“Did Abraham Speak Hebrew?”

What language did Abraham speak? What I really want to know is, did Abraham speak Hebrew?

I honestly don’t know for sure what language Abraham spoke. It would have surely been one of the ancient Semitic languages and thus would have been quite similar to ancient Hebrew in many respects. Easton’s Bible Dictionary has this to say about the Hebrew language and the language of Abraham:

> *“It is one of the class of languages called Semitic, because they were chiefly spoken among the descendants of Shem.*
>
> *When Abraham entered Canaan it is obvious that he found the language of its inhabitants closely allied to his own. Isaiah (19:18) calls it “the language of Canaan.” Whether this language, as seen in the earliest books of the Old Testament, was the very dialect which Abraham brought with him into Canaan, or whether it was the common tongue of the Canaanitish nations which he only adopted, is uncertain; probably the latter opinion is the correct one….*
>
> *The Hebrew is one of the oldest languages of which we have any knowledge. It is essentially identical with the Phoenician language… The Semitic languages, to which class the Hebrew and Phoenician belonged, were spoken over a very wide area: in Babylonia, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and Arabia, in all the countries from the Mediterranean to the borders of Assyria, and from the mountains of Armenia to the Indian Ocean. The rounded form of the letters, as seen in the Moabite stone, was probably that in which the ancient Hebrew was written down to the time of the Exile, when the present square or Chaldean form was adopted.”*

If you've never heard of the Biblical Studies Foundation website, I would strongly encourage you to check it out at www.netbible.com. They have hundreds of articles on biblical and theological issues.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

© 2008 Probe Ministries

"Why Did the Book of Jacob Get Changed to the Book of James?"

By what authority did the translators of the KJV (and other translations) change the name of the book of YAAKOV (Jacob) to JAMES? The original Greek states this author's name as "IAKOBOY", or Jacob in English. Thank you.

You are correct in your awareness of the Old Testament designation "Yaakov" (Hebrew) and the New Testament designation, "Iakboy" (Greek).

Tracing the etymology of a word is a fascinating endeavor. And as it is translated from language to language, or even its development within a language, spelling and pronunciation often change. Beyond the Greek and the Hebrew, this word went through several stages of the Latin language (i.e., Old Latin, New Latin, Late Latin), and there were further influences of the word through the barbarian tribes that overran Western Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries. In England this involved two distinct blending of languages—the first by the

Anglo-Saxons (Angles, Saxons, and Jutes), who overlaid their language on top of the (1) Latin & (2) Celtic (two dialects: Brythonic and Goidelic) amalgamation as they conquered much of England between the fifth and seventh centuries, and second, by the Norman/Vikings, who overlaid their language upon all of that during the eleventh and twelfth centuries!

One of the reasons the English Language is such a rich one is because of the blending of these linguistic strains which created totally different words for identical things: for example: lamb-mutton, brotherly-fraternal, etc.

The words *Jacob* and *James* come out of this matrix. Jacob follows the French/Norman tradition (Jacobin, for example), and James comes out of the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

The use of "James" in the King James Version was not something they had to think about. It was already imbedded into their language as the equivalent of "James" or "Jacob." Since this translation from Greek and Hebrew involved putting the text into readable and understandable English, they chose the popular word already in circulation.

Actually, three common English names come out of this: James, Jacob, and Jack.

Hope this answers your question.

Thanks for writing.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

Christian Cliches

Conversations and Clichés

Do you ever use clichés? Do you hear them often? No doubt you can answer “Yes” to either question. But have you stopped to consider what they may mean? Christians often use clichés among themselves and even with non-Christians, but there may be a need to give thought to the meanings of these oft-repeated phrases. That is the intent of this essay. We will investigate what is behind the “Christian clichés” that tend to become so much a part of our conversations.

