re not there, either.

GEORGE: What?

CLARENCE: Zuzu’s petals. [George feverishly continues to turn his pockets inside out.]

CLARENCE (cont’d): You’ve been given a great gift, George. A chance to see what the world would be like without you.{1}

Do you remember George Bailey’s encounter with Clarence the angel? George didn’t think life was worth living, and it was Clarence’s job to show him he was wrong. To do so, he showed George what Bedford Falls would have been like if George had never been born.

In desperation, George races through town looking for something familiar. After observing him for a little while, Clarence utters this bit of wisdom: “Strange, isn’t it? Each man’s life touches so many other lives, and when he isn’t around he leaves an awful hole, doesn’t he?”{2} Inspired by the plot of *It’s a Wonderful Life,* in 1994 D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe wrote a book titled *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?*{3} The authors determined to show what the world would be like if, like George Bailey, Jesus had never been born.

Christianity has come under attack from many different directions. It is often derided as the great boogeyman of human civilization. It is presented as an oppressive force with no regard for the higher aspirations of humankind. To throw off its shackles is the way of wisdom.

Kennedy quotes Friederich Nietzsche, a nineteenth century philosopher whose ideas continue to have a profound effect on our society. Said Nietzsche: “I condemn Christianity; I bring against the Christian Church the most terrible of all the accusations that an accuser has ever had in his mouth. It is, to me, the greatest of all imaginable corruptions; it seeks to work the ultimate corruption, the worst possible corruption. The Christian Church has left nothing untouched by its depravity; it has turned every value into worthlessness, and every truth into a lie, and every integrity into baseness of soul.”{4}

This article will—we hope¾show just how beneficial Christianity has been, even for its critics. Drawing from Kennedy and Newcombe’s book in addition to other literature, we will examine the impact of Christian beliefs on society. The four areas we’ll consider are science, human freedom, morality, and healthcare. A theme which will run throughout this discussion is the high value Christianity places on human beings. Far from being a source of oppression, the message of Christ serves to heal, set free, and provide protective

boundaries.

Contributions to Science

Perhaps the area in which Christianity has been the most vociferously attacked in this century has been the area of science. Religion and science are thought by many to be like oil and water; the two simply don't mix. Religion is thought to offer superstition while science offers facts.

It would seem, however, that those who make such a charge haven't given much attention to the history of science. In their book, *The Soul of Science,*{5} authors Nancy Pearcey and Charles Thaxton make a case for the essential role Christianity played in the development of science. The authors point out four general ways Christianity has positively influenced its development.{6}

First, Christianity provided important presuppositions of science. The Bible teaches that nature is real, not an illusion. It teaches that is has value and that it is good to work with nature. Historically this was an advance over pagan superstitions because the latter saw nature as something to be worshipped or as something filled with spirits which weren't to be angered. As one theologian wrote, "Nature was thus abruptly desacralized, stripped of many of its arbitrary, unpredictable, and doubtless terrifying aspects."{7}

Also, because it was created by God in an orderly fashion, nature is lawful and can be understood. That is, it follows discernible patterns which can be trusted not to change. "As the creation of a trustworthy God, nature exhibited regularity, dependability, and orderliness. It was intelligible and could be studied. It displayed a knowable order."{8}

Second, Christianity sanctioned science. Science "was justified as a means of alleviating toil and suffering."{9}

With animistic and pantheistic cultures, God and nature were so closely related that man, being a part of nature, was incapable of transcending it, that is, of gaining any real control over it. A Christian worldview, however, gave man the freedom to subject nature to his needs-with limitations, of course-because man relates primarily to God who is over nature. Technology-or science applied-was developed to meet human needs as an expression of our God-given duty to one another. As one historian put it, "the Christian concept of moral obligation played an important role in attracting people to the study of nature."{10}

Third, Christianity provided motives for pursuing scientific knowledge. As scientists learned more about the wonders of the universe, they saw God's glory being displayed.

Fourth, Christianity "played a role in regulating scientific methodology."{11} Previously, the world was thought to work in perfectly rational ways which could be known primarily through logical deduction. But this approach to science didn't work. Planets don't have to orbit in circular patterns as some people concluded using deductive logic; of course, it was discovered by investigation that they didn't. A newer way of understanding God's creation put the emphasis on God's will. Since God's will couldn't be simply deduced through logical reasoning, experimentation and investigation were necessary. This provided a particular theological grounding for empirical science.

The fact is that it was distinctly Christian beliefs which provided the intellectual and moral foundations for the study of nature and for its application through technology. Thus, although Christianity and some scientists or scientific theories might be in opposition, Christianity and science are not.

Contributions to Human Freedom

One of the favorite criticisms of Christianity is that it inhibits freedom. When Christians oppose funding pornography masquerading as art, for example, we're said to be unfairly restricting freedom of expression. When Christians oppose the radical, gender feminism which exalts personal fulfillment over all other social obligations, and which calls for the tearing down of God-given moral structures in favor of "choice" as a moral guide, we're accused of oppression.

The problem is that people now see freedom not as self-determination, but as self-determination unhindered by any outside standard of morality. Some go so far in their zeal for self- expression that they expect others to assist them in the process, such as pornographic artists who expect government funding.

There are at least two general factors which limit or define freedom. One we might call the "rules of the game." The other is our nature.

The concert violinist is able to play a concerto because she knows the "rules of the game." In other words, she knows what the musical notation means. She knows how to produce the right sounds from the violin and when to produce them. She might want the "freedom" to make whatever sounds she wishes in whatever key and whatever beat, but who would want to listen? Similarly, as part of God's universe, we need to operate according to the rules of the game. He knows how life on earth is best lived, so we need to live according to His will and design.

Our nature also structures our freedom. A fish can try to express its freedom by living on dry land, but it won't be free long; it won't be alive long! We, too, are truly free only in so far as we live according to our nature-not our fallen nature, but our nature as created by God. This is

really another way of looking at the "rules of the game" idea. But it's necessary to give it special focus because some of the "freedoms" we desire go against our nature, such as the freedom some want to engage in homosexual activity.

Some people see Christianity as a force which tries to inhibit proper expression of who we are. But it is the idea of helping people attain the freedom to be and do as God intended that has fueled much Christian activity over the years. For example, Christians were actively engaged in the battle against slavery because of their high view of man as made in God's image.{12}

Another example is feminism. Radical feminists complain that Christianity has been an oppressive force over women. But it seems to have escaped their notice that Christianity made significant steps in elevating women above the place they held before Christ came.{13}

While it is true that women have often been truly oppressed throughout history, even by Christian men, it is false that Christianity itself is oppressive toward them. In fact, in an article titled "Women of Renewal: A Statement" published in *First Things*,{14} such noted female scholars as Elizabeth Achtemeier, Roberta Hestenes, Frederica Mathewes-Green, and May Stewart Van Leeuwen stated unequivocally their acceptance of historic Christianity. And it's a sure thing that any of the signatories of this statement would be quite vocal in her opposition to real oppression!

The problem isn't that Christianity is opposed to freedom, but that it acknowledges the laws of our Creator who knows better than we do what is good for us. The doctrines of creation and redemption define for us our nature and our responsibilities to God. His "rules of the game" will always be oppressive to those who seek absolute self-determination. But as we'll see, it is by submitting to God that we make life worth living.

Contributions to Morality

Let's turn our attention to the issue of morality. Christians are often accused of trying to ram their morality down people's throats. In some instances this might accurately describe what some Christians have done. But for the most part, I believe, the criticism follows our simple declaration of what we believe is right and wrong and our participation in the political and social arenas to see such standards codified and enforced.

The question that needs to be answered is whether the high standards of morality taught in Scripture have served society well. Has Christianity served to make individuals and societies better and to provide a better way of life?

In a previous article I wrote briefly about the brutality that characterized Greco-Roman society in Jesus' day.{15} We often hear about the wondrous advances of that society; but do you know about the cruelty? The Roman games, in which "beasts fought men, men fought men; and the vast audience waited hopefully for the sight of death,"{16} reveal the lust for blood. The practice of child exposure shows the low regard for human life the Romans had. Unwanted babies were left to die on trash heaps. Some of these were taken to be slaves or prostitutes.{17} It was distinctly Christian beliefs that brought these practices to an end.

In the era following "the disruption of Charlemagne's great empire", it was the Latin Christian Church which "patiently and persistently labored to combat the forces of disintegration and decay," and "succeeded little by little in restraining violence and in restoring order, justice, and decency."{18}

The Vikings provide an example of how the gospel can positively affect a people group. Vikings were fierce plunderers who terrorized the coastlands of Europe. James

Kennedy says that our word *berserk* comes from their fighting men who were called "berserkers."{19} Gradually the teachings of Christ contributed to major changes in these people. In 1020 A.D., Christianity became law under King Olav. Practices "such as blood sacrifice, black magic, the 'setting out' of infants, slavery and polygamy" became illegal.{20}

In modern times, it was Christians who led the fight in England against slavery.{21} Also, it was the teaching of the Wesleys that was largely responsible for the social changes which prevented the social unrest which might have been expected in the Industrial Revolution.{22}

In an editorial published in the *Chicago Tribune* in 1986 titled "Religious Right Deserves Respect,"{23} Reo Christenson argues that conservative Christians have been vindicated with respect to their concerns about such things as drinking, the sexual revolution, and discipline in schools. He says that "if anybody's values have been vindicated over the last 20 years, it is theirs." He concludes with this comment: "The Religious Right is not always wrong."

To go against God's moral standards is destructive to individuals and societies. In a column which ran in the *Dallas Morning News* following the shootings at Columbine High School,{24} a junior at Texas A&M University asks hard questions of her parents' generation including these: "Why have you neglected to teach us values and morals? Why haven't you lived moral lives that we could model our own after?"{25}

Why indeed! In time, our society will see the folly of its ways by the destruction it is bringing on itself. Let's pray that it happens sooner rather than later.

Contributions to Healthcare

Healthcare is another area where Christianity has made a positive impact on society. Christians have not only been

involved in healthcare; they've often been at the forefront in serving the physical health of people.

Although some early Christians believed that disease came from God, so that trying to cure the sick would be going against God's will, the opposite impulse was also seen in those who saw the practice of medicine as an exercise of Christian charity.{26}

God had already shown His concern for the health of His people through the laws given through Moses. In his book, *The Story of Medicine,* Roberto Margotta says that the Hebrews made an important contribution to medicine by their knowledge of personal hygiene given in the book of Leviticus. In fact, he says, "the steps taken in mediaeval Europe to counteract the spread of 'leprosy' were straight out of the Bible."{27}

Of course, it was Jesus' concern for suffering that provided the primary motivation for Christians to engage in healthcare. In the Middle Ages, for examples, monks provided physical relief to the people around them. Some monasteries became infirmaries. "The best- known of these," says Margotta, "belonged to the Swiss monastery of St Gall which had been founded in 720 by an Irish monk; . . . medicines were made up by the monks themselves from plants grown in the herb garden. Help was always readily available for the sick who came to the doors of the monastery. In time, the monks who devoted themselves to medicine emerged from their retreats and started visiting the sick in their own homes." Monks were often better doctors than their lay counterparts and were in great demand.{28}

Christians played a significant role in the establishment of hospitals. In 325 A.D., the Council of Nicea "decreed that hospitals were to be duly established wherever the Church was established," says James Kennedy.{29} He notes that the hospital built by St. Basil of Caesarea in 370 even treated lepers who previously had been isolated.{30}

In the United States, the early hospitals were "framed and motivated by the responsibilities of Christian stewardship."{31} They were originally established to help the poor sick, but weren't intended to provide long-term care lest they become like the germ- infested almshouses.

A key factor in making long-term medical care possible was the "professionalization of nursing" because of higher standards of sanitation.{32} Before the 16th century, religious motivations were key in providing nursing for the sick. Anne Summers says that the willingness to fracture family ties to serve others, a disciplined lifestyle, and "a sense of heavenly justification," all of which came from Christian beliefs, undergirded ministry to the sick.{33} Even if the early nursing orders didn't achieve their own sanitation goals, "they were, nevertheless, often reaching higher sanitary standards than those previously known to the sick poor."{34}

There is much more that could be told about the contributions of Christianity to society, including the stories of Florence Nightingale, whose nursing school in London began modern nursing, and who saw herself as being in the service of God; or of the establishment of the Red Cross through the zeal of an evangelical Christian; or of the modern missions movement which continues to see Christian medical professionals devote their lives to the needs of the suffering in some of the darkest parts of the world.{35} It is obvious that in the area of medicine, as in a number of others, Christians have made a major contribution. Thus, those who deride Christianity as being detrimental are either tremendously biased in their thinking or are ignorant of history.

Notes

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24. Littleton, Colorado. Two young men killed 12 students and a teacher, and then killed themselves.
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27. Roberto Margotta, *The Story of Medicine,* ed. Paul Lewis (New York: Golden Press, 1968), 36. Referenced in Kennedy, 142.
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29. Kennedy, 145.
30. Ibid., 146. From Margotta, 102.
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32. Kennedy, 148. Quote is from Rosenberg, 8.
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Rousseau: An Interesting Madman

Popular song lyrics often have a way of reflecting what many people think, but rarely articulate. Recently, a song with a catchy tune and lots of airtime verbalized a way of thinking about God that is quite popular. The song, *What God Said* by a group called the Uninvited begins with the lyrics, "I talked to God and God said 'Hey! I've got a lot of things to say; write it down this very day and spread the word in every way.'" This is a remarkably evangelistic idea in this day of absolute tolerance for other people's beliefs. However, this god who has revealed himself to the songwriter doesn't expect much from the listener. According to the first verse we are to floss between each meal, drive with both hands on the wheel, and not be too sexually aggressive on the first date. In the second verse god wants us to ride bikes more, feed the birds, and clean up after our pets.

The third verse gets a little more interesting. God supposedly reveals that humans killed his only son and that his creation is undone, but that he can't help everyone. These obvious references to the incarnation of Christ and the Fall of Adam set up the listener for the solution to mankind's situation which, according to the song, is to "start with the basics—just be nice and see if that makes things all right." The chorus drives home this theology by repeating often that "I talked to God and God said nothing special, I talked to God and God said nothing that we shouldn't already know, shouldn't already know."

This idea, namely that any revelation from God would consist primarily of common sense notions, is a product of the Enlightenment and found an extraordinary voice in the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau argued that all one needs to know about God has been revealed in nature or in

one's own conscience. Rousseau is often called the father of the French revolution, a movement that exalted the worship of reason and attempted to purge the clergy and Christianity from French culture. Although Rousseau wasn't around for the bloodshed of the revolution itself, his idea of a natural theology helped to provide a framework for rejecting special revelation and the organized church.

Few people in history have caused such a wide spectrum of responses to their ideas. At his death, Rousseau's burial site became a place of pilgrimage. George Sand referred to him as "Saint Rousseau," Shelly called him a "sublime genius," and Schiller, a "Christ-like soul for whom only Heaven's angels are fit company."{1} However, others had a different perspective. His one and only true love, Sophie d'Houdetot, referred to him as an "interesting madman." Diderot, a long time acquaintance, summed him up as "deceitful, vain as Satan, ungrateful, cruel, hypocritical and full of malice."{2} In addition to anything else that might be said about Rousseau, he was at least an expert at being a celebrity. He was a masterful self-promoter who knew how to violate public norms just enough to stay in the public eye.

