# The Development of Modern Culture – Critical Role of Christianity Downplayed

Steve Cable explodes 5 myths about history, showing Christianity's true critical role in the progress and development of culture.

Is our history really what you have been taught in school? For at least the last five decades in schools across this nation, most of us have digested a similar litany of facts about the development of the Western world. Among these commonly accepted facts are these five:

   1. The Roman Empire introduced and maintained a period of relative peace in which innovation and free thought could flourish.

   2. The Dark Ages, coming after the fall of the Roman Empire, was a period of over 500 years during which the European world languished in feudalism and ignorance.

   3. The Protestant Reformation, fueled by the invention of the printing press, introduced a new era of religious freedom.

   4. The Scientific Revolution was the result of Europe casting aside religious "superstitions" during the so-called Enlightenment.

   5. Protestant missionaries were a negative, colonizing influence on the non-Western world.
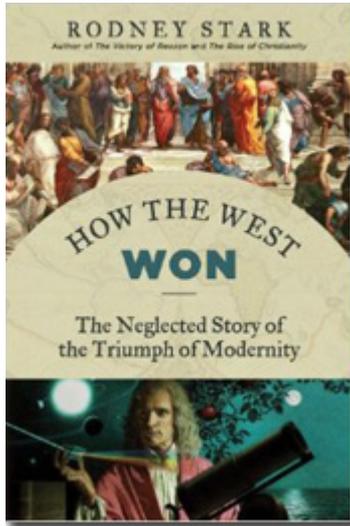
In his recent book, entitled *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity*, Rodney Stark, Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences at Baylor University, questions these "historical facts" from our childhood along with many others. His premise, based on the current state of historical data and analysis, is that the conventional wisdom about the history of the western world was tainted by the prejudices and lack of knowledge of the early historical writers. His view is backed up by the research and writings of many contemporary scholars. He clearly points out that what is taught in our schools lags far behind the common knowledge held by top researchers in the field. It is interesting to note that this phenomenon is very similar to the difference between high school textbooks on the evolution of man and the current state of research into the origins of life.

Stark concludes that contrary to the conventional wisdom of high school textbooks, the worldview that developed as a result of following after the God revealed in Christian scripture was critical to the advent of our modern age. Only a society steeped in the message of an all-powerful, loving, creator of this universe was postured to take on the scientific and societal endeavors which are crucial to our society today. According to Stark, our modern world is not the result of key people freeing themselves from the chains of religious intolerance to pursue knowledge and truth, but rather the result of people seeking to better understand this universe created out of nothing into an orderly something by our Lord and God.

In the remainder of this article, we will look at these five key concepts of our history still taught to our students today and see how contemporary research has significantly modified

or completely discredited them.

The Impact of Greece, Judaism, and Rome

Apart from periods of Jewish history, most of the world before 600 B.C. was controlled by systems of government that awarded the elite few at the expense of the rest of society. In China, India and Egypt societies had this common theme: "Wealth is subject to devastating taxes and the constant threat of usurpation; the challenge is to keep one's wealth, not to make it productive."[{1}](#) Their rulers strived to make it so. Stark pointed this out: "As Ricardo Caminos put it about the ancient Egyptians, 'Peasant families always wavered between abject poverty and utter destitution.' If the elite seizes all production above the minimum needed for survival, people have no motivation to produce more."[{2}](#)

Beginning around 600 B.C., the Greek city-states prior to the reigns of Phillip of Macedonia and his son, Alexander the Great, were the first to offer a different economic model on a large scale. "The major benefit of Greek democracy was sufficient freedom so that individuals could benefit from innovations making them more productive, with the collective result of economic progress."[{3}](#) This unprecedented freedom was partly the result of Greece having an unfavorable geography with an abundance of mountains, no abundance of natural resources, and no large navigable river. This geography helped to promote the large number of small, independent city states. "Thus, having an unfavorable geography contributed to the greatness of Greece, for disunity and competition were fundamental to everything else."[{4}](#) Once Greece was under the rule of the Macedonians and later the Romans, the scale of innovation in the areas of democracy, economic progress, the arts, and technology slowed dramatically.

Unlike other peoples near the cities of Greece, the Jews were greatly impacted by the Greek philosophers. Why? The God the

Jews worshipped was "conscious, concerned and rational"{5} and as such the Jewish theologians were committed to reasoning about God from the things God revealed through Scripture. At this time the vast majority of Jews lived in the Diaspora outside of Palestine. And so, like the Apostle Paul, these Jews were exposed to Greek thought filtered through their understanding of Scripture.

Of course, the early Christians accepted this view of God but also added the idea that our knowledge of God and of his creation is progressive.{6} Understand that our early Christian fathers did not wholeheartedly embrace Greek ideas, choosing to show how Christian doctrines were much more rational. But they did embrace the ideas of reason and logic which were behind Greek philosophy. This train of thought by our Christian fathers set the stage for the development and advances of science. As Stark notes, "The truth is that science arose only because the doctrine of the rational creator of a rational universe made scientific inquiry plausible."{7}

The rule of the Roman Empire provided centuries of relative peace and free travel throughout the Mediterranean area. This *pax Romana* facilitated the spread of Christianity across the Mediterranean world and thus played an important role in the growth of Christianity. However, Stark suggests that "the Roman Empire as at best a pause in the rise of the West, and more plausibly a setback."{8}

Most of us probably view the Roman Empire as an expanded version of the great age of Greece where advancements were common in philosophy, commerce and technology. Stark points out that as a large, centrally controlled empire, Rome had plenty of labor and a large distance between the privileged few and the laboring masses. Consequently, the art and literature of the Roman period was fundamentally Greek. There were very few technological innovations developed during this period. In fact, "the Romans made little of no use of some

known technologies, e.g. water power."{9} They preferred to use manual labor rather than employ labor saving devices.

Stark suggests that two events during the period of Roman control were important to the development of our modern culture: the Christianization of the empire and the fall of Rome. "It was Rome that fell, not civilization. . . the millions of residents of the former empire did not suddenly forget everything they knew. To the contrary, with the stultifying effects of Roman repression now ended, the glorious journey toward modernity resumed."{10}

The Not-So-Dark Ages

My understanding of the Dark Ages as a student from the 1970's is probably similar to yours. It was pictured as a time in which European culture took a step backward from the advances of the Roman Empire and made little or no progress in advancing culture, economics, philosophy, or technology. It was a time characterized by wars and the stultifying oppression of the Catholic Church. Many historians of the past wrote that the fall of Rome cast Europe into this dismal age, aided by Christianity which celebrated poverty and urged contentment.

Stark, along with most modern historians, take a far different view of this period of Western history. Stark puts it this way: "The fall of Rome was, in fact, the most beneficial event in the rise of Western civilization, precisely because it unleashed creative competition among the hundreds of independent political units, which, in turn resulted in rapid and profound progress."{11}

In this culture of independent political units, trade developed and expanded rapidly, the average person ate better and grew larger than in the past because the people could now put to personal use the wealth Rome had previously squeezed from them. "Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the Dark

Ages myth is that it was imposed on what was actually 'one of the great innovative eras of mankind.'"{12} During this period technology was developed and put into use "on a scale no civilization had previously known."{13}

One of the strongest influences during this period came from the Scandinavians, the Vikings. "The Viking merchants traveled a complex network of trade routes extending as far as Persia. . . (The) Vikings had excellent arms, remarkable ships, and superb navigational skills . . . Their boats were far superior to anything found elsewhere on earth at that time."{14} Our history lessons, however, placed an emphasis on great empires rather than movements impacting our way of life. "Not only have they continued to regret the fall of Rome, but they remember Charlemagne as the man who almost 'saved' Europe. In fact, the Scandinavians were as civilized as the Franks, while William the Conqueror was certainly as able as Charlemagne, and considerably more tolerant."{15}

One of the major events during this period was the rise of capitalism as an economic driver. Capitalism can only exist in societies with free markets, secure property rights and the right of individuals to work where they wish. The Christian West, out from under the yoke of the Roman Empire, was the only society where this move was possible. As Stark explains, "Of the major world faiths, only Judaism and Christianity have devoted serious and sustained attention to human rights, as opposed to human duties. Put another way, the other great faiths minimize individualism and stress collective obligations. They are . . . cultures of shame rather than cultures of guilt. There is not even a word for freedom in the languages in which their scriptures are written."{16} Counter to the position of earlier historians who put the advent of capitalism much later in history, capitalism not only thrived during this period but had been fully debated by theologians who on the whole gave it general approval.

You may remember being taught that during these Dark Ages that

Islamic scholarship and technological innovation kept society moving forward in the areas of science and technology. In fact, Stark points out, "The 'Golden Era' of Islamic science and learning is a myth. Some Muslim-occupied societies gave the appearance of sophistication only because of the culture sustained by their subject peoples — Jews and various brands of Christianity."{17} In fact when they later cleansed their society of these other people, they soon fell back into a state where any technology was bought from the West and in many cases had to be operated by Westerners. One area where this was revealed on multiple occasions was in the area of military strategy and technology. In numerous battles between A.D. 1200 and 1600, Western forces on land and on the oceans typically inflicted casualties upon their Muslim foes at a rate ranging from 10 to 1,000 Muslim casualties for every casualty among the Western forces.