Let’s begin by considering a dictionary definition of the word *cliché*. A cliché is a “trite, stereotyped expression; a sentence or phrase, usually expressing a popular or common thought or idea, that has lost originality, ingenuity, and impact by long overuse.”{1}

My ministry has put me in touch with Christians all over this country. As I engage in conversation with these Christians, invariably I will hear language about Christian things that has become “stereotyped” and has “lost impact by long overuse.” This doesn’t mean there isn’t truth contained in the clichés. Indeed, often there is truth of great importance for Christian theology and life. The problem is that frequently we use these clichés while thinking we know what we are saying. But do we? Could we explain these phrases if someone were to ask us to define them? My experience is that Christians have difficulty when asked to explain themselves.

Let’s listen to the following conversation and hear how a Christian named Tom responds to questions from a non-believer named Sam.

Tom: Hi, Sam!

Sam: Hello, Tom. Remember when you were to talking to Jim yesterday?

Tom: You mean before the sales meeting?

Sam: Yeah. I hope you aren't offended, but I was listening to your conversation.

Tom: Oh, that's okay. We weren't having a private conversation. We were just sharing our beliefs.

Sam: Well, I'm curious about some of the things you discussed.

Tom: Like what?

Sam: Like when you said you have Jesus in your heart. Were you referring to the Prophet who lived so long ago? If so, how can you possibly have Him in your heart?

Tom: Well, yes, I was referring to the Jesus of long ago. But He is alive now, and He has saved me.

Sam: What do you mean, He's alive now? That's not possible.

And what do you mean when you say He saved you? These are weird ideas.

Tom: I guess they sound weird, but they really aren't. You see, Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and His spirit lives in me.

Sam: Tom, I don't mean to be rude, but such things sound ludicrous to me. Hey, my phone's ringing and I'm expecting an important call. Maybe we can talk again later.

Sam asked some good questions. They deserved answers. But was Tom able to explain himself? He had a difficult time, didn't he? For example, the phrase, "I have Jesus in my heart" had become a cliché for Tom. He was able to converse with a fellow Christian with the assumption that they understood one another. But it was a different matter when a non-Christian expressed his curiosity about the conversation he had heard the previous day.

I have Jesus in my heart is one of several clichés we will consider. The goal of this article is to motivate Christians to give attention to our conversations and see if you find clichés lurking there.

I Have Jesus in My Heart

Why are you a Christian? How do you answer that question? In my experience many people have responded by stating that they have *Jesus in their heart.* As important as this response may be, too often it is a cliché that belies its meaning. The Christian who acknowledges the importance of thinking through

his beliefs will want to consider its implications for those who hear him. After all, the one who hears has every right to ask what such a statement might mean.

In the third chapter of Paul's Ephesian letter he prayed that his readers would "be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith . . ." (Eph. 3:16-17, NASB). Galatians 2 contains one of the most powerful expressions of the indwelling Christ in Paul's life. Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me . . ." (Gal. 2:20, NASB). In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul asks, "do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?" (2 Cor. 13:5, NASB). These passages, and many more, serve to show that the New Testament affirms that Jesus indwells His followers. Thus it is important to stress that when someone says *I have Jesus in my heart* it has biblical merit. A problem arises, though, when we use this expression without attention to its profound message. When this happens we are using a cliché.

So how can we go beyond the cliché in order to describe its significance in our lives? The first point of reference centers on the fact that Christians are Trinitarian, not Unitarian. We believe God exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is a difficult doctrine to understand and share, but it must be upheld if one is using the Bible as the guide for beliefs. If God exists in three persons, and one of those persons is Jesus, God the Son, then we can better understand *Jesus in my heart* by observing that there is a unity between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. For example, in Romans 8 "the indwelling of the Spirit and the indwelling of Christ are the same thing."{2} This doctrine permeates the writings of Paul. He asserted "that Jesus is no mere fact in history, no towering personality of the past, but a living, present Spirit, whose nature is the very nature of God."{3} In addition, we should realize that Paul's favorite

expression revolved around the phrase “in Christ.” This phrase “(or some cognate expression, such as “in the Lord,” “in Him,” etc.) occurs 164 times in Paul.”{4} Thus we can conclude that Jesus is very much alive in the Christian’s life through the Spirit.

