Worldviews, Part 2 — Comparing Postmodernism and Other Worldviews with a Christian View

Rick Wade adds to our understanding of worldviews by adding three classical and one very current life perspective to our worldview discussion. Understanding how deism, nihilism, existentialism, and postmodernism address the fundamental worldview questions helps us to deeply understand their similarities and differences with Christian theism.

This article is also available in [Spanish](). 🇪🇸

Introduction

A few years ago, former Probe staff member Jerry Solomon wrote an [article on worldviews]() in which he provided a basic introduction to the subject, and then gave a sketch of three major worldviews: Christian theism, naturalism, and New Age pantheism.[1] In this article we'll look at four more worldviews: deism, nihilism, existentialism, and postmodernism. We frequently refer to these various philosophies in our articles, so it seems good to give a brief description for reference.[2]

Worldviews: Some Basics

What is a worldview? James Orr, the 19th century church historian, said that a worldview "[denotes] the widest view which the mind can take of things in the effort to grasp them together as a whole from the standpoint of some particular philosophy or theology."[3] A developed worldview supplies answers to the questions of origin, purpose, and destiny among

other things, or as some put it, the "why, whence, and whither" of things.{4}

But some may object that such a view of Christianity is too intellectual or esoteric, or might say that Christianity by its very nature doesn't allow being forced into some set of philosophical ideas. It's true that one can present an overly philosophical picture of Christianity, one that makes it seem very remote from real life. But does that invalidate the cognitive element? Note that the apostle Paul had no problem with considering the rational aspect of the faith. There must be knowledge of Christianity in order to live it out. Read Eph. 1:17,18.{5} In Colossians we see how Paul gave his readers intellectual grounds for rejecting the philosophy of the day (cf. 1:9ff).

There are a couple of reasons for thinking of Christianity in worldview terms. Over a hundred years ago church historian James Orr called for such a perspective because first, Christianity *does* involve a lot of interconnected beliefs which cannot be picked and chosen in a cafeteria-style fashion. He says, "He who with his whole heart believes in Jesus as the Son of God is thereby committed to much else besides. He is committed to a view of God, to a view of man, to a view of sin, to a view of Redemption, to a view of the purpose of God in creation and history, to a view of human destiny, found only in Christianity. This forms a '*Weltanschauung*,' or 'Christian view of the world,' which stands in marked contrast with theories wrought out from a purely philosophical or scientific standpoint."{6} Christianity, thus, by its nature forms a worldview.

Second, Orr says, since Christianity as a whole is under attack, it must be defended as a whole; not just as individual doctrines but the whole concept of supernatural, revealed religion. "The opposition which Christianity has to encounter," says Orr, "is no longer confined to special doctrines or to points of supposed conflict with the natural

sciences—for example, the relations of Genesis and geology—but extends to the whole manner of conceiving of the world and of man's place in it, the manner of conceiving of the entire system of things, natural and moral, of which we form a part."{7}

Evaluating Worldviews

How shall we evaluate a worldview? We have every right to expect that a true description of reality will be rational, be supported by evidence, provide the widest explanation for all of reality, and accord with human experience. Regarding its rational nature, it must both not contradict itself and be coherent as a system. Regarding evidence, it must not only be consistent with and explain the facts of nature and history, but it must give an adequate explanation for special occurrences in history (I'm thinking here specifically of the person and work of Jesus, including His life, death, and resurrection). A worldview answers the "why" question in its ability to explain what we see around and within ourselves. Regarding human experience, it must both explain what we know of ourselves *and* answer our deepest longings and aspirations.

Furthermore, we should not be surprised at supernatural elements such as miracles and prophecies, and reports of such should withstand investigation as far as we're able.

Finally any truths revealed which couldn't be known otherwise—even though transcending what we can know on our own and being difficult to understand—should not conclusively contradict what we know in the range of human experience.

Let's turn now to a consideration of our four worldviews.

Deism

Historical background

The era called the Enlightenment, which spanned the 17th and

18th centuries, saw significant changes in the way Western man viewed his world. The flowering of knowledge in the Renaissance which broke through in the arts and sciences led to the restoration of a high view of man. Even in the Christian church there developed something called "Christian humanism." In the Enlightenment era which followed, though, the "Christian" part began to fall off, leaving man as the final authority on all that is true. But this change didn't occur overnight. There was a period of time when God was still recognized, although some believed He had lost touch, as it were, with His creation. He was pushed out and restricted to His heaven. Notions of God's providential care over the earth faded away. Thus was born deism, the first of four worldviews.

Several factors were involved in this transition. One was the flowering of science, specifically Newtonian physics, which supposedly gave a rational, orderly explanation of the world, thereby removing the mysterious, supernatural elements. Another factor was the religious wars a century or two before which had a souring effect on people's attitudes about organized religion. Finally, there was a growing awareness of other peoples and religions which made Christianity seem provincial rather than universal.{8} Divine law gave way to natural law. Now there was "revealed religion" coming from God, and "natural religion" discovered in nature. And "natural religion," believed to be neutral and universal, became the norm for what could be accepted as true "revealed religion."

Described

Deism, then, is the belief that "natural religion contains all that is true in revealed religion; where the latter differs, the differences are either morally insignificant or superstitious."{9} There is nothing higher than natural religion. Reason is capable of knowing God and His will, so there is no need for revelation. On the moral side, man's duty is simply to do God's will which is to seek the happiness of all men.

How was it that deists retained belief in God? According to one writer, the Newtonian view of the cosmos seemed to demand a God; the intricate order of the universe suggested an intelligent designer. In fact, this made God seem bigger than ever. However, God was removed from an active part in human affairs. His transcendence was emphasized at the expense of His immanence. Also, although God was the author of natural law, He "receded behind the battery of secondary causes with which men have daily to do."{10} God was seen as too big to be involved in the trivial experiences of man's life. There was no real concern on God's part for the details of our lives and no divine purpose in history. Knowledge of God was "emptied of most of its concrete religious connotations."{11}

Contrasted with Christian Theism

Three major factors separate deism from biblical Christianity. First, God was separated from the workings of real life due to His awesome transcendence. As Sire puts it, "God is distant, foreign, alien."{12} Scripture teaches, however, that God continues to be involved in His creation both in sustaining the natural order (Col. 1:17) and in relating to mankind.

Second, deists saw man as just a part of the clockwork universe, operating according to strict laws. While man was recognized as a creation of God and made in His image, he wasn't seen as essentially a sinner. Gone was the sense of the drama of human interaction with God over concerns about sin and grace and judgment. Man was now in charge of himself. However, he was not truly free for man was locked in the natural system of cause and effect.{13}

Third, because the world was not seen as fallen, but rather as God created it to be, the natural order reflected what was good and right. As Pope said, "One truth is clear, whatever is, is right."{14} Not every deist went this far, however. Ethics was very important to deists; they didn't turn morality over to the subjective realm. But wrongdoing wasn't against

God so much as against some abstract ethical principles discernible in nature.

Internal Weaknesses

Although few if any people would claim to be deists today, there are some aspects of deism which still reveal themselves in our beliefs. For example, some speak of one God who is all-powerful yet not directly concerned with the daily lives of human beings, who is known through the world of nature, but who hasn't revealed Himself authoritatively and finally in Scripture or through Jesus.

However, the halfway position of deism made it incapable of standing as a serious worldview for very long. Deists believed they knew things about God, but they were limited to empirical knowledge; that is, knowledge obtained through nature. If we only gain knowledge from nature, we cannot see the whole picture, and there are certainly things about God which can't be known unless He tells us (which is what revelation is). It would seem that they were presupposing certain things about God learned from special revelation without giving credit where it was due.

Thus, one needed to either keep God in the picture and acknowledge His significance, or remove Him altogether. The latter was the response of naturalism. Since that worldview was considered in the previous article, we'll move next to nihilism, a frame of mind growing out of naturalism.

Nihilism

Now that God was pushed to the edge of human experience, why not remove Him altogether? He had lost all practical value; why believe in Him at all? Thus was ushered in naturalism, the belief that there is only one order of existence and that is nature; there is no supernatural order. This view was discussed in the earlier article, so I won't develop it here.

Historical Background

For many, naturalism was a breath of fresh air, for now one needn't look to religion to find answers. Modern man with his naturalistic beliefs tended to be optimistic about man's prospects for making a good life for himself. Being free from the confines of the supernatural, man was free to make of himself whatever he wanted

Many, however, didn't see the clear benefits of this "freedom." Naturalism produced an emptiness it couldn't fill. Are we really just another stage of evolutionary development? Is this present reality all there is? Is there no permanent, transcendent value in the universe? The worldview—or perhaps we should say, mindset— which emerged was *nihilism*. Nihilism isn't really a philosophy because it doesn't present any kind of a systematic conception of the world. It is more anti-philosophy than philosophy because it is essentially denial—denial of real value in anything. There is no real right and wrong, no beauty, no knowledge, etc.

A name very often associated with nihilism is that of Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th century philosopher. Having decided that God was dead, Nietzsche saw that with God's death went the high values of Western man which were based upon belief in God. He also recognized the loss of freedom which this loss entailed. That we are just the natural products of evolution, just materialistic bodies and minds means that there is no real freedom at all. We are determined parts of a determined universe.

Another explanation for the rise of nihilism brings in the social and political elements. After going through many "isms" this century, many people have decided that one simply cannot put one's confidence in any of them, so they simply adopt a basic pragmatism, the idea that workability is all that matters. German theologian Helmut Thielicke made this comment:

In a world that is saturated and infested with pragmatism, the question inevitably arises whether everything is not "pseudo," whether everything is not—at best—a productive lie, and thus whether at the tail end of this parade of idols there is *Nothing*, a *Nothing* which is always dressed up in some new ideology, but still nothing but nothingness."{15}

Described

Thielicke continues, "Nihilism is not a program but rather a value judgment. It is the last of all conceivable value judgments—at least in any logical series—and to that extent a judgment of death. Nihilism has no other will or purpose; it is content to draw a line and call it quits."{16}

James Sire mentions *Breath*, a play by Samuel Beckett, as a prime example of nihilism in theater. There are no actors, just a pile of rubbish on the stage. The light on the stage dims, then brightens, then dims again. "There are no words, only a 'recorded' cry opening the play, an inhaled breath, an exhaled breath and an identical 'recorded' cry closing the play. For Beckett life is such a 'breath.'"{17}

Nihilism, then, is a philosophy of loss; those who toy with it as a trendy worldview either don't understand it or haven't tried to. As one writer said, "Nietzsche replaces easy-going atheism with agonized atheism."{18}

Contrasted with Christian Theism

Nihilism is obviously out of accord with Christian doctrine. God is *not* dead, and His nature and will provide a structure for value and meaning which transcend us. Because God is active in the world and is working to bring about His plans, there is real basis for hope. *Internal Weaknesses*

Nihilism also has its own internal weaknesses. Because it is fundamentally naturalistic, it carries naturalism's

weaknesses. It robs us of any real freedom since the natural order is believed to operate either on a strictly causal basis or by chance (or both). Yet nihilists, like everyone else, act as if they have significant freedom. We are all daily confronted with the responsibility of making right choices and of facing the consequences if we don't. Also, the strict naturalism of nihilists makes their claims to knowledge suspect. If the chemicals and electrical charges in our brains are simply following the physical laws of cause and effect, why should we believe our ideas reflect any reality outside ourselves and aren't just the results of the random activity of our brain cells? Finally, morality can't be simply a matter of "what is, is what ought to be" or else there would be no room for reform. Any charge that another person or culture *ought* to do something—not just because it would work better but because it is *right*—would be illegitimate. Nihilism thus leaves us empty with respect to our being, our knowledge, and our morality. With all of these goes a loss of meaning.

But all this is to say what the nihilist already knows! Sincere nihilists haven't just adopted this worldview because they like to be trendy. They are simply reflecting back in their words the way they see the world, and they grieve over it.

How can we respond to nihilism? We can start out by pointing out the existential inconsistencies nihilists exhibit. For one thing, although they say there is no meaning to anything, they indicate what *they* think is meaningful by the time and effort they put into various activities. The art of nihilism, such as *Dada*, for example, attempts to say something; it is purported to have *meaning*. If it doesn't mean anything, it can't convey the image of the world nihilism wants to reveal. Second, all their assertions about meaninglessness are supposed to be statements about the way the world *is*. But if there is no knowledge, nihilists can't know the way the world is. Third, it simply flies in the face of everything our being seems to

require—meaning, value and dignity being three examples.

Very few people can live out a completely nihilistic worldview. The most thoroughgoing cynics will apply themselves to *something*—even if it's small—which they consider meaningful, even if it is crying out against the meaninglessness of life. To feel the despair of the loss of meaning and value indicates that one really *wants* such things. What can the nihilist do? He can take his life so he doesn't have to face such an absurd world. He can keep on living but keep his philosophy of no value and his life of value-seeking separate. Or he can look for something to give life value and meaning. In existentialism we find a worldview which seeks to find meaning in an absurd universe. To that we now turn.

Existentialism

Existentialism is a worldview (or really a collection of worldviews) which holds, in essence, that our choices determine what we are. We create our *own* meaning and value. "Existence precedes essence," it is said. What we do, the choices we make, determine our essence. Existentialists, thus, seek to create their own meaning in a meaningless world.

