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# Chalcedon report

#445

**A Monthly Report Dealing with the Relationship of Christian Faith to the World**

## The Wonderful Works of the Lord

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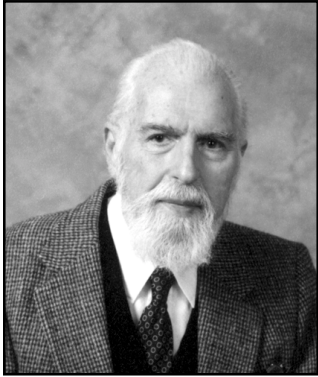
**Rev. R. J. Rushdoony** (1916-2001) was the founder of Chalcedon and a leading theologian, church/state expert, and author of numerous works on the application of Biblical Law to society.

**Rev. Mark R. Rushdoony** is president of Chalcedon and Ross House Books. He is also editor in chief of the *Chalcedon Report* and Chalcedon's other publications.

**Susan Burns** is Chalcedon's executive assistant and managing editor of the *Chalcedon Report* and Chalcedon's other publications.

**Ronald Kirk** is engaged in research and development promoting Chalcedon's work to Christian schools and home educators.

**Rebecca Rouse is Chalcedon's Circulation and Data Manager.  
Contact her at (209) 736-4365 ext. 10 or [chaloffi@goldrush.com](mailto:chaloffi@goldrush.com)**



# Family and Civilization

By R. J. Rushdoony

(Presented to the California Home Educators' Association  
in Anaheim, California in 1997)

To reduce civilization to political entities, races, nationalities, or other like groupings is to insure misunderstanding, for a civilization is at heart a *faith* and a *community*. The faith is of course *religious*. Civilization for us is a Christian one based on Jesus Christ as Lord and the Bible as God's enscriptured Word. But civilization is not only the expression of a faith, it is being part of a *community*. There is a very important distinction here that in our time is often obscured, the difference between *becoming a member*, as against *belonging*. We can become a member of a club, of a social circle, or of a church; but, where a family is concerned, we do not join it: we *belong* to it, and not by choice. Membership means choice, whereas belonging means no choice because it is something we are born into and, like our bodies, is always a part of us. This is God's ordination, not ours. We may rebel against God's choice, but to do so is useless and morally wrong. We can change churches, but we cannot alter the nature of our birth and its locale.

## The Basic Community

Now the family is the basic community; its ties are normally life-long. But *faith* also means community, and Jesus Christ requires that, if need be, we leave father, mother, and children for His sake (*Mt. 10:37*). If *faith* and *family* coincide, we then have an especial strength as we face the world.

From the Christian perspective, faith and the family are basic to civilization, and culture is religion externalized, to use Henry R. Van Til's definition. From the viewpoint of humanism, education and technology are basic. One writer, for example, sees utopia ahead by means of licensing all parents, guaranteeing work for all, and so on and on, even to ending death itself, and all progress is seen as inevitable because of evolution! Randal Craig Fasnacht (*Life Child: The End of Poverty, The Case for Licensing All Parents*, 1992) is indeed a man of great faith in Darwin's theory. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:26 declares that Christ will finally destroy death itself. For Fasnacht, a blind, impersonal evolution will do so.

The difference between the two positions is very great. For Fasnacht, civilization is an automatic goal of evolution, whereas for us it is the expression of a faith and a community. This impersonal and mechanical vein of things is currently responsible for our problems. Society is reduced to the outworking of blind, biological forces.

During the tenth century, there was a radical disintegration of public authority in Europe. Its origins were certainly in the decline of the Faith, not impersonal, evolutionary sources. The revival of civilization came about because of a *faith* revival.

The family as a biological entity has received some attention in recent years from sociologists, and, while their approach is sometimes of interest, it is defective. The *Christian* family is more than a biological entity. On the biological side, the Christian family is an example of *redeemed* nature in that more than biology is involved in its life because we have in the Christian family *redeemed* nature plus *grace*. The Christian family cannot be reduced to its physical components because it is radically altered by grace. This means that a supernatural power has been introduced into history to alter it.

## Serving Grace

The early church father, Lactantius, stressed the family as the center of community life. For him the family was no longer a unit of the Roman state nor the servant of social goals, but a unit in the kingdom of God. Its task is to serve God and to obey Him rather than being a humanistic agency.

This was a major revolutionary step in that nature was seen as called to submit to and serve grace. For the Romans, *piety* was the proper emotional attitude towards one's parents and the state. For Lactantius, "the contemplation of God is the reverence and worship of the common Parent of mankind." Lactantius used the word *humanity* and meant kindness and humaneness, that which is properly characteristic of man. In his words, "For what is humanity itself, but justice? What is justice, but

piety? And piety is nothing else than the recognition of God as a parent.”<sup>1</sup> This is an important statement because God as the Father of all families requires justice, His law applied, and this means piety, reverencing Him as our Father. Civilization then is not a product of society and the state but of men in families working together to apply God’s law-word to every area of life and thought, with Jesus Christ as their Redeemer-King.

Civilizations in the broader sense have been created by fire and sword so that we can speak of Assyrian and ancient Chinese civilizations, but, in the Christian sense, civilization is a faith product which is inclusive of every area of life and thought and begins in the Christian family.

Earlier, we referred to the revival of civilization in tenth century Europe. It was a faith revival, but its error was that it was state centered. Subsequent revivals of European civilization have been either state centered or church centered. What is now needed is one that is family centered.

Steven Ozment, in *When Fathers Ruled, Family Life in Reformation Europe* (1983), called attention to the impact of the Protestant Reformation on family life. Despite lingering medieval ideas, the Reformers saw that marriage and the family should serve, not church, state, or men, but the Faith and Christ’s kingdom. Like church and state, the family should serve God. Because family life is most personal, it is thereby closer to the totally personal God. Celibacy was seen as a social error where stressed above marriage and the family, and, while the suppression of convents and monasteries by Henry VIII was evil and brutal as well as politically governed, in countries other than England, the movement was religious.

Earlier, as in the Cleric Reformation, monks had been the source of reform. After Luther and Calvin, the family slowly became the nursery of the Faith. In the home school movement, a great development of this impetus is under way.

This meant, in the early years of the Reformation, a strong emphasis on informed and disciplined marriage. One aspect of this still survives in pre-marital counseling.

The trends towards the continuing Reformation by means of the family were thwarted by an evil development which began in the eighteenth century with the Marquis de Sade and came into fruition with the modern twentieth century sexual revolution. Neil Baldwin called it a movement believing in “the sovereignty of pleasure” (Neil Baldwin, *Man Ray, American Artist*, 213). Western civilization has moved from the sovereignty of God to the sovereignty of the state, then of man, and now to pleasure. This is a shift of very major dimensions.

What we see in such things as the home school movement is a reversal of this pattern. Two facets of this are especially revealing; it begins in the family, and its motivation is mainly Christian. This makes it an important development and basic to any realistic appraisal of the future. When great numbers of parents tax themselves in money and time to home school or Christian school their children, we see a social change in the making, and a sign of the renewal of civilization.

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<sup>1</sup>Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, Book 3, chap ix, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, editors, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, vol. 11, Lactantius, vol. 1, (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1871), 157.

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# Motives of Ministers

*By Mark R. Rushdoony*

**T**he are too prone to assume the early church was characterized by purer faith and life than even the best examples of modern Christianity. This is to misread the New Testament and to underestimate the power of sin on the saints of all centuries. It is important to understand that the Bible is unique among holy books in that it reveals multiple flaws in even its greatest men of faith. We must not look for heroes in the Bible. The *hero* was a role created by Greek religion that looked for men who could rise above their mortality by doing great deeds. Greek heroes were gods in the making. Scripture shows us sinners. Many were sinners saved by grace, yet they remained sinners.

The great men of Scripture were not in the heroic tradition, but were those who were obedient to God, faithful when faith seemed humanly inadequate. Some of the most memorable stories of Scripture are of those who rose, by God's grace, above various limitations and did mighty things. Some, like David, repented from their own sin, lived with its consequences, and dedicated themselves to greater faithfulness and service. Some, like Moses and Paul, had physical limitations. Some were faced with unbelievable situations not of their own making; Noah, Gideon, and Joseph all faced such situations with action based on their faith in God. Some, like Jacob and Esther, faced the limitations of their birth with trust in God. Many, like the disciples prior to Christ's resurrection, were limited by their lack of understanding of their role in serving God. The great men of Scripture were not heroes who rose to super-human levels by their own initiative; they were men

*And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

*Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:*

*The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:*

*But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.*

*What then? not withstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.*  
(Phil. 1:14-18)

and women whose faith and faithfulness relied on God with Whom all things are possible.

If we are honest with ourselves, we see ourselves as sinners — sinners saved by grace, but nevertheless sinners. We are never surprised to see sin in ourselves; we should not be surprised to see sin in others. As this was true in Biblical times, it is true in the church today and, Paul says in Philippians 1:14-18, was even true amongst those ministers who preached the true gospel. Some of them, Paul says, had less than pure motives and even preferred that the apostle remain in prison!

## Pure and Impure Motives

Paul contrasted two groups of ministers. Some preached Christ in "good will," "sincerely," and "of love" with an understanding that Paul, who had been imprisoned for about five years, was "set for the defense of the gospel." Others, however, preached Christ "of envy and strife," "of contention, not sincerely," and in "pretense." Their motive was "to add affliction to my [Paul's] bonds."

Paul's reference to the very impure motives of the latter group of ministers should not be taken to assume these were heretics or false prophets. Paul in no way condemned what they were preaching; he equates the two messages as both preaching Christ. Only the motives and character of the two groups of ministers were different. One group of ministers was glad the apostle was out of the way and would even have preferred more "affliction" be placed on him. Perhaps they saw themselves as the better preachers, the more savvy ambassadors of Christ to the Roman audience. Perhaps they saw Paul's problems as being of his own making and their own skills as the reason they had

steered clear of legal problems. Paul's point here is, in fact, to remind the supportive church at Philippi that his imprisonment, rather than being a discouraging setback, was in fact furthering the gospel (1:12). He gave two examples (*vv. 13-14*). *First* was the notoriety of his case, which was "famous" in the emperor's palace. The *second* was that Christ was being boldly preached, even if by some with impure motives.

One group of ministers wanted to see more grief come to Paul; another group recognized that he was positioned to defend the gospel itself and that this was of great value to the kingdom of God. A somewhat comparable example of recent years is the great number of Christian and home school trials of parents, churches, and pastors during the 1970s and 1980s. Many thought them embarrassing spectacles and piously condemned the Christians involved as distracting the church from "the pure gospel." Others saw them as standing firm for a legal, moral, and religious principle. In retrospect we now easily can see that those who stood firm and those who supported them greatly furthered religious liberty and the cause of Christian education. Paul's point was to help the Philippians to see his imprisonment in the same way (*vv. 12-14*).

Unfortunately, even amongst those who preached the true gospel there were noble and ignoble motives. Some put the cause of Christ first and some were motivated by a desire to compete with Paul for prominence. Some who preached the true gospel exemplified Christian character and some did not. They were all orthodox, for Paul says he rejoiced at their preaching,

but they were also men of strife and contention, and in this context they preached the gospel.

Some men preached without any selfish motives, without a view to promote themselves or to be pre-eminent. They preached with a love for Jesus Christ and His gospel. As regards Paul, they knew he served God's purpose even in prison. They sought to support him by preaching in places and times he could not.