The second point of reference concerns the word *heart*. The Bible refers to the heart of man frequently. “The heart is the focus of mind, feeling, and will; it stands for the whole personality.”{5} Jesus is to “take up residence” in our whole personality. So when a Christian says *Jesus is in my heart* there is a literal implication. Jesus resides supernaturally in the believer through His Spirit. This is an astounding doctrine that indicates a transformed person! May our Lord lead us to continue sharing His presence in our lives by indicating that we understand truly what it means to say *I have Jesus in my heart.*

I Have Faith

Is a Christian the only person who has faith? Many Christians seem to think so. On many occasions I have played “the devil’s advocate” among Christian groups by asking them to describe and defend their beliefs. One of the most frequent responses I get is *I have faith*. When I hear this I usually retort by saying “So what? Do you think that because you are a Christian you are given sole ownership of the idea?” After this I encourage them to think about the implications of the phrase. It is much more than a cliché.

All people, Christians and non-Christians, even atheists, exercise faith. That is, each day of our lives we apply faith in simple and profound ways. For example, you may take a pill of some kind today. That requires faith that the pill will help you rather than hurt you. If you travel on an airplane, that requires faith that you will arrive safely at your intended destination. Usually you don’t even see the pilots until you have landed. These are everyday illustrations of

faith. But just what does this word mean?

A major dictionary provides us with intriguing definitions. The first entry states that faith is “confidence or trust in a person or thing.” The second entry says faith is “belief which is not based on proof.” And then in the eighth entry the dictionary declares faith is “trust in God and in His promises as made through Christ by which man is justified or saved.”{6} Obviously the eighth entry comes closest to a Christian understanding of faith. The first entry is also important to a Christian because it includes the idea of trust in a person. But it is the second entry that causes the most problem among Christians. Too many Christians use *I have faith* to mean they believe in something that is not based on proof. Unfortunately, this is when the phrase becomes a cliché.

For over 100 years, naturalism has been the dominant worldview in our culture. Among other things, this worldview bows at the altar of modern science to the extent that many believe that nothing can be true until it can be proven scientifically. Many Christians have been highly influenced by this concept. Thus they tend to say *I have faith* when they can’t “prove” their beliefs in a scientific manner. This reaction is not legitimate within a Christian worldview. It is important to realize that even an atheistic scientist takes faith into the laboratory. There are facets of his own life that cannot be “proven” scientifically. If he is married, he may say he loves his wife. Can that be proven scientifically?

The key word in discussing faith is *in*, a small but crucial preposition for all people. Remember, the first dictionary definition we quoted said that faith includes the idea of “trust *in* a person or thing” (emphasis added). Hebrews 11:1, perhaps the most succinct definition of faith in the Bible, states that “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” When we read the rest of chapter 11 we realize that *assurance* and *conviction* are words that are alive. They refer to the reality of the living God in

the lives of those who put faith *in* His reality. God was already "proven" to them. He was to be trusted with their very lives.

The same is true for one who claims to be a Christian in our day. When we say we have faith, we should continue by declaring faith *in* the living God.

I'm Saved!

When you say *I'm saved!*, have you ever considered what someone may be thinking? People who hear you may have a number of questions. For example, they may ask why you are speaking in present tense. If you are saved now, does that mean you were actually saved at some point in the past? If so, does the present connect with the past in some way? Or they may want to know why you needed to be saved in the first place. Were you drowning and someone rescued you? Maybe they would even like to know if you are saved *for* something or someone. Proclaiming *I'm saved!* can be a strange expression if it is not explained. If someone asks for an explanation and we can't respond, we may be guilty of using a cliché. We think we know what we mean, and our fellow Christians may think they know what is meant, but a lack of articulation implies a lack of understanding.

Salvation, of course, permeates the Bible. And innumerable volumes have been written about what the Scriptures tell us about this crucial doctrine. For our purposes the clearest emphases are centered on the person of Jesus, the Savior. When we say *I'm saved!* we imply that Jesus is at the center of salvation.