"Despite the record of Muslim failure against Western military forces, far too many recent Western historians promulgate politically correct illusions about Islamic might, as well as spurious claims that once upon a time Islamic science and technology were far superior to that of a backward and intolerant Europe."{18}

"In 1148 all Christians and Jews were ordered to convert to Islam or leave Moorish Spain immediately, on pain of death. . . . And as (they) disappeared, they took the "advanced" Muslim culture with them. What they left behind was a culture so backward that it couldn't even copy Western technology but had to buy it and often even had to hire Westerners to use it."{19}

What we had been taught were Dark Ages of no progress were actually a period of great progress in the development of individual freedom and the concept of capitalism.

The Reformation and Religious Freedom

Martin Luther, the catalytic figure of the Reformation, asserted that salvation is God's gift, freely given, and gained entirely by faith in Jesus as the redeemer. Each person must establish his or her own personal relationship with God. This new emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility was certainly consistent with the key aspects of Western modernity. But the way these ideas played out in society were a different matter.

The popular view promulgated by English and German historians was that the Protestant Reformation, which roughly occurred between A.D. 1515 and 1685, was facilitated by the printing press and the spread of literacy, resulting in a "remarkable revival of popular piety and the spread of religious liberty." You were probably taught that this new view of piety, placing the responsibility of a relationship with God squarely on the shoulders of the individual rather than on the intervening work of the Church, created a new environment of religious tolerance and personal piety. This environment was invigorating to the concepts of scientific and economic progress. However, the real situation was far different from this idealistic view promulgated by English and German historians. Far from introducing religious liberty to the masses, the Protestant Reformation was more about switching one monopoly religion for another.

Stark points out three ways in which earlier historians and sociologists have misrepresented what went on in the spread of the Protestant Reformation. These historians and probably your high school history textbook, taught the following about the Reformation:

1. The Reformation introduced an era of religious freedom in Europe

2. The Reformation was able to spread rapidly because of the

newly invented printing press

3. The Reformation's spread was partially a result of its attractiveness to the common man.

On the first point, rather than introducing an era of religious freedom, the Reformation produced competing monopoly religions. Depending upon the area in which one lived, the pressure to conform to the religion adopted by that region was immense. So what determined whether your region would be Catholic or Protestant? If the area's current Catholic hierarchy was not operating under the rule of local rulers or councils, the rulers were very likely to convert to a Protestant view, thereby removing the influence of the Catholic Church in their domain. Importantly, it allowed them to loot church property in the name of religion. As Stark point out, "It is all well and good to note the widespread appeal of the doctrine that we are saved by faith alone, but it also must be recognized that Protestantism prevailed only where the local rulers or councils had not already imposed their rule over the Church. Pocketbook issues prevailed."[20]

Was it the printing press that allowed the Reformation to spread rapidly? If so, one would expect that cities with printing presses producing Luther's pamphlets and his Bible, would be most likely to align with Protestantism. Yet what we find is a negative correlation between towns with printers who had published Luther's Bible and those towns which had converted to Protestantism. The printing press was certainly a factor in spreading Luther's theology, but if it was the dominant factor we should see a strongly positive correlation, not a negative one. "Indeed, assessments of the impact of printed materials on the success of the Lutheran Reformation too often overlook a critical factor: no more than five percent of Germans in this era could read."[21]

Finally, a widely held belief is that the Lutheran Reformation touched the hearts of the masses, resulting in a huge revival

in personal faith and piety. However, most people were not personally impacted by the theological arguments between Catholicism and Protestantism. The common man in Germany at that time was, at best, semi-Christian. As Stark points out, "Eventually even Martin Luther admitted that neither the tidal wave of publications nor all the Lutheran preachers in Germany had made the slightest dent in the ignorance, irreverence, and alienation of the masses. Luther complained in 1529, "Dear God, help us! . . . The common man, especially in the villages, knows absolutely nothing about Christian doctrine; and indeed many pastors are in effect unfit and incompetent to teach. Yet they all are called Christians, are baptized, and enjoy the holy sacraments — even though they cannot recite either the Lord's Prayer, the Creed or the Commandments. They live just like animals."

The Scientific Revolution and Christianity

The term "Scientific Revolution" was coined, referring to the period in the sixteenth and seventeenth century beginning with Copernicus and ending with Newton, when the rate of scientific advancement was thought to have increased dramatically. However, modern historians say that no such revolution occurred, although the role of science definitely matured during that period of time. Many of us remember being taught three aspects of this so-called revolution that we want to consider:

1. Most key scientific contributors had freed themselves from the rigid dogmas of faith.

2. The Protestant Reformation had freed society from "the dead hand of the Catholic Church," thereby making real scientific thinking possible.

3. Real science could not occur in universities controlled by the churches.

However, Rodney Stark points out that current evidence indicates that all of these claims are false, stating, "Indeed, Christianity was essential to the rise of science, which is why science was a purely Western phenomenon."{22}

Of the 52 most prominent contributors to scientific advancement during this period, we find that 60% of them were devout believers in Christianity. Only one of them was a skeptic toward the message of Christianity. And the rest were classified as conventionally religious. So, the idea promoted by contemporary philosophers that scientific advancement was the result of freeing themselves from belief in the dogmas of the faith could not be further from the truth.

Of these 52 leaders of the scientific community, 26 were Protestant and 26 were Catholic. This equal distribution belies the common wisdom that the Protestant revolution allowed real scientific thinking to begin to take root. It appears that prior advances in scientific thought had prepared the minds of these individuals to advance the frontiers even further, regardless of whether they were Protestant or Catholic. Both faiths believed in God as the Intelligent Designer of a rational universe, and a rational universe was one that could be understood through the application of the scientific method.

As noted earlier, most modern historians sided with the statement, "Not only were the universities of Europe not the foci of scientific activity . . . but the universities were the principal centers of opposition for the new conceptions of nature which modern science constructed."{23} Actually, 92% of these leaders in scientific research spent an extended period of time of ten years or more in the universities. Nearly half of them served as university professors during their careers. In fact, the distinguished historian of science Edward Grant stated, "The medieval university laid far greater emphasis on science than does its modern counterpart."{24}

Stark wrote, "Science only arose in Christian Europe because only medieval Europeans believed that science was possible and desirable. And the basis of their belief was their image of God and his creation."{25} As the distinguished mathematician and scientist, Johannes Kepler stated, "The chief aim of all investigations of the external world should be to discover the rational order and harmony imposed on it by God and which he revealed to us in the language of mathematics."{26} Thus, the so-called scientific revolution occurred not in spite of Christianity but rather directly because a Christian worldview beckoned them to study the nature of our world more closely.

Protestant Missionaries and the Rise of Western Democracies

Protestant missionaries are often portrayed as the villains of imperialistic expansion. They have often been portrayed as having a greater interest in converting their charges to Western culture than introducing them to eternal life through Jesus Christ. However, their personal and public publications do not support this negative view. On the contrary, "Missionaries undertook many aggressive actions to defend local peoples against undue exploitation by colonial officials."{27}

Beyond correcting this distorted view of missionary purpose, modern historians have discovered an interesting impact. A recent study has shown that the rise and spread of stable democracies in the non-Western world can be attributed primarily to the impact of Protestant missionaries. According to a study by sociologist Robert Woodberry,{28} the impact of these missionaries far exceeds that of fifty other control variables such as gross domestic product and whether or not a nation was a British colony. One would think that having a healthy amount of production per individual would be one of the biggest factors leading to a stable democratic government. But the data shows that it has been much more important to

have the teaching and leadership development provided by Protestant missionaries.

In addition, the greater number of Protestant missionaries per capita in a nation in 1923, the lower that nation's infant-mortality rate in 2000. In this case, the effect of having Protestant missionaries was more than nine times as large as the effect of current GDP per capita. In other words, having a history of Protestant missionaries is much more important than having a large amount of money in determining a low infant-mortality rate.

Conclusion

Many of us have been given the impression by educators that the scientific, governmental, and societal advances we enjoy are the result of enlightened people taking off their religious blinders and thinking more clearly about these topics. Sociologist Rodney Stark presents compelling data, arguing that in fact it was the unique worldview of Christianity that created societies in which new ideas could foment and flourish. This Christian worldview was fundamental to the advances in economics, science and government common in our current world. Understanding the worldview that fueled the advances making up our modern world is important if we are to continue to move ahead responsibly.

Notes

1. Rodney Stark, *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity.* Wilmington DE: ISI Books, 2014. 12.
2. Stark, 11.
3. Stark, 19.
4. Stark, 15.
5. Stark, 33.
6. Stark, 33.
7. Stark, 40.
8. Stark, 47.

9. Stark, 53.

10. Stark, 66.

11. Stark, 69.

12. Gimpel,Jean, *The Medieval Machine: The Industrial Revolution of the Middle Ages*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

13. Stark, 76.

14. Stark, 95.

15. Stark, 118.

16. Stark, 125.

17. Stark, 43.

18. Stark, 283.

19. Stark, 302.

20. Start, 272.

21. Stark, 270.

22. Stark, 304.

23. Westfall, Richard S. *The Construction of Modern Science* New York: Wiley, 1971. 105.

24. Grant, Edward. "Science and the Medieval University" in James M. Kittelson and Pamela J. Transue, eds., *Rebirth, Reform, and Resilience: Universities in Transition, 1300-1700* . Ohio State University Press, 1984. 68.

