

A Biblical World and Lifeview

by Rev. Kevin Twit

Every single person in the world has a worldview. A worldview is the conceptual grid we use to understand how life fits together. But most people (including most Christians) never really think about what their worldview is. Thus their worldview is filled with inconsistencies, and is usually a mish-mash of Biblical and unbiblical ideas. As Christians we are called to glorify God in all we do (1Cor 10:31), and to love God with our minds (Mt 22:37.) Thus we must seek to have a consistently Biblical world and lifeview. We must bow to God's interpretation of the world, and adhere to the interpretive grid we find revealed in His Word.

When we begin to look at this idea of a worldview, we find that there are four basic questions that every worldview must attempt to answer. First, the question of origin, where did we come from? Second, the question of meaning, why are we here? Third, the question of morality (or ethics), why do we do what we do? And fourth, the question of destiny, where are we going. As we evaluate the different answers given to these questions, we should submit them to three tests. First, is the answer logically consistent? Second, is it empirically verifiable? (i.e. Is there any evidence for it?) And lastly, Is it existentially relevant? (i.e. Can I live it?) Every worldview tries in some way to provide answers to these questions. Be it the worldview of Materialism, or Buddhism, or Deism, these questions must be dealt with. But it is not enough to come up with answers that we like, we must seek to discover how God has answered these questions. Unfortunately many Christians fail to do this, and thus they have bits and pieces from all sorts of mutually-exclusive worldviews floating around in their heads! Most commonly, Christians today will have a mixture of a Biblical, and Secular/Materialistic worldview, often with contradictory ideas that have never been thought through.

What is the worldview taught in the Bible? This is difficult to briefly summarize because to fully answer this question we must look at the "whole counsel of God." In this age of quick answers there is a desperate need for Christians who will think through all that the Bible has to say about a particular topic, rather than settling for a couple of "proof-texts." However, there are some Biblical categories that should be the basis of forming a truly Biblical world and lifeview. They are creation, fall, and redemption.

Creation: A Biblical worldview starts with the assertion that God has created all that there is and He rules over it sovereignly. He is not a part of creation, and He affirms the goodness of what He has created (Gen 1:31, 1Tim 4:4-5.) Some important aspects of creation are that God affirms the goodness of physical reality. Unlike the Greek philosophers (and much popular Christian teaching), physical reality is not inherently of a lower order than spiritual reality. In fact we could say that all of life is spiritual! We should never make a sort of sacred/secular dichotomy in our thinking about life or our callings. Also mankind (male and female) is made in God's image and is the crown of creation. Mankind has dignity because man has been made in God's image, and though fallen, we still retain that image (Gen 9:6.) Francis Schaeffer is correct when he calls man a "glorious ruin." From the creation account in Genesis we find what our purpose is. We

are called to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, in everything we do, as image bearers living in a covenant relationship with our Creator-God. It is important that we answer the question of purpose correctly. Often Christians make the mistake of confusing a valid sub-purpose (like evangelism or social justice) with purpose of man. To paraphrase Calvin, a half truth masquerading as the whole truth, is a complete untruth. Our purpose is to glorify God, though there are a plethora of ways this is carried out.

To help us categorize what it means to glorify God, theologians often refer to the three mandates of creation. The first is the cultural mandate (Gen 2:15, 1:28) We are called to "till the Garden." This means first of all that work is not a result of the Fall but it is part of what we were made for. As O.P. Robertson says, we are called to, "... bring out all the potential within the creation which might offer glory to the Creator." This means we should pursue things like science and the arts because they are no less important than things like evangelism and so-called "spiritual" activities. The second mandate is the social mandate. This is found in Gen 1:28 where we are told to be fruitful and multiply. This is the basis for marriage and family life. The third mandate is the spiritual mandate. This is the call to worship God and cultivate our relationship with Him. We see the Sabbath as part of God's provision for nurturing our love relationship with Him. When we take all of these mandates together we see that God's call to obedience is bigger than refraining from eating the forbidden fruit. He calls us to glorify Him in every area of life. Fall: A Biblical worldview must also consider how the Fall has affected the world we live in. From Romans 8:19-23 we discover that not only has man fallen and been corrupted by Adam's sin, but that the whole creation has been affected. Because the crown of creation (man) has failed to fulfill his purpose, all of creation has failed to achieve its purpose, it has become frustrated. The Fall means that what we see around us is not what God intended. We must remember that we live in a fallen world, and we are called to boldly face this fact (Mt 6:34.) We are never called to downplay the reality of sin or to deny our own propensity for self-deception (Jer 17:9), and our inability to fix what is wrong with the world in our own strength. This means we must look to God and His Word for our direction, rather than to our own ideas, and that we must never look to education or political structures to solve this world's problems. Rather we look to God to extend His Kingdom into all areas of life. This brings us to our third category.

Redemption: A Biblical worldview must take into account the reality of Christ's death and resurrection. His Kingdom is moving forward and the gates of Hell (gates are defensive weapons remember) won't be able to stop its advance. Christ's Kingdom is not a merely spiritual one (as some Christians believe), He rules over all things, though right now we don't see it (Heb 2:8.) History is going somewhere and our God holds the future in His hands.

As we consider these three categories (remembering this is just scratching the surface of all that a Biblical worldview entails) we see that our attitude towards the world we live in should be to recognize its inherent value and dignity (creation), honestly face its brokenness and sin (fall), and remember with confident hope that God's Kingdom is on the move and will extend (in the words of Isaac Watts in "Joy to the World") "far as the curse is found" (redemption.) May we take up the challenge to love God with our minds

and seek to develop a Biblical world and lifeview by His grace and power as we seek to glorify Him in all we do!

The Uniqueness of Christ in an Age of Relativism

By Dick Keyes
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One of the most contentious and difficult issues any Christian has to face today is the question of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. This issue is difficult, in part, because our society is religiously pluralistic.

We live in a society where kind, intelligent, sincere people all around us have very, very different religious convictions from Christian ones. What would ever lead a person to believe that there is one true God and only one way to Him in a time of such plurality? Or as it was asked to me once, what is your excuse for believing such a thing?

The intellectual and spiritual atmosphere in which we live quickly answers that question by saying that Christians who do believe in Christ's uniqueness believe it only because they are arrogant, ignorant, ethnocentric, and perhaps neurotic. If a Christian tries to convert somebody, then he or she is seen as bigoted, intolerant, imperialistic, and perhaps psychologically unbalanced.

Christians do not want to be arrogant, ignorant, ethno-centric, or neurotic, nor do we even want to be thought of in that way by other people. At the same time, the uniqueness of Christ as the Son of God, as the way, the truth, and the life, the only way to the Father, is not just something Christians can brush off or leave aside as if it were optional or on the periphery of the faith.

As we relate to others in the midst of these challenging assumptions we must see the place from which some of the assumptions stem. The conviction of Christ's uniqueness did not arise or thrive first in the nineteenth century colonial era of Western imperialism. In fact, it did not even arise in Europe. The whole Christian faith is a Middle Eastern religion, not a European religion at all.

In addition, religious pluralism is nothing new. The start of the Christian faith was in the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire in the first century was possibly more pluralistic than modern America. It was more radically diverse in the different religious movements. The Christian faith, with its claims to Christ's uniqueness, grew and thrived exactly in that pluralistic setting. Pluralism in the modern world may surprise the church today, but it offers no new challenge to the Christian faith.

Ironically, there is a special relevance of the New Testament for us now in dealing with pluralism. Far from putting us in a new paradigm, pluralism puts us back into the first century, right into the setting of the book

of Acts. Pluralism was exactly what the Apostle Paul was facing as soon as he stepped out the front door of a synagogue onto the main street of any gentile city.

Pluralism and Relativism

While pluralism is not new, we need to see that our society has developed a way for viewing pluralism that is widely accepted. That way of viewing is a philosophical system called relativism. Relativism is one possible paradigm for understanding pluralism. It is a system that denies that anyone can know absolute truth about God or about ultimate things and asserts that it is naïve for a person to think he or she has knowledge about such truth. Relativism declares that we are finite; we have no standard or criterion to judge competing truth claims, no scale with which to measure or examine differing beliefs.

When considering relativism, I often think of the example of a lifeguard on a beach who has an elevated chair so he can look down over everybody and see what is going on. He has a perspective that nobody else on the beach has. Everybody else has his or her feet in the sand, cannot see beyond immediate neighbors. But the lifeguard has an elevated chair from which to see the whole beach. Relativism tells us that nobody has that elevated view when it comes to religion. Everybody is at ground level, with only his or her local perspective.

Relativism claims that we have a lot of people from different perspectives saying what they think ultimate truth is, but that these people are simply expressing their own beliefs. They are attempting to name what is not namable. Relativism claims that it does not make sense to talk about some religions being true and other religions being false; doing so brings the wrong categories to the discussion. To the relativist no religions are true or false. Certainly none are true in any way that would exclude any others being true. They are all true in that they do more or less the same job; they express the deepest human longings and are means for achieving social cohesion; they help hold societies together and give them a sense of unity and common purpose.

Just as you would never say that vanilla ice cream is the only true ice cream and chocolate ice cream is false ice cream because you prefer vanilla, so also the relativist says you should never speak in such a way about your religious preferences. The issues of true and false have no place in the discussion.

How does relativism relate to pluralism? Simply put, relativism disrespects pluralism. Relativism seems to have high moral ground. It seems to celebrate the plurality of religious beliefs and be tolerant, non-judgmental, generous, and enlightened. It seems to celebrate the diversity of religious perspectives, but in fact the message of relativism is that it is the one exclusive and correct way to understand the full picture of religious diversity in the world. In fact, relativism is extremely absolutist! It assumes for itself the very status that it scorns when anybody else holds it.

This Way Up The Mountain

The relativist is a closet absolutist. You may have heard the idea that all religions are ways, or paths, up the same mountain. As these paths travel up the mountain the climber has no clue that there are actually other roads up the same mountain. When he finally gets to the top of the mountain and sees God, the person realizes that he was not on the only road at all but that there are lots of people on their way to God by all sorts of paths or religions.

This mountain analogy sounds very humble and makes any people who disagree with it feel ignorant, small-minded, and arrogant if they think that their road is the only road. But the real question to ask is – where is the person standing who is describing this mountain? He or she must be in an airplane in order to see the whole mountain. Why is the relativist the only one who gets to have an airplane when all others sweat and trudge up their roads in ignorance?

The relativist is not just giving us a lovely picture of openness. The relativist is giving one exclusive model to understand all the religions of the world. Relativism is an over-religion or a meta-religion that forces all religions into its mold. It sounds humble and willing to admit the fallibility of human knowing, but it produces a single vision of ultimate truth that excludes all other contenders. The relativist claims an immaculate perception of religious truth, but at the same time denies that anyone can have such a perspective.

Relativism denies pluralism, the idea that there are different options that differ substantially from each other. Relativism actually destroys pluralism. It homogenizes all differences so they are seen as basically the same. In the relativist's own illustration, pluralism is represented by these poor people struggling up the road on the mountain, all of them in the same ignorance about what they are doing.

Think of what this means for specific religions. For instance, the Christian faith affirms a belief in a personal God. Buddhism denies a personal God. Relativism says that these two religions are really the same in their most basic convictions. This is a homogenizing process that obscures the real differences.

So, for the relativist all views are one view. All religions are paths to salvation. But here we must ask, what does salvation mean? The different religions have very different views of salvation. Which salvation gets to be the one that we are talking about? For Buddhism salvation is nirvana. The Buddhist finally leaves behind all his desires and even his experience of his individuality. Compare this to the Muslim view of salvation. At least for the hijackers of recent fame, it meant that they would be met by seventy-two dark-eyed virgins who would be committed to indulging their every desire.