(I should note here that there are theistic and atheistic forms of existentialism. Here we will only consider the atheistic variety.) *Historical background*

Existentialism has both philosophical and experiential roots. With respect to philosophy, naturalism had left man without God, and the radical individualism and autonomy endorsed by modernistic thinking had left individuals standing alone. With respect to life's experience, technology had made us just another part of the machine; either be efficient or get out of the way, was the modernistic attitude. In addition, some by-products of technology such as pollution and the atomic bomb made life riskier. Then came two devastating World Wars conducted on the doorsteps of Europeans. The result was that

man was thought to be in all alone and in danger. These factors provided the setting for a philosophy of despair. *Described*

Despair is at the foundation of existentialism. We are said to live in "a 'broken world,' an 'ambiguous world,' a 'dislocated world,' a world into which we are 'thrown' and 'condemned' yet 'abandoned' and 'free,' a world which appears to be indifferent or even 'absurd.'"[{19}](#) Existentialists refused to accept the solutions coming from reason or nation or tradition. They saw that the usual means of happiness failed people, means such as money, physical pleasure, and fame. Of course, atheistic existentialists refused to look to God. God was dead, not only in the halls of philosophy, but also in the city streets, and man was left on his own.

The real problem, they thought, was a false understanding of the human condition itself which kept people from true happiness. We are alone in a vast and scary universe that doesn't care a whit about us. This realization produces anguish, an interplay between a sense of dread on one hand and the exhilaration of complete freedom on the other. We don't know why we exist or what our destiny is; we aren't told where we come from or given the value of anything. It is all up to us—to *me*—to decide. Even though I can have no confidence that the universe will suit itself to my ideas and desires, I must do something—I must act. I am condemned to make of myself whatever I can. And to be authentic I must be true to myself and my own chosen values above all.

Existentialism, then, is first of all a theory of value. It focuses on the human condition and what makes for a good life. This has made it popular with many who are sensitive to the plight of humanity living in a very impersonal world.

Existentialism proved to be very attractive in this country in the '60s. It gave individuals the "freedom" to toss aside convention and tradition and make their own rules. We see

traces of it in the prevalent notion that we, individually, are the final authorities for value in our own lives, in our emphasis on experience over reason, in our live-for-the moment attitude.

The theme of turning one's back on traditional morality in favor of determining one's own life was seen in the movie *Pleasantville,* the story of two young people who are transported into the world of *Pleasantville,* a black and white TV show. Their lives only turn into color when they begin to express their sexuality. The girl eventually finds herself in the healthy area of academics, but this is a choice *she* alone makes; she is in charge of her own existence. *Contrasted with Christian Theism*

The contrasts between atheistic existentialism and Christianity are obvious. The Bible teaches that we *do* know where we came from; the universe isn't just some vast wasteland but the setting in which the true and living God is working out His plans of which we are part. We *do* have a source for truth, morality, and values which stands above us. We *do* (or *can*) know where we're going. On the other hand, however, while we do have significant freedom, we don't have absolute freedom to make of ourselves what we will. Neither are we all alone; we have the resources of God to experience rich and meaningful lives.

There's nothing wrong with taking note of our predicament, with noting the dangers to life, and with being resolved to stand firm in the face of a seemingly absurd world. The problems come with believing we are all alone, and that the burden of our lives rests upon us. God has taken on the burden of our present and future lives. We aren't on our own. *Internal Weaknesses*

There are internal problems with existentialism as well. For one thing, one wonders why we should even care if we are in the condition existentialists say we are. Why care about being

authentic, about operating in good faith, as we create our own existence? Why bother about bothering at all? Why not just eat, drink and be merry? Regarding standards of value, how can one avoid the notion that there are some values that everyone should accept, universal standards of good and evil, beauty and ugliness? We can't help believing some things are worth preserving while others are unworthy of our efforts.

With existentialism there is no basis for judging actions or for making the major decisions of life beyond the simple affirmation, "I choose it."

Is that enough?

Postmodernism

It is rather easy for us to consider the worldviews already discussed from a distance. Probably few who read this article are deists or nihilists or even existentialists. These can be safely tucked away in the cupboard of tried and forgotten worldviews by most of us (even though many of us can find elements of one or another in our own thinking). The situation is quite different with respect to postmodernism, the last worldview we'll consider, because it describes the basic mindset of turn-of-the-century Western mankind. We are all immersed in the sea of postmodernism whether we know it or not, and its presuppositions are rooted so deeply in our thinking that even those who are Christians often reveal postmodern attitudes. *Described*

What is postmodernism, anyway? In the 1970s, Jean-François Lyotard presented "a report on knowledge in the most highly developed societies" to the Council on Universities of the government of Quebec. This report was published as *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.*{20} This book, a standard text in understanding postmodernism, gives a clue as to the nature of this worldview in its very title. Postmodernism isn't really a philosophy, for philosophy

traditionally has been a tool used to understand the reality in which we live. Postmodernists believe that can't be done. So postmodernism is more a condition or mood than a philosophy. In short, postmodernism is a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism. But it's also an era, a historical time period which began somewhere between the late 19th and late 20th centuries.{21} In this article we'll concentrate on postmodernism as a mood rather than as a time period.

Historical Background

By "Enlightenment rationalism" we're referring to the ideal of knowledge which was developed in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe. It formed the intellectual basis of what we call *modernity*. Two issues were important in the Enlightenment: criticism and power (*criticism* referring here to close analysis). The object was, as one writer says, to free people from "myth, superstition and enthralled enchantment to mysterious powers and forces of nature."{22} Truth wasn't found through revelation but through scientific investigation and reason. Knowledge now had to be dispassionate, objective, and certain. Everything now had to conform to the rules of computation and utility; it had to be measurable, and it had to be functional. Reason was in effect reduced to one *kind* of reason, that of mathematics or scientific precision.{23}

Postmodernists believe that when knowledge was reduced to computation, something was lost.

There were several problems with Enlightenment rationalism. First, newfound knowledge gained through science and the resulting development of technology led people to think that man could solve the major difficulties of life without any transcendent help. It was found, however, that reason didn't have the potency it was thought to have. With all our learning and technology, we still didn't have the power we desired over our lives. Natural disasters and major wars such as the two World Wars in this century made people realize that we *aren't* able to fix everything that ailed us simply through reason.

These and other factors such as new mysteries discovered by science served to undermine our ability to really know what is true. In fact, postmodernists veer away from the classical understanding of truth, that is, the correspondence of propositions with external reality. Some very influential postmodernists now espouse pragmatism, the belief that workability is all that can be hoped for. This, I would venture to say, is how many if not most Americans think today.

Another postmodern characteristic regarding truth is this. In keeping with its rejection of the individualistic attitude characteristic of modernism, postmodernism holds that truth isn't found in the workings of the individual mind, but in the group. As one writer noted, "Truth consists in the ground rules that facilitate personal well-being in community and the well-being of the community as a whole."{24} Our thinking like all other aspects of our being is shaped by our community.{25} Politically and sociologically this means, for example, that the individual is expected to conform in his or her thinking to that of the larger group.

Still another problem which resulted from the secularized nature of knowledge and from the loss of confidence in knowing truth in general was the loss of the knowledge of *ultimate* truths. There can be no "totalising metanarratives," that is, no big stories or explanations of the way things are which encompass everything. This can be both liberating and frightening: liberating in the sense that one needn't feel bound by any system of thought; frightening in the sense that we are in the dark about what is true. This is a bit like eating in a cafeteria where one can choose from a variety of foods without having any confidence in the nourishing value of any of it.

A second problem with Enlightenment rationalism was the separation of fact from value. The mathematical mindset of Enlightenment didn't permit the intrusion of judgments about value; that was something separate. What grounds were left,

then, upon which to make judgments? Thus the ethical dilemma of postmodernism: How does one make judgments without having any grounds for judgment?{26} One writer argues that the Holocaust itself was a model of Enlightenment thinking. "In the world of the death camps," says author Thomas Docherty, "everything was rationalized." There was the desire to master nature seen in determining which races and kinds of people should survive and which shouldn't. The process was very orderly and efficient. The tools of technology, also, were used efficiently to advance the Nazi cause.{27} They even used reason as their greatest ally in accomplishing their goals. Thus, the ideals of Enlightenment rationalism could be put to fundamentally evil purposes.

Third, with the secularization of reason in the Enlightenment there developed a growing pessimism about the future. With no transcendent Being to consult, who was to know where history was going? And who was to say whether the direction being taken was truly *progress*? "No longer do we know with any certainty the point towards which history is supposedly progressing," says Docherty. "Humanity has embarked upon a secular movement whose teleology is uncertain."{28}

Postmodernism, then, leaves us without knowledge of ultimate truths, with no basis for value judgement, and with no basis for confidence in the future. In general, then, the postmodern mood is pessimistic. How, then, do we know what we should believe and do? With no knowledge of why we're here or where we're going to guide us, and no grounds for determining value coming from some transcendent source, people have grown to believe that we must simply choose for ourselves what will be true for us. The *will* is now introduced into knowledge.{29} The questions postmodernists ask are: "What do *I* choose to believe?" and "What do *I* choose to do?"

The postmodern mindset has shown itself in several areas of life. One is a change in understanding language. Language is now thought to be socially constructed; it conveys what the

group says it does. Literature, then, is understood as reflecting the biases of a writer and his cultural group: the writer was obviously saying what would benefit himself or his group. It's up to the reader, then to *deconstruct* the text to find the *real* meaning. Since the writer is trying to perpetuate his will on the reader, the reader adopts a suspicious mindset and looks for political demons behind every tree. Since the meaning of a text is determined by the reader, a text can have as many interpretations as readers.

In art, there was a move to the abstract, because it was thought that we couldn't accurately represent the essence of whatever the object is being painted, for instance. Those things which couldn't be represented accurately had to be presented abstractly. Also, since there are no rules anymore in general, there are none which define or delimit good art. The artist discovers what she's doing as she does it.

Architecture was one of the first areas in which postmodernism showed its face. With the demise of a modernism which always looked to the future, and, again, the loss of any rules, architecture moved from a functionalistic, forward-looking style to an eclectic style. Old buildings are restored, since the past can be appreciated, too. Several different styles can be mixed together. As one writer said, "postmodern design is historically and stylistically pluralistic."{30}

Earlier I spoke of the fact that even Christians espouse postmodern beliefs without realizing it. It is so much a part of the thinking of young people today that even some in the church accept without even thinking about it a "true for you but not for me" mindset. A young woman who taught high school Sunday School at an evangelical Baptist church in Dallas told a newspaper reporter that *she* believed what the Bible taught, but that it wasn't necessarily true for everyone.{31} Perhaps she doesn't understand the claims of Scripture, but more likely she has fit Christianity into the framework of "my truth, your truth." *Contrasted with Christian Theism*

Although Christians can learn from postmodernists (especially with respect to the excesses of the Enlightenment), it's important to see the fundamental differences between postmodernism and Christianity. Most importantly, we *can* know ultimate reality because "it" is a "He" who has revealed Himself and His will. The result is that we *can* know truth even though not the exhaustive truth which the Enlightenment thought possible. We *do* have an idea of where history is going, and we *do* have a basis for moral judgment.[{32}] *Internal Weaknesses*

Postmodernism cannot long survive. Besides being devoid of anything upon which to build a philosophy of life, it also reveals internal problems. While we might like to take an aesthetic approach to truth—in other words, judge by style rather than by substance—we want others to treat us in keeping with universal canons of truth and morality. Also, it is impossible, we now know, to make a clean break between fact and value. Even the most precise and objective scientists must make value decisions with respect to the very work they do. In other words, one project must be chosen over others, and such choices reflect certain values. Furthermore, postmodernism strips us of all stability beyond what our immediate culture can give us. But since even a cultural group can't know ultimate truth but can only choose its values based on a pragmatic viewpoint, there is ultimately no stability in one's cultural group either.

As I've noted, postmodernism is a mood rather than a full-fledged worldview. Something must fill the vacuum created by the demise of modernism. This is what excites some Christian thinkers. For now the door blocking out the supernatural has been thrown open, providing an avenue for Christians to announce the good news that in Christ is found truth, value, and hope for the future, indeed, for all the human race.

Notes

1. Jerry Solomon, "Worldviews," Probe Ministries International, 1996. Available on our Web site at www.probe.org/worldviews/.

2. James W. Sire's *The Universe Next Door* (3rd ed., InterVarsity Press, 1997), has provided an almost indispensable guide in understanding worldviews. The choice of views considered in this program were taken from this text.

3. James Orr, *The Christian View of God and the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 3.

4. Orr, 6,7.

5. "[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

6. Orr, 4.

7. Ibid., 4.

8. Waring, v-viii.

9. Ibid., x.

10. Ibid., xiii.

11. Ibid., xiii.

12. Sire, 44.

13. Ibid., 46.

14. Quoted in Sire, 48.

15. Thielicke, 25.

16. Ibid., 29.

17. Sire, 76.

18. Bloom, quoted in Sire, 93.

19. Robert C. Solomon, ed., *Existentialism* (New York: The Modern Library, 1974), ix.

20. Published in English by the University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

21. Docherty, 1,2. One theologian of our day sees modernism as having ended on July 15, 1972 when a housing project based upon modernistic principles of functionality was demolished. Still another marks its demise with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Cf. Gene Edward Veith, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL; 1994), 27,39. Perhaps this wide time span points to the way philosophies can take years to come to fruition in the public sphere.

22. Thomas Docherty, ed., *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993), 5.

23. Docherty, 5.

24. Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 14.

25. For more on this the reader might wish to consult my article "Where Did 'I' Go?: The Loss of the Self in Postmodern Times," available on our Web site at www.probe.org/where-did-i-go-the-loss-of-self-in-postmodern-times/.

26. Docherty, 26.

27. Ibid., 12,13.

28. Ibid., 10.

29. Ibid., 6.

30. Veith, 114.

31. Mary A. Jacobs, "Truths Under Construction," *Dallas Morning News*, 31 May, 1997.

32. Another major difference is over the matter of human nature and identity. In postmodern thought, the self is lost, whereas Christian theology sees us as distinct individuals with permanent identities (even though we might experience changes in our personalities, vocations, lifestyles, etc.). See my article "Where Did 'I' Go?: The Loss of the Self in Postmodern Times" available on our Web site at www.probe.org/where-did-i-go-the-loss-of-self-in-postmodern-times/.