Before Jesus was born, an angel told Joseph the shocking news that Mary was carrying the center of salvation. "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21, NASB). Take note of the last portion of this verse. It states that

Jesus will save, and that He will save *from* sins. When Jesus was an infant, Mary and Joseph took Him to the temple for the Jewish rites of redemption of the firstborn, and the purification of his mother. . . .”{7} While there, they were approached by a righteous and devout man named Simeon who took Jesus into his arms and declared to God that he was now ready to die, “For my eyes have seen Thy salvation . . .” (Luke 2:30, NASB). Another amazing declaration! Mary and Joseph’s son was being called God’s salvation. During His earthly ministry Jesus asserted many things about Himself, including this famous proclamation: “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9, NASB). Because Jesus is the door, there is a present reality concerning salvation that applies to those who enter through the door.

Through these and numerous other verses we have a more complete picture of what *I’m saved!* entails. But there is a crucial question leaping from such passages. If sin creates the need for salvation, then what is it? To put it simply, when the Christian proclaims *I’m saved!* his hearers should understand that “. . . sin is not only an act of wrongdoing but a state of alienation from God”{8} affecting everyone (Rom. 3:23). This is a crucial concept in contemporary culture that is generally misunderstood and rejected. In addition, such alienation from God cannot be rectified by “rightdoing.” It can only be rectified through Jesus’ sacrificial payment for sin on the cross. I’m saved because of what Jesus did for me. In an amazing, life-changing way an event of the past brings salvation into the present. Praise God, we have been saved! Now we can live knowing salvation is in the present.

What Would Jesus Do?

What Would Jesus Do? is a question that can be seen and heard virtually everywhere in the evangelical Christian community. “The slogan has appeared on coffee mugs, lapel pins,

paperweights, and a host of other knickknacks. There are now devotionals, Bibles, books and CDs based on WWJD."{9} With all of this exposure, does the phrase still have meaning? Or has it become a cliché without proper impact? Or does it carry the correct content in the first place? Lets consider what the expression tells us.

One of the more positive aspects of *What Would Jesus Do?* is that it can serve as a simple reminder of the Christian's moral life. Surely each Christian has a perspective of Jesus that includes the moral perfection that permeated His earthly life. There is no greater model to emulate than Jesus. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15, NASB). The same writer tells us He "offered Himself without blemish to God . . ." (Heb. 9:14, NASB). Jesus was and is the only one who could make such an unblemished offering. So asking *What Would Jesus Do?*, whether audibly or inaudibly, can awaken us to our need for a moral model.

But can we always know what Jesus would do in all circumstances? Perhaps it would be more accurate to ask What *did* Jesus do? in certain circumstances. Through a study of the gospels of the New Testament we can learn exactly how Jesus acted and reacted to specific challenges He faced. For example, He was faced with "moral conflicts between obedience toward parents and God (Luke 2), Sabbath regulations and healing (Mark 2), and government and God (Matt. 22)."{10} More importantly, on the cross "he was squeezed between the demands of justice for the innocent (himself) and mercy for mankind (the guilty). This conflict was without question the greatest ever faced by man. . . ."{11} These examples usually have entered our consciousness to the point that they ring in our minds like bells tolling the truth. It is as if we would not have expected Jesus to have done or said anything other than what we know from the gospels.

Were Jesus' disciples ever surprised, if not shocked, by what

Jesus did? Of course we know they often were stunned as they watched and heard Jesus do and say unusual things. The words *amazed* and *astonished* are found frequently in the Gospels. The story of the rich young ruler, for example, relates the disciples' reaction after hearing Jesus' teaching. He said, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!" (Mark 10:23, NASB). And the disciples were "amazed" at His words. Jesus continued by stating, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were "even more astonished" and said to Him, "Then who can be saved?" (Mark 10:23-26, NASB).

The actions and words of Jesus and the reactions of the disciples remind us of the deity of Jesus. Think of this in present time. If Jesus physically walked beside you, would you always know what He was about to do? "Jesus is unique in his identity as the incarnate Son of God, and we should not assume that we could do or should do everything he did."{12} Thus, caution is urged when we assume we always know what Jesus *would* do while we affirm what Jesus *did* do.