It is not too hard to find some very disagreeable ministers who compete with others for preeminence. Arrogance is probably no more common amongst clergy than elsewhere, and perhaps less so, but it is always more offensive for its inappropriateness. If this situation existed in Paul's day, it should not surprise us that it exists in ours.

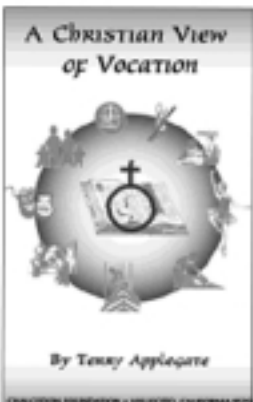
## The Pure Gospel in Impure Hands

Paul's conclusion is that he can nevertheless rejoice because, when all was said and done, Christ was being preached. In some cases it was in "truth" and in some it was with "pretense," but Christ was preached and God's Word will not return unto Him void. All the saints militant (alive) are sinners. The sins of men like Moses, David, or Peter do not reveal them to be hypocrites; they reveal them to be sinners dependent on God's grace. Their sin does not reveal failure of God's work in men; it reveals their failure in doing God's work. Sin causes us all to fail God and man at times. There are no heroes in God's service, only those whose faithfulness causes them to be used, in God's pleasure, and by the power of His Spirit, for His service.




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# Fundamentals of an Applied Theology: Education for Liberty

*By Ronald Kirk*

**E**v. Rushdoony observed that a liberal education historically meant learning the art of life in a free society. The term *liberty under law* aptly summarizes the Biblical view. For the one governed by the law of liberty, God increasingly inhibits sinful internal impulses. Here, “liberty” means “full godly obedience.” As the ability for godly self-government grows, God increasingly inhibits the tyranny of man. By faith, man becomes a slave to Christ — wherein is true liberty.

Jesus promised an abundant life. Success in living, a down payment on eternity, manifestly testifies of God’s wisdom in granting grace to sinful men. A true Christian education prepares the individual to live for God on *His* terms, with the blessings of life and liberty following in due season.

Here is a brief introduction to the fundamentals of an applied Biblical theology leading to the art of life. The fundamentals represent a concise Biblical confession of human responsibility before God. Mastering them means possessing a working set of principles remarkably comprehensive of the Biblical faith. These principles can guide the Christian’s thought and decision-making for every human concern and endeavor. For the inspired, earnest, and intrepid believer, the following Biblically derived and historically manifest principles offer a powerful and accessible discipline toward a gospel-fulfilled life.

## The Triune God, His Creation and Individuality

Intellectual attempts to understand the universe apart from God inevitably lead to the bizarre combination of personal license and totalitarian civil government. Regardless of philosophical or religious justification, or the absence thereof, the results are the same: The sin nature declares itself sovereign and the center of the universe. Others must serve *me*, my needs and desires. As the influence of sin mounts and becomes institutionalized, the powerful subjugate the weak, while the lazy evade difficulty and seek as much comfort as possible.

The pagan heart and mind can never rightly reconcile the One and the Many without schizophrenia. In the higher order philosophical development of the ancient cultures, wholeness and meaning existed in dialectic tension with chaos, death, destruction, and perversion. It is the *yin yang* of the Orient, and the *Force* of Star Wars. Debauchery becomes a way of life in such a culture, because chaos supposedly feeds order and meaning.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, Biblical Christians may rest perfectly contently with the *apparent* contradictions between individuality and diversity. This is so because we know that God’s handiwork in creation merely reflects His being. God is at once One and Three. We do not understand, but we accept. Upon accepting God on His terms, life makes sense. We accept our spiritual nature in earthy bodies. We accept our individualities as created in the image of God. We accept peace and excitement, fulfillment and a thirst for life, difficulty and ease. Such tensions are not antithetical since diversity and change do not equate to chaos. Moreover, we accept good and evil, the true antithesis, because all things work together for the good. Evil loses. Christ reconciles all things in Himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

Thus, we observe God’s principle of individuality. According to this fundamental truth of creation, God created everything in the universe as an identifiable *whole* of some kind. God maintains relationship between every individual entity in the universe, directly or indirectly. This principle provides a seed for understanding both human relationships and the material creation. *Individuality* essentially means *unity* or *oneness*. *Unity* means *separation* from others. Individuality also implies *wholeness*. We distinguish wholeness from damage, brokenness, and impurity. An impurity destroys wholeness, as an infected body or poisoned water. The Biblical and English words *sanctity* and *holiness* correspond to this understanding.

Noah Webster says that “Unity may consist of a simple substance or existing being, as the soul; but



usually it consists in a close junction of particles or parts.” In nature, only subatomic particles appear to be truly simple in substance. Therefore, a fundamental premise of individuality declares every individual to be made of constituent parts, themselves wholes of some kind. The mathematical fraction highly approximates individuality in nature, as a fractional part is a whole of another kind, as in a third of a yard or a quarter of a gallon. Similarly, every individual is a part of some greater identifiable whole. The very term *universe* recognizes the ultimate orderly collection of the created one and many before God.

Man, from the beginning, found his wholeness or holiness solely in covenantal relationship to God. Man fell by his assumption of truth apart from God and His Word. Man finds restoration to wholeness solely in availing himself of renewed relationship with God through Christ by faith. Certain clear rules of relationship emerge from individuality. We recognize the mutual image of God in us, and therefore the fundamental sanctity of human life. Thus, we possess a moral responsibility to one another. “Owe nothing except love.” Men must honor the liberty of other individuals. God is no respecter of persons. All Christian manners and America’s relational institutions based in liberty owe their existence to the implications of true individuality before God.

Applied to the nature, individuality provides the great organizing principle. Science consists largely in arranging the parts of any area of study into a coherent whole, defining clear relationships between them. The science of any subject is important to a fulfillment of its art. Thus, music consists in pleasant sounds taken in order — melody — and pleasant sound taken at the same time — harmony. Melody and harmony constitute two fundamental elements of music. A mastery of these in relationship to one another provides the knowledge needed to make music. Similarly, a mathematical ratio and a graph are statements of relationship between individuals of different kinds. Counting, addition, and subtraction are statements of relationship among like kinds.

An accomplished understanding and use of godly individuality is the most powerful tool of knowledge and Christian dominion. For example, individuality guides the sound curriculum plan, the parts reconciled to the whole. Individuality applied to relationship reflects the command to love, and guides its particular expressions. The next principles articulate further expressions of individuality in both spiritual and practical terms.

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## The Need of and Capacity for Self-Restraint

Due to the nature of the Fall righteous treatment of God and neighbor is extremely difficult. We are very ready to grant ourselves so-called liberty (license really) while exacting a much higher standard for others. Therefore, Christian love and general liberty demand self-restraint above everything else. Such self-restraint means treating people well when they are nasty. It means husbands laying their lives down for their wives as Christ did for the church. It means graciously conceding a lost political battle for the moment while trusting God to restore right in due season. Consider the proverbial good medieval knight. In single combat, though the bad knight used every ploy to achieve victory, the good knight would cease the fight to hand back his adversary’s dropped sword. He knew that, not the strong arm of the flesh, but a righteous appeal to Heaven decided the battle. Providence decides the victory. Simply put, the ends do not justify the means, but rather the means must be in perfect harmony with godly ends. While personal liberty to serve God is certainly the rule, successful self-restraint avoids presumption and unnecessary offense.

God provides the capacity for self-restraint; yet its reality comes by faith. In other words, one undertakes the discipline and practice of self-restraint until by God’s grace the Holy Spirit makes godly personal liberty a second nature — the law of God written on the heart. Personal practice produces an influence on others. General liberty then appears in a community that generally practices self-restraint. For education, this means systematic training in self-restraint toward the task, regardless of personal whims. The student accepts the learning process to please God and receives the reward of accomplishment in due season.

## A Strength of Heart Prepared for Liberty

Trials are necessary to the hope of the gospel, for trials produce character. This is the fundamental premise of godliness: all true character is *proven* character (*Rom 5:4*). Adam failed due to the lack of godly character. As part of restoration, God calls Christians to acquire character in adversity. When it is mature, true character will stand in any circumstance. Much of the requirement of this life amounts to character training. Character grows through self-restraint in relationships, through the trials of learning new skills, and through Christian enterprise as a stewardship for Christ. Every trial accepted in faith builds character. God comforts those willing to accept discipline.

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## God's Assigned Work

Rather than seek a merely heavenly or spiritual existence, as Rev. Rushdoony notes, God's people must abide in the earth. However temporary our station in this life, it is nonetheless the beginning of eternity. We should learn to live for God in adversity, so that we may live forever with Him upon a proven faith in perpetual glory. However, work is central to this glory. Adam worked before the Fall, though without toil. Isaiah prophesies every Christian ultimately sitting under his own vine and his own fig tree. Jesus suggests in Matthew 25 that reward for a faithful job well done is *more* work, *more* responsibility (*vv.* 21 and 23).

The commonly used word "stewardship," originally meaning "taking care of the sty for one's master," is apt. Stewardship assumes a sphere of authority. Good stewardship requires a sound conscience, void of offense. How can one righteously handle the things that are God's if sin corrupts the conscience? Training and correcting a godly conscience is thus a principal goal of Christian education. Parents must not wait for a child to feel sorry for his wrong before requiring confession, restitution, and reconciliation.

The sciences (learning) and arts (applied skills) are legitimate and required endeavors. Every accomplishment of a self-consciously and Biblically educated faith contributes to the gospel, because it magnifies God to the world. "Truth shall spring out of the earth" declares apologetics for natural science (*P. 85:11-12*). God's choosing the Tabernacle architects by name for their clever design and craftsmanship abilities likewise defends the creative arts. The maintenance of civil liberty, where God once grants it, constitutes a great stewardship responsibility. "To whom much is given much is required." Every subject must be redeemed in the hands of the redeemed.

As Rev. Rushdoony often observed, the Christian does not properly consider the earth to be evil, as did the ancient Greek. God made the earth good, but, like man, it requires deliverance (*Rom. 8:21*). God uses redeemed man to reclaim the earth for Him. God grants an economy of difficulty, but one designed to yield to faithful effort. Life and the created world are harmonious in Christ, not antithetical. The world is won by faith. Present difficulty is a construct and discipline of God designed to lead us to entire trust in Him, to prepare us for eternity, and to make an effective contribution to Christ's kingdom, ministering to others' lives.

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## Appropriate Forms for Christian Workmanship

Every entity in God's creation takes a form appropriate to its constitutive qualities. A stone is hard and unyielding because of its molecular structure. Jesus said, "You know a tree by its fruit." That is, you know the internal quality based on its expression. This truth has ramifications for the Christian in two ways — in appropriate human relations and in appropriate expressions of labor.

First, godly men ought to live free and yet in community. To protect liberty, voluntary association, and to encourage community, God provides certain principles to govern relationships. These, necessarily without elaboration here, include *association by covenant*, which is agreement before God; *economic representation or specialization* according to gifts and calling (*1 Cor. 12*); and *federalism* — acknowledging both independent peer relationships and relationships involving authority. Authority relationships are always limited in scope, according to their covenanted purpose. Many separate and overlapping local authority relationships exist. Because covenant establishes authority, reciprocation of power characterizes authority relationships. Thus, we choose our civil representatives and then submit to them in their spheres. A general understanding and practice of these Biblical principles leads to the miracle of lasting and loving attachments, in the context of general peace and good will. The negative law of civil justice intervenes when ordinary relationships fail.

