A Doctor’s Journey with Cancer

When you suddenly learn you might have only 18 months to live, its a good time to sort out what really matters in life.

Last December, Yang Chen, MD, dismissed an aching pain under his shoulder as muscle strain. Five weeks later, as the pain persisted, a chest x-ray brought shocking results: possible lung cancer that might have spread.

A highly acclaimed specialist and medical professor at the University of Colorado Denver, Yang knew the average survival rate for his condition could be under 18 months. He didnt smoke and had no family history of cancer. He was stunned. His life changed in an instant.

I wondered how I would break the news to my unsuspecting wife and three young children, he recalls. Who would take care of my family if I died?

Swirling Vortex of Uncertainty

When I heard his story, I felt a jab of recognition. In 1996, my doctor said I might have cancer. That word sent me into a swirling vortex of uncertainty. But I was fortunate; within a month, I learned my condition was benign.

Yang did not get such good news. He now knows he has an inoperable tumor. Hes undergoing chemotherapy. Its uncertain whether radiation will help. Yet through it all, he seems remarkably calm and positive. At a time when one might understandably focus on oneself, hes even assisting other cancer patients and their families to cope with their own challenges. Whats his secret?

I learned about Yangs personal inner resources when we first

met in the 1980s. He worked at the Mayo Clinic and brought me to Rochester, Minnesota, to present a seminar for Mayo and IBM professionals on a less ponderous theme, Love, Sex and the Single Lifestyle. With the audience, we laughed and explored relationship mysteries. He felt it was essential that people consider the spiritual aspect of relationships, as well as the psychological and physical.

Later he founded a global network to train medical professionals how to interact with patients on spiritual matters. Many seriously ill patients want their doctors to discuss spiritual needs and the profession is taking note.

Reality Blog

Now a patient himself, Yang exhibits strength drawn from the faith that has enriched his life. He has established a websitewww.aDoctorsJourneyWithCancer.netto chronicle his journey and offer hope and encouragement to others. The site presents a compelling real-life drama as it happens.

As a follower of Jesus, Yang notes biblical references to Gods light shining in our hearts and people of faith being like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. He sees himself as a broken clay jar through which Gods light can shine to point others who suffer to comfort and faith.

As he draws on divine strength, he reflects on Paul, a first-century believer who wrote, We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair.

A dedicated scientist, Yang is convinced that what he believes about God is true and includes information about evidences for faith. Hes also got plenty to help the hurting and the curious navigate through their pain, cope with emotional turmoil, and find answers to lifes perplexing questions about death, dying, the afterlife, handling anxiety, and more.

With perhaps less than 18 months to live, Yang Chen knows whats most important in his life. He invites web surfers to walk with me for part, or all, of my journey. If Im ever in his position, I hope I can blend suffering with service while displaying the serenity and trust I observe in him. Visit his website and youll see what I mean.

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Being a Christian in Science

Rich Milne covers an excellent book by Walter Hearn, both a Christian and a scientist, giving perspective and advice on how to be a Christian in the science field.

Being a Christian in Science

"Carl Sagan is a friend of mine. He said that if Jesus ascended literally and traveled at the speed of light, he hasn't yet gotten out of our galaxy."{1}

So said Episcopal Bishop John Spong, when asked if he believed that Jesus had ascended into heaven. This is an example of the worst kind of mixing of science and Christianity.

In this essay we are considering how to live with integrity as both a Christian and a scientist. Books about science and Christianity are published every month, but they are usually difficult to read and seldom easy to apply. Walter Hearn dynamites those stereotypes in his new book, *Being a Christian in Science*.

Hearn's book is the result of having been a Christian from childhood, and a scientist for much of his working life. His desire is for Christians to enter into science and make a

career of it. But he also wants anyone who enters this road to know what joys and obstacles lie ahead around the many bends. His book is by turns intensely practical and deeply devotional.

Ever since Darwin, many Christians have been uncomfortable around science. Many of us have the feeling that science is trying to do away with the need for God. Most of us have heard scientists like Carl Sagan, speaking far from their field of expertise, make grand pronouncements like "The universe is all that is, or was, or ever will be." Is it possible for Bible-believing Christians to also be committed scientists?

Hearn's book, *Being a Christian in Science*, does not try to deal with creation/evolution issues, or chance vs. design arguments, or even science vs. God questions. Instead, his clear and heartfelt focus is on questions such as, How do you work as a scientist if you are also a Christian? What is science like as a profession? Can I really pray in the laboratory?