Interestingly enough, Rousseau's ideas have actually had greater and longer impact outside of France. Two centuries later, his natural theology plays a significant role in determining our society's view of human nature as well as how we educate our children. Thus it is important to consider the thoughts of Rousseau and see how they impact our culture today, especially in the realm of education.

Rousseau's Natural Theology

To begin our examination of the thoughts of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his impact on our view of human nature and education, we will turn our attention to the foundational thoughts of his natural theology.

Rousseau often claims in his writings that all he seeks is the truth, and he is very confident that he knows it when he sees it. Being a child of the Enlightenment, Rousseau begins with the Cartesian assumption that he exists and that the universe is real. He then decides that the first cause of all activity is a will, rather than matter itself. He states, "I believe therefore that a will moves the universe and animates nature. This is my first dogma, or my first article of faith."{3} He then argues that this "will" that moves matter is also intelligent. Finally, Rousseau writes that "This 'being' which wills and is powerful, this being active in itself, this being, whatever it may be, which moves the universe and orders all things, I call *God*."{4} So far, so good, but according to Rousseau, to guess the purpose of this being or to ask questions beyond immediate necessity would be foolish and harmful. Rousseau writes "But as soon as I want to contemplate Him in Himself, as soon as I want to find out where He is, what He is, what His substance is, He escapes me, and my clouded mind no longer perceives anything."{5}

The problem with Rousseau's view of God is that we can know so little of Him. Rousseau rejects special revelation and argues that it is only by observing nature and looking inward that we can perceive anything at all about the Creator. Rousseau perceives from nature that the earth was made for humans and that humanity is to have dominion over it. He also argues that humanity will naturally worship the Creator, stating, "I do not need to be taught this worship; it is dictated to me by nature itself."{6} In Rousseau's opinion, to seek any other source than nature for how to worship God would be to seek man's opinion and authority, both of which are rejected as destructive.

Rousseau believes that humans are autonomous creatures, and that humanity is free to do evil, but that doing evil detracts from satisfaction with oneself. Rousseau thanks God for making him in His image so that he can be free, good, and happy like

God.{7} Death is merely the remedy of the evils that we do. As he puts it, “nature did not want you to suffer forever.”{8}

Rousseau is clear about the source of evil. He writes, “Man, seek the author of evil no longer. It is yourself. No evil exists other than that which you do or suffer, and both come to you from yourself. . . .Take away the work of man, and everything is good.”{9} It is reason that will lead us to the “good.” A divine instinct has been placed in our conscience that allows us to judge what is good and bad. The question remains that if each person possesses this divine instinct to know the good, why do so many not follow it? Rousseau’s answer is that our conscience speaks to us in “nature’s voice” and that our education in civil man’s prejudices causes us to forget how to hear it.{10} So the battle against evil is not a spiritual one, but one of educational methods and content.

Although Rousseau thought he was saving God from the rationalists, mankind is left to discern good and evil with only nature as its measuring rod, and education as its savior.

A Philosophy of Education

Whether you agree with his ideas or not, Rousseau was an intellectual force of such magnitude that his ideas still impact our thinking about human nature and the educational process two centuries later. His work *Emile* compares to Plato’s *Republic* in its remarkable breadth. Not only does the book describe a pedagogical method for training children to become practically perfect adults, but he also builds in it an impressive philosophical foundation for his educational goals. *Emile* is a very detailed account of how Rousseau would raise a young lad (Emile) to adulthood, as well as a description of the perfect wife for his charge. Along the way, Rousseau proposes his natural theology which finds ardent followers all over the world today.

Although *Emile* was written in the suburbs of Paris, Rousseau's greatest impact on educational practice has actually been outside of France.{11} French educators have been decidedly non-Romantic when it comes to early childhood education. Rousseau had a great deal of influence on the inventor of the Kindergarten, Friedrich Froebel, as well as the educational Romantics Johann Pestalozzi and Johann Herbart. These three educators' names are engraved on the Horace Mann building on the campus of Teachers College, Columbia University. Columbia has been, and continues to be, at the center of educational reform in America, and happens to have been the home of John Dewey, America's premier progressive thinker and educational philosopher. Dewey and William Heard Kilpatrick further secularized and applied the thinking of Froebel, Pestalozzi, and Herbart, and thus Rousseau.

The common bond that connects these educators is a Romantic view of human nature. Besides a general faith in the goodness of all humanity, there are two other Romantic fallacies that are particularly dangerous when carried to extremes. The first is what is called the doctrine of developmentalism, or natural tempo, which states that bookish knowledge should not be introduced at an early age.{12} Second is the notion of holistic learning, which holds that natural or lifelike, thematic methods of instruction are always superior.{13} Both ideas tend to be anti-fact oriented and regard the systematic instruction of any material at an early age harmful. This has had a profound effect on how we teach reading in this country. The ongoing battle between whole- language methods and the use of systematic phonics centers on this issue. When the Romantic view prevails, which it often does in our elementary schools, systematic phonics disappears.

Rousseau's theology and educational methods are tightly bound together. He argues against the biblical view that humanity is fallen and needs a redeemer. He believes that our reason and intellect are fully capable of discerning what is right and

wrong without the need of special revelation or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As a result, Rousseau argues that a proper education is man's only hope for knowing what limited truth is available.

Rousseau and Childhood Education

An interesting aspect of Rousseau's child-raising techniques is his reliance on *things* to constrain and train a child rather than people. Rousseau rightfully asserts that education begins at birth, a very modern concept. However, in his mind early education should consist mainly of allowing as much freedom as possible for the child. Rebellion against people is to be avoided at all costs because it could cause an early end to a student's education and result in a wicked child. He puts it this way: "As long as children find resistance only in things and never in wills, they will become neither rebellious nor irascible and will preserve their health better."{14} Rousseau believed that a teacher or parent should never lecture or sermonize. Experience, interaction with things, is a far more effective teacher. This dependence on experience is at the core of modern progressive education as well.

As a result, Rousseau was remarkably hostile towards books and traditional education's dependency on them. From the very beginning of *Emile,* he is adamant that books should play little or no part in the young man's education. He claims that, "I take away the instruments of their greatest misery—that is books. Reading is the plague of childhood and almost the only occupation we know how to give it. At twelve, Emile will hardly know what a book is."{15} At one point Rousseau simply says, "I hate books. They only teach one to talk about what one does not know."{16}

A corollary aspect of this negative view of books is Rousseau's belief that children should never be forced to memorize anything. He even suggests that an effort be made to

keep their vocabulary simple prior to their ability to read. This antagonism towards books and facts fits well with Rousseau's notion that people "always try to teach children what they would learn much better by themselves."{17}

He also believed that children should never memorize what they can not put to immediate use. Rousseau acknowledged that children memorize easily, but felt that they are incapable of judgment and do not have what he calls true memory. He argued that children are unable to learn two languages prior to the age of twelve, a belief that has been refuted by recent research.

Prior to that age, Emile is allowed to read only one book, *Robinson Crusoe*. Why *Crusoe*? Because Rousseau wants Emile to see himself as Crusoe, totally dependent upon himself for all of his needs. Emile is to imitate Crusoe's experience, allowing necessity to determine what needs to be learned and accomplished. Rousseau's hostility towards books and facts continues to impact educational theory today. There is a strong and growing sentiment in our elementary schools to remove the shackles of book knowledge and memorization and to replace them with something called the "tool" model of learning.

Rousseau's Philosophy and Modern "Tools"

Rousseau argued against too much bookish knowledge and for natural experiences to inform young minds. Today, something called the "tool" model carries on this tradition. It is argued that knowledge is increasing so rapidly that spending time to stockpile it or to study it in books results in information that is soon outdated. We need to give our students the "tools" of learning, and then they can find the requisite facts, as they become necessary to their experience.

Two important assumptions are foundational to this argument.

First, that the “tools” of learning can be acquired in a content neutral environment without referring to specific information or facts. And secondly, that an extremely child-centered, experience driven curriculum is always superior to a direct instruction, content oriented approach.

The “tool” model argues that “love of learning” and “critical thinking skills” are more important to understanding, let’s say chemistry, than are the facts about chemistry itself. Some argue that facts would only slow them down. Unfortunately, research in the real world does not support this view of learning. Citing numerous studies, E.D. Hirsch contends that learning new ideas is built upon previously acquired knowledge. He calls this database of information “intellectual capital” and just as it takes money to make money, a knowledge framework is necessary to incorporate new knowledge. To stress “critical thinking” prior to the acquisition of knowledge actually reduces a child’s capacity to think critically.{18} Students who lack intellectual capital must go through a strenuous process just to catch up with what well-educated children already know. If children attempt to do algebra without knowing their multiplication tables, they spend a large amount of time and energy doing simple calculations. This distracts and frustrates children and makes learning higher math much more difficult. The same could be said for history students who never learn names and dates.

The second idea is that students should learn via natural experience within a distinctly passive curriculum. While there is wisdom in letting nature set as many of the limits as possible for a child—experience is probably the most powerful teaching method—Rousseau and progressive educational theory go too far in asserting that a teacher should never preach or sermonize to a child. At an early age, children can learn from verbal instruction, especially if it occurs along with significant learning experiences. In fact, certain kinds of learning often contradict one’s experience. The teaching of

morality and democratic behavior involves teaching principles that cannot be experienced immediately, and virtually everything that parents or teachers tell children about sexual behavior has religious foundations based on assumptions about human nature.

The bottom line seems to be that if higher math, morality, and civilized behavior could be learned from simply interacting with nature, Rousseau's system would be more appealing. However, his version of the naturalistic fallacy—assuming that everything that is natural is right—would not serve our students well. Rousseau's observations about the student-teacher relationship fall short first because of his overly optimistic view of human nature and because we believe that there is truth to convey to the next generation that cannot be experienced within nature alone.

Notes

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4. Ibid., 277.
5. Ibid.
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7. Ibid., 281.
8. Ibid.
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16. Ibid., 184.

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Faith and Reason

Are faith and reason friends or foes? Does faith in Christ require checking your brain at the door? This essay presents 3 positions on faith and reason, from Tertullian, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

Friends or Foes?

One of the more intriguing aspects of the *Indiana Jones* film trilogy is its focus on religious themes. In the third installment, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Indy is involved in a search for the Holy Grail, the cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper. As the film reaches its climax, Indy must go through three tests in order to reach the Grail. After overcoming the first two obstacles, the final test required Indy to "step out" in faith, even though he was on one side of a cavern that appeared to be thirty feet across, without any visible way to reach the other side. Following the instructions from his father's diary, Indy stepped into the void, and to his amazement, his foot came down on solid ground. It turned out that there was a bridge across the cavern but because the rocky texture of the bridge perfectly matched the facing wall of the cavern, the bridge was invisible from Indy's perspective.

According to this scene, and enforced by general opinion, religious faith and human reason are opposites. Indiana Jones simply could not understand how it was possible to reach the

Grail without any visible means to do so; the implication is that his decision to step out was a forfeiture of his intellect. This idea that Christian faith is a surrender of our reasoning abilities is a common one in contemporary culture.

For many Christians, the scene that we've been discussing is a disturbing one. On the one hand, it is a moment of triumph. It seems to lend credence to the importance of religious faith. Then again, it portrays faith as being a mindless exercise. Indiana Jones is an intellectual college professor who is interested in the Grail primarily as an historical artifact. His leap of faith goes against everything he stands for. This reveals a tension that has existed in the church for centuries. Is faith in Christ a surrender of the intellect? Is godly wisdom in complete opposition to what Scripture calls "worldly wisdom"? There are many who question whether the Christian should even expose himself to teaching that is not consistent with the Word of God. For example, it is a frightening prospect for many Christian parents to consider sending their children off to a secular college where the Christian faith is often ridiculed or condemned. Still others want their children to be challenged by a secular education. They consider it part of the Christian's missionary mandate to confront secular culture with their very presence. In their mind, the tendency of Christians to separate themselves from secular environments leads to an isolationist mentality that fails to reach the lost for Christ.

As we examine the relationship of faith and reason for the Christian in this discussion, there are several questions to keep in mind. Is there such a thing as Christian philosophy, or is philosophy primarily opposed to theology? Should believers read literature that is not explicitly religious, or should we only read Christian literature? What about secular music or films? How we view the relationship between faith and reason will reveal itself in how we answer these questions. We

will try to shed light on these issues as we examine three distinctive positions that have been prominent throughout church history.

Earlier, we mentioned that in the popular film, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Indy had to make a literal leap of faith. When he stepped into the "void" in order to reach the Grail, he was unable to see the pathway to the Grail, but his "blind faith" was rewarded when it turned out that the pathway was hidden by an optical illusion. He did what most people would consider suicidal. But is this a true picture of religious faith? Is faith or religious belief irrational? In the next section we will look at the answer of Tertullian, a Christian apologist from the early church who has been accused of saying this very thing.

Tertullian's Dilemma

Tertullian was a lawyer who converted to Christ sometime around the year A.D. 197. It was he who asked the famous questions, "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem? What have heretics to do with Christians?" Tertullian's major distinction was to create a metaphorical contrast between Athens, the home of pagan Greek philosophy, and Jerusalem, the central locale of divine revelation. Tertullian was convinced that the Christian faith and human wisdom were polar opposites. It was his conviction that God had revealed His plan of salvation in Scripture alone; to mix Scripture with the philosophy of pagans could only distort God's message. But does this mean that Tertullian believed that human wisdom is irrational? Let's look at the evidence.

Contemporary theologians who deny the rationality of Christian belief often quote Tertullian's statement that the crucifixion should be believed because it is absurd. He also said the fact of the Resurrection is certain because it is impossible. But these statements must be understood from the context of Tertullian's own life and work. He himself utilized elements

of Greek philosophy and logic that he believed to be compatible with Christian belief. The major emphasis in his writings was to contrast the coherence of Christianity with the inconsistency of his heretical opponents. When he does speak of the absurdity of Christian belief, he is actually referring to the unlikelihood that any human mind could conceive of God's redemptive plan. Like C. S. Lewis, he was convinced of the truth of the gospel by the very fact that no human being could possibly concoct such a story as is presented in Scripture. Certainly the Jews could not; the claim of Christ that He was God in the flesh was blasphemous to many of them. Nor could the Greeks create such a story; for them, the material world was inferior to the divine realm. God could not possibly assume human flesh in their philosophical reasoning. But for Tertullian, this was compelling evidence that the gospel is true! The religious and philosophical systems contemporary with the advent of Christianity would have prevented any human from simply making up such a fantastic tale. He concluded that the gospel had to originate in the mind of God himself.