Second, a principle of appropriate expression guides the form our work takes. What glorifies God in our product? What reflects the excellence of Christ in us? What will exert the greatest influence for Christ in our ways? Should Christians slavishly follow worldly musical fashion, for example, or should Christians master music on God's terms, while seeking appropriate new forms? Should the natural sciences follow the godless path of the last century, or should we seek new models based on Biblical presuppositions? Should Christians be the creative heads or the slavish tails in human endeavors? Discoverable Biblical principles ought to direct all of our creative and productive activities. Our work should then become increasingly refined, beautiful, useful, and excellent. Moreover, our attitudes toward the world become positive and solution oriented, as opposed to negative and merely critical.



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## Reproduction

This principle is fundamental to Christian endeavor. It lies at the heart of the Great Commission and “hastening the day.” It includes, of course, the basic evangelical premise of the Faith, the Good News, but seeks much more. Reproduction requires two constituents: the Seed and the Soil. The Seed is God’s Word. Biblical content interprets and guides empirical learning. No other foundation serves. Certainly, Christians ought not to assume an understanding of human conduct on the mere basis of observation. Modern psychology thus walks by sight, not by faith. Reproduction also requires good soil, prepared for its purpose. Good living in every corner of our existence both fulfills God’s blessings of life as a preview of eternity and constitutes the effective influence of the gospel. Culture is important. Life is important. All human activities represent potential contributions to God’s purpose, and ought, as we noted previously, to be redeemed in the hands of the redeemed.

A vision for a fulfilled faith, an applied Biblical theology, ought therefore to found the Christian’s every educational effort. Effective methods, because they reflect man’s image of God and his need of conversion, must be re-implemented. The other principles outlined here represent fundamentals toward such an educational method. Jesus said, “Learn of Me” (*Mt. 11:29*).

## Love is the Highest Expression

The final principle brings us full circle from the first. Individuality in right relationship constitutes the principle of unity and union. Our unity lies in Christ. Our union lies in patient and forbearing acceptance of our neighbor as God made him. The only test for church or civil relationships is the violation of particular Biblical commandments. The greatest miracle of human life is the ability to dwell in peaceful union without pressures to conform compromising individuality. Once more, applying the principles of self-restraint and practicing the principles that rightfully govern human relationship establish the basis, by faith, of peaceful co-existence. The key to the success of godly union is the general practice of Biblical love as defined in Galatians 5 and 1 Corinthians.

As with every other worthwhile endeavor, love is at first a discipline, an exercise of faith. Clearly, love is the highest requirement of the gospel and its best expression. Christians ought to make every effort to learn charity in practice, to learn what godly love would do in every situation.

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## Effective Living

As a Christian educator for over twenty years, I have found these principles a true and effective core of applied theology. Spawned from the basic doctrines of the Faith, particularly as identified in the historic Reformed expressions, these principles matured in early America. Forged from the trials of life, they formed the basis of our faith and morality-based free market and federal, constitutional, representative republic. The willing student will consistently discover these principles everywhere associated with the good fruit of the Faith. The decline of these principles has led to our secularization, and evangelical and cultural decline. If we will once more, in the context of earnest devotion to Christ, learn to love Christian liberty, endeavor to master these principles conceptually, identify them in the circumstances of ordinary life, and endeavor to apply them in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances, the generations will see the promised growth of the kingdom of God. In thus skillfully practicing the Two Commandments of Christ as a self-conscious way of life, God will be glorified, and we will receive His promised blessings.

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<sup>1</sup> See Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The One and the Many* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1978).

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# Great are the Works of the Lord

Part 1 of 2

By James Nickel

**D**efinitive moments in life transcend time and are unforgettable. One such moment occurred for me in Arizona on a lazy, late afternoon in November of 1980.

My wife and I, newlyweds en route by car from Louisiana to California, were seated on a bench overlooking the south rim of the Grand Canyon. My mind was somewhat numbed due to its recent exposure to a National Park presentation explaining the evolutionary origin and age of the strata before us. Both of us were in a lackluster state as we stared inattentively at the extraordinary vista. To our rear I heard a bus putter to a stop and its occupants unload in a cacophony of voices. As the voices approached the volume noticeably decreased. I could distinguish German phrases. “Great,” I thought, “tourists and foreign to boot!” What happened next stunned me in my stupor. An elderly, large-framed German lady marched past us and stopped abruptly a few feet in front of us. With a sweeping motion of her eyes, she surveyed the scene before her. She lifted her hands toward the sky and out from her mouth poured resounding and angelic “Alleluias” (German for, you guessed it, Alleluia).

## The Blunt of Naturalism

I had lost an attitude of wonder and it took this worshipping lady from Germany (God bless her) to rouse me from my inattention. What had dulled me for a few moments *has blunted modern culture for generations*. One of the characteristic signs that a culture is under divine judgment is a loss of wonder in the greatness of God’s Works. The prophet Isaiah articulated this truth over 2,700 years ago:

*Woe to those who rise early in the morning that they may pursue strong drink; who stay up late in the evening that wine may inflame them! And their banquets are accompanied by lyre and harp, by tambourine and flute, and by wine; but **they do not pay attention to the deeds of the Lord, nor do they consider the work of His hands.***

*Therefore My people go into exile for their lack of knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude is parched with thirst. (Is. 5:11-13, emphasis added.)*

Modern culture, indoctrinated by the evolutionary presuppositions that govern its education, media, and politics has, as a result, absolutized the naturalistic perspective. Rainbows, rocks, stars, butterflies, and the entirety of humanity are nothing but pieces of driftwood washed up on the shore of fate. Converts to this “evangel” stare inattentively at the Grand Canyon and repeat the liturgy of despair, “Praise and honor to Strata, Subsidences, and Uplifts.”<sup>1</sup>

Seeing the world through regenerated hearts and “Biblical eyes” will produce awe and wonder in the beholder. God has designed every aspect of the created order to instruct us (*Job 12:7-9*). The “evangel” of evolution, with its sweeping applications to every area of thought and life has, by its denial of the Creator God, blinded the eyes of a great many people to this reality.<sup>2</sup>

## The Pleasure of Creation

This has not always been the case. Science historian Reijer Hooykas (1906-1994) said this about the early European scientists: “What strikes one most about the early Protestant scientists is their love for nature, in which they recognize the work of God’s hands, and their pleasure in investigating natural phenomena.”<sup>3</sup> Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), one of those scientists, found the same pleasure in the study of heavenly harmony as the 1924 four hundred meter Olympic gold-medallist and “Flying Scotsman” Eric Liddell (1902-1945) did when he ran. According to Liddell, “God made me for a purpose. He made me for China [as a missionary – JN]. But He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure.”<sup>4</sup> For John Ray (1627-1705), who wrote *Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation* (first published in 1691),<sup>5</sup> nature was a vast library of creation and there he found a limitless store of

divinity. He believed the most glorious calling of man was to study and enjoy the Works of God as manifested in nature and, by that, honor the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. He said, "You ask me the use of butterflies. I reply to adorn the world and delight the eyes of men, to brighten the countryside like so many golden jewels. To contemplate their exquisite beauty and variety is to experience the truest pleasure. To gaze inquiringly at such elegance of color and form devised by the ingenuity of nature and painted by her artist's pencil, is to acknowledge and adore the imprint of the art of God."<sup>6</sup>

Modern proponents of evolutionary naturalism, having their understanding darkened to the reality that the world is the product of a personal, rational Creator, can *only* find "pleasure in pleasure." This pleasure can never endure (*Heb. 11:25*) since, for them, the world is a cold, blind, and purposeless realm. Whatever purpose man finds in life must therefore be self-created. Man must, using the Darwinian mechanism, "fit himself in order to survive in this cruel world." For the Biblical Christian, purpose comes from a source outside of himself; *i.e.*, from the calling of God. As Liddell confessed, "God made me for a purpose: for China and to run fast." If a man's vision is governed by naturalism instead of supernaturalism (the Biblical God, His purpose, and His presence), then he ultimately walks alone, without comfort or hope. Whatever comfort or hope man finds is self-generated, dependent upon circumstances, and temporal (since at death, everything ends for naturalistic man). The message of Biblical Christianity frees man from the oppressive burden of creating his own purpose, his own pleasure, and his own world. The glad tidings of the gospel not only deliver man from the encumbrance of sin, they transfer man into a realm (the kingdom of God) where he can learn to realize the reality of the presence, power, and pleasure of God.

## Delighting in God's Revelation

The Psalmist David responded to God's Works with pleasurable delight, "The works of the Lord are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them" (*Ps. 111:2*). David's attitude toward the Works of God was the same as his attitude toward the Law-word of God, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night" (*Ps. 1:2*). David delighted in the Works and Word of God because he considered them to be of highest value: both revealed to him his Creator and Redeemer.<sup>7</sup> David's pleasurable delight in the revelation of God was a direct consequence of his intensive study of that revelation. He meditated on the law of God day and night. His study of the Works of God received

similar attention: "I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk on Your deeds" (*Ps. 77:12*). "I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Thy hands" (*Ps. 143:5*). The story was once told of a wealthy family that prominently placed a beautifully bound book near the entryway to their house. Friends, as they walked by it, would often remark about its elegance. As the sands of time passed, the family moved away, and the house deteriorated to the point that it had to be demolished. Before tearing the building down, what remained in the house was removed. The book was one of those remaining items. As the book was retrieved, it was discovered that it was impossible to open it. Its pages were uncut due to a printer failure. The book had served only a decorative purpose; its contents had never been opened or studied. Both God's Word and God's Works are like the uncut pages of this book to many people, both in the church and outside the church. The Bible may have a prominent decorative place in some homes and God's Works are all around us. Yet, how many people have opened the book of God's Word and the book of God's Works with the intent of serious study?

## Biblical Meditation and Delight

The Bible commands us to meditate upon His Word and His Works, and pleasurable delight is the consequence of such reflection. Biblical meditation is an active and deep engagement of the heart (contra the passive transcendental meditative practices of Eastern mystics). We also cannot equate the Biblical practice of meditation with study; *i.e.*, study as we commonly know it (*e.g.*, I've got to study for this exam by stuffing facts in my head). Biblical meditation is a prodigious leap beyond mere study. Meditation is the amazing and marvelous capacity God has given man to discover and observe the revelation of God in His Word and Works, to compare and contrast each of its parts. The treasures of the revelation of God must be patiently excavated because "it is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter" (*Pr. 25:2*).

Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, Biblical meditation results in memorization (in no way equivalent to rote memorization), in muttering to oneself with pleasure the Works and Word of God (in no way equivalent to senile mumbling), and in composition. The Hebrew word for "study" in Psalm 111:2 means "sought out, to tread frequently, to beat a path, to learn or study, to compose a book studiously." We may respond to our musings by writing a book or by composing a Psalm, prayer, or a piece of music (*Job 36:24*). We can also respond in triumphant

and joyful celebration (*Ps. 92:4*). As we particularly reflect upon God's Works (in the context of and in submission to God's Word), we also come to acknowledge God's exhaustive sovereignty (*Job 9, 37-41*). More importantly, since Biblical meditation is always linked to faithful obedience (*Jos. 1:8; Pr. 4:20-22*), its practice will generate enduring fruit (*Ps. 1:3*) and our lives will become a "living epistle, known and read by all men" (*2 Cor. 3:2-3*).