At the outset it is important to distinguish between a "Christian Scientist," with a capital S, and a "Christian scientist." In the first pages of the book, Hearn, a life-long chemist and editor, separates what science can and cannot do. Science can in no way establish the claim that nothing supernatural or eternal is real. When such a claim is made, it is not scientific but scientistic.{2} While this is not the book's emphasis, Hearn is very clear about what the limits of science are, and as Christians we must think clearly about what science can and cannot do.

Using *Being a Christian in Science* as a basis, we will look at what scientists really do, why Christians might spend their lives in science, and what resources there are for believers who make science their chosen career. My hope is that you will see, not only the value of science, but, if you are a Christian young person who already loves science, you will see

that this is a vocation to which God may be calling you. Science is changing the shape of our world and we need Christian scientists just as much as we need Christian teachers, or carpenters, or missionaries.

What Do Scientists Do, Anyway?

Many Christians are not too sure what scientists do, and fairly sure they don't want to know. As Walter Hearn pointedly observes in his book, "Evangelical churches that send missionaries around the world seldom see the 'World of Science,' or scholarship in general, as a mission field."{3} Too many Christians seem to see scientists as "the enemy" with little thought of what they do or how they might be reached with the Gospel.

What is a Christian? Someone who believes in Jesus. Yes and no. What is a scientist? Someone who believes in science. Again, yes and no. A Christian believes that Jesus is the answer to certain questions about how we can be forgiven and stand before a holy God, questions about how we can know what will happen to us when we die. As a Christian, have you ever thought about being a scientist? Just what is a scientist, anyway?

A scientist believes that science is a "group of methods for solving a particular kind of problem."{4} Science is not just a list of facts or theories, it is a way to understand the natural world by observing, experimenting, and then attempting to find cause and effect relationships. Scientists are fascinated by the world around them. They long to understand more than what we already know about this complex and intricately connected world we live in. A scientist knows we have few of the answers, and he or she sets out to at least try to ask the right questions so that we can learn more about how things work, and how this wildly diverse world fits together.

What does it take to be a scientist? Walter Hearn, himself a lab chemist for twenty years, gives a disarmingly simple answer to this question. A scientist needs "curiosity about nature, intelligence, perseverance, common sense, and better-than-average conceptual ability. . . . Flexibility is another important characteristic."{5} This is a little like saying "Just have faith" to someone about to enter a long spiritual trial. What he does not say is how hard it can be to maintain these admirable traits on a day-to-day basis in the face of what much of science really is.

Mathematicians can look at the same set of equations for months before they see the relationship between them. Biologists can do the same or nearly the same experiment dozens of times over weeks and months, before they see the result they hoped might happen. Geologists may spend months in the field gathering data, unsure of how they will ever make sense of the big picture. Much of science is daily hard work, often without knowing whether you are succeeding or failing, and then, occasionally, the "aha" moment when things suddenly fall into place and you have one more small stepping stone across the wide expanses we know little or nothing about. Would you still like to be a scientist?

Next we will consider why God might call people to be full time scientists and how a Christian might live out such a calling. There are no easy answers, but if you enjoy science, God might well call you to be one of the bridges in the twenty-first century that allows Christians and scientists to understand one another. It is a critically important calling.

How Can a Believer Live as a Christian in Science?

"Avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called, which some professing have erred concerning the faith." (1 Tim. 6:20-21, KJV)

Misunderstanding Paul's admonition to Timothy has left many Christians skeptical of science. After all, don't most scientists believe Darwin, and didn't Darwin disprove the need for God? Why should Christians waste their time on science?

In his wonderfully gentle-tempered book Being a Christian in Science, Walter Hearn offers a quotation from a Christian physics professor that capsulizes this feeling as it applies to a broad range of academic pursuits:

> *One hears Christians speak proudly of their sons or daughters who have married seminary students or missionaries. . . [But] I have yet to hear a Christian father speak proudly of his son or daughter marrying a graduate student. No wonder our young people are discourage from entering the rigorous life of learning and research.{6}*

Christians could once justly claim to be leaders in most intellectual arenas. Modern science is widely acknowledged to have its roots in a Christian perspective on nature. If we believe that God created the world we live in, then shouldn't we be involved with the scientists who are exploring it?