Notes

1. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 1967.
2. Lewis B. Smedes, *Union with Christ*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 114.
3. James Stewart, *A Man in Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, n.d.; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 154.
4. Ibid., 155.
5. A. Skevington Wood, "Ephesians," in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Regency, 1978), 51.
6. The Random House Dictionary.
7. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 194.
8. Donald G. Bloesch, "Sin," in *Evangelical Dictionary of*

Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984).
9. Albert Hsu, "What Would Jesus Do About WWJD?", *re:generation quarterly* (Winter, 1998/99), 6.
10. Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1989), 125.
11. Ibid.
12. Hsu, "What Would Jesus Do About "WWJD", 6.

©1999 Probe Ministries.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a politically correct attempt to over-correct cultural bias by elevating all subcultures to equal status.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

What is Multiculturalism?

A few years ago the campus newspaper of a major university published an essay written by two professors titled *The Statement of the Black Faculty Caucus.*{1} The purpose of the essay was to define how the University might become a truly multicultural institution. It spoke of empowerment, authority, Western culture, and transformation. The objective of the Black Faculty Caucus was to create a critical mass of empowered "minority people" at all levels of the university system. The essay argued that "Euro-Americans teaching the materials of people of color cannot make the University multicultural because multiculturalism demands empowered

people of color as well as empowered areas of knowledge."{2} At the end of their essay the authors wrote, "What we are talking about here is no less than transforming the University into a center of multicultural learning: anything less continues a system of education that ultimately reproduces racism and racists."{3}

Racial reconciliation should be a top priority for every Christian, of any race or cultural background. But will this demand for a "multicultural center of learning" produce a less prejudiced society? Multiculturalists insist on greater sensitivity towards, and increased inclusion of, racial minorities and women in society. Christians should endorse both of these goals. But many advocating multiculturalism go beyond these demands for sensitivity and inclusion; here is where Christians must be careful.

One of the difficulties of accommodating multiculturalists is that defining a multicultural society, curriculum, or institution seems to be determined by one's perspective. A commonly held view suggests that being multicultural involves tolerance towards racial and ethnic minorities, mainly in the areas of dress, language, food, religious beliefs, and other cultural manifestations. However, an influential group calling itself NAME, or the National Association for Multicultural Education, includes in its philosophy statement the following: "Xenophobia, discrimination, racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia are societal phenomena that are inconsistent with the principles of a democracy and lead to the counterproductive reasoning that differences are deficiencies."{4} NAME is a powerful organization composed of educators from around the country, and it has considerable influence on how schools approach the issue of diversity on campus. The fundamental question that the folks at NAME need to answer is, "Is it always counterproductive to reason that some differences might be deficiencies?" In other words, isn't it possible that some of the characteristics of specific

culture groups are dangerous or morally flawed (for example, the culture of pedophilia)?

It is not uncommon for advocates of multiculturalism like NAME to begin with the assumption that truth is culturally based. It is argued that a group's language dictates what ideas about God, human nature, and morality are permissible. While Americans may define reality using ideas from its Greek, Roman, and Judeo-Christian heritage, Asian or African cultures see the world differently based on their traditions. Multiculturalists conclude that since multiple descriptions of reality exist, no one view can be true in any ultimate sense. Furthermore, since truth is a function of language, and all language is created by humans, all truth is created by humans. This view of truth and language has a spokesperson in Dr. Richard Rorty, humanities professor at the University of Virginia, who argues that truth that transcends culture is not available because "where there are no sentences there is no truth, and sentences and their respective languages are human creations."{5}

Finally, if all truth is created by humans, it is all equally true. Cultural ideas or institutions, like human sacrifice or welfare systems, are equally valid if they are useful for a given group of people. In other words, we live in a universe that is blind to moral choices. We are the final judges of how we shall live.