Online Affairs – A Christian Look at a Major Problem

Kerby Anderson highlights online affairs, the sin of adultery with an "electronic" relationship on the Internet.

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

The Allure of Cyber-Relationships

The Internet is becoming a breeding ground for adultery, so say many experts who track the pattern of extramarital affairs. So we will discuss the phenomenon of online affairs.

Peggy Vaughn is the author of *The Monogamy Myth* and also serves as an expert for America Online on problems caused by infidelity. She predicts that one "role of the Internet in the

future will be as a source of affairs." She is writing a second book on the subject of adultery and says she could base half of it just on the letters she receives from people who started an affair online.{1}

An online affair (or cyberaffair) is an intimate or sexually explicit communication between a married person and someone other than their spouse that takes place on the Internet. Usually this communication takes place through an online service such as America Online or CompuServe. Participants usually visit a chat room to begin a group conversation and then often move into a one-to-one mode of communication. Chat room categories range from "single and liking it" to "married and flirting" to "naked on the keyboard."

Women in a chat room are often surprised at what develops in a fairly short period of time. At first the conversation is stimulating, though flirtatious. Quickly, however, women are often confronted with increasingly sexual questions and comments. Even if the comments don't turn personal, women find themselves quickly sharing intimate information about themselves and their relationships that they would never share with someone in person. Peggy Vaughn says, "Stay-at-home moms in chat rooms are sharing all this personal stuff they are hiding from their partners." She finds that the intensity of women's online relationships can "quickly escalate into thinking they have found a soulmate."

Online affairs differ from physical world affairs in some ways, but are similar in others. Cyberaffairs are based upon written communication where a person may feel more free to express herself anonymously than in person. Frequently the communication becomes sexually graphic and kinky in ways that probably would not occur if a real person were hearing these comments and could act on them. Participants in an online affair will often tell their life stories and their innermost secrets. They will also create a new persona, become sexually adventurous, and pretend to be different than they really are.

Pretending is a major theme in cyberaffairs. Men claim to be professionals (doctors, lawyers) who work out every day in the gym. And they universally claim that if their wives met their needs, they wouldn't be sex shopping on the Internet. Women claim to be slim, sexy, and adventurous. The anonymity of the Internet allows them to divulge (or even create) their wildest fantasies. In fact, their frank talk and flirtation pays great dividends in the number of men in a chat room who want to talk to them and get together with them.

Just as the Internet has become a new source of pornography for many, so it seems that it has also become a new source for affairs. Relationships online frequently go over the line leaving pain, heartbreak, and even divorce in their wake. Even though these online affairs don't involve sex, they can be very intense and threaten a marriage just the same.

Current Statistics on Adultery

In a [previous article](), I talked about some of the statistics concerning adultery. Before we continue, let me update some of those numbers with a multitude of studies all coming to similar conclusions.

One conclusion is that adultery is becoming more common, and researchers are finding that women are as likely as men to have an affair. A 1983 study found that 29 percent of married people under 25 had had an affair with no statistical difference between the number of men and women who chose to be unfaithful to their spouses early in life.[{2}] By comparison, only 9 percent of spouses in the 1950s under the age of 25 had been involved in extramarital sex. Another study concluded that by age 40 about 50 to 65 percent of husbands and 45 to 55 percent of wives become involved in an extramarital affair.[{3}]

Affairs are usually more than a one-time event. A 1987 study surveyed 200 men and women and found that their affairs lasted an average of two years.[{4}] In fact, affairs go through

transitions over time. They may begin as romantic, sexual, or emotional relationships and may become intimate friendships. Affairs that become friendships can last decades or a lifetime.

Online affairs differ from other affairs in that they may not involve a physical component, but the emotional attachment is still there. Online affairs develop because of the dual attraction of attention and anonymity. Someone who has been ignored by a spouse (or at least perceives that he or she is ignored) suddenly becomes the center of attention in a chat room or a one-on-one e-mail exchange. A woman finds it exciting, even intoxicating, that all these men want to talk to her. And they are eager to hear what she says and needs.

Anonymity feeds this intoxication because the person on the other end of this cyberaffair is unknown. He or she can be as beautiful and intelligent as your dreams can imagine. The fantasy is fueled by the lack of information and the anonymity. No one in cyberland has bad breath, a bald head, love handles, or a bad temper. The sex is the best you can imagine. Men are warm, sensitive, caring, and communicative. Women are daring, sensual, and erotic.

Is it all too good to be true? Of course it is. Cyberaffairs are only make-believe. Usually when cyberlovers meet, there is a major letdown. No real person can compete with a dream lover. No marriage can compete with a cyberaffair. But then an online affair can't really compete with a real relationship that provides true friendship and marital intimacy.

Nevertheless, online affairs are seductive. An Internet addict calls out to a spouse "one more minute" just as an alcoholic justifies "one more drink." Cyberaffairs provide an opportunity to become another person and chat with distant and invisible neighbors in the high-tech limbo of cyberspace. Social and emotional needs are met, flirting is allowed and even encouraged, and an illusion of intimacy feeds the

addiction that has caught so many unsuspecting Internet surfers.

Motivations for Affairs

Affairs usually develop because the relationship meets various social and psychological needs. Self-esteem needs are often at the top of the list. Self-esteem needs are met through knowing, understanding, and acceptance. Psychologists say that those needs are enhanced through talking intimately about feelings, thoughts, and needs. This can take place in person or take place through the Internet.

Even though online affairs may not involve a physical component, the emotional attachment can be just as strong and even overwhelming. And when they end, this strong attachment usually leaves participants in emotional pain.

Women report feeling thrilled by their lover's interest in them physically, emotionally, and intellectually. They are also excited about the chance to know a different man (how he thinks and feels). They also feel intimate with their lovers because they can talk about their feelings openly. However, when the affair ends, they feel a great deal of guilt with regard to their husband and children. They also regret the deceit that accompanied the affair.

Men report feeling excited about the sexual experience of the affair. They try to control their feelings in the affair and do not compete with their feelings for their wife. Often they limit the emotional involvement with their lover. Men also feel guilt and regret over deceit when an affair ends, but less so than most women.

Men and women have affairs for different reasons. Research has shown that women seek affairs in order to be loved, have a friend, and feel needed. Men seek affairs for sexual fulfillment, friendship, and fun.{5}

It appears that the percentage of women who have extramarital sex has increased the last few decades. In 1953 Alfred Kinsey found that 29 percent of married women admitted to at least one affair.{6} A *Psychology Today* survey in 1970 reported that 36 percent of their female readers had extramarital sex.{7} One study in 1987 found that 70 percent of women surveyed had been involved in an affair.{8}

It also appears that women who are employed full-time outside of the home are more likely to have an affair than full-time homemakers. Several studies come to this same conclusion. One study found that 47 percent of wives who were employed full-time and 27 percent of full-time homemakers had been involved in an affair before they were 40 years old.{9} And *New Woman* magazine found that 57 percent of employed wives who had an affair met their lover at work.{10}

Contrary to conventional wisdom, an affair will not help your marriage. In 1975, Linda Wolfe published *Playing Around* after she studied twenty-one women who were having affairs to keep their marriages intact.{11} The reasoning for many of these women was that if they could meet their own needs, their marriages would be more successful. Many said they were desperately lonely. Others were afraid, believing their husbands did not love them or were not committed to their marriage. Five years after the initial study, only three of the twenty-one women were still married.

Adultery can destroy a marriage, whether a physical affair or an online affair.

Preventing an Affair

The general outline for some of these ideas comes from family therapist Frank Pittman, author of *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*, although I have added additional material. He has counseled 10,000 couples over the last forty years, and about 7,000 have experienced infidelity. He has

nineteen specific suggestions for couples on how to avoid affairs.{12} Let's look at a few of them.

First, accept the possibility of being sexually attracted to another and of having sexual fantasies. Frank Pittman believes we should acknowledge that such thoughts can develop so that you don't scare them into hiding. But he also says you shouldn't act on them.

Second, we should hang out with monogamous people. He says, "They make a good support system." To state it negatively, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Third, work on your marriage. He says to keep your marriage sexy and work to be intimate with your spouse. He also says to make marriage an important part of your identity. "Carry your marriage with you wherever you go."

Fourth, be realistic about your marriage. Pittman says, "Don't expect your marriage to make you happy. See your partner as a source of comfort rather than a cause of unhappiness." Accept the reality of marriage; it isn't always beautiful. Also accept that you are both imperfect.

Fifth, keep the marriage equal. Share parenting duties. "If not, one partner will become the full-time parent, and the other will become a full-time child" without responsibilities, who seeks to be taken care of. And keep the relationships equal. Pittman says, "The more equal it is, the more both partners will respect and value it."

Sixth, if you aren't already married, be careful in your choice of a marriage partner. For example, marry someone who believes in, and has a family history of, monogamy. Frank Pittman says, "It is a bad idea to become the fifth husband of a woman who has been unfaithful to her previous four." Also, marry someone who respects and likes your gender. "They will get over the specialness of you yourself and eventually

consider you as part of a gender they dislike."

Seventh, call home every day you travel. "Otherwise, you begin to have a separate life." And stay faithful. "If you want your partner to (stay faithful), it is a good idea to stay faithful yourself." And make sure you are open, honest, and authentic. Lies and deception create a secret life that can allow an affair to occur.

Finally, don't overreact or exaggerate the consequences of an affair if it occurs. Pittman says, "It doesn't mean there will be a divorce, murder or suicide. Catch yourself and work your way back into the marriage."

Affairs can destroy a marriage. Take the time to affair-proof your marriage so you avoid the pain, guilt and regret that inevitably results. And if you have fallen into an affair, work your way back and rebuild your marriage.

Consequences of Affairs

When God commands, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14), He did so for our own good. There are significant social, psychological, and spiritual consequences to adultery.

A major social cost is divorce. An affair that is discovered does not have to lead to divorce, but often it does. About one- third of couples remain together after the discovery of an adulterous affair, while the other two-thirds usually divorce.

Not surprisingly, the divorce rate is higher among people who have affairs. Annette Lawson (author of *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal*) found that spouses who did not have affairs had the lowest rate of divorce. Women who had multiple affairs (especially if they started early in the marriage) had the highest rate of divorce.

A lesser known fact is that those who divorce rarely marry the

person with whom they are having the affair. For example, Dr. Jan Halper's study of successful men (executives, entrepreneurs, professionals) found that very few men who have affairs divorce their wife and marry their lovers. Only 3 percent of the 4,100 successful men surveyed eventually married their lovers.{13}

Frank Pittman has found that the divorce rate among those who married their lovers was 75 percent.{14} The reasons for the high divorce rate include: intervention of reality, guilt, expectations, a general distrust of marriage, and a distrust of the affairee.

The psychological consequences are also significant, even if they are sometimes more difficult to discern. People who pursue an affair often do so for self-esteem needs, but often further erode those feelings by violating trust, intimacy, and stability in a marriage relationship. Affairs do not stabilize a marriage, they upset it.

Affairs destroy trust. It's not surprising that marriages formed after an affair and a divorce have such a high divorce rate. If your new spouse cheated before, what guarantee do you have that this person won't begin to cheat on you? Distrust of marriage and distrust of the affairee are significant issues.

Finally, there are spiritual consequences to affairs. We grieve the Lord by our actions. We disgrace the Lord as we become one more statistic of moral failure within the body of Christ. We threaten the sacred marriage bond between us and our spouse. We bring guilt into our lives and shame into our marriage and family. Affairs extract a tremendous price in our lives and the lives of those we love and hold dear.

And let's not forget the long-term consequences. Affairs, for example, can lead to unwanted pregnancies. According to one report, "Studies of blood typing show that as many as 1 out of every 10 babies born in North America is not the offspring of

the mother's husband."{15} Affairs can also result in sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, or even AIDS. Many of these diseases are not curable and will last for a lifetime.

Adultery is dangerous, and so are online affairs. The popularity of the recent movie *You've Got Mail* has helped feed the fantasy that you are writing to Tom Hanks or Meg Ryan. In nearly every case, nothing could be further from the truth. An online affair could happen to you, and the plot might be more like *Fatal Attraction*.

Notes

1. Karen Peterson, "Spouses Browse Infidelity Online," *USA Today*, 6 July 1999, 1D.
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12. "Reducing the risks of a wandering eye," *USA Today*, 6 July 1999, 10D.
13. Jan Halper, *Quiet Desperation: The Truth About Successful Men* (New York: WarnerBooks, 1988).

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15. William Allman, "The Mating Game," *U.S. News and World Report*, 19 July 1993, 57-63.

Pokemon

Former Probe staffer Russ Wise provides a conservative Christian assessment of the Pokemon character and games.

Pokemon, also known as pocket monsters, has become the biggest game phenomenon among pre-adolescents in modern history. It has not only won the hearts of young boys, but young girls as well.

Pokemon has not only captured the game and collecting market among young people; it has also captured the financial market. Pokemon began in Japan as a Nintendo *Game Boy* game, and now encompasses television with a cartoon program by the same name, plush toys, posters, coloring books, T-shirts, comics, audio CD's, strategy books, hats, and a growing list of other possibilities. *Mewtwo Strikes Back*, a full-length motion picture, will be out November 10th.

And Who Is Pokemon?

In *The Land of Pokemon* there are dozens of exotic little monsters who have magical powers. They come in all shapes and sizes and have both strengths and weaknesses. However, they can be trained. The goal of the trainer is not only to have

the right Pokemon for the event but also to have properly trained the Pokemon. Thus, the trainer can ultimately capture them all and become a master.

