

TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

By Winkie Pratney

Christianity is based on the idea of absolutes, rooted, of course, in the fact of the reality of God and His created Universe, and the things He has revealed to us about our being and our world in the Bible.

It had lasted many weary years, but finally the war was over.

People were determined it must never happen again. A *better* world must be built; a brave new world, worthy of the sacrifice made by those who had died and their survivors. Hope was born for a Golden Age; poets wrote about it, actors dramatized this dream, bards filled their songs with expectancy. Mankind had learned his lesson. Now he would form a Utopia!

The years passed. The dream died. People knew it was *not* happening, and never would. Society was still torn between extremes of poverty and gluttony.

Government was still corrupted. Universal moral decline began to eat like a cancer at the fiber of the nations. Hope began to fade. The gods of civilization had failed, and were utterly unworthy of worship; although some people put in a token appearance at a place of worship, most were virtually atheists. In the place of religion, thousands turned to magic; horoscopes, astrology and soothsaying became commonplace. Others, scorning witchcraft, turned to philosophy for answers, but the schools of thought were barren. Mankind began to settle in the darkness of despair.

It was a world with unique advancements in technology. There was one world government; a world communications system, universal transportation; a universal language. But in all of this progress, fear stalked men. They were afraid of exposure; they were afraid of life; but above all, they feared death. Death was a subject nobody cared to talk about, and people rarely tried to think about. There was very little hope of life beyond the grave.

The time: 25 AD Or perhaps the year 2,000 AD!

Cry - You're In the New Generation!

There has *never* been a generation like this one. Its uniqueness does not merely come from the fact that there have been more technological advances in the past fifty years than in all of previous history, but from a totally *new way of thinking and looking at life*. Unless this is understood, the church will be unable to speak to modern man in a way that he will understand the Good News of the Word of God. This new concept fills the modern world in *every basic discipline*; philosophy, art, music, theology, and it is even affecting the

sciences. Modern communications media channel it to the general culture through radio, television, films, CDs, newspapers and the Internet. It is sung about by rock idols and dramatized in modern theater. Dr. Francis Schaeffer, one of the foremost Christian analysts in this area, called it the most *crucial problem* facing the church of Christ today. This article is an attempt to simplify this concept as developed by Dr. Schaeffer and others to help you understand just what is happening to the thought forms of your world in the light of Bible revelation.

Christians have forgotten a vital command: "You shall love the Lord with all your MIND." God is reasonable in His approach to man. (Isaiah 41:20; 43:26; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Micah 6:2-3; 6:8) He wrote His laws on the heart *and* the mind. (Hebrews 8:10; 10:16) The Lord Jesus, our example, was marked by His wisdom while He walked out earth. (Luke 2:47; Mark 12:33) To combat the non-Christian thought of our day, it is imperative that Christians give their *minds* to God; the early Christian church knew how to use the understanding and knowledge of God in their preaching and teaching to men who did not know Christ, and their simplicity and childlikeness was not stupidity and childishness. (Acts 17:2; 18:4; 17:17; 18:19; 24:25; 26:25, 28; 28:23) As men saw their wisdom they knew they had been with the Master Teacher, for their words were with profound understanding deeper than mere human speculation that could only have come from Divine revelation. (Acts 4:13; 6:10; 1 Corinthians 2:12) To be saved is to come into the "knowledge of truth" and "understand" the Word of God. (1 Timothy 2:4; Matthew 13:3) To be a true child of God is to be a thinking person. God puts no premiums on ignorance. (Romans 12:2; 14:5) To reach our generation requires two keys; knowing God, and knowing people. Our vision of God gives us a message; our understanding of people gives us a language with which we can speak to our world. To know how men think requires determination and discipline as well as devotion to the Lord Jesus, for God has called us to understand our generation's needs and meet them with Himself. It will be costly to understand; it will require toil and tears; it will ask exposure to non-Christian thought and culture; it will demand our utmost. But the price of failure to honor God in knowing our generation's thought forms will be a total communication breakdown between the church and the world that cries for its message.