25. Stark, p. 315.

26. Bradley, Walter, "The 'Just So' Universe: The Fine-Tuning of Constants and Conditions in the Cosmos" in William Dembski and James M. Kushiner, eds., *Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001. 160.

27. Stark, 366.

28. Woodberry, Robert D. "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy," *American Political Science Review*, 2012. 106:1-30.

What is Technology?

Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese uncovers a disturbing new view of technology: not as neutral, but a way of life that objectifies everything, including people.

The Neutrality View

Most people take a favorable view towards technological progress; new cars, cell phones and computers — what's not to like? They embrace technological innovation as a plus despite the suspicions of questionable things like cloning, genetic engineering and nuclear weapons. But what is technology anyway? Do we really understand this all-embracing phenomenon directing human history? We often take for granted that we think we know the answer when in fact the meaning of the greatest social mover of all times remains elusive. When it comes to defining technology we are beset with the problem of defining more than just a word, but a concept and whole way of life and worldview.

The typical definition of technology these days says technology is neutral, suggesting that technology is nothing more than tools that people use as needed. Technology is a means to an end and nothing more. All objects are separate and disconnected. They are neutral and value-free, right? Tables, chairs, and light fixtures have nothing to do with each other and express no values in themselves and are completely determined by our use. They are simply objects at our disposal and present no moral problems so long as we use them for good. We can pick up a hammer and use it, then place it back in the tool box when finished. The hammer has appropriate and inappropriate uses. Hitting nails into wood is one of the acceptable uses of a hammer; using it to play baseball is not acceptable. So long as we act as good moral agents we use our technology rightly, or so we think. This definition is so

widely accepted that we have trouble ever questioning it. When faced with morally questionable uses of technology we fall back on this old cliché: "technology is neutral," and that settles all disputes. We are all familiar with this popular view and embrace it to some extent. The problem is not that the cliché is so simple or popular, but that it is so wrong. Philosophers have been telling us for decades now that the neutrality of technology definition is wrong and dangerous because it blinds us to the true nature of technology.

The Holistic View

The second view of the nature of technology, held mainly by philosophers, we call the "holistic view." This view states that the "neutral view" is false because people hold to it as a means of justifying every type of technology. The neutrality view blinds us to the true nature of technology, which is not value-free. The lack of understanding regarding the true nature of technology creates a serious problem for a society so heavily influenced by technological development. As sociologist Rudi Volti says, "This inability to understand technology and perceive its effects on our society and on ourselves is one of the greatest, if most subtle, problems of an age that has been so heavily influenced by technological change."{1} Technology is understood as a social system. We can also call it a worldview, a philosophy of life that sees all things as objects, including people. Instead of defining technology as disparate tools unconnected to each other, philosophers have suggested a more comprehensive definition that says technology does not mean neutral objects ready for use at our convenience, but a way of life that informs and controls everything we do. In other words, technology is a belief system with its own worldview and agenda—more like a religion than a hammer.

This belief system is often called the *essence of technology* or *spirit of technology* and cannot be seen in technological

objects because we cannot see the entire system by looking at individual parts. We must grasp the spiritual essence before we can understand its technical parts. The "neutrality view" looks only at parts rather than the whole and misses technology's true nature. This is a lot like looking at the tires of your car or its engine parts and thinking you now understand a car from seeing separate pieces of it and never seeing how the whole thing fits together.

The holistic view understands technology as a way of life and spiritual reality that shapes all our thinking. Philosopher Martin Heidegger gives the example of how the Rhine River exists not as a river, but as a source for electricity. Everything becomes stuff ready for usefulness.{2}

Technology really means an interconnected system rather than a neutral tool. The neutral definition blinds us to the true nature of technology and prevents us from mastering it. Heidegger argued that "we are delivered over to [technology] in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularity like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology."{3}

Technology as Spirituality

The neutrality argument reassures us that we remain in control of our means rather than our means controlling us. It does not allow us to find the essence of technology in everyday technological objects such as cars, computers, or screw drivers and baseball bats; rather, technology is a way of life and thought that creates a universal system. Technology means the grand accumulation of all the different technological parts into a global system.

Technology is a system of interlocking systems. As philosopher Jacques Ellul said, "It is the aggregate of these means that

produces technical civilization."{4} Technology is our modern frame of reference that speaks of the profoundly spiritual and not the strictly technical. If we look at individual everyday technologies we will miss it. Instead we must see past the common objects to the larger global system that comprises technology as a social process. In the technological system both humanity and nature have no separate standing or value outside of technical usefulness. People are simply resources to be used and discarded as needed.

This view reveals the depths to which technology shapes our thinking by informing us and conforming us into the image of the machine, which represents the greatest example of technological thinking. Everything is understood as a machine and should function like a machine including the government, the school, the church and you! Bureaucracy is a social machine.

The machine is predictable. It has no freedom. It follows mechanical steps, or linear logic. Step one leads to step two, and so forth. Any deviation from its programming causes chaos and possible break down, which is why the machine is the worst possible analogy for human beings to follow. Yet this is the basis of the entire modern conception of life.{5} People are not machines that can be programmed; to adopt this conception reverses the role between humanity and its machines, making people conform to the image of the machine rather than vice versa. Machines are our slaves. They do what we tell them to do. They have no will, feelings or desires. Philosophers tell us that the natural relationship between people and machines is in a process of reversal so that we are becoming slaves to technology. We may control our individual use of technology but no one as of yet controls the entire system.{6}

Neutrality as Modern Myth

Nothing can be explained by the neutrality argument, not even

the meaning of "neutrality." It is simply not possible for any technology to be neutral; even the most primitive tools such as fire or stone axes take the form of their designers. Every technology bears inherent values of purpose and goals. Fire has value for a particular reason, to clear the land, cook food, keep people warm and ward off dangerous animals. By their very design, all inventions and tools reflects our values and human nature. Philosopher of Science Jacob Bronowski argued that "to quarrel with technology is to quarrel with the nature of man."{7} Technology is an extension of ourselves and expresses human nature, which is never entirely good or bad, but ambivalent. Our technology reflects who we are and nothing more; it is not divine, it will not save the human race; but neither is it animal, but fully human, whose nature is always ambiguous, capable of great acts of kindness and mercy as well as cruelty and evil. People can be self-sacrificial and giving and self-destructive and greedy. There will always be good and bad effects to our inventions. They are a double edged sword that cuts both ways and it is our responsibility to discern between the two.

The modern bias in favor of neutrality reveals our protectionist tendencies towards all things technological. How is it that sinful people can produce morally neutral technology? We would not say that about art. "Oh! All art is morally neutral! It is all a matter of how you use it!" Yet the same creative forces go into producing technology as art. Is there anything neutral about the works of Caravaggio, Da Vinci or Picasso? Why then should there be anything neutral about Facebook or MX missiles?

This appears simple enough, but as modern people addicted to our latest toys and novelties we have difficulty admitting we may have a problem. We don't like to think that too much Facebook might be causing young people to be further isolated from the community because they are more accustomed to relate electronically than in person, or that email actually reduces

our ability to communicate because of the absence of tone of voice, body language, eye contact and personal presence. TV and film may have a surreal effect on its message, giving it a dream like quality rather than communicating realism.

Controlling Technology

The solution is not to abandon any of the incredible inventions of the modern age, but to recognize their limits. It is the sign of wisdom that we understand our limits and work within them. We should proceed along a two tiered path of questioning and the application of values. Ellul said that "It is not a question of getting rid of [technology], but by an act of freedom, of transcending it."{8} The act of questioning is the first act of freedom; by becoming aware of the problem we can assert a measure of freedom and control. Through critical questioning we recognize our limits and thus we are able to exercise a measure of control over technology.

We should develop technologies that reflect our values of freedom, equality and democracy. For example, Ellul did envision in the early 1980's the potential use of computer technology in a way that would create a decentralized source of knowledge that would maintain the values of democracy. We know this now as the internet. However, as Ellul also argued technology cannot change society for the better if we don't change ourselves. The computer can also be used to bring in stifling State control.{9} We will never have a perfect technology that has no problems, but we should be visionaries in how we think about technology and the application of our values to it.

Limits serve as a warning to us. It is obvious that society has progressed in many ways thanks to advanced technology, but society's spiritual regression shares the same condition as advancement. We have not become better people because we live in the twenty-first century rather than the nineteenth

century. Without a renewed spiritual and moral framework to direct our development and give new purpose to the system, technology may become the source of our own destruction rather than improvement. An inventory of advancement compares starkly with the litany of potential catastrophe. We have eliminated disease, but also created dangerous levels of overpopulation. We live longer and more abundant lives materially, but are pushing the natural world into extinction. We are able to travel quicker and communicate instantly, contributing to world peace and understanding, but have also developed the weapons of war to unimaginable levels of devastation.