Pokemon have more working for them than having strengths and weaknesses; they also have the ability to evolve into "higher forms" by making a conscious choice rather than evolving as a matter of, —oh well!— evolution. Pokemon can either evolve or *devolve* depending on the trainer's needs. Pokemon also has characters that are psychic or ghostly, thereby giving them advantages by displaying supernatural powers.

Problems in the Land of Pokemon

As mentioned earlier, Pokemon has captured the minds and hearts of our youth, not to mention their pocketbooks. The game has become so competitive that parents have begun to make purchases while their young players are in school. A recent *Dallas Morning News* editorial, written by a Dallas-area mom, bemoaned the fact that parents have ruined Pokemon for children because they have purchased unfairly and taken the fun out of the game for children in general. It seems that parents have become over-zealous in their desire to give their children every advantage.

Another problem that Pokemon raises is that young peole cannot make good decisions about when to play and "not" play. A growing number of schoolteachers and schools have banned Pokemon from their schools and classrooms. Students have difficulty leaving playtime at the classroom door, thereby not giving the teacher their full attention during class.

Students also have difficulty dealing with their emotions after making a "bad" trade or purchase. It is not uncommon for a student to become depressed after a bad deal literally ruining his day.

There have been reports of young people having their valuable

cards stolen on campus or in the clssroom. You can imagine the trauma of having your card collection of several hundred dollars disappear.

Eric, a thirteen-year-old enthusiast, said, "It's highly addictive and I think it's fun that there's a world out there with imaginary creatures that you can control and are highly powerful."

Another problem, and one that the Christian cannot ignore, is the occultic influence that comes with the game. Pokemon who have psychic abilities and are able to evolve or devolve introduce an occultic world that young people may not have the maturity to deal with. The wise parent will oversee this child's activities and playtime, interacting with his child, and instructing his son or daughter in their faith. In a word, it offers the parent a *teachable* moment that may not otherwise occur.
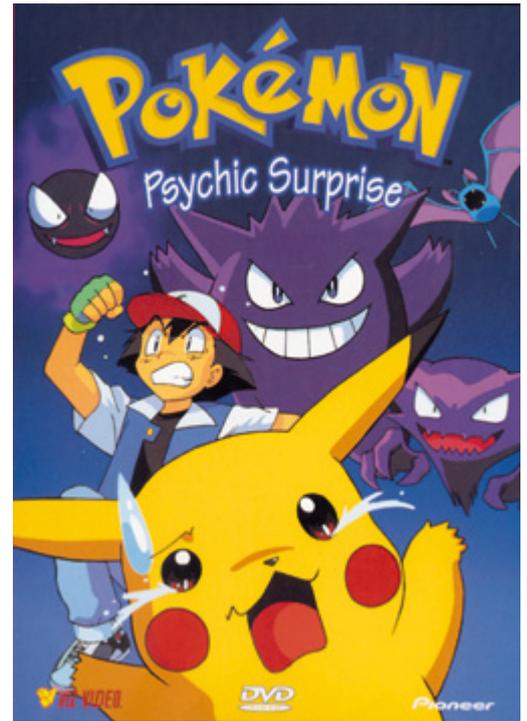
Teachable moments are precious and few. It is not uncommon for Christian parents to overreact and want to protect their children from all negative influences in their lives. However, it may be an opportunity for parents to teach their children a biblical truth, rather than calling for the censors.

The fact that Pokemon opens a door into the realm of the occult and the world of fantasy should concern parents because it can easily lead to a deeper involvement with other games that are more seductive and ultimately deadly.

A concern worth noting is that Pokemon may whet the appetite for more sophisticated fantasy games such as *Magic* and

ultimately *Dungeons and Dragons*. Pokemon is primarily played by elementary-aged students, whereas *Magic* is played by junior high students, and *Dungeons and Dragons* is mostly played by students in high school and older. Each game introduces the player to more and more seductive and occult fantasies and activities.

What is a Parent to Do?

If you have decided that your child will be allowed to play, it would be wise to limit the time he or she can play. Set limitations on when your child can play—after homework is done, chores are completed, etc.

It may be wise to limit the amount of money that will be used for the game. Pokemon, with its addictive potential, can easily become a money pit. It may be instructive to encourage your child to use his own money that he has earned through chores, for example. Learning the value of a dollar is always a good lesson to learn.

We need to ask the question, What is this game teaching me—or my child—about magic, power, God, and spirituality? Do the answers to these questions bring my child or me into a closer relationship with God? If not, why?

Positive Lessons to Be Learned

#118 GOLDY
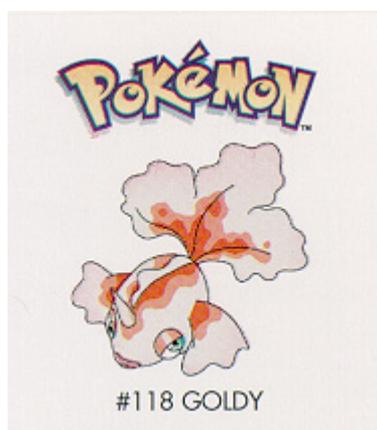
Pokemon has positive lessons to be learned. However, these lessons need to be channeled in a productive manner. Proponents of the game offer several reasons why Pokemon is and can be enriching.

First, the game is a social time for engaging in friendly

play.

Second, the game fosters cooperation. It takes the help of one's playmates to capture and train all one hundred and fifty-plus Pokemon.

Third, the game helps the player develop skills in using strategy, thinking, and memorization. The game also encourages a child to develop reading skills so he can achieve mastery.

Fourth, the game promotes negotiation and organization skills that may be useful in life.

Wrapping it Up

Pokemon helps develop positive skills in the life of a young person. However, the game can easily become addictive and disruptive. The introduction of psychic powers and other occultic manifestations are indeed troublesome. We as parents must be proactive in teaching our children how to discern those things that are destructive to their relationship with God.

We must keep our focus on the things of God. Philippians 4:8 tells us to keep our minds on those things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely and of good report. These are the things that we are to dwell on—not on the magical world of fantasy and psychic power.

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Churches That Equip

I STILL REMEMBER THE SINKING FEELING IN THE PIT OF MY STOMACH. I was a university student, a young believer, and my faith in

Christ seemed like a house of cards that had just crumbled. For awhile, the Christian life that had been so exciting and joyful became a myth. I felt rootless, adrift, and confused.

One of my fraternity brothers had just asked me some questions about Christianity that I couldn't answer. This bothered me deeply until Bob Prall, a pastor and campus Christian worker, answered them for me. "Always remember," he advised as he finished, "just because you don't know the answer, doesn't mean there is no answer."

For the next two years I followed him around, watching as he shared Christ with skeptics, listening to his speeches, and observing how he dealt with non-Christians. Bob's loving, learned example and teaching helped me sink my spiritual roots deeply into God's truth and provided a foundation for three decades of interaction with unbelievers. I shall always be grateful to him for equipping me in this way.

Just as Bob helped me, a number of churches across North America are helping equip their members to answer effectively questions that non-Christians ask. Maybe their stories will encourage you.

Conversation and Cuisine

Dennis McCallum pastors Xenos Christian Fellowship in Columbus, Ohio. He is keenly interested in reaching "postmoderns" for Christ, and Xenos members have developed some successful methods of equipping members for outreach. In his book, The Death of Truth, McCallum outlines a practical plan using dinner-party discussion groups. "It's not impossible to communicate with postmodern culture," he claims, "it's just more difficult." Just as missionaries need to learn the language and customs and build relationships with those they seek to reach, so we must understand and befriend today's postmoderns.

Xenos' "Conversation and Cuisine" gathers Christians in a home with non-Christian friends for food and discussion. Guests are assured it's not a church service and that all opinions are welcome. Topics include "To judge or not to judge," "Forgiveness in relationships," "Views of the afterlife," and current events.

After dinner the facilitator presents several scenarios for discussion. For instance, in a session on judging, he might describe a situation of racism in the workplace and ask participants to decide "OK" or "bad." Next the facilitator tells of a mother who chooses to leave her husband and children for another man. The participants also vote. The point is to create a bit of confusion and help participants realize that—in contrast to today's "tolerate all viewpoints" mindset—they themselves sometimes make judgments that they feel are entirely appropriate.

This dialogue can lead to discussions of, for instance, Hitler's Germany. Was killing Jews merely a cultural tradition that should be respected?

The aim is not to preach, but gently to lead non-Christians to rethink their presuppositions. Sessions don't always include a gospel presentation. They may be "pre-evangelistic"—helping unbelievers reconsider their own relativism, appreciate that some universal or absolute truths might be necessary, and realize that Christians may have some answers. Church members can then continue the relationships and share Christ as appropriate. "Once people's thinking has been thawed—or even shocked—out of their totalistic postmodern pattern," claims McCallum, "they will have a new receptiveness to the gospel."

Xenos is also committed to grounding youth in God's Word. Its curriculum uses age-appropriate games, stories, and study to help grade-school through university students understand and explain God's truth. High school home meetings designed for secular audiences involve adult-student team teaching: kids

reaching kids. Campus Bible studies reach Ohio State students.

Kellie Carter's New Age background could not save her mom from breast cancer. Disillusioned with God after her mother's death, Kellie sought answers in crystal healing, astrology, and meditation. Then a friend invited her to a Xenos campus Bible study, where she debated Christianity with attendees.

"The amazing thing here was that I was getting answers," Kellie recalls. "These people knew what they believed and why. I wanted that." Scientific and historical evidences for Christianity prompted her to trust Christ as Savior.

Kellie later invited Jeremy ("Germ") Gedert to a Xenos meeting about anger, a problem he recognized he had. Subsequent Bible studies on fulfilled prophecy pointed Germ to faith in Christ. Now Germ claims God has given him "great relationships, controlled temper, and a real vision for my life with Christ" plus "an awesome wife (named Kellie Gedert)." Equipped students are reaching students.

Xenos offers courses, conferences, papers, and books to help Christians understand and communicate the gospel in modern culture. For information visit their web site at www.xenos.org.

Spreading the Passion

When George Haraksin became a Christian while studying at California State University Fullerton, he switched his major to comparative religions so he could investigate Christianity's truth claims. Through his involvement in New Song Church in nearby San Dimas, he found his biblical and apologetic knowledge strengthened and was able to teach classes on New Age thinking. Study in philosophy and ethics at Talbot Seminary fanned his passion for communicating biblical truth, which Haraksin now spreads as New Song's Pastor of Teaching and Equipping.

"Ephesians tells us to equip the church," he notes. "People learn on three levels: a classroom level, a relational level, and at home." He and his co-workers seek to use all three levels to help prepare members to be ready to answer questions non-Christians ask.

New Song's leaders integrate equipping the saints into their regular gatherings. Some sermons handle apologetic themes. Weeknight classes cover such topics as "Evangelism and the Postmodern Mindset." Monthly men's breakfasts may deal with "Evidences for the Resurrection" or "Is Jesus the Only Way?" New Song has also invited faculty from the International School of Theology to teach courses on "Developing a Christian World View" and other theological topics.

"I'm trying to find people within the church who have that sort of passion (for apologetics) and gifts for teaching," Haraksin explains. "As I identify them, I'm trying to come alongside them, develop that passion, and develop them as leaders."

If people have questions about science and Christianity, he wants to be able to refer them to a member with that specialty who can help them. He's setting up an apologetics network at the local church level.

New Song member Jeff Lampman received a phone call and letter from a cousin with unusual perspectives on the Bible. "I had no idea how to respond to him," Jeff recalls. He showed the letter to Haraksin, who recognized Jehovah's Witness doctrines. When two Jehovah's Witness members showed up at Jeff's door, he invited them to meet with him and Haraksin. "I was very uncomfortable at first," Jeff explains, but he grew in his knowledge of the Bible as he watched Haraksin in action over the next six months.

The experience "taught me why I believe what I believe," Jeff remembers. "Before, if somebody asked me why I believe what I

do, I wouldn't have a clue as to how to respond to them. Now I do. George [Haraksin] was a tremendous help. I feel a lot more confident now and know where to go to get resources to defend the faith effectively." He continues to apply what he's learned as he interacts with skeptical co-workers and helps equip and encourage other Christians to learn.

Not everyone at New Song is interested in apologetics. Haraksin estimates that about 10 to 20 percent are thirsty enough to attend weekly meetings if personally encouraged to do so. Others want answers on a more spontaneous basis when they encounter a skeptic. Still others have little or no interest.

"There is still an anti-intellectualism in the church," Haraksin notes. People want to know "Why can't I just love God? Why do I need to know all this other stuff?" Society is on information overload, and some "people don't want to take the time to read and study," which can be frustrating to a pastor with a burning desire to see people learn.

Haraksin tells of a woman who questioned Jesus' deity. At another church she had been told not to ask questions but to spend time in personal devotions. Haraksin answered some of her concerns individually and encouraged her to enroll in New Song's "Jesus Under Fire" class, which she did. She could ask questions without fear of causing offense. Soon she became a solid Christian, committed to the church.

"We're relational people in a relational culture," Haraksin notes. We're still learning." This product of his own church's equipping ministry is helping to light some fires.

Issues and Answers

Barry Smith is Pastor of Discipleship Ministries at Kendall Presbyterian Church in Miami. He has a keen desire to see adults and youth understand Christianity's truth. Sunday

schools have featured quarters on apologetics and on Christian ethics. The heart of Kendall's apologetics emphasis is "Issues and Answers," monthly dinner discussions relating faith to the secular world.

The meetings arose out of conversations between Smith and hospital chaplain Phil Binie, who had served on the staff of L'Abri in Switzerland and Holland. (L'Abri is a network of Christian study centers founded by the late Dr. Francis Schaeffer.) The core group is composed of Kendall members—both men and women—who are professionals in the community. Leaders include a *Miami Herald* editor, a federal judge, a medical professional, University of Miami professors, an attorney, and a musician.