A New Way Of Looking At Life

There are multitudes of ideas abroad in our world. At first glance, it seems an almost hopeless task to try to categorize them for the Christian to understand so he can speak intelligently to his generation. But the exciting fact is this - almost *all* philosophies, or ways of looking at the world, can be unified by a *single common concept*. Once this concept is understood, the problem of communication with our generation is vastly simplified. This basic idea concerns the **way** in which people come to look at facts and truth. Before 1890

in Europe, or 1935 in America, this was *not* an important issue. Everyone in the Western world, whether Christian or non-Christian, thought with the same basic framework, around which they built their ways of looking at life. The most *fundamental* idea of this framework was the idea of *absolutes*; that there *was* such a thing as *absolute truth*, and that, therefore, if one thing connected with this absolute was "true" the *opposite* of this must have therefore been "false." When you think of an absolute, you can think on the basis of opposites. If there is a true absolute, and we can know some things about this absolute, then we have a foundation for saying some things are true and some which are not "true" must therefore be false. (If this is "X", then its **opposite** must be "non-X"). Christianity is based on the idea of absolutes, rooted, of course, in the fact of the reality of God and His created Universe, and the things He has revealed to us about our being and our world in the Bible.

For centuries, men hoped to find a *non-Christian* universal which would allow them to find an explanation for everything in the Universe and personal meaning as well. But God has so designed His Universe and our own human make-up to testify against every non-Bible concept. Man thinks *and* he feels; whenever he tries to invent non-Christian systems and then attempts to live rationally *and* meaningfully in them, he just cannot do it. The entire harmony of man and his universe is based on the acceptance of the reality of a Personal-Infinite God, and His revelation in Scripture and nature. When God is rejected, man is then forced into thought-patterns that leave him not only religiously foolish, but also intellectually foolish. Paul understood this, and used this as his basis of preaching to the modern man of his time who did not have a background knowledge of the Scriptures. (Romans 1:18-32; Acts 17:16-31) *Understand*; God has two witnesses to His reality besides the revelation of Scripture; the design and order, harmony and beauty of the universe, and the fact that man feels and experiences personality and has the ideas and concepts of awareness and being. God is thus the linking factor between man and his universe; with Him as the center and basis of understanding and experience, man becomes free to explore himself and his world. Without God, man has not found any universal that will tie these two witnesses together; now the non-Christian thinker has given up hope of finding this link outside of God and done something totally different from all non-Christian thinkers before our time. And we are the first generation been raised under this totally non-Christian concept!

Today's modern think has come to the logical end of his non-Christian thinking: if there is no God, then there are no absolutes; if there are no absolutes there are no opposites. The German philosopher Hegel (1770-1831) first put forward the idea that has altered the thinking of the whole world. He said in effect: "Instead of thinking in terms of cause and effect, let us think in terms of one fact opposed to another fact and the result being a new fact." In this philosophy, two things may be opposed but not necessarily opposite! The idea of opposites (antithesis) is removed, and replaced with the idea of

combination (synthesis). Modern man has thus rejected the idea of opposites and now finds no strange thing in accepting two contradictory ideas at once. To do this, he cannot use his mind, so following the lead of Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher (1813-55) he arrives at this fusion of contradictions by a mindless "leap of faith", a blind, non-rational acceptance.

This death of absolutes and opposites fills the thought forms of the world we live in. It is difficult to stress just how totally modern man has been affected. Without these two basic ideas, man has no guidelines to direct his life in any area. No longer is there a clear picture of darkness and light; everything is "shades of gray". Morality must begin to totally dissolve, and nothing then *is* "right" or "bad". Any form of restrictions on individual freedom can no longer be tolerated, and thousands of young people are now in revolt from all kinds of authority, from home to the government of their countries. Every difference in nature comes under attack; every opposite God has placed in the world as a testimony to absolutes comes under fire. Even the difference in the sexes has begun to disappear; if there are no absolutes or opposites, why shouldn't a person be both a man and a woman at the same time as much as possible? Clothes reflect this increasingly.

The denial of absolutes and opposites has given man the most terrifying dilemma of all time. Decades of philosophy based on absolute/opposite thought have not produced a satisfactory philosophy of life to explain the universe and give man meaning *without* including God and His creative work. Rationalism, an idea framework that, beginning with man only, and rejecting God, attempts to find a universal explanation for man and the universe still runs into the problem Plato put forward thousands of years ago: no finite point of view can have real meaning unless it is understood in terms of a fixed *universal* point. In other words, you can have no true understanding of a part until you first have a true understanding of the whole. How *can* a finite, limited man be sure of *anything* he knows as "truth" if he does not know *all* existing facts in the universe? Since his knowledge must be imperfect, all he can say, at the most, is that he knows more about some things than someone else does. But unless he is shown something by someone who does know all things, and can reveal true "truth" he has nowhere to begin with. He cannot even be sure that he exists himself!