To conclude, let's put Tertullian in the shoes of Indiana Jones. What would Tertullian do if faced with the prospect of crossing over the invisible bridge? My guess is that he would see such a step as consistent with God's way of directing His people. The key to understanding Tertullian's view of faith and reason is to consider what the unbeliever would think. Since most unbelievers would consider what Indiana Jones did as unreasonable, he would probably consider such an attitude as compelling proof that the person of faith must take such a step.

Tertullian, the early church apologist, was convinced that belief in the Scripture was the basis for the Christian life. He also considered Greek philosophy to be the basis for heresy in the Church. Unfortunately, he seemed to assume that all Christians intuitively understood Scripture in the same way.

His motto might have been “God said it, I believe it, that settles it.” But it is one thing to believe; it is another thing to understand what we believe. Next, we will consider the ideas of Augustine, who is known by the phrase “faith seeking understanding.”

Augustine’s Solution

Augustine, who died in the year A.D. 430, recounts in his famous *Confessions* how as a young man he was constantly seeking for a philosophy that would be consistent and guide him to truth. At one point he abandoned any hope in his search and became a skeptic. But at the age of 33, Augustine came to accept the truth of the gospel. He recognized that the speculation of Greek philosophy was incapable in itself of bringing him to salvation. But, on the other hand, he could see that it had prepared him to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and laid the groundwork by which he came to accept the claims of Christ. Augustine believed that the Scripture was the authoritative Word of God, but in interpreting difficult scriptural concepts such as the Trinity, he found it necessary to utilize his own philosophical training to explain the teaching of Scripture.

Whereas Tertullian considered faith in Christ’s revelation of himself to be the only thing worth knowing, Augustine emphasized both the priority of faith and its incompleteness without the help of reason. One of his great insights is that faith is the foundation for all knowledge. Christians are often ridiculed for their faith, as if “faith” and “gullibility” were synonyms. But Augustine reminds us that each of us must trust some authority when making any truth claim, and that “faith” and “trust” *are* synonyms.

Consider a few examples: Christians and non-Christians alike agree that water freezes at zero degrees centigrade. However, I myself have never performed that experiment; I simply trust what reliable scientific studies have confirmed. Likewise, no

one living today was present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, but all Americans celebrate that day as having been July 4, 1776. We trust the witness of those who were actually there. In other words, our knowledge *begins* with faith in some authority, just as Augustine emphasized.

But Augustine distinguished himself from Tertullian by acknowledging that philosophy does have a role in how the Christian understands God's revelation. Because humanity is made in the image of God, we are all capable of knowing truth. Augustine found in pagan philosophy helpful ideas that enabled him to elaborate God's Word. But it must be emphasized that his interest in pagan philosophy was not an end it itself, but rather a tool by which to grasp more deeply the meaning of Scripture.

What would Augustine have done if he had faced the choice of Indiana Jones? First, he would have needed scriptural support for such a choice. Secondly, he would have considered the logic of such a decision. Whereas Tertullian considered God's mind to be contrary to the philosophies of man, Augustine believed God created us to think His thoughts after Him. His was a reasonable faith. This is why his motto has been described as "faith seeking understanding."

The Synthesis of Thomas Aquinas

Now we turn to look at the teaching of the twelfth-century scholar Thomas Aquinas, whose own slogan has been called, "I understand in order to believe."

A good way to get a handle on Thomas's position is to recognize that his own motto is a reversal of Augustine's *faith seeking understanding*. It was Augustine who first explained the concept of *original sin*, which states that we are alienated from God at birth because we have inherited a sin nature from Adam. Thomas agreed that our moral conformity to God had been lost, but he believed that sin had not

completely corrupted our intellect. Thomas believed, therefore, that we could come to a basic knowledge of God without any special revelation. This is not to say that Thomas did not hold a high view of Scripture. Scripture was authoritative for Thomas. But he seemed to believe that divine revelation is a fuller explanation of what we are able to know about God on our own. For example, his attempts to prove the existence of God were based on the aftereffects of God's action in the world, such as the creation, rather than in the sure Word of Scripture. In contrast to Tertullian and Augustine, who placed faith in God's revelation of Christ as the foundation for knowledge, Thomas started with human reason and philosophy. His hope was to show that even people who reject the Scripture could come to believe in God through the use of their intellects. But the Scriptures were necessary since the human mind cannot even conceive of concepts such as the Trinity.

Thomas lived at a time when most of Aristotle's philosophy was first being introduced into the Latin language. This created quite a stir in the universities of the day. Up until that time, Augustine's emphasis on an education centered on Scripture was the dominant view. Thomas himself was educated in the tradition of Augustine, but he appreciated the philosophy of Aristotle as a witness to the truth. He found Aristotle to be more balanced in his approach to philosophy than Augustine had been. Whereas Augustine emphasized the eternal realm in his own philosophy, Aristotle's philosophy confirmed the importance of the natural world as well and assisted Thomas in his effort to create a comprehensive Christian philosophy which recognized that the material world was important because it had been created by God and was the arena in which His redemptive plan was to be fulfilled. Prior to Thomas, the tendency had been to downplay the physical world as greatly inferior to the spiritual world.

If we were to place Thomas in the shoes of Indiana Jones, it

is likely that he would have stepped out as well. But he would have arrived at the decision for different reasons than Tertullian or Augustine. Because of his emphasis on the thinking ability of the human race and his emphasis on physical reality, he might have knelt down on the ground and felt for the hidden pathway before actually stepping out. Since he leaned toward utilizing reason and his own understanding to discover the bridge, he would not have depended solely on revelation to cross over like the others.

We will conclude our series as we evaluate the implications of the three different views of faith and reason that we have been examining in this discussion.

Implications

We have been examining three distinctive positions on the question of faith and reason. Basically, we have been attempting to discern whether or not human reason, as expressed in pagan philosophy, is a help or a hindrance to Christian theology.

The first position we addressed was that of Tertullian, who viewed the combination of divine revelation and Greek philosophy as the root of all false teaching in the church. We then showed that even though Augustine agreed with Tertullian that faith in divine revelation is primary for the Christian, they differed in that Tertullian emphasized *belief in* the Scriptures, while Augustine focused on the *understanding* of what one believes. That is why he was willing to incorporate pagan philosophy to help further his understanding of Christian theology. He was delighted to find pagans whose philosophy, though not Christian in and of itself, was in some way compatible with Christianity.

The third and final position we examined was that of Thomas Aquinas, who believed that all people could have a basic knowledge of God purely through natural reason. He did not

agree with Augustine that the human mind had been totally corrupted by sin at the Fall. This belief led to his elevation of the power of the mind and his appreciation of philosophy. Theology is the higher form of wisdom, but it needs the tools of science and philosophy in order to practice its own trade. Theology learns from philosophy, because ultimately theology is a human task.

How we view the relationship between faith and reason can have powerful implications for how the Christian engages society with the gospel. One of the problems with the apologetics of Tertullian is that he seemed to view all that opposed him to be enemies of the gospel, rather than as potential converts. This is in stark contrast to the behavior of the Apostle Paul in Acts 17, when he proclaimed the gospel among the Greeks at Mars Hill. He did not condemn them for their initial failure to accept the Resurrection. Instead, he attempted to reach common ground with them by quoting some of their own philosophers, picking out isolated statements from pagan thinkers which were consistent with Scripture, while still maintaining the absolute truth of Scripture as his foundation. In this way, he was able to gain a hearing with some of his listeners. But this presupposes some familiarity with pagan thought. This familiarity made Paul a more effective witness to his audience.

Paul’s attitude toward pagan philosophy seems to be consistent with those of Augustine and Aquinas. All three felt it was beneficial to know what the non-believer thought in order to communicate the gospel. How then can believers apply this attitude today without compromising their values? Perhaps it involves Christian parents listening with their children to the music they enjoy, and then constructively discussing its message. After all, many contemporary musicians utilize their music to proclaim their own philosophies of life. Or maybe it will mean watching a popular movie that has taken the country by storm, with the goal of discerning its importance to the

average viewer. Rather than criticizing literature, philosophy, film, or music that is not explicitly Christian, we may find that by attempting to appreciate their value or worth, no matter how meager, we may be better able to dialogue with, and confront, our post-Christian culture with the claims of Christ.

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Blaise Pascal: An Apologist for Our Times – A Defense of Christianity Ringing True Today

Rick Wade examines the contemporary relevance of the apologetics of Blaise Pascal, a 17th century mathematician, scientist, inventor, and Christian apologist.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

One of the tasks of Christian apologetics is to serve as a tool for evangelism. It is very easy, however, to stay in the realm of ideas and never confront unbelievers with the necessity of putting their faith in Christ.

One apologist who was not guilty of this was Blaise Pascal, a seventeenth-century mathematician, scientist, inventor and Christian apologist. Christ and the need for redemption through Him were central to Pascal's apologetics.

There was another feature of Pascal's thought that was, and remains, rare in apologetics: his understanding of the human

condition as both created and fallen, and his use of that understanding as a point of contact with unbelievers.

Peter Kreeft, a modern day Christian philosopher and apologist, says that Pascal is a man for *our* day. "Pascal," he says, "is three centuries ahead of his time. He addresses his apologetic to modern pagans, sophisticated skeptics, comfortable members of the new secular intelligentsia. He is the first to realize the new dechristianized, desacramentalized world and to address it. He belongs to us. . . . Pascal is our prophet. No one after this seventeenth-century man has so accurately described our twentieth-century mind."{1}

Pascal was born June 19, 1623 in Clermont, France, and moved to Paris in 1631. His mother died when he was three, and he was raised by his father, a respected mathematician, who personally directed his education.

Young Blaise took after his father in mathematics. In 1640, at age 16, he published an essay on the sections of a cone which was much praised.{2} Between 1642 and 1644 Pascal developed a calculating machine for his father to use in his tax computations. Later, he "invented the syringe, refined Torricelli's barometer, and created the hydraulic press, an instrument based upon the principles which came to be known as Pascal's law" of pressure.{3} He did important work on the problem of the vacuum, and he is also known for his work on the calculus of probabilities.

Although a Catholic in belief and practice, after the death of his father and the entrance of his younger sister into a convent, Pascal entered a very worldly phase of his life. Things changed, however, on the night of November 23, 1654, when he underwent a remarkable conversion experience which changed the course of his life. He joined a community of scholars in Port-Royal, France, who were known as Jansenists. Although he participated in the prayers and work of the group,

he didn't become a full- fledged member himself. However, he assisted them in a serious controversy with the Jesuits, and some of his writings on their behalf are considered "a monument in the evolution of French prose" by historians of the language.{4}

In 1657 and 1658 Pascal wrote notes on apologetics which he intended to organize into a book. These notes were published after his death as the *Pensees*, which means "thoughts" in French. It is this collection of writings which has established Pascal in Christian apologetics. This book is still available today in several different versions.{5}

Pascal was a rather sickly young man, and in the latter part of his short life he suffered from severe pain. On August 19, 1662, at the age of 39, Pascal died. His last words were "May God never abandon me!"{6}

The Human Condition

To properly understand Pascal's apologetics, it's important to recognize his motive. Pascal wasn't interested in defending Christianity as a system of belief; his interest was evangelistic. He wanted to persuade people to believe in Jesus. When apologetics has evangelism as its primary goal, it has to take into account the condition of the people being addressed. For Pascal the human condition was the starting point and point of contact for apologetics.

In his analysis of man, Pascal focuses on two very contradictory sides of fallen human nature. Man is both noble and wretched. Noble, because he is created in God's image; wretched, because he is fallen and alienated from God. In one of his more passionate notes, Pascal says this:

> What kind of freak is man! What a novelty he is, how absurd he is, how chaotic and what a mass of contradictions, and yet what a prodigy! He is judge of all things, yet a feeble

> worm. He is repository of truth, and yet sinks into such doubt and error. He is the glory and the scum of the universe![7]

Furthermore, Pascal says, we know that we are wretched. But it is this very knowledge that shows our greatness.

Pascal says it's important to have a right understanding of ourselves. He says "it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own wretchedness, and to know his own wretchedness without knowing the Redeemer who can free him from it." Thus, our message must be that "there is a God whom men can know, and that there is a corruption in their nature which renders them unworthy of Him."[8] This prepares the unbeliever to hear about the Redeemer who reconciles the sinner with the Creator.

Pascal says that people know deep down that there is a problem, but we resist slowing down long enough to think about it. He says:

Rick Wade examines the contemporary relevance of the apologetics of Blaise Pascal, a 17th century mathematician, scientist, inventor, and Christian apologist.Man finds nothing so intolerable as to be in a state of complete rest, without passions, without occupation, without diversion, without effort. Then he faces his nullity, loneliness, inadequacy, dependence, helplessness, emptiness. And at once there wells up from the depths of his soul boredom, gloom, depression, chagrin, resentment, despair.[9]

Pascal says there are two ways people avoid thinking about such matters: diversion and indifference. Regarding diversion, he says we fill up our time with relatively useless activities simply to avoid facing the truth of our wretchedness. "The natural misfortune of our mortality and weakness is so miserable," he says, "that nothing can console us when we really think about it. . . . The only good thing for man, therefore, is to be diverted so that he will stop thinking

about his circumstances." Business, gambling, and entertainment are examples of things which keep us busy in this way.{10}

The other response to our condition is indifference. The most important question we can ask is What happens after death? Life is but a few short years, and death is forever. Our state after death should be of paramount importance, shouldn't it? But the attitude people take is this:
Just as I doRick Wade examines the contemporary relevance of the apologetics of Blaise Pascal, a 17th century mathematician, scientist, inventor, and Christian apologist. not know where I came from, so I do not know where I am going. All I know is that when I leave this world I shall fall forever into oblivion, or into the hands of an angry God, without knowing which of the two will be my lot for eternity. Such is my state of mind, full of weakness and uncertainty. The only conclusion I can draw from all this is that I must pass my days without a thought of trying to find out what is going to happen to me.{11}

Pascal is appalled that people think this way, and he wants to shake people out of their stupor and make them think about eternity. Thus, the condition of man is his starting point for moving people toward a genuine knowledge of God.

Knowledge of the Heart

Pascal lived in the age of the rise of rationalism. Revelation had fallen on hard times; man's reason was now the final source for truth. In the realm of religious belief many people exalted reason and adopted a deistic view of God. Some, however, became skeptics. They doubted the competence of both revelation and reason.

Although Pascal couldn't side with the skeptics, neither would he go the way of the rationalists. Instead of arguing that revelation was a better source of truth than reason, he

focused on the limitations of reason itself. (I should stop here to note that by *reason* Pascal meant the reasoning process. He did not deny the true powers of reason; he was, after all, a scientist and mathematician.) Although the advances in science increased man's knowledge, it also made people aware of how little they knew. Thus, through our reason we realize that reason itself has limits. "Reason's last step," Pascal said, "is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it."{12} Our knowledge is somewhere between certainty and complete ignorance, Pascal believed.{13} The bottom line is that we need to know when to affirm something as true, when to doubt, and when to submit to authority.{14}

Besides the problem of our limited knowledge, Pascal also noted how our reason is easily distracted by our senses and hindered by our passions.{15} "The two so-called principles of truth*reason and the senses*are not only not genuine but are engaged in mutual deception. Through false appearances the senses deceive reason. And just as they trick the soul, they are in turn tricked by it. It takes its revenge. The senses are influenced by the passions which produce false impressions."{16} Things sometimes appear to our senses other than they really are, such as the way a stick appears bent when put in water. Our emotions or passions also influence how we think about things. And our imagination, which Pascal says is our dominant faculty{17}, often has precedence over our reason. A bridge suspended high over a ravine might be wide enough and sturdy enough, but our imagination sees us surely falling off.