Without a moral framework to control technology and understand its ethical limits we will go down a path of losing control of technology's direction, allowing it to develop autonomously. This means it will develop in a predetermined linear direction, like a clock that will inevitably strike midnight once wound up. That direction as we have seen moves inexorably closer to the mechanization of humanity and nature. With the right value-system we can begin to reassert control. The choice is yours. Where do you want to go?

Notes

1. Rudi Volti, *Society and Technological Change*, 4th ed. (New York: Worth Publishes, 2001), 3.
2. Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. by William Lovitt (New York; Harper, 1977), 16, 17.
3. Ibid., 4.
4. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. by John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage, 1964), 2.
5. John Herman Randall, Jr. *The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 227.
6. Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine; Technics and Human Development* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1966); Idem, *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power* (New York:

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970); Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1992); Lawrence J. Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2005).
7. Jacob Bronowski, "Technology and Culture in Evolution," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 1. 3(1971): 199.
8. Ellul, *The Technological Society,* xxxiii.
9. Jacques Ellul, "New Hope for the Technological Society: An Interview with Jacques Ellul" in *Et cetera* 40.2 (1983): 192-206.

Dangerous Worldviews

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

In order to help our friends understand the importance of viewing reality accurately, which is only possible with a pair of glasses that consist of truths that align with what God has revealed in scripture, we brought along a prop. We brought a pair of goggles called "Drunk Busters" that give the wearer a dizzying approximation of what being drunk does to your vision. State police and drivers' education programs use them to demonstrate why it's deadly to drink and drive.

We ask for a volunteer to first navigate a simple obstacle

course of chairs, catch an object we toss to them, and pick up that object from the floor. No one has any trouble doing these things.

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

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

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

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

Some believers think that they put their trust in Christ to

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

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

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

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

Those are sexy worldview glasses you've got there.

Feb. 3, 2011

E's email is a response to the post "[Glee-tastic!](#)"

Ms. McKenzie

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

Hi E,

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

I also understand that not everyone has the same level of freedom to interact with various aspects of our unbelieving society. Everyone is different. There are certain things which are particularly spiritually unsafe for me—I know it in my

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

Anyone who believes he or she is safe from the all the various temptations available in film is a fool. My colleague Todd wisely notes and advises, "Exercising rampant Christian freedom does not necessarily mean one is a strong Christian [referring to 1 Cor 8]. It could indicate that one is too weak to control one's passions and is hiding behind the argument that they are a stronger brother." If we choose to watch TV or movies at all, we must approach them through a "framework of moderation," to use Todd's phrase, that addresses *our*

particular weaknesses, for we are all of us the weaker brother somewhere. "Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments" (Ps 119:66).

There is a difference between conviction and legalism. One of those differences is the legalistic compulsion to impose one's personal convictions on others. It is possible to abstain from certain types of movies and shows, or even all movies and television, in a genuinely free way. I greatly admire my friends who abstain; who don't even have a TV. Together we add to the richness of each others' lives by bringing perspective to one another about who God is and how we relate to him. Together we present to the world a more complete picture. It is the diversity of the Body that most beautifully represents Christ to the world. It is vital to our Christian calling to live as much as we can in the tension between the pulls of legalism and libertinism. The ebb and flow of this kind of living is part of what in means to live the full, rich, abundant life of Christ.

With affection in our Lord Jesus,
Renea

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

Into the Void: The Coming Transhuman Transformation

In the TV show *The Six Million Dollar Man*, Lee Majors played Steven Austin, a crippled astronaut who was rehabilitated through bionic technology that gave him superhuman strength and powers. The show, like so much science fiction, presents

us with the dream that technology will enhance all our facilities from sight to memory, hearing to strength, and lengthen our life span to boot. The bionic man represents a fictional forerunner of the transhuman transformation. The Transhumanist school believes that technology will not only enhance the human condition, but eventually conquer death and grant us immortality. Human enhancement technology performs wonders in allowing the lame to walk, the blind to see, the deaf to hear and the sick to be well, but even immortality is out of the reach of technology. In striving to enhance our physical existence we may lose our souls in the process.

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

In leaving traditional spiritual values behind, Lewis argues, modern technological civilization has reduced human value to only what is natural, and we have lost our spiritual quality. Modern society has striven to conquer nature and largely succeeded, but at a great cost—with each new conquest, more losses in human dignity, more of the human spark extinguished. Lewis offers the example of eugenics from his time in the 1930's and 40's.{5} Eugenics is now a debunked science of racial manipulation and something we know was practiced with particular ferocity in Nazi Germany.{6} But the driving philosophy of manipulating nature and humanity into something new and final remains prominent. Lewis underestimated the truth of his own prophecy. He thought that maybe in 10,000

years the final leap will be taken when mankind will solidify itself into some kind of inert power structure dominated by science and technology.[{7}]

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

Metaman

Our present condition will give way to the cyborg (which is short for cybernetic organism) as we join our bodies and minds to technological progress. Transhumanists believe that because Artificial Intelligence (computing power) advances at such a rapid pace, it will eventually exceed human intelligence and humanity will need to employ genetic engineering to modify our bodies to keep pace or become extinct. Therefore, the cyborg condition represents humanity's inevitable destiny.

The two predominant pillars in transhumanism revolve around Artificial Intelligence (AI) and genetic engineering. One represents a biological change through manipulating genes. The other presents the merging of human intelligence with AI. The biological position (through use of genetic engineering)

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

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

Stock states that through "conscious design" humanity has replaced the evolutionary process.{11} This leads us to Post—Darwinism where people have supplanted the natural order with their own technological modification of humanity and the entire ecological system. "Life, having evolved a being that internalizes the process of natural selection, has finally transcended that process."{12} Humanity may now, through the agency of technological progress, seize direction of its development and guide it to wherever it wants itself to go. No other species has ever controlled its own destiny as we do.

The Singularity

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

Both of these positions, one emanating from genetic engineering that seeks to enhance the body, the other from Artificial Intelligence that seeks to supersede and even supplant the need for bodies, argue for the eventual replacement of humanity with biological–machine hybrids. Metaman and Singularity systems are direct heirs of the modern idea of progress. They present the dawning of a technological Millennium, but they also share a long history dating back into medieval Christendom. In the early Church, technology, or the "mechanical arts," was never considered as a means to salvation or Edenic restoration. Historian David Noble argues

that from Charlemagne to the early Early Modern period technology became associated with transcendence as the means of restoring the lost divine image or *imago dei*.{16}

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

Despite the apparent secularity of the super science behind all the technological wonders of our time, the notions of modern progress and transhumanism remain grounded in an aberrant form of Christian theology. Noble summarizes this well when he states, "For modern technology and modern faith are neither complements nor opposites, nor do they represent succeeding stages of human development. They are merged, and always have been, the technological enterprise being, at the same time, an essentially religious endeavor."{18} The theology behind Modern technological progress remains rooted in Medieval and Early Modern notions of earthly redemption when the "useful arts,"{19} which ranged anywhere from improved agricultural methods to windmills, were invested with redemptive qualities and humanity began to assume an elevated status over nature. "In theological terms, this exalted stance vis-à-vis nature represented a forceful reassertion of an early core Christian belief in the possibility of mankind's recovery of its original God—likeness, the 'image—likeness of man to God' from Genesis (1:26), which had been impaired by sin and forfeited with the Fall."{20} Technology becomes the means of restoring the original divine image. Technological development was expected to reverse the effects of the Fall and restore original perfection. This theology also serves as the impetus behind Millennial thought which believes

technology helps humanity recover from the Fall and leads to an earthly paradise. Transhumanism extends this Millennial belief into the twenty-first century.

Redeeming Technology

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

In seeking to reconcile technology with a biblical theology we have three possible approaches. *Technophobia* represents the first position. This view contends that we should fear technological innovation and attempt to destroy it. The Unabomber Manifesto offers the most radical, pessimistic and violent expression of this position, arguing for a violent attack against the elites of technological civilization such as computer scientists in an effort to return society to

primitive and natural conditions in hopes of escaping the kind of future transhumanists expect.{22} However, the entire tenor of our times moves in the opposite direction, that of *technophilism*, or the inordinate love for technology. Transhumanism optimistically believes that through technological innovation we will restore our God-like image. A third position asserts a mediating role between over-zealous optimism and radical morose pessimism. {23}

Technocriticism

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

Technocriticism humanizes technology. We assert nothing more than the idea that technology expresses human nature. Technology is us! Technology suffers the same faults and failures that plague human nature. Technology is not a means of restoring our lost divine image or reasserting our rightful place over nature. This amounts to a works-based salvation and

leads to dangerous utopian and millennial delusions that amount to one group imposing its grandiose vision of the perfect society on the rest. Such ideologies include Marxism, Technological Utopianism and now Transhumanism. We are restored to the divine "image of His Son" by grace through faith alone (Rom. 8:29). Technology, serving as an extension of ourselves, means that what we create will bear our likeness, both as the image-bearers of God and in sinful human identity. It contains both positive and negative consequences that only patient wisdom can sort through.

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

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 77.
2. Ibid., 86.

3. Lewis, of course, did not originate this ancient Chinese concept but rather applied it to universally accessible principles.