Whose salvation are we talking about? Whose heaven? If you take the relativist line, you have got to acknowledge that we really cannot say anything about the nature of salvation because the moment a person does, that person has excluded somebody else's view. So the only thing to say is that we know nothing. But that does not get anyone very far. So salvation generically is defined as "enabling a truly moral life" or "keeping the forces of despair at bay." The intriguing thing is that those statements do not sound like they are coming out of any of the world religions but more like modern western liberal humanism forced onto the plurality of world religions.

In Defense of Pluralism

Christians need to be the ones defending pluralism against relativism. We need to defend the point that there is a difference among the religious options, and maintain that these differences are important.

Why are words like 'conversion' or 'proselytize' or 'missionary' so offensive today? It is not just because the people involved are belligerent and insensitive, because not all of them are. It is because the idea of conversion or proselytizing is offensive to the doctrines of relativism. If somebody converts, he or she is saying the options are not all the same – otherwise why would I change? You do not convert unless you believe there are real differences between the options available. The existence of any convert is testimony to the fact that those differences matter, and some conversions are enormously costly.

Why not change if you no longer believe your earlier convictions to be true? If they are important enough, why not even persuade somebody else to change, if you care about them? Isn't this true of every other area of knowledge? In history, economics, political science, medicine, physics – there are important differences. The health of those academic disciplines depends on free discussion about the differences in those fields. Because there is a plurality of views, people change their minds about affirmative action, tax cuts, global warming, counter-terrorist measures, and origins of the American Revolution. People change their views about all sorts of things and a good educational environment, and a free society, demands that conversions be possible.

Why is conversion such a problem only when it comes to religious truth in our society? If there is real plurality, a real difference of religious options, then it is possible to be wrong and to be wrong in a way that matters a great deal. If there really are differences, it is possible to be so wrong that it can be catastrophic. We could, for example, be accountable to some far greater Being than ourselves. We could be entirely wrong as to how to approach that greater Being. We could miss out on whole realms of meaning in our life here on earth.

If there are real choices between religious options it raises some very uncomfortable questions. By contrast, relativism, which does not respect the plurality of religions, is very comforting. It tells us that it is impossible to be wrong in any way that matters. It is perfectly safe to be entirely wrong about God, or to totally ignore God and questions of God's existence and relevance. Different views are differences only in preference – vanilla, chocolate, coffee, whatever. This way of looking at things encourages people to sleepwalk through the biggest choices of their lives.

It is relativism that is the opiate of the masses – especially in the modern university setting, where it deadens and discourages what could be enormously stimulating intellectual and spiritual discussion. Discussions of serious differences, however, too often are seen as dangerous and liable to offend somebody. Discussion of difference is put under the carpet as quickly as possible. But if we respect the plurality of religions, we are saying the choice between them is possible and necessary. God? No God? Which god? These are important questions that everybody ought to grapple with. We need an atmosphere that facilitates asking these questions and does not bury them in shame and fear of political incorrectness.

Any person is free to believe something that excludes my beliefs. Relativists do this all of the time. But it is important that they admit that they are excluding my beliefs. And then we can talk – one absolutist to another. We can be civil to each other, we can care for each other, we can love each other, we can have wonderful discussions together. Even if we end agreeing to disagree, I find that we will always learn from each other.

Welcoming the Open Discussion

If everyone would admit to being an absolutist – and everyone with any conviction about God has to exclude somebody else’s view of God – there could be much more fruitful discussion. We all hold some absolutes. Join the club. We are all fundamentalists; it is just a question of what things are fundamental to us. If we could agree this far, then the discussion about Jesus as the way to God could be a discussion held on a level playing field. My hope is for an atmosphere in which the reality of pluralism can be put on the table, in which there can be a civil interaction of different positions and their enormous implications. This calls for courage to let questions be aired and discussed openly. We must welcome the open discussion.

In that discussion, Christians must be ready to give an answer for their hope with gentleness and respect. Nothing so quickly discredits the Christian claim than if that claim is made in arrogance, defensiveness or the desire to just win an argument. May we look to Jesus himself as the one to give us the humility and the loyalty to truth which we need to represent him to our contemporaries.

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What Does Winsome Look Like?

PART ONE IN A SERIES ON WINSOMENESS.

by Denis Haack

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Resources
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One of our neighbors uses a pickup occasionally to haul junk to the dump or to transport furniture when a new tenant moves into one of his rental units. It's an old pickup, showing signs of wear and the rust so common in this part of the country where salt is used to battle icy streets in winter. The truck sports a bumper sticker which caught my attention one day as he drove down the alley behind our house. "Save me Jesus" were in large-enough print to read as he passed, but I had to walk over to where it was parked to make out the fine print. "Save me Jesus..." it said "...from your followers."

I haven't had the chance to ask him about the bumper sticker. It'll be interesting to talk about it, though I must say that I fear hearing some story in which he was treated poorly by someone claiming to be a Christian. It's entirely possible, on the other hand, that what he's suffered is an offense against the cross, and that no believer has mistreated him. That's a possibility, but it troubles me that I doubt it is the case. Worse, I confess that I would find it almost refreshing to discover he has heard and considered the gospel but rejected it because he finds its claims to be offensive. Refreshing, that is, not because it wouldn't be grievous news—for it is—but refreshing because at least this is an offense that has some integrity.

Given the present state of affairs, what with pluralism and the insistence on tolerance, we may wonder if it is even possible for Christians to be winsome before a watching world. To be attractive, that is, without compromising righteousness or hiding the gospel. Is it possible to live out and speak the truth so that any offense taken is limited to the offense of the cross?

Jesus was without sin and never compromised the truth, and yet he attracted sinners to himself.

The answer, I believe, is YES. We will make mistakes and blunder, of course. We have clay feet, and the Scriptures do not give us leave to witness to the truth only after achieving some sort of perfection. There will be plenty for which we must seek forgiveness from our unbelieving friends, but amazingly such authenticity and humility can be attractive in its own way. Our foul-ups can even, by God's grace, at least occasionally be redeemed instead of remaining a hindrance in the relationship.

The primary reason, however, for being confident that it is possible to be winsome and attractive to sinners is the example of Jesus. He was without sin and never compromised the truth, and yet

attracted sinners to himself. He even called them to repentance—not a particularly popular message for sinners—and though not all believed, the record of the Gospels is that they followed him around in droves. Our message is the gospel of Christ, and since he is attractive, shouldn't our proclamation be attractive as well? Since our lives are to reflect his righteousness, shouldn't our lives be as winsome as his was?

What an irony: Christ attracted multitudes wherever he went, while much that passes for Christian witness today is neither attractive, creative, nor winsome, but aggressive, insensitive, and rote.

Imagine what it would be like, a friend recently said, to sit in the chair of an angry dentist. Or one who is offended by your dental habits and decides that you need to be taught a good lesson in dental hygiene. Or one who accosts strangers with the sad state of their mouths, expects them to submit to treatment on the spot, and when they refuse issues dire warnings. Or one who has reduced the rich array of dental medicine into a single therapy that can be accomplished in less than five minutes. Or one that uses the identical technique on every patient, time after time.

Graceful, salty conversation

"Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders," Paul wrote to the believers in

Colosse, “make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (4:5-6). The final Greek phrase translated “everyone,” actually means “to each one.” Each individual, in other words, “is to be treated as an end in himself,” Peter O’Brien notes in his commentary, “and not subjected to a stock harangue.” Which is precisely how we want to be treated, and if we think about it, how we would expect to treat anyone who bears the image of God.

Paul’s notion of our conversations with non-Christians being “seasoned with salt” is intriguing. Pagans in the first century used the expression to mean witty; Jewish rabbis used it to mean wise. Wisdom and wit are related, and both are characteristic of the conversations of Jesus recorded for us in the New Testament. His insight into people and the world was astounding, and his enigmatic answers and probing questions fostered reflection and further questions instead of terminating the discussion. He often turned things on their head in unexpected ways, and his stories usually contained twists, often amusing ones. “Those who are the salt of the earth,” O’Brien says, “might be expected to have some savor about their communication.” Salt makes food zesty and flavorful, and keeps it free of corruption. So our witness must never be insipid or dull, never tactless or argumentative. After all, we are witnessing to the Lord of life and glory.

“Ah, well,” someone might respond. “That’s all fine and good for the likes of Paul and C. S. Lewis and G. K. Chesterton, but I’m just an ordinary person. I barely know how to share my faith and now I have to be creatively attractive, too?” A good question. The answer is that we misunderstand the meaning of creative. We are made in the Creator’s image, and therefore creativity is inescapably part of our very being. We may not have artistic gifts, but that’s not the issue. Creativity is expressed not just in art, but in hospitality, warmth, and community when we open our life and heart and home to another, even at cost. We may not be able to write good fiction, but we can all host neighbors for an evening’s reading. We are attractive and winsome when in Christ’s name we ask questions and truly listen, when we share the suffering of another,

and when we risk everything to be authentic. From this perspective, it is the ordinary believer who has the best shot at being winsome in life and conversation. If Paul or Lewis or Chesterton were alive today their fame would likely isolate them, and raise barriers we don’t have to worry about.

That may be reassuring—it should be reassuring—but it still is not an adequate answer for the question we’ve raised. Just what does it look like for a Christian—an ordinary Christian—to be winsome and attractive in our pluralistic world? How might our conversations be graceful and salty as we interact with our non-Christian neighbors and friends? How can we be, in other words, more like Jesus?

Beginning in the beginning

If we wish to reflect on this in the light of Scripture, we will seek an answer in terms of Creation and Redemption—since it is the Fall, the other aspect of the Christian

Creativity is expressed not just in art, but in hospitality, warmth, and community when we open our life and heart and home.

world view which is causing the difficulty. Since we share a common humanity with unbelievers because like them we are made in God’s image, the doctrine of Creation forms a foundation for Christian witness. And since Christ is both our final example and Lord for all of life, his humanity is the ultimate demonstration of the grace of God in redemption.

The Francis Schaeffer Institute (Covenant Seminary), under the direction of Jerram Barrs, has identified eight principles of communication which are central to the vision and work of the Institute. The principles are their attempt to name vital aspects of communication for the Christian in a fallen world. The list can be best understood as an effort to imagine Christian witness in light of the doctrine of Creation as demonstrated by Christ. To ask, in other words, what our conversations with non-Christians would look like if we really believed in our heart of hearts what the Bible teaches about every person being created in the image of God and loved by him even at the high cost of the death of his beloved Son. The FAS Institute’s list is as follows:

- Respect for those to whom we communicate.
- Building bridges of commonality to the listener.
- Understanding what others believe.
- Language comprehensible and familiar to the listener.
- Reasoned presentation of the message.
- Clarity, a careful definition of the message.
- Challenge to both the mind and the heart.
- Imagination and creativity in presenting the glorious gospel.

A list, it seems to me, worthy of being meditated over and prayed for daily.

Consider a few of the implications that follow if I truly believe my neighbors are created in God’s image. Among other things, I will not be dismissive of them, their ideas, their lifestyle, their choices, or their values. Even if they seem repugnant to me, or irrational, or inconceivable, or entirely lacking in common sense. That might be difficult, of course, especially if they do not return the favor, but such is the cost of following Christ.

This means that I will work hard to never be guilty of misrepresenting what they think, or summarizing it unfairly. I will honestly seek to learn from them, realizing that they live in God’s world just as I do, and so will have learned much that I do not yet know. I will remember how painful it is to face up to being mistaken, so that my probing of their beliefs will be clothed in humility. I will realize that calling them to repentance requires me to demonstrate repentance, since like them I am a sinner in need of grace. Treating those with whom we disagree with the respect worthy of the person created in God’s image is both disarming and heartwarming because such love is in short supply in this broken world. It may not bring all to Christ, of course, but it will mean that we are living out what we claim to believe.

Because I am talking to someone made in God’s image, I will take the conversation seriously instead of seeing it merely as a means to an end. As I ask questions of them appropriate to the moment, we might indeed get to the big issues of life. I will not imagine, however, that only a conversation on that level is significant, for that too would treat them with disdain. And just as

I resent being invited to “dessert” only to discover I am at a sales presentation, so I will never ask people to take a “survey” which is merely a cleverly written set of questions designed to manipulate the conversation in a certain direction. I will refuse “bait and switch” tactics, in other words, because they treat people with contempt.

In short, treating people as if I truly believe they are created in God’s image means nothing less than loving them as

Jesus loves them. Which means they should truly believe that I would be willing to die for them. ■

~Denis Haack

to Answer the World: An Introduction to the Francis A. Schaeffer Institute at Covenant Theological Seminary” (booklet) available from FSI, 12330 Conway Road, St. Louis, MO 63141.

Sources:

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QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. How might it be possible to determine the difference between someone taking offense at the gospel and someone taking offence at us? What is our responsibility in this?
2. What was your reaction to the questions about the angry dentist? Is this an unfair metaphor? Why or why not?
3. Where do you see creativity in Jesus? How would you characterize his conversations with unbelievers? To what extent would he have learned this in today’s training in evangelism?
4. Discuss each of the eight principles (from the Francis Schaeffer Institute), unpacking their meaning and implications. Have you known anyone who exemplifies them?
5. What problems or hesitations do you face in conversations with unbelievers? Would you hesitate to ask a neighbor about the bumper sticker on his truck? Why or why not? How would you respond if he told of the actions of an offensive Christian?
6. What is the difference between seeking to share the gospel while talking to a friend, and manipulating the conversation?
7. “Treating people as if I truly believe they are created in God’s image means nothing less than loving them as Jesus loves them. Which means they should truly believe that I would be willing to die for them.” Do you agree? Why or why not? What other implications can you think of that follow from believing that our neighbors bear God’s image?
8. Covenant before the Lord to begin praying daily for a non-Christian friend, by name, expressing willingness to be used of God to bring them to Christ. Would they consider you their friend? How can you deepen that friendship?

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What Does Winsome Look Like?

by Denis Haack

Occasionally I am asked what Christians need to do to reach the post-modern generation with the gospel. My answer is that I am not particularly impressed with the available programs, and I don't believe ministry should be left to professionals. I have no formula for reaching the world, and believe none exists. I am confident, however, that God is at work, and that we can engage our post-Christian culture with discernment. And that we can incarnate the love of Christ with four simple things: learning to listen, being authentic, opening our lives and homes with warm hospitality, and giving the gift of unhurried time.

Simple things. They are also the most radical expression of Christian faithfulness possible in our postmodern world. And they are so rare in evangelical circles as to constitute a scandalous denial of the gospel.

In reality, of course, they only sound simple. Everything in our culture and churches leans against them. On the deepest level, however, they capture something of what is at the heart of our covenant calling before God. Best demonstrated by Jesus, they define something of what it means to be incarnational in a lost world. Or as John Perkins put it, "Jesus did not commute from heaven every day in a fiery chariot."

Consider listening

When was the last time someone really listened to you? I don't mean merely sat quietly waiting their turn to speak—but truly listening? Their body language and focus made you the center of their attention, demonstrating they cared about what you thought and felt. Their questions proved their interest in you, that you were worth

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knowing. They listened actively, asking more questions to be sure they understood. They proved their willingness to enter your world, with all its brokenness, even if it cost them.

Can you think of a more meaningful expression of love? If you can't remember such a time, doesn't your heart ache for it? The question I'd like to pose here, however, is this: Do we listen this way to our non-Christian friends and neighbors?

We often think of witnessing primarily as proclamation: telling the gospel to someone and inviting a response to the claims of

Christ. And there is truth to that, since there is good news to tell. What must be remembered, however, is that proclamation always occurs within some sort of relationship. Even when I speak to a group—on a campus, perhaps, or at a lecture at a Borders Book Store—I must make human contact with my listeners. If I fail to tell the gospel in terms they can understand and find plausible, it is "proclamation" only in the sense that a public speaker is making noise before a crowd.

Jesus faithfully proclaimed the good news, but if we trace his ministry in the Gospels we find he listened as well as spoke. Which is a bit surprising, since if there was anyone who didn't need to ask questions to learn what his listeners thought, surely it was Jesus. His divinity allowed him to know what was on their minds before they opened their mouths. Occasionally he simply acted on this knowledge, amazing his audience with his insight into their hearts. Repeatedly, though, he asked questions, and in the ongoing conversation shaped his message to their ideas, doubts, and fears. His message never changed, but it also was never merely regurgitated.

The importance of listening, however, extends beyond our gaining information. Asking questions and listening changes us.

More specifically, it affects our reading of the Scriptures.

To see what I mean by this, consider the preaching ministry of pastors and teachers within the church. I mention them here not to put them on the spot, but because their proclamation of the gospel is public enough to provide a ready illustration. “When we study the Bible,” Timothy Keller says, “we only extract answers to the questions that we implicitly or explicitly have on our hearts as we read it.” Some pastors, for example, concentrate on theological books, and so their sermons tend to reflect the questions of interest to theologians. Ordinary Christians may find it interesting, but it is often far removed from the concerns of everyday life. “It is not really true that some sermons are too academic and thus lack application,” Keller says. “Rather, the preacher is applying the text to the people’s questions that he most understands—other academics.” Other pastors, on the other hand, interact primarily with believers. Christians feel “fed” by their sermons, but hesitate to invite non-Christians. The sermons address their concerns, but not the concerns of unbelievers.

This applies to us as well. Our “people context,” Keller says, will shape our reading of Scripture and our proclamation of the gospel. So we must learn to listen, and we can do that, Keller says, by varying our reading and by varying those with whom we talk.

Varying our reading is relatively easy—assuming we’ve planned our lives to include sufficient reading in the first place. We can

make sure our reading includes work by thoughtful non-Christians who provide a window of insight into the hearts and minds of those who do not share our deepest convictions and values. At a retreat I was once asked what single magazine I found most helpful in understanding our pluralistic, postmodern culture. “*Rolling Stone*,” I said. “It allows me to listen in as postmoderns discuss pop culture in light of the

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questions and issues that most concerns them.” One participant commented that they “wouldn’t allow such filth” into their home. Ignoring the fact that Jesus warns us not to identify evil in externals but rather in the heart, the point is not that everyone should subscribe to *Rolling Stone*, but that we each need to listen to those we are called to reach with the gospel. It is true that magazines produced by fallen people contain the sad traces of their fallenness, but who can claim exemption from that? “All our righteous acts,” Isaiah says, “are like filthy rags” (64:6).

Entering another’s world

Varying who we talk to is more difficult, and certainly more threatening. At the least we should always have one non-Christian

for whom we are praying by name, daily, asking not just that they come to Christ but that we be used in the process. As well, we should each find natural ways to interact meaningfully and regularly with unbelievers. It may involve joining a book discussion group, an investment club, or some other forum where friendships can be forged and where conversation flourishes. Such opportunities abound, though most of us are too busy to take advantage of them.

Listening can also take a more radical form. Students at the Francis Schaeffer Institute, for example, are given an assignment worthy of being emulated by all discerning Christians. They attend a meeting in the community where they will be in the minority and will find it easier to disagree than to agree. Perhaps it’s a lecture sponsored by pro-abortion activists, or a talk on Buddhism or neo-pagan spirituality. The assignment is to listen, to demonstrate that we care enough to learn about the things they hold most dear. And when we do speak, to demonstrate that, contrary to popular opinion, evangelical Christians can be thoughtful and discerning and compassionate—even when outside our comfort zone.

“Christians are frequently too quick to give answers,” John Seel and Stephan Fisher write. “Unless we can identify with a modern seeker’s sense of meaninglessness out of our own life experience or out of empathetic reflection, our answers to their deepest longings will seem trite and sentimental.” The very thought of rendering the gospel

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Tell about a time when someone really listened to you.
2. What are some of the barriers to listening? Are there particular barriers that exist for Christians listening to non-Christians? How should we respond to them?
3. To what extent does the doctrine of the Incarnation inform your definition of witness and Christian faithfulness? What are the implications of Incarnation in following Christ?
4. “Christians are frequently too quick to give answers. Unless we can identify with a modern seeker’s sense of meaninglessness out of our own life experience or out of empathetic reflection, our answers to their deepest longings will seem trite and sentimental.” Discuss.
5. Consider the notion that learning to listen includes varying our reading. How would you assess your reading over the last year? What should you plan for the next year?
6. Consider the notion that learning to listen involves varying whom we talk with. How would you assess your track record in this regard? What plans should you make?

trite and sentimental should be a great horror. Identifying with the seeker brings us back, once again, to the notion of Incarnation, of entering another person's world to bring them the gospel. And though Jesus did more than listen when he entered our world, we certainly dare not do less. Listening opens doors into hearts and minds and lives so our good news makes sense. Listening also changes us, just as the Incarnation forever changed the Second Person of the Trinity. We will read the Bible differently, attuned to a set of questions that are the heart's cry of our neighbors.

Listening is winsome because it is an expression of compassion. An entering into

someone else's broken life, at the cost of sharing that brokenness. If our listening is mere silence masking our preparation for the next assault on their beliefs or values or lifestyle, our hypocrisy will be evident and the conversation soon terminated. Never was Christ accused of such duplicity. His listening was earnest and his questioning sincere. Sinners flocked to be with him and to hear him talk. Perhaps if we learn to listen we'll find them more ready to listen to us. But even if they don't, we'll know we have loved them as our Master loves us. ■

~Denis Haack

Sources: Perkins quoted in *Postmodern Youth Ministry* by Tony Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan; 2001) p. 70. "Preaching the Gospel in a Post-Modern World" by Timothy Keller, a course syllabus in the Doctor of Ministry program at Reformed Theological Seminary. "Radiohead's Kid A" by Seel and Fisher in *Critique* #9-2001 (pp. 14-15).

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by Denis Haack

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Resources
for Equipping
Wise Christians

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At a recent conference for pastors I was amused during the Q&A session by how few questions were actually raised. It's not that no one was interested in participating. There was a long line at the microphone in the aisle; so many, in fact that only a fraction had a chance to speak before time was up. What was amusing was that almost no one actually asked a question. Instead, they made comments, sharing a quote or telling a story or expanding on some point that one of the speakers had made. The moderator mentioned—more than once—that the hour was intended for asking questions of the speakers, but his reminders seemed to fall on deaf ears. A few of the participants asked questions, but most contributions were little monologues. The tone was that of proclamation rather than questioning, of seeking to instruct rather than being content to listen.

As I sat there, my attitude slowly shifted from amusement to irritation. I had paid good money to attend this conference, and the idea was to learn from the speakers, not hear every Tom, Dick and Harry pontificate about their latest hobby horse. My irritation turned into disgust, and I walked out. It was only later that I recognized my self-righteousness, and remembered that I, too, prefer proclamation to listening. Not only

is asking good questions hard work, but sad as this is to confess, I tend to prefer almost anything I have to say, to anything you have to say.