We have already spoken briefly of some of the personal characteristics that many scientists share. If God is calling you to a life as a scientist it is likely that He has also given you the gifts or talents that it takes to work as a scientist. Have math and science classes gone well for you in school? Do you feel some drive to find out more than what you already know about outer space or inner space? What would life be like as a scientist?

Being a Christian in Science spends several chapters on questions like "What to Expect" and "Science as a Christian Calling." Perhaps the most difficult situation is being misunderstood by both scientific colleagues and other Christians. Christians in science live between two cultures. As Hearn warns: "Christians in science are people with two

strong allegiances, holding citizenship in two distinct communities."{7}

The scientific community sets a very high premium on good work. Hearn writes of the importance for Christians who are also scientists not only to make clear their faith in Jesus Christ, but also to be committed to doing really good science. One author found that many Christian graduate students felt guilty about how much time they spent in the laboratory or the library, because it took time away from other Christian activities. They seemed to feel that "their professional work clearly did not have the same value in God's sight as their Christian 'witness.'"{8}

If God is calling you into scientific work, you must not only love scientific work, you must have an assurance that your work will be a way to serve God with your life. And this is where you may feel under attack from your Christian friends.

Most of us are used to the idea that the world needs Christian salespeople and Christian mechanics and Christian lawyers. If scientists are to be reached with the good news of Jesus Christ, the church must see that scientists too are a mission field, and, like most mission fields, they are best reached by the "natives," other scientists.

In the next section we will consider some of the controversies that await a Christian entering science, and how a believer might respond to them.

Caution, Controversies Ahead

"Scientists may not believe in God, but they should be taught why they ought to behave as if they did."{9}

Max Perutz, with a Nobel prize in chemistry, made this statement several years ago in response to critical remarks about Cambridge University establishing a Lectureship in Theology and Natural Science. Richard Dawkins, outspoken

biologist and atheist, could barely contain himself in an editorial letter about the same lectureship: “The achievements of theologians don’t do anything, don’t affect anything, don’t achieve anything. What makes you think that ‘theology’ is a subject at all?”{10}

Being a Christian in our culture is often not politically correct. Christians often see scientists as not being biblically correct. So, if you intend on being a Christian scientist, controversy likely awaits you. How can you respond?

Walter Hearn has a chapter entitled “What to Expect.” It has much hard-won advice, and he skillfully raises a number of issues while carefully avoiding taking sides. Hearn seems preeminently the peacemaker in both this chapter and the whole book.

One of Hearn’s suggestions is to learn to live cross-culturally. A missionary to Africa may learn another language, and must understand a new culture well enough to explain the Bible in ways that make sense to those people. So, too, a Christian scientist must learn to explain the beliefs of Christians to unbelieving scientists. But at the same time, he or she must also learn how to explain the workings of science to Christians suspicious of the pronouncements of scientists. And the two different funds of knowledge make fundamentally different requirements on those who hear. Hearn summarizes: “Scientific conclusions generally take the form of statistical generalities making no demands on the knower. In contrast, the moral aspect of religious knowledge puts doing the truth on a par with knowing the truth.”{11}

A second simple statement of great insight is, “It may be wise to step back from some issues even when people whom we admire are passionate about them.”{12} Hearn follows his own advice as he discusses Phil Johnson and his critiques of Christian scientists who accept the whole of evolutionary theory and then have God direct evolution. Hearn does a masterful job of

stepping back from this issue and presenting mostly the views in favor of Johnson's position. At the very least he is demonstrating another characteristic of a peacemaker: being willing to listen to and understand the criticism of those who disagree.

One area Hearn discusses at some length is the growing crisis in ethics among scientists. This is exactly the point of the quotation at the beginning of this section. As science has disowned God, it has also lost any rock on which to anchor a sense of right and wrong conduct. This is where Christians have much to contribute to the discussion. The Bible gives us a basis for deciding right and wrong that science is sorely missing. But it will be primarily in our daily work as scientists that we will show what a biblical framework for ethics looks like.

Hearn makes the wonderfully sensible suggestion of keeping our Bible among the reference works at our desks. All of us, whether scientists or not, need to live more clearly by the book we claim as our authority.

Christians in Science Have a Godly Heritage to Follow

Being a Christian in Science may frustrate some people. Some will find themselves wondering why he doesn't take a more clear-cut stand on certain issues. Others will want Hearn to be more specific. But the often inconclusive stance of the book is also what allows Hearn to be so conciliatory in tone. On almost every issue he touches he allows as much diversity as he feels he possibly can. He is never strident, almost never critical, always positive or at most questioning. He models the role of a peacemaker in the midst of controversies that are dividing both the church and the scientific community.

Some of the best material in the book Hearn saves for last. In

his chapter “Good Company” he gives us his personal Hall of Fame and Encouragement. Much like Hebrews 11, Hearn considers the lives of other Christians who have gone before him and lived the Christian life in the midst of the scientific community. Some are dead, some are newly arriving on the scene. All he considers friends. What unites them is their commitment to the work of science and their service for the God they love. It is both an encouraging and challenging chapter. There are men and women, a Nobel laureate, and the head of the government’s Human Genome Project. There are mathematicians and biochemists, teachers and astronomers. Some are members of the National Academy of Sciences, the most prestigious group of scientists in America. But all of them, Hearn tells us, “Have contributed to science . . . while clearly identifying themselves as Christian believers.”{13}

Another feature of the book is its short but intensely practical suggestions for living out what we believe. Stuck in a meeting that is starting late? Don’t waste the time, says Hearn—pray for each person around the room or table, bringing each before the Lord. Don’t know how to pray for someone? Perhaps this is a sign you need to spend more time listening to that person.

Possibly the most valuable part of the book are the resources mentioned throughout the text and then richly documented in the notes at the end of the book. Hearn describes how to develop a web of friends who can be a support when experimental work is going badly or when spiritual encouragement is needed. He also shows how the ubiquitous World Wide Web is opening up a whole new frontier of both information and possible friendships.

The twenty-three pages of notes at the end must be read to be appreciated. It is amazing how much diverse information Hearn packs into his comments on each chapter. If you are considering a career in science, or if you are already a working scientist, you need to read this section.

In summary, *Being a Christian in Science* is a compelling expression of just what Paul exhorts us to do: "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men."{14} Hearn shows the potential young scientist what it will take to do his or her work heartily, and at the same time makes clear where many of the potential pitfalls lie, and what vast resources are available for the Christian who is serious about living as both a Christian and a scientist in this complex and confusing world. If you are a scientist, keep this book on your desk along with your Bible.

Notes

1. Quoted in Phillip Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 110, Note 1.
2. Walter Hearn, *Being a Christian in Science* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 12.
3. Hearn, p. 90
4. Hearn, p. 46.
5. Hearn, p. 51-52.
6. Hearn, p. 11
7. Hearn, p. 59.
8. Hearn, p. 112-113.
9. Hearn, frontispiece.
10. Ibid.
11. Hearn, p. 61.
12. Hearn, p. 74.
13. Hearn, p. 138.
14. Col. 3:23, NASV.

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

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

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

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

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

There was another feature of Pascal's thought that was, and remains, rare in apologetics: his understanding of the human condition as both created and fallen, and his use of that understanding as a point of contact with unbelievers.

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

mind."{1}

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

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

Although a Catholic in belief and practice, after the death of his father and the entrance of his younger sister into a convent, Pascal entered a very worldly phase of his life. Things changed, however, on the night of November 23, 1654, when he underwent a remarkable conversion experience which changed the course of his life. He joined a community of scholars in Port-Royal, France, who were known as Jansenists. Although he participated in the prayers and work of the group, he didn't become a full- fledged member himself. However, he assisted them in a serious controversy with the Jesuits, and some of his writings on their behalf are considered "a monument in the evolution of French prose" by historians of the language.{4}

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

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

The Human Condition

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

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

> What kind of freak is man! What a novelty he is, how absurd he is, how chaotic and what a mass of contradictions, and yet what a prodigy! He is judge of all things, yet a feeble worm. He is repository of truth, and yet sinks into such doubt and error. He is the glory and the scum of the universe!{7}

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

Pascal says it's important to have a right understanding of ourselves. He says "it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own wretchedness, and to know his own wretchedness without knowing the Redeemer who can free him from it." Thus, our message must be that "there is a God whom men can know, and that there is a corruption in their nature

which renders them unworthy of Him."{8} This prepares the unbeliever to hear about the Redeemer who reconciles the sinner with the Creator.