4. Ibid., 56.

5. Ibid., 72

6. See [*Darwin's Racists: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*](#) by Sharon Sebastian and Raymond G. Bohlin, Ph.D. Though the German Nazis acted out this hideous ideology to an extreme, eugenics was actually first promulgated in the United States, Germany and Scandinavia around the turn of the 20th Century.

7. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 71.

8. See Dr. Ray Bohlin's article [PBS Evolution Series](#), especially the section entitled "'Great Transformations' and 'Extinction'."

9. Gregory Stock, *Metaman: The Merging of Humans and Machines into a Global Superorganism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 165.

10. Ibid., 20.

11. Ibid., 228.

12. Ibid., 231.

13. Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

14. Ibid., 9.

15. David Gregory, *The Last Christian*, (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2010), 102.

16. David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 9.

17. Ernst Benz, *Evolution and Christian Hope: Man's Concept of the Future from Early Fathers to Teilhard de Chardin* trans., Heinz G. Frank (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 124-125.

18. Noble, *The Religion of Technology*, 4, 5.

19. Ibid.,14.

20. Ibid.

21. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Reason and Revelation Being and God*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 13.

22. FC, *The Unabomber Manifesto: Industrial Society and Its*

Future (Berkeley, CA: Jolly Roger Press, 1995).

23. See Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 5.
24. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 79, 80.
25. Frank Herbert, *Dune* (New York: Ace, 1965), 11.

Examining Our Cultural Captivity – A Christian Look at the Impact of Popular Thought on the Church

Steve Cable looks at the current epidemic of cultural captivity as a repeat of the concerns introduced by the Apostle Paul in the second chapter of Colossians. When Christians give up their biblical worldview and take on the ideas of the culture around them it weakens their witness to a dying world. He offers practical ideas to combat the types of captivity identified: carnal, confused, compromised and contented.

A common theme of many science fiction tales is mass delusion. From *The Matrix* to *The Truman Show*, we find fictional characters who think they are making decisions on their own volition based on an accurate perception of their situation. In each of these cases, the people are actually experiencing a false reality manipulated by outside forces using them for their own purposes.

Sadly, many of us are unwittingly being manipulated by

distorted perceptions of reality. And, just as in these fictional tales, these distortions are not an accident. They are promoted by the spiritual forces of darkness to keep us from being effective agents of light in this world.

As the Apostle Peter explained, to fulfill our purpose of proclaiming Christ in a world of darkness, we must

> Keep (our) behavior excellent . . . so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Pet. 2:12)

Distinctive thoughts produce distinctive behavior. Only by applying Christ to every aspect of life will we be able to "keep our behavior excellent" even as we are being slandered by the world. This is why Paul commands us:

> See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Col. 2:8-9)

Paul is not talking about physical bars or chains. He is warning us about invisible chains constraining our minds to think like the world. Whenever we assume that the perspective of the world overrides the truth of Christ in some aspect of life, we are allowing ourselves to be taken captive. Paul also says that "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3) Since that is true, we need to filter all truth claims through biblical revelation about the nature of God, man and the universe.

Let's be honest. Most of us are oblivious to the invisible bars of cultural captivity. We think we are A-OK in balancing our spiritual beliefs with our everyday lives. However, most of us must be captive to some degree or the church would not be conforming to a degraded culture. As believers, we have the resources to escape from cultural captivity, but we need to

make it a priority.

In this article we look at four types of captive believers: *carnal, confused, compromised* and *contented*.

As we consider these different manifestations of captivity, let's ask God to make us aware of areas of captivity in our own lives.

Carnal Christians

Just as there are different types of prisons, there are different ways that captivity can affect the lives of believers. **Carnal Christians** are believers who have misplaced priorities. As citizens of heaven,{1} they are living as if they are citizens of earth. The apostle Paul introduces us to these believers in his first letter to the Corinthians:

> And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. . . .. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? (1 Cor 3:1-3 NKJV)

The word *carnal* comes from the Greek word that literally means *fleshly*. These are believers who are focused on serving their flesh rather than on using their flesh to serve God. The carnal Christian looks upon salvation as an opportunity to cater to the flesh while avoiding eternal consequences.

For example, carnal Christians view marriage as a means to meet their needs. As one young husband told his pastor, "God wants me to be happy. I am not happy in my marriage. So, God must want me to get a divorce."{2} A 2008 survey found the divorce rate among "born again" Christians was the same as the rate among the population as a whole: about one in three (33%).{3} However, the rate of divorce among those who regularly attend church is much lower, about 1 in 4.{4,5} And my personal observation among actively growing Christians is a

rate of less than 1 in 10.

Another area where carnality is evident is in business practices. We all drop our heads when we read about a "respected" church member who has been caught applying unethical and sometimes illegal business practices. It is highly likely that these individuals viewed the Scriptures as supporting their unethical attempts for temporal riches.

As Paul points out, minds that view the world through a fleshly perspective often lead to division and strife within the church. In fact, if the church is dominated by carnal Christians it may be worse than the world as "cheap grace" turns into license.

Let's examine ourselves. Do we elevate the temporal above the eternal? What do our daily decisions reveal about our perspective? Is it carnal or spiritual?

A Christian struggling with a carnal perspective needs to start asking the question, "Which decision or course of action has the most positive benefits for eternity?" In Christ, we are no longer slaves to our flesh, so when we start turning control over to the Holy Spirit, the flesh cannot keep its control over us.

[For helpful articles on divorce: Probe's Marriage and Family section

On business: Business and Ethics and Can the Just Succeed?]

Confused Christians

Confused Christians desire to please God, but they are confused about what God wants. Unlike the carnal Christian, confused Christians are concerned about the spiritual life. However, instead of being grounded in the Bible, they create their own spiritual truth from multiple sources.

Two thousand years ago, Paul warned believers that people will try to "delude you with persuasive arguments" (Col. 2:5) based on "the trickery of men, by craftiness and deceitful scheming" (Eph. 4:14). Today, believers are still bombarded with deceptive ideas designed to prevent them from living in a way that exalts Christ.

Recent surveys by the Barna Group show that this approach is prevalent among those between the ages of 18 and 25. According to their surveys, 78% of young adults identify themselves as Christians,{6} but more than half of them believe that the Qur'an and Book of Mormon offer the same spiritual truths as the Bible.{7} Is it any wonder that many sincere believers are confused?

Confused Christians are often influenced by those who offer to enhance their Christian experience with new insights. Recently, Oprah hosted a popular webinar with Eckhart Tolle. His repackaged Eastern mysticism is counter to the teachings of Christ on almost every topic. However, many of the participants were Christian women duped into believing that this false teaching was what Jesus was really trying to say all along.

One woman asked, "It's really opened my eyes up to a new way of thinking; . . . that doesn't always align with the teachings of Christianity. . . . Oprah, how have you reconciled these spiritual teachings with your Christian beliefs?"

In part, Oprah's reply was "I took God out of the box. . . I'm a free-thinking Christian who believes in my way, but I don't believe that it's the only way, ..." In other words, "I am going to abandon the God of the Bible and create my own God who thinks like me."

Confused Christians often misapply God's character of love and compassion. We see this confusion in the debates on abortion,

same sex marriage and homosexual clergy.

[For more information on these issues see these Probe articles:
[Abortion](#)
[Arguments Against Abortion](#)
[The Dark Underside of Abortion](#)

[Same Sex Marriage: A Facade of Normalcy](#)
[Answering Arguments for Same Sex Marriage](#)]

Once again, we need to examine ourselves. Am I confident that my beliefs are based on the principles revealed in the Bible? Am I confusing the wisdom of the world with the wisdom of Christ?

The primary prescription for a confused Christian is a steady dose of God's word through personal study and trusted teachers who understand the Bible as the ultimate source of truth.

Compromised Christians

Compromised Christians profess a set of beliefs generally consistent with a biblical worldview, but compromise those beliefs by living like the world in one or more areas.

Jesus may have been referring to compromised Christians when He said,

> And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (Mark 4:18-19)

Knowing that they are called to a fruitful life, they allow the pressures and the temptations of the world to take precedence over the truth of Christ. They have allowed their concern for the things of the world to compromise their walk.

Some Christians are compromised by the desires of the flesh, addictions to alcohol, drugs or pornography. The high percentage of Christian men struggling with pornography is an example. Satan promotes the lie that this is a secret sin that can be kept from compromising one's public witness for Christ. Yet, anytime we consistently make provision for the flesh, it is going to result in a compromised walk. I distinctly remember the day my friend and fellow church leader who had been struggling with pornography had to confess to his wife that he had committed adultery. Even with his sincere heart for restoration and reconciliation, the healing process was painful.

Other Christians are compromised by their pride or desire for earthly success. As Jesus warned the Jewish leaders,

> How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? (John 5:44-45)

They rationalize unethical practices, questionable morals and exploitation of others as worth the price to achieve success. These Christians embrace the sacred/secular split described by Nancy Pearcey in her book *Total Truth*. They partition their lives and their minds so that biblical truth only applies to their spiritual, church life while pragmatism determines what is true for every other aspect.

