

**CHRIS CHRISMAN
G O E S T O
COLLEGE**

**. . . and faces the challenges of
relativism, individualism and pluralism**

JAMES W. SIRE



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To

Chris **Chrisman**, Bob **Wong**, Susie Sylvan, Bill **Seipel**
and aft the students they represent
at every Hansom State University

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Acknowledgments

This book had its origins in what I thought would be a short illustration to begin a lecture on the challenges to Christian faith experienced by Christian students attending state or other secular universities. The illustration grew so that it became half of the lecture itself. It appears here as chapter one. Chapter two is essentially the second half of that lecture. My thanks go to Wheaton College, which invited me to present this talk in the Morris Inch Lectureship, spring 1991.

Other sections of this book, especially the material on individualism and privatization and the cosmic lordship of **Christ**, have at least part of their origin in lectures and discussions developed for Agents of Transformation, a training program sponsored by the Great Lakes Region of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. My thanks go first to James Paternoster, with whom I worked from the first of these pro-

separate way of viewing reality. It made his head hurt Who is right? Is anyone right? What should I believe? Isn't one thing just as good as another? Why shouldn't I live with a **lover—same sex**, different sex—why not? Why should I believe anything at all?

Chris now began to notice how his academic coursework was not helping to resolve these difficulties in the least Most of them never raised the questions he was interested in. In English he struggled with a few foibles of his **graduate-student** English instructor, but soon learned what he wanted and produced it It wasn't what Chris **wanted**.

In Biology everything went smoothly until Professor Barbara **Sil**-vera insisted that evolution by chance and necessity was a **fact**; design had nothing to do with it Professor Silvera had asked on a test "By what process did the giraffe come to have a long neck?" and Chris had **answered**, "In order to reach the leaves at the top of the trees." The **professor's** comment on that idea was devastating. Silvera's grad-student grader later explained to Chris why the professor's comment was so harsh and what it meant for evolution to be nonteleological, without deliberate **direction**, strictly accidental At least that's what Chris thought it meant though he could never quite get the hang of that notion. It didn't seem to explain **what** it purported to explain. But Chris couldn't quite figure out why.

Chris found out later that Professor Silvera had once chanced to be battered in a public dialogue with a creationist who, the professor said, pretended to be a scientist but was simply a misguided ideologue. Now in her class presentations she gave no consideration to any of the **creationist's** arguments; she just flatly denied that they were relevant This gave Chris a funny feeling. Obviously, Professor Silvera knew biology; she talked and thought circles around the best students in the class. What she said about evolution seemed credible. Yet it went against Chris's notion of God's somehow being in **charge**.

Sociology didn't help either. Everything had a natural explanation, if it had one at all Religion was the opiate of the people or the vestige of our primitive origins, a piece of the machinery of society or (and

Chris could make very little of this) a language game played in a thousand different dialects. It was anything but true. In fact the **ques-**tion of religious truth seldom came up in the course; when it **did—**usually from a puzzled **student—it was laid** to rest by the comment "We do not deal with the truth or falsity of religious ideas, only with their history and function in the fabric of society. Your question **is** just not one sociology tries to answer."

World Civilization fascinated **Chris**. It introduced him not just to Western civilization but to prehistory, primal peoples, African and Asian history and a good deal more, but the course moved so fast that Chris felt like he did on his first commercial jet flight. He had looked forward to seeing the entire United States as he flew from New York to San Francisco, **but** he found that except for the high mountains and dry desert of the West everything was in a soft haze. So too, in World Civ a few things, like ancient Greece and Egypt stood out but most of the course was a big blur. Still, he did well on the many **multiple-**choice quizzes and the occasional short papers he had to write.

But it was the special course that had interested him at the beginning of the semester that really gave him fits. Religious Options Around the **World—that** was the right title, all right. That was **precise-**ly how the course was taught. Here's an option. There's an option. Here's the potted history of this option. There's the potted history of that option. (Each got a chapter in a book called *Major Religions of the World*.) Chris did like the fact that Professor Compriel asked guests **from** several of the religions to speak to the class. That gave each option personal credibility.

But that was the problem again. Each faith looked right to each of those who spoke, and each one began to look right to Chris as he heard them and noted their sincerity. Still, that couldn't be *so* if Christianity was the one true **way—and** that was what Chris believed. Chris tried several times to raise the question of which if any of the various faiths could be thought to be true. But Professor Compriel would not answer, and when one of the guests would make a stab at **answering,**

the professor would soften his or her argument with something like "Remember, we are talking about religious belief here. Truth is not really the issue. It's beyond the scope of this course. And besides, in a state school we can't advocate any particular religion in a **classroom.**" He did suggest though, that Chris take a course in the philosophy of religion. He thought **that they** just might deal with the truth question there, though of course **not** by way of advocating any specific religion.

With **all this confusion**, Chris decided that discretion was the better part of valor. The advice his roommate had given him at the beginning of the semester became the principle he decided to live **by—at** least for a while. He would live **and** let live. His faith was not so much put on the back burner as confined to his private life. Among his fellow students he would take on the color of his **surroundings—**accede to the notion that everyone is entitled to his or her own views on anything. All notion of sharing his faith with the idea that others should be converted was laid aside. The wind had gone out of his sails, and the ship of Chris's faith lay dead in the water.¹

2 THE VORTEX OF MODERNITY

We believe in sex before **during**
and after marriage.