Core members invite friends and colleagues to join them. Families, including children, gather at a home and enjoy mealtime conversation. After the 45-minute dinner, youth workers spend time with the children while a group member guides an hour-long presentation for the adults. Smith led one on the problem of evil: "If God is good, where did evil come from?"

Journalistic ethics dominated another discussion. A judge handled the separation of church and state. An English professor covered "deconstructionism" and literary analysis as they apply to the Bible, a somewhat perplexing but highly relevant theme. (Deconstructionism includes a tendency to seek a text's meaning not in what the original author likely intended, but in what readers today want it to say.)

Smith says that at least one person has professed faith in Christ through a personal search that attending the group prompted. All of the non-clergy members at first felt uncomfortable sharing their faith outside the church; now all feel more at ease. Smith especially notes one couple (a psychology professor and an attorney) who began the program as young Christians and have experienced dramatic growth as they

have understood how Christianity makes sense in their work settings.

Smith emphasizes that the "Issues and Answers" format is easy to replicate and need not involve professional clergy leadership. It started informally and at first was not even an official church ministry. "The idea," he explains, "was simply to find people trying to contextualize their Christianity in the marketplace who could share with us how they do that."

Scheduling seems the biggest obstacle; professionals' crowded calendars can be hard to mesh. But Smith is encouraged by what the program has accomplished in its two years. He sees a revival of interest in the works of Francis Schaeffer and enthusiastically recommends them to both believers and seekers.

The apostle Peter told believers, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Paul wrote that God gives spiritual leaders to the church "to prepare God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:12). Xenos, New Song, and Kendall churches are taking those admonitions seriously and are seeing fruit for God's kingdom.

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Christian View of Government

and Law

Kerby Anderson helps us develop a biblically based, Christian view of both government and the laws it enforces. Understanding that the New Testament does not direct a particular type of government, Kerby leads us to understand how the principles of the New Testament will help us select governmental models that a conducive to Christian life and witness.

Christian View of Government

Government affects our lives daily. It tells us how fast to drive. It regulates our commerce. It protects us from foreign and domestic strife. Yet we rarely take time to consider its basic function. What is a biblical view of government? Why do we have government? What kind of government does the Bible allow?

Developing a Christian view of government is difficult since the Bible does not provide an exhaustive treatment of government. This itself is perhaps instructive and provides some latitude for these institutions to reflect the needs and demands of particular cultural situations. Because the Bible does not speak directly to every area of political discussion, Christians often hold different views on particular political issues. However, Christians are not free to believe whatever they want. Christians should not abandon the Bible when they begin to think about these issues because there is a great deal of biblical material that can be used to judge particular political options.

The Old Testament teaches that God established government after the flood (Gen. 9:6). And the Old Testament provides clear guidelines for the development of a theocracy in which God was the head of government. These guidelines, however, were written for particular circumstances involving a covenant

people chosen by God. These guidelines do not apply today because our modern governments are not the direct inheritors of the promises God made to the nation of Israel.

Apart from that unique situation, the Bible does not propose nor endorse any specific political system. The Bible, however, does provide a basis for evaluating various political philosophies because it clearly delineates a view of human nature. And every political theory rests on a particular view of human nature.

The Bible describes two elements of human nature. This viewpoint is helpful in judging government systems. Because humans are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27), they are able to exercise judgment and rationality. However, humans are also fallen creatures (Gen. 3). This human sinfulness (Rom. 3:23) has therefore created a need to control evil and sinful human behavior through civil government.

Many theologians have suggested that the only reason we have government today is to control sinful behavior because of the Fall. But there is every indication that government would have existed even if we lived in a sinless world. For example, there seems to be some structuring of authority in the Garden (Gen. 1–2). The Bible also speaks of the angelic host as being organized into levels of authority and function.

In the creation, God ordained government as the means by which human beings and angelic hosts are ruled. The rest of the created order is governed by instinct (Prov. 30:24–28) and God's providence. Insect colonies, for example, may show a level of order, but this is due merely to genetically controlled instinct.

Human beings, on the other hand, are created in the image of God and thus are responsible to the commands of God. We are created by a God of order (1 Cor. 14:33); therefore we also seek order through governmental structures.

A Christian view of government differs significantly from views proposed by many political theorists. The basis for civil government is rooted in our created nature. We are rational and volitional beings. We are not determined by fate, as the Greeks would have said, nor are we determined by our environment as modern behaviorists say. We have the power of choice. Therefore we can exercise delegated power over the created order. Thus a biblical view of human nature requires a governmental system that acknowledges human responsibility.

While the source of civil government is rooted in human responsibility, the need for government derives from the necessity of controlling human sinfulness. God ordained civil government to restrain evil (cf. Gen. 9). Anarchy, for example, is not a viable option because all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and are in need of external control.

Notice how a Christian view of human nature provides a basis to judge various political philosophies. For example, Christians must reject political philosophies which ignore human sinfulness. Many utopian political theories are based upon this flawed assumption. In *The Republic*, Plato proposed an ideal government where the enlightened philosopher-kings would lead the country. The Bible, however, teaches that all are sinful (Rom. 3:23). Plato's proposed leaders would also be affected by the sinful effects of the Fall (Gen. 3). They would not always have the benevolent and enlightened disposition necessary to lead the republic.

Christians should also reject a marxist view of government. Karl Marx believed that human nature was conditioned by society, and in particular, the capitalist economy. His solution was to change the economy so that you would change human nature. Why do we have greed? Because we live in a greedy capitalist society. Marx taught that if society changed the economy from capitalism to socialism and then communism, greed would cease.

Christians should reject the utopian vision of marxism because it is based upon an inaccurate view of human nature. The Bible teaches that believers can become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17) through spiritual conversion, but that does not mean that the effects of sin are completely overcome in this life. The Bible also teaches that we will continue to live in a world tainted by sin. The view of Karl Marx contradicts biblical teaching by proposing a new man in a new society perfected by man's own efforts.

Since civil government is necessary and divinely ordained by God (Rom. 13:1–7), it is ultimately under God's control. It has been given three political responsibilities: the sword of justice (to punish criminals), the sword of order (to thwart rebellion), and the sword of war (to defend the state).

As citizens, Christians have been given a number of responsibilities. They are called to render service and obedience to the government (Matt. 22:21). Because it is a God-ordained institution, they are to submit to civil authority (1 Pet. 2:13–17) as they would to other institutions of God. As will be discussed later, Christians are not to give total and final allegiance to the secular state. Other God-ordained institutions exist in society alongside the state. Christians' final allegiance must be to God. They are to obey civil authorities (Rom.13:5) in order to avoid anarchy and chaos, but there may be times when they may be forced to disobey (Acts 5:29).

Because government is a divinely ordained institution, Christians have a responsibility to work within governmental structures to bring about change. Government is part of the order of creation and a minister of God (Rom. 13:4). Christians are to obey governmental authorities (Rom. 13:1–4, 1 Peter 2:13-14). Christians are also to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13–16) in the midst of the political context.

Although governments may be guilty of injustice, Christians should not stop working for justice or cease to be concerned about human rights. We do not give up on marriage as an institution simply because there are so many divorces, and we do not give up on the church because of many internal problems. Each God-ordained institution manifests human sinfulness and disobedience. Our responsibility as Christians is to call political leaders back to this God-ordained task. Government is a legitimate sphere of Christian service, and so we should not look to government only when our rights are being abused. We are to be concerned with social justice and should see governmental action as a legitimate instrument to achieve just ends.

A Christian view of government should also be concerned with human rights. Human rights in a Christian system are based on a biblical view of human dignity. A bill of rights, therefore, does not grant rights to individuals, but instead acknowledges these rights as already existing. The writings of John Locke along with the Declaration of Independence capture this idea by stating that government is based on the inalienable rights of individuals. Government based on humanism, however, would not see rights as inalienable, and thus opens the possibility for the state to redefine what rights its citizens may enjoy. The rights of citizens in a republic, for example, are articulated in terms of what the government is forbidden to do. But in totalitarian governments, while the rights of citizens may also be spelled out, power ultimately resides in the government not the people.

A Christian view of government also recognizes the need to limit the influence of sin in society. This is best achieved by placing certain checks on governmental authority. This protects citizens from the abuse or misuse of governmental power which results when sinful individuals are given too much governmental control.

The greatest threat to liberty comes from the exercise of

power. History has shown that power is a corrupting force when placed in human hands. In the Old Testament theocracy there was less danger of abuse because the head of state was God. The Bible amply documents the dangers that ensued when power was transferred to a single king. Even David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), abused his power and Israel experienced great calamity (2 Sam. 11–21).

Governmental Authority

A key question in political theory is how to determine the limits of governmental authority. With the remarkable growth in the size and scope of government in the 20th century, it is necessary to define clearly the lines of governmental authority. The Bible provides some guidelines.

However, it is often difficult to set limits or draw lines on governmental authority. As already noted, the Old Testament theocracy differed from our modern democratic government. Although human nature is the same, drawing biblical principles from an agrarian, monolithic culture and applying them to a technological, pluralistic culture requires discernment.

Part of this difficulty can be eased by separating two issues. First, should government legislate morality? We will discuss this in the section on social action. Second, what are the limits of governmental sovereignty? The following are a few general principles helpful in determining the limits of governmental authority.

As Christians, we recognize that God has ordained other institutions besides civil government which exercise authority in their particular sphere of influence. This is in contrast to other political systems that see the state as the sovereign agent over human affairs, exercising sovereignty over every other human institution. A Christian view is different.

The first institution is the church (Heb. 12:18–24; 1 Pet.

2:9–10). Jesus taught that the government should work in harmony with the church and should recognize its sovereignty in spiritual matters (Matt. 22:21).

The second institution is the family (Eph. 5:22–32, 1 Pet. 3:1–7). The family is an institution under God and His authority (Gen.1:26–28, 2:20–25). When the family breaks down, the government often has to step in to protect the rights of the wife (in cases of wife abuse) or children (in cases of child abuse or adoption). The biblical emphasis, however, is not so much on rights as it is on responsibilities and mutual submission (Eph. 5:21).

A third institution is education. Children are not the wards of the state, but belong to God (Ps. 127:3) and are given to parents as a gift from God. Parents are to teach their children (Deut. 4:9) and may also entrust them to tutors (Gal. 4:2).

In a humanistic system of government, the institutions of church and family are usually subordinated to the state. In an atheistic system, ultimately the state becomes a substitute god and is given additional power to adjudicate disputes and bring order to a society. Since institutions exist by permission of the state, there is always the possibility that a new social contract will allow government to intervene in the areas of church and family.

A Christian view of government recognizes the sovereignty of these spheres. Governmental intervention into the spheres of church and family is necessary in certain cases where there is threat to life, liberty, or property. Otherwise civil government should recognize the sovereignty of other God-ordained institutions.

Moral Basis of Law

Law should be the foundation of any government. Whether law is

based upon moral absolutes, changing consensus, or totalitarian whim is of crucial importance. Until fairly recently, Western culture held to a notion that common law was founded upon God's revealed moral absolutes.

In a Christian view of government, law is based upon God's revealed commandments. Law is not based upon human opinion or sociological convention. Law is rooted in God's unchangeable character and derived from biblical principles of morality.

In humanism, humanity is the source of law. Law is merely the expression of human will or mind. Since ethics and morality are man-made, so also is law. Humanists' law is rooted in human opinion, and thus is relative and arbitrary.

Two important figures in the history of law are Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) and William Blackstone (1723-1780). Rutherford's *Lex Rex* (written in 1644) had profound effect on British and American law. His treatise challenged the foundations of 17th century politics by proclaiming that law must be based upon the Bible, rather than upon the word of any man.

Up until that time, the king had been the law. The book created a great controversy because it attacked the idea of the divine right of kings. This doctrine had held that the king or the state ruled as God's appointed regent. Thus, the king's word had been law. Rutherford properly argued from passages such as Romans 13 that the king, as well as anyone else, was under God's law and not above it.

Sir William Blackstone was an English jurist in the 18th century and is famous for his *Commentaries on the Law of England* which embodied the tenets of Judeo-Christian theism. Published in 1765, the *Commentaries* became the definitive treatise on the common law in England and in America. According to Blackstone, the two foundations for law are nature and revelation through the Scriptures. Blackstone

believed that the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom, and thus taught that God was the source of all laws. It is interesting that even the humanist Rousseau noted in his *Social Contract* that one needs someone outside the world system to provide a moral basis for law. He said, "It would take gods to give men laws."

Unfortunately, our modern legal structure has been influenced by relativism and utilitarianism, instead of moral absolutes revealed in Scripture. Relativism provides no secure basis for moral judgments. There are no firm moral absolutes upon which to build a secure legal foundation.

Utilitarianism looks merely at consequences and ignores moral principles. This legal foundation has been further eroded by the relatively recent phenomenon of sociological law. In this view, law should be based upon relative sociological standards. No discipline is more helpless without a moral foundation than law. Law is a tool, and it needs a jurisprudential foundation. Just as contractors and builders need the architect's blueprint in order to build, so also lawyers need theologians and moral philosophers to make good laws. Yet, most lawyers today are extensively trained in technique, but little in moral and legal philosophy.

Legal justice in the Western world has been based upon a proper, biblical understanding of human nature and human choice. We hold criminals accountable for their crimes, rather than excuse their behavior as part of environmental conditioning. We also acknowledge differences between willful, premeditated acts (such as murder) and so-called crimes of passion (i.e., manslaughter) or accidents.

One of the problems in our society today is that we do not operate from assumptions of human choice. The influence of the behaviorist, the evolutionist, and the sociobiologist are quite profound. The evolutionist and sociobiologist say that human behavior is genetically determined. The behaviorist says

that human behavior is environmentally determined. Where do we find free choice in a system that argues that actions are a result of heredity and environment? Free choice and personal responsibility have been diminished in the criminal justice system, due to the influence of these secular perspectives.