Consider a thinking non-Christian of this decade. If he does not accept the revealed fact of God's reality (by the testimony of nature, Scripture, and personality of his own being) he must find, by reason, another explanation of his personality and the complexity of the universe. He has no other answer than the possibility of time, matter, and chance combining to make man and the world around him. These are all impersonal; thus he must conclude that all he is and sees is wholly accidental, without meaning, purpose, or destiny. Not only does the universe have no purpose, but he, as merely the result of a series of chemical accidents, has absolutely no significance either. This is

frightening. Besides this, however, when he honestly uses his mind, he is going to run into some serious intellectual difficulties in being a rationalist. Chief of these is that on the basis of all recent evidence there is just *not enough time* in the universe to make any being approaching the complexity of man by chance. The scientific method of study confirms, rather than denies the fact of intelligent creation.

The modern scientific method is a child of Christian concepts; that creation is the orderly product of a personal, infinite God, and that man can discover the secrets of the universe since he is made in a rational image of his marvelous Maker. Eastern thinking would never have produced modern technology, as to this thought-form, the universe is simply an extension of the essence of God; everything *is* God, including man and his world, and as whatever *is* has been determined, nothing *can* or will change. To the Eastern mind, the use of logic in worship or the search for meaning is impossible; experience without verifiable content is the only acceptable key to religion and reality. To the Christian thinker however, the universe was created by God outside Himself, marked with the evidences of His wisdom and love, but not an extension of His being. Since God is rational and has made man in His own image, science and worship are not incompatible; men could be fully scientists and just as wholly Christians, like Newton, Kepler, Galileo, and Bacon. Today, all too often, the East spends time mastering the fruit of Western technology without thinking of the Biblical-concept roots that formed this scientific tree, while people of the West study the religions of the East with great diligence, avoiding with embarrassment any reference to the Scriptural revelation that gave them the key to developing their technology!

"Modern" science differs in one key way from the early Biblically-oriented scientists. They believed that although the universe was run by the force laws of cause-and-effect that God had set up for its direction, MAN HIMSELF was *not* programmed. He could, by a creative act of choice, alter or reorder this system, and since the Fall had produced great ills on the world, mankind had not only the ability but the responsibility to do so. Man was not part of the impersonal machinery of the universe, but made in the likeness of his Maker, who, not being Himself a part of His creation, could Himself step in and reorder events.

Now non-Christian science is in grave trouble. A rationalistic scientist is forced to include man himself in the scientific system of cause and effect, closing it to reordering. Man is thus now only a part of the machine. Even free choice must be explained by some form of psychological, chemical, or environmental determination. If man is no more than a complex machine, those that men create now become a threat to humanity itself - if we are no more than highly-ordered physical and chemical systems, the time will soon come when scientific advances will replace man himself with better machines. Physical systems were never a threat to the Bible-oriented scientist; now it is a frightening one.

Political ideas based on this materialistic picture of man are only logical extensions of this thought. If it *was* true that;

1. There is no God;
2. There is nothing but matter in motion in the universe (no soul, no spirit, no supernatural); and
3. Man is determined completely by his environment, and more particularly by his economic environment,

a logical person would become a Marxist. Marxism in its simplest theoretical form seeks to eradicate selfishness from society by the application of scientific principles on the above three supposed premises. Unfortunately for Marx, applied forms of his theory have failed; men brought up in an atheistic, materialistic, and socialist environment are still selfish. God has written the lie of these three premises into the universe and the very being of man.

The Perfect Society

There does exist, however, a society on earth that functions like a programmed machine, that could be called a "perfect society." This society has *no* problems of crime, juvenile delinquency, or civil disobedience! It has no real problems concerning the aged, the sick, the disabled or retarded. It is highly efficient, fully integrated and totally productive. It is called a beehive.

Bees have no problem with crime because bees have no free choice; they function under a force law called instinct. The unproductive members of the beehive are simply allowed to die or are killed, and more bees are raised to take their place. All bees are literally worked to death; the survival of the fittest rules. No bee is individually important. Each bee is only a part of the total hive, and his worth is measured on his contribution to the hive; on his own he means absolutely nothing. Unfortunately, this society does not produce poets, artists, philosophers, inventors, *or* lovers. (For further information, read George Orwell's "1984"!). But Man cannot think like a bee or a machine. Deep inside, he knows he is more than a blind accident, without individual meaning; his own being testifies against *impersonality*.

Besides this, man has feelings that he cannot really explain or deal with *if* God is left out of life. Feelings like guilt, fear of non-being, beauty, love, the desire to communicate and worship. His mind tells him things he cannot fit into his non-Christian thought framework; rationalism tells him he is merely a meaningless machine, and he has only one other alternative.