As Christians, we believe that ideas do have consequences. While being careful not to promote one set of cultural rules over others simply because we are comfortable with them, we acknowledge that Scripture reveals to us the character and nature of God, humankind, and our need for a savior. These truths can be communicated cross-culturally in a sensitive way, regardless of the people-group involved. If we didn't believe this to be true in a universal sense, then Christianity can't be true in any real way. In other words, in order to be what it claims to be, Christianity must transcend

culture in a way that many multiculturalists argue cannot occur.

Language and Sensitivity

In recent years, America has been attracting over one million immigrants annually. This has resulted in a country that is religiously, racially, and linguistically more diverse. Conflict arises, however, over the question of how our nation's institutions should respond to this diversity. Until recently, it was argued that America was a melting pot society, that regardless of an immigrant's origin, given a generation or two, his family would be assimilated into American culture. Multiculturalists have challenged both the reality and advisability of this view.

Multiculturalists brand our culture as white, Western, male, Christian, middle-class and heterosexual. They declare that our schools have forced on students a curriculum that promotes only that perspective. The books they read, the ideas they consider, the moral and ethical standards they are taught, explicitly or implicitly, tend to be those of dead white European males. The problem, they argue, is that this leaves out the contributions of many people. People of color, women, homosexuals, and various religious traditions are ignored and thus silenced. As a result, they contend, what passes for knowledge on campus is biased. Their goal is to correct this bias.

This charge of bias is not a groundless one. Even though many feel that Western culture has been very open to outside ideas, all majorities—in any society—will tend to seek cultural dominance.

The resulting multiculturalist agenda includes three demands on American society. The first is that the white Americans become more sensitive to minorities. This demand has resulted in what is referred to as "politically correct language."

Speech codes enforcing sensitivity on college campuses have attempted to protect oppressed groups from having to endure words and ideas that might ostracize them. At the center of this issue is the individual's feelings or self-esteem. The multiculturalists argue that if a person's self-esteem is damaged, he or she cannot learn in school.

Christians ought to be the most sensitive people in society. If calling people handicapped, Black, or Indian makes them feel diminished in importance or somehow less human, we as Christians need to be empathetic and make changes in our use of language. This sensitivity should grow out of a sense of biblical humility, not for political or economic reasons.

But another question still must be answered. Will the enforced use of certain words really benefit the self-esteem and thus the learning of minority students in schools, as some have suggested? Dr. Paul Vitz, professor of psychology at New York University, argues that this is a far too simplistic view of human nature.{6} Self-esteem itself cannot be tied directly to any behavior, positive or negative.

Some contend that enforcing "politically correct speech" is an attempt to redescribe our society in a manner that changes the way we think about issues. If the concepts of personal and family responsibility become labeled as hate speech towards those on welfare, an entire way of looking at the issue is forced out of the dialogue.

Unfortunately, language can also be used to legitimize behavior that Christians believe to be morally wrong. Homosexuality has progressively been referred to as a sin, then a disease, a lifestyle, and now a preference or sexual orientation. Just by re-describing this activity in new terms, an entirely different connotation is given to what homosexuality is. This has not occurred by accident.

Hebrews 12:14 tells us to make every effort to be at peace

with all men. As we articulate truth, our language should lean towards gentleness and respect, for the sake of the Gospel. When we believe that every person deserves to be shown respect because we are all created in the image of God, our attitude will result in language and tone that is sensitive and gentle—not because political correctness demands it, but because out of a heart of love flow words of love.

Inclusion and Truth

A second demand being made on our schools and society is in the area of inclusiveness. Multiculturalists contend that marginalized people need to be brought into the curriculum and the marketplace of ideas on campus. No group should ever have to feel left out. One example is the recent set of standards offered by UCLA's National Center for History in the Schools. As originally offered, the standards greatly increased the voice of both minorities and women in the telling of our nation's history. However, many charge that they denigrated or ignored the contributions of white Americans in order to be inclusive. In fact, some complained that the overall picture of America produced by the standards was of an oppressive, WASPish empire. Even the U.S. Senate denounced the proposed standards by a vote of 99 to 1. One Senator voted against the resolution because it wasn't strong enough.