It is, therefore, not by accident that we have seen a dramatic change in our view of criminal justice. The emphasis has moved from a view of punishment and restitution to one of rehabilitation. If our actions are governed by something external, and human choice is denied, then we cannot punish someone for something they cannot control. However, we must rehabilitate them if the influences are merely heredity and environmental. But such a view of human actions diminishes human dignity. If a person cannot choose, then he is merely a victim of circumstances and must become a ward of the state.

As Christians, we must take the criminal act seriously and punish human choices. While we recognize the value of rehabilitation (especially through spiritual conversion, John 3:3), we also recognize the need for punishing wrong-doing. The Old Testament provisions for punishment and restitution make more sense in light of the biblical view of human nature. Yet today, we have a justice system which promotes no-fault divorce, no-fault insurance, and continues to erode away the notion of human responsibility.

C.S. Lewis: His Enduring

Legacy

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

A Christian For All Men and A Man For All Seasons

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mere Christianity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Space Trilogy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Problem of Pain and *A Grief Observed*

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Screwtape Letters and *The Great Divorce*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

School-Based Health Clinics

and Sex Education

Kerby provides an in-depth critique of how our public schools are addressing sex education and providing sex aids through health clinics. Speaking from a Christian worldview perspective, he looks at the data and concludes that public schools are doing more harm than good in the addressing dangerous sexual activity among teenagers.

School-based Health Clinics

As comprehensive sex education curricula have been promoted in the schools, clinics have been established to provide teens greater access to birth control information and devices. Proponents cite studies that supposedly demonstrate the effectiveness of these clinics on teen sexual behavior. Yet a more careful evaluation of the statistics involved suggests that school-based health clinics do not lower the teen pregnancy rate.

The first major study to receive nationwide attention was DuSable

High School. School administrators were rightly alarmed that before the establishment of a school-based health clinic, three hundred of their one thousand female students became pregnant. After the clinic was opened, the media widely reported that the number of pregnant students dropped to 35.

As more facts came to light, the claims seemed to be embellished. School officials admitted that they kept no records of the number of pregnancies before the operation of the clinic and that three hundred was merely an estimate. Moreover, school officials could not produce statistics for the number of abortions the girls received as a result of the clinic.

The most often-cited study involved the experience of the

clinic at Mechanics Arts High School in St. Paul, Minnesota. Researchers found that a drop in the number of teen births during the late 1970s coincided with an increase in female participation at the school-based clinics. But at least three important issues undermine the validity of this study.

First, some of the statistics are anecdotal rather than statistical. School officials admitted that the schools could not document the decrease in pregnancies. The Support Center for School-Based Clinics acknowledged that "most of the evidence for the success of that program is based upon the clinic's own records and the staff's knowledge of births among students. Thus, the data undoubtedly do not include all births."

Second, an analysis of the data done by Michael Schwartz of the Free Congress Foundation found that the total female enrollment of the two schools included in the study dropped from 1268 in 1977 to 948 in 1979. Therefore the reduction in reported births could have been merely attributable to an overall decline in the female population at the school.

Finally, the study actually shows a drop in the teen birth rate rather than the teen pregnancy rate. The reduction in the fertility rate listed in the study was likely due to more teenagers obtaining an abortion.

Today, more and more advocates of school-based health clinics are citing a three-year study headed by Laurie Zabin at Johns Hopkins University, which evaluated the effect of sex education on teenagers. The study of two school-based clinics in Baltimore, Maryland showed there was a 30 percent reduction in teen pregnancies.

But even this study leaves many unanswered questions. The size of the sample was small and over 30 percent of the female sample dropped out between the first and last measurement periods. Since the study did not control for student mobility,

critics point out that some of girls who dropped out of the study may have dropped out of school because they were pregnant. And others were not accounted for with follow-up questionnaires. Other researchers point out that the word abortion is never mentioned in the brief report, leading them to conclude that only live births were counted.

The conclusion is simple. Even the best studies used to promote school-based health clinics prove they do not reduce the teen pregnancy rate. School-based clinics do not work.

Sex Education

For more than thirty years proponents of comprehensive sex education have argued that giving sexual information to young children and adolescents will reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. In that effort nearly $3 billion have been spent on federal Title X family planning services; yet teenage pregnancies and abortions rise.

Perhaps one of the most devastating popular critiques of comprehensive sex education came from Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. The journalist who said that Dan Quayle was right also was willing to say that sex education was wrong. Her article, "The Failure of Sex Education" in the October 1994 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, demonstrated that sex education neither reduced pregnancy nor slowed the spread of STDs.

Comprehensive sex education is mandated in at least seventeen states, so Whitehead chose one of those states and focused her analysis on the sex education experiment in New Jersey. Like other curricula, the New Jersey sex education program rests on certain questionable assumptions.

The first tenet is that *children are sexual from birth*. Sex educators reject the classic notion of a latency period until approximately age twelve. They argue that you are "being sexual when you throw your arms around your grandpa and give

him a hug."

Second, *children are sexually miseducated.* Parents, to put it simply, have not done their job, so we need "professionals" to do it right. Parents try to protect their children, fail to affirm their sexuality, and even discuss sexuality in a context of moralizing. The media, they say, is also guilty of providing sexual misinformation.

Third, *if mis-education is the problem, then sex education in the schools is the solution*. Parents are failing miserably at the task, so "it is time to turn the job over to the schools. Schools occupy a safe middle ground between Mom and MTV."

Learning about Family Life is the curriculum used in New Jersey. While it discusses such things as sexual desire, AIDS, divorce, condoms, and masturbation, it nearly ignores such issues as abstinence, marriage, self-control, and virginity. One technique promoted to prevent pregnancy and STDs is noncoital sex, or what some sex educators call "outercourse." Yet there is good evidence to suggest that teaching teenagers to explore their sexuality through noncoital techniques will lead to coitus. Ultimately, outercourse will lead to intercourse.

Whitehead concludes that comprehensive sex education has been a failure. For example, the percent of teenage births to unwed mothers was 67 percent in 1980 and rose to 84 percent in 1991. In the place of this failed curriculum, Whitehead describes a better program. She found that "sex education works best when it combines clear messages about behavior with strong moral and logistical support for the behavior sought." One example she cites is the "Postponing Sexual Involvement" program at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, which offers more than a "Just say no" message. It reinforces the message by having adolescents practice the desired behavior and enlists the aid of older teenagers to teach younger teenagers how to resist sexual advances. Whitehead also found that "religiously

observant teens" are less likely to experiment sexually, thus providing an opportunity for church- related programs to help stem the tide of teenage pregnancy.

Contrast this, however, with what has been derisively called "the condom gospel." Sex educators today promote the dissemination of sex education information and the distribution of condoms to deal with the problems of teen pregnancy and STDs.

The Case Against Condoms

At the 1987 World Congress of Sexologists, Theresa Crenshaw asked the audience, "If you had the available partner of your dreams and knew that person carried HIV, how many of you would have sex, depending on a condom for your protection?" None of the 800 members of the audience raised their hand. If condoms do not eliminate the fear of HIV infection for sexologists and sex educators, why encourage the children of America to play STD Russian roulette?

Are condoms a safe and effective way to reduce pregnancy and STDs? Sex educators seem to think so. Every day sex education classes throughout this country promote condoms as a means of safe sex or at least safer sex. But the research on condoms provides no such guarantee.

For example, Texas researcher Susan Weller, writing in the 1993 issue of *Social Science Medicine*, evaluated all research published prior to July 1990 on condom effectiveness. She reported that condoms are only 87 percent effective in preventing pregnancy and 69 percent effective in reducing the risk of HIV infection. This 69 percent effectiveness rate is also the same as a 31 percent failure rate in preventing AIDS transmission. And according to a study in the *1992 Family Planning Perspectives*, 15 percent of married couples who use condoms for birth control end up with an unplanned pregnancy within the first year.

So why has condom distribution become the centerpiece of the U.S. AIDS policy and the most frequently promoted aspect of comprehensive sex education? For many years the answer to that question was an a priori commitment to condoms and a safe sex message over an abstinence message. But in recent years, sex educators and public health officials have been pointing to one study that seemed to vindicate the condom policy.

The study was presented at the Ninth International Conference on AIDS held in Berlin on June 9, 1993. The study involved 304 couples with one partner who was HIV positive. Of the 123 couples who used condoms with each act of sexual intercourse, not a single negative HIV partner became positive. So proponents of condom distribution thought they had scientific vindication for their views.

Unfortunately, that is not the whole story. Condoms do appear to be effective in stopping the spread of AIDS when used "correctly and consistently." Most individuals, however, do not use them "correctly and consistently." What happens to them? Well, it turns out that part of the study received much less attention. Of 122 couples who could not be taught to use condoms properly, 12 became HIV positive in both partners. Undoubtedly over time, even more partners would contract AIDS.

How well does this study apply to the general population? Not very well. This study group was quite dissimilar from the general population. For example, they knew the HIV status of their spouse and therefore had a vested interest in protecting themselves. They were responsible partners in a committed monogamous relationship. In essence, their actions and attitudes differed dramatically from teenagers and single adults who do not know the HIV status of their partners, are often reckless, and have multiple sexual partners.

And even if condoms are used correctly, do not break, and do not leak, they are still far from 100 percent effective. The Medical Institute for Sexual Health reported that "medical

studies confirm that condoms do not offer much, if any, protection in the transmission of chlamydia and human papilloma virus, two serious STDs with prevalence as high as 40 percent among sexually active teenagers."

Abstinence Is the Answer

Less than a decade ago an abstinence-only program was rare in the public schools. Today, directive abstinence programs can be found in many school districts while battles are fought in other school districts for their inclusion or removal. While proponents of abstinence programs run for school board or influence existing school board members, groups like Planned Parenthood bring lawsuits against districts that use abstinence-based curricula, arguing that they are inaccurate or incomplete.

The emergence of abstinence-only programs as an alternative to comprehensive sex education programs was due to both popularity and politics. Parents concerned about the ineffectiveness of the safe- sex message eagerly embraced the message of abstinence. And political funding helped spread the message and legitimize its educational value. The Adolescent Family Life Act, enacted in 1981 by the Reagan Administration, created Title XX and set aside $2 million a year for the development and implementation of abstinence-based programs. Although the Clinton Administration later cut funding for abstinence programs, the earlier funding in the 1980s helped groups like Sex Respect and Teen-Aid launch abstinence programs in the schools.

Parents and children have embraced the abstinence message in significant numbers. One national poll by the University of Chicago found that 68 percent of adults surveyed said premarital sex among teenagers is "always wrong." A 1994 poll for USA Weekend asked more than 1200 teens and adults what they thought of "several high profile athletes [who] are saying in public that they have abstained from sex before

marriage and are telling teens to do the same." Seventy-two percent of the teens and 78 percent of the adults said they agree with the pro-abstinence message.

Their enthusiasm for abstinence-only education is well founded. Even though the abstinence message has been criticized by some as naive or inadequate, there are good reasons to promote abstinence in schools and society.

First, teenagers want to learn about abstinence. Contrary to the often repeated teenage claim, not "everyone's doing it." A 1992 study by the Centers for Disease Control found that 43 percent of teenagers from ages fourteen to seventeen had engaged in sexual intercourse at least once. Put another way, the latest surveys suggest that a majority of teenagers are not doing it.

A majority of teenagers are abstaining from sex; also more want help in staying sexually pure in a sex-saturated society. Emory University surveyed one thousand sexually experienced teen girls by asking them what they would like to learn to reduce teen pregnancy. Nearly 85 percent said, "How to say no without hurting the other person's feelings."

Second, abstinence prevents pregnancy. After the San Marcos (California) Junior High adopted the Teen-Aid abstinence-only program, the school's pregnancy rate dropped from 147 to 20 in a two-year period.

An abstinence-only program for girls in Washington, D.C. has seen only one of four hundred girls become pregnant. Elayne Bennett, director of "Best Friends," says that between twenty and seventy pregnancies are common for this age-group in the District of Columbia.

Nathan Hale Middle School near Chicago adopted the abstinence-only program "Project Taking Charge" to combat its pregnancy rate among eighth-graders. Although adults were skeptical, the school graduated three pregnancy-free classes in a row.

Abstinence works. That is the message that needs to be spread to parents, teachers, and school boards. Teenagers will respond to this message, and we need to teach this message in the classroom.

Third, abstinence prevents sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). After more than three decades, the sexual revolution has taken lots of prisoners. Before 1960, doctors were concerned about only two STDs: syphilis and gonorrhea. Today there are more than twenty significant STDs, ranging from the relatively harmless to the fatal. Twelve million Americans are newly infected each year, and 63 percent of these new infections are in people under twenty-five years of age. Eighty percent of those infected with an STD have absolutely no symptoms.

Doctors warn that if a person has sexual intercourse with another individual, he or she is not only having sexual intercourse with that individual but with every person with whom that individual might have had intercourse for the last ten years and all the people with whom they had intercourse. If that is true, then consider the case of one sixteen-year-old girl who was responsible for 218 cases of gonorrhea and more than 300 cases of syphilis. According to the reporter, this illustrates the rampant transmission of STDs through multiple sex partners. "The girl has sex with sixteen men. Those men had sex with other people who had sex with other people. The number of contacts finally added up to 1,660." As one person interviewed in the story asked, "What if the girl had had AIDS instead of gonorrhea or syphilis? You probably would have had 1,000 dead people by now."

Abstinence prevents the spread of STDs while safe sex programs do not. Condoms are not always effective even when they are used correctly and consistently, and most sexually active people do not even use them correctly and consistently. Sex education programs have begun to promote "outercourse" instead of intercourse, but many STDs can be spread even through this

method, and, as stated, outercourse almost always leads to intercourse. Abstinence is the only way to prevent the spread of a sexually transmitted disease.