So, our finiteness, our senses, our passions, and our imagination can adversely influence our powers of reason. But Pascal believed that people really *do* know some things to be true even if they cannot account for it rationally. Such knowledge comes through another channel, namely, the heart.

This brings us to what is perhaps the best known quotation of

Pascal: “The heart has its reasons which reason does not know.”{18} In other words, there are times that we know something is true but we did not come to that knowledge through logical reasoning, neither can we give a logical argument to support that belief.

For Pascal, the heart is “the `intuitive’ mind” rather than “the `geometrical’ (calculating, reasoning) mind.”{19} For example, we know when we aren’t dreaming. But we can’t prove it rationally. However, this only proves that our reason has weaknesses; it does not prove that our knowledge is completely uncertain. Furthermore, our knowledge of such first principles as space, time, motion, and number is certain even though known by the heart and not arrived at by reason. In fact, reason bases its arguments on such knowledge.{20} Knowledge of the heart and knowledge of reason might be arrived at in different ways, but they are both valid. And neither can demand that knowledge coming through the other should submit to its own dictates.

The Knowledge of God

If reason is limited in its understanding of the natural order, knowledge of God can be especially troublesome. “If natural things are beyond [reason],” Pascal said, “what are we to say about supernatural things?”{21}

There are several factors which hinder our knowledge of God. As noted before, we are limited by our finitude. How can the finite understand the infinite?{22} Another problem is that we cannot see clearly because we are in the darkness of sin. Our will is turned away from God, and our reasoning abilities are also adversely affected.

There is another significant limitation on our knowledge of God. Referring to Isaiah 8:17 and 45:15{23}, Pascal says that as a result of our sin God deliberately hides Himself (“hides” in the sense that He doesn’t speak}. One reason He does this

is to test our will. Pascal says, “God wishes to move the will rather than the mind. Perfect clarity would help the mind and harm the will.” God wants to “humble [our] pride.”{24}

But God doesn’t remain completely hidden; He is both hidden and revealed. “If there were no obscurity,” Pascal says, “man would not feel his corruption: if there were no light man could not hope for a cure.”{25}

God not only hides Himself to test our will; He also does it so that we can only come to Him through Christ, not by working through some logical proofs. “God is a hidden God,” says Pascal, ” and . . . since nature was corrupted [God] has left men to their blindness, from which they can escape only through Jesus Christ, without whom all communication with God is broken off. *Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whosoever the Son will reveal him*.”{26} Pascal’s apologetic is decidedly Christocentric. True knowledge of God isn’t mere intellectual assent to the reality of a divine being. It *must* include a knowledge of Christ through whom God revealed Himself. He says:

> All who have claimed to know God and to prove his existence without Jesus Christ have done so ineffectively. . . . Apart from him, and without Scripture, without original sin, without the necessary Mediator who was promised and who came, it is impossible to prove absolutely that God exists, or to teach sound doctrine and sound morality. But through and in Jesus Christ we can prove God’s existence, and teach both doctrine and morality.{27}

If we do not know Christ, we cannot understand God as the judge and the redeemer of sinners. It is a limited knowledge that doesn’t do any good. As Pascal says, “That is why I am not trying to prove naturally the existence of God, or indeed the Trinity, or the immortality of the soul or anything of that kind. This is not just because I do not feel competent to find natural arguments that will convince obdurate atheists,

but because such knowledge, without Christ, is useless and empty." A person with this knowledge has not "made much progress toward his salvation."{28} What Pascal wants to avoid is proclaiming a deistic God who stands remote and expects from us only that we live good, moral lives. Deism needs no redeemer.

But even in Christ, God has not revealed Himself so overwhelmingly that people cannot refuse to believe. In the last days God will be revealed in a way that everyone will have to acknowledge Him. In Christ, however, God was still hidden enough that people who didn't want what was good would not have it forced upon them. Thus, "there is enough light for those who desire only to see, and enough darkness for those of a contrary disposition."{29}

There is still one more issue which is central to Pascal's thinking about the knowledge of God. He says that no one can come to know God apart from faith. This is a theme of central importance for Pascal; it clearly sets him apart from other apologists of his day. Faith is the knowledge of the heart that only God gives. "It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason," says Pascal. "That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason."{30} "By faith we know he exists," he says.{31} "Faith is different from proof. One is human and the other a gift of God. . . . This is the faith that God himself puts into our hearts. . . ."{32} Pascal continues, "We shall never believe with an effective belief and faith unless God inclines our hearts. Then we shall believe as soon as he inclines them."{33}

To emphasize the centrality of heart knowledge in Pascal's thinking, I deliberately left off the end of one of the sentences above. Describing the faith God gives, Pascal said, "This is the faith that God himself puts into our hearts, often using proof as the instrument."{34}

This is rather confusing. Pascal says non-believers are in

darkness, so proofs will only find obscurity.{35} He notes that “no writer within the canon [of Scripture] has ever used nature to prove the existence of God. They all try to help people believe in him.”{36} He also expresses astonishment at Christians who begin their defense by making a case for the existence of God.

> Their enterprise would cause me no surprise if they were addressing the arguments to the faithful, for those with living faith in their hearts can certainly see at once that everything which exists is entirely the work of the God they worship. But for those in whom this light has gone out and in who we are trying to rekindle it, people deprived of faith and grace, . . . to tell them, I say, that they have only to look at the least thing around them and they will see in it God plainly revealed; to give them no other proof of this great and weighty matter than the course of the moon and the planets; to claim to have completed the proof with such an argument; this is giving them cause to think that the proofs of our religion are indeed feeble. . . . This is not how Scripture speaks, with its better knowledge of the things of God.{37}

But now Pascal says that God often uses proofs as the instrument of faith. He also says in one place, “The way of God, who disposes all things with gentleness, is to instil [*sic*] religion into our minds with reasoned arguments and into our hearts with grace. . . .”{38}

The explanation for this tension can perhaps be seen in the *types* of proofs Pascal uses. Pascal won’t argue from nature. Rather he’ll point to evidences such as the marks of divinity within man, and those which affirm Christ’s claims, such as prophecies and miracles, the most important being prophecies.{39} He also speaks of Christian doctrine “which gives a reason for everything,” the establishment of Christianity despite its being so contrary to nature, and the testimony of the apostles who could have been neither

deceivers nor deceived.{40} So Pascal *does* believe there are positive evidences for belief. Although he does not intend to give reasons for everything, neither does he expect people to agree without having a reason.{41}

Nonetheless, even evidences such as these do not produce saving faith. He says, "The prophecies of Scripture, even the miracles and proofs of our faith, are not the kind of evidence that are absolutely convincing. . . . There is . . . enough evidence to condemn and yet not enough to convince. . . ." People who believe do so by grace; those who reject the faith do so because of their lusts. Reason isn't the key.{42}

Pascal says that, while our faith has the strongest of evidences in favor of it, "it is not for these reasons that people adhere to it. . . . What makes them believe," he says, " is the cross." At which point he quotes 1 Corinthians 1:17: "Lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."{43}

The Wager

The question that demands to be answered, of course, is this: If our reason is inadequate to find God, even through valid evidences, how *does* one find God? Says Pascal:

> Let us then examine the point and say: "Either God exists, or he does not." But which of the alternatives shall we choose? Reason cannot decide anything. Infinite chaos separates us. At the far end of this infinite distance a coin is being spun which will come down heads or tails. How will you bet? Reason cannot determine how you will choose, nor can reason defend your position of choice.{44}

At this point Pascal challenges us to accept his wager. Simply put, the wager says we should bet on Christianity because the rewards are infinite if it's true, while the losses will be insignificant if it's false.{45} If it's true and you have rejected it, you've lost everything. However, if it's false

but you have believed it, at least you've led a good life and you haven't lost anything. Of course, the best outcome is if one believes Christianity to be true and it turns out that it is!

But the unbeliever might say it's better not to choose at all. Not so, says Pascal. You're going to live one way or the other, believing in God or not believing in God; you can't remain in suspended animation. You must choose.

In response the unbeliever might say that everything in him works against belief. "I am being forced to gamble and I am not free," he says, "for they will not let me go. I have been made in such a way that I cannot help disbelieving. So what do you expect me to do?"{46} After all, Pascal has said that faith comes from God, not from us.

Pascal says our inability to believe is a problem of the emotions or passions. Don't try to convince yourself by examining more proofs and evidences, he says, "but by controlling your emotions." You want to believe but don't know how. So follow the examples of those who "were once in bondage but who now are prepared to risk their whole life. . . . Follow the way by which they began. They simply behaved as though they believed" by participating in various Christian rituals. And what can be the harm? "You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, full of good works, a true and genuine friend. . . . I assure you that you will gain in this life, and that with every step you take along this way, you will realize you have bet on something sure and infinite which has cost you nothing."{47}

Remember that Pascal sees faith as a gift from God, and he believes that God will show Himself to whomever sincerely seeks Him.{48} By taking him up on the wager and putting yourself in a place where you are open to God, God will give you faith. He will give you sufficient light to know what is really true.

Scholars have argued over the validity of Pascal's wager for centuries. In this writer's opinion, it has significant weaknesses. What about all the other religions, one of which could (in the opinion of the unbeliever) be true?

However, the idea is an intriguing one. Pascal's assertion that one must choose seems reasonable. Even if such a wager cannot have the kind of mathematical force Pascal seemed to think, it could work to startle the unbeliever into thinking more seriously about the issue. The important thing here is to challenge people to choose, and to choose the right course.

Summary

Pascal began his apologetics with an analysis of the human condition drawn from the experience of the new, modern man. He showed what a terrible position man is in, and he argued that man is not capable of finding all the answers through reason. He insisted that the deistic approach to God was inadequate, and proclaimed Christ whose claims found support in valid evidences such as prophecies and miracles. He then called people to press through the emotional bonds which kept them separate from God and put themselves in a place where they could find God, or rather be found by Him.

Is Blaise Pascal a man for our times? Whether or not you agree with the validity of Pascal's wager or some other aspect of his apologetics, I think we can gain some valuable insights from his ideas. His description of man as caught between his own nobility and baseness while trying to avoid looking closely at his condition certainly rings true of twentieth-century man. His insistence on keeping the concrete truth of Christ at the center keeps his apologetics tied to the central theme of Christianity, namely, that our identity is found in Jesus, where there is room for neither pride nor despair, and that in Jesus we can come to a true knowledge of God. For apart from the knowledge of Christ, all the speculation in the world about God will do little good.

Notes

1. Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Pensees Edited, Outlined and Explained* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 13, 189.
2. Hugh M. Davidson, Blaise Pascal (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 4.
3. The New Encyclopedia Britannica Macropedia, 15th ed., s.v. "Pascal, Blaise."
4. Davidson, 18.
5. James Houston's translation, Mind On First: A Faith for the Skeptical and Indifferent (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997), will be quoted extensively in these notes. This version was edited to retain only the individual pensees which are pertinent for apologetics. Mind On Fire also includes edited versions of some of Pascal's Provincial Letters, the ones he wrote against the Jesuits. The reader might also want to refer to Peter Kreeft's version (cf. note 1 above) which includes Kreeft's comments on individual pensees.
6. Davidson, 22.
7. Houston, 91.
8. Blaise Pascal, Pensees, trans. W.F. Trotter, 97.
9. Kreeft, 187.
10. Houston, 96.
11. Ibid., 122.
12. Kreeft, 238.
13. Ibid., 124.
14. Ibid., 236.
15. Houston, 58.
16. Ibid., 58.
17. Ibid., 53.
18. Trotter, 50.
19. Kreeft, 228.
20. Ibid., 229.
21. Ibid., 238.
22. Ibid., 120-26, 293.

23. Trotter, 178; see also 130.
24. Kreeft, 247.
25. Ibid., 249.
26. Ibid., 251.
27. Houston, 147.
28. Ibid., 149.
29. Kreeft, 69.
30. Ibid., 232.
31. Houston, 130.
32. Kreeft, 240.
33. Houston, 223.
34. Kreeft, 240.
35. Houston, 151.
36. Ibid., 152.
37. Kreeft, 250-51.
38. Ibid., 240.
39. Houston, 205; Trotter, 52.
40. Trotter, 52; Kreeft, 266.
41. Houston, 116-17.
42. Ibid., 221-22.
43. Ibid., 223.
44. Ibid., 130-31.
45. Kreeft, 292.
46. Houston, 133.
47. Ibid., 133.
48. Kreeft, 251, 255.

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C.S. Lewis: His Enduring

Legacy

C.S. Lewis was a tremendously gifted writer of profound insight and wisdom. Todd Kappelman argues that both Christians and non-Christians should read his wonderful writings, the major of which are reviewed here.

A Christian For All Men and A Man For All Seasons

There was a time not too long ago when nearly half of the Christians I enjoyed regular fellowship with, not only knew who C.S. Lewis was, but had actually read at least one of his books. Lewis represented for us a means by which we could enter into some of the deepest theological and philosophical discussions imaginable without possessing a degree in either theology or philosophy. Lewis's writing spoke to children, soldiers, Oxford professors, believers and unbelievers alike. His inviting, conversational tone in writing made him one of the first authors that I can say with some confidence I truly know.

Today, approximately 18 years after my first encounter with Lewis, I know people who have read him, and still others who have heard of him, but far too many who do not read him, nor recommend him to their friends. Without going into a discussion about the shift in our society from being text-driven to media-driven, I would like to make a case for the need to read Lewis, and to recommend him to our friends, both believers and unbelievers. In this essay I will discuss some of his major works and recommend some of my personal favorites that I believe you will enjoy reading.

One reason I recommend Lewis is that, given the extremely diverse society we live in today, the church is in profound need of a person of integrity and knowledge who can speak to as many different groups as possible. Lewis was, and remains,

one of the best men for this task. He was born in 1898 and died in 1963. The story of his early life is one of conversion from hard core intellectual atheism to Christianity, and then to one of the great champions of the Christian faith in this century. He was an Oxford professor whose range of writings included theology, ethics, philosophy, literary criticism, science fiction, children's stories, imaginative literature, and much more. There are very few areas of concern in which Lewis did not have something say, and he always said it with both wit and sensitivity.

Those who have never read Lewis can begin with one of the many volumes of collected essays on theology, philosophy, and cultural issues. *God in the Dock*, with 48 essays, is an excellent place to start. One will encounter titles such as "What Are We to Make of Jesus Christ," where Lewis says that we must either accept or reject the gospel, but we cannot explain it away. Other essays have titles such as "The Laws of Nature" or "Religion and Science." One of my favorites in this collection is entitled "We Have No Right to Happiness," in which Lewis warns us that the continual pursuit of happiness as an ultimate goal will result in an unnatural affection for something that will eventually sweep us away.