The standards declared that the U.S. is not a Western-based nation, but the result of three cultures. These cultures—Native American, African-American and European—are not seen as moral equals. In fact, the European contribution was one of oppression, injustice, gender bias and rape of the natural world. Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, responded to the standards by saying that "No other nation in the world teaches a national history that leaves its children feeling negative about their own country—this would be the first."{7}

In fact, U.S. history textbooks have been moving toward

inclusion for some time. In order to make up for the neglect of women and people of color in past texts, some historians and publishers have gone a bit overboard in their attempts at finding the right balance. In one text, The American Nation, of the 13 religious leaders mentioned in short biographies, only two are non-Hispanic white males—Brigham Young and Ralph Waldo Emerson.{8} Often women and minorities are injected into the text in odd ways. In this book, Senator Margaret Chase Smith is cited for challenging Senator Joseph McCarthy. While she was an early critic of McCarthy, she had little to do with his eventual political demise. Another example is Native American chief George Crum, noted for making the first potato chips in 1853.

The writing of history is a delicate task, and is probably impossible to accomplish without bias. But as Christians, we would prefer that truth—what really happened—at least be the goal, rather than political or racial propaganda, even if this goal will never be perfectly accomplished. This notion of truth demands that students be taught as much U.S. history as feasible. To leave out the experience of Native Americans, African-Americans or women would be a tremendous failure. But writing our entire history from their perspective is unfair as well. One answer to this problem is to have students read more primary historical documents and depend less on history textbooks. Unfortunately, multiculturalists see all texts as primarily political. They argue that only one view prevails: either the empowered majority's or the oppressed minority's. This belief that all knowledge is political results in turning schools into battlegrounds where representatives from every group, from Hispanics to gay rights activists, go over the curriculum with a magnifying glass, looking for the proper amount of inclusion or any derogatory remarks made about their group.

Tolerance as a Worldview

Many multiculturalists insist that we embrace multiculturalism in our schools not just in the way we teach, but in the way we think. Multiculturalists have specific ideas about the notion of truth; paramount is the belief that no truth transcends culture, that no idea or moral concept might be true for every cultural group or every human being. As a result, multiculturalists demand that we give up our beliefs in moral absolutes and become moral relativists.

This worldview model has been the litmus test for college professors on many campuses for quite some time, particularly in the humanities. Evidently, in some programs it is now being applied to college students as well. In 1992, St. Cloud (Minn.) State University made it known that if students were to be accepted, those who desired to enter the social work program must relinquish specific notions of moral truth. While acknowledging that many students come from religious backgrounds that do not accept homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle, these very students were required to go beyond "hating the sin and loving the sinner." Students who had predetermined negative attitudes towards gays and lesbians were told to look elsewhere for a major. In other words, one must, at the level of faith commitment, find no moral aversion to homosexuality in order to be admitted to this program. This removes a majority of our population from consideration right off the bat.

Part of the problem with multiculturalism is that it allows for a broad definition of cultural groups. There is both a gay culture and a feminist culture in America. In fact, any group can identify itself as a marginalized culture group. The homeless become a cultural group, as do single mothers on welfare. Should their perspectives get equal treatment in our schools? Are their moral values as valid as all others? The problem is that to be considered multiculturally sensitive,

one must be able to place oneself into the perspective of the oppressed group completely, at the metaphysical level, not just to sympathize or even empathize with them. This means that one must be willing to compromise faith-based beliefs about God, human nature, and reality itself. For instance, if the gay community, being an oppressed minority group, believes that being homosexual is natural and every bit as normal as heterosexual relationships, Christians should ignore what they believe to be revealed truth about homosexuality's sinfulness.

Christians are called to have mercy and compassion on the poor and less fortunate, but not at the expense of recognizing that some lifestyles result in the impoverishment of people regardless of their race or cultural heritage. What is being asked of Christians is that we give up our view of a universe governed by a moral God who has established a moral universe, and replace it with a morally relativistic one. Tolerance becomes the only absolute. To be exclusive about truth, or to argue that some action might be morally wrong for all people all the time, violates this new absolute of tolerance.