Fourth, abstinence prevents emotional scars. Abstinence speakers relate dozens and dozens of stories of young people who wish they had postponed sex until marriage. Sex is the most intimate form of bonding known to the human race, and it is a special gift to be given to one's spouse. Unfortunately, too many throw it away and are later filled with feelings of regret.

Surveys of young adults show that those who engaged in sexual activity regret their earlier promiscuity and wish they had been virgins on their wedding night. Even secular agencies that promote a safe-sex approach acknowledge that sex brings regrets. A Roper poll conducted in association with SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) of high schoolers found that 62 percent of the sexually experienced girls said they "should have waited."

Society is ready for the abstinence message, and it needs to be promoted widely. Anyone walking on the Washington Mall in July 1993 could not miss the acres of "True Love Waits" pledge cards signed by over 200,000 teenagers. The campaign, begun by the Southern Baptist Convention, provided a brief but vivid display of the desire by teenagers to stand for purity and promote abstinence. For every teenager who signed a card pledging abstinence, there are no doubt dozens of others who plan to do the same.

Teenagers want and need to hear the message of abstinence. They want to promote the message of abstinence. Their health, and even their lives, are at stake.

Art and the Christian

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

🇪🇸 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Art in our Lives

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

If I had the pleasure of dialoguing with you in regard to these questions, no doubt we would have a very interesting conversation. Some of you may say, "No, art doesn't describe anything I see at the moment." Or, some of you may state, "I haven't thought of this before. You'll have to give me more time for reflection." Others may assert, "I only think of art within museums, concert halls or other such places that enshrine our art." Others may say, "Yes, art is very much a part of my daily life." But since I can't dialog with you in order to know what you are doing at the moment, and I certainly cannot see what you see, let me tell you where I am and what I see as I write these comments. I am sitting in my

study at my desk while I am listening to the music of Bach. I see a clock on one of the bookshelves, a hand-painted plate I purchased in the country of Slovenia, a framed poem given to me by my daughter, several chairs, two floor lamps, a mirror with a bamboo frame, two canoe paddles I bought in the San Blas islands off the coast of Panama, a wooden statue I purchased in Ecuador, and a unique, colorful sculpture that was made by my son. As I mention these things, perhaps you are attempting to imagine them. You are trying to "see" or "hear" them and in so doing there are certain of these items you may describe as art. Your first response may be to say that the music of Bach, the hand-painted Slovenian plate, or the Ecuadorian statue can be described as art. But what about the chair in which I am sitting, the desk, the bookshelves, the chairs, or the lamps? Better yet, what about such items that are found where you live? Are they art?

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

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

will find that our discussion can have significant application in your life.

Art and Aesthetics

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

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

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

good, and others not worthwhile.

Aesthetics and Nature

Perhaps one of the clearest ways to begin to understand the aesthetic dimension of our lives is to consider how we respond to nature. Have you ever heard anyone say, "That's an *ugly* sunset." Probably not, but surely you have heard the word *beautiful* applied to sunsets. And when you hear the phrase "beautiful sunset" you probably don't hear an argument to the contrary. Usually there is a consensus among those who see the sunset: it is beautiful. From a Christian perspective those who are there are offering a judgment concerning both the "artist" and the "art." Both the "cause" and "effect" have been praised aesthetically. Torrential waterfalls, majestic mountains, as well as sunsets routinely evoke human aesthetic response. The Christian knows that the very fabric of the universe expresses God's presence with majestic beauty and grandeur. Psalm 19:1 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows forth his handiwork." Nature has been called the "aesthetics of the infinite." Through telescope or microscope, one can devote a lifetime to the study of some part of the universe—the skin, the eye, the sea, the flora and fauna, the stars, the climate. All of nature can be appreciated for its aesthetic qualities which find their source in God, their Creator. In fact, we can assert that "the major premise of a Christian worldview, including a Christian aesthetic, is that God is the Creator."(1)

Human Creativity

"You have a wonderful imagination! Are you an artist?" Has anyone said such things to you? If so, perhaps you responded by saying something that would reject the person's perception of you. Most of us don't see ourselves as imaginative, artistic people. Indeed, most of us tend to think of the artist and imagination as terms that apply only to certain

elite individuals who have left a legacy of work. "The truth is that in discussing the arts we are discussing something universal to mankind."(2) For example, anthropologists tell us all primitive peoples thought art was important.(3) Why is this true?

From the perspective of a Christian worldview the answer is found in how we are created. Since we are made in God's image that must include the glorious concept that we too are creative. After creating man, God told him to subdue the earth and rule over it. Adam was to cultivate and keep the garden (Gen. 2:15) which was described by God as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The implication of this is very important. God, the Creator, a lover of the beauty in His created world, invited Adam, one of His creatures, to share in the process of "creation" with Him. He has permitted humans to take the elements of His cosmos and create new arrangements with them. Perhaps this explains the reason why creating anything is so fulfilling to us. We can express a drive within us which allows us to do something all humans uniquely share with their Creator.

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

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

Understanding this dichotomy allows Christians to genuinely appreciate something of the contribution of every artist, composer, or author. God is sovereign and dispenses artistic talents upon whom He will. While Scripture keeps us from emulating certain lifestyles of artists or condoning some of their ideological perspectives, we can nevertheless admire and appreciate their talent, which ultimately finds its source in God.

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

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

Art and the Bible

What does the Bible have to say about the arts? Happily, the Bible does not call upon Christians to look down upon the arts. In fact, the arts are *imperative* when considered from the biblical mandate that whatever we do should be done to the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31). We are to offer Him the best that we have—intellectually, artistically, and spiritually. Further, at the very center of Christianity stands the *Incarnation* ("the Word made flesh"), an event which identified God with the physical world and gave dignity to it. A real Man died on a real cross and was laid in a real, rock-hard tomb. The Greek ideas of "other- worldly-ness" that fostered a tainted and debased view of nature (and hence aesthetics) find no place in biblical Christianity. The dichotomy between

sacred and secular is thus an alien one to biblical faith. Paul's statement, "Unto the pure, all things are pure" (Titus 1:15) includes the arts. While we may recognize that human creativity, like all other gifts bestowed upon us by God, may be misused, there is nothing inherently or more sinful about the arts than other areas of human activity.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament is rich with examples which confirm the artistic dimension. Exodus 25 shows that God commanded beautiful architecture, along with other forms of art (metalwork, clothing design, tapestry, etc.) in the building of the tabernacle and eventually the temple. Here we find something unique in history art works conceived and designed by the infinite God, then transmitted to and executed by His human apprentices!

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

Music and dance are often found in the Bible. In Exodus 15 the children of Israel celebrated God's Red Sea victory over the Egyptians with singing, dancing, and the playing of instruments. In 1 Chronicles 23:5 we find musicians in the temple, their instruments specifically made by King David for praising God. And we should remember that the lyrical poetry of the Psalms was first intended to be sung.

The New Testament

The New Testament also includes artistic insights. The most obvious is the example of Jesus Himself. First of all, He was by trade a carpenter, a skilled craftsman (Mark 6:3).

Secondly, His teachings are full of examples which reveal His sensitivity to the beauty all around: the fox, the bird nest, the lily, the sparrow and dove, the glowering skies, a vine, a mustard seed. Jesus was also a master story-teller. He readily made use of His own cultural setting to impart His message, and sometimes quite dramatically. Many of the parables were fictional stories, but they were nevertheless used to teach spiritual truths via the imagination.

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

Evaluating Art

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

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

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

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

The second word refers to the concept of *honor* or *dignity*. This can refer to what we related earlier in this essay about

the nature of man: we have dignity even though we are sinful. This gives a basis, for example, to reject the statements in the work of the artist Francis Bacon. Bacon painted half-truths. He presented deterioration and hopeless despair, but he didn't present man's honor and dignity.

The third key to aesthetic comprehension has to do with the moral dimension—what is *right*. Not all art makes a moral statement, but when it does Christians must deal with it, not ignore it. For example, Picasso's painting, Guernica, is a powerful moral statement protesting the bombing by the Germans of a town by that name just prior to World War II. Protesting injustice is a cry for justice.

Purity is the fourth concept. It also touches on the moral— by contrasting that which is innocent, chaste, and pure from that which is sordid, impure, and worldly. For instance, one need not be a professional drama critic to identify and appreciate the fresh, innocent love of Romeo and Juliet, nor to distinguish it from the erotic escapades of a Tom Jones.

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

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

Excellence is yet another concept. It is a comparative term; it assumes that something else is not excellent. The focus is on quality, which is worth much discussion. But one sure sign

of it is craftsmanship: technical mastery. Another sign is durability. Great art lasts.

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

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

Notes

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

Knighthood and Biblical Manhood – A Christian Perspective on True Manliness

Lou Whitworth summarizes an inspiring book which lays out the characteristics of a godly man. The ceremonies and the code of conduct of knights are compared to a biblical perspective on Christian manhood. This model encourages us to live in Christ as examples of godly men.

A Vision for Manhood

In this essay we will be looking at an inspiring book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* in an effort to learn how we can motivate our sons to live lives of honor and nobility. This book, written by Robert Lewis, grew out his own experiences as he and some close friends struggled to lead their sons into balanced, biblical masculinity.

C. S. Lewis wrote that the disparate strands of manhood—fierceness and gentleness—can find healthy synthesis in the person of the knight and in the code of chivalry. Here these competing impulses—normally found in different individuals—find their union.(1)

Were one of these two bents given full rein, the balance required for authentic Christian manhood would be lost. Strength and power, without tenderness, for example, give us the brute. Tenderness and compassion without masculine firmness and aggressiveness produce a male without the fire to lead or inspire others.

Biblical examples of these two elements resident in one man are numerous. Jesus Christ, our Lord, revealed both tough and tender aspects in His humanity. Once Jesus expressed a desire to gather the citizens of Jerusalem together as a hen gathers

her young under her wings.(2) We know that Christ wept at least twice: once at the tomb of Lazarus(3) and again as He looked out over the city of Jerusalem and reflected on the fate of those who rejected His witness.(4) However, Jesus could also be very stern. Once He made a whip, ran off the money changers in the temple area, and turned over their tables.(5) And, in the Garden of Gethsemane, His mere glance knocked grown men to the ground.(6)

In Paul, we see the same blend of firmness and gentleness. He poured himself out tenderly nurturing his spiritual children,(7) but he endured more hardship than most soldiers(8) and didn't hesitate to castigate false teachers.(9)

In the Old Testament, we see David, who was a poet and singer, but also a warrior and king. He had the fierceness to kill Goliath, the giant, and the tenderness to provide for the needs of Jonathan's descendants after Jonathan was killed.

Keeping the right balance between our impulses toward power and aggression and the need to be gentle and tender is a challenge most men face. In his book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* author Robert Lewis says that Christian fathers can use knighthood as a symbol, an ideal, and a metaphor for guiding their sons into authentic manhood. In this way opposing drives can be harnessed and balanced.

Now, of course, everyone experiences difficulty balancing competing impulses, but it is specifically the violence by young males that is bringing our society to the verge of breakdown. Our young men need a vision for masculinity that challenges and inspires if our society is to be stable and healthy. In an age of great social, spiritual, and gender confusion, such as ours, there is a desperate need for clear guidelines and models that can inspire young men and harness their aggression for constructive ends.

This is where the image of the knight comes in. Since the Middle Ages these men in iron have fired the imaginations of young men. Knighthood is attractive because of its code and its call to courage and honor. Young men are intrigued by testing themselves against various standards, and the code is inspiring because of its rigor and strictness.

The Need for Modern-Day Knights

In his enthusiastic foreword to Robert Lewis's book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* Stu Weber writes:

> *Our culture is in deep trouble, and at the heart of its trouble is its loss of a vision for manhood. If it's difficult for you and me as adult males to maintain our masculine balance in this gender-neutral' culture, imagine what it must be like for our sons, who are growing up in an increasingly feminized world.(10)*

We must supply our young men with healthy, noble visions of manhood, and the figure of the knight, in this regard, is without equal. In the knight we find a conception of manhood that can lift, inspire, and challenge our young men to new heights of achievement and nobility. One authority asserted: "Not all knights were great men, but all great men were knights."(11) According to Will Durant, chivalry and knighthood gave to the world one of the "major achievements of the human spirit."(12)

C. S. Lewis, in his essay, "The Necessity of Chivalry," agreed.(13) He wrote that the genius of the medieval ideal of the chivalrous knight was that it was a paradox. That is, it brought together two things which have no natural tendency to gravitate towards one another. It brought them together for that very reason. It taught humility and forbearance to the great warrior because everyone knew by experience how much he usually needed that lesson. It demanded valour of the urbane

and modest man because everyone knew that he was likely as not to be a milksop.(14)

In Malory's *Morte Darthur* a fellow knight salutes the deceased Lancelot saying: "Thou wert the meekest man that ever ate in hall among ladies; and thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest." This expresses the double requirement made on knights: sternness and meekness, not a compromise or blend of the two. Part of the attraction of the knight is this combination of valor and humility.

Someone once said history teaches us that, "When most men are soft, a few hard men will rule." For that reason we must do everything we can to build into our boys the virtues of strength and tenderness so they can be strong, solid family men and so society will be stable.

The lack of connection between fathers and sons in our culture, made worse by broken homes and the busyness of our lives, has left many young men with a masculine identity crisis. That's why the ideas in this book are so timely and important. Our sons are looking to their fathers for direction. Fathers are searching for real answers in their attempts to guide their sons into godly manhood. This book provides answers and guidelines for this search.