We believe in the therapy of **sin.**

We believe that adultery is **fun.**

We believe that sodomy's OK

We believe that taboos are taboo.

(**STEVE TURNER, "CREED*")**

What has happened to Chris Chrisman?

W Chris Chrisman has been done to. He has been sucked into the vortex of the modern university, where whirl is king. Chris has faced the challenges the university poses for Christian **faith**, and already, at the end of his first semester in college, he has lost his grip.

Let's leave the story of Chris and his friends for a while and look at the forces that have moved against his **faith**. This will be the first of several chapters in which I invite the reader to step back from the story and think with me about the issues it **raises**.

In this chapter we will look first at the sociological and then the intellectual forces that are working on **Chris**, mostly without his knowing it. He could, of course, learn about these **forces**, and as the story progresses we will find him doing so.

Four Forces of Modernity

Every human being is enmeshed in society **and**, more broadly, in culture. We are social beings. We began that way as children, growing up in one specific family and one specific country, learning one specific language (some grow up speaking two from childhood) and being governed by a specific social order. Our first beliefs are those of our first environment usually our parents. We are shaped socially and psychologically before we know what our shape is.

Sometime in adolescence we begin to know ourselves as **ourselves**. We begin to recognize who we are and begin to have some ability consciously to shape who we will be from then on. But we never lose our rootedness. We never become autonomous individuals totally in charge of who we are and who we **will** be.

Chris Chrisman could have rebelled against his upbringing, but he never felt much like doing so. Those in his high school who did rebel were known in Chris's crowd as punkers or **deadheads**.

Let's briefly survey a few of the forces that were working on Chris even after he had achieved some degree of self-identity, some measure of autonomy. Sociologists label this complex of forces *modernity*: the condition of modern society. Most of them will be **addressed** in greater detail in subsequent **chapters**.

Individualism

Individualism is at the root of modernity. Individualism proclaims, "I am self-sufficient I need not **I** ought not depend on anyone but myself After **all**, I am who I am; I am who I make myself to be."

Individualism is primarily a Western phenomenon. It is rooted in the Christian notion of being created in the image of **God**. But it appears in its modern form, if not first then certainly most visibly in Martin **Luther's** refusal to agree with the hierarchy of the **church**. "**Unless** I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I will not change my mind." The individual conscience cannot be forced

Chris himself felt this **way—especially** as he found himself with

did they **still** believe in **God**, or at least in some higher being? Only his biology **professor—Dr. Darwin**, the students called him; his name was really **Darwain—admitted** to being an atheist. Even the grad-student lab instructor was unwilling to do that. He would say to people troubled by evolution, "**Look**, God could've done it that way. It's just that we can't do science by using God as an **explanation**. So let's stick with what we can know from the physical facts before us." Then he would explain evolution just like Dr. Darwin.

Professor Comprel gave him the most trouble. Why was he so sympathetic to so many beliefs? Couldn't he see that they contradicted each other? In high school Michael Stone had taught Bob the basics of logic. X and not-X could not both be true. Zen Buddhism taught that there was no personal higher **being**; Islam said there **was**. Comprel thought both had something true to say but neither was final. That as far as Bob was **concerned**, was nonsense, but when he made an objection along those lines in class Comprel said, "**You** must look for the truth within the statements, behind the words. The truth here is symbolic." Well, Bob **concluded**, if that was so he had certainly better not major in **symbolism**, because he couldn't see truth of any kind behind two sentences that contradicted each other.

Bob had indeed become immersed in the university **mind—individualistic, pluralistic, relativistic, privatized**. He was losing his grip on his **atheism**. He was in trouble.

Bob was **beginning** to doubt his atheism. All the machinations of Professor Comprel, all the conversations he'd had in the dorm, especially with his roommate, were getting to him. His roommate had not come on like Hank back in Mendocino. **Like** Chris, Kevin had a simple faith and knew enough to know that it takes just as much faith to believe that God doesn't exist as it does to believe that he does. Bob was gradually coming to believe this too. But he still didn't believe that Kevin's faith could be true. That seemed too much like a leap in the **dark**.

"Okay, maybe I can't prove God doesn't exist" he told Kevin at the

a ticket away from the West Coast and into the center of America. *What can be more American than the **Midwest?*** he thought

So Bob Wong went to State.

Bob enrolled in English **Comp**, World Civ, **Biology—the** same courses as Chris **Chrisman**, but different sections. And he took Religious Options Around the World with Professor Comprel. He thought that because this was a university, certainly the teacher would **not** be a believer in any of the religions he taught. He would be too intelligent. Taking a course on this topic from an atheist professor would round out Bob's critique of all religions and forever justify his own atheistic **commitment—not** that Bob had any doubts about it.

Then a curious thing **happened**. Bob began to have the same experience as Chris. Like **Chris**, Bob lived in a coed **dorm**. In the luck of the draw, however, Bob's roