



PROFILES IN FAITH

Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471)
Author of history's most popular devotional classic
by Mark Galli, *Managing Editor, Christianity Today*



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Sir Thomas More, England's famous lord chancellor under Henry VIII (and subject of the film *A Man for All Seasons*) said

it was one of the three books everybody ought to own. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, read a chapter a day from it and regularly gave away copies as gifts. Methodist founder John Wesley said it was the best summary of the Christian life he had ever read.

They were talking about Thomas à Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, the devotional classic that has been translated into over 50 languages, in editions too numerous for scholars to keep track of (by 1779 there were already 1,800 editions).

Little is known of Thomas himself, and he is known for little else—although this one contribution to history seems to be enough.

Humility First

Called the "calamitous century," the fourteenth century into which Thomas Hemerken was born felt the shadow of the apocalypse. Constant wars and repeated bouts of the Black Plague drove population down. The Great

Schism tore the church apart, seating one pope in Rome and another in Avignon. In rural areas, roving marauders knew no restraints, and peasant revolts kept urban centers reeling with confusion.

Early on Thomas gave himself to a Dutch Augustinian monastery associated with a group called The Brethren of the Common Life. There he became the prior's assistant, charged with instructing novices in the spiritual life. In that capacity, he wrote four booklets between 1420 and 1427; they were collected and named after the title of the first booklet: *The Imitation of Christ*.

In *The Imitation*, Thomas combines a painfully accurate analysis of the soul with a clear vision of the fullness of the divine life. He does not describe the spiritual life in a linear way, as if one step precedes another, but instead repeats and embellishes themes, like a symphonic composer.

In the first treatise, "Useful reminders for the spiritual life,"

Thomas lays out the primary requirement for the spiritually serious: "We must imitate Christ's life and his ways if we are to be

We must imitate Christ's life and his ways if we are to be truly enlightened and set free from the darkness of our own hearts. Let it be the most important thing we do....



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Editor's Note



Thomas à Kempis is a name unknown to most in today's world, yet his book *The Imitation of Christ* has touched more lives through the centuries than any other book, save the Bible. One of those whose life was

dramatically changed was the slave-trading sea captain, John Newton.

John saw *The Imitation of Christ* among one of his seamen's belongings and began to read it. In its pages he began to see the depth of his own sinfulness and depravity. Slowly the light of Christ dawned in his soul and the transforming work of the Spirit began, changing Newton entirely, eventually moving him to oppose the very trade which had served as his livelihood.

Although Newton's name is also little known to most, the hymn he penned in gratitude for the gracious forgiveness of his merciful Savior has become perhaps the best known and loved hymn in our time: "Amazing Grace."

Even more unknown yet more significant was the role that the transformed Newton played in exhorting a young Christian friend not to abandon his calling to a difficult and oft-criticized arena: politics. That young man, William Wilberforce, is credited more than any one person with the abolition of slavery from the British Empire, a feat of truly astonishing proportions.

What about you? What are you writing, speaking, or singing in response to God's work of grace in your life? Who are you encouraging to pursue God's call, despite its difficulty?

Do you think your words, written or spoken, matter little? I suppose Thomas and John may have thought the same....



What Kind of Community Do We Need?

Sequel to last issue's article "Community – and Why We Need It"

by Art Lindsley, Ph.D.

Senior Fellow, C. S. Lewis Institute

In the previous article, we looked at the many reasons we as believers need community based on Hebrews 10:24-25:

...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

It was argued that love is never stimulated (encouraged, nurtured, motivated) apart from community. We will now look at the qualities that should be part of any community, any church.

One of the things we need to be encouraged to do is to be reconciled. We are called to be agents of reconciliation. If we are going to be able to share the message of reconciliation with the world, we need to be a reconciled community. In II Corinthians 5:18-21, Paul writes:

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us a ministry of reconciliation namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Note that God is the one who initiates the process "All these things are from God." William Temple once wrote: "...all is of God;

the only thing of my very own which I contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed."

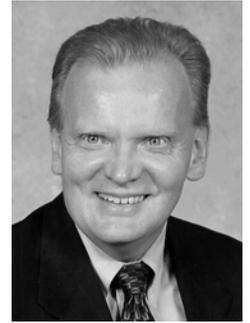
Note also that Christ, of course, is the one who carries out the task of reconciliation. We are reconciled "through Christ," "in Christ," and it is Christ that takes our place. Christ who was perfect took our sin on Himself that we might become righteous in Him. There is a double transfer: our sin is transferred to Christ's account and Christ's righteousness is transferred to our account. Luther put it this way:

Learn to sing to Him and say, Lord Jesus you are my righteousness. You took on you what was mine, you set on me what was yours. You became what you were not that I might become what I was not.

Now it can not only be said of us "no condemnation" but also "righteous." Christ's righteousness covers us like a full length coat. Now when God looks at us, He sees Christ. There is a sense in which you look as beautiful to the Father as does His Son. There is also a sense in which you are as accepted by the Father as is the Son. How accepted is the Son? One hundred percent. How accepted are you? One hundred percent (in Christ). How accepted do we feel? Often we do not experience the real acceptance we have in Christ.

Notice also that because of what God has done in Christ, we are given a task. We now have a "ministry of reconciliation;" we are entrusted with a "word of reconciliation;" we are "ambassadors for Christ;" our new message is "be reconciled to God." The only way we can speak this message with conviction is if we are reconciled ourselves. We

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Dr. Art Lindsley

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What Kind of Community Do We Need?

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must be reconciled in order to be reconcilers.

The Cross is the only basis on which community can last. Christ's sacrificial love on the cross impels us to love sacrificially. In Christ's teaching forgiveness is not optional, it is absolutely necessary. Jesus says these shocking words right after teaching his disciples the Lord's Prayer:

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Matt. 6:14-15

One of the marks of being reconciled to the Father is a willingness to be reconciled to others—to forgive. If you do not forgive, you are not forgiven.

I say that this is the only basis on which community can last because no other religion or philosophy makes reconciliation and forgiveness an absolute necessity. Back in the 1960s there were many communes that emerged around the United States. It was supposed to be all peace and love. Yet, after hearing many stories of how they fell apart, the pattern is familiar. Sooner or later an issue arose between individuals or between rival groups that could not be settled. Bitterness rose until the individuals or group split off. Then the same thing happened again to the remnant.

The problem was that the philosophy of the 1960s was often hedonistic—pursuing personal pleasure. This self-oriented philosophy did not mandate reconciliation or forgiveness. There were many good intentions to be sure, but nothing that made the painful act of loving a necessity. The philosophy was inward towards self and not outward to love the other person as you loved yourself.

Some of the communes were based in an Eastern religious perspective, but this did not work either and the same pattern recurred. This is because the whole thrust of the New Age (Hinduism and Buddhism) is inwards to the divine within or upwards to merge your identity to that of the One but definitely not outwards because the external world (including other people) were philosophically regarded as “maya” or illusion. They were not thrust out to take seriously distinct people because distinction was regarded as the ultimate lie since “All is One.”

Once I met with a leader of a New Age think tank. For fifteen years he studied the best of New Age philosophy and met all the top leaders and gurus. He was profoundly disappointed. He said that all the leaders were so “narcissistic.” I pointed out to him that New Age direction was inwards and upwards but not outwards. He agreed. Of course, people in these communes did love and care for each other. But when

difficulties arose, there was nothing in their philosophy that necessitated their breaking down walls between rival individuals or groups. Why would you want to reconcile when you were already “One”?

Marxism had a glorious vision of a utopian community of the workers. It was to be “from each according to his ability to each according to his need.” Why was the utopia never realized? The whole thrust was outward: to overthrow the ruling classes that oppressed the workers. But the end always justified the means. There was nothing that was prohibited if it led to the good of the masses. Murder, theft, even genocide could be strategies or tactics viewed as necessary to accomplish the larger goal. Anyone was expendable—not exactly a philosophy that fostered trust. Just study the history of Lenin, Stalin, Pol Pot, or Mao if you want to see how it worked out in practice. Again, there was nothing in this philosophy that necessitated reconciliation and forgiveness.

No other religion or philosophy requires reconciliation and mandates forgiveness. No one but Jesus said that if you do not forgive, you are not forgiven (Matt. 6:15). No other religious teacher requires that we reconcile with anyone who just might have something against us (even if we think it unjustified) before we come to worship (Matt. 5:23-24).

...the philosophy of the 1960s was often hedonistic – pursuing personal pleasure. This self-oriented philosophy did not mandate reconciliation or forgiveness.

How Does Community Stimulate Character?

Without fellowship, without joy. So how are we stimulated to love and good deeds – through fellowship. In I John 1:3-4 it says:

...what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write so that our joy may be made complete.

So our fellowship is first with the Father and the Son and that leads to fellowship with each other and that results in joy. When there is deep fellowship there is joy. And conversely, let me suggest, if you are without joy you are without fellowship.

In Psalm 133 we see the joy of fellowship pictured in imagery.

Behold how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing – life forever.