## Creativity, Invention, and Ethics

The principles of meditation are keys to creativity and invention. The characteristics of the great inventors are intense diligence and persistence (they keep coming back to the object of study leaving no stone unturned), optimism, and originality of approach combined with an almost mystical conviction that there are more effective, more elegant ways of doing things. The English physicist E. N. da Costa Andrade (1887-1971) said this about the meditative habits of the great English scientist Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727): "I would rather say that Newton was capable of greater sustained mental effort than any man, before or since."<sup>8</sup> Science historian Stanley L. Jaki (1924-) notes that "Newtonian science was the product of a truly inventive intellect pondering the witness of the senses."<sup>9</sup> Speaking to the YMCA at Blue Ridge, North Carolina in 1921, the scientist George Washington Carver (1864-1943), a seasoned student of God's Word and Works, said:

*Years ago I went into my laboratory and said, "Dear Mr. Creator, please tell me what the universe was made for?" The Great Creator answered, "You want to know too much for that little mind of yours. Ask for something more your size, little man." Then I asked, "Please, Mr. Creator, tell me what man was made for?" Again the Great Creator replied, "You are still asking too much. Cut down on the extent and improve the intent." So then I asked, "Please, Mr. Creator, will you tell me why the peanut was made?" "That's better, but even then it's infinite. What do you want to know about the peanut?" "Mr. Creator, can I make milk out of the peanut?" "What kind of milk do you want? Good Jersey milk or just plain boarding house milk?" "Good Jersey milk." And then the Great Creator taught me to take the peanut apart and put it together again. And out of the process have come forth all these products!"<sup>10</sup>*

The three key ingredients for creativity are *contemplation, imagination, and wonder*. Non-Christians who possess these qualities have and can invent. Biblical

Christians have the ethical and redeeming component (the glory of God) to motivate them to bring healing to the nations via their discoveries and inventions (*Rev. 22:2*). This Christian ethic is a crucial distinction.<sup>11</sup> Without the Biblical ethic (produced by the Biblical gospel) controlling the personnel involved in the scientific enterprise, its fruits will be governed, in the words of famed World War II General Omar Bradley (1893-1981), by "nuclear giants" who are "ethical infants."<sup>12</sup> One of the ethical lessons that scientists must learn is that science has limitations. To assume otherwise, to assume that science can find a *technical* solution to *all* problems, is to embark on a road to disaster.

"Mr. Carver, does the Bible tell about peanuts?" queried the United States Senate Ways and Means Committee in 1921. Carver answered, "No sir, but it tells about the God who made the peanut. I asked Him to show me what to do with the peanut, and He did."<sup>13</sup> Ethical maturity is not the only component that Christians bring to the scientific table. Christians also have an additional laboratory assistant (as Carver readily acknowledged); they are in fellowship contact with the Author of all things, the Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom of knowledge, and the illuminatory ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is to the chagrin of the Christian church and a dishonor to the name of Christ that Christians are not consistently on the forefront of scientific and technological invention.<sup>14</sup>

*With decades of combined professional experience as a mathematician, systems analyst, and educator, James Nickel also holds B.A. (Mathematics), B.Th. (Theology and Missions), and M.A. (Education) degrees and is the author of Mathematics: Is God Silent? (available from Ross House Books). He can be reached at jdnickel@juno.com.*

<sup>1</sup> Renowned philosopher (according to the standards of modernity), logician, and mathematician Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) once made this remarkably incoherent proposition: "only within the scaffolding of these truths [that humanity is the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms - JN], only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built." *Why I Am Not a Christian* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 107.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Richard Dawkins (1941-) of Oxford University, along with the late Stephen J. Gould (1941-2002) and Carl Sagan (1934-1996) are/were modernity's self-proclaimed "evangelists" of Darwinism. Like Bertrand Russell before him, Dawkins, in his classic national bestseller *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe Without Design* (New

York: W. W. Norton, [1986, 1987] 1996), puts on the cloak of the atheistic “evangel” and proclaims, “Darwinism encompasses all of life — human, animal, plant, bacterial, and...extraterrestrial. It provides the only satisfying explanation for why we all exist” (x). “It is the only known theory that *could*, in principle, solve the mystery of our existence” (xiv). For him, given enough time, non-random (his semantic “end around” for hurdling the problem of “random chance”) reproduction has “consequences that are far-reaching” (xv). Again and again, he restates his case that the design and order that we detect in the universe is only the *mere appearance of design*. And to him, it takes a “leap of imagination” (xvi) to believe this. He proves that this leap is possible, not empirically, but through the use of a computer program (“designed” to illustrate the portentous power of non-random reproduction). What Dawkins is doing is *designing a proof to show that all design is only apparent design*. Hence, by his logic, the design of his computer program must also, of necessity, be only *apparent* (along with its output). Hence, everything in life is therefore only *apparent*, a chimera whether it be ethical standards, the nature of reality, or the quest for and assurance of knowledge. This is vanity (cf. *Eph. 4:17-20*)! Rousas J. Rushdoony’s comments are apropos: “Evolution is a belief that violates a variety of scientific concepts. It posits spontaneous generation, the emergence of something out of nothing, miraculous changes such as a non-eye somehow becoming an eye, and so on. For God’s creative *act*, it substitutes *time* and *process* and endows both with God-like powers. Somehow the mindless churnings of process for billions of years work amazing miracles. Somehow, out of total nothing, a single atom emerged, and that single atom had all the potentialities of a universe; in brief, it had amazing god-like powers! Evolution requires belief in miracles greater than any described in the Bible! It is not only the faith of those who hate God but also of those whose premises are irrational ones.” In *Genesis* (Vallecito: Ross House Books, 2002), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Reijer Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 105.

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Hudson, dir., *Chariots of Fire* (20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, 1981). Liddell kept his love of running in balance. When asked, in the context of his missionary work in China, if he missed the limelight, the rush, the frenzy, the cheers, the rich red wine of victory, Liddell replied, “Oh well, of course it’s natural for a chap to think over all that sometimes, but I’m glad I’m at the work I’m engaged in now. A fellow’s life counts for far more at this than the other. Not a corruptible crown, but an incorruptible, you know.” Cited in Sally Magnusson, *The Flying Scotsman* (New York: Quartet Books, 1981), 102.

<sup>5</sup> According to C. E. Raven, this was the book that “more than any other determined the character of the interpretation of nature till Darwin’s time.” In *Natural Religion and Christian Theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), 110.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Richard S. Westfall, *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973), 46.

<sup>7</sup> To paraphrase Cornelius Van Til (who borrowed from John Calvin), we must use the spectacles of the objective Word of God to see clearly (understand) the Works of God. *It is only through the light of God’s Word that we can understand anything properly* (Ps. 36:9).

<sup>8</sup> E. N. da Costa Andrade, “Isaac Newton,” *The World of Mathematics*, ed. James R. Newman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), 1:275. Newton is reported to have been able to spend eighteen to nineteen hours a day in study and writing.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley L. Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1978), 119.

<sup>10</sup> Cited in Ethel Edwards, *Carver of Tuskegee* (Cincinnati: Ethel Edwards & James T. Hardwick, 1971), 114-117. Carver discovered nearly three hundred derivative products from his study of the peanut.

<sup>11</sup> Taking the lead from Voltaire (1694-1778), the pen name of François Marie Arouet, who ridiculed the Christian convictions of the great mathematical genius Leonhard Euler (1707-1783), modernity considers a scientist with Christian convictions (*i.e.*, Biblical view of reality, knowledge, and ethics) to be, at best, deplorably inconsistent.

<sup>12</sup> Bradley said this in Boston on November 10, 1948. Cited in Jaki, 304.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Charles E. Jones, *The Books You Read* (Harrisburg: Executive Books, 1985), 132.

<sup>14</sup> The reason that we are not on the forefront is because of the insidious snare and strangling affects of pietism. I believe that we shall once again rise to this forefront due to the impact of the demonstrative teaching of Biblical Christian mediation in Christian day schools, home schools, and universities.

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# Eschatology and the Power of Myth

By Greg Uttinger

**S**. Lewis argued that certain stories have the power to captivate the imagination and move the human soul in ways that the words themselves cannot account for.<sup>1</sup> These stories he called “myths.” Their power is not, strictly speaking, literary in nature. That is, a myth can work its magic even when it is told in summary or told badly. For example, the average American has not read the Arthurian myth in any of its classic forms. He has not read Mallory, let alone Chrétien de Troyes or Geoffrey of Monmouth. At best, he may have seen Disney’s *Sword in the Stone* or a Hollywood distortion of the legend, like *Knight’s Tale*. In spite of this, the names Arthur, Merlin, and Camelot still have meaning for him. He finds the words “Round Table” and “Holy Grail” charged with significance. Lewis was unwilling to speculate on the source of the power that myths exercise.<sup>2</sup> Jung, referring to myths in the broader sense, ventured to speak of archetypes that lie buried in the collective unconscious. Joseph Campbell had similar ideas. As Christians, we must look elsewhere.

## Creaturehood and Myth

God is the Creator of heaven and earth, and therefore the universe in all its parts bears His imprint. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (*Ps. 19:1*). Man, however, is the very image of God (*Gen. 1:27*). So when we look at the things that God has made, especially when God has named them for us or used them in a particularly grand manner, we see reflections of our Maker and also reflections of ourselves. When we use these things in poetry or in story, the effect can be quite powerful.

Think of the words *mountain*, *water*, *bride*, and *blood*. Contrast them with the words *skyscraper*, *soda*, *significant other*, and *plasma*. “Sword of the Spirit” carries a power that “machine gun of the Spirit” clearly lacks. And “great red dragon” is worlds away from “friendly purple dinosaur.” Furthermore, even though we are fallen, our imaginations still resonate

to the whole Biblical story of creation, fall, and redemption. We cannot escape our creaturehood. And herein, at least in part, lies the power of myth.

In myths we regularly have a number of Biblical images or story elements arranged in a pattern that echoes the Biblical story. Sometimes the echo is clear: the prince in disguise, the dragon-slaying knight, the sleeping beauty, the returning king, the thousand-year kingdom. Sometimes the echo is subtler. For example, “the blade that was broken” — either Aragorn’s or Sigurd’s before him — reflects the sword-image that began at Eden’s gate and continues to the two-edged sword in Christ’s mouth. Because none of the Biblical blades were broken, we must make further connections. The king’s sword is his office and his right to rule: for example, when Arthur broke the sword from the stone, he jeopardized his right to rule; thus, Merlin moved quickly to secure for him Excalibur. Now in redemptive history, the Davidic kingship was broken; the messianic dynasty was seemingly cut off. But with the coming of Christ, the dynasty and kingship were suddenly reformed.

Now, all myths are fiction,<sup>3</sup> and some were never meant to be taken as anything else. No one gives primary belief to Middle-Earth or to the mythic elements in the Star Wars saga.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the Aryan Atlantis, the Master Race, and the Thousand-Year Reich were another matter. There were people who took this mythology very seriously, and millions died as a result. Myths can be very dangerous.

## The Dispensationalist Myth

Dispensationalism has given us a very powerful myth. The Rapture, the Anti-Christ, the rebuilt Temple, the Great Tribulation — these images, sequenced together and interpreted as they have been for two hundred years in American churches, have stamped a deep impression on the hopes and fears of the average American Christian. Christians who have never read Ezekiel or Zechariah nevertheless assume



that a new Temple will stand on Mount Moriah some day soon. Christians who have never studied Revelation 13 are nonetheless afraid of bar coding, government identification numbers, and computer systems that make use of the digits 666. And many, many Christians have found themselves in a deserted classroom or office building and wondered, if only for a moment, "Have I been 'left behind'?"