In a small collection entitled *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*, one will find titles such as "The Efficacy of Prayer" and "Good Work and Good Works." A larger volume entitled *The Seeing Eye* has the wonderful essays "Christianity and Culture" and "The Poison of Subjectivism." These volumes of essays should provide an excellent introduction to Lewis, and help the new reader understand why he is one of the most beloved Christian writers of our time.

Mere Christianity

We have been discussing the importance of reading the works of C.S. Lewis and have urged those who are not familiar with his works to begin with one of the collections of essays such as

God In The Dock, The World's Last Night, or *The Seeing Eye*.

These essays are an excellent place to start, but it is in *Mere Christianity* that Lewis details what he saw as the essentials of the faith. All of Lewis's writings have a common theme: a reasonable and thorough faith which is capable of reaching everyone from the most highly educated to the simplest common man on the street. Whether it is the Narnia books for children, the science- fiction trilogy, the essays on theology and philosophy, or the technical works on miracles and the problem of pain, Lewis is committed to a rational and well thought-out faith. There was no easy faith for the Oxford professor, and Lewis would have nothing to do with a religion that was not grounded in both history and fact.

Originally aired as "The Broadcast Talks" in the early forties, *Mere Christianity* has an almost conversational tone to it. This is one of the interesting features that first attracted me to Lewis. It's as if one were sitting down to tea and having a discussion with him; he is continually anticipating, and answering, the questions that his imaginary interlocutor might have. It must be remembered that Lewis is not arguing for a specific denominational faith in this work. Rather, he is attempting to raise the basic tenets of the Christian faith for discussion, acceptance, or even rejection. Lewis says that if one is hesitating between two Christian "denominations," one will not learn from reading this book whether he or she ought to become an Anglican, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, or a Roman Catholic.(1) The faith Lewis is outlining is mere, or basic, Christianity.

Many objections can be, and have been, made to this ecumenical approach. However, this is also the strength of Lewis, and one which I believe is especially relevant for the modern, pluralistic times we live in. Lewis went so far in the ecumenical aspect of this work that he sent the original transcripts for *Mere Christianity* to four clergymen: an Anglican, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, and a Roman Catholic.

They all had helpful advice, and all said they could live with the brand of Christianity that Lewis was detailing as “mere” Christianity.(2) This is a remarkable response which might be difficult to reproduce today.

In the first of the three books, or chapters, Lewis discusses the natural moral law found in all men. He argues that this natural understanding of right and wrong is a clue as to the nature of the universe and its Creator. In the second of the three books, Lewis outlines the basics of the Christian faith. It is here that the reader encounters the “mere” Christianity of the title. Finally, in book three, Lewis discusses the behavior which one should rightly expect from the believer. Some of the topics he discusses are sexual morality, marriage, forgiveness, charity, hope, and faith. Lewis takes the ideas from the three chapters on the law of human nature and develops that beautifully into the beliefs and behavior one should expect from Christians. *Mere Christianity* also provides an excellent introduction to Lewis at his best, and is a foundation text for understanding his work.

The Space Trilogy

The space trilogy is remarkable as both a good work of science fiction, and a great work of imaginative theology. Lewis’s science fiction is a sophisticated and highly developed fantasy dealing with the differences between natural and supernatural philosophy, original sin and temptation, as well as the perennial struggle between good and evil.

Out of The Silent Planet, published in 1938, is the first volume in the series. The silent planet, Earth, is so named because it has been cut off from beatific language as a result of sin.(3) In this initial book, we are introduced to many of the characters who will be used in the following volumes. Elwin Ransom, often taken to be a development of Lewis himself, is a philologist from Cambridge University who is kidnapped while on a walking holiday in the Midlands and taken

to Malacandra, or Mars, by two evil men named Devine and Weston.

Perelandra, the second volume in the series, was published in 1943, and is my personal favorite in the space or science fiction trilogy. Perelandra, or Venus, is a paradisiacal world full of floating and fixed islands and a green-fleshed Adam and Eve who live in a pre-fallen universe. This unfallen state of existence is perfectly symbolized in the relationship between "The Green Lady," as Eve is called, her husband, and the animal and fish life of the planet. This is a harmonious picture of a world where the natural and spiritual co-exist in beautiful perfection. In the original garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. In Perelandra, the Green Lady and her husband are forbidden to be on the fixed land after sunset. One of the most interesting features in Perelandra is the naivete of the Green Lady and her husband. They live in an unfallen world, and therefore are unaware of the consequences following willful disobedience. Perelandra is a stunning fictional treatment about the nature of obedience and man's fallen nature.

That Hideous Strength, published in 1945, is the third and final installment in the trilogy. In this volume, the action is once again set on earth, the silent planet, and Lewis shows the reader that the result of continual and willful sin is the destruction of the individual, and the propagation of evil on a worldwide scale. As a study of evil, *That Hideous Strength* shows how the wicked sow the seeds of their own destruction.(4)

The brillance of the space trilogy is that Lewis is able to reverse the perceptions found in the science-fiction of his day and counter that with a theological lesson woven into the fabric of fiction. Lewis understood the ability of fiction to capture the imagination of the reader and thus its ability to be used as a vehicle to raise serious theological concerns. He

once said, “Any amount of theology can now be smuggled into people’s minds under the cover of romance without their knowing it.” Those who thought that C.S. Lewis was primarily an author of theological and philosophical works will find a refreshing change of pace in the space trilogy.

The Problem of Pain and *A Grief Observed*

Now, let’s continue our discussion by looking at two works by C.S. Lewis which deal with the problem of evil and suffering. We should begin our discussion by stating that the problem of pain and suffering, or the problem of evil, as it is often referred to, is one of the oldest and strongest objections against the Christian faith. Briefly, the problem of evil runs as follows: If God is all powerful, all knowing, and all good, He should know about the plight of man, He should care about our situation, and He should rid the universe of pain and suffering.

The Problem of Pain, published in 1940, is specifically dedicated to the intellectual problems raised by evil and suffering. In *The Problem of Pain* Lewis begins by discussing God’s omnipotence and characteristic goodness. By beginning with God’s omnipotence, or His unlimited power, Lewis addresses the first charge in the problem of evil, namely that God may in fact be unable to rid the universe of evil. Here Lewis simply states that one need not infer from the existence of an omnipotent God and the existence of evil that God is unable to do something about it. Lewis advances several options; such as God may be using the evil to work out His plan among men; He may be ridding the universe of evil and we cannot see the end; or most importantly, evil is a necessary condition of the relationship between God and His creatures if they are to have a free will.

Again, when addressing the problem of God’s goodness and His willingness to help out His creation, Lewis simply argues that one need not, and in fact cannot, come to the conclusion that

God is not good based on the available data. We, as finite creatures, argues Lewis, are in no position to draw these kinds of conclusions. There are many perfectly logical explanations for the coexistence of evil and an all-powerful and all-good God. Subsequent chapters in *The Problem of Pain* deal with human wickedness, the fall of man, human pain, animal pain, and heaven and hell.

Twenty years after the publication of The Problem of Pain, in 1961, and just two years before his death at the age of 65, Lewis published a very small work entitled *A Grief Observed*. Whereas *The Problem of Pain* is a theoretical treatment of the problem of evil and suffering, *A Grief Observed* is the pragmatic working out of the problem of evil.

In April of 1956, C.S. Lewis, a 57-year-old dedicated bachelor, married Joy Davidman, an American poet with two young children. Lewis and Davidman enjoyed four years of blissful marriage and were intensely happy together. Joy died of cancer in 1960 at the age of 45. Her death shattered Lewis, and his pilgrimage through the process of bereavement resulted in his writing *A Grief Observed*. When reading this work, one will see Lewis at his most tender moments. He discusses their relationship, his struggles through her illness, his doubts after her death, and most importantly his intense efforts to come to grips with death and dying. A Grief Observed shows that Lewis had both emotional and intellectual depth. Any Christian would benefit from reading this small and extremely accessible work.

The Screwtape Letters and *The Great Divorce*

In this discussion we have sought to inform you of the wide range of subjects that Lewis addressed in his writing. In the process we have attempted to direct you to those books and essays that would (1) heighten your desire to become

acquainted with his works, or (2) stimulate you to continue reading them. At this point we will look at one of the most widely read of Lewis's books, *The Screwtape Letters*, and another less read, but related work, *The Great Divorce*.

The Screwtape Letters, first published in 1942, is one of the most straightforward and pointed works about hell and demonic activity that Lewis ever penned. The book is a satire about damnation and the efforts of demons to influence men. The "letters" are correspondence between a senior demon named Screwtape, who has centuries of experience in the art of tempting humans, and his younger nephew, Wormwood. The younger demon is a fresh graduate from The Tempters Training College and is on his first assignment. His task involves attempting to block, by any means necessary, a certain individual from becoming a Christian.

Lewis's audience is allowed to read the correspondence between these two demons, whose greatest desire is to facilitate the downfall and ultimate damnation of human beings. One is able actually to enter into a kind of "psychology of damnation" and see how the forces of evil operate in men's lives.

The Great Divorce, written just three years later in 1945, deals with heaven and hell and continues the satirical and comedic style of *The Screwtape Letters*. In his story Lewis speaks in the first person and is in the midst of a dream about a bus ride to heaven. The story opens in hell, where Lewis is preparing to leave with several people who are permanent residents in hell. Lewis meets people in various stages of damnation, much like Dante's *Inferno,* all of whom appear to have chosen their eternal residence freely. The story is a contrast between the "solid" people of the heavenly realm and the transparent ghost-like people of hell. The less real inhabitants of hell cannot participate in, or endure, the realness of heaven. The analogy illustrates the difficulty the unregenerate have in even understanding the things of God. Do not be fooled by the satirical nature of *The Great Divorce* or

The Screwtape Letters, for both contain an abundance of theology. Issues concerning salvation, damnation, heaven, hell, the free will of men, and the practical matters of the Christian faith are all present in these two volumes.

In concluding this discussion, I would first like to urge anyone who is not familiar with the works of C.S. Lewis to take the time to become acquainted with him. He is one of the most beloved and original Christian writers of this century. Secondly, to those who have read Lewis, and enjoyed him in the past, please recommend this wonderful author to your Christian friends. Lastly, and most importantly, I strongly urge anyone who has a friend who is an unbeliever to use a work such as Mere Christianity, or a collection of essays such as God in the Dock, as introductions to an ecumenical and eloquent apologist for the Christian faith.

Notes

1. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillian, 1943). (Originally aired in three parts as "The Broadcast Talks," p. 6.)
2. Ibid., p. 8.
3. Colin Duriez, *The C.S. Lewis Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to His Life, Thought and Writings* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1990), p. 199.
4. Ibid., p. 200.

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Christian Psychology: Is

Something Missing?

The Church as a Healing Community

Worldviews shape the way we think. Psychology, once an outsider both to the sciences and most people's experience, has become a worldview for many people today. Evolutionary psychology, the view that our long evolution from animal to human has deeply imprinted all our behavior, is gaining acceptance on a rapidly widening scale. Psychology is often used to provide an explanation for everything from our "religious aspirations" to our behavior as consumers. How should a Christian view psychology, and what does psychology offer the believer? This essay will consider only one small part of the answer to those questions.

While specifically Christian counseling was once rare in the church, today it is a recognized part of many churches. As Christian counseling has become more widespread, some see it as the answer for the struggles that seem to plague most of us. The therapeutic worldview sees many of our problems and struggles in life as stemming from unresolved problems arising in childhood. The cataloging and diagnosis of psychological disorders has become widespread, both within the church and in the culture at large. Professional counselors are seen as the primary way of dealing with these disorders. How many of us, when faced with someone enduring an ugly divorce, or hounded by problems of self-guilt, or struggling with their self-image, don't think, "This person needs to see a counselor"?

Larry Crabb has done much to bring counseling into the American church. Having written books for more than 23 years, Crabb has always seen the church as being central in the counseling process. He has trained many of the counselors working in churches today. He has written books, taught, founded schools, and lectured around the country on Christian

psychology. He has successfully questioned the church's distrust of psychology.

Now Larry Crabb is asking a new question: Is the common, therapeutic model of Christian psychology really right? Should the church depend on mental health professionals to do all but minor, pat-on-the-back, words-of-cheer kinds of counseling? Is counseling really a matter of education and degrees and specialized training?

While being very clear that professional Christian counselors have an important role to play in the Christian community, Crabb is asking, Could we be depending on counselors too much? Could it be that God has given all believers more resources than we think to help one another deal with many of the troubles and struggles we face in daily life?

Going even deeper, Crabb asks the heretical question, Are psychological disorders really at the bottom of most of our struggles? "I conclude," says Crabb, "that we have made a terrible mistake. For most of the twentieth century, we have wrongly defined soul wounds as psychological disorders and delegated their treatment to trained specialists."(1) What he proposes in his book, *Connecting*, is both revolutionary and profound. In giving us new life in Christ, God has put in each of us the power to connect with other believers and to find the good God has put in them. We have the opportunity to heal most wounded souls. This is Larry Crabb's proposal. While he is still solidly behind professional counseling, he has come to see a broader place for healing within the context of Christian relationships. In this essay we will talk about what it means for two people to connect, and how God can use this connection to heal the deepest wounds of life and expose a beautiful vision of God's work in us.

What Is Connecting?

Some people seem to write a new book as often as most of us

buy new shoes. And, like shoes, most of those books don't attract too much attention. But when well-known author Larry Crabb questions the very discipline that he helped establish, his book *Connecting* may cause more of a stir.

Christian psychology views human problems as primarily the result of underlying psychological disorders. We may be angry at a teenager's disobedience, but anger is only the symptom of problems buried within us. Stubborn problems may require deeper exploration of our thinking. Counselors are those people who have special training, enabling them to understand the various disorders we struggle with, and how to fix what's wrong.

In this book, Larry Crabb calls this whole picture into question. He describes the most common ways we react to people who are hurting and puts those reactions into two categories: moralistic and psychological. The moralist looks for what scriptures have been disobeyed, rebukes our disobedience, calls us to admit our sin and repent, and sees that we have some sort of accountability in the future. The psychologist listens to us, tries to find out what is wrong internally, and then helps us learn healthier ways of living. This process often takes months of self-exploration to find the roots of our problem, and to chart a course towards self-awareness and better ways of coping with the world.

Could there be another way for people to relate to each other when problems arise? Crabb's suggestion is a powerful one. Could it be, Crabb asks, that God has put within each of us His power, which, when we connect with another person, allows us to find the good that God has already put in them, and to release that good so that they can respond to the good urges God has placed there?

This is the main premise of the book *Connecting*. Coming straight to the point, Crabb says, "The center of a forgiven person is not sin. Neither is it psychological complexity. The

center of a person is the capacity to connect."(2) The gift of salvation gives us the Holy Spirit, Who allows us first to connect with God the Father, and then, on a new and deeper level, with each other. But what is connecting?