I have experienced how good, pleasant, and joyous fellowship can be on a number of

occasions. One instance stands out among them. I went on tour with the Continental Singers (I played trumpet) for almost a whole summer. We drove around in our big bus with about 50 in the choir and orchestra performing every day at churches, in gyms, and in concert halls. Sometimes we performed more than once a day which meant much work setting up and breaking down all the equipment involved. On this tour we left from Los Angeles and went all around the United States with a few days trip on a cruise ship culminating in a performance at a hotel in the Bahamas. We had devotions on the bus each morning and various people had the opportunity to share what had happened in the homes they stayed in that night and to ask for prayer. There was also a policy instituted that you had to sit with a different person each day on our several hour bus rides between cities. That provided unique opportunity for each person to get to know each of the other people on tour. We also had a time of prayer and sharing before each concert. A number of times, issues came up that needed confrontation. We had some remarkably honest people on that tour and our sharing times were not always nice and comfortable. There were times when virtually the whole group was in an uproar. But by working through our problems, a

deep unity and love grew.

When we were on the cruise ship out of Miami to the Bahamas, we made friends readily with those on the ship particularly, being musicians, with the band in the ship nightclub (we even performed a couple songs there). Many people on the ship were drawn to ask what we were about because the unity and love was evident. Fourteen people made commitments to Christ through individual conversations that few days. One of these was the drummer in the nightclub. I will never forget the time when we were all sitting in the bus, on the dock in Miami, ready to leave for the rest of our tour. The drummer got on the bus and asked for the microphone. He said to us, "Thank you for all you have done for me on this trip. I have committed my life to Christ. I have just quit my job. I have decided to go back to England to try to get back together with my wife." There was not a dry eye on the bus. The love and unity seen in our close fellowship acted like a centripetal force drawing others to talk to us. We did not have to force conversations into spiritual areas; people, out of their need, were attracted to ask about these very things.

The last week as we drove each day (doing concerts in between) across the southwestern United States to Los Angeles, each person on tour had an opportunity to take

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In Search of Unknown Gods

by J. John

Author and Speaker



J. John

J. John is regarded as one of the most creative Christian speakers and writers in the U.K. He has an appeal that transcends age, gender, culture and occupation. His much-loved art of storytelling helps people to discover spiritual meaning in a way that makes sense of everyday life.

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Evangelism is traditionally depicted as Christians grappling with the faith of their contemporaries in order to share the good news of Jesus with them. Yet today many of us find such grappling hard because there seems to be nothing there firm enough to grapple with. What our friends believe is not fixed, certain or even explicit; they affirm everything and deny nothing. Grappling with something so vague is like grasping water; it flows through your fingers. How can you share *the* faith amongst those who do not seem to have *a* faith?

Christians who turn to their Bibles for help here can feel curiously frustrated. Evangelism in the New Testament was carried out in the presence of overt, firmly held and very solid religious beliefs made visible in shrines, temples and idols. It is all so very different. Yet, in the account in Acts 17 of Paul's visit to Athens, we are given a brief glimpse of a culture that resembles our own. There too, we see a multi-faith world where scepticism occurred alongside credulity and philosophy coexisted with superstition.

An Oddity in Athens

A curious feature of this encounter is Paul's reference to shrines to an Unknown God. At the mention of the worship of Unknown Gods we are inclined to scratch our heads in puzzlement and move on. After all, a belief in *Unknown* Gods is a supremely bizarre concept. How can you worship what is totally unknown? Enormous problems emerge with such gods. Are they good or bad, kind or cruel? What do they want? How would you address your prayers to an Unknown God? "To Whom it May Concern?" It is these absurdities that underlie Paul's references to the worship of an

Unknown God; for all their show of religion and wisdom, the Athenians are ignorant of the reality of who God is and what he requires.

Yet before putting the concept of Unknown Gods in that very big waste-bin marked *Absurd Religious Ideas of Antiquity* it is worth pausing. Why did anybody put up shrines to Unknown Gods? The answer seems plain. The Athenians so hungered for blessing and protection from calamity that they took out the spiritual insurance of offering worship to "anybody else out there who we may have overlooked".

Seen like that, the relationship of these Unknown Gods to the beliefs of present day society is clear. Although those specific Athenian deities may be long dead, the pressures that created them still exist. Two thousand years on from ancient Athens, men and women still walk uncertain paths through life and still seek what was sought then: blessing and protection.

The Search for Blessing

Despite the relentless atheistic propaganda that all there is to life is birth, reproduction and sex, our contemporaries still hope for more. They long for peace, joy, fulfilment and meaning, and dream that, one day, their lives will climb out of the grey clouds that surround them into the sunlight blue skies of blessing. In their longing they turn to many things. Some seek such a blessing in their careers, in the expectation (increasingly less confident with time) that their next promotion or pay rise will bring them their heart's desire. For others, it is the lottery win that will bring in the age of joy. Others seek the blessing in pleasures; in shopping,

sport, entertainment, cooking, clubbing, or in health, families or the pursuit of fitness. Still others look for blessing in holidays or in some quiet rural retirement place where, at last, they will be blessed. This hunger for blessing lies behind so much of our culture's feverish activity.

The Search for Protection

And as our contemporaries long for blessing they also search for protection. For all our knowledge, fate, destiny or bad luck still prowl the world doling out misfortune and there is a deeply entrenched hope that such calamities can be averted. How often do our contemporaries react to some news of tragedy by muttering 'there but for the grace of God go I', crossing themselves, or touching wood? Today the bringer of disaster may be a downturn in the economy rather than black magic, a cancer rather than a curse, but it makes no real difference. Men and women still lie awake and wonder how the unknown gods that rule their lives may be persuaded to spare them. Some seek protection in such morally neutral (and unsupernatural) things as insurance, healthcare and pension schemes; some turn to superstition with horoscopes, charms and palmistry, and some descend deeper to spells, witchcraft and spirit guides.

Our contemporaries may not look to exactly the same gods as the Athenians did but they have the same twin needs of blessing and protection. And as they seek blindly around them for things and powers that will answer those needs, the Unknown Gods of Athens are remade.

So How Does That Help Us?

So what light does this shed on sharing our

faith today? First, we need to practice that most valuable (but neglected) evangelistic skill of listening. We need to let our friends tell us their hopes and fears. They may do it naturally or we may need to sensitively and lovingly prompt them. In terms of blessing we might then ask what they really want in life; what is it that would make their life complete? Or we might - with even greater sensitivity - pursue the issue of protection: what worries them? What is their biggest fear? As we listen to their answers we will learn of the forms that the Unknown Gods of blessing or protection take in their lives.

Then, as Paul did, we need to point out the superiority of Jesus. As ever, the Unknown Gods merely promise blessing and protection; they do not deliver it. They cannot, for it is not in their power. In contrast, in Jesus, the real God has allowed himself to become really known and has shown his character. He has declared that he is the God who can be trusted. There is another contrast. Even if they could, the Unknown Gods cannot be relied on because they make no covenants and sign no contracts. After all, they bear no names. But in Jesus, God has sworn to eternally protect and bless his people and has guaranteed that oath with his own blood. Why choose the Unknown Gods for blessing and protection when you can know the One is real and reliable? ■

“Today the bringer of disaster may be a downturn in the economy rather than black magic, a cancer rather than a curse, but it makes no real difference. Men and women still lie awake and wonder how the unknown gods that rule their lives may be persuaded to spare them.”



Jefferson and Wilberforce: Leaders Who Shaped Their Times

by Ray Blunt

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Ray Blunt

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In the annals of history, there are singular individuals who by superior and often unique personal qualities are able to energize many others to shape or transform their times. Often their influence seems to come from the exercise of power – military, economic, or political. Sometimes their impact comes from unique insights and galvanizing ideas that capture the imagination of large numbers of people. For people of faith, there is the added dimension of God’s activity in the world, shaping events and lives for his purposes, and raising up leaders of all stripes to positions of influence, particularly in times of crisis.

A Search for Heroes

We live in an era that many describe as unprecedented in history. Various commentators refer to it as chaotic, a time of continuous, unpredictable change – permanent white-water. Rapidly spreading technology; bewildering and deadly religious and ethnic passions; moral and cultural decline – especially in the West; a global economic, political, and media influence; and the widespread availability of stunningly lethal weapons that can be employed by a single person. This is the stuff of our everyday lives and daily headlines. In such times people often greet the day with a sigh and search for wise and good leaders who can navigate the treacherous shoals. Often there is a deep need and even a craving for past examples – heroes – who have exercised transformational moral leadership and who have changed their times to give us hope and to encourage our hearts in these difficult days.

In recent years, Americans have begun to rediscover the time of our nation’s founding,

closely studying the lives of a small group of Revolution leaders. Authors have relentlessly mined history in a number of biographies, searching for clues to the character and wisdom that brought the world’s first freely elected democracy into being in a time of great testing. But, perhaps we have been a bit myopic and limited in this search for leaders and heroes.

If we turn to examine England during the same time period, we would find the entire moral culture of a nation being transformed over the course of some 40 years – largely by the determined leadership of another small group, most of them scarcely known. They were men and women of Christian faith who gave up their lives and ambitions for a great moral cause. This remarkable story is perhaps best embodied in one man, called to the vocation of politics: William Wilberforce. His career spanned the administrations of Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and John Quincy Adams. But his impact in transforming English morals, practices, and culture arguably gave rise to the greatest era in English history and accomplished what America could not without its bloodiest war ever – the peaceful abolition of slavery in the entire British Empire.

If we then juxtapose the founding era in America, we find one man in particular, who gave eloquent voice to the freedom of man that would roll down through the ensuing centuries as his legacy: Thomas Jefferson.

Both men, Wilberforce and Jefferson, challenged perhaps the most perplexing cultural and moral issue of their time – the existence of slavery in a free and advanced society. How each approached this challenge

and how they influenced others to engage their culture is one of the more interesting and compelling lessons of leadership to be found.

Parallel Paths

To begin, what is particularly intriguing in comparing these two great men is the remarkably similar nature of their early paths in life, in their public commitments, and in their choice of career. Only later in life would their actions begin to diverge—starkly.

They entered the world in the same era—Thomas Jefferson born on April 13, 1743; William Wilberforce on August 24, 1759. Each came from famous bloodlines and a privileged, achieving background: Wilberforce's father and grandfather were wealthy merchants and his grandfather a revered politician; Jefferson's father was an important plantation owner and a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses; his mother was a Randolph, the first family of Virginia with a line to British aristocracy.

They subsequently lost their fathers at an early age, Jefferson at 14 and Wilberforce at the age of 10. They went on to receive an excellent education for their time, one that opened doors to important careers. Wilberforce would attend Cambridge while Jefferson attended William and Mary. Most significantly for our initial focus, each man was to come under the early influence of significant male role models who would not only mentor them but also provide them with an example and a worldview that shaped their entire lives.

In their choice of vocations, while in their early twenties, both young men embarked on a political career. And then, early on as young legislators, they made it a matter of priority to sponsor bills to eradicate slavery. And, not surprisingly, they received a common reaction from their older peers—legislative failure and personal vilification. But, the lessons each drew from those early setbacks would be quite different. In observing the roads each man subsequently chose, we come to the heart of what we will attempt to discover—why do common beliefs and common commitments not always translate into

common actions in leaders? Or, in today's vernacular, what causes some to walk the talk and others not.

For while Jefferson continued to ever more sporadically speak and write against slavery for the rest of his life—most importantly in his memorable phrasing in the Declaration of Independence—he never did embody his early words with consequent actions. He died in 1826 with slavery more firmly ensconced in the culture, not only in the south, but also in the growing western lands of America as he failed to even lend a hand to a growing abolition movement. Forty years later, that failure would come home with a vengeance.

By contrast, Wilberforce would for 40 years keep a clear-eyed focus on abolishing the slave trade and then slavery itself in all of England's colonies. Before his death in 1833, word came to him that his lifelong objective had become a legal reality. In the course of his pursuit of this objective, he was to see the beginning of a cultural and moral transformation in England that made it fashionable to do good, ushering in the Victorian era for decades to come.

Their Times

To be fair, for both men the difficulty of their abolition task was enormous and it daunted many others who shared their views. Not unlike our time today, each country faced threats to their national survival. They came of age in a time of revolution in both Europe and America. There was not only the common threat of military conquest but also economic failure if the slave-driven engines of the largely agrarian economies were to run down and imperil national security.

England was confronted by the threat of France, and the example of the French and American revolutions loomed as frightening possibility at home. As an island nation that relied so heavily on trade, England's wealth was dependent on its colonies and their use of slaves to produce trading goods. Abolishing slavery would be tantamount to surrendering to their enemies and a crippling

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...what is particularly intriguing in comparing these two great men is the remarkably similar nature of their early paths in life, in their public commitments, and in their choice of career.

What Kind of Community Do We Need?

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If you want fellowship, go to the Word. Fellowship is never an end in itself but a by-product of our relationship with Christ and the task of reconciliation to which we are called.

the microphone and share what the summer tour had meant to them. Because each person had gotten to know each of the others there was a personal bond with each person that we shared and also a deep bond that held together the whole group. That week was filled with emotion, tears often flowing as people shared and expressed their love to others on the tour. It is difficult to express what it was like, but it was something like what I imagine heaven will be like. We basked in a unity that I have seldom experienced since that time.

A few principles that I drew from that time that have been verified through my study of Scripture and my experience later are these. First, if you want community, you need to come together before the Word of God (as we did each day). Second, community is best nurtured not as an end in itself, but in the context of doing the work of Christ in the world. Third, a community is only as unified as the relationships between each one of the members. Fourth, expressing our love verbally for each other and verbally encouraging each other is essential to building unity in the Body of Christ.

In Psalm 133, the images are along the line of what I have experienced. Unity is like precious oil being poured on our head. Oil often signified an anointing, a being set apart as holy, as in the anointing of kings or priests like Aaron—“even Aaron’s beard.” Fellowship is something holy, set apart, and sanctified. Oil in the Psalms also signifies joy as in the “oil of gladness.” Fellowship is surrounded by holiness and joy. It is also abundant and overflowing. Like the oil “coming down” upon the beard, “coming down” upon the edge of the robes, “coming down” upon the mountains of Zion. The last image—the dew of Hermon coming down on the mountains of Zion—is powerful. The mountains of Zion are quite a distance away from the mountains of Hermon. The mountains of Hermon are described as being lush and having abundant water supplies while the mountains of Zion are often

dry and dusty. Imagine the dew of Hermon dripping on the dry, dusty mountains of Zion. What would the mountains do? Naturally, “clap their hands.” So do we when the dew of fellowship drips on our dry, dusty souls.

If you want fellowship, go to the Word. Fellowship is never an end in itself but a by-product of our relationship with Christ and the task of reconciliation to which we are called. In John 17:20-23 it says,

I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those who believe in me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity that the world may know that Thou didst send Me....

Note here that Jesus emphasizes twice that the effect of the believers being one in truth and love is that the world will believe. When believers are not reconciled or not unified in ways that diminish who Christ is, it is a tragedy for the world. At times the disunity in the Body may be responsible for the unbelief of the world. Especially note here that the unity of believers is not here described as an end but as a means to show the glory of the Father and Son to the world.

In the passage discussed earlier, I John 4:1-4 it says in verses 1 and 2 that the “Word of Life” is the means through which the Father was manifested to us and through that Word we have come to have fellowship with each other. It seems that the “Word” here is Christ or perhaps the Word about Christ—the Gospel—but in either case this is the source of our fellowship. When we come together we need to focus on Christ, not primarily on ourselves.

For about three years, prior to being married, I traveled extensively speaking at

colleges, churches, and in prisons. In my travels, I have often seen or heard about fellowship groups that seem to be stuck in a rut. When they come together they start by sharing their problems and by the end of the time things have spiraled down into a rather depressed state of affairs and there is little or no time left for Bible study or prayer. This approach is the opposite of what ought to be. We need to first focus on Christ and on His Word and let that shed its light on our struggles. Our difficulties are seen differently when viewed from the perspective of God's eternal truth.

I have seen this in my own experience, not only on the Continental Singers tour discussed earlier, but in a Young Life Leadership House in which I lived. We had about ten leaders of Young Life Clubs (high school ministry) around the Pittsburgh area living in two row houses. Every night at 11:00 p.m. whoever was back from their clubs, campaigners, or contact work gathered in one of the living rooms and together we read a chapter of the Scripture, shared insights about the passage and talked about points that related to our experiences that day or that week. Then we would pray for kids we knew, parents, teachers, and school administrators. Those times of fellowship were incredibly rich and the prayer times flowed with amazing intensity praising God, thanking Him, confessing sin, and pleading for our needs and the needs of people we knew. I am convinced that the key to our times was that we started with time in the Scriptures. Otherwise our sharing would be just like any other secular support group. It is only when we come together in Christ that we see his light shed and His power flow.

It is of value to have a spiritual director, discipler, or mentor. Apart from the general value of fellowship to stimulate us to love and good deeds it is often good to have someone older, wiser and more experienced to hold us accountable and give us insight on how to overcome our particular

problems and difficulties. Whether we call this a spiritual director or mentor does not matter. What matters is that we have a plan designed particularly with our needs in mind to move forward in our spiritual lives. Each of us has different learning styles, different personalities, different besetting sins, different family situations, and different callings. General Biblical principles are essential for us to know but exactly how do they apply to us? That is where a discipler or spiritual director can help. This is an area of my ministry focus. I was involved with teaching, discipling, and mentoring during my six years at the Ligonier Valley Study Center and since 1987 at the C. S. Lewis Institute in the Washington, D. C. area. I have had numerous, regular individual meetings with people that have lasted up to about ten years in duration (although usually shorter). I have also worked with two groups (of about 12 people) for a year at a time—The Falls Church Fellows (post-college) and the C. S. Lewis Fellows (mid-career professionals). With the former group, this will be my tenth year.

What has become clear over that time is that there is a crying need for discipleship in the Body of Christ and that the Church is largely unable or unwilling to provide it. It is especially the case that young people are not specifically prepared to be disciples in their professions and that professional people are desperate to know how faith in Christ relates to their work in politics, business, law, medicine, science, education, and so on. In *Christianity and Real Life*, William Diehl says this:

I am now a sales manager for a major steel company. In the almost thirty years of my professional career, my church has never once suggested that there be any type of accounting of my on-the-job ministry to others. My church has never once offered to improve those skills which could make me a better lay minister, nor has it ever asked if I needed any kind of support in what I was

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The Story That Makes Sense of all Stories

The second of a two-part series exploring a vision for the arts for ordinary Christian people who want to understand the meaning of that dimension of human activity.

by Steven Garber

Scholar-in-Residence, The Evermay Project, and Senior Fellow, C.S. Lewis Institute



Steven Garber is Scholar-in-Residence for The Evermay Project, located in an historic home in Georgetown, a place committed to “connecting conversations with consequences, learning with life, Washington with the world.” The author of *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior During the University Years*, and a

contributor to the recent volume, *Get Up Off Your Knees: Preaching the U2 Catalogue*, he speaks widely on the relation of popular culture to political culture, of the moral imagination to cultural responsibility. In addition, he serves as Senior Fellow for both The C.S. Lewis Institute and The Clapham Institute. A native of the great valleys of Colorado and California, he lives in Virginia with his wife Meg, their five children, and a number of chickens. They are members of The Falls Church where for many years he has taught a class, *Visions of Christian Spirituality*.

The great churchman and theologian, Lesslie Newbigin, came back into the West after 40 years in India where he had seen his vocation as translating the gospel of the kingdom into Hindu culture. Upon his return to England, he wondered at the working assumption that marked the church’s engagement of contemporary culture. It seemed clear to him that the West was post-Christian, becoming pagan, and he could not understand why the church continued to relate to the world as if Christendom was still a reality.

And so he began to write, addressing the church at the end of the 20th-century, asking “Does it still make sense to speak about the gospel as true, even in a pluralist society?” In *Foolishness to the Greeks, Beyond 1984, Proper Confidence, Truth to Tell*, and one titled, very plainly, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, he took up the task of arguing for the truth of

the gospel in an evermore secularizing, pluralizing world. Taking on the hardest questions, the most complex issues, his critique is incisive, and his vision of a way forward marked by unusual wisdom and grace.

He tells of a conversation with a Hindu scholar, in which they talked about the possibility of a story that could make sense of all stories. “A learned Hindu friend has several times complained to me that we Christians have misrepresented the Bible. He has said to me something like this:

As I read the Bible I find in it a quite unique interpretation of universal history and, therefore, a unique understanding of the human person as a responsible actor in history. You Christian missionaries have talked of the Bible as if it were simply another book of religion. We have plenty of these already in India and we do not need another to add to our supply.¹

At one point late in his life I asked Newbigin about this man, and he told me that the Hindu was a long-time friend, the kind that one could not see for years, but when reunited, enter again into the most important conversations. We all hope for friends like that.

What impressed me about the conversation is that the Hindu saw more clearly than do many Christians. What is the Bible anyway? The Christian’s holy book? Our parochial perspective on life and the world? No, no, a thousand times no. The Bible is not just one more book of religion to add to anyone’s supply. It is the Story that makes sense of all stories, and the Hindu could see that that was both its claim and its promise. The vision of history and human nature which are integrally woven into

the worldview of its text are central to our deepest yearnings as sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. We long for meaning and purpose, for accountability and responsibility, and the Hindu could see that the Christian holy book was unique among holy books in its ability to offer such hope.

It is this Story with which we begin, as we seek to orient ourselves to understanding the arts as one expression of human responsibility in history. It seems almost too simple to say that the story that Scripture tells begins at the beginning. Yet it does, and it is profound in the way that it shapes human life under the sun, from the first days on into our own.

Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation

“In the beginning God made....” Yes, yes, and yes again. God imagined a universe, and set it into motion. Sun, moon, stars, galaxies, seas, mountains, birds, bears, beavers, and finally the crown of his creation, a man and a woman, given the task to understand and develop the world, to care for it in God’s name. Some translations offer the word “dominion” as a way of getting at the complex character of the task given to Father Adam and Mother Eve. Just as God is the sovereign of all that he has made, he gave the first man and the first woman a sovereignty-of-sorts, a dominion, over all that he had made; in effect saying to them, “I give you responsibility. Be creative in my creation, and understand what I have made. Enjoy it and use it well. Develop its possibilities. Love it as I love it.”

Though the Fall radically affected that charge, skewing the human heart and every aspect of the creation, dramatically distorting the purposes God had intended for his stewards and their task, the mandate remains. God’s word to his world is sure and sustained—even in a horribly sin-shaped existence. It is with toil and pain that the work of stewardship is now done, but the work is still to be done. Land is to be tilled, tools are to be made, music is to be made, children are to be

born, cities are to be built—the task of forming culture is still written into the human heart.

But with *such* toil and pain we take up that task.

Will it ever change? Can it ever be different? As the tale is told in the Old Testament, from Genesis 3 onward, there is the promise of a day of salvation, a day when all will be made right, *viz.* someday the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. We have windows into this generation after generation, as God unfolds his purposes, in love choosing to redeem a people and their world.

One of the most fascinating moments along the way is the story of God’s chosen people in exodus, on their way out of Egypt and on their way to the land of promise. With great drama, God stops them in their tracks, and speaks to them from a mountain, giving “ten words” which will be life to them—should they choose to hear with their hearts. He also gives them extensive instruction about the way they are to worship and work, live and learn. As he explains the whys and wherefores, the whats and the hows, he then says:

The LORD spoke to Moses and said, Mark this: I have specially chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God, making him skillful and ingenious, expert in every craft and a master of design, whether in gold, silver, copper, or cutting stones to be set, for carving wood, for workmanship of every kind. Further I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan to help him, and I have endowed every skilled craftsman with the skill which he has.

Exodus 31:1-6

If ever we needed a biblical account of the vocation of artist, here it is! God has called, and God has gifted through his Spirit particular people to be artists—for the glory of

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“We long for meaning and purpose, for accountability and responsibility, and the Hindu could see that the Christian holy book was unique among holy books in its ability to offer such hope.”

The Story That Makes Sense of All Stories

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*We yearn for
the
dissonance in
our souls to
be over, for
the struggles
in our
families to be
finished, for
the work of
our hands to
deeply satisfy
and serve, for
our relations
with
neighbors
near and far
to be what
they ought to
be....*

God and for the sake of beauty in his world, even a world marred by sin with all of its distortions, all of its sadnesses, all of its pains.

It is not an isolated example. The God who creates sunsets and seas, butterflies and elephants, Rocky Mountain peaks and Midwest prairies, pink dogwood blossoms and bright red roses, in each generation calls out certain persons to creative acts that serve him and his world. Haven't you ever wondered about the shepherd-becoming David, and his tune "The Lilies of the Covenant"? In the Psalms, themselves songs of wide-ranging emotion, the instruction is to sing particular songs to particular tunes, such as "The Lilies of the Covenant." Simply said, it sounds beautiful. (I can't wait to hear it... walking around a corner in the New Jerusalem and finding to my deepest pleasure David with Bach and Bono jamming, working off of each other's God-graced gifts to the age-old tune, "The Lillies of the Covenant"!)

This unfolding of God's work through his people Israel—through prophets, priests, and kings, poets, craftsman, and designers, each in their own way wondering and hoping, making choices that blessed and cursed their generations and ones that followed—it all points towards the long-awaited day of salvation, the renewal of all

things in the cross and resurrection of Christ. The angels of heaven sing gloriously of "Peace on earth," and each and every one of us longs for the reality of redemption—in every area and arena of human life, from the most personal to the most public.

We yearn for the dissonance in our souls to be over, for the struggles in our families to be finished, for the work of our hands to deeply satisfy and serve, for our relations with neighbors near and far to be what they ought to be—if in fact Jesus is Lord and he is bringing "peace on earth" not just for some future day, but for now. That is the substance of our hope.

The renewal of all things means *all things*. As Hebrews 2 argues, someday we will see it all: everything made new, because everyone will understand that Jesus is Lord of Lords and King of Kings. But for right now, we are in what some have called "the now but the not yet" time in history; when peace has been made through the death and resurrection of Christ, but we do not yet see all of its fruits—only its first fruits. Someday, someday, it will be the whole shebang, a cosmic redemption! Everyone and everything made new.

But for now, as we worship and work and wait, the mandate given at the very beginning is still in place: "I give you responsibility. Be

creative in my creation, and understand what I have made. Enjoy it and use it well. Develop its possibilities. Love it as I love it." In every way our responsibilities are more complex, full of both frustrations because of the Fall, but also because history has brought into being so many more possibilities. A garden has become a city... and another city and another city, until the whole earth seems full of cities. A man and a woman have become billions of men and women, scattered all over the face of the earth. And on and on.

But the mandate remains. From creation, through the fall, on into redemption, the call to care for God's world in his name, to take up responsible dominion in the forming of cities and families, of societies and cultures, is still there, shaping human life under the sun. And God is still giving gifts, through his Spirit, so that his own creativity, his own imaginative heart and mind might be expressed in the creative gifts of his people. Never an end in themselves, but always an evidence of the possibilities built into the creation itself, waiting to be discovered—for a new generation to enjoy and use.

And of course each generation has the charge of remembering to remember

that the gifts have a giver, that creativity itself is a possibility only because we are made in the image of the Creator.

For centuries and centuries, Christian people have seen the world through the spectacles of this story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. Augustine of Hippo was deeply grounded in this vision, in many different places reflecting upon the world in light of this motif for moral meaning. One of his best contributions comes in the way that he articulated the nature and character of responsibility, arguing:

At creation, Adam and Eve were *posse peccare, posse non peccare*

At the fall, they were *non posse, non peccare*

At redemption, they were *posse non peccare*

And at the consummation, they were *non posse peccare*

We do not have to be Latin scholars to understand the Augustinian vision. At each moment in the biblical story our place in the moral universe is different: able to sin, able not to sin (creation); not able not to sin (fall); able not to sin (redemption); and not able to sin (consummation).

Making sense of sin, of our responsibility, of our choices and their consequences, is

complex and perplexing. Fifteen hundred years later it is a good gift to us to have Augustine's paradigm to ponder, as it still rings true for those whose lives are shaped by Scripture and the story it tells.

The Hindu scholar was right, profoundly. The Story told in Scripture is not "one more to add to our supply" – rather it is a way of seeing all of life, all of history, each of our lives with each of our histories, in a way that makes sense of our hopes and dreams, our gifts and skills – even the dimension of human activity we call the arts. In a pluralist society, that is the gospel, that is good news. ■

1 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 89.

“*The Hindu scholar was right, profoundly. The Story told in Scripture is not “one more to add to our supply” – rather it is a way of seeing all of life, all of history, each of our lives with each of our histories, in a way that makes sense of our hopes and dreams, our gifts and skills – even the dimension of human activity we call the arts. In a pluralist society, that is the gospel, that is good news.*”

Profiles in Faith: Thomas à Kempis

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truly enlightened and set free from the darkness of our own hearts. Let it be the most important thing we do, then, to reflect on the life of Jesus Christ."

The highest virtue, from which all other virtues stem, is humility. Thomas bids all to let go of the illusion of superiority. "If you want to learn something that will really help you, learn to see yourself as God

sees you and not as you see yourself in the distorted mirror of your own self-importance," he writes. "This is the greatest and most useful lesson we can learn: to know ourselves for what we truly are, to admit freely our weaknesses and failings, and to hold a humble opinion of ourselves because of them."

Furthermore, humility leads us to embrace the path of suffering: "Plan as you like and arrange everything as best you can, yet you will always encounter some suffering whether you want to or not. Go wherever you will, you will always find the cross.... God wants you to learn to endure

troubles without comfort, to submit yourself totally to him, and to become more humble through adversity."

Trust Not Yourself

Thomas goes on to tell his novices how to handle criticism, failures, sensual desires, and the difficulties of obedience—always with an eye to the paradoxes of the deeper Christian life. For example, in chapter 20 of the first book, he writes, "If you aim at a fervent spiritual life, then you too must turn your back on the crowds as Jesus did. The only man who can safely appear in public is the one who wishes he were at home. He alone can safely speak who prefers to be silent. Only he can safely govern who prefers to live in submission, and only he can safely command who prefers to obey."

The first two treatises are written as sermons or reflections. In the third treatise, "Of Inner Comfort,"

Jesus and the Disciple talk together about the spiritual life, and in the fourth treatise, "The Book on the Sacrament," Thomas discusses how the Eucharist can help the faithful draw nearer to Christ.

Throughout the book, Thomas's advice is consistent: Do not trust yourself, do not indulge yourself, do not put yourself forward; instead put your full trust in God and, out of love for God's will, yield to all the circumstances of life into which God places you.

The Imitation was published in Latin, French, German, Spanish, Italian, and English by the end of the fifteenth century, and it remains one of the most popular devotional guides to this day.



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Religion's Second-best Seller

by Walter A. Elwell

The lasting power of Scripture surges through its pages.

Everyone knows the Bible is the best-selling religious book of all time. But do you know what religious book is second? Here are five hints: (1) it was originally written in Dutch and Latin; (2) was anonymous, but later given the probable author's name; (3) went through 1,800 printings by the eighteenth century; (4) is now available in a hundred languages; and (5) has been read by over a billion people.

Still don't know? The answer is *The Imitation of Christ*, the author of which, according to tradition, was Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471).

I had tried to read this book many years ago as a teen-ager, but gave up, and it has languished on my shelf ever since. Now, a flurry of new editions and translations has renewed my interest and provoked the question: Why has this book endured so long, second only to the Bible in popularity? By the time I had the answer, the *Imitation* had become a vital part of one more life.

The Imitation of Christ is a devotional work with a

profound, yet simple, message. It calls us to look away from our self-sufficiency to God who is all-sufficient, then to look back with transformed vision to a world in need where service replaces self-seeking. God becomes central in our lives as we systematically bring ourselves into line with his sovereign control. This will involve self-mortification, a ruthless honesty with ourselves, a determination to change, and plain, hard work. When we have done this we will be following the pattern of Jesus' earthly life in imitation of the God-man. Such is the essence of Thomas à Kempis's attitude toward the spiritual life.

Distinctive Approach

The lasting power of the *Imitation* is based on the inherent value of its message. But other works have said similar things. This one has become a popular classic because of the way that message is cast.

Thomas put the message in biblical form. Scholars have found anywhere from 850 to 1,200 biblical quotations or allusions. Every page in some way embodies a fundamental biblical idea. The power of Scripture surges through the work and gives it its spiritual depth. These references are not merely catalogues in some pearl-on-a-string fashion; rather, they are woven carefully into the entire fabric of the work so that they become the essence of what is said. Meditate on the following paragraph, taken from E. M. Blaiklock's new translation, and observe the subtle, yet overwhelming, biblical orientation:

Son, you cannot possess perfect liberty unless you completely renounce your own self. They are shackled, all people of property, lovers of themselves, covetous, anxious, restless folk, seekers of luxuries rather than the things of Christ, always planning and setting up that which will not stand. For all will perish, which has not sprung from God. Hold fast this short, inclusive saying: Abandon all, and you will find all; give up desire and you will discover rest. Ponder this in your mind, and when you have fulfilled it, you will understand everything.

Another element in the format of the *Imitation* that creates its appeal is the angle of approach, that of Christ speaking to his servant, called "son." The above paragraph is an illustration. Christ speaks to his own in challenge, rebuke, instruction. This keeps

the presence of Christ always before the reader as a Person who speaks. The reader is also drawn to respond in prayer and dialogue with Christ. This keeps the advice from being static. As Christ speaks, as the reader prays, as both observe life's vagaries together, a dynamic experience is created that gently compels change in the right direction. "Men swiftly change," says Thomas, "and fast disappear; but Christ abides forever, and stands firmly right to the end."

Looking Inward, Then Outward

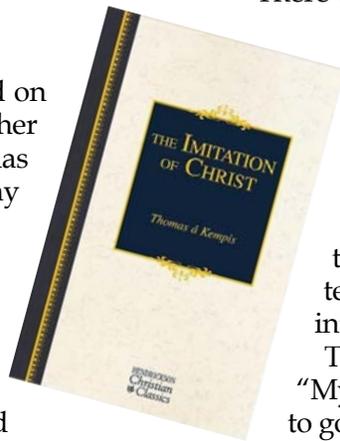
There is a modernity to the style of devotion depicted in the *Imitation*, almost prophetic of our own day. Long before psychotherapy, Thomas was working out the intricate dimensions of an interior, personal religion. He saw piety as the wellspring of action, beginning inside, swirling around there, and working itself out. He speaks of the "interior man," considering ourselves "interiorly," and of our inclinations, feelings, and intentions.

There is shrewd psychological perception in "My son, sensual craving sometimes entices you to go out. But when you come home what do you bring back with you? An uneasy conscience and a distracted heart." In response, Thomas offers the solid advice of this prayer: "Make my mind concentrate on you, forget the world, and quickly drop and reject the mental pictures of evil deeds." (These quotations are from Henry Kloster's new translation, entitled simply *Imitation*).

The entire second book contains advice about the inner life. One paragraph ends, "His visits are many to the inner man, sweet discourse, gracious consolation, great peace, and fellowship most marvellous." This direct, personal, internalized approach to religious devotion has power because it draws us into ourselves, and then more deeply, into God.

When we turn outward from the inner man, we must focus in a healthy way on other people and interpersonal relationships. If we fail here in our quest for godliness, says Thomas, we will become egocentric. It is not enough to luxuriate in the limpid sweetness of Jesus. Christ must be made common property of ourselves and others, for he is known supremely in making himself known. His benefits are most ours when they are shared with the spiritually needy among us. We give, but do not take back; the source

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Religion's Second-best Seller

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of strength is within us. Thomas knows well how to speak of the "empty judgments of man," devoting an entire chapter to it.

Peace in Chaotic Times

Part of *The Imitation's* appeal has been its stress on the positive qualities that characterize spiritual existence. These qualities are always present, but are most apparent (and necessary) in times of distress. The believer gladly bears up, patiently endures, thankfully accepts his burden, calmly suffers, and peacefully rests. Thomas's advice is:

Seek true peace, not on earth, but in heaven, not in men, nor in other things created, but in God alone. For the love of God you must undergo all things gladly, toils, undoubtedly, and sorrows, temptations, harassments, anxieties, compulsions, weaknesses, injuries, insults, reproaches, humiliations, confusions, rebukes and despising.

Peace is available; gladness is there, but not if we isolate ourselves from the pressures of life. Indeed, it is precisely within the soul-numbing upheavals of fallen existence that we find ourselves refreshed. Those who seek to escape the sorrows of life also escape the grace of God. God's grace is for those who *need* it. If we deny our need, we deny God and establish ourselves as the source of our own strength.

The difficult time in which Thomas lived drove him to find a reliable source of help. It also allowed him to speak with quiet assurance and authority because he spoke from experience.

The exiled sons of Eve sigh because this day is bitter and wearisome. The days of this time are few and evil, full of sorrows and pressing trials; where a man is soiled by many sins, snared by many passions, shackled by many fears, torn apart by many cares, distracted by many questionings, tangled with worthless things, crowded round by many errors, worn by many toils, burdened by temptations, weakened by pleasures and tortured by want.