Let's examine our lives to see if we are rationalizing un-Christlike behavior to satisfy our own selfish desires. Are we choosing to conform to the world because we think we will enjoy that more than conforming to Christ?

If you are struggling with compromise, look for others who can help hold you accountable, mature believers who can join with us in allowing God's Spirit to "destroy fortresses and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God."{8}

Contented Christians

Contented Christians are actively choosing the truth of Christ for their own lives, yet they are content to allow others to continue in cultural captivity. Either from fear of persecution or concern with hurting others or time pressures, these Christians avoid confronting others to unmask the deceptive, destructive ideas crippling their witness.

Although the apostle Paul was always content despite his physical circumstances,[9] he was never satisfied with the spiritual condition of the world. Paul said:

> We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. (Col. 1:28-29)

Mature Christians are called to impart their understanding to others, particularly carnal, confused and compromised Christians. The fact that we have not been doing so in recent decades can been seen in the diminished influence of the church on public life.

For example, over 87% of Congress members are affiliated with a Christian denomination. Yet, this Congress recently passed so-called "hate crimes" legislation which will limit the ability of Christians to speak biblical truth on sexuality. While abhorring any crimes, we realize that one of the most loving things we can do is to point out to others when they are engaged in destructive behavior. Yet contented Christians stood by as a nation with a Christian majority elected national leaders who seem to be carnal, confused and compromised.

As contented Christians, we have let family hour on television move from "Father Knows Best" to "The Secret Life of

Teenagers" which feeds American youth a constant diet of promiscuity and disrespect for authority.

As contented Christians, we have let carnal, confused and compromised believers set the example for our younger generations. Is it any wonder that these generations are largely confused about their beliefs? Recent surveys indicate that although over one in three young adults can be identified as born again, less than one in a hundred has beliefs consistent with a biblical worldview.

So let's examine ourselves. Do I sit on the sidelines watching other believers conforming to the world without attempting to intervene?

We are not spectators seeking to keep from getting stains on our white, linen knickers; instead, we are called to be warriors in the battle for the fate of our fellows. If we do not stand firm and confront error, we are just as much captives of our culture as the others.

Notes

1. Philippians 3:20
2. Al Janssen, *The Marriage Masterpiece* (Colorado Springs: Focus Publishing, 2001).
3. Barna Group, New Marriage and Divorce Statistics Released, March 31, 2008, www.barna.org/barna-update/article/15-familykids/42-new-marriage-and-divorce-statistics-released
4. Ibid.
5. Bradley Wright, Divorce Rates Among Christians by Church Attendance, December 4, 2006, brewright.blogspot.com/2006/12/divorce-rates-among-christians-by.html
6. Barna Group, Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years, www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/147-most-t

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7. Barna Group, New Research Shows How Different Generations View and Use the Bible, October 19, 2009, www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/317-new-research-explores-how-different-generations-view-and-use-the-bible

8. 2 Corinthians 10:4
9. Philippians 4:11-13

Hume's Critique of Miracles

Michael Gleghorn examines Hume's influential critique of miracles and points out the major shortfalls in his argument. Hume's first premise assumes that there could not be miracles and his second premise is based on his distaste for the societies that report miracles. As a Christian examining these arguments, we find little of value to convince us to reject a biblical worldview saying that God can and has intervened in natural history to perform miracles.

Introduction

One of the most influential critiques of miracles ever written came from the pen of the skeptical Scottish philosopher David Hume. The title of the essay, "Of Miracles," originally appeared in Hume's larger work, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, first published in 1748. This was the Age of Enlightenment, a time in which skepticism about miracles was becoming increasingly widespread among the educated elite.[{1}](#) So what were Hume's arguments, and why have they been so influential in subsequent scholarly discussions of this topic?

Hume essentially "presents a two-pronged assault against miracles."{2} He first argues that "a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature." But since "a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle," he says, "is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined."{3} In other words, given the regularity of the laws of nature, Hume contends that miracles are exceedingly improbable events. But this is not all. He also argues that since miracle reports typically occur among uneducated, barbarous peoples, they are inherently untrustworthy and, hence, unworthy of our belief.{4}

Now clearly, if Hume is correct, then this presents a real problem for Christianity. For Christianity is full of miracles. According to the New Testament, Jesus walked on water, calmed raging storms, healed diseases, exorcised demons, and brought the dead back to life! But if miracles are really as utterly improbable as Hume maintains, and if reports of miracles are completely lacking in credibility, then it would seem that the New Testament's accounts of miracles are probably unreliable and that Christianity itself is almost certainly false!

So how compelling are Hume's arguments? Should believers be quaking in their boots, fearful that their most cherished beliefs are a lie? Not at all! As philosopher of science John Earman observed in a scholarly critique of Hume's arguments, Hume's essay is not merely a failure; it is "an abject failure." He continues, "Most of Hume's considerations are unoriginal, warmed over versions of arguments that are found in the writings of predecessors and contemporaries. And the parts of 'Of Miracles' that set Hume apart do not stand up to scrutiny. Worse still, the essay reveals the weakness and the poverty of Hume's own account of induction and probabilistic reasoning. And to cap it all off, the essay represents the kind of overreaching that gives philosophy a bad name."{5} Now

admittedly, these are strong words. But Earman argues his case quite forcefully and persuasively. And in the remainder of this article, I think the truth of his remarks will become increasingly evident.

Hume's Argument from the Laws of Nature

What are we to say to Hume's argument that "a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature" and that "the proof against a miracle…is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined"?

First, we might question whether miracles *should* be defined as violations of the laws of nature. According to Christian philosopher Bill Craig, "An examination of the chief competing schools of thought concerning the notion of a natural law…reveals that on each theory the concept of a violation of a natural law is incoherent and that miracles need not be so defined."{6} Thus, we might object that Hume's definition of a miracle is simply incoherent. But this is a debated point, so let's instead turn our attention to a more pressing matter.

When Hume says that the laws of nature are established upon "a firm and unalterable experience," is he claiming that the laws of nature are never violated? If so, then his argument begs the question, assuming the very thing that needs to be proved. It would be as if he argued this way:

- *A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature.*

- *Experience teaches us that the laws of nature are never violated (i.e. that miracles never occur).*

- *Therefore, experience teaches us that miracles never occur.*

Such an argument is clearly fallacious. Hume would be assuming "as a premise for his argument the very conclusion he intends to prove."{7} But this is probably *not* what Hume intended.

As Earman observes, Hume's view rather seems to go something like this: "When uniform experience supports" some lawlike regularity "that is contradicted by testimony," then one must set "proof against proof," and judge which of the two is more likely. The result of this new formulation, however, is that "uniform experience does *not* furnish a proof against a miracle in the sense of making the . . . probability of its occurrence flatly zero."[8]

This is an important point. After all, there is a great deal of human testimony that solemnly *affirms* the occurrence of miracles. Thus, the only way that Hume can maintain that the uniform experience of mankind is against the occurrence of miracles is by *assuming* that all miracle reports are false. But *this* assumption, as we'll see, is completely untenable when miraculous events are attested by numerous, independent witnesses.

Hume's Argument Against the Reliability of Human Testimony

In Part II of "Of Miracles," David Hume argues that there has never been the kind of testimony on behalf of miracles which would "amount to entire proof."[9] He offers four reasons for this claim.[10]

First, no miracle on record has a sufficient number of intelligent witnesses, of good moral character, who testify to a miraculous event that occurred in public and in a civilized part of the world. Second, human beings love bizarre and fantastic tales, and this irrationally inclines them to accept such tales as true. Third, miracle reports are usually found among barbarous peoples. And finally, the miracle reports of different religions cancel each other out, thus making none of them effective for proving the truth of their doctrines.

What should we say in response to these arguments? While all of the points have merit, nevertheless, as Bill Craig

observes, "these general considerations cannot be used to decide the historicity of any particular miracle."{11} The only way to determine if a miracle has actually occurred is by carefully examining the evidence. How many witnesses were there? Are they known to be honest, or are they generally unreliable?

These questions are particularly important when one considers the cumulative power of independent witnesses for establishing the occurrence of some highly improbable event like a miracle. By "independent witnesses" I simply mean witnesses whose testimony to an event comes from firsthand experience and is *not dependent* on the testimony of others.

As Charles Babbage demonstrated in his *Ninth Bridgewater Treatise*, if one can find enough independent witnesses to a miraculous event, who tell the truth more often than not, then one can always show that the occurrence of the miracle is more probable than not.{12} Craig explains the matter this way: "If two witnesses are each 99% reliable, then the odds of their both independently testifying falsely to some event are only . . . one out of 10,000; the odds of three such witnesses being wrong is . . . one out of 1,000,000." "In fact," he says, "the cumulative power of independent witnesses is such that individually they could be *un*reliable more than 50% of the time and yet their testimony combine to make an event of apparently enormous improbability quite probable in light of their testimony."{13}

So while Hume's arguments should make us cautious, they cannot prevent human testimony from plausibly establishing the occurrence of miracles. And the only way to determine if the testimony *is* plausible is to carefully examine the evidence.