"The Leap Of Faith..."

Following Kierkegaard's and Hegel's lead, the modern man without Christ tries to accept the fact that he is only a machine, but that nevertheless he does

have meaning. Since logic, based on his non-Christian premises, does not tell him that, he makes a leap of faith to find meaning. Understand; his search for purpose has no necessary connection with facts. He has begun on a search for reality that completely divorces fact from meaning; this is the first generation that has ever grown up accepting this as a possibility.

Many men believe that truth is not found in facts, but only in experience; and that human happenings are not able to be talked about in scientific or thinking terms. Man's own choices are used to give him meaning, although the world means nothing; man creates his own meaning by experience, although his existence is an accident. Thus, man is what he makes himself to be; reality is whatever he thinks it is, and has no connection with any possible truth or reality outside of his own existence. This is the basics of the philosophy of existentialism.

Reaching For Meaning

Modern man has experimented with many methods of finding meaning. The most common forms are searches in sex, and in the ancient Eastern way of releasing mind restrictions, drugs. Because these searches are existential (experience-centered only) they cannot be explained or talked about to another as realities that can be shared outside the experience of the one who has had them; they do not rest on any factual, logical truths that can be shown to exist outside the individual's own being. There are a number of forms of existentialism, all of which base their hopes on experiences which hopefully bring some kind of meaning, from Jasper's final experience and Heidegger's angst to Sartre's self-authentication by an act of the will; all have in common the basing of hope on a non-rational, non-logical, non-communicable act or experience. Other forms of non-logical leaps have been transcendental meditation, which involves the use of a mantra, or meaningful word, as a concentration point around which the problems of life can be left behind and serenity achieved; Zen, yoga, and various forms of Eastern disciplines, religions and philosophies which reach for meaning in a non-rational way. This is a horrifying pattern to find purpose, and failure has often led to suicide.

All these methods may temporarily clear the mind, but will not clear the conscience. If it is true that modern man can only solve his problems of meaning by abandoning reason, then true meaning lies in the discarding of all reason; madness! If meaning and the mind are opposed, then true freedom lies in insanity. Temporary thought disconnection by the use of drugs or religious experiences that require constant repetition could be better replaced by permanent disconnection; a lobotomy! Yet, most young people who begin on this search do not see where their non-rational search is leading to; the darkness of insanity. What a choice; being a machine or being mad! Right across the world, non-Christian thought forms that seek an answer to man and his universe can be finally reduced to these two extremes. The terror of these

two alternatives is impossible to adequately describe; it can only be measured in the exploding insanity and suicide rates.

This same thinking permeates the new theologies; they unify in separating the truth of their religious systems from history and science. Christian experiences must be simply taken *by faith* when that faith is *not* Bible faith, which is never blind. True faith is founded in the character and promises of God, which are open to verification by historical or scientific means as well as experience. Today, the Church is in grave danger of assimilating this thinking into its preaching or teaching, and the danger is this: if faith is not based on fact, but only experience, how can you know whether the Christ a man has an experience with is the Christ of the Bible, instead of a Christ of his own imagination or a Satanic counterfeit? Without factual moorings, men in search of religious experience are dangerously open to deception. Satan's specialty has always been to get man to suspend judgment and reason, given by God to inform him of the truth of the world and his own being; all forms of spiritualistic or mediumistic works first require a surrender of reason before demonic operation. Modern man, with all his technology, is rapidly moving towards a mysticism of seeking divine reality by insight, intuition or illumination alone without content or verifiable foundations. The god of this world is setting it up for total takeover, and the Church must open her eyes and see this spirit of the world for what it is! Even the word Jesus has become dangerous now, because through this thinking, people can create their own Christ that has no relationship to the Living Lord of Scripture. (Matthew 24:23-24; 2 Corinthians 4:1-4) The Bible revelation of an infinite, personal God who is there, with the idea of absolutes and true opposites is the only meaningful and rational answer to our world's needs; modern man must be faced with the truth or shown the consequence of his non-Christian thinking. We must study and pray and preach for and with a factual faith that is not simply experience-based, but founded on verifiable truth in Scripture, nature, and man's being; without this there is no answer for our era!

For Further Study:

- *"Escape From Reason", "The God Who Is There", and "Death In The City"*, by Francis Schaeffer
- *"Honest Religion For Secular Men"*, by Leslie Newbigin
- *"Man Alive!"* by Michael Green

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