There are other reasons why many of us aren't good at asking questions. We have never practiced the skill, and so aren't very comfortable with trying. Or we have a limited understanding of what teaching or mentoring or evangelizing includes. We imagine it to be merely a transfer of infor-

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mation instead of a dynamic process in which we walk alongside another person, helping them discover truth. And then there is the ever-present problem of busyness. Let's face it: simply telling you what to think takes far less time than helping you think it through. Less effort, too. And I maintain more control over the conversation if we stay away from questions, since I can never be quite sure where your answers will lead us. It's troubling for the discussion to wander off into areas about which I know little, or worse, have doubts about.

In *Church on Sunday, Work on Monday*, authors Laura Nash and Scotty McLennan are concerned that little meaningful conversation occurs between the Church and the business world, even though many on both sides desire it. And now because businesspeople are open to spiritual concerns in a new way, a host of programs and experts have arisen to address that need, but the spirituality taught in these seminars is seldom Christian in any meaningful sense.

Though Nash and McLennan identify numerous reasons for the failure to communicate, and though there is culpability on both sides, one reason they identify is that Christian leaders don't ask questions or listen. "Even among those who were enthusiastic about possibly creating a forum or other occasion to explore faith and work," they write, "few [clergy] suggested that they were eager to hear what businesspeople had to say about their impressions of the tension they faced at work. Feeling they had seen just about enough of what business really cares for—consumerism, selfishness, careerism, insensitivity—they prepared themselves for lecturing, not listening."

Windows into hearts & minds

Before we get too critical of those clergy, we should consider whether there aren't times when we act similarly. Whether there aren't

situations in which we assume we already know enough about the other person to skip asking questions or listening, and simply get to the proclamation we want to give.

One place this weakness tends to show up is in our interactions with non-Christians. Our preference for telling rather than listening, of proclaiming rather than asking questions is one reason I think so many non-Christians find many presentations of the gospel to be unattractive and less than fully personal or engaging or winsome. Many of us think of witnessing as almost exclusively proclamation, perhaps with a few questions thrown in as a staged tool to launch the presentation. The questions can have the added problem of being duplicitous, in the form of a fake “survey,” the results of which are meaningless except to provide an opportunity for the witnesser to say what they intended to say all along. But even for those of us who eschew such techniques, asking sensitive, creative, and appropriately probing questions can be a challenge. Learning to ask such questions is part of learning to listen, and both are skills that can be developed and practiced, by God’s grace, as we seek to live winsomely before a watching world.

If we are to demonstrate the power and attractiveness of the gospel, we must exhibit a true authenticity as the people of God. Entering into a conversation with a non-Christian is not a signal to launch a technique, but a God-ordained opportunity to have a relationship with someone made in the image of God. People made in God’s image should be loved as we desire to be loved, by being listened to with care and attention. And because we live in an increasingly pluralistic world, among people who do not necessarily share our deepest convictions and values, asking questions and listening takes on added importance.

“We need to learn to ask questions that will help us understand the heart and mind of each individual we meet,” Jerram Barrs says. “The fundamental issue here is one of love. Do we care enough for people that we want to get to know them, so that what we say to them will be... a word fitly framed to touch the inner being of the unique person before us?”

That’s all fine and good, someone might object, but if the gospel is proclaimed, surely we can’t complain about

that. There can’t be any harm in telling someone the truth, even if it happens to be in terms they don’t fully understand or appreciate. Not so, Barrs insists. “Evangelism that bypasses understanding runs the risk of offending people and turning them away from Christ. Such evangelism makes them feel treated without respect or discernment, just a number on the end of a sales pitch. Or they may sense they are being used to assuage our sense of guilt about not doing evangelism, or that we are doing some spiritual good work that will make God pleased with us but that shows no concern for them.”

There’s another problem with evangelism without understanding. It is contrary to the example set by Christ in the Scriptures.

“Do we care enough for people that we want to get to know them, so that what we say will be a word fitly framed to touch the inner being of the unique person before us?”

He didn’t treat Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman (John 4) to identical presentations. Neither did Paul say the same things to the people of Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13) as to the people of Athens (Acts 17). Both Christ and Paul knew whom they were talking to, and spoke accordingly. And lest we think that Christ, because of his divinity, and Paul because he was an apostle, came by their insight into their audience effortlessly, consider the text again. Both asked questions.

Willing to learn

Here’s an even more radical idea. As we ask questions of non-Christians, we must be prepared and eager to learn from them, not just gain ammunition or an opportunity for the gospel presentation that is to come. The conversation itself should have integrity. We are talking about having a relationship—whether briefly as we sit beside them on a plane or long-term as neighbors who can become good friends—with people for whom Christ died. And though they may know nothing of saving grace at the moment, they may, through God’s common grace have much to teach us about many things.

In the 1980s, Peter and Miranda Harris established A Rocha, a bird observatory and conservation center in Portugal. They welcomed strangers into their home,

inviting them to help conduct field studies, enjoy the creation, and care for the earth. They began A Rocha because they are Christians and so take seriously the biblical command to care tenderly for God’s world. John Stott calls A Rocha “an exciting, contemporary form of Christian mission.” Yet, as we might imagine, things don’t always flow smoothly in such a setting. People come and go, and studies of migratory birds must follow the bird’s schedule, come what may. “Many of those who stay here are far more impressive and seem far more calm and coherent than we do,” Peter Harris writes. “Among our early visitors were a couple with three small children, unmarried Vegans with an unswerving determination to live sensitively in the fragile environment of the planet. It is quite a challenge to encounter such radical commitment. Their serenity was impressive, not least because at the time we were trying to cope with a particularly full house.

[Their] quasi-Buddhist reverence was no path to God, although there were many things they could teach us.” Sometimes, Harris says, Christian visitors would “almost begin a conspiracy” to influence the non-Christians to believe in Jesus. “We would have no part of that,” he says. “We have no option but to be honest about him and ourselves... I can think of many conversations with many people, and often they are in the form of an adventure, because genuine questions need genuine answers. By definition, if we are going to listen to each other, we do not know where the conversation will lead us. Our relationships with each other and those who stay with us can be taken at face value, and hold no hidden agenda.”

The community lived out at A Rocha is far from perfect, but it is a setting in which both Christians and non-Christians can come together, learn from one another, work together to care for and enjoy creation, and converse as those who bear God’s image. And because Peter and Miranda Harris and their staff are believers, it is a place where numerous people have come to look at birds but leave having seen both birds and the truth of the gospel.

Comfortable with unbelievers

There is an offense to the cross, but a graceful life and manner of conversing is both warmly personal and profoundly attractive.

That is why sinners flocked to Jesus.

Yet, too often followers of Christ are uncomfortable around non-Christians. We feel ill at ease, and unable to simply enjoy a conversation with them that is relaxed and personal. “Not only did he come from heaven to earth to make contact with mankind,” Stott says of Christ, “but during his public ministry he mixed freely with the world. He attracted sinners. They knew that he had come to call them to repentance and that his message proclaimed righteousness. Yet, far from being repelled, ‘tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.’ He befriended them. He did not seem to be at all embarrassed by them; he was at ease in their company. His viewpoint was radically different from that of the Pharisees. ‘Pharisee’ means separatist. They would gather up their robes and recoil in self-righteous horror from the prostitute; Jesus allowed a prostitute to wash his feet with her tears and wipe them with her hair. The Pharisees had no dealings with publicans, regarding them as politically and morally despicable; Jesus entered publicans’ homes and ate with them. The Pharisees threw stones at lepers to make them keep their distance; Jesus stretched out his hand and touched a leper into health.” Christ never for a moment compromised nor did he ever withdraw. In fact, he was on comfortably intimate terms with the sort of people many Christians feel uneasy being around. “Are we like Jesus or the Pharisees?” Stott asks. “We find the company of Christians congenial and are uncomfortable in the presence of non-Christians. And in this we are poles apart from Jesus Christ.”

Though it is true that I might have more in common with a fellow Christian than with an unbeliever, discomfort and unease should not loom between me and my unbelieving friends. They too are made in God’s image, and like me, are sinners in need of grace. They are creative and significant, have much to teach me, and wrestle with similar questions, doubts, and fears. We would do well to become better conversationalists—and something good conversationalists all have in common is the ability to ask questions, a willingness to listen, and an eagerness to learn. Becoming more comfortable with these simple skills may make us more comfortable with people. Comfortable with conversations that are allowed to be

natural and holy spirited. Including conversations with people who do not share our deepest values and convictions.

Skill in asking questions

By God’s grace all of us can develop skill in asking questions. Not as a technique, but as a true desire to listen, to understand, and to befriend. There are a number of ways we can begin to do so.

First, we should pray for grace that we might grow in the skill. And remember as we pray that we are addressing the Lord who asked questions and listened with care to the answers. Not because he was clueless about things, but because he showed love by conversing with people in a way that demonstrated his care for them.

Related to that, we could spend time meditating on the biblical texts in which

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God (in the Old Testament) and Christ (in the New) ask questions. What were the questions like, why were they asked, and how did they probe the inner recesses of hearts and minds? Helpful in this study is Dick Keyes’ lecture, “Jesus the Questioner” given as a workshop at the 2002 Rochester L’Abri Conference—an audio tape can be ordered online (www.soundword.com).

We can also learn from people who are good at it. Some have written books in which their giftedness in asking keenly-crafted questions is evident. Though as a postmodern philosopher he believes that the question, rather than any final answer is all that we have, Christopher Phillips has dedicated his life to leading thoughtful discussions. His *Socrates Café* is a lively exchange of questions and ideas about things that matter. Sharon Parks is similarly helpful in her book *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*. And don’t miss Steven Garber’s book *The Fabric of Faithfulness*. The product of a mind and heart deeply immersed in the truth of God’s word, *Fabric* not only teaches us about knowing and doing, it also demonstrates how a master teacher asks questions that uncov-

er truth.

Better yet, begin to pray for a mentor who can demonstrate the skill. Attend a seminar led by Steven Garber or Donald Guthrie—two godly teachers who are especially gifted in asking questions. Seek to come alongside someone who is a comfortable conversationalist and learn from them.

We can also simply begin to actively trust God by asking more questions in conversations, whether with individuals or in groups. Over the years Margie and I have often covenanted together to “proclaim” less at the Bible study we were about to lead, and to teach primarily through asking questions. We’ve worked hard to develop questions ahead of time, and then tried to be sensitive listeners during the study so we could ask questions that prompt further reflection and discussion. And we’ve evaluated afterwards, seeking to learn from our

mistakes and giving thanks when by grace we’ve been used to stimulate people to think in new ways. When we have someone over for supper, we try to ask questions to

learn something of their spiritual pilgrimage, their doubts and ideas and hopes. These are small steps, perhaps, but they’ve helped us treat people as if they were truly made in God’s image. Be willing to be pushed outside your comfort zone. If someone’s answer to a question takes the conversation into an area about which you know nothing, relax. It’s a God-ordained opportunity to learn, to walk by faith, and when necessary, to say, “I haven’t got a clue.”

A few things are certain. It’s amazing how much you learn when you listen. It’s also amazing how cared for we feel when someone asks us a question and then really listens to the answer. And it’s amazing how the gospel is so rich and so deep that it addresses the reality of every person with their own ideas and values and yearnings. Not just in some general way, like a mortar shell lobbed in their vicinity, but like a sword piercing down into the recesses of their darkest secrets. They may reject that piercing, of course, but at least they won’t be able to dismiss it like they can the mortar shell, which is so impersonal and unspecific. They may even imagine the mortar wasn’t meant for them.