Pascal says that people know deep down that there is a problem, but we resist slowing down long enough to think about it. He says:
Rick Wade examines the contemporary
relevance of the apologetics of Blaise Pascal, a 17th century mathematician, scientist, inventor, and Christian apologist.Man finds nothing so intolerable as to be in a state of complete rest, without passions, without occupation, without diversion, without effort. Then he faces his nullity, loneliness, inadequacy, dependence, helplessness, emptiness. And at once there wells up from the depths of his soul boredom, gloom, depression, chagrin, resentment, despair.{9}

Pascal says there are two ways people avoid thinking about such matters: diversion and indifference. Regarding diversion, he says we fill up our time with relatively useless activities simply to avoid facing the truth of our wretchedness. "The natural misfortune of our mortality and weakness is so miserable," he says, "that nothing can console us when we really think about it. . . . The only good thing for man, therefore, is to be diverted so that he will stop thinking about his circumstances." Business, gambling, and entertainment are examples of things which keep us busy in this way.{10}

The other response to our condition is indifference. The most important question we can ask is What happens after death? Life is but a few short years, and death is forever. Our state after death should be of paramount importance, shouldn't it? But the attitude people take is this:
Just as I doRick Wade examines the contemporary
relevance of the apologetics of Blaise Pascal, a 17th century mathematician, scientist, inventor, and Christian apologist. not know where I came from, so I do not know where I am going.

All I know is that when I leave this world I shall fall forever into oblivion, or into the hands of an angry God, without knowing which of the two will be my lot for eternity. Such is my state of mind, full of weakness and uncertainty. The only conclusion I can draw from all this is that I must pass my days without a thought of trying to find out what is going to happen to me.{11}

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

Knowledge of the Heart

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

Although Pascal couldn't side with the skeptics, neither would he go the way of the rationalists. Instead of arguing that revelation was a better source of truth than reason, he focused on the limitations of reason itself. (I should stop here to note that by *reason* Pascal meant the reasoning process. He did not deny the true powers of reason; he was, after all, a scientist and mathematician.) Although the advances in science increased man's knowledge, it also made people aware of how little they knew. Thus, through our reason we realize that reason itself has limits. "Reason's last step," Pascal said, "is the recognition that there are an infinite number of things which are beyond it."{12} Our knowledge is somewhere between certainty and complete ignorance, Pascal believed.{13} The bottom line is that we need to know when to affirm something as true, when to doubt, and when to submit to authority.{14}

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

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

This brings us to what is perhaps the best known quotation of Pascal: "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know."{18} In other words, there are times that we know something is true but we did not come to that knowledge through logical reasoning, neither can we give a logical argument to support that belief.

For Pascal, the heart is "the `intuitive' mind" rather than "the `geometrical' (calculating, reasoning) mind."{19} For example, we know when we aren't dreaming. But we can't prove it rationally. However, this only proves that our reason has weaknesses; it does not prove that our knowledge is completely uncertain. Furthermore, our knowledge of such first principles as space, time, motion, and number is certain even though known by the heart and not arrived at by reason. In fact,

reason bases its arguments on such knowledge.{20} Knowledge of the heart and knowledge of reason might be arrived at in different ways, but they are both valid. And neither can demand that knowledge coming through the other should submit to its own dictates.

The Knowledge of God

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

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

There is another significant limitation on our knowledge of God. Referring to Isaiah 8:17 and 45:15{23}, Pascal says that as a result of our sin God deliberately hides Himself ("hides" in the sense that He doesn't speak}. One reason He does this is to test our will. Pascal says, "God wishes to move the will rather than the mind. Perfect clarity would help the mind and harm the will." God wants to "humble [our] pride."{24}

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

God not only hides Himself to test our will; He also does it so that we can only come to Him through Christ, not by working through some logical proofs. "God is a hidden God," says Pascal, " and . . . since nature was corrupted [God] has left men to their blindness, from which they can escape only

through Jesus Christ, without whom all communication with God is broken off. *Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whosoever the Son will reveal him*."{26} Pascal's apologetic is decidedly Christocentric. True knowledge of God isn't mere intellectual assent to the reality of a divine being. It *must* include a knowledge of Christ through whom God revealed Himself. He says:

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

If we do not know Christ, we cannot understand God as the judge and the redeemer of sinners. It is a limited knowledge that doesn't do any good. As Pascal says, "That is why I am not trying to prove naturally the existence of God, or indeed the Trinity, or the immortality of the soul or anything of that kind. This is not just because I do not feel competent to find natural arguments that will convince obdurate atheists, but because such knowledge, without Christ, is useless and empty." A person with this knowledge has not "made much progress toward his salvation."{28} What Pascal wants to avoid is proclaiming a deistic God who stands remote and expects from us only that we live good, moral lives. Deism needs no redeemer.