Now the point is this: dispensationalism no longer survives as a carefully worked out and Biblically defended theological system. It survives primarily as myth. Its mythic quality sustains it, maintains its momentum, and makes it unlikely that we will hear the end of it anytime soon.

On the other hand, traditional dispensationalism of the Darby-Scofield type is dying out. Its multiple gospels and its relegation of Jesus' own sermons to the prior dispensation of Law<sup>5</sup> were features so clearly at odds with faith in Christ that younger pastors and teachers simply steered clear of them, though without consciously breaking with the system. This is on the one hand. On the other, popularizers of the movement could never resist the sensationalism of signs and portents. The World Wars, the rise of Bolshevik Russia, and above all the creation of Israel in 1948 were heralded as sure signs that the rapture of the church was at hand. The problem is that traditional dispensationalism taught an imminent, any-moment, *signless* rapture.

According to the founding fathers of dispensationalism, the prophetic clock stopped ticking at Calvary.<sup>6</sup> The Church Age was an unforeseen parenthesis in God's dealings with Israel. Nothing in the Church Age was prophesied in the Old Testament. Therefore, there could be no prophesied signs of its end. Only with the Rapture would the prophetic clock start afresh. But the man in the pew never really got this, and those hawking sensationalism simply ignored it. Sensationalism built the dispensational myth, but without any regard to the finer points of the system itself.

As a result, the Great Tribulation and Rapture are still fixtures in the evangelical mindset, but evangelical theologians are no longer quite sure about the nature of the dispensational system itself. At least no one is writing detailed dissertations on God's two eternally distinct peoples, Israel and the church. No one is arguing for a signless rapture and a frozen prophetic clock. Grace and Talbot Seminaries have quietly moved away from their strict dispensational legacies, and Dallas is still working on the details of its new and improved brand of dispensationalism.<sup>7</sup>

But the dispensational myth continues. And it is a myth; that is, it is fictional creation that contains a

powerful use of Biblical images and a powerful echo of the Biblical story. The Rapture has Biblical precedent in Noah's embarking seven days before the rains began, in Lot's escape from Sodom hours before the fires fell, and in the flight of Christians from Jerusalem in AD 70 just before the siege began. The mythic Anti-Christ echoes Nimrod, Antiochus Epiphanes, Herod the Great, and Nero. The Great Tribulation bears some resemblance to the plagues on Egypt and the real Great Tribulation in AD 70. Oddly, the Biblical echo here is fainter. The Great Tribulation of pop dispensationalism, unlike that described by our Lord in the Olivet Discourse (*Mt. 24; Mk. 13; Lk. 21*), is mostly the reign of hell on earth and has little to do with the active judgment of God. With the church and the Spirit withdrawn at the Rapture, Satan gets to have his fling on earth, and he seems to have a penchant for nuclear and biological warfare.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, these echoes are only echoes, not accurate interpretations of Scripture. Certainly, the Bible speaks of a rapture, but dispensational writers somehow overlook the fact that it will be neither silent nor secretive (*1 Thes. 4:15-5:4*). It will accompany the Resurrection, which will swallow up Death, the *final* enemy (cf. *1 Cor. 15:51-55; Rev. 20:11-14*). Dispensational writers never seem to notice that the word "antichrist" only appears in 1 and 2 John and is associated there with false teachers who deny the Incarnation.<sup>9</sup> And no dispensational writer accepts as literal truth our Lord's clear time frame for the Great Tribulation: "this generation" — that is, His own (*Mt. 24:34; Mk. 13:30; Lk. 21:31-32; cf. Mt. 23:29-36*).

At present, the dispensational myth is being fueled by Tim LaHaye's best selling *Left Behind* series. The strategy behind the series is sound: fuel a deeply held myth with fast-paced fiction about likable characters who are never far from occult forces and human violence — then turn it into a film.<sup>10</sup> The books sell, the myth becomes more deeply engrained, and nobody has to debate theology or answer embarrassing exegetical questions.

## Diffusing a Myth

So, how do you diffuse a myth?

A counter-myth might have some success. And we may hope that the current run of *Lord of the Rings* will exercise a greater sway over the hearts and minds of the young than the *Left Behind* books and films. Better a generation of Rangers and hobbits who are willing to fight for Middle-Earth than one of cultural retreatists who don't plan on being around much longer.

But ultimately, myths must be overturned by the clear and repetitive proclamation of truth. The preaching of Christ crucified overturned the oracles, the mysteries, and the magic of the pagan world.<sup>11</sup> It eclipsed Gaea, buried Osiris, and banished Balder. It can overturn the Tribulation myth as well. But we must tell the whole truth, the whole gospel: the Sovereign Creator; man's transgression of His law; man's true moral guilt; the wrath of an offended God; the true Incarnation of the Word; the blood atonement; the Resurrection and Ascension; the defeat of Satan; the end of Jewish ceremonies; the coming of the Kingdom; justification by faith; the power of the Spirit; the victory of the gospel; the final Judgment; and our own Resurrection. Truncated gospels and isolated snippets of theology, however orthodox, will not answer a cultural myth. We must answer a system with a system and a story with the Story.

When a thousand years from now historians evaluate our age, they will probably reckon it as one of the most superstitious in the history of the world. Cosmic and biological evolution will, of course, be counted as the chief and most permeating superstitions. The whole Nazi mythology may be next, followed by some Marxist and Keynesian ideas about economic history and the nature of the economy. UFOs, white racism, reincarnation, and the goddess reborn will all receive some sort of footnote. But for the superstition that held the greatest sway among professing Christians, the Tribulation myth will be the clear winner. Future scholars will wonder that self-professed Christians ever believed such a thing; but perhaps they will take into account the folly of our age and the power of myth.

*Greg Uttinger teaches theology, history, and literature at Cornerstone Christian School in Roseville, California.*

*He lives nearby in Sacramento County with his wife, Kate, and their three children. He may be contacted at paul\_ryland@hotmail.com.*

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 41.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 44ff.

<sup>3</sup> Yes, C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien both spoke of Christianity as a "true myth." But they knew they were dealing in paradox.

<sup>4</sup> I have been told that in a recent survey in Great Britain a large number of people listed their religion as "Jedi Knight." We will hope they were joking.

<sup>5</sup> See Philip Mauro, *The Gospel of the Kingdom* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, n.d.), ch. VI and XI, for the relevant citations from C. I. Scofield and a response to them.

<sup>6</sup> For a number of relevant quotes, see Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1957), 219ff.

<sup>7</sup> See Gary North, *Rapture Fever, Why Dispensationalism Is Paralyzed* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1993), 195ff.

<sup>8</sup> The dispensational Great Tribulation has become the evangelical substitute for the doctrine of hell. The Great Tribulation, as bad as it is, is kinder and gentler. Some survive it, some come to Christ in the midst of it, it only lasts seven years, and it is mostly the work of Satan and the Anti-Christ: evangelicals still can frighten people towards Christ without suggesting that a loving God would ever pour out His wrath on sinners.

<sup>9</sup> They could dump the word "antichrist" and talk only about the Beast, but "Anti-Christ" is a more powerful word.

<sup>10</sup> This might sound an awful lot like the Harry Potter franchise, but Potter works more from folk superstition than from true myth, at least so far.

<sup>11</sup> See Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Divine Word*.

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# Open Your Eyes Before You Die

*By N. D. Wilson*



**T**he sun didn't reach the earth behind the barn until after lunch. The ground was always wet because the barn trapped the run-off from the hill behind it. When the boy played there in the mornings he grew cold. But when the sun was high, the earth was warm and he did not mind the moisture seeping through his shirt to his chest as it was now.

He was on his belly and he was watching something he had never seen. In his six years he had seen and done many things. He had seen a rattlesnake. He had held rabbits, frozen spiders, drunk rain, swum the length of the pond in one breath, fallen from the willow tree. He had never seen this.

His chin was in the warm earth directly between his hands. He was staring at a creamy slick thing. It was not long. It was very short. It writhed. At one end, the end he had decided was the front end, he could see little holes, or dents that went all the way around in a circle. That whole end, but especially the circle, was stretched tight.

He had been in the barn collecting what he called owl pellets without knowing what anyone else called them. There was a miniature dresser on top of his dresser in his room. The top drawer held very small rocks that he liked, the bottom two held mouse skulls with long yellow teeth, but only one rat skull with only one tooth. These were the bounty of owl pellets. His father knew about his dresser. He didn't know if his mother did.

The owl pellets had never been explained to him, but he had played with enough that he knew all about them. The owls swallowed mice whole. They couldn't digest the bones and fur, so their stomachs would wrap the bones in the fur using some owl glue to make a pellet. They then threw the pellets up for him to find. He preferred that they throw them up.

He always looked for rat's skulls. His dresser was full, and he could only make room for rats. This morning had been passed in the barn, and there had been many pellets. No rats, but his pockets were full of new mice that he would sow in the field on his way home.

After he had cracked open his fill of owl treasure he threw open the door of the loft and sat kicking his feet in the sun, leaning back on his hands watching the pigeons above. Dust crawled slowly through the new sunlight, visible where it had just been hiding. Some moved slowly out of the loft and into daylight and new invisibility. Some moved back into the darkness of the loft and old invisibility. The rest danced methodically in the borderland. The boy's eyes were not long on the pigeons, but refocused on the closer action, the slow swirl of the dust world.

When the dust began to make him feel small he sat up. The sun had climbed, and the shadow of the elevator was no longer beneath him. The ground looked up at him, and he jumped.

His feet sank, but not deep, and he fell forward onto his hands. Between them, he found something. He lowered his chin into the softness, and began his watching.

The creamy thing had stopped its squirming. The front end was still tight, but not stretching.

The boy jumped. The front end had blown off. His face reapproached and stared, waiting for what would emerge. First came a bag. It drooped and sagged, full of what the boy immediately identified as goop. Behind the bag came the head and body of a fly. The head was split wide open where the bag attached.

The fly fought its way out and stood in the mud beneath the boy's nose. It stood still for a while. The boy watched for a while. Then it puffed its abdomen, sucked in the bag, shut its face, and flew away. The boy stayed. He thought about putting the maggot skin in his pocket with the mice, but decided against it. Instead he looked around for others. He found two more still full, and one empty, but he did not get to watch the magic again. The birth of one fly was all creation was willing to reveal for the day.

After his search he ran home to eat, scattering mouse bones as he went. He told his mother about the fly and she made him wash his hands and face before he could touch his peanut butter and jelly.

When dinner found him he was not on his belly, but his back. He had spent a good deal of time on a bucket watching his favorite anthill, helpfully handing them sticks and straw. But then he had felt coming what every other creature felt as well. He had run out into the fallow pasture grass to watch the storm approach.

The air in the world was compressed around him. Black walls from the West were pressing it in. He watched while the sun was swallowed by the clouds. He watched lightening flicker while the sky was yet blue. Still the world was tight and crowded. And then the skin broke. With thunder the lid popped off. The world's head split open and the tightness went away.

He watched the rest of the storm soaked, wrapped in a blanket in his living room. He watched as a new world crawled out of old skin, and prepared to fly.