Learning to ask questions and listen, instead of simply issuing proclamations, doesn’t guarantee that the world will

believe. It may make us believers less argumentative and more winsome, however. And for those of us who wish to be like Christ, that would certainly be a step in the right direction. ■

~Denis Haack

Nash and Scotty McLennan (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2001) p. 130. *The Heart of Evangelism* by Jerram Barrs (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books; 2001) p. 234, 237. *Evangelism: Why & How* by John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1962) pp. 23-25. *Under the Bright Wings* by Peter Harris (London: Hodder & Stoughton; 1993) pp. 90-91, 95.

Sources:

Church on Sunday, Work on Monday: The Challenge of Fusing Christian Values with Business Life by Laura

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Can you think of a time you were taught something important by being asked questions instead of simply being told about it? How did it make you feel? How effective was the learning? Why do we find it difficult to ask questions? To listen?
2. Have you known anyone that was a gifted conversationalist? What was their impact?
3. Consider the quote by Peter Harris about learning from the Vegan couple that stayed with them at A Rocha. What is your response? Why? Also consider the quote about how they pursued conversations with those who came. What is your response? Why? Should we never have “an agenda” or “strategy” when talking to non-Christians? Why or why not? If you think an agenda permissible, are there any limits to this agenda? What would they be?
4. Several reasons were listed as to why we may feel uncomfortable in conversations with non-Christians. Can you think of others?
5. A Christian argues that in a conversation with an unbeliever, we should use the time when they speak not primarily to listen, but as an opportunity to prayerfully consider what we should say next, and how we can turn the conversation towards the gospel. Another argues that we don't really have much to listen to, since at root everything is simple: everyone is a sinner and needs forgiveness. Just get the conversation around to that and present Christ. How would you respond? Why?
6. Do you agree with the notion that our faith will not be winsome to unbelievers if we are uncomfortable with them, or ashamed of being seen with them, or uncomfortable conversing with them? Why or why not? Consider the quote by John R. W. Stott on the example of Christ. Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. What plans should you make to develop skill in asking questions?

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The Weight of Glory

by C.S. Lewis

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Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford,
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1942*

If you asked twenty good men to-day what they thought the highest of the virtues, nineteen of them would reply, Unselfishness. But if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old he would have replied, Love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative ideal of Unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others, but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point. I do not think this is the Christian virtue of Love. The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the

unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of reward. There is the reward which has no *natural connexion* with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it. A general who fights well in order to get a peerage is mercenary; a general who fights for victory is not, victory being the

proper reward of battle as marriage is the proper reward of love. The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation. There is also a third case, which is more complicated. An enjoyment of Greek poetry is certainly a proper, and not a mercenary, reward for learning Greek; but only those who have reached the stage of enjoying Greek poetry can tell from their own experience that this is so. The schoolboy beginning Greek grammar cannot look forward to his adult enjoyment of Sophocles as a lover looks forward to marriage or a general to victory. He has to begin by working for marks, or to escape punishment, or to please his parents, or, at best, in the hope of a future good which he cannot at present imagine or desire. His position, therefore, bears a certain resemblance to that of the mercenary; the reward he is going to get will, in actual fact, be a natural or proper reward, but he will not know that till he has got it. Of course, he gets it gradually; enjoyment creeps in upon the mere drudgery, and nobody could point to a day or an hour when the one ceased and the other began. But it is just in so far as he approaches the reward that he becomes able to desire it for its own sake; indeed, the power of so desiring it is itself a preliminary reward.

The Christian, in relation to heaven, is in much the same position as this schoolboy. Those who have attained everlasting life in the vision of God doubtless know very well that it is no mere bribe, but the very consummation of their earthly discipleship; but we who have not yet attained it cannot know this in the same

way, and cannot even begin to know it at all except by continuing to obey and finding the first reward of our obedience in our increasing power to desire the ultimate reward. Just in proportion as the desire grows, our fear lest it should be a mercenary desire will die away and finally be recognized as an absurdity. But probably this will not, for most of us, happen in a day; poetry replaces grammar, gospel replaces law, longing transforms obedience, as gradually as the tide lifts a grounded ship.

But there is one other important similarity between the schoolboy and ourselves. If he is an imaginative boy he will, quite probably, be revelling in the English poets and romancers suitable to his age some time before he begins to suspect that Greek grammar is going to lead him to more and more enjoyments of this same sort. He may even be neglecting his Greek to read Shelley and Swinburne in secret. In other words, the desire which Greek is really going to gratify already exists in him and is attached to objects which seem to him quite unconnected with Xenophon and the verbs in $\mu\iota$. Now, if we are made for heaven, the desire for our proper place will be already in us, but not yet attached to the true object, and will even appear as the rival of that object. And this, I think, is just what we find. No doubt there is one point in which my analogy of the schoolboy breaks down. The English poetry which he reads when he ought to be doing Greek exercises may be just as good as the Greek poetry to which the exercises are leading him, so that in fixing on Milton instead of journeying on to Aeschylus his desire is not embracing a

false object. But our case is very different. If a transtemporal, transfinite good is our real destiny, then any other good on which our desire fixes must be in some degree fallacious, must bear at best only a symbolical relation to what will truly satisfy.

In speaking of this desire for our own far-off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. Wordsworth's expedient was to identify it with certain moments in his own past. But all this is a cheat. If Wordsworth had gone back to those moments in the past, he would not have found the thing itself, but only the reminder of it; what he remembered would turn out to be itself a remembering. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them,

and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited. Do you think I am trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am; but remember your fairy tales. Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years. Almost our whole education has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent, inner voice; almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth. And yet it is a remarkable thing that such philosophies of Progress or Creative Evolution themselves bear reluctant witness to the truth that our real goal is elsewhere. When they want to convince you that earth is your home, notice how they set about it. They begin by trying to persuade you that earth can be made into heaven, thus giving a sop to your sense of exile in earth as it is. Next, they tell you that this fortunate event is still a good way off in the future, thus giving a sop to your knowledge that the fatherland is not here and now. Finally, lest your longing for the transtemporal should awake and spoil the whole affair, they use any rhetoric that comes to hand to keep out of your mind the recollection that even if all the happiness they promised

could come to man on earth, yet still each generation would lose it by death, including the last generation of all, and the whole story would be nothing, not even a story, for ever and ever. Hence all the nonsense that Mr. Shaw puts into the final speech of Lilith, and Bergson's remark that the *élan vital* is capable of surmounting all obstacles, perhaps even death—as if we could believe that any social or biological development on this planet will delay the senility of the sun or reverse the second law of thermodynamics.

Do what they will, then, we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy. But is there any reason to suppose that reality offers any satisfaction to it? “Nor does the being hungry prove that we have bread.” But I think it may be urged that this misses the point. A man's physical hunger does not prove that that man will get any bread; he may die of starvation on a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist. In the same way, though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will. A man may love a woman and not win her; but it would be very odd if the phenomenon called “falling in love” occurred in a sexless world.

Here, then, is the desire, still wandering and uncertain of its object and still largely unable to see that object in the direction where it really lies. Our sacred books give us some account of the object. It is, of

course, a symbolical account. Heaven is, by definition, outside our experience, but all intelligible descriptions must be of things within our experience. The scriptural picture of heaven is therefore just as symbolical as the picture which our desire, unaided, invents for itself; heaven is not really full of jewelry any more than it is really the beauty of Nature, or a fine piece of music. The difference is that the scriptural imagery has authority. It comes to us from writers who were closer to God than we, and it has stood the test of Christian experience down the centuries. The natural appeal of this authoritative imagery is to me, at first, very small. At first sight it chills, rather than awakes, my desire. And that is just what I ought to expect. If Christianity could tell me no more of the far-off land than my own temperament led me to surmise already, then Christianity would be no higher than myself. If it has more to give me, I must expect it to be less immediately attractive than “my own stuff.” Sophocles at first seems dull and cold to the boy who has only reached Shelley. If our religion is something objective, then we must never avert our eyes from those elements in it which seem puzzling or repellent; for it will be precisely the puzzling or the repellent which conceals what we do not yet know and need to know.

The promises of Scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised, firstly, that we shall be with Christ; secondly, that we shall be like Him; thirdly, with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have “glory”; fourthly, that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and, finally,

that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe—ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God’s temple. The first question I ask about these promises is: “Why any of them except the first?” Can anything be added to the conception of being with Christ? For it must be true, as an old writer says, that he who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only. I think the answer turns again on the nature of symbols. For though it may escape our notice at first glance, yet it is true that any conception of being with Christ which most of us can now form will be not very much less symbolical than the other promises; for it will smuggle in ideas of proximity in space and loving conversation as we now understand conversation, and it will probably concentrate on the humanity of Christ to the exclusion of His deity. And, in fact, we find that those Christians who attend solely to this first promise always do fill it up with very earthly imagery indeed—in fact, with hymeneal or erotic imagery. I am not for a moment condemning such imagery. I heartily wish I could enter into it more deeply than I do, and pray that I yet shall. But my point is that this also is only a symbol, like the reality in some respects, but unlike it in others, and therefore needs correction from the different symbols in the other promises. The variation of the promises does not mean that anything other than God will be our ultimate bliss; but because God is more than a Person, and lest we should imagine the joy of His presence too exclusively in terms of our present poor experience of personal love, with all its narrowness and strain and monotony, a

dozen changing images, correcting and relieving each other, are supplied.

I turn next to the idea of glory. There is no getting away from the fact that this idea is very prominent in the New Testament and in early Christian writings. Salvation is constantly associated with palms, crowns, white robes, thrones, and splendour like the sun and stars. All this makes no immediate appeal to me at all, and in that respect I fancy I am a typical modern. Glory suggests two ideas to me, of which one seems wicked and the other ridiculous. Either glory means to me fame, or it means luminosity. As for the first, since to be famous means to be better known than other people, the desire for fame appears to me as a competitive passion and therefore of hell rather than heaven. As for the second, who wishes to become a kind of living electric light bulb?

When I began to look into this matter I was stocked to find such different Christians as Milton, Johnson and Thomas Aquinas taking heavenly glory quite frankly in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures—fame with God, approval or (I might say) “appreciation’ by God. And then, when I had thought it over, I saw that this view was scriptural; nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine *accolade*, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” With that, a good deal of what I had been thinking all my life fell down like a house of cards. I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child—not in a conceited child, but in a good child—as its great and undisguised

pleasure in being praised. Not only in a child, either, but even in a dog or a horse. Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures—nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator. I am not forgetting how horribly this most innocent desire is parodied in our human ambitions, or how very quickly, in my own experience, the lawful pleasure of praise from those whom it was my duty to please turns into the deadly poison of self-admiration. But I thought I could detect a moment—a very, very short moment—before this happened, during which the satisfaction of having pleased those whom I rightly loved and rightly feared was pure. And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. She will be free from the miserable illusion that it is her doing. With no taint of what we should now call self-approval she will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made her to be, and the moment which heals her old inferiority complex for ever will also drown her pride deeper than Prospero's book. Perfect humility dispenses with modesty. If God is satisfied with the work, the work may be satisfied with itself; "it is not for her to bandy compliments with her Sovereign." I can imagine someone saying that he dislikes my idea of heaven as a place where we are patted on the back. But proud

misunderstanding is behind that dislike. In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised. I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God Himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of Him is of no importance except in so far as it is related to how He thinks of us. It is written that we shall "stand before" Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.