Historically, the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth was a turbulent era, full of political unrest, war, economic insecurity, moral corruption, and religious uncertainty. Popes, antipopes, emperors, and kings all vied for power and crushed the simple people, the source of their wealth and power. Thomas learned in the fires of life how to find peace of soul when all else seemed to be collapsing around him. This, too, gives a timeless quality to the *Imitation*. When, as Thomas so clearly sees, is life anything but uncertain?

What Counts Most?

Another aspect of the *Imitation's* endurance is that values are put in proper order: God, then the things of earth; spiritual, then material things; eternal, then temporal things:

Vanity of vanities and all is vanity, except to love God and serve Him alone.

It is vanity to accumulate perishable riches and trust in them.

There is nothing therefore to be gained by acquiring and multiplying external possessions.

The reason why you are often upset and depressed is because you haven't left yourself completely and separated yourself from earthly things.

The Life you lead should be one of dying to self. The more you do so, the more you live in union with God.

Thomas also stresses embodying Christian virtue in concrete action, rather than merely theorizing:

Resist your evil inclinations at the beginning and break off your evil habits, otherwise it will be harder to do so later on.

Tackle your worst habits first, that is far better than knowing the answer to a complicated problem.

Popes,
antipopes,
emperors,
and kings all
vied for
power and
crushed the
simple
people, the
source of
their wealth
and power.
Thomas
learned in the
fires of life
how to find
peace of soul
when all else
seemed to be
collapsing
around him.

Jefferson and Wilberforce

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of their economy opening the door potentially to chaos.

America, throughout most of Jefferson's lifetime, would contend for freedom from what they saw as the overt and then latent tyranny of England as well as military threats from France and Spain. In addition, the passions of regional contention between the states of the industrial north and the agrarian south were fueled by a plantation economy which required more slaves as the landholdings expanded farther south and then west when the soil was depleted. This issue, alone—slave or free—as the nation grew, threatened the very capacity of a United States to hold together.

The Role of Mentors

We begin by focusing on one important explanatory factor for why Wilberforce and Jefferson took different roads: the critical role their early mentors played—particularly in shaping their character and their contrasting worldviews. A significant relationship with older, wiser people is one of the key lessons of experience that shape a leader.¹ In particular, it is these relationships that do more to shape character than anything else.² In one of the best analyses of what shapes a leader, the authors of *The Ascent of a Leader* use the metaphor of two ladders. One is the short capability ladder where individuals identify their gifts, develop their capabilities, acquire a position or title, and ultimately reach their potential. But what is ignored in this typical pattern of developing a leader is the very reason people follow others—character leading to trust in difficult times. The longer character ladder is a development process that doesn't ignore capability but which focuses greatly on important shaping relationships such as good mentors provide. It is here that individuals learn to trust God and others with their lives, make choices to be vulnerable and open about their entire lives, align their actions with time tested truths, often paying a price for choices made, and reaching not simply a position of power,

but one they have been called to by their Creator and co-laborer. This examination of their mentors is a good illustration of how the development of character and capability were different for Jefferson and Wilberforce. It is at least a beginning explanation for where and why their paths ultimately diverged.

James Houston has rightly observed that the whole subject of mentoring today has taken a turn toward intense interest as we look for exemplars in an age of alienation.³ Indeed, talk of mentors is rare in the pages of history; it was more a matter of fact. Houston ascribes it, in part, to a hunger for soul friendship in today's culture. Another more prosaic reason might be the changing demographics that find the aging population becoming much larger proportionately as younger persons acquire the leadership roles earlier than they would normally expect. The hunger for mentors we see today may be even more shaped by the whole range of issues surrounding missing parents—divorce, busyness, self-preoccupation, and absent parents (particularly fathers).

Jefferson's Early Mentors

Both Wilberforce and Jefferson would say that they were fortunate protégées and indeed, they were deeply impacted by their early mentors.

It was at William and Mary at the age of 17, that Jefferson encountered the three men who would be his most important mentors. The first, William Smalls, was a philosopher and mathematician from Scotland (and the only non-clergy person on the faculty) and one of the earliest Enlightenment scholars in America. There was also Governor Fauquier, a prominent government leader in Williamsburg, who held strong views on the role of government and the need to curtail state sponsored religion—an issue Jefferson later took up with some success. And, finally, there was attorney George Wythe who would shape Jefferson not only as his law tutor but also later as a

(continued on page 24)

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1 Morgan McCall, Jr., Michael Lombardo, Ann Morrison, *The Lessons of Experience*, (New York: Lexington books, 1988), p. 68.

2 Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, Ken McElrath, *The Ascent of the Leader: How Ordinary Relationships Develop Extraordinary Character and Influence*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999); Howard and William Hendricks, *As Iron Sharpens Iron: Building Character in a Mentoring Relationship*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995)

3 James M. Houston, *The Mentored Life*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), p. 16.



What Constitutes Christian Maturity?

by J. Oswald Sanders

Reprinted by permission from his book *In Pursuit of Maturity*



A native of New Zealand, the late **J. Oswald Sanders** (1902-1992) was a consulting director for Overseas Missionary Fellowship, the organization founded by Hudson Taylor in 1865. He preached and taught in conferences in many countries and

wrote over 40 books on the Christian life, including *The Incomparable Christ*, *Satan Is No Myth*, and *Enjoying Intimacy With God*.

This is the first in a series of reprinted chapters from his book *In Pursuit of Maturity* which will be featured in *Knowing & Doing* during 2005.

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Colossians 1:28-29

Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Colossians 4:12

It will help to clear the ground if we consider first several factors that do *not* constitute Christian maturity. A study of the relevant Scripture verses will reveal these facts.

First, *Christian maturity is not an aging process*. Gray hairs and spiritual maturity are not necessarily wedded. Because we are aging, we should not conclude that of necessity we are progressing in maturity. Gray hairs can cover a person whose reactions to people and circumstances are anything but mature. It has been said that it is the *intensity* of years and not their *extensity* that is a true measure of maturity, for maturity is an attitude of life. It is our attitudes, not our arteries, that determine the quality of our life. Our age is beyond our control, but whatever our age, our attitudes can be changed by the power of grace and a holy purpose.

Spiritual growth is not measured by the calendar, and it can continue to the hour of death or translation if we are willing to comply with the laws governing growth.

Spiritual maturity is not instantaneous and final. If it were so, what would be the point of the exhortation in Hebrews 6:1, "Let us go on to maturity," (or, catching the correct sense of the verb, "Let us continue progressing toward maturity")? The whole tenor of Scripture is against the idea that one supreme act of decision permanently secures to us all the blessings of sanctification.

No living thing comes to maturity instantaneously. In the attainment of intellectual maturity, there is no alternative to the student painfully working through the prescribed courses. Nor is it any different in the spiritual life. Growth toward spiritual maturity will of necessity involve moral effort, discipline, renunciation, and perseverance in pursuit of the goal. There are no shortcuts.

Spiritual maturity is not automatic as a result of the mastery of scriptural teachings. Of course that is an essential element in attaining maturity, but of itself it cannot produce maturity. The accumulation of biblical information is of immense value, but it is only as the principles of Scripture are worked out in daily obedience that spiritual growth is advanced. Bible study can be largely an intellectual exercise that leaves the life unchanged.

There is of necessity an intellectual component in this pursuit, but it is fruitful only if it results in increased likeness to Christ. Sincere moral effort in dependence on the Holy Spirit is involved.

Spiritual maturity is not the mere possession of spiritual gifts. The maturing Christian will have those spiritual gifts with which the Holy Spirit has sovereignly endowed him or her (see 1 Cor. 12:11), but these of themselves are not the measure of spiritual maturity. The case of the Corinthian church bears this out. Paul affirmed of them, "You do not lack any spiritual gift" (1 Cor. 1:7). Yet a little later he goes on to say to them, "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual, but as worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly" (1 Cor. 3:1-3a).

These spiritual gifts are valuable, but only if they are exercised in love and only as they result in the unity and upbuilding of the church. The true index of Christian maturity is not the possession of gifts of the Spirit, but the production of the fruit of the Spirit (see Gal. 5:22-23). It is sadly true that not all spiritually gifted believers act and react in a mature way.

The activity of the Holy Spirit in the believer bringing about progressive and manifest growth will always be the unimpeachable evidence that he is God's child. It may be possible for the gifts of the Spirit to be imitated in the context of a local culture, but Godlike quality of moral life called "the fruit of the Spirit"—its Spirit-led

direction, its victory over the flesh—is the only valid evidence that one is God's child.

Spiritual maturity is not copying Christ. *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis does not advocate a self-generated copying of Christ. Spiritual maturity is rather what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." No one can live by the Sermon on the Mount, for example, without first experiencing the new birth and living it out under the control of the Holy Spirit. The steps of the Master are too majestic for unaided or unregenerate people to follow.

What Christian Maturity Is

Before we can consider how to progress in spiritual maturity, we need to define several terms. The word frequently translated "perfect" in the King James Version of the Scripture is often and correctly rendered "mature" in more recent versions. Our English word "mature" is defined as "a state of full development."