## Eyes of Wisdom

To gain wisdom is to have eyes that are open and always opening. The wise man sees the world as it is, with the awestruck eyes of a child. The world for him is full of magic that has not been dulled by chalkboards and soulless lectures. What we so often call education can simply be the road to a numb blindness. Instead of reveling in the wonder of it all like children watching their first anthill, we cover glory with truncated names so as to hide from what is being preached. We are man, and so we are to name. We are of Adam's race and so we are to take dominion over the earth. But we are not to pull the naming of things over our eyes so that we can no longer see them.

It is no surprise that pagans hide from God, and from the wonder they might have in His creation, through giving lifeless names to life. It is no wonder that pagan schools are experts at knowledge-inflicted blindness. They must not see the glory of God and His creation, and so they name a thing *photosynthesis*, and make charts, and charge money to show those charts to others who also must be blinded. If there are charts to look at, then they can focus on them and not on the fact that in God's world, sunlight makes plants, trees, and eventually us, out of thin air. To them, there is no surprise, no glory. Nothing is made from thin air. But many things are made from the carbon in carbon dioxide. It should not surprise us that pagans do this. But Christians? Why do Christians run from God?

Christians are to be children. We are to be children in how we trust God, in how we see Him, in how we see His world. We are to be in a state of constant amazement. We must never delude our-

selves into thinking that we know something because we've seen a chart or heard a lecture. We must be in pursuit of a fuller knowledge of God. We must glorify and enjoy Him forever. When we study we should not be closing our eyes with an illusion of knowledge. We should be grasping after God through looking at His world, knowing that we are giving nicknames to creation, the nicknames of children who must not think that they are grown.

We ought to study. We ought to educate and be educated. But that education should not be simple hiding and blinding. We ought not blind ourselves to God with theology. We ought not run from Him with science. Instead we should use our studies by faith, to pry our lids wider and wider, forever feeling smaller.

If we have studied, if we have been educated, and we think that we know something, then we are playing at grown-ups and are almost certainly in ignorance. Fools and blind, blind to the dance of creation. We are of Christ. We must be children; our eyes must be wide.

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*Nathan Wilson is the managing editor of Credenda Agenda magazine and author of Right Behind: A Parody of Last Days Goofiness. He and his wife, Heather, have one son, Rory D. He can be contacted at [natewilson@moscow.com](mailto:natewilson@moscow.com)*



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# Teaching Apologetically: Getting Down and Dirty for Christ

*By William Blankenschen*



**Y** toddler daughter loves oatmeal. Sort of. She loves the flavors available — scrumptious maple sugar, apple, cinnamon roll, and (lest we forget) tasty vanilla. She loves the satisfying feeling that comes from appeasing those early morning hunger pangs. I hope she loves the time spent with her father feeding her. But sometimes she tries to take matters into her own hands. Literally. She'll grab the spoon, dig into the gooey dish, when — horror of horrors — some of the oatmeal actually sticks to her pristine fingers! When such a calamity occurs, breakfast stops. Everything stops until I restore normalcy by removing the offending oatmeal and cleansing her fledgling digits. Only then can she return to eating with an indignant look that shouts, "How dare this oatmeal stick to my hand!"

It's funny when the world of my two-year old daughter collapses because she gets her hands dirty. But it's tragic when students who have graduated from Christian schools do the same thing — not with oatmeal, but with a culture that is craving Christ.

Too often, Christian educators send students into a sinful world woefully unprepared to deal with the sticky, sinful philosophies waiting to assail them. Such students may function tolerably until they realize that reality refuses to cooperate with their Christian agenda. Quite the opposite, the young minds soon find the sinful world is doing all it can to frustrate and destroy them. And so they simply stand stupefied, startled by sinful thinking that they never dreamed existed to such a patently pernicious degree. Many do not survive the ordeal with their faith intact.

How foolish and shortsighted, yet prevalent, is such a predicament in the body of Christ today. Perhaps we can see the lunacy of the matter a bit more clearly if we consider the fate of a soldier sent into battle with little or no knowledge of the enemy. How long would such a warrior last, however strong his patriotic zeal, with no knowledge of the enemy's strategies, weaknesses, weapons, or

positions? About as long as an auto mechanic who has no knowledge of carburetors and pistons, his only qualification being that he has driven cars before and never had a problem.

## Blind Faith

A fundamental cause of this problem may be the blind faith often required of students by Christian educators, parents, and churches. Far too many youths are told to shut up and sit down (both implicitly and explicitly) when daring to question the beliefs being passed down to them. Consequently, the sincere student is left with one of three options: 1) ignore the restrictions and continue to question silently; 2) shut up, sit down, and just cling to blind faith; or 3) reject the Faith entirely as being indefensible since even those who are teaching it are apparently incapable of its defense.

But should we be afraid of questions, even those queries that, if answered sloppily, would negate the truths of Christianity? By no means. In fact, we should welcome them. Jesus did. Certainly, he had His fair share of sinfully motivated questions from the Pharisees, yet He never failed to defend the truth, even if it meant confronting the interlocutor on the state of his own heart. Nor did His patience fail when challenged by Thomas' inquiring mind. Far from it, he willingly showed the doubting disciple His punctured hands, feet, and side. The Puritan preacher Richard Baxter has rightly said that nothing is so firmly believed as that which has once been doubted.

So what are we afraid of? When students ask (and they should ask<sup>1</sup>), should not we, as teachers, parents, and pastors, be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in us? Of course. God's Word is clear. Yet we seldom are capable of answering. By failing to defend the Faith ourselves, we compound our sin by shortchanging our sacred trusts, leaving them ill prepared to obey the command themselves.

The solution to this inadequacy is simple. We must follow the example of Paul who very nearly persuaded King Agrippa to be converted. How

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many of our young people today could stand before rulers and “damn their treacherous flatteries without winking?”<sup>2</sup> On the Areopagus in Athens, Paul poignantly demonstrated that if one is to defend the Faith, he must do two things: know the truth, and know the untruth.

## Know the Truth

Jehovah told Hosea that “My people perish for lack of knowledge,” and we would be wise to presume He knew what He was talking about (*Hos. 4:1-6*).<sup>3</sup> Quite simply, we cannot defend what we do not know. A teacher cannot explain the theological basis for all truth and reality, if he himself does not know that the very nature of the infinite yet personal God is our bedrock of certainty. He cannot adequately respond to questions of the history of man if he has not first understood what God has revealed of His own eternal plans for redemption and mankind. He cannot adequately explain continuity in reality if he does not first comprehend the eternal One and Many that is our Triune God. On an even more obviously practical note, the teacher cannot adequately deal with questions of discipline if he is not first grounded in the covenantal nature of such actions. But knowing what it is we are defending is not enough.

## Know the Untruth

When Paul stormed the gates of Hell on that hallowed philosophical hill of the Greeks, he knew his opposition well, as evidenced by his salient strategy. He cited phrases from the Stoics’ favorite authors to make his points. He invoked their own terminology to communicate truth. In short, he knew the fallacies he faced. He knew how they came to be, who espoused them, and why they were wrong. Knowing Paul’s intellectual acumen and academic training, we are hard-pressed to doubt that he knew their philosophical systems better than they did themselves.<sup>4</sup> His is an example worthy to be emulated. “For a full-orbed Christian witness, we should strive to understand and be able to respond to those who would subvert doctrine within the church.”<sup>5</sup>

## Barriers to Success

In spite of this simple, Biblical formula to success being so evident, we can anticipate barriers to implementing such a strategy. Don’t be alarmed, Jesus warned us about it. “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (*Jn. 16:33* NKJV).<sup>6</sup>

So what are the barriers and how do we overcome them?

## Ignorant Teachers

One malaise facing us in our struggle to prepare the next generation is that, like Lou Costello from the comedy duo Abbott and Costello, teachers often don’t know what they’re talking about. Unfortunately, unlike Lou Costello, most teachers won’t admit it. To be sure, many have education degrees. Many have studied the psychoanalytical methods of nurturing and building self-esteem in students. Many have even become familiar with a few words like *postmodern* and *relativism*. But when it comes to defending the Faith to the depths required by an adolescent’s inquiring mind, many educators fall short. Instead, educators often prefer to focus on the process rather than the product to define success.

*What can we do?* Simple — expect more. Too often in Christian education circles, we cater to a “struggling servant” mentality. Such a mentality rightly recognizes the heavy load often placed on under-paid Christian educators at home and in school. But such a mentality responds by relaxing the expectations to accommodate for the burden. Hence, we show mercy on the struggling servant by dismissing incompetence with an understanding, “Just do what you can, and we’ll be grateful for what we can get.” But are such allowances Biblical? “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...for my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (*Mt. 11:28-30*).<sup>7</sup> Struggling joyfully as servants for Christ is the Christian way of life. It does not require special accommodations but rather edifying aid in dying daily to self, taking up the cross, and following Him.

One way that an educator can address his lack of understanding is by becoming an avid reader. The teacher, who ceases to learn, soon ceases to teach.<sup>8</sup> Another way is for schools to use in-services productively, not as rest times but as challenging and stimulating educational times for the teachers. In this way, individual teachers can be called to present facets of their particular studies to the rest of the staff who then begin to see the big picture in Christian education. Summers, the traditional off-season for educators, should also be viewed in a new light — as a time of rest from the daily grind of the classroom, but also as a time of recharging the intellectual and spiritual batteries for the next leg of the marathon. Summer should be when the teacher “goes to school.”

## Lackadaisical Parents

Let’s face it. It is the parents’ duty to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Consequently, it is ultimately the parents’ job to



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make certain their children are prepared to defend their faith against all attacks. We must strive then to make Christian education a parental rather than a professional enterprise.<sup>9</sup>

But many parents, if they were humbly honest, would confess their own inability to defend the Faith. In short, they are ignorant in these vital areas themselves, thus they seem lifeless, uninterested, or even afraid of what they cannot comprehend. Although some earnestly try to grasp a cogent understanding of the truth, many parents simply shrug their shoulders and mutter something pharisaical, pious, and paranoid such as, “Beware of vain philosophies.”

*What can we do?* Speak the truth in love. As educators are able, they should lovingly challenge parents to fulfill their divine duties in overseeing the education of their children. Schools should get parents involved intentionally, not just behind the scenes but also in the classroom. Schools or home education groups could sponsor seminars, perhaps led by teachers or members of the group on various philosophies and approaches to defending the Faith. Special speakers could address certain core issues thoroughly. In short, part of the long-range vision of any educational endeavor should be the education and involvement of the parents as well as the students.

## Anemic Churches

Parents don’t ask. Pulpits don’t tell. Too many churches have abandoned their Biblical role of challenging God’s people to grow in the grace and knowledge of God and instead have resorted to pampering them in their plush pews. The pulpits offer milk exclusively in message, music, and ministry, depriving parents of the intellectual meat they need to do their divinely-mandated job. Seldom seen are preachers like Jonathan Edwards, generally assumed to be one of the greatest minds in American history.<sup>10</sup> In his place, we find an affable business manager who can’t even spell existentialism, let alone denounce its devastating effects on the church.

*What can we do?* Parents, schools, and churches should form a symbiotic relationship, each fulfilling its role in the kingdom by assisting the others to do their duties. Churches should actively pursue pastors with intellectual acumen and the character to match. Elders should likewise be continually challenged to grow in their own understanding and ability to defend the Faith, although not necessarily through seminary programs. They are educators too, after all, and must be “able to teach” as a minimum requirement of holding the office.