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

a contrary disposition."{29}

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

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

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

> Their enterprise would cause me no surprise if they were addressing the arguments to the faithful, for those with living faith in their hearts can certainly see at once that everything which exists is entirely the work of the God they worship. But for those in whom this light has gone out and in who we are trying to rekindle it, people deprived of faith and grace, . . . to tell them, I say, that they have

> only to look at the least thing around them and they will see in it God plainly revealed; to give them no other proof of this great and weighty matter than the course of the moon and the planets; to claim to have completed the proof with such an argument; this is giving them cause to think that the proofs of our religion are indeed feeble. . . . This is not how Scripture speaks, with its better knowledge of the things of God.{37}

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

The explanation for this tension can perhaps be seen in the *types* of proofs Pascal uses. Pascal won't argue from nature. Rather he'll point to evidences such as the marks of divinity within man, and those which affirm Christ's claims, such as prophecies and miracles, the most important being prophecies.{39} He also speaks of Christian doctrine "which gives a reason for everything," the establishment of Christianity despite its being so contrary to nature, and the testimony of the apostles who could have been neither deceivers nor deceived.{40} So Pascal *does* believe there are positive evidences for belief. Although he does not intend to give reasons for everything, neither does he expect people to agree without having a reason.{41}

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

Pascal says that, while our faith has the strongest of

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

The Wager

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

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

At this point Pascal challenges us to accept his wager. Simply put, the wager says we should bet on Christianity because the rewards are infinite if it’s true, while the losses will be insignificant if it’s false.{45} If it’s true and you have rejected it, you’ve lost everything. However, if it’s false but you have believed it, at least you’ve led a good life and you haven’t lost anything. Of course, the best outcome is if one believes Christianity to be true and it turns out that it is!

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

In response the unbeliever might say that everything in him works against belief. “I am being forced to gamble and I am not free,” he says, “for they will not let me go. I have been made in such a way that I cannot help disbelieving. So what do

you expect me to do?”{46} After all, Pascal has said that faith comes from God, not from us.

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

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

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

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

Summary

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

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

Notes

1. Peter Kreeft, *Christianity for Modern Pagans: Pascal's Pensees Edited, Outlined and Explained* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 13, 189.
2. Hugh M. Davidson, Blaise Pascal (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), 4.
3. The New Encyclopedia Britannica Macropedia, 15th ed., s.v. "Pascal, Blaise."
4. Davidson, 18.
5. James Houston's translation, Mind On First: A Faith for the

Skeptical and Indifferent (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997), will be quoted extensively in these notes. This version was edited to retain only the
individual pensees which are pertinent for apologetics. Mind On Fire also includes edited versions
of some of Pascal's Provincial Letters, the ones he wrote against the Jesuits. The reader might also want to
refer to Peter Kreeft's version (cf. note 1 above) which includes Kreeft's comments on individual pensees.
6. Davidson, 22.
7. Houston, 91.
8. Blaise Pascal, Pensees, trans. W.F. Trotter, 97.
9. Kreeft, 187.
10. Houston, 96.
11. Ibid., 122.
12. Kreeft, 238.
13. Ibid., 124.
14. Ibid., 236.
15. Houston, 58.
16. Ibid., 58.
17. Ibid., 53.
18. Trotter, 50.
19. Kreeft, 228.
20. Ibid., 229.
21. Ibid., 238.
22. Ibid., 120-26, 293.
23. Trotter, 178; see also 130.
24. Kreeft, 247.
25. Ibid., 249.
26. Ibid., 251.
27. Houston, 147.
28. Ibid., 149.
29. Kreeft, 69.
30. Ibid., 232.
31. Houston, 130.
32. Kreeft, 240.
33. Houston, 223.

34. Kreeft, 240.
35. Houston, 151.
36. Ibid., 152.
37. Kreeft, 250-51.
38. Ibid., 240.
39. Houston, 205; Trotter, 52.
40. Trotter, 52; Kreeft, 266.
41. Houston, 116-17.
42. Ibid., 221-22.
43. Ibid., 223.
44. Ibid., 130-31.
45. Kreeft, 292.
46. Houston, 133.
47. Ibid., 133.
48. Kreeft, 251, 255.

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