Crabb uses an analogy to the Trinity to make his point clear. The Trinity, Crabb writes, is "an Eternal Community of three fully connected persons."(3) They have delighted in each other for eternity, there is no shadow of envy or minute bit of jealousy between them, and they love to do what is best for each other. Since God made us in His image, we too can enjoy one another, but we must rely on the power of God in us to show us what is good in the other person.

Connecting is so powerful, Crabb says, because it requires that we look past the surface of people and see the new creation God has already begun. Connecting with someone else requires us to look at what a person could be, not just what he is right now. With God's insight, we look beyond the small amount God may already have done and ask God for a vision of what this person could be like. Connecting finds the spark in someone else and is excited about what it could flame into.

Is professional counseling unnecessary? Of course not, says Crabb. But connecting is a powerful way God uses us to bring out His good in others. What keeps us from doing this more?

What Keeps Us From Connecting?

If connecting is what God has made us for, and if this is what the Holy Spirit equips us to do, then why don't more of us connect with one another? Larry Crabb's answer is developed around four analogies. We tend to be either city builders, fire lighters, wall whitewashers, or well diggers.

City builders are those who know what resources they have and how to use them. They know their strengths, and they have a solid sense of their adequacy to meet whatever lies ahead.

City builders want to be in control, and fear that they might be found inadequate. City builders have a hard time connecting with someone else because they are looking for affirmation of themselves, not what is good in another. They can work together with other people towards a common goal, but only if it increases their sense of adequacy.

Martha Stewart, for example, has built an empire on feeding people's desire to be adequate, able to handle any situation. She is in control of her kitchen, her house, her yard, her life. And she is the one who will show us how to bring our lives under control.

God has created us with a desire for good. We want to please others, we want to live in peace, we want to have everything work out right. And in heaven it will. But we are not in heaven, and too often we try to insulate ourselves from the messiness of the world around us. City builders depend on their own resources to bring a sense of control into their lives. Their adequacy comes from themselves and what they can accomplish. But this blocks them from depending on God. God encourages us to seek peace with all men (Rom. 12:18), but at the same time we must realize that following Christ is a path of difficulty, not ease (2 Tim. 3:12). We are being prepared for perfection, but we are not to expect it here on earth. God has prepared a perfect city for us, but we are not to try to create it on our own now (Heb. 11:13-16).

Fire lighters are like those people described in Isaiah 50:10-11. They walk in darkness, but rather than trust in God to guide them by His light, they light their own torches, and set their own fires to see by. Fire lighters, Crabb says, are those people who must have a plan they know will work. Their demand of God is the pragmatist's "Tell me what will work!" Fire lighters trust and hold closely to their plans, so connecting is hard for them because it would require them to trust God and not know what might happen next. Connecting requires us to give up our plans and expectations so that we

can recognize and enjoy God's plans. We can either trust God or trust our own plans, but we cannot do both. It is not wrong to plan, but we must be willing to give up our plans when Jesus does not fit into them in the way that we want. As C.S. Lewis describes Aslan, the great lion who represents Jesus in *The Chronicles of Narnia:* "It's not as if he were a tame Lion."(4)

Have you ever known people whose primary efforts in life were directed towards protecting themselves and their children from any difficulties? When safety is your top priority, then you have become a *wall whitewasher*, Crabb says. Wall whitewashers build flimsy walls of protection around themselves and their worlds, and then whitewash them to make them appear stronger than they really are. These people want protection from whatever they fear. They are sure that their lives of dedication to the Lord are a protection from major problems. "Wall whitewashers cannot welcome tribulations as friends. . . Character isn't the goal of a wall whitewasher. Safety is."(5)

Many people who feel God's calling in their lives, also assume that God will take care of them and of their families. And He will, but not always in the way that we imagine. As we raise our children and watch the terrible struggles that seem to overcome so many other young people, we may feel that at least God will protect our own children from such affliction. But if our trust is that our serving the Lord is protecting our family, then we have built up a false sense of security. We are trying to cover our own uncertainty about the future with the whitewash of our own good deeds. God builds us up and shows us our need to depend on Him alone in our tribulations, but we often want to hide ourselves and protect our families from the very misfortunes that God wants to use to strengthen us. We are whitewashing a failing wall when we try to put up a hedge around ourselves and our families, sure that God will protect us from trouble. Everything that happens in our lives has come through God first, has been "Father-filtered," as

someone once said. But we must depend on the Lord in all circumstances, not just when we feel protected. God loves us perfectly, but His desire is to give us His character, not to protect us from any difficulty. That is why, as James says, we are to greet tribulations as friends, and not with fear.

Crabb's fourth class of people who thwart God's purpose in connecting are those he calls *well diggers*. The image comes from Jeremiah 2, where God marvels at the broken, pitiful wells that the Israelites make instead of coming to Him for real, unlimited water. Well diggers are looking for satisfaction on their terms, and they want to escape pain at any cost. The well digger asks, "Do I feel fulfilled?" If the answer is no, then he renews his quest for something that will give even a moment's pleasure. We judge drug addicts harshly, but what about needing to have a certain position to feel good, or driving a certain kind of car to prove we're reaching our goals?

Well diggers also are characterized by something that marks our whole first-world culture: the desire for satisfaction now. Well diggers dig their own wells because it often seems faster than the way God is providing water. We want to be filled, and we want it immediately. We live in a fast-everything world. We stand around the microwave oven, wondering why it takes so long to heat a cup of water. Or, more seriously, we wonder why God is taking so long to bring along the right woman or man, so we find our own ways to satisfy our desires, whether in pornography, or cheap sex, or relationships we know can't last. We want to be satisfied, and if God seems slow, we find our own satisfaction any way we can.

God plans for eternity, and builds to last forever. But it takes time, and patience. If we fulfill our own desires, we will be like the Samaritan woman at the well: we will soon thirst again. But if we allow God to provide for our thirst, He fills us with living water, and we are filled in ways we

could never have known otherwise.

Whether we are city builders, fire lighters, wall washers, or well diggers, we will never be able to deeply connect with another person until we kill these urges of the flesh, and allow God to strengthen our spirit. What will help us connect with other people?

Finding What God is Doing in Others

To connect with another believer, we "discover what God is up to and join Him in nourishing the life He has already given."(6) This is why Larry Crabb sees connecting as central to the Gospel. To connect with another Christian is to let the power of the Holy Spirit in you, find the good that God has planted in the spirit of another believer. It requires us to get past our flesh, which Paul instructs us to crucify (Gal. 5:24), so that we can be alive to the Spirit, the one Who makes connection possible. Connecting with someone else is a triumph of the Spirit over my own fleshly desires to control my own life (being a city builder), to create a plan I know will work (fire lighter), to protect myself against the uncertainties of life (wall whitewasher), and to find my own ways to feel good when I want to (well digger). To connect with a fellow believer I must see what God sees in him or her, not just what I can see.

So how do we see as God sees? God's forgiveness of us provides a clue. Does God forgive me because I am such a nice fellow? No. Does God forgive me because I have such a good heart? No. Am I forgiven because I will always do the right thing in the future? No. God forgives me because He sees Jesus' death in my place. It must be the same when I look at a fellow Christian. I must see him or her as someone whom God cared enough to die for, and as someone worth the incredible price that Christ paid on the cross.

Just as God looks past what is bad in my flesh to what He is

creating in my spirit, so I must learn to look at other people and find the good that God is working on in them.

Have you ever heard a child learning to play a musical instrument? We don't just listen to the noises coming from the violin or piano or drums. We listen to what is behind the music—the effort, the intensity, the desire to do better, the willingness to work. We listen for the spark that might indicate that this child really connects to music. That is just what we need to look for in one another: the sparks of eternity God has placed in each one of us. We need to look for what God is doing in our friends that can delight us, and make us "jump up and down with excitement" at how wonderfully God is remaking them.

If we would truly connect with someone else, we must also be putting to death the flesh and feeding the spirit. Larry Crabb goes back to an old Puritan phrase, "mortifying the flesh," to describe what we are to do as we discover urges of the flesh rising up in us. As Crabb emphatically writes: "The disguise [of the flesh] must be ripped away, the horror of the enemy's ugliness and the pain he creates must be seen, not to understand the ugliness, not to endlessly study the pain, but to shoot the enemy."(7) This is an ongoing war, one we will fight until we are home with Jesus, but alongside this battle to "crucify the flesh" (Gal. 5:24) we must also feed the Spirit. By this Crabb means that we are, as a community of believers, to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24). As we put to death the flesh, we are indeed made alive in the Spirit (Rom. 8:10-14).

Discerning a Vision for Others

Larry Crabb's book *Connecting* has two subtitles. The first subtitle is "Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships." Earlier, we saw how we are healed as we allow Christ to sweep away all of our own methods of dealing with life. Whether we are city builders, fire lighters, wall whitewashers, or well

diggers, these are all ways that we try to manage life. Jesus does not ask us to manage our lives. Instead, as a father might take his son through a crowded mall, God asks us to take His hand, and let Him guide us to where He chooses. The urges we need to kill are the very urges that whisper in our ears that we must take care of ourselves.

Remarkably, as we abandon our own techniques for survival, and let God use our lives in His own way, we also find that we can approach others much more openly and honestly. We are free to love people for who they are, not what they can do for us. And this opens up what is one of Larry Crabb's most important ideas. When we look at others the way God does, we begin to see what He is doing to make them new and incredible creations, just as He is doing for us.

The second subtitle for *Connecting* is "A Radical New Vision." It is certainly radical when one of the leading voices for Christian psychology suggests that lay Christians themselves can deal with many of the personal problems they often refer to counselors. But the radical view he has most in mind is a new way we can relate to and view one another.

Crabb's challenge is for us to kill the bad urges in ourselves so that we are able to begin seeing and hearing what God is doing in other people. This will not be just a warm feeling. We discern visions for a person's life; we do not create them.

When a doctor announces "It's a girl!" he is not making her a girl, he is announcing what is already the case. In the same way, Crabb writes, we are, by prayer, listening, and reading God's Word, to discern what God is doing in someone's life and then announce it. And the process of seeing what God is doing in someone's life may not be easy.

Larry Crabb's vision for the church is that we will become communities of people who care desperately about one another, so much that we will let down our guard. People can truly know

us, and we can see into them. In this process of connecting with a few other people, we will see God take the power of His Holy Spirit, and use that power to see what another person could be. As we walk with the Lord, and grow in godly wisdom, He enables us to see the good in other believers, and to encourage that good in a way that gives that person a vision of why she is here. It is this vision of who we could be in Christ which can transform each of us. But we must be willing to die daily to who we are on our own, and arise daily to do and say the things that God desires us to do and say. Are you ready for a radical new vision? It will fill your whole world with the power God has put in you to release the good He has put in others. What a calling of hope!

Notes

1. Larry Crabb, *Connecting* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), p. 200.
2. Crabb, 38.
3. Crabb, 53.
4. C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), p. 138.
5. Crabb, 121.
6. Crabb, 49.
7. Crabb, 91.

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The Breakdown of Religious Knowledge

What constitutes truth? The way we answer that question has greatly changed since the Middle Ages. Todd Kappelman provides

an overview of three areas in philosophical thought, with their impact on Western culture: premodernism (the belief that truth corresponds to reality), modernism (the belief that human reason is the only way to obtain truth), and postmodernism (the belief that there is no such thing as objective truth).

The Postmodernism Revolution

There is a sense among many people today that the modern era, both in terms of technical and financial prosperity, as well as personal spiritual well-being, is over. There appears to be a general malaise among many people today, and a certain uneasy feeling that the twentieth-century has entered a new phase. Additionally, most believe that this new phase is not a very good one. Many diverse new "communities" such as feminists, gays, pro-choice advocates, pro-life advocates, conservatives, liberals, and various other groups, both religious and non-religious, make up the global village we now live in. These various groups are frequently at odds with one another and more often than not there is a breakdown in communication. This breakdown can be attributed to the lack of a common frame of reference in vocabulary and, more importantly, in views about what constitutes truth.

Most Christians suspect that something is wrong, and though they know that they should continue to engage the culture, they are often at a loss when they try to confront people from different philosophical worldviews because truth itself has come under question. The late Francis Schaeffer wrote a small but extremely important book titled *Escape From Reason* in which he outlined the progression of thought from the late middle ages through the 1960s where the progression culminated in the movement known as existentialism. In this work Schaeffer noted that the criteria for truth had changed over the years until man found himself living in an age of *non-reason*. This was an age that had actually become hostile to

the very idea of truth and to the concept that truths are timeless and not subject to change with the latest fashions of culture.

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Darwinian naturalism has been one of the chief philosophical revolutions that has gripped the world. And, although few at the time had any idea how much Darwin's ideas would permeate the culture, no one today doubts the far reaching results of that revolution. The Christian church was not ready for the Darwinian revolution, and thus this philosophy was able to gain a foothold (and later a death grip) on every aspect of modern life, both in academic and popular circles. For decades after the revolution, many church leaders thought it unimportant to answer Darwin and said little or nothing about the new philosophy. Most Christians were, therefore, not equipped to provide coherent answers and were too late in entering the debate. The result is that most of our public schools and universities, and even our political lives, are dominated by the erroneous assumption that Darwinian naturalism is scientifically true and that creationism is fictitious.

Now, in the late twentieth century, we are in the middle of a revolution that will likely dwarf Darwinism in its impact on every aspect of thought and culture: the revolution is *postmodernism*, and the danger it holds in its most serious form is that truth, meaning, and objective reality do not exist, and that all religious beliefs and moral codes are subjective. In every generation the church has had its particular heresies to deal with, and postmodern relativism is ours. Christ has called us to proclaim truth to a dying generation, and if we fail at this task, the twenty-first century may be overshadowed by relativism and a contempt for reason as much as the twentieth century was overshadowed by Darwinian naturalism.

From the Premodern to the Modern

Historians, philosophers, theologians, sociologists, and many others use the terms *modern*, *premodern*, and *postmodern* to help them navigate through large pieces of time and thought. In order to understand what these very helpful terms are used for, we will try to understand the premodern period first. The term *premodern* is used to describe the period before the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The premodern period is often referred to as the precritical period—a time before the criteria of truth became so stringent. The premodern period ends somewhere between the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century and the high part of the Renaissance in the sixteenth century. The major thing one should remember is that, with the advent of new scientific discoveries, the Western world was changing forever, and this would have far reaching impact on every aspect of life, especially religion.

Life in the premodern period was dominated by a belief in the supernatural realm, by a belief in God or gods, and His or their activity in human and cosmic affairs. The printing press had not been invented and the truth or falsity of these gods was largely communicated through oral tradition and hand-written texts which were extremely rare and precious. One can imagine daily or weekly events at which the elders of a tribe or village would gather and share stories with the younger members of the tribe. Typically, these stories contained important matters of faith and history that provided a structure, or worldview, to help the people make sense of their world. These tales also included instructions or moral codes concerning the behavior that was expected for the community to live in peace.