And now notice what is happening. If I had rejected the authoritative and scriptural image of glory and stuck obstinately to the vague desire which was, at the outset, my only pointer to heaven, I could have seen no connexion at all between that desire and the Christian promise. But now, having followed up what seemed puzzling and repellent in the sacred books, I find, to my great surprise, looking back, that the connexion is perfectly clear. Glory, as Christianity

teaches me to hope for it, turns out to satisfy my original desire and indeed to reveal an element in that desire which I had not noticed. By ceasing for a moment to consider my own wants I have begun to learn better what I really wanted. When I attempted, a few minutes ago, to describe our spiritual longings, I was omitting one of their most curious characteristics. We usually notice it just as the moment of vision dies away, as the music ends or as the landscape loses the celestial light. What we feel then has been well described by Keats as "the journey homeward to habitual self." You know what I mean. For a few minutes we have had the illusion of belonging to that world. Now we wake to find that it is no such thing. We have been mere spectators. Beauty has smiled, but not to welcome us; her face was turned in our direction, but not to see us. We have not been accepted, welcomed, or taken into the dance. We may go when we please, we may stay if we can: "Nobody marks us." A scientist may reply that since most of the things we call beautiful are inanimate, it is not very surprising that they take no notice of us. That, of course, is true. It is not the physical objects that I am speaking of, but that indescribable something of which they become for a moment the messengers. And part of the bitterness which mixes with the sweetness of that message is due to the fact that it so seldom seems to be a message intended for us but rather something we have overheard. By bitterness I mean pain, not resentment. We should hardly dare to ask that any notice be taken of ourselves. But we pine. The sense that in this universe we are treated as strangers, the longing to be acknowledged, to meet with some

response, to bridge some chasm that yawns between us and reality, is part of our inconsolable secret. And surely, from this point of view, the promise of glory, in the sense described, becomes highly relevant to our deep desire. For glory meant good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgment, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.

Perhaps it seems rather crude to describe glory as the fact of being "noticed" by God. But this is almost the language of the New Testament. St. Paul promises to those who love God not, as we should expect, that they will know Him, but that they will be known by Him (I Cor. viii. 3). It is a strange promise. Does not God know all things at all times? But it is dreadfully re-echoed in another passage of the New Testament. There we are warned that it may happen to any one of us to appear at last before the face of God and hear only the appalling words: "I never knew you. Depart from Me." In some sense, as dark to the intellect as it is unendurable to the feelings, we can be both banished from the presence of Him who is present everywhere and erased from the knowledge of Him who knows all. We can be left utterly and absolutely *outside*—repelled, exiled, estranged, finally and unspeakably ignored. On the other hand, we can be called in, welcomed, received, acknowledged. We walk every day on the razor edge between these two incredible possibilities. Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of

some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honour beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache.

And this brings me to the other sense of glory—glory as brightness, splendour, luminosity. We are to shine as the sun, we are to be given the Morning Star. I think I begin to see what it means. In one way, of course, God has given us the Morning Star already: you can go and enjoy the gift on many fine mornings if you get up early enough. What more, you may ask, do we want? Ah, but we want so much more—something the books on aesthetics take little notice of. But the poets and the mythologies know all about it. We do not want merely to *see* beauty, though, God knows, even that is bounty enough. We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. That is why we have peopled air and earth and water with gods and goddesses and nymphs and elves—that, though we cannot, yet these projections can, enjoy in themselves that beauty grace, and power of which Nature is the image. That is why the poets tell us such lovely falsehoods. They talk as if the west wind could really sweep into a human soul; but it can't. They tell us that “beauty born of murmuring sound” will pass into a human face; but it won't. Or not yet. For if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously, if we believe that God will one day *give* us the Morning Star and cause us to *put on*

the splendour of the sun, then we may surmise that both the ancient myths and the modern poetry, so false as history, may be very near the truth as prophecy. At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Some day, God willing, we shall get *in*. When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch. For you must not think that I am putting forward any heathen fancy of being absorbed into Nature. Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol; but it is the symbol Scripture invites me to use. We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into that splendour which she fitfully reflects.

And in there, in beyond Nature, we shall eat of the tree of life. At present, if we are reborn in Christ, the spirit in us lives directly on God; but the mind, and still more the body, receives life from Him at a thousand removes—through our ancestors, through our food, through the elements. The faint, far-off results of those energies which God's creative rapture implanted in matter when He made the worlds are what we now call physical pleasures; and even thus filtered, they are too much for our present management. What would it be to

taste at the fountain-head that stream of which even these lower reaches prove so intoxicating? Yet that, I believe, is what lies before us. The whole man is to drink joy from the fountain of joy. As St. Augustine said, the rapture of the saved soul will “flow over” into the glorified body. In the light of our present specialized and depraved appetites we cannot imagine this *torrens voluptatis*, and I warn everyone seriously not to try. But it must be mentioned, to drive out thoughts even more misleading—thoughts that what is saved is a mere ghost, or that the risen body lives in numb insensibility. The body was made for the Lord, and these dismal fancies are wide of the mark.

Meanwhile the cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning. A cleft has opened in the pitiless walls of the world, and we are invited to follow our great Captain inside. The following Him is, of course, the essential point. That being so, it may be asked what practical use there is in the speculations which I have been indulging. I can think of at least one such use. It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. The load, or weight, or burden of my neighbour's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted

to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously—no flippancy, no superiority, no presumption. And our charity must be a real and costly love, with deep feeling for the sins in spite of which we love the sinner—no mere tolerance or indulgence which parodies love as flippancy parodies merriment. Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour he is holy in almost the same way, for in him also Christ *vere latitat*—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.

Certainty: Taking a Bite Out of a Dangling Carrot, Part 1 of 2

By Esther L. Meek
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"Know" is an odd word! Suppose I say that I *know* that my husband is at the hardware store. Doesn't it seem as if he absolutely has to be there? Suppose I find out later that he really was at the bookstore. Then I have to fix what I said before: I no longer say that I *knew* he was at the hardware store; I say I *thought* he was at the hardware store. "Know" is a success word: to use it is to imply that you were successful at getting the truth right.

This odd feature has led philosophers ever since Plato (400 BC) to assume that for a person to say that he or she knows something, that truth claim can't possibly be wrong - it must be *certain*. Obviously, people serious about truth would therefore try to think up a way to test truth claims to see if they meet this ideal of certainty.

Who Cares About Certainty?

The quest is not limited to philosophers. It engages every serious human being. Anyone who has asked the question, "How can I be sure that this claim is true?" -- anyone who has said they *knew* something, and later found out they were wrong -- has been touched by this pressing question.

Every believer in Jesus Christ has had to wrestle with this question. To decide to be a Christian is first and foremost a decision to believe certain claims to be true. We accept Jesus Christ as Savior -- that is, we take to be true what the Bible says about who Jesus is and what He does for us. Whatever other fruits there are of the Spirit's work in our lives, believing truly is one of them, and perhaps the earliest: "The work of God is to believe the one that God has sent." (John 6:29) "No one says that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:3) And when the Church confesses its faith, it does so by giving a list of claims that it takes to be true: the Apostles' Creed.

Many of us can remember a time when the decision to believe God's Word was up for grabs. This was true when we first decided to trust Christ. It engages us afresh every time new or difficult circumstances press us to ask whether God and His Word are indeed trustworthy. To struggle with doubts about Christianity is to fear that we might be wrong. All of us ask the "epistemological" question: how do we know that these claims are true? How can I be sure, or *certain*?

As a teenaged Christian, I struggled with such doubts, as well as with a strong sense of guilt: If to know something is to be certain of it, then I couldn't say I knew Christ; and if I didn't know Christ, then maybe I wasn't a Christian. How can I be a good Christian if I doubt that Christianity is true? My own pursuit of philosophy, through study and teaching, has all along been shaped by the question of truth and certainty.

I was grappling with the "modernist" approach to knowledge which reigned through my teenage years. Today teenagers (of all ages!) wrestle with a "postmodernist" dilemma. The consensus now is that absolute truth simply isn't possible. All anybody has a right to hope for is personal truth or certainty. To claim absolute truth (as Christians do when they embrace Christ!) is the height of arrogance. This is just as painful a challenge for the believer to face as the one I faced.

Modernists and postmodernists actually agree about what truth is like. Both assert that it is universal knowledge that couldn't possibly be mistaken ("certain"), unshaped by personal or subjective contributions. But the modernist believes such knowledge is possible, and the postmodernist thinks it isn't. While the consensus has shifted in the recent decade or so to the postmodernist point of view, modernism continues to thrive in pockets -- among groups of people and at various periods in our lives. Thoughtful Christians must address both challenges.

To restate our concern: What right do I have to say that I know that what the Bible says, or any truth claim at all, is true? How can I act responsibly in this area? How can I please God if I'm not certain? Here's a closely linked question: How can I persuade others that these claims are true? How do I get prepared to "give a reason for the hope that is within me" (1 Peter 3:15)?

Pursuing the Carrot

The history of philosophy chronicles the quest for certainty. Classical philosophers believed certainty depends on apprehending the proper sort of object -- a permanent and unchanging reality. Modern philosophers shifted the ground of certainty to the mind -- the knower's self-evident claims and orderly procedures guarantee reliable knowledge.

Medieval philosophers introduced a distinction between claims we believe because God reveals them in Scripture and claims we know on the basis of human reasoning. The faith/reason distinction held the fatal implication that our beliefs fall outside the realm of rational knowledge.

It may sound super-spiritual to say that we believe God in the absence of (human) reason. But unbelievers have simply dismissed religious claims as *rationaly illegitimate*, which is worse than saying they are *false*. We experience pressure to keep our religious affairs *private*. We often feel doubly uncertain of our own religious claims: not only do they lose the certainty game, but they don't even qualify to be in the ballpark.

The Carrot Proves Illusory

The ideal of certainty in knowledge is this: I must accept as true only those claims of which I am rationally certain. Philosophers in recent decades have exposed a fatal flaw in this lofty ideal. If I must accept as true only those claims of which I am certain, what about the claim that I must accept as true only those claims of which I am certain? (This is not a typographical error! Think about it!) The ideal does not meet its own standard; it is an expression of faith.

What's more, the philosopher of science Michael Polanyi has argued, if we limited "knowledge" to claims that meet this standard of certainty, we would know nothing. Just about everybody can see this if they stop to think about it. If scientists had been so limited, no scientific discovery ever would have taken place. If students had been restricted to certainty, no learning ever would have taken place. But learning and discovery occur regularly. Therefore...write the conclusion yourself. Certainty -- that fat old carrot that's been tantalizing us -- is a misguided ideal.

Whither Now?

Do we cheer or weep with the collapse of the ideal of certainty? Postmodernists and modernists would have us believe that if modernism fails, all that is left is postmodernism. If the ideal of certainty proves unattainable, no objective truth is possible at all. Modernism condemned Christians for believing less-than-certain claims; postmodernism condemns Christians for arrogantly holding out for certainty when it's obviously impossible. Are we for certainty or against it? Neither feels like a fit.

Hope lies in pursuing a third alternative. Not only are modernism and postmodernism both impossible; but both Scripture and common sense -- not to mention the work of Polanyi and several others -- point in another direction.

I'd like to sketch this solution in the next issue (a real serial thriller!!). But let us not leave the carrot dangling untouched.

Something Bigger and Better Than the Carrot

The classical philosophers grounded certainty (and hence knowledge) in the existence of a properly permanent object. The modern philosophers grounded certainty in the knowing self. Ask yourself this question: Where does the Bible ground knowledge? Some Bible verses come immediately to mind. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 1:7). Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus is the Word who is God and who was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1). The Bible teaches us to acknowledge one ground -- of truth, of life, of anything -- alone: the living and true God. To do otherwise is to violate the first commandment: no other gods before me. To know Christ is not only to have the answers, but to have the questions redefined and asked by Somebody else.

If certainty requires that I be sure of what I claim to be true, then the Lord requires something of me more basic than certainty. It is trust and obedience. This fact actually

kept me going through years of doubt. I chose to live as a Christian even though I wasn't dead sure.