The Greek word Paul uses, *teleios*, has a special technical meaning. It signifies "an end, a goal, a limit," and it combines dual ideas: first, the full development of one's powers; and second, the attainment of some goal or standard—the realization of the proper end of one's existence. So our word "mature" has come to mean complete or full grown, and implies ripeness in character and experience. It is used of the full development of adulthood as compared with the immaturity of childhood.

Philo divided his students into three categories: beginners, those who were making progress, and those who were beginning to attain maturity—classifications not unlike those of John who wrote to little children, young men, and fathers.

The word "perfect" or "mature" can be used of our Lord in the absolute sense, for during His life on earth all His powers reached their full development. He completely fulfilled His Father's will and attained the standard of perfection implied in

(continued on page 22)

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What Constitutes Christian Maturity?

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Viewed
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maturity is
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We are as
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we are like
Christ, and
no more.

His Father's will. He also attained the goal for which He came to earth—to redeem a world of lost men and women.

When the word "mature" is used of us, however, it is not absolute but relative; it is like comparing a child with an adult. The word "perfect" in the Book of Hebrews does not hold out the promise of moral perfection on earth. If that were attainable, how could we "keep on progressing toward maturity"? It has been pointed out that perfection always has another summit, but as the poet Coleridge said, "beyond what is found in Christ, the human race has not and will not progress."

To the Gnostics, "perfect" was a favorite and oft-used word. They used it to describe one who was no longer a novice, but one who had matured, was fully initiated, and had mastered the secrets of their own mystery religion. But as Marvin Vincent says, in Christ every believer is *teleios*—fully initiated into the most profound mysteries of the Christian gospel. As Paul used the term, it meant "mature and complete in Christ."

Viewed from another angle, spiritual maturity is simply *Christlikeness*. We are as mature as we are like Christ, and no more. He was the only fully mature man. His character was complete, well balanced, and perfectly integrated. All His qualities and capacities were perfectly attuned to the will of His Father, and this is the model, the standard God has set for us:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11-13, italics mine

The supreme goal of the church is not evangelism, important and indispensable as that ministry is. The ultimate goal is stated by

Paul when he wrote: "We proclaim him, teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect [mature] in Christ" (Col. 1:28, italics mine). God's purpose is to produce disciples who reflect the perfect humanity of His Son, people who are able to react to the exigencies and trials of life in an adult and not in a childish manner—meeting adult situations with adult reactions. In short, God's purpose is to produce people who fulfill their humanity and become what God designed for them.

The questions naturally arise: "Can Christians attain a perfect maturity in this life? What degree of maturity can one expect?"

In his commentary, William Hendriksen says, "A high degree of maturity can be attained in this life here and now, but full maturity cannot be realized this side of heaven. In heaven we will be perfectly sinless and obedient."¹ This statement is in keeping with the whole tenor of Scripture:

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:18, italics mine

Grow in the grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 3:18

Maturity is not an end we have achieved. We are to keep on growing and progressing. "None of us has yet attained perfection. So come and take your full share in our gatherings and in our discussions, which are aimed at helping us all towards maturity. Don't stand aloof as though you know it all already."²

The above extract from *The Epistle of Barnabas* gives an insight into the thinking of one of the early church fathers. Because maturity is related to an infinite God, our maturity will never be absolute but only relative. It is a goal unattainable in this life, but it can be a dynamic process involving constant progress.

¹ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1967), p. 200.

² Quoted in David Winter, *Faith Under Fire* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1977), p. 85.

For the Christian, spiritual maturity involves a final transformation into the likeness of Christ, and this will be consummated at His second advent.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

1 John 3:2-3 ■

Religion's Second-best Seller

(continued from page 18)

Lord, let me know what I ought to know, love what I ought to love, praise what pleases you, esteem what you deem precious and reject what you abhor.

Finally, the appeal of Thomas's *Imitation* comes from its comprehensive nature. It covers virtually all aspects of human existence from birth to death. He deals with riches, knowledge, guilt, hope, honor, resignation, joy, wisdom, truth, and obedience.

Criticisms

Some, such as Roman Catholic historian Philip Hughes and Canon Henry Liddon, have found fault with this devotional classic because of its inattention to doctrinal exactitude, or for its gloominess. Thomas did not spend enough time on the entire syllabus of theology, and at times seems to denigrate the world in rather harsh terms. The charge is not without merit. But in Thomas's defense, he was writing from *within* the faith, and not intending to develop a systematic theology. He was writing devotionally from the heart. As for his gloominess, he lived in a gloomy age, so it is not surprising that he takes a dim view of politics or worldly advancement.

The wonder (and appeal of the work) is

that the author was able to rise above the seemingly hopeless situation of his day to take a firm stand of faith, allowing him to see God's good hand in spite of the circumstances. Let those complain who will. The *Imitation* has been a source of comfort and strength to innumerable people for five centuries. When Dag Hammarskjold died, it was the only book in his immediate possession. Edith Cavell and Dietrich Bonhoeffer had it with them the night before they died. Matthew Arnold pronounced the book the most excellent document ever conceived by the mind of man, after the Bible. Ignatius of Loyola called it the most precious book on devotion ever written. Fontanelle extolled it as the most influential book ever written by the hand of man.

We can conclude that the *Imitation*, faults and all, has secured a place for itself as long as mankind shall last.

For those who are interested in reading this perennial favorite, several new editions are available, as well as the standard works that can be found in libraries. E. M. Blaiklock has newly translated the work and written a helpful introduction in *The Imitation of Christ* (Nelson). Henry Kloster has two offerings: *Imitation: Selection Edition*, and a two-volume complete edition, topically arranged. Two large print editions are *Of the Imitation of Christ* (Keats) and *Imitation of Christ* (Catholic Book Publishers), a new, revised edition by Clare L. Fitzpatrick.

To extend this reading further, Baker has republished Thomas a Kempis's *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. Reading this goes a long way toward answering objections to Thomas's theology. ■

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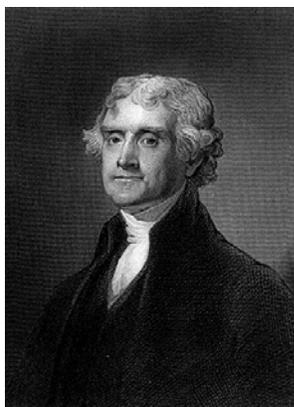
*Let those
complain
who will.
The
Imitation
has been a
source of
comfort and
strength to
innumerable
people for
five
centuries.*

Jefferson and Wilberforce

(continued from page 19)

business partner and lifelong friend. Wythe would later become a prominent Virginia leader as a signer of the Declaration of Independence and as a framer and signatory to the Constitution.

The four men formed somewhat of a European style salon during Jefferson's university years, brought together by Smalls, with the teenage Jefferson the clear beneficiary of such heady company arranged by Smalls. Here the great issues of the day were discussed and debated as Jefferson learned to think widely about the world he was entering.



Jefferson would say later in his autobiography that of the three mentors, William Smalls, his professor in mathematics and later philosophy, "probably fixed the destinies of my life."⁴ Perhaps Smalls' greatest impact was on Jefferson's lifelong passion for science and the supremacy of rational thought over supernatural revelation.

Smalls' form of philosophy, formerly called skepticism, and later rationalism, would be fully embraced by the young Jefferson as a means of understanding the world and later the role and limits of politics. That philosophy marked the emergence of the Enlightenment in Europe and in America. Jefferson's years as ambassador in France where the Enlightenment originated only reinforced his early discovery of the exciting new way of understanding the shaping of history and the destiny of man at William and Mary. It was also a rejection of the longstanding biblical view of the sovereign guidance of God in the affairs of men.

In one sense, this begins to explain how Jefferson could write so tellingly about slavery as a violation of rights (and not moral law). This was a central idea from the Enlightenment: a rejection of revealed truth

about morality as a basis for decisions. He would also come to place his trust in the moral progress of man as the eventual answer to slavery – another central Enlightenment tenet. We will examine these impacts in greater detail later, but it is clear that the roots of those views in an older Jefferson can be traced back to Smalls and to the Williamsburg salon. It did fix Jefferson's "destinies" in ways he may not have understood. Throughout his life, Jefferson was more a man of great ideas with a faith in the ultimate perfectibility of man and society.

Wilberforce's Mentors

Wilberforce was only 10 when his father died and his mother was also ill at the time, so for two years he lived with his uncle and aunt, recent evangelical converts to Methodism under Whitefield. There he met two of their friends who both became important male role models and mentors.

The first man, John Thornton, his aunt's half brother, was also a convert under Whitefield's preaching and one of the wealthiest men in England who lived simply and used his wealth to do his "Church work." He took the unusual step of giving William a large sum of money and instructing him to use it to alleviate the needs of the poor. Here was a lesson that could be seen later in Wilberforce's life as he took up dozens of causes for the poor in England.

The other mentor, John Newton, was the colorful ship's captain, preacher, and converted slave trader – whom we know as the author of "Amazing Grace." Childless, he came to consider young William as a son. Under the influence of Thornton and Newton and that of his uncle and aunt, William became a practicing evangelical and a Methodist, alarming his mother who finally recalled him home. Though his early faith would fade as Wilberforce encountered the culture at his mother's insistence, he would later recommit his life to this faith spawned under his mentors' influence.