One of the most interesting features about the premodern period is the way in which people decided if the stories that were shared among them were true or false. Imagine that

someone had just told you that the world was created by a being that you could not detect with your five senses and that He had left a written communication about His will for your life. You would look around at the world that you lived in, and you would decide if the stories that were told to you explained the world and were reasonably believable. This method for determining truth is called the *correspondence method of truth*. If the story being told corresponds to the observable phenomenon in the world, then the story is accepted as truth. There is also a *coherence method of truth* in operation during this period. The coherence theory would add to the correspondence theory the idea that all of the individual stories told over a period of time should not contradict one another. These two forms of determining whether something is true or not were the primary means of evaluation for many centuries.

We may look at the premodern period of human history also as the precritical period, a time before the criteria of truth was based on the scientific method. The premodern period is often characterized as backward and somewhat inferior to modern society. And, although the premodern period is not a time period that most of us would want to live in, there is a certain advantage to having the test for truth based on oral and written tradition which corresponds to physical reality. For example, it is easy to see how something such as the creation stories and the gospel would fare much better in the premodern period than the modern period.

The Advent of the Modern

We must now leave our discussion of the premodern period and turn our attention to the beginning of the modern period. Some see the modern era as beginning in the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; others, however, believe it began with the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

A main tenet of *modernism* is that human reason, armed with the scientific method, is the only reliable means of attaining knowledge about the universe. During the Renaissance men began to discover the means to harness the powers and resources of the earth in ever increasing ways. It was a time marked by invention and discovery that led to what may be termed an optimistic humanism, or a high confidence in mankind. The Renaissance was followed by the Enlightenment where better telescopes and microscopes allowed men to unlock the secrets of the universe. The unlocking of these secrets led to the initial impression that the universe, and the human body, resembled machines and could be understood in mechanistic terms.

In the eighteenth century the progress of science accelerated so rapidly that it appeared as if science would soon be able to explain everything. Many believed that there were no limits to the power of human reason operating with the data from sense perception. In contrast to the truth of the oral tradition in the premodern era, the modern period accepted as truth only that which could be proven to be true. Many of the philosophers and theologians of the modern period sought to devise a rational religion, a faith that could incorporate all of the considerations and discoveries of the new science.

The effort of the Enlightenment rationalists to synthesize the new scientific method with the premodern religious beliefs soon resulted in a suspicion about the oral and written truth claims of the Christian religion. It is easy to see how doctrines such as the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, and the resurrection could not be proved using scientific methods. There is no way to repeat such historical events in a laboratory environment, and, therefore, the credibility of such events began to become suspect.

The modern industrial revolution yielded new labor-saving inventions on a regular basis. These new discoveries substantiated the optimism of the modernists and gave credence

to the belief that science and the scientific method would one day yield a utopian society. It is easy to see how the optimism of this period became almost intoxicating to many. The so-called-truths of religion were quickly being cast aside in favor of the new, and better, truths found by science. Examples found in advertising may be helpful. A company that wished to sell a car or a pair of tennis shoes would appeal to the scientific truths of their product. That is, a company would attempt to persuade a potential buyer into purchasing its product based on the fact that it was the best item obtainable. Add to this scientific furor, the advancement of Darwinian naturalism, and it is easy to see how religious claims seemed like quaint, antiquated beliefs for many people. The modern period culminated in arrogance concerning human abilities and human reason. It proposed a world created without any assistance from God. The modern period differs from the premodern in its rejection of the supernatural or the transcendent which is based largely on the belief that religious truth claims are different than scientific truth claims. According to many, truth itself had changed.

The End of the Modern and the Advent of the Postmodern

We have been discussing the changing beliefs about the nature of truth. There are many things that contributed to the end of the modern period and the demise of the Enlightenment confidence that had driven Western development for over three centuries. The major driving tenet behind the advance of modernism was the belief that reality was objective and that all men could discover the principles of nature and unlock her secrets.

The failure of the modern project according to many postmodernists was due to the erroneous assumption that there is such a thing as “objective truth.” Following the Romantic and Existentialist movements, the postmodernists would build

their theories of reality on the latest discoveries in language, culture, psychotherapy, and even cutting-edge science. Theories in quantum physics, radically different views about cultural norms, and ethnic differences all contributed to the belief that truth claims are much more relative than the Enlightenment thinkers had believed. Many believed that science had substantiated relativity.

Modernity may be understood as a time when our best philosophers, theologians, and scientists attempted to make sense out of the world based on the belief in objective reality. One of the central tenets of the era we live in (the postmodern period) is that there is no such thing as objective truth. In fact, the new trend in postmodern thought is to embrace, affirm, and live with philosophical, theological, and even scientific chaos. Earlier we used an example from advertising; suggesting that products were marketed based on their claims to be superior to what a competitor might offer. If we use this example again, postmodern methodology appeals more to a person's feelings than to his or her sense of factual truth. Cars, tennis shoes, and other products are marketed based on image. The best car is not necessarily the one that has been made to the highest standard; rather the best car is the one that can bolster the image of the driver.

The effects of this type of thinking may be seen in our contemporary ethical dilemma. While it is true that people from various ethnic, geographic, and other time periods place different values on certain behaviors, it cannot be true that any behavior is acceptable dependent only upon the individual's outlook. The effect of postmodern theories on Christian truth claims is that the creation accounts found in Genesis, and the stories about Christ in the gospels have been reduced to one cultural group's account of reality. Christians, argue many postmodernists, are free to believe that Christ is God if they like. But their claims cannot not be exclusive of other people's beliefs. Truth may be true for

one person and false for another.

Furthermore, Christians are expected to tolerate contradicting truth claims and to look the other way if certain ethical behaviors (abortion, homosexuality, etc.) do not suit their tastes. The current postmodern condition is only in the early stages of development, not even a half a century old, and yet its devastating effects have penetrated every aspect of our lives. Christians largely responded too late to the threats of Darwinism, and now the destructive effects of that movement are evident to anyone in the Christian community. Postmodernism, and its companion rampant philosophical relativism, should be among the foremost concerns of any Christian who wishes to engage his or her culture and ensure that the gospel of Christ has a fertile context in which it can take root and grow in the future.

Responding to the Current Crises in Knowledge

We have been discussing changing views of truth and the problems these changes pose for Christians as we approach the twenty-first century. Recently a young woman at the University of Bucknell in Pennsylvania provided a perfect example of how modern men are different from their predecessors. This young woman believed that truth was a matter of how one looked at things. She, like so many others believed that two people could look at a given situation or object and arrive at different conclusions. While this is true to some degree, it is not true to the degree that the two truth claims can logically be contradictions of one another.

When she was pressed on her beliefs concerning reality, the inconsistencies of her philosophy were evident. She stated that everything was a matter of opinion or one’s personal perspective. When asked if this belief extended to physical reality, she said it did. She said that a person could look at

something in such a way as to alter reality.

The example of the existence or nonexistence of her car was raised. She said that if she believed that her car was not in the parking lot and if another person believed that it was, it could be possible that it actually existed for one person and not for the other. When one first hears something like this, it sounds as if the person who maintains this position is joking, and could not possibly mean for us to take him or her seriously. However, the sad and frightening truth is that this individual is very serious.

This young woman is representative of a large part of our Western culture, men and women who tend to think unsystematically. The result of this way of thinking is that people often hold ideas that are logically inconsistent and contradict each other. The result is that persons professing to be Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, or even atheists are given equal degrees of credibility. Truth has become a function of personal preference, not correspondence to objective reality.

The effects of this new way of thinking are evident everywhere. When we attempt to speak to people on any controversial issue, whether it is political, ethical, or religious, we invariably are confronted with different approaches to truth. Some people accept divine revelation, some accept science, and others accept no final authority. We have moved from a fact-based criteria to a feeling-based criteria for truth. The final appeal in many disagreements is often a statement such as: “That may be true for you, but it is not true for me.” This is an implicit denial of a common reality.

Psalm 11:3 asks what the righteous can do if the foundations have been destroyed. While the threat of postmodern relativism may be something new, it is not the first time that Christians have seen a concentrated effort to destroy the foundations of

truth. The New Testament is replete with admonitions for Christians to allow their behavior to speak for them. In John 13:35 we are told that people will know that we belong to Christ, and that our testimony is true, by the way we love one another. The premodern, modern, and postmodern tests for truth all have strengths and weaknesses, but the Scriptures seem to indicate that it is our behavior towards one another and our devotion to God, not our ability to prove God's existence, that will convince a skeptical postmodern world that hungers for truth.

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The Christian Mind

The Need for a Christian Mind

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matt. 4:17)(1) This familiar admonition was first spoken by John the Baptist and soon after it was echoed by Jesus. The phrase is certainly worthy of a great deal of attention; it provides a lot of food for thought. For the moment, though, let's concentrate on the first word: *Repent*. This expression is a central portion of the doctrines concerning sin and salvation. Literally it refers to a *change of mind*. It does not mean that one is to be sorry for some action. Thus, the first hearers were admonished to realize that they were in need of radical change before a holy God, beginning with their minds. They were to turn from sin to God by changing their thinking. Certainly the same holds true for us. Most of us are in need of reminders that lead us back to one of the crucial aspects of our salvation: repentance, or a change in our thinking. In addition, we should couple such memories with the realization that our changed

minds should always be alive to God. To paraphrase Kepler's famous phrase, we are to "think God's thoughts after Him." Since the Christian life is all-inclusive, the mind is included.

But, some may ask, do we actually have a mind? Current research and thought in the fields of neuroscience and evolutionary psychology concludes that we are much too free with the word *mind*. Perhaps we should get used to making reference to the brain, rather than the mind.

"Some neuroscientists are beginning to suspect that everything that makes people human is no more than an interaction of chemicals and electricity inside the labyrinthine folds of the brain."(2) E.O. Wilson, the father of what is called sociobiology, proposes that we can determine an ethical system based on scientifically observable evidence. He writes, "The empiricist argument holds that if we explore the biological roots of moral behavior, and explain their material origins and biases, we should be able to fashion a wise and enduring ethical consensus."(3) Thus, ethics are not to be found external to physical reality; there is no mind through which we can respond ethically. It seems that Wilson and those who are like-minded believe "the mind is headed for an ignoble fate. Just as the twinkle of stars was reduced to nuclear explosions, and life itself to biochemical reactions, so the brain may one day be explained by the same forces that run the rest of the universe."(4)

Such perspectives should come as no surprise if we are aware of the permeation of a naturalistic worldview in both the physical and social sciences. The Christian, though, is not relegated to this

type of reduction. A biblical worldview makes it clear that we are more than physical beings; we are also non-physical beings made in God's image. As a popular joke from the nineteenth century says:

> *What's the matter?*
> *Never mind.*
> *What is mind?*
> *No matter.(5)*

The truth of the joke should not be lost on those of us who claim to be followers of Christ. We should realize the importance of cultivating Christian minds. As the great statesman Charles Malik stated, "As Christ is the Light of the World, his light must shine and be brought to bear upon the problem of the formation of the mind."(6)

The Scriptures and the Mind (Part 1)

"Come now, and let us reason together, says the LORD" (Isa. 1:18). Imagine you are in a courtroom. You are the defense attorney; the prosecutor is God Himself. He has just invited you, Judah's attorney, to engage in debate concerning the case at hand which happens to focus on the crimes of your client. Indeed, He wants the two of you to *reason together*. That is the scenario presented in this famous passage from the first chapter of Isaiah. God was inviting Judah to debate a case in court.(7) What a remarkable idea! And what a stunning statement concerning the importance of the mind. God was calling upon His people to use their minds to see if they could engage Him in debate concerning their sins.

In a time when the mind appears to be denigrated at every hand, such a passage should serve to reawaken us to the importance of using the minds God has given us. After all, the Bible, which most Christians claim to be the very word of God, calls the mind to attention throughout its pages. As J.P. Moreland states, “If we are going to be wise, spiritual people prepared to meet the crises of our age, we must be a studying, learning community that values the life of the mind.”(8) Let’s begin such studying and learning by considering some of what the Bible says about the ungodly and rebellious mind, and then the godly mind.

First, the ungodly mind is described in terms that are sobering. When we apply these phrases to the culture around us, we can better understand why what we see and hear disturbs us. For example, Romans 1:18-28 describes what one scholar called “The Night.” Here are some of the ways unbelievers’ minds are depicted in this dark passage:

- Suppressing the truth
- Rejecting God
- Foolish speculations
- Foolish hearts
- Professing wisdom
- Exchanging God for a counterfeit
- Lusting hearts
- Exchanging truth for a lie
- Worshipping the creature
- Degrading passions
- Exchanging the natural for the unnatural
- Committing indecent acts
- Depraved minds

Another somber statement about the ungodly way of thinking is found in 2 Corinthians 4:4: “The

god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Perhaps you have had conversations with unbelievers that were characteristic of such "blindness." The person with whom you were talking just didn't see it as you attempted to share the truth of Christ. Such responses should not surprise us.

A foolish mind also is described frequently in Scripture. Jeremiah 4:22 is a strong indictment of those who know the things of God, but foolishly reject them:

> *For My people are foolish,*
> *They know Me not;*
> *They are stupid children,*
> *And they have no understanding.*
> *They are shrewd to do evil,*
> *But to do good they do not know.*

Hosea 4:6 shows the result of God's reaction when His people reject the truth:

> *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*
> *Because you have rejected knowledge,*
> *I also will reject you from being My priest.*

These ancient proclamations could not be more contemporary. May we heed their warnings!

The Scriptures and the Mind (Part 2)

"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). When the apostle Paul wrote these words, he was very aware of the need for a

Christian mind. Philosophical speculations abounded in his time, just as in our time. Thus he described the Christian's mental responsibility in terms of warfare. The Christian mind is active—it enters the battle; it is filled with the knowledge of God—it is prepared for battle; it puts all things under the lordship of Christ—it follows the only true commander into battle. And that battle has been won innumerable times, even in the minds of brilliant people. "One of the most astonishing and undeniable arguments for the truth of [Christianity] . . . is the fact that . . . some of the most subtle of human intellects have been led to render submission to the Saviour."(9) The Bible contains many such insights into the nature of a Christian mind. We will consider two of these.

Reason is a term that is descriptive of the Christian mind. This does not mean that a Christian is to be a rationalist, but rather he is to use reason based on the reason of God found in Scripture. For example, on one of several occasions Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus to test Him by asking for a sign from heaven. Jesus responded by referring to their ability to discern signs of certain kinds of weather. Then He said, "Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times" (Matt. 16:3)? Obviously He was noting how people use reason to arrive at conclusions, but the Christian mind would conclude the things of God. The book of Acts indicates that the apostle Paul used reason consistently to persuade his hearers of the truth of his message. Acts 17:2-3 states that "according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths *reasoned* [emphasis added] with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving

evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead.” For two years in Ephesus Paul was “reasoning [emphasis added] daily in the school of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9). In light of the fact that our contemporary world attempts to reject reason, such examples should spur us to hold out for the possibility of reasonable dialogue with those around us. After all, those who reject reason must use reason to reject reason.

If the Christian mind is characterized by reason, such reason must be founded upon knowledge from God. Upon reflection of their conversation with Jesus on the road to Emmaus, two of the disciples said, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us” (Luke 24:32)? The word *hearts* in this passage refers to both moral and mental perception. In his letter to the Colossians Paul wrote, “we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ” (Col. 1:28). And in his Ephesian letter he wrote, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened” (Eph. 1:18-19). May this beautiful prayer apply to us as we consider how to use our God-given minds!

Mandates for the Mind

“AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH” (Mark 12:30). These words have echoed for thousands of years, beginning with Moses and leading to Jesus. They contain the first of what I call *Mandates for the Mind*: Strive to Know

God. To love someone we must know him or her. In the case of my wife, for instance, it would have been absurd to declare that I loved her before ever meeting her. My love for her implies an intimate knowledge *about* and knowledge *of* her. In the same manner we are to strive both to know *about* God and to *know* Him intimately. Our minds are crucial to this mandate. It is my contention that one of the major problems in contemporary Christianity is that too many of us are attempting know God without using our minds to investigate what He has told us of Himself in Scripture.

The second mandate is that the Christian mind should strive for truth. "Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'" (John 8:31-32). Abiding in His word implies a continual dedication to using the mind to search the Scriptures, the place where His truth is written.

The third mandate pertains to maturity. Romans 12:2 declares: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." It is pertinent to note that the words *conformed*, *transformed*, and *prove* refer to continuous action. Thus, the Christian mind is to be characterized by continuous development toward maturity. Hebrews 5:14 refers to Scripture as "solid food" as the writer describes the mature mind. He then asserts that the Christian is to "press on [continually] to maturity" (Heb.

6:1). Such maturity is a strategic need in the contemporary church.

The fourth mandate involves proclaiming and defending the faith. The maturing Christian mind will actively engage the minds of those around him. For example, Paul modeled this while in Athens: "[H]e was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him" (Acts 17:17-18). Paul proclaimed and defended the truth of the gospel in the synagogue with his own people, among the populace, and even with the intellectual elite of the time. Such encounters are easily duplicated in our day.

The fifth mandate refers to the need for study. Philippians 4:8 states: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." Note the final phrase: "let your mind dwell," a clause indicative of the need for concentration, or study. The phrase also includes a command that such study is to be continuous. We are to ponder, or think on the things of God.

Applying the Christian Mind

"Prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22). This exhortation from the book of James includes the last of our *Mandates for the Mind*. That is, the Christian mind should be applied; what is in the mind should flow to the feet.

It would be easy to state that such a mandate applies to all of life and let that suffice, but specific examples can help us focus on how this works. Thus we will focus on three contrived stories.

Our first story involves a fellow we will call Billy. Billy is an excellent softball player. Three nights per week he plays for his company team. He has a reputation as a fierce competitor who will do virtually anything to win. He also has a volatile temper that explodes in ways that embarrass his family and teammates. On some occasions he even has had shoving and cursing bouts with opposing players. Each Sunday, and even on other occasions, he attends a well-known church in his city. One Sunday his pastor shared an exceptional sermon based on 1 Corinthians 3:16: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” Upon hearing this message, he suddenly realized that softball games could not be isolated from his commitment to Christ. Whether in his business, his family, or his softball games he needed to stop and think: if he is a temple of God, all of life is a sacred task. His life, including softball, was never the same.

The second story focuses on a woman named Sally. She is a teacher in a public elementary school who is also a young Christian. Her new life in Christ has invigorated her to the point that she is beginning to think of ways she can share her joy with her students. She decides that at every opportunity she will encourage the children to discover the wonder of life. As she guides them through science, she expresses awe as they investigate the simplest flower, or the profundity of the solar system. As she discusses arithmetic she encourages them

to realize the beauty of logical order in numbers. As she reads stories to them she gently emphasizes the amazing concept of human imagination. In these ways and others Sally begins to realize the excitement of using her mind for God's glory. In addition, she soon finds that she is having conversations with her students that give her opportunities to share the One who is guiding her.

Our third story concerns Steven, a businessman and father of an eight-year-old boy. Steven has come to the realization that his son, Jimmy, spends most of his time either watching television or playing computer games. So he begins to consider ways to stimulate Jimmy's thinking. Since he also wants to see Jimmy come to faith in Christ, Steven suggests that they read C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* together. Soon, the two of them are delighting in these tales, and Steven finds ways to discuss the spiritual metaphors in Lewis' classic fantasies.

These stories may not apply directly to your life at this time. But, hopefully they will stimulate a broader understanding of how your mind can be used for God's glory within the routines of life.

Notes

1. All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Version.

2. Sharon Begley, John Carey, and Ray Sawhill, "How the Brain Works," *Newsweek* (7 February 1983), 40.

3. Edward O. Wilson, "The Biological Basis of Morality," *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 1998), 54.

4. Begley, 47.

5. Quoted in Begley.

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8. J.P. Moreland, *Love Your God With All Your Mind* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1997), 39.

9. R.V.G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 135.

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Art and the Christian

How should Christians think about art from a framework that starts with the Bible? The concept that people are made in God's image is reflected in the fact and the content of the art we produce.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Art in our Lives

Where are you as you read this? You may be sitting in an office, reclining in a lounge chair at home, lounging in your

back yard, sitting at a desk in your dorm room, or any other of a number of scenarios. Consider for a moment if art is part of your consciousness. If you are sitting in an office, is art anywhere within your vision? If you are reclining in a lounge chair, does the furniture have an artistic dimension? If you are lounging in your back yard, can the word art be used to describe any facet of what you see? If you are in your dorm room, are you listening to music that is art?

If I had the pleasure of dialoguing with you in regard to these questions, no doubt we would have a very interesting conversation. Some of you may say, “No, art doesn’t describe anything I see at the moment.” Or, some of you may state, “I haven’t thought of this before. You’ll have to give me more time for reflection.” Others may assert, “I only think of art within museums, concert halls or other such places that enshrine our art.” Others may say, “Yes, art is very much a part of my daily life.” But since I can’t dialog with you in order to know what you are doing at the moment, and I certainly cannot see what you see, let me tell you where I am and what I see as I write these comments. I am sitting in my study at my desk while I am listening to the music of Bach. I see a clock on one of the bookshelves, a hand-painted plate I purchased in the country of Slovenia, a framed poem given to me by my daughter, several chairs, two floor lamps, a mirror with a bamboo frame, two canoe paddles I bought in the San Blas islands off the coast of Panama, a wooden statue I purchased in Ecuador, and a unique, colorful sculpture that was made by my son. As I mention these things, perhaps you are attempting to imagine them. You are trying to “see” or “hear” them and in so doing there are certain of these items you may describe as art. Your first response may be to say that the music of Bach, the hand-painted Slovenian plate, or the Ecuadorian statue can be described as art. But what about the chair in which I am sitting, the desk, the bookshelves, the chairs, or the lamps? Better yet, what about such items that are found where you live? Are they art?

Such questions are indicative of the challenges we face when we begin to consider the place of art in our lives. As an evangelical Christian I can state that art and the aesthetic dimensions of life have not received much attention within my formal training. Only through my own pursuit have I begun to think about art with a Christian worldview.And I have found my experience is similar to what many have experienced within the evangelical community. Too often we have tended to label art as inconsequential or even detrimental to the Christian life.

Actually, there is nothing new about this. Our spiritual forefathers debated such issues. They were surrounded by Greek and pagan cultures that challenged them to give serious thought to how they should express their new beliefs. Art surrounded them, but could the truth of Christ be expressed legitimately through art? Could Christians give positive attention to the art of non-Christians? In light of such struggles it is my intention to encourage you to give attention to some of the basic elements of a Christian worldview of art and aesthetics in this essay. I believe you will find that our discussion can have significant application in your life.

Art and Aesthetics

Several years ago I was having dinner with a group of young people when our conversation turned to the subject of music. During the discussion I made a comment about how I believe there is a *qualitative* difference between the music of Bach and that of a musician who was popular among Christians at the time of our discussion. When one of the group at our table heard this, he immediately responded in anger and accused me of flagrant prejudice and a judgmental spirit. Even though I attempted to elaborate my point, the young man had determined that I was an elitist and would not listen any longer.

This incident serves as a reminder that one of the most prevalent ways of approaching art is to simply say that

“beauty is in the eye (or ear) of the beholder.” The incident also serves to show that concepts of “good” and “bad,” or “beautiful” and “ugly,” or other adjectives, are part of our vocabulary when we talk of art. This is true whether we believe such terms apply only to individuals or everyone. The vocabulary pertains to a field of philosophy called aesthetics.

All of us deal with aesthetics at various times in our lives, and many of us incorporate aesthetic statements in daily conversations. For example, we may say, “That was a *great* movie.” Or, “That was a *terrible* movie.” When we make such statements we normally don’t think seriously about how such terms actually apply to what we have seen. We are stating our opinions, but those opinions are usually the result of an immediate emotional response. The challenge comes when we attempt to relate *qualitative* statements about the movie as part of a quest to find universal guidelines that can be applied to all art. When we accept this challenge we begin to explain why some artists and their art is great, some merely good, and others not worthwhile.

Aesthetics and Nature

Perhaps one of the clearest ways to begin to understand the aesthetic dimension of our lives is to consider how we respond to nature. Have you ever heard anyone say, “That’s an *ugly* sunset.” Probably not, but surely you have heard the word *beautiful* applied to sunsets. And when you hear the phrase “beautiful sunset” you probably don’t hear an argument to the contrary. Usually there is a consensus among those who see the sunset: it is beautiful. From a Christian perspective those who are there are offering a judgment concerning both the “artist” and the “art.” Both the “cause” and “effect” have been praised aesthetically. Torrential waterfalls, majestic mountains, as well as sunsets routinely evoke human aesthetic response. The Christian knows that the very fabric of the

universe expresses God's presence with majestic beauty and grandeur. Psalm 19:1 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows forth his handiwork." Nature has been called the "aesthetics of the infinite." 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. All of nature can be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities which find their source in God, their Creator. In fact, we can assert that "the major premise of a Christian worldview, including a Christian aesthetic, is that God is the Creator."(1)

Human Creativity

"You have a wonderful imagination! Are you an artist?" Has anyone said such things to you? If so, perhaps you responded by saying something that would reject the person's perception of you. Most of us don't see ourselves as imaginative, artistic people. Indeed, most of us tend to think of the artist and imagination as terms that apply only to certain elite individuals who have left a legacy of work. "The truth is that in discussing the arts we are discussing something universal to mankind."(2) For example, anthropologists tell us all primitive peoples thought art was important.(3) Why is this true?

From the perspective of a Christian worldview the answer is found in how we are created. Since we are made in God's image that must include the glorious concept that we too are creative. After creating man, God told him to subdue the earth and 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 us 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.

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 the 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 Jekyll and Hyde: noble image-bearer and morally-crippled animal. His works of art are therefore bittersweet.

Understanding this dichotomy allows Christians to genuinely 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.

The fact is that if God can speak through a burning bush or Balaam’s donkey, He can speak 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 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 but speculate about what lies ahead for those who love Him!

Art and the Bible

What does the Bible have to say about the arts? Happily, the Bible does not call upon Christians to look down upon the arts. In fact, the arts are *imperative* when considered from the biblical mandate that whatever we do should be done to the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31). 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" (Titus 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 artistic dimension. 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 and eventually the temple. Here we find something unique in history art works conceived and designed by the infinite God, then transmitted to and executed by His

human apprentices!

Poetry is another evidence of God's love for beauty. A large portion of the Old Testament, including Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, portions of the prophets, and Job contain poetry. Since God inspired the very words of Scripture, it logically follows that He inspired the poetical form in such passages.

Music and dance are often found in the Bible. 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. And we should remember that the lyrical poetry of the Psalms was first intended to be sung.

The New Testament

The New Testament also includes artistic insights. 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, 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 vine, a mustard seed. Jesus was also a master story-teller. He readily made use of His own cultural setting to impart His message, and sometimes quite dramatically. Many of the parables were fictional stories, but they were nevertheless used to teach spiritual truths via the imagination.

We should also remember that the entire Bible is not only revelation, it is itself a work of art. And this work of art "has been the single greatest influence on art. It sheds more light upon the creative process and the use of the arts than any other source, because in it are found the great truths about man as well as God that are the wellsprings of art."(4)

Evaluating Art

Can the Bible help us evaluate art? Consider the concepts found in Philippians 4:8:

> Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

Let's concentrate for a few moments on this verse in order to see if it might at least provide the beginning of a framework for the evaluation and enjoyment of art.

Paul begins with *truth*. When considering art the Christian is compelled to ask, "Is this really true?" Does life genuinely operate in this fashion in light of God's revelation? And Christians must remember that truth includes the negatives as well as the positives of reality.

The second word refers to the concept of *honor* or *dignity*. This can refer to what we related earlier in this essay about the nature of man: we have dignity even though we are sinful. This gives a basis, for example, to reject the statements in the work of the artist Francis Bacon. Bacon painted half-truths. He presented deterioration and hopeless despair, but he didn't present man's honor and dignity.

The third key to aesthetic comprehension has to do with the moral dimension—what is *right*. Not all art makes a moral statement, but when it does Christians must deal with it, not ignore it. For example, Picasso's painting, Guernica, is a powerful moral statement 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.

Purity is the fourth concept. It also touches on the moral— by contrasting that which is innocent, chaste, and pure from that

which is sordid, impure, and worldly. 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.

While the first four concepts have dealt with facets of artistic statements, the fifth focuses on sheer beauty: "Whatever is *lovely*." If there is little to evaluate morally and rationally, we are still free to appreciate what is beautiful in art.

The sixth concept, that of *good repute*, gives us impetus to evaluate the life and character of the artist. The less than exemplary lifestyle of an artist may somewhat tarnish his artistic contribution, but it doesn't necessarily obliterate it. The greatest art is true, skillfully expressed, imaginative, and unencumbered by the personal and emotional problems of its originators.

Excellence is yet another concept. It is a comparative term; it assumes that something else is not excellent. The focus is on quality, which is worth much discussion. But one sure sign of it is craftsmanship: technical mastery. Another sign is durability. Great art lasts.

The last concept is *praise*. Here we are concerned with the impact or the effect of the art. Great art can have power and is therefore a forceful tool of communication. Herein lies the "two-edged swordness" of art. It can encourage a culture to lofty heights, and it can help bring a culture to ruin. Paul undergirds this meaty verse by stating that we should let our minds "dwell on these things," a reminder that Christianity thrives on intelligence, not ignorance even in the artistic realm.

Thus it is my hope that we will pursue the artistic dimensions of our lives with intelligence and imagination. The world needs to see and hear from Christians committed to art for the

glory of God.

Notes

1. C. Nolan Huizenga, “The Arts: A Bridge Between the Natural and Spiritual Realms,” in *The Christian Imagination*, ed. Leland Ryken (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), 70.
2. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980), 4.
3. Ibid.
4. Frank E. Gaebelein, “Toward a Biblical View of Aesthetics,” in *The Christian Imagination*, ed. Leland Ryken (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1981), 48-49.

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