Now I see that this is no stopgap measure but rather the proper approach to knowing. More fundamental than my search for truth is my relationship with the source of it. How right the founders of Covenant Seminary were when they chose its name! For God's relationship to us is our ultimate context -- the biggest "room" in which we find ourselves, our life, our purpose, *and* our knowing.

I'm not saying, "Don't think! Just believe!" I'm saying, "Trust in order to understand" (*Credo ut intelligam*, as Augustine said). "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God" (John 7:17).

In this respect knowledge of God is not different but actually just the same as "ordinary" knowledge! How many of you rely on a mechanic's assessment of your car or a doctor's assessment of your health? Until next time, pay attention to the statements you claim to know and the grounds on which you say you know them!

Certainty: Taking a Bite Out of a Dangling Carrot, Part 2 of 2

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The surgeon reported that my husband's prostate tested positively for cancer. He advised removing it immediately. Imagine Jim's emotions that morning as he checked in for surgery. He felt perfectly healthy. On the strength of one man's testimony and a couple pathology reports, my husband was turning over his body to the invasion of a scalpel that would bring danger, pain, and a difficult, lengthy recovery. What an agonizingly risky cognitive act.

Life is full of such acts, some more difficult than others. One of these is trusting Christ as Savior. What is involved in saying that we *know* God?

The Dangling Carrot of Certainty

In Part 1 we talked about certainty in knowledge. It seems that to say we know something implies that we are certain of it and that it cannot be false. If so, any doubts I have about Christianity being true imply that I don't know it. How can I be a Christian if I have doubts?

We saw that certainty is a false ideal: it is both logically impossible and practically futile to hold out for truths that are incapable of being doubted. Such an ideal is like a carrot that's been dangling before us, leading at least this old donkey in the wrong direction.

Cognitive Acts -- Religious and Otherwise

To help us with our doubts, we need to rethink knowing, faith, reason, and certainty. I'd like to describe what I think goes on in any act of knowing -- any cognitive or epistemic act. I want to show that a religious act of knowing is no different from a non-religious one. Both contain elements of "faith" and elements of "reason." Both can be successful; both can be mistaken. Both can be doubted but are not thereby discredited. Both can be accompanied by certainty of a proper sort. From this exercise we can draw deep encouragement.

For example: trusting God, considered as an act of knowing, is no different from trusting your doctor. Discovering that Jesus is the Messiah is no different from Claudio, in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, discovering that Hero is, after all, virtuous. Seeing that Christianity offers the best explanation of our human experience compares to a mechanic's diagnosis of my car's mysterious clunk. If one sort involves sense perception and reason, so does the other. If one involves choice, risk, commitment, faith, so does the other.

I don't mean to say that each is equally important. Nothing is more important than believing that what the Bible says is true. But this doesn't mean that as an act of knowing it works any differently, or that one is superior to the other.

"Oh! I See It!"

Let's think about the act of knowing. Think of a Magic Eye 3-D picture. You are given a complex, apparently repeating, pattern of shapes and colors. You are told to focus your eyes beyond the frame of the picture. If you do this, there comes a moment when you see three-dimensional objects, perhaps dolphins swimming in a tropical ocean, leap up out of the surface of the picture. Your words are likely to be, "Oh! I see it!" Your emotion: a tremendous sense of accomplishment.

Michael Polanyi helped me think of the act of knowing as the creative integration of clues into a meaningful whole. With the 3-D picture you start with a bunch of meaningless, apparently unrelated particulars. Your eyes do something that, even if you could explain it, wouldn't guarantee that you could actually *perform* it. Then something happens -- that's hard to explain, too -- and all that unrelated stuff integrates into a meaningful whole. In the integrated whole, all the unrelated particulars take on meaning as clues. In the act of integration, you no longer focus on the particulars; you rely on the particulars in a subsidiary way to focus on the whole.

I love applying this model to just about any act of living I can think of. Think of wielding a crochet hook or a golf club. Think of driving a car or reading a fairy tale. Do you not focus somehow beyond the particulars of what you're actually doing, relying on them to accomplish something meaningful? If you were to stop and think about your particular bodily actions, the whole procedure would grind to a halt. We live in bodily actions to focus beyond us. The integrative act is rooted in our real body and stretches to explain and appropriate the real world around us.

All acts of knowing have this creatively reaching and grasping quality. When God commanded humans to subdue the earth, he gave a command that exactly matched the epistemic makeup he had built into us. We can't resist the compulsion to make sense of our surroundings.

Much Ado About Nothing

What are the particulars that get integrated into a whole? These at least: our own body's activity (just what is your optical nerve doing as you read this sentence?), perceptual data, and also previous conceptions and commitments. Let's think about Claudio seeing Hero amorously involved with another man on the eve of her wedding. This is what he believes he sees. We know he sees another woman being called "Hero" in the act. Hero is asleep in her room. Claudio's truth claim: "Hero is not virtuous, even though she was presented as such."

In addition to what he *sees*, there must be some other particulars, and the audience knows there are. Don John, the Count's evil brother, deceives him, pretending to do him a favor. Added into the epistemic act are certain *beliefs* suggested by Don John: "Hero is not really virtuous, and this can be shown by looking." "More than one eyewitness can see this." It also involves certain *criteria* for how to evaluate truth claims: "I ought to believe the brother of my superior more than I ought to believe the professions of my fiance and her family." For this last one the audience could punch him in the nose.

"Seeing is believing," we say. But Claudio proves that what he believes shapes what he sees. Does this make Claudio postmodernist? No! First he thinks with outrage that he is right; then he thinks with the deepest remorse that he was wrong. And we know that he is right to think he was wrong.

Faith and Reason, Mistakes and Doubt

This cognitive act, like all cognitive acts, had elements of reason. It is more reasonable to trust my senses than to distrust them. It is more reasonable to believe this person than that one. If Hero is involved with this man, then she is not a maid. She is involved; therefore, she is not a maid. Therefore, I have been betrayed.

It also contains elements of faith. No integrative act of knowing ever reduces without remainder to its subsidiary particulars. The claim itself is a credo: I believe that Hero is not virtuous. I should believe what Don John is telling me and what the Count confirms. I ought to denounce this girl because of what she has done to me.

The act is capable of being mistaken; in fact it is mistaken. It is also possible to be right about what happened. And doubt at any point would have been legitimate, especially if Claudio had only stopped to think a little harder about what he was doing.

Jesus Does Epistemology

Compare Claudio's cognitive act with several in the Bible, namely, the disciples coming to *know* Christ. Compare it also with your own conversion. Jesus appeals to sense perception guided by an authoritative interpretation. Jesus asks about John the Baptist, *What is it that you saw?* as he teaches the people who John (and who he himself) really is. Sometimes little commentary is needed. Peter *sees* the empty fishnet suddenly fill with fish, the disciples *see* the winds and waves calm at a word; they act as if they've *seen* God (!)

At other times it feels more like an unreasonable choice and is accompanied by doubt. John the Baptist *doubts* that Jesus is the one who is to come, especially as he himself faces execution. Thomas naturally *doubts* that Jesus has risen from the dead.

Jesus responds with evidence, but never claims that we'll see it as evidence without some supernatural eye-opening. Jesus says, "Tell John what you've *seen and heard*." Jesus lovingly makes Thomas eat his words: "Put your fingers in the spike wounds.

Stop doubting and believe." My favorite: the two crestfallen disciples talk theology with the risen Jesus they haven't recognized. Then occurs Scripture's most wonderful, Spirit-prompted, *Oh! I see it!* moment.

"Stop doubting and believe" aptly expresses the epistemic act, the act of knowing: put your trust in what I tell you and you'll perceive aright. Scripture also makes it perfectly clear: only if the Holy Spirit graciously opens your eyes, eyes disposed to rebel against their maker, will you grasp the truth.

Sometimes trusting God feels like the Magic Eye -- sudden recognition. Sometimes it feels like my husband's trusting the surgeon -- agonizing choice. These are divergent points on a spectrum that characterizes every epistemic act. The degree of doubt doesn't disqualify the act. God continually demonstrates his patience with the doubts of crabby psalmists and cocky disciples.

Certainty -- Proper Confidence

Can we be certain of anything? Yes, if by certainty we mean the confidence or trust we place in a truth claim. While any truth claim relies on evidence, it also involves submission to a criterion of evaluation, often a person whose word we trust. Claudio should have trusted Hero's word and not Don John's. I believe my mechanic's words because I know him to be truthful. Even more, I believe God's Word because I have put my trust in His steadfastly perfect character: "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced (certain, confident) that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day." (2 Timothy 1:12).

If certainty is trust, and God is who he says he is, our proper epistemic confidence must be placed in God alone. To do otherwise is idolatrous, not to mention misguided. This is a *resolve* I can maintain even when I doubt. And in its light he promises me that I will apprehend truth. I will know the One who is Truth. *Credo ut intelligam*.

Taking the Swagger Out of Christian Cultural Influence

By: John Piper

The fact that Christians are exiles on the earth (1 Peter 2:11) does not mean that they don't care what becomes of culture. But it does mean that they exert their influence as very happy, brokenhearted outsiders. We are exiles. "Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). "Here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

But we are very happy sojourners, because we have been commanded by our bloody Champion to rejoice in exile miseries. "Blessed are you when others... persecute you... on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matthew 5:11-12). We are happy because the apostle Paul showed us that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). We are happy because there are merciful foretastes everywhere in this fallen world, and God is glad for us to enjoy them (1 Timothy 4:3; 6:17). And we are happy because we know that the exiles will one day inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). Christ died for sinners so that "all things" might one day belong to his people (Romans 8:32).

But our joy is a brokenhearted joy, because Christ is worthy of so much better obedience than we Christians render. Our joy is a brokenhearted joy because so many people around the world have not heard the good news that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). And our joy is a brokenhearted joy because human culture — in every society — dishonors Christ, glories in its shame, and is bent on self-destruction.

This includes America. American culture does not belong to Christians, neither in reality nor in Biblical theology. It never has. The present tailspin toward Sodom is not a fall from Christian ownership. "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). It has since the fall, and it will till Christ comes in open triumph. God's rightful ownership will be manifest in due time. The Lordship of Christ over all creation is being manifest in stages, first the age of groaning, then the age of glory. "We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23). The exiles are groaning with the whole creation. We are waiting.

But Christian exiles are not passive. We do not smirk at the misery or the merrymaking of immoral culture. We weep. Or we should. This is my main point: being exiles does not mean being cynical. It does not mean being indifferent or uninvolved. The salt of the earth does not mock rotting meat. Where it can, it saves and seasons. And where it can't, it weeps. And the light of the world does not withdraw, saying "good riddance" to godless darkness. It labors to illuminate. But not dominate.

Being Christian exiles in American culture does not end our influence; it takes the swagger out of it. We don't get cranky that our country has been taken away. We don't whine about the triumphs of evil. We are not hardened with anger. We understand. This is not new. This was the way it was in the beginning — Antioch, Corinth, Athens, Rome. The Empire was not just degenerate, it was deadly. For three explosive centuries Christians paid for their Christ-exalting joy with blood. Many still do. More will.

It never occurred to those early exiles that they should rant about the ubiquity of secular humanism. The Imperial words were still ringing in their ears: "You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved" (Mark 13:13). This was a time for indomitable joy and unwavering ministries of mercy.

Yes, it was a time for influence — as it is now. But not with huffing and puffing as if to reclaim our lost laws. Rather with tears and persuasion and perseverance, knowing that the folly of racism, and the exploitation of the poor, and the de-Godding of education, and the horror of abortion, and the collapse of heterosexual marriage, are the tragic death-tremors of joy, not the victory of the left or the right.