First, from the example of the knight, fathers have a way to point their sons to manhood with clear ideals: a vision for manhood, a code of conduct, and a transcendent cause. Second, the pattern of advancement from page to knight provides fathers with a coherent process for guiding their sons to manhood. Third, numerous suggestions for ceremonies equip dads with a variety of means to celebrate and validate their sons' achievements.

The Knight and His Ideals

Now we will turn our attention to the knight and his ideals. In *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* author Robert Lewis suggests three major ideals for modern-day knights: a vision for manhood, a code of conduct, and a transcendent cause.

A Vision for Manhood – The author states four manhood principles: Real men (1) reject passivity, (2) accept responsibility, (3) lead courageously, and (4) expect the greater reward. He suggests that though men have a natural inborn aggressiveness, they tend to become passive at home and avoid social responsibility. These principles, if followed, prevent passivity from becoming a significant problem.

A Code of Conduct – The code for modern-day knights comes from the pages of the Bible. Lewis lists 10 ideal characteristics appropriate for modern-day knights taken from the Scriptures: loyalty, kindness, humility, purity, servant- leadership, honesty, self-discipline, excellence, integrity, and perseverance. Modern-day knights must be trained in three important areas. First, the modern-day knight needs to understand that there must be a will to obey (God's will) if there is to be spiritual maturity. The young man must come to know that life is inherently moral and that there is a God who knows everything and who rewards good and punishes evil. He must know that absolute values exist and that the commandments of God are liberating, not confining. Lewis states "True satisfaction in life is directly proportionate to one's obedience to God. In this context, moral boundaries take on a whole new perspective: they become benefits, not burdens."

Second, the modern-day knight needs to understand that he has a work to do that is in keeping with his inner design. This work is not just his profession or trade, but refers to work in his home, church, and community. Life is certainly more than a job, and your son should hear this from you lest he get the mistaken perception that manhood is just one duty and

obligation after another.

A third realm of responsibility for the modern-day knight is a woman to love. The code of chivalry requires that all women be treated with respect and honor. Sons need to see and hear from their fathers the importance of caring for women in general and loving, leading, and honoring their wives in particular.

The knight in training should be taught the value of work, have summer jobs, do chores around the house, and study hard on his school work. The goal here is to establish patterns of industry and avoid sloth so that a solid work ethic is in place as he gets older.

A Transcendent Cause — Life is ultimately unsatisfying if it is lived solely for self. Jesus said if you give up your life you will find it, so if you live for a cause greater than yourself, you'll be happy and fulfilled. A transcendent cause is a cause that a person believes is truly heroic (a noble endeavor calling for bravery and sacrifice), timeless (has significance beyond the moment), and is supremely meaningful (not futile).

The only antidote to the futility of life is a transcendent cause and a vision for life that "integrates the end of life with the beginning," and connects time and eternity. Obviously becoming a Christian, developing a personal relationship with Christ, and living for Him are basic, irreplaceable elements for having a meaningful life.

A Knight and His Ceremonies

At this point, we turn to focus on the importance of ceremonies in the life of a young man. It is said that a knight remembers the occasion of his dubbing (i.e., his installment as a knight) as the finest day of his life. Such is the power of ceremony that it makes celebrated events unforgettable. Ceremonies are also invaluable markers that

state emphatically: "Something important has happened here!"

In much of the world, older men have instinctively seen the wisdom of providing for their sons markers of their journey to manhood. These markers have been in the form of periodic ceremonies or a significant, final ceremony. Following such events there is no doubt in the young man's mind that he has reached the stage in his development celebrated in the ceremony. Later he can always look back on the ceremony and remember what it meant.

After the elaborate physical, mental, and religious disciplines endured and passed in relation to his dubbing ceremony, no medieval knight ever wondered, "Am I a knight?" Such matters had been settled forever by the power of ceremony in the presence of other men. This is what our sons need.

Our sons do not normally have such experiences. As Lewis writes, "One of the great tragedies of Western culture today is the absence of this type of ceremony. . . . I cannot even begin to describe the impact on a son's soul when a key manhood moment in his life is forever enshrined and memorialized by a ceremony with other men."(15)

The author suggests that there are natural stages in a young man's life that lend themselves to celebration. Each stage has a parallel in the orderly steps toward knighthood.

Puberty: The Page Ceremony — The first step for a young boy on the path to knighthood was to become a page. He was like an apprentice, and he learned about horses, weapons, and falconry and performed menial tasks for his guardians. Since puberty occurs in a young boy's life around 13 and is an important point in a young man's journey toward adulthood, it is an excellent time for a simple ceremony involving the boy and his father celebrating this stage of the young man's life.

High School Graduation: The Squire Ceremony — The next stage on the path to knighthood was the squire; he was attached to a

knight, served him in many ways, and continued to perfect his fighting skills. This stage is roughly parallel to the time of high school graduation. It should be marked by a more involved ceremony led by the boy's father but involving other men.

Adulthood: The Knight Ceremony – This is the stage in which the squire, after a period of testing and preparation, is dubbed a knight in an elaborate ceremony. This marks the end of youth and the arrival of adulthood for the knight. For the modern- day knight this stage of life is characterized by the completion of college or entering the world of work or military service. The author suggests this stage as a perfect time to have a celebration marking a son's arrival at manhood and full adulthood. This ceremony should be very special; it should involve the young man, his father, his family, and other men.

Some Final Thoughts on Knighthood

In this discussion we have been looking at Robert Lewis's book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* and discussing knights and chivalry in an attempt to promote the knight as a worthy ideal, symbol, and metaphor for young men to emulate. A question left unasked is why young men might need a stirring, vivid image or concept like the knight as a model. After a lifetime of studying cultures and civilizations, both ancient and modern, the eminent anthropologist Margaret Mead made the following observation:

> *The central problem of every society is to define appropriate roles for the men.(16)*

Though Margaret Mead was a controversial figure, and I have sometimes disagreed with her myself, in this statement, I believe she is right on target. Author George Gilder adds a similar insight when he states: "Wise societies provide ample means for young men to affirm themselves without afflicting

others."(17)

Men need appropriate roles, and they need the desire to live and perform those roles. They need to be inspired to do so. Men need roles that are considered valuable and held to be worthwhile. This is true because men are psychologically more fragile than women and suffer with their identity more than women do, though feminists would have us think otherwise. Why is this so? It is true because "Men, more than women, are culture-made."(18) This is why it is so important to have a culture-wide vision of manhood.

In modern Western society boys make the journey to manhood without a clear vision for what healthy manhood is. If they get out of control, the whole society suffers. Proverbs 29:18 states: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" [or, "are unrestrained"]. Knights and chivalry can supply a stirring vision of manhood that has been lacking. Yet some may think that the figure of the knight is an inappropriate image to use to inspire Christian young men. Such people need to take a close look at Scripture. The teachings of Jesus and the letters of Paul use the image of the hard working farmer, the athlete, and the soldier to illustrate the points they are trying to make.

Furthermore, there are numerous biblical passages that picture knight-like images, some of whom are angelic beings and others are Christ Himself. Specifically, Revelation is replete with images of courtly life familiar to medieval knights: kings, thrones, crowns, swords, censers, bows, armies, eagles, dragons, chariots, precious stones, incense, etc.

Actually, we are more indebted to the knightly virtue of chivalry than we realize. Many of the concepts and words have become part of our familiar vocabulary. It is from chivalry, for example, that we acquired the concept of the gentleman (notice the dual stress here—gentle-man) and our concepts of sportsmanship and fair play. It is perhaps no accident that

the decline in chivalry parallels the rise of taunting and the "win at any price" attitude among our sports figures.

There is one more aspect to all of this that needs to be emphasized. If we are successful in inspiring our young men to seek to become modern-day knights, we need to remind them and ourselves that one can't become a knight on his own. Our young knights need the company of godly men to be all that they can be; they need the Roundtable. As Robert Lewis states so well: "Boys become men in the community of men. There is no substitute for this vital component. . . . if your boy is to become a man, you must enlist the community."(19) Why? "First, if a father's presence is weighty, the presence of other men is weightier still. . . . Second, enlisting the community of men results in a depth of friendship that the lonely never experience. . . . And third, the community of men expands a son's spiritual and moral resources."(20)

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, "The Necessity of Chivalry," *Present Concerns* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), pp. 11-16.

2. Matthew 23:37.

3. John 11.

4. Luke 19:41.

5. John 2:13-16.

6. John 18:6.

7. Thessalonians 2: 5-9.

8. 1 Corinthians 11:23-27.

9. Galatians 5:12.

10. Stu Weber cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising A Modern-Day Knight: A Father's Role in Guiding His Son to authentic Manhood* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Focus on the Family, 1997), vii.

11. Matthew Bennett, "The Knight Unmasked," *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, vol. 7, no. 4(Summer 1995): 10, cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 18.

12. Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization—The Age of Faith 4* (New York: Simon & Schuster,1950), 578, cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 18.

13. C. S. Lewis, "The Necessity of Chivalry," 13-26.

14. Ibid.

15. Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 99.

16. Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: Dell, 1968),168, cited in Lewis, 46.

17. George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1992), 34, cited in Lewis, 46.

18. David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America* (New York: Basic, 1995), 17, cited in Lewis, 46.

19. Lewis, 150.

20. Ibid., 150-51.

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Film and the Christian

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

The Convergence of High and Low Culture

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

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

The church as a body has a long standing and somewhat

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

Alcuin, an influential Christian leader of the ninth century was extremely concerned about the worldliness he saw in the church. One of the things that troubled him the most was the monks' fondness for fictional literature and stories about heroes such as Beowulf and Ingeld. Writing to Higbald, Alcuin said: "Let the words of God be read aloud at the table in your refractory. The reader should be heard there, not the flute player; the Fathers of the Church, not the songs of the heathen. . . . What has Ingeld to do with Christ?"{1}

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

Paul, the apostle, writing to the Church at Corinth, said: "What partnership does righteousness have with iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial?"{3}

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

saying and why.

The Nature of Film and the Opportunity for Christians

Properly understood film is a narrative medium, a kind of "visual book" with a beginning, middle, and ending that contains some degree of resolution. All film is not created equal; some movies are made with the express purpose of providing diversionary entertainment, while others represent the sincere efforts of artists to make works of art that reflect human emotions and call people to a more reflective existence. This second category of film should be considered an art form and is therefore worthy of the same attention that any other art such as the ballet, sculpture, or painting receives.

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

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

Film is not and should not be required to be "uplifting" or

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

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

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

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

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

Some Concerns about Christian

Participation in Cinema

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

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

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

Every time this poem is read in a class or other group there is invariably some person who is fixated on the act of

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

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

Biblical Examples of Gratuitous Violence

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

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

the surrounding countries will experience. He writes:

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

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

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

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

over the evil men for punishment.

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

Conclusion: The purpose of the violence in these examples may be that the details in each passage provide information which serves as a reason for a latter action. Or, the information provided shows us something about the nature of God and the way He deals with sin. If both these examples show a difficult, but necessary use of violence in telling a story, then perhaps violence may be used (portrayed) for redemptive purposes in fictional mediums such as film. This is not an airtight argument, rather the issue is raised as a matter for consideration while keeping in mind that Christians should always avoid living a vicariously sinful life through any artistic medium.

Weaker Brother Considerations in Viewing Film

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

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

person to sin.

There are basically three positions related to Christians viewing film.

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

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

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

Conclusion: There is a valid history of concern about Christian involvement in the arts and fictional and imaginative literature. This issue extends to the medium of film and manifests similar concerns about film and Christians

who view film. However, because film is one of the dominant mediums of cultural expression, film criticism is necessary. If Christians do not make their voices heard then others, often non-Christians, will dominate the discussion. All films contain the philosophical persuasions of the persons who contribute to their development, and it is the job of the Christian who participates in these arts to make insightful, fair, and well-informed evaluations of the work. Not everyone feels comfortable in viewing some (or any) films and the Christian should be especially mindful of the beliefs of others and always have the interest of fellow believers as well as non-believers in mind. While "film," the artistic expression of the cinematic medium has been the focus and not "movies," the entertainment based expression, much of what has been said of the former is applicable to the later.

Appendix

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

He is addressing the issue of meat sacrificed to idols in chapter 10 and sexual purity in chapter 6. This may serve as a guide for Christians who are concerned about their involvement in film and a caution against construing what is written here as a license to watch anything and everything. The Apostle is very careful to distinguish between that which is permissible and that which is constructive, or expedient. What Paul means is that, in Christ, believers have freedoms which extend to all areas of life, but these freedoms have the potential to be exercised carelessly or without regard for others, and thus become sin. The guiding rule here is that Christians should seek the good of others and not their own desires. This would mean that anyone who is participating in film that is

objectionable should have the interests of others, both believers and non-believers, in mind. We live in a fallen world and almost everything we touch we affect with our fallen nature, the arts notwithstanding. If we are to be active in redeeming the culture for the glory of God, then by necessity we must participate in the culture and be salt and light to a very dark and unsavory world. It is imperative that Christians who are active in their culture and interested in participating in the ever growing "culture wars," remember Paul's admonition in Philippians that we "work out our salvation daily with fear and trembling." Anything less would be flirting with spiritual disaster and would not bring glory to God.

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

Notes

1. "Letter to Higbald," as quoted in Eleanor S. Duckett, *Alcuin, Friend of Charlemagne* (New York:Macmillan, 1951), 209.
2. Tertullian, *On the Against Heretics*, chap. 7.
3. Paul, 2 Corinthians 6:14-15.

4. John Dixon, Jr., *Nature and Grace in Art,* as quoted in Leland Ryken's *The Liberated Imagination*, p.23.

5. T. S. Eliot, *Religion and Literature.*

6. Much of the material for this section was first articulated by Jeff Hanson, my co-editor, in the March/April issue of *The Antithesis,* vol. 1, no. 2, 1995.