Hume and Probability Theory (Part 1)

Hume argues that since miracles run contrary to man's uniform experience of the laws of nature, no testimony can establish

that a miracle has occurred unless "its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavors to establish."{14} Although Hume makes it sound as though establishing one miracle would require an even greater miracle, all his statement really amounts to, as John Earman rightly notes, is that no testimony is good enough to establish that a miracle has occurred unless it's sufficient to make the occurrence of the miracle more probable than not.{15}

But in Hume's view this is virtually impossible. *No* testimony is really ever sufficient to establish that a miracle has occurred. And this is problematic. For it can be perfectly reasonable to accept a highly improbable event on the basis of human testimony. In fact, we do it all the time.

Suppose the evening news announces that the number picked in the lottery was 8253652. As Craig observes, "this is a report of an extraordinarily improbable event, one out of several million."{16} If we applied Hume's principle to such a case, it would be irrational for us to believe that such a highly improbable event had actually occurred. So something is clearly wrong with this principle. But what?

The problem, says Craig, is that Hume has not considered all of the relevant probabilities. For although it might be highly improbable that just this number should have been chosen out of all the possible numbers that *could* have been chosen, nevertheless one must also consider the probability that the evening news would have reported just *this* number if that number had *not* been chosen. And this probability is "incredibly small," for the newscasters would have no reason to report just this number unless it had, in fact, been chosen!{17}

So how does this relate to the question of miracles? When it comes to assessing the testimony for a miracle, we cannot simply consider the likelihood of the event in light of our

general knowledge of the world.[18] This was Hume's mistake. Instead, we must also consider how likely it would be, if the miracle had *not* occurred, that we would have just the testimony and evidence that we have.[19] And if it is highly unlikely that we would have just this evidence if the miracle had *not* occurred, then it may actually be *highly probable* that the miracle did, in fact, occur. Even if a miracle is highly *improbable* when judged against our general knowledge, it may still turn out to be highly *probable* once all the specific testimony and evidence for the miracle is taken into account.[20]

Hume and Probability Theory (Part 2)

There's still another problem with Hume's critique, namely, that he never actually establishes that a miracle *is* highly improbable in light of our general knowledge of the world. He simply assumes that this is so. But the problem with this becomes evident when one reflects upon the fact that, for the Christian, part of what's included in our "general knowledge of the world" is the belief that God exists. What's more, as believers we have at our disposal a whole arsenal of arguments which, we contend, make it far more plausible than not that this belief is really true.

But notice how this will influence our estimation of the probability of miracles. If belief in God is part of our general knowledge of the world, then miracles will be judged to at least be possible. For if an all-powerful God exists, then He is certainly capable of intervening in the natural world to bring about events which would never have occurred had nature been left to itself. In other words, if God exists, then He can bring about miracles! Thus, as Bill Craig observes, whether or not a miracle is considered highly improbable relative to our general knowledge of the world is largely going to depend on whether or not we believe in God. So the question of God's existence is highly relevant when it

comes to assessing the probability of miracle claims.{21} While those who believe in God may still be skeptical of most miracle reports, they will nonetheless be open to the *possibility* of miracles, and they will be willing to examine the evidence of such reports on a case-by-case basis.

To conclude, although Hume's critique of miracles is one of the most influential ever written, it really doesn't stand up well under scrutiny. Indeed, John Earman concludes his devastating critique of Hume's arguments by noting his astonishment at how well posterity has treated Hume's essay, "given how completely the confection collapses under a little probing."{22} Although Hume was doubtless a brilliant man, his critique of miracles is simply unconvincing.

Notes

1. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 248.

2. Ibid., 250.

3. David Hume, "Of Miracles," in *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Charles W. Hendel (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1955), 122.

4. Ibid. See Hume's discussion in Part II of his essay.

5. John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument against Miracles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

6. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 261.

7. Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 65.

8. Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure*, 32

9. Hume, "Of Miracles," 124.

10. See ibid., 124-41.

11. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 277.

12. This sentence is a paraphrase of a statement from Babbage's treatise cited in Earman, Hume's Abject Failure, 54.

13. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 272, n. 26.

14. Hume, "Of Miracles," 122-23.

15. Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure*, 41.

16. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 270.

17. Ibid., 271.

18. Jason Rennie, "Epistemology and the Resurrection: An Interview with William Lane Craig," in Sci-Phi Show Outcasts, 2006, available in the "Interviews" section at bit.ly/9SSrWU (note: this page is accessible by members only. We urge you to register free of charge to access this and many excellent resources. The link is down the page underneath the "Closer to Truth" links.)

19. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 270.

20. Rennie, "Epistemology and the Resurrection."

21. Ibid. See also the discussion in Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 274-76.

22. Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure*, 71.

Humanitarian Aid

dear world,

if i'm just a walking sac of chemicals,
then there's no such thing as miracles
and caring isn't caring; just synapses
flaring—so tell me, why should i care?

movies end happily, but i can't for the life of me
understand—if God is dead, what's the hurry?
why this cumbersome worry?
there's no referent and nothing is definite;
so do as you please; forget
poverty, education, disease.

please tell me why should I care; pack my bags
and go over there; pay plane, bus and taxi fare?
so what if children don't eat and people can't walk
down the street without rape, AIDS, pregnancy to meet?

i get the green thing. i have to live in this space with all
the rest of this evolving race. but there's no Telos
so Darwin tells us—no meaning in our beginning;
no meaning in our end—so why should i care?

because apparently, we ain't goin' nowhere.

so dear world,

i decided i don't care. but i can't. i mean, just listen to
this rant.
there's care there.
care's there from the start, presupposing Science and Art;
care recessed, repressed in my bleeding heart.

things aren't the way they're supposed to be,
and the Story of Biology is not sufficient—
they say we're here on accident… but i need more.

i need more in order to account for this life
as we live it. look around and see people caring,
friend and neighbor sharing—poverty and injustice repairing.
there's care there… but, from where?

people don't love wholly right—even when striving
with all our light. we withhold, we withdraw, we fight.
we harbor anger; we brandish pride; we've all of us
murdered and lied; selfishly denied truth, justice, mercy.

and yet… there's Care there. it echoes in our tomes,
recalling to our breath and bones our Original Shimmering Start,
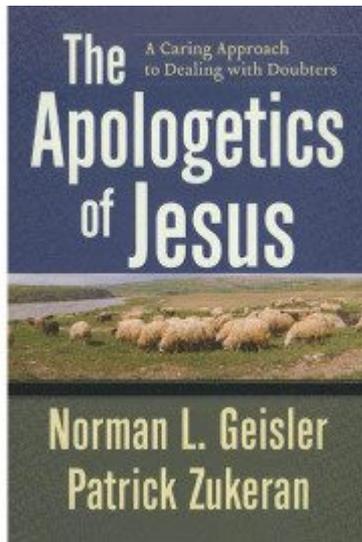pulsating, all along, in our heart.

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Apologetics of Jesus: Interview with Author Patrick Zukeran

Written by Probe Ministries Administrator

Question: This is a very interesting topic, *The Apologetics of Jesus*. What inspired this book?

Zukeran: While I was in a doctoral class with Dr. Norman Geisler, he stated one day in class, "You may be surprised to discover, the greatest apologist is Jesus Himself. Someone needs to write a book on the apologetics of Jesus. In 2000 years of Christian history, no one has written on this subject." The idea of studying the apologetic methods of Jesus and knowing that no one had written on the subject really stirred my interest. It thus became my doctoral project.

Question: You said that after you finished, you realized this would be an extremely important book for the body of Christ. Why do you feel this is a critically significant work?

Zukeran: There is a lot of confusion regarding the role and the need for apologetics in ministry. Many Christians believe our faith in Christ involves a blind leap of faith. In other words, our faith calls for acceptance of Christ without any reason or evidence. Therefore, in evangelism Christians should simply preach the gospel and the Holy Spirit will do the rest. When Christians are challenged by other worldviews or ideas of the culture, we often fail to offer well-reasoned and substantial answers. Often I hear Christians say, "You just need to believe" or "You simply need to have faith." That is not a good answer to an unbelieving world or even to

Christians who are questioning their faith because they have been confronted by a challenge to the credibility of Bible or the claims of Christ. Jesus commanded us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Answers like these simply do not exemplify what it means to love God with our minds. Apologetics is the defense of the Christian faith. Apologetics uses reason and presents compelling evidence to communicate the message of Christ, defend the message of Christ and challenge unbelief. Apologetics was an essential component in the ministry of Christ and if it was important in His ministry, it is crucial for Christians as we engage our world for Christ as He commanded and modeled.

Question: Many Christians do not realize Jesus was an apologist. Scores of books have been written on His teaching methods, leadership skills, prayer life, etc… Few realize apologetics was an important part of His ministry. Why is that?

Zukeran: Apologists defend the message of Christ but when it comes to Jesus, He *was* the message. Perhaps that is why this aspect of His ministry is overlooked. When you study the life of Christ, He made some astounding claims and He did not expect or want people to take a blind leap of faith. He presented reasons and compelling evidence to support His claims.

Question: People may be asking, since Jesus was God incarnate, why did He need to give a defense of His claims?