For Wilberforce, the most influential of his

4 Adrienne Koch and William Peden, eds., *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, (New York: Random House, 1944), p. 4

two mentors was clearly John Newton. In those early days at his aunt and uncle's, Newton and the boy he came to call his "son" became close. Newton would come to the house to preach "parlor sermons," often an exposition on *Pilgrim's Progress*, which remained vivid in Wilberforce's memory. Later as Wilberforce came to place his entire faith in Christ after a time of wandering in the cultural enticements of his day, he came to repent of his man-about-town ways as a young, bachelor parliamentarian.

Newton had not lost track of Wilberforce over the ensuing years but followed his career, even using him to illustrate how a life could go off track. "The most promising views of this sort (Christian conviction) I ever met with were in the case of Mr. Wilberforce when he was a boy but now they seem entirely worn off, not a trace left behind, except a deportment comparatively decent and moral in a young man of a large fortune."⁵

It was on the heels of his recommitment to his earlier Christian faith that he secretly sought out Newton for advice. To openly associate with such a religious enthusiast as Newton would potentially doom Wilberforce's political career, yet the two met. This was to be a life changing conversation, because Wilberforce had concluded that now as a professing Christian, he could not remain in the sordid world of politics but must instead enter the ministry. He sought confirmation from Newton only to be told that his calling was to remain where he was. The government needed godly leaders during difficult times. Newton made it clear that his calling to politics was not a lesser choice.

This understanding of vocation would become the centerpiece for Wilberforce's work for the next 40 years and soon led him directly to his clearer understanding of his call. In 1787 he saw his specific mission was laid down in "two great objects" that came from God—to abolish slavery in all of Britain's colonies and to reform the manners

and morals of England. Against horrendous odds, that breathtaking vision remained his focus for the rest of his life.

Newton's early influence led to the conversion of young William; his later influence was certainly twofold. First, in helping Wilberforce to see that his vocation, his calling by God, was politics, not the church. This ran counter to the common view that the highest expression of religious commitment was to be in the profession of clergy. Second, Newton helped Wilberforce to understand the horrors of the capture and transporting of slaves where almost half would die in what was called "the middle passage." It not only galvanized William's conscience, it provided him with the beginnings of his exhaustive documentation of the realities of slavery that proved so effective in the debates that led up to the slave trade being ended in 1807. Without Newton's influence as a mentor, it is doubtful that Wilberforce would have become the man in later life that became known as "the Washington of humanity." It was in the shaping of Wilberforce's character that Newton made the greatest impact.



Conclusion

Two older men, Smalls and Newton, were at the forefront of those who shaped the thinking and ultimately the destinies, not only of Jefferson and Wilberforce, but arguably of America and England as well. Their place is perhaps little appreciated but clearly they were a part of God's design for the lives of Jefferson and Wilberforce as both began their rise to power. Their role is at least one piece to the puzzle of why the leadership of Jefferson and Wilberforce in transforming their cultures was one of divergence from

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5 Steve Turner, *Amazing Grace*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), p. 95

What Kind of Community Do We Need?

(continued from page 11)

doing. There has never been an inquiry into the types of ethical decisions I must face, or whether I seek to communicate my faith to my co-workers. I have never been in a congregation where there was any type of public affirmation of a ministry in my career. In short, I must conclude that my church really doesn't have the least interest in whether or how I minister in my daily work.

Notice what is missing: accountability, development of ministry skills, support, help in ethical decisions, encouragement to evangelize, and affirmation of a God-given calling to professional life. In other words, he and others like him are not really equipped, helped, or supported in specific ways for what they do 9 - 5 (or more), Monday to Friday. This evaluation of Diehl's has proved true in my own experience. Churches seldom help professional people in anything other than general support in their jobs. Specific issues are rarely addressed and accountability is almost non-existent. Calling in a profession is not affirmed in any public way as a ministry. There is a desperate need for attention to be given to these matters.

For example, in the Washington, D. C. area many churches have congressmen, senators, cabinet officials, top aides - to pick only one part of the cross-section - in attendance. How many of these are followed up with regular individual meetings with pastors or other leaders of the Church? Not many. It is difficult enough to run a church with all its responsibilities. That does not leave much time except for the issues that demand immediate attention. Yet those members that could be significant shapers and builders of the Kingdom of God are seldom nurtured. There is a crying need for more stimulation to love and good deeds in professional life.

We need a theology of the ascension. We

have regular holidays that celebrate Christ's birth, death, and resurrection (Christmas, Good Friday and Easter) but little, if any, place given to the ascension. Yet the ascension has three particularly relevant implications. First, Christ was going, not on vacation, but to be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. He was seated at the right hand of God - the position of power and authority. Second, He was sending the Holy Spirit in His place. The Holy Spirit comes to glorify the Son. Jesus says that it is to "your advantage" that He goes away (John 16:7). In other words, His absence is better than His presence. It is better that He goes than if He stays. The One whom He sends in His place is better than Christ standing in the flesh beside us. I wonder if we believe that. The third implication is what He is now doing in the heavenlies, namely praying for us. "Christ died for us, rose for us, reigns

*...the implications
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have to do with
what Christ is
doing at present,
now, at this
moment for us.*

in power for us, and prays for us" (Romans 8:34 Phillips translation). In other words, the implications of the ascension have to do with what Christ is doing at present, now, at this moment for us. He is Lord of all life, the Sender of the Holy Spirit, and the great High Priest for us. We have focused (rightly) on what Christ has done for us in the past, but (wrongly) neglected what He is doing for us in the present (and what He will do for us in the future).

The Body of Christ needs to discover the gifts given for the church and the world and use them. Over the past twenty years, I have done vocational interviews with hundreds of people helping them to sort out their gifts and work out a plan to use them. Normally, I focus on teaching Apologetics, Theology, Ethics, Spirituality, and Bible courses. However, because the need is so great, I am often called on to help people clarify their gifts. Rarely do I meet

someone who knows their giftedness with clarity. What would happen if church members knew their gifts thoroughly and utilized them in the church and in their profession? It would be a revolution. There are groups that have helped churches do this such as People Management and the Doma Group. But there should be a hue and cry for more of this kind of equipping. Not only are people encouraged and stimulated by such a process, but they are given a newly clarified purpose when they see what they were created to do.

Stimulating to love and good deeds takes many diverse people. It is good to have a mentor and an accountability group, but it takes what one counselor called a “cast of thousands.” It is not enough to have one person or a group; it takes exposure to the whole Body to grow into what Christ wants us to be. Each person sees a different side of us, brings out different aspects of who we are, can provide solutions from different areas. For instance, I have worked as spiritual director alongside a counselor where I focused on spiritual issues and he focused on therapy. Often people do not have the strength to face their deepest struggles and move forward unless they gain spiritual strength to do so. But more than this, everyone needs close relationships with family and friends, a sense of physical well-being (sleep, exercise, and nutrition), a sense of who they are as a man or a woman. Different people can help in these different areas (i.e. a personal trainer, nutritionist, doctor, a psychiatrist, etc.). But these people need to be mobilized to help and asked to participate in the process of discipleship knowing that the sole weight does not rest on them.

We all live on the edge. In Alcoholics Anonymous there is the sense that each

person lives on the edge of falling back into their addiction to alcohol. Therefore, they can call on any member of the group, day or night, for support. In the same way, we all live on the edge of falling into sin, and not just individual acts, but patterns of behavior, bad habits (let us call them addictions). If we do not have such destructive habits (who does not?), then we continually need to beware of falling into them. The Scriptures warn us to beware when we think we stand lest we fall (I Cor. 10:12). We need the kind of support that Alcoholics Anonymous provides. So many people suffer silently with profound moral issues and struggles and are afraid to let anyone in their church know about it. We need to, as Christ did, let them know that

a “bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick He will not quench” (Matt. 12:20). Even the weakest, most struggling believer is welcome and will be stimulated and encouraged to love and good deeds. ■

What would happen if church members knew their gifts thoroughly and utilized them in the church and in their profession?

Jefferson and Wilberforce

(continued from page 25)

their early commitments. Jefferson became a man of science, philosophy, and rational thought, trusting in the forces of enlightened minds. Wilberforce became a man with a calling and a commitment to act on that call, empowered by a God who acted in history.

However, a fuller explanation remains as we next examine the role of their colleagues, followers and supporters in shaping their commitments and then as we take a fuller look at how their worldviews shaped not only their choices but their legacies in shaping the culture of their times. ■

Look for Part II in the Fall 2005 issue.



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Ravi Zacharias – “The Challenge of Religious Pluralism”

“Aren’t all religions basically the same?” “How can you say Christianity is the only true religion?” “Aren’t there many ways to God?” These questions and others like them are increasingly in the minds of our friends and neighbors today. They are the fruit of a postmodern culture that denies the existence of truth and absolutes while promoting relativism, religious pluralism, and a misguided notion of tolerance. How do we understand this growing challenge to biblical truth and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ? And, how can we effectively present the Christ of Scripture to those around us? These are some of the questions Ravi Zacharias addresses in this series of lectures.



Alister McGrath – “The Twilight of Atheism”

These lectures explore the relation between biblical faith and the natural sciences. They are of compelling interest both to believers wanting to explore how the natural sciences fit into their understanding of the world and also to any scientists wishing to link their work with their faith. The lectures deal with some of the great debates of the past and present, including whether the natural sciences are necessarily atheistic, as argued by Richard Dawkins and others. Although these lectures are rigorously grounded in scholarship, they are presented in a highly accessible form, suitable for a wide audience.



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