The greatness of Christian exiles is not success but service. Whether we win or lose, we witness to the way of truth and beauty and joy. We don't own culture, and we don't rule it. We serve it with brokenhearted joy and longsuffering mercy, for the good of man and the glory of Jesus Christ.

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A Reformed Response To:

Is Science a Religion?,

By: Richard Dawkins, *The Humanist*, Jan./Feb. 1997., pp 26-29

By: Jonathan Barlow

Introduction

The article presently under examination is a transcript of a speech made to the American Humanist Association by Richard Dawkins on the occasion of his being named "Humanist of the Year, 1996". Filled with his customary rhetorical excess (and also his much-appreciated humor), Dawkins' speech provides a good opportunity for Christians to take note of the role of presuppositions in every intellectual endeavor and the role of self-deception in unbelief.

The Faith of Science

Dawkins begins his speech by comparing the threat of AIDS and "mad-cow" disease to the threat posed by faith. He writes that faith is "one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate" (p 26). Dawkins defines faith as "belief that isn't based on evidence" and calls it the "principle [sic] vice of any religion" (ibid). Reformed Christians realize that this definition of faith is a caricature. Instead of viewing faith as belief that is not based upon evidence, we view faith as that which is a pre-condition for gaining any other knowledge; faith itself is not irrational or unscientific, but that which must be in order to gain other knowledge through science and logic. For instance, confidence in the law of non-contradiction could be said to be faith. There is no direct way to prove the law of contradiction except that it must be presupposed in order to learn anything or differentiate anything from anything else. Likewise, the principle of induction, which states that the future will be generally like the past, is what makes possible the formulation of scientific laws and theories. We cannot test the truth of this principle scientifically, for we would be assuming the truth of induction to try and prove it. We cannot test the truth of the principle logically, for logic has as its subject matter static propositions. Thus, induction and the law of contradiction, two of the bedrocks upon which all the rest of Richard Dawkins' knowledge is based, are both things he must accept on faith. Dawkins does not believe this, however, and directs this entire speech at demolishing the notion that science is a religion, or at least a faith-based discipline.

Dawkins and the Apostle Thomas

Dawkins writes, "Well, science is not religion and it doesn't just come down to faith. Although it has many of religion's virtues, it has none of its vices. Science is based upon verifiable evidences" (27). What we have seen above, however, is that science is based upon evidences which are themselves held to be true because of principles which are accepted on faith, induction and the laws of logic. No understanding of the philosophy of science seems to be evidenced by Dawkins' statements. He, in fact, appears to have the same honorific view of science as the technology-stunned hoi polloi. Dawkins compares science, which he sees as being based upon "verifiable evidence" with religion which he says shouts "independence from evidence" from the rooftops (ibid.). This is why, he says, we Christians criticize Thomas, the disciple who doubted Jesus' resurrection. He writes, "The other apostles are held up to us as exemplars of virtue because faith was enough for them. Doubting Thomas, on the other hand, required evidence. Perhaps he should be

the patron saint of scientists" (27). Let us examine the Thomas story, so as not to let any of Dawkins' erroneous statements pass by without comment.

First of all, Dawkins says that the disciples only believed based upon faith. This is not at all accurate. In John 20:19 and following we find Jesus, after his resurrection, appearing miraculously in a locked room among the disciples. He "came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you!' After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord" (Jn 20:19,20). Jesus not only appears to them, but he also shows them his wounded side and wounded hands to prove to them that he is the crucified, but resurrected Jesus. Where is the faith here?

Well, Thomas wasn't with the other disciples, so they reported to him what they had seen. Ten of his best friends all reported to him the same thing, that Jesus was resurrected. He did not believe them, however. Is this because he refused to believe on faith? No. There was the evidence of ten eyewitnesses, and yet he refused to believe, even given all the miraculous things he had already witnessed. How many journal articles must Dawkins read before he agrees with the findings of the scientific community? Has he seen all the calculations which allow us to postulate the existence of sub-atomic particles? Doesn't the testimony of witnesses count as evidence for Dawkins? I would imagine so, or else he would be forced to personally verify every experiment upon which he bases his current research.

Thomas' answer is more revealing of his attitude than his evidential requirements. He says to his 10 closest friends, whose word he doubts, "Unless I see the nail marks in the hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (Jn 20:25). Notice how strident Thomas' evidential ultimatum is. One thing that should be clear is that one's expectation for verification must match the entity under question. What if I stated, "I will not believe in the existence of Saltine Crackers until I eat one and it makes a sweet taste in my mouth"? This would be absurd. I would be requiring verification that is not and could not be accessible to me -- verification inappropriate to the entity under question. Suppose Jesus had come back with a non-scarred side and non-scarred hands. Suppose he appeared to the ten and then decided to re-enter heaven. Thomas' requirement for verification would be unreasonable. As it turns out, Thomas may not have even fulfilled his stated evidential standards before he believed. When confronted with Jesus personally, Thomas can do nothing but declare "My Lord and my God!" (v 28). Jesus' response is perhaps where Dawkins and the rest of the atheistic or so-called "freethought" community have received their impetus to use Thomas as the poster-child for Enlightenment rationalism and Baconian empiricism. He says to Thomas, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (29). In context, this quote is easily understood to be speaking of a different kind of belief required in the post-apostolic era. In the Gospels are recorded many miraculous acts of Jesus. Many who witnessed these events with their very eyes did not even believe! Some did, however. Now that Jesus is returning to heaven, there will be no chance to believe based upon sight. One must believe based upon the testimony of the apostles. Thomas' brand of faith is inappropriate for the apostolic era and beyond. Analogously, I must believe in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln based upon the testimony of witnesses. I cannot demand to see the event personally in order to believe it. Such a requirement is inappropriate for this time in history. Thomas, likewise, is held up to be an example of one whose brand of faith was too crude for the coming era. The question is not faith versus evidence, but what kind of evidence! If believing the testimony of witnesses is a kind of faith that scientists are not to embrace, then why are there scientific journals? (Dawkins here may well respond that scientists often include their data in journal articles, and thus their experiments can be checked. But who is to say that the scientists are honest in the reporting of their findings?)

Dawkins and Morality

On page 27, Dawkins calls faith a "vice". He criticizes scientists who falsify evidence. He calls science "one of the most moral, one of the most honest disciplines around - because science would completely collapse if it weren't for a scrupulous adherence to honesty in the reporting of evidence". He criticizes the law profession for being based upon the falsifying, or at least the twisting, of evidence. On page 28 he calls religious instruction "mental child abuse" stating that it is wrong to inculcate children in a particular religion. On page 29, Dawkins draws a finer point on the issue of morality writing, "When the religious

education class turns to ethics, I don't think science actually has a lot to say, and I would replace it with rational moral philosophy." Further, "It's a rewarding question, whatever your personal morality, to ask as an evolutionist where morals come from; by what route has the human brain gained its tendency to have ethics and morals, a feeling of right and wrong?" He hints that a "thinking and feeling chimpanzee" should have more rights than "a human fetus with the faculties of a worm". He writes, responding to the charge of scientific zealotry, "Sometimes there may be a little bit of justice in this accusation; but as zealous bigots, we scientists are mere amateurs at the game. We're content to argue with those who disagree with us. We don't kill them". Here, apparently, Dawkins means to say that arguing is morally better than killing. As the above testifies, it is truly amazing how much time Dawkins devotes to ethical issues. Let us ask, however, what kind of pronouncements Dawkins is able to make about ethical issues given his view of the world.

For Dawkins, human beings are animals that have evolved from lower forms of life and ultimately from non-life. They have material brains which have formed alongside material arms, legs, and colons. Somehow, a sense of feeling that some things are right and wrong have welled up in the human mind over the course of evolution. Ethical feelings are epiphenomena, feelings that have developed out of the chemical construction of the brain which itself evolved to possess this capacity. What does this mean? This means that ethical norms are like opposable thumbs, an inherited trait that has evolved gradually from non-life. Ultimately, in Dawkins' particular scientific world-view, there is nothing but matter. Thus, ethical obligations are mere feelings like indigestion or fear. How then, does Dawkins make pronouncements about how children ought to be taught? How does he know that it is better to let them decide about religion for themselves? Suppose someone else felt the epiphenomenon of obligation to teach his children his own religion. How does Dawkins propose going about arbitrating between the two feelings, his and the religious educator? He offers one alternative - rational moral philosophy, a discipline which has not exactly been responsible for very much agreement in the past! How does he decide which is more rational, killing someone for fun or killing someone in self-defense? It seems that since the former produces the state of mind "fun" and the latter is simply a response to the negative state of mind "fear", the former is a more positive, and thus presumably a more rational, thing to seek out. Of course, he is no more able to define rationality in terms of his Darwinistic world-view than he is able to define the ethical. For both are mere epiphenomena like fear, pain or pre-menstrual syndrome. Dawkins would do well to avoid altogether this subject for which his own world-view provides no answers, only a morass. In Dawkins' world-view, people are just animals battling it out in history -- it is no more ethical to let our children decide for themselves about religious issues than it is to grind them up and use them to fertilize the family garden.

Christianity, however, provides a coherent basis for ethics. There is an absolute person, God, and thus his unchanging character, and the ethical aspects of his character, can serve as absolute ethical norms. An added element is that with the character of an absolute God as our guide for ethical obligations we are not left in the dark because God is a person who can reveal his character to us. Not only are there obligations, then, but we can know them. The amazing amount of consolation Dawkins receives from his self-satisfaction with atheistic ethics is further evidence of his self-deception with regard to the possibility of ethics within his world-view. At least Christianity provides the ethical tools needed to critique the behavior of its own. Christians can condemn the actions of the Spanish Inquisition. Scientists like Dawkins, however, cannot even give a coherent reason for why the biological experiments of the Nazis were unethical.

Dawkins and Awe

Dawkins writes,

"All the great religions have a place for awe, for ecstatic transport at the wonder and beauty of creation. And it's exactly this feeling of spine-shivering, breath-catching awe - almost worship - this flooding of the chest with ecstatic wonder, that modern science can provide ... The merest glance through a microscope at the brain of an ant or through a telescope at a long-ago galaxy of a billion worlds is enough to render poky and parochial the very psalms of praise" (27).

Later, however, he writes, "we know from the second law of thermodynamics that all complexity, all life, all laughter, all sorrow, is hell-bent on leveling itself out into cold nothingness in the end. They - and we - can never be more than temporary, local buckings of the great universal slide into the abyss of uniformity" (29). So is science a good source of encouragement and awe, or for despair and nihilism? Dawkins' universe is one in which humans are animals presently evolving and battling it out until the time when the "sun will engulf the earth" (29). I'm not so sure that Dawkins has made his case that science replaces religion's sense of wonder and awe. Assume for a moment that an absolute person designed and created the ant's brain with all of its minute detail; assume for a moment that a loving God made the crab nebula and the planets and stars in all their vast array! Which is more awe-inspiring, the creation or the creator? I'm not giving an argument for God's existence, here, only that given his existence as creator, he is more awesome than the creation.

Conclusion

I would do well at this point to break away and leave Dawkins in the morass of his purely contingent universe in which not even logic, science, and morality make any sense. For all of his huff and puff against faith, Dawkins lives in a drafty house of pure scientism that he has sealed up with faith -- faith in logic, of whose foundations he can give no account, faith in induction, upon which he builds science, and faith in the evolving human brain and the evolving human society to more often produce Martin Luther Kings than John Wayne Gacys.

For Further Reading

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