Ultimately, this current enforcement of tolerance is really a thinly veiled pursuit of power. The only way certain groups, such as homosexual activists or the more radical feminists, can get recognition and the ability to spread their views, is by establishing tolerance as an absolute. Eventually, they win affirmative action concessions from universities and public schools, which enforces their viewpoint. Recently, the state of Massachusetts passed legislation recognizing the difficulties of gay elementary and secondary students, forcing all public school teachers to be educated and sensitized to their plight. This recognition and re-education of teachers further legitimizes and enhances the power of the gay rights movement.

Without losing sight of our calling to reach out and minister to people caught in lifestyles and cultures that vaunt themselves against the knowledge and standards of God, we

cannot become moral relativists in the process.

Justice and Truth

While multiculturalists occasionally refer to justice, it cannot be the foundation of their movement. This is for the simple reason that justice is not possible without truth. In order to claim that someone's actions or words are unjust, one must assume that a moral order really does exist, a moral order that would be true for all cultures and at all times. Injustice implies that justice exists, justice implies that moral laws exist, and moral laws imply that a lawgiver exists.

One college professor, explaining his plan for a liberal ironist utopia, says that a liberal is someone who thinks that being cruel is the worst thing that one can do. He argues that this moral standard can be used to create a utopia on earth. But he admits, being a good moral relativist, that he cannot give any non-circular arguments for why being cruel is the worst thing one can do. He is inventing a moral law, but admitting that its foundation lies only in his preference for that law.

Even if we accept his moral standard as useful, it leaves us with many questions. The first is, what does it mean to be cruel? Is it cruel to encourage people in their gay lifestyle given the short life span of male homosexuals, even without AIDS?{9} If pain is part of our definition of cruelty, should all operations be banned because even if successful, pain might result? How can he know that being cruel is the worst thing one can do in a morally neutral universe? Without truth, without knowledge of right and wrong, justice is impossible, as is any notion of a good life. The word "cruel" becomes an empty word.

By declaring tolerance an absolute, multiculturalists are consistent with their view of reality. They see all human cultures as morally equal because of their faith in a

naturalistic world view. This view argues for a godless universe, and recognizes chance as the only possible cause for what exists. If this is true, absolute tolerance is the best we can hope for. Christians seek sensitivity and inclusion for a much better reason.

We believe that every human being was created in God's image and reflects God's glory and majesty. We were created to have dominion over God's creation as His stewards. Thus, we are to care for others because they are ultimately worthy of our care and concern. We are not to be cruel to others because the Creator of the universe made individuals to have fellowship with Him and He cares for them. This does not discount that people are fallen and in rebellion against God. In fact, if we really care about people we will take 2 Corinthians 5:19-20 seriously. First, that God has made reconciliation with Himself possible through His Son Jesus Christ, and as verse 20 says, "..he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us."

True sensitivity and inclusion will not be achieved by making tolerance an absolute. They occur when we take what people believe, and the consequences of those beliefs, seriously. When you think about it, what could be crueler than failing to inform people of the Gospel of redemption through Christ, leaving them to spend eternity separated from the Creator God who loves them?

Notes

1. Berman, Paul. *Debating P.C.: The Controversy Over Political Correctness on College Campuses* (NY: Dell Publishing, 1992), 249.

2. Ibid., 253.

3. Ibid., 257.

4. Francis, Samuel, “The Other Face of Multiculturalism,” *Chronicles*, April, 1998, p. 33.

5. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p 5.

6. Guinness, Os & Seel, John, ed. *No God But God*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), p. 96.

7. Leo, John “History standards are bunk” *U.S. News & World Report* February 6, 1995, 23.

8. Ibid.

9. Dr. Paul Cameron, *Family Research* (Newsletter of the Family Research Institute, Inc.), April-June 1991.

©1998 Probe Ministries