Zukeran: As our creator, Jesus understood that we are created in the image of God. God is a rational and morally perfect being and we reflect His nature. Jesus understood that we use reason and evidence to make our daily decisions. For example, when you see two fruit stands how do you decide which one to go to? If one looks clean, has bright looking fruit, and the owner is neatly dressed while the other one looks dirty, the fruit does not look as fresh and you spot a few flies buzzing

in the area, which stand will you choose? Here's another example. What if you enter a hotel lobby and see two elevator doors open. One elevator has lights, the music is playing and people flow in and out of it. Next to it the elevator has no lights on, there is no music playing and you do not see people entering it. Which elevator will you choose? We examine the evidence and use our reasoning ability to make daily decisions. We do the same when it comes to deciding what we will believe and who we will entrust our life and eternal destiny to. Jesus understood that when it comes to persuading people to believe in His message, He would need to provide good reasons and compelling evidence and He did.

Question: What are some of the apologetic methods of Jesus?

Zukeran: Jesus used several apologetic methods. He used reason and presented logical arguments to defend His claims and expose error. He used the evidence from the Scriptures, prophecy, His miracles, the resurrection and more. When you study His apologetics, you really appreciate the brilliance of our Lord. He truly was the greatest thinker as well as a powerful communicator.

Question: There are some passages that appear to teach against the use of reason and evidence such as Matthew 12:38-39. When Jesus was asked to perform a sign by the He rebukes them saying, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah" (12:39). Jesus refused to show them evidence. Isn't this a passage that speaks against the use of apologetics?

Zukeran: One of the chapters in the book addresses several alleged anti-apologetic passages. There are no passages that speak against the use of reason and evidence. Jesus and the apostles did not ask people to make a commitment to Christ without good reasons. For example, to understand Jesus' response, you must understand the context. Christ had already

performed numerous miracles (Matt. 4:23-25, 8:1-4, 5-13, 28-34, 9:1-7, 9:18-26, 11:20). In fact, this confrontation occurs closely after Jesus' healing of a man's withered hand (12:13), and the deliverance of a demon—possessed individual (12:22-23). Despite these miracles, the Pharisees demanded that Jesus perform another sign. Knowing they were not sincere in their demand, He refused to appease them. Misunderstanding passages like these confuse Christians and their understanding of apologetics.

Question: What was it like writing this work with Dr. Geisler?

Zukeran: I have read many of Dr. Geisler's works and he has had a great influence on my life. I consider him one of the premier defenders of the faith of our generation. It was a great privilege to work on this book with Him and Dr. Ron Rhodes. They would not let me get away with weak arguments and often pointed out areas and questions I needed to address. It is too bad some of those issues are left out of the book, but they really challenged me to write and think at a higher level. Perhaps you could compare it to football player receiving a chance to play under the great Tom Landry or a basketball player learning under John Wooden, or an investor working with Warren Buffett. I learned a lot but also realized I still have a lot more to learn. It was valuable to see the precision in their arguments, and their foresight in anticipating how opponents may respond. These were valuable examples for me to learn from.

Question: How do you hope this book will impact the body of Christ?

Zukeran: One of the concerns of Christian apologists is that the body of Christ is neglecting the mind. Since the Great Awakening and the preaching of men like Charles Finney, there has been a shift in evangelical Christianity. We have moved to a more emotional faith based on a moving experience. But, an emotional faith can only take you so far. Sooner or later, you

will need reasons upon which to base your faith when it is challenged whether through a tragedy or an intellectual challenge. The unbelieving world also needs to see that the Christian worldview offers the best answers to the issues we face in our culture. I hope when Christians read this book and see that Jesus modeled how to love God with our minds, they will be encouraged to engage their minds with their faith in Christ.

Question: Some may see this as an intellectual book. However, you state that there are a lot of practical lessons we can apply from the study of Jesus' apologetics. What are some examples of lessons we can learn and apply?

Zukeran: Since we use our reasoning capacity in daily life, apologetics is tremendously practical in our evangelism. If we are going to have ministries that will engage a lost world that is in rebellion to God, we will need compelling reasons but we will also need to know how to present our case to various audiences, often a hostile one. Jesus was the master at this. This does not mean He was always successful, but He did show us how to communicate a powerful message. Each chapter ends with practical applications we can apply when engaging our culture for Christ. Hopefully, we will all be more effective witnesses for Christ as a result of studying the model of Christ.

Does It Matter What We

Believe?

Does *what* we believe matter, or just *that* we believe? A study recently released by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, suggests that most religious people in America think *what* they believe isn't so important.[1]

According to the report, eighty-three percent of people identifying themselves with mainline Protestant churches believe that many religions can lead to eternal life. That might not come as a surprise to those who are familiar with the changes in mainline churches over the last century.

But what would you say if you knew that fifty-seven percent of people identifying themselves as evangelicals believe that many religions can lead to eternal life? Fifty-seven percent! That means the majority of evangelicals are what we call "religious pluralists." Are you surprised? To add to our embarrassment, Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses have stronger convictions about their beliefs being the true ones than do evangelicals.

Some findings in the survey were real head-shakers. For example, thirteen percent of evangelicals surveyed believe God is an impersonal force. It might be a little reassuring to learn that evangelicals don't have a corner on the "confused beliefs" market. Six percent of atheists surveyed believe in a personal God, and twelve percent believe in heaven! What are we to make of this?

Whatever it might mean precisely, it at least means that specific beliefs are the property of the believer, not of the religion itself. Fidelity to the beliefs of particular religions (or irreligion, in the case of atheism) means much less today than in the past. I can associate myself with a given group, but I retain the right to decide for myself what I should believe.

It's understandable, in a sense, why people think this way, including evangelicals. This pluralistic mentality infuses our social consciousness. We aren't to exclude people of other races or the other gender from all the multitudinous areas of society. Businesses are forbidden to discriminate on the basis of "race, color, national origin, religion, or sex."{2} I'm not arguing against any of this. I'm simply pointing to our social mentality which requires (or aims at) the leveling out of differences. The refusal to extend special status is applied to religious beliefs as well. But this doesn't mean we simply tolerate people of different beliefs; now we're supposed to affirm their beliefs!

In addition to this pluralist mentality there is the serious problem for evangelicals of the reduction of doctrinal teaching in churches. David Wells lamented this loss in his 1993 book, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* He was spurred on to write the book after having a student in his seminary class on theology ask him how he could justify spending so much money on a class that "was so irrelevant to his desire to minister to people in the Church."{3}

One problem some people have with a strong concern for doctrine is that it tends to divide Christians. In so far as we *do* segregate ourselves from other Christians over non-essential beliefs we are in error. Unity is very important. But nowhere in Scripture are we taught that unity is to be preserved regardless, at the expense of truth. After exhorting the Ephesians to be unified in the bond of peace, Paul lists what we are to be unified around: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (4:3-6). We aren't to be united around the conviction that when it comes to religion, to each his or her own.

Another reason for a reluctance to insist on doctrinal integrity is the postmodern mentality about truth. This issue is being played out now in discussions about what is called

the "emerging church." The desire to correct an overzealous modernism in its confident claims of truth is showing itself in *some* Christians who align themselves with this movement in a diminishing of the importance of doctrinal commitments. The attempt to avoid both absolutism and relativism has them walking a tightrope which too easily swings toward a pluralist mentality.

What does it mean to give up on the importance of specific doctrinal beliefs? First, and very obviously, we have abandoned biblical Christianity. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul states specific beliefs that are essential: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (verses 3-5). Jesus made the bold and definitely non-politically correct claim that he was the *only* way to God (John 14:6). Paul says that salvation comes to those who confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9). Throughout both Old and New Testaments, we are presented with claim after claim presented as being true.

Second, we must hold fast to the historic teachings of biblical Christianity if we are to have anything to offer the world. One of the most significant results of liberal watering down of Christian distinctives is that, over time, attendance in mainline churches dwindled; they had nothing to offer that was different from what people could get outside the church.

Wells notes that "the great sin of Fundamentalism is to compromise; the great sin in evangelicalism is to be narrow." Whereas evangelicals once strongly opposed doctrinal decline in liberalism, now, Wells says, "evangelicals, no less than the Liberals before them whom they have always berated, have now abandoned doctrine in favor of 'life'."{4} We're doing well in the arena of social relief; we're doing very poorly in training our people in basic Christian beliefs *as beliefs that are true for all people for all time.*

Wells notes these consequences of the loss of doctrinal conviction. First is simply the loss of conviction. What do we stand for? You've heard it before: A person [or church] that stands for nothing will fall for anything. Second is the loss of what might be accomplished when spurred on by a theological vision. Is being nice and doing good the substance of our marching orders? Third is the loss of any really meaningful sense of what "evangelical" means. Fourth is the loss of unity with the spinning off of individual interests.

If Christianity doesn't have *the* truth about how one might obtain eternal life, it has nothing more to offer than religious experience (whatever that might be for a given individual). It has lost all its substance. Since it *claims* to be the only way to God, what has been aptly said many times bears repeating: either it is true *for* all, or it is not true *at* all.

Notes

1. U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant, June 2008; religions.pewforum.org
2. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, www.eeoc.gov/facts/qanda.html.
3. David Wells, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 4.
4. Ibid., 129, 131.