Churches must take a stand on Christian education, breaking out of the pathetic and wimpy fog that presents atheistic education as one legitimate option among many at the educational buffet. Churches must teach fathers to take responsibility for the Biblical education of their families. As Steve Schlissel has said, preach to children, you get children; preach to fathers, you get families. Churches should take the initiative, perhaps in Sunday school settings, to train their people to know the truth and the untruths. Unfortunately, many families often accomplish this feat in spite of, not because of, the teaching of the church they attend.

Defending the Faith is not optional. Training the next generation to know the truth better than we do is only the beginning of our duty. We must be willing to dirty our hands if we are to be in the world but not of it. No matter the barriers, no matter the cost, our Commander-in-Chief has given us an order to be ready to answer *every* question. Enough excuses. Let’s get to it.

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*William Blankschaen holds a Bachelors in English and History and is presently pursuing a Masters in Theological Studies at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Blessed with a wife and two daughters, he writes Christ-honoring fiction and challenging essays as he teaches at Cornerstone Christian Academy near Cleveland, Ohio. He welcomes comments at WBBblankschaen@cs.com.*

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:25-27.

<sup>2</sup> “God Give Us Men” by Josiah Gilbert Holland.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. John Gerstner named Paul as one of the top five of the greatest minds in the Ancient world, if not in all of history. I see no reason to disagree.

<sup>5</sup> Gentry, Kenneth L., *He Shall Have Dominion* (ICE: Tyler, TX, 1992), 31.

<sup>7</sup> For a challenging look at this verse and others on the theme of being a disciple of Christ read *Christ’s Call to Discipleship* by James Montgomery Boice, published by Kregel Publications, 1986.

<sup>8</sup> For a more thorough explanation of this thought see “The Teacher as Student” in *The Philosophy of the Christian Curriculum* by R.J. Rushdoony (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1981), 132-135.

<sup>9</sup> Adams, Jay, *Back to the Blackboard: Design for a Biblical Christian School* (Timeless Texts: Woodruff, SC, 1982), 79.

<sup>10</sup> Edwards is a prime example of a minister with a full-orbed faith. His work often referenced applications to the sciences including his treatises on physics, biology, and — of all things — spiders. For a superb treatment of Edwards as a student read *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* by Ian Murray, published by Banner of Truth Trust, 1987.



# Miles from the Truth

*Jack Miles, Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God (New York: A. Knopf, 2001).*

*Jack Miles, God: A Biography (New York: A. Knopf, 1995).*

*By Joel Miller*

**I**n 1995, author Jack Miles touched off a tempest in the theological teapot with the publication of *God: A Biography*, in which he attempts to tell the story of God by reading the Hebrew Scriptures as “imaginative literature.” With the 2001 publication of *Christ: A Crisis in the Life of God*, Miles uses the same approach to explore the life and significance of Jesus, and the tempest is again brewing.

## Powerful Ignoramus

The result of the Pulitzer-winning *God* was a radical revisionist take on its subject, casting God as something of an all-powerful tot in the beginning, who, as a babe playing with fragile toys, plunges His creation into ruin. Like process or openness theology taken to the nth degree, God in Miles’ scheme explores, experiments, and toys through life with the rest of His creatures. He’s learning His own ropes.

“The Lord God at the start of the Tanakh [the Jewish Bible] is a being in whom self-ignorance is joined to immense power,” but God begins to doubt and falter as He is “immediately surprised by the consequences of his actions,” says Miles. People don’t act the way He thinks they should. They rebel, and He overreacts. Miles, for instance, refers to God’s post-Fall treatment of Adam and Eve as a “vindictive reaction.” But Miles sees God as mellowing over time.

The Tanakh arranges the Scriptures differently than does the Old Testament. Tucked in the back are books like Psalms, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Using this arrangement, Miles reads the Tanakh in one start-to-finish, organic chunk and concludes that God, excited and powerful in the beginning of the “narrative,” trades His omnipotence for omniscience as He goes along. Increasingly He learns His own limitations and becomes humble, even reclusive. Miles quotes David’s “Why do you sleep, O Lord?” as evidence of God’s disengagement. With Lamentations God is sitting back and watching, but not acting. By the time we get to Esther, God doesn’t even make an appearance. As God comes to learn more and more, He “understands what motivated

him at the start, [thus] his motivation to continue is undercut.” In short, God gets bored with creation. He quits.

God lets Judah get sacked, whereas in previous times He would have sent a host of angels to thwart the attackers of His people. His restoration of the captives is only partial. Nehemiah and Ezra live out of Persia’s pocket. Zerubbabel, of David’s line, is not like the kings of His forebears, but rather Babylon’s appointed governor of Judea; His name means simply “born in Babylon.” It’s almost as if God just doesn’t care anymore.

In *Christ*, Miles describes Him as “a white-haired sage seated on a throne, burdened with his own knowledge and emotionally detached.”

But by the time we get to the New Testament, as Miles spins the yarn, there is a switch. God has grown up and, now older and wiser, wants to fix the disaster He’s made of creation. He’s no self-justifying King Lear (“I am a man more sinned against than sinning”<sup>1</sup>). Rather, Christ fesses up and wants to set things right.

## God Repents

Mentioning that Jesus’ ministry begins with John’s baptism, Miles is quick to note the “remarkable fact that God Incarnate has begun his redemptive work with an act of public repentance. Everything that will follow...will be preformed under the sign of this repentance. The fact bears repeating: *God has repented!* But of what?” Turn back a few pages for the answer. “The world is a great crime,” he explains, “and someone must be made to pay for it.” Ah, but “who is to be blamed for our expulsion from Eden? It is the Lord himself who cursed what he created.” Thus, he says, “Mythologically read, the New Testament is the story of how someone, the right someone, does pay for it.”

Miles’ theology in a nutshell: God fouls things up. God as Christ repents. Christ pays for His sins on the cross — what Miles refers to as a “sacred suicide.”

Whereas in the Old Testament, God “was ignorant of his own power” and “had to discover it by using and by misusing it,” in the New Testament, Christ “was blind to his own weakness” and “had to discover by succumbing to it. At length, he chose to undergo a human death in order to prove to himself and to reveal to the world the full, mixed truth about himself.”

Ignoring basic critiques about Miles’ methodology, which is more than a little suspect, one question juts to prominence: Why would anyone buy into such an upended gospel? According to Miles himself, readers’ initial reactions have been, “How dare you?” Big surprise. “But then,” he says, “they tried to identify with what is inspiring in it. The notion that God repents is unorthodox. But in the gospel, when Jesus is baptized at the Jordan River, he goes through the ritual of repentance. If at first people say, ‘How dare you?’ they then say, ‘Can’t we be inspired by a God who does repent?’”<sup>22</sup>

Not really.

## Broken Promises

In an online discussion of *Christ* with New America Foundation fellow Debra Dickerson, *Nation* columnist Katha Pollitt points out that Miles’ thesis does little to inspire or encourage. “[B]y New Testament times God seems to have lost his old military magic... He not only knows he won’t rescue the Jews from the Roman oppressors but perhaps could not do so even if he wanted to. Becoming human, sharing the fate he imposed on humanity, is God’s atonement and also his triumphant second act: The material blessings hitherto promised to the Jews become the supernatural blessings — life after death — promised to all. Clever of God, isn’t it? He obviously failed to deliver on his part of the covenant with the Jews. But who can say whether God is keeping his new covenant with believers? By the time we find out, we’ll be dead.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, instead of inspiring, all Miles does is throw salvation into jeopardy. If God can’t save, if He falls short and fails the Jews, then who knows if He can save New Covenant believers?

Miles stands against the orthodox view that God is mighty to save, full of power and capable of achieving His aims. For Miles, God is a failure. Take his appraisal of Christ’s table-turning trip to the Temple: “As for the Temple that Jesus now visits, though Jewish taxes have paid for it, is it the Lord’s or Herod’s? Observing its commercialization, Jesus feels shame. If the chosen people have to conduct their very worship as junior partners in a foreign-owned enterprise, the blame is not theirs. *He had*

*promised it would not be so, and he has not kept his promise*” (emphasis added).

Here Miles shows that he didn’t get much out of his previous study of the Tanakh. He completely misses the concept of covenant. God blesses when Israel obeys, curses when it rebels (*Dt. 28*).

Israel’s pummeling by the nations was not a failing of God. It was God’s doing, spurred by Israel’s recalcitrance. “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then... you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually...” (*Dt. 28:15, 33*, all quotes are ESV). God is not obligated to bless or protect Israel if it breaks its end of the bargain. Says God in Ezekiel, “I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant” (*16:59*). Jesus did not feel shame because He had not kept His promise. He was released from any obligation by Israel’s unfaithfulness.

But in the midst of that unfaithfulness there is also hope: “I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD” (*Ez. 16:62-63*).

## God Restores

Early in *Christ* Miles notes, “If God had to suffer and die, then God had to inflict suffering and death upon himself. But why would God do this?” Miles says it’s because God is a sinner, because God slipped up. But the better answer is right there in Ezekiel. God wants to covenant with His people. He wants to be intimate with them. Thus he must redeem and atone for them. Largely ignoring the writings of Paul, Miles misses Romans 8:20: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

God didn’t subject the world to futility in ignorance, as Miles supposes. He did it because He had a grand tale of redemption to tell. Miles’ mix-up starts right at the beginning: God is a character in the story, yes. In fact, He is the hero who rescues His damsel, the Bride as she is called in Revelation 19 — atoning for her sins, not His own. But as much as He is the Hero, He is also the *Author*. God writes the story. God says what happens in it. God decrees it. He makes it so. In short, He is not some heavenly

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# The Secret of American Prosperity

*By Samuel L. Blumenfeld*

**A**mericans have enjoyed the world's highest standard of living for at least the last one hundred years, and probably longer. Libertarians will tell you that the cause of this prosperity is economic freedom. There is no doubt that economic freedom is an important factor in our marvelous economic development, but where did the idea of economic freedom come from? It came from men imbued with Biblical teaching. Adam Smith, for example, was well-versed in Biblical principles of economy.

## The Necessity of a Biblical Moral Code

Capitalism also requires a moral code. With it, businessmen can trust their colleagues. Without trust there can be no climate of integrity needed to make contracts and agreements viable. Free enterprise cannot grow if its practitioners live by a moral code other than that found in the Bible. And it has been essential to the growth of America for the past two hundred years. It could not have flourished as it has today if the institution of private property had not taken hold in this country. Property rights are a natural outgrowth of individual rights, which our Constitution has protected from the beginning.

Much of what has gone wrong with American free-enterprise today is due to the rejection of the Biblical moral code that governed business practice in the past. The Harvard School of Business teaches secular business ethics to its students. But secular ethics, based on humanist moral relativism, is no substitute for the Ten Commandments.

Today, hardcore pornography is big business. It can thrive in a system based on economic freedom. However, it can't thrive in a system based on Biblical morality. Separating economic freedom from its Biblical roots has degraded and corrupted our society. Our free enterprise system has been perverted to permit the growth of cultural insanity. The answer, of course, is not a secular dictatorship to rein in the pornographers. What it does require is a revival of the Christian moral system.

When such a system was in place earlier in America's history, pornographers operated underground. When they were found, they were prosecuted and put out of business. Dishonest businessmen went to jail. Today, pornographers thumb their noses at the Justice Department, which, under Attorney General Janet Reno, gave them full freedom to take their trade to the limits of human depravity. It is hoped and expected that Attorney General John Ashcroft will begin closing down at least the most depraved of the pornographers. But the war against terrorism has just about monopolized the activities of the Justice Department.

## Freedom to Invent

There is another very important factor that has helped to make us the richest nation in the world. This country has been blessed by an incredible number of inventive human beings whose inventions have changed the way the world lives. A way to become aware of this extraordinary phenomenon is to read a mid-19<sup>th</sup> century report from the U.S. Patent Office. One is amazed at the inventive genius of the American, who is not only inventing new things, but is also constantly improving existing inventions.

That spirit of invention is another outgrowth of individual freedom, the freedom to improve and invent. Both England and France contributed to this explosion of invention in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it was in America that inventive genius and creativity were greatly celebrated and rewarded with wealth and celebrity.

In the space of only two hundred years we have gone from the stagecoach to the 747 jumbo jet. The names of our inventors used to be honored in our school textbooks. But today's youth hardly know how our prosperity came about. They think that it is a product of big government regulating human endeavors.

Eli Whitney obtained the patent to his cotton gin in 1794. In that same year John Hewitt and four

other mechanics set up the first steam engine to be constructed in the United States. In 1807, Robert Fulton built the first steam-driven ship. In 1834, Cyrus McCormick invented a mechanical mower and reaper, a machine that cut grain as it advanced across a field and then ejected the cut grain in quantities enough to be tied into a sheaf. And that was just the beginning.

## The Necessity of Private Property

The Patent Office provides the inventor with copyright protection. Our legal system, based on the concept of private property, permits inventors to invent and retain the rewards of their inventions. We all know of Samuel B. Morse and the Morse Telegraph, Alexander Bell and the telephone, the Wright Brothers and flight, Edison and the electric light, and dozens of other important inventions.

All of these inventions required the building of factories, which required the raising of capital, which brought investment banking into the picture and individual investors buying stock in new companies. And once the products were produced, advertisers and retail outlets were added to the economic fabric.

Probably no invention has had a more dramatic influence on our lives than that of the internal combustion engine, which gave the individual the means to travel great distances in the privacy of his own automobile. Mobility, comfort, and privacy gave individuals an enormous sense of well-being and physical power. With the automobile, life has become far more pleasant and expansive.

Meanwhile, radio, television, computers, faxes, and copy machines continue to evolve into more sophisticated instruments of daily life. There is seemingly no end to computer development and new conveniences in communication. Today, one can send an email from Boston to Australia or China where it is instantly received. Who could have predicted that such convenience would become real?

We haven't even touched on such important improvements as the great American bathroom, the refrigerator, the washing machine, the microwave oven, escalators, and much more.

So, what is the secret of our high standard of living? First, the concept of private property, tempered by Biblical morality, then economic freedom as a natural outgrowth of individual freedom protected by a legal system based on the Constitution, and also inventive genius, which spawned the growth of factories, investors, advertising, retail outlets, mail order businesses, door-to-door salesmen, and internet commerce.

The fabric of American capitalism is made up of Biblical threads reflecting Biblical law. There are secular forces in our society trying to rip those threads apart. Private property has been undermined by environmental groups advocating socialism in the guise of environmentalism. Economic freedom is being misused by pornographers to debase our culture. Abortionists and secular physicians have subverted scientific investigation with anti-Biblical medical experimentation. Corporations and accounting firms are cooking books instead of adhering to Biblical morality. As the Bible tells us, the love of money is the root of all evil.

Can we get America back on its Biblical track? It will take a mighty, concerted effort to do so. But if we want future generations to enjoy the freedoms and prosperity we inherited, we have no choice but to take up the challenge.

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*Samuel L. Blumenfeld is the author of eight books on education, including NEA: Trojan Horse in American Education, How to Tutor, Alpha-Phonics: A Primer for Beginning Readers, and Homeschooling: A Parents Guide to Teaching Children. All of these book are available on Amazon.com or by calling 208-322-4440. Mr. Blumenfeld can be reached at slblu@netway.com.*

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goof-up, for whom we are to feel pity as if He were some well-meaning figure in a piece of pulp fiction or a tragic character like Hamlet. He is almighty. He is sovereign.

And, as far as I can tell, he's not Jack Miles' God.

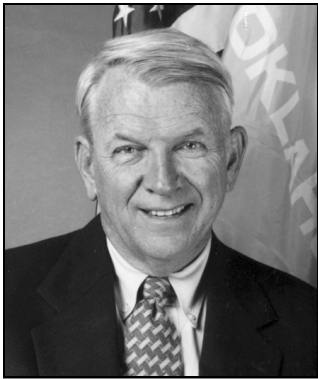
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*Joel Miller is commentary editor for WorldNetDaily.com and editor of the daily Reformed webzine, RazorMouth.com. Publisher of Oakdown Books, which has just released Ken Gentry's God Gave Wine (godgavewine.com), he and his family are members of Evangelical Reformed Church in Sacramento, Calif. He can be e-mailed at jmillier@razormouth.com.*

<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 3.2.59-60.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Rourke, "Confessions of God's Extreme Biographer," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec. 9, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Debra Dickerson and Katha Pollitt, "Christ" *Slate*, Dec. 18, 2001.



# “Dumb And Dumber” Jurisprudence

*By Bill Graves*

**S**trict constitutionalists are always apprehensive when the U.S. Supreme Court closes its annual session having ruled so erroneously as it has this year. We wait with bated breath to see what will be the Court's latest outrage and what liberal agenda will be declared to be a part of the Constitution. We know now.

## The Death Penalty and the Mentally Retarded

The Court had previously held in *Penry v. Lynaught* in 1989 that executing mentally retarded persons who were guilty of murder was not cruel and unusual punishment under the Constitution. Based in part on *Penry*, Oklahoma Governor Frank Keating recently vetoed legislation exempting mentally retarded persons from the death penalty. In Oklahoma, and presumably in all states, a murderer may not be executed unless it is proven that he or she had a deliberate intent to murder as well as the capacity to know right from wrong. Now, this has changed.

In June, the Court overturned *Penry* and held in *Atkins v. Virginia* that executing mentally retarded persons convicted of murder is “cruel and unusual” punishment. What makes the *Atkins* ruling so outrageous is that the Court reversed the death sentence while admitting that “[m]entally retarded persons frequently know the difference between right and wrong and are competent to stand trial.” The *Atkins* defendant, who had twenty previous felony convictions, had carefully planned his crimes. He clearly knew that murder was wrong since he attempted to cover up his act, but since he scored low on an IQ test, he was “rescued” from the death penalty.

It is very cruel for an innocent victim to be murdered, but it is apparently crueler to execute the mentally retarded murderer even though he knew exactly what he was doing. To paraphrase Mr. Brumble in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*: “[I]f the law supposes that... the law is a ass, a idiot.” Most murderers are not the brightest people on the block,

but the dumbest. Must one now be a rocket scientist to be worthy of execution? And how many people might intentionally score low on their IQ tests if their own lives were at stake?

Governor Keating “respectfully” disagreed with the Court, but does the decision merit our respect? The issue at stake in *Atkins* really had nothing to do with the Constitution. Nothing in the Constitution exempts the mentally retarded from the death penalty, as the Court had upheld in 1989. The 8th Amendment merely prohibits “cruel and unusual” punishment. The clause was taken from the 1689 English Bill of Rights under which whipping, pillorying, excessive imprisonment, or disemboweling were prohibited. As the Supreme Court held in *Ex parte Kemmler* (1890), the clause prohibited such methods of punishment as burning at the stake, crucifixion, and breaking on the wheel, but not the death penalty. The clause did not mitigate a person's mental status. Moreover, the Bible, on which so many of our criminal laws are based, makes no exemption from the death penalty for the mentally retarded.

The Supreme Court had held in *Barron v. Baltimore* (1810) that the Bill of Rights, including the 8th Amendment, restricted the federal government only and not the states. The 14th Amendment, enacted in 1868, did not state that the Bill of Rights was a restriction on the states, but the Court nevertheless held that it did in 1925 (while overturning numerous precedents), and without documenting or even explaining how or why. After Professor Charles Fairman demolished this “incorporation” theory in his famous *Stanford Law Review* article, the Supreme Court reversed itself in *Bartkus v. Illinois* (1958) and held that the 14th Amendment did not apply “any of the provisions of the first eight amendments” to the states. Since then, more liberal Justices have ignored *Bartkus* and continued the emasculation of states' powers and the right of the people to republican government. In 1962 the Court held for the first time that the 8th Amendment did, after all, restrict the states.



## A Living Constitution

The Court, in fact, stated that the actual basis of its decision in *Atkins* was “that a national consensus has developed against” executing the mentally retarded. Only 18 of 38 states that allow the death penalty have such bans. Some consensus! The Constitution, as the Court incredibly first told us in 1958 and again in *Atkins*, must be interpreted based not upon the Framers’ intent and the text the Court is sworn to uphold, but upon “the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of our maturing society.” This is the “living Constitution” with a vengeance under which the Constitution means just about anything the Justices want it to mean.

Robert Bork commented on the revisionist Constitution by relating the anecdote of a new State Supreme Justice, who, when he meets a U.S. Supreme Court Justice, says, “I’m delighted to meet you in person because I have just taken an oath to support and defend whatever comes into your head.” The “living Constitution” doctrine assumes the Justices are infallible, or as Professor Edward S. Corwin said in the 1930s, that on account of “some mystical connection between the Court and the Deity, the Court is able... to speak the authentic Constitution....” This, Corwin said, provides “grounds for skepticism.”

In regard to overruled cases, Corwin asked, “which Court was it that enjoyed divine inspiration — the one that did the overruling, or the one that was overruled? And why this discrimination of divine favor? And when a decision disallowing an act of Congress is a five-to-four decision, is the inspiration enjoyed by all the majority judges, or only by the odd man?” Now however, since the Court no longer even acknowledges the existence of God, “divine” inspiration must be discounted. Perhaps the source of these “evolving standards”<sup>1</sup> is, as Justice Scalia himself jestingly suggested, newspapers, radio talk shows, public opinion polls, and chats at the country club? No. One suspects the source is the Justices own personal beliefs, feelings, or their “gut reactions.” Justice Douglas even admitted most of his constitutional rulings were based on these.

What the Court has done is distort the Constitution and usurp the states’ constitutionally guaranteed powers of republican government. “Usurpation,” George Washington said, “is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed.” Chief Justice John Marshall called usurpation “treason to the Constitution.” It is the function of the Court not to rewrite the Constitution or to legislate laws, but to interpret the Constitution based upon its original meaning. James Madison, the father of the Constitu-

tion, said its “legitimate meaning must be derived from the text itself” — not evolving standards. The Court should never be a forum for liberal special interest groups to achieve what they cannot in the Legislature. What is the sense in having a written Constitution if the Court adjudicates based not on the written Constitution, but on what they proclaim to be a “national consensus” or “evolving standards”?

In doing so, the Justices usurp legislative powers in the guise of interpretation and engage in, as Bork said, “civil disobedience, a disobedience arguably more dangerous, because more insidious and hence more damaging to democratic institutions, than the civil disobedience of the streets.” *Atkins* is a classic case of “dumb and dumber” jurisprudence. It merits neither the respect nor the obedience of the states, but instead their defiance.

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*Bill Graves is a lawyer and a member of the Oklahoma Legislature. He can be contacted at [gravesbi@lsb.state.ok.us](mailto:gravesbi@lsb.state.ok.us).*

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<sup>1</sup> The Court has not exactly been infallible in determining “evolving standards.” After it declared in *Furman v. Georgia* (1971) that capital punishment violated these standards, and presumably a national consensus, 37 states immediately re-enacted death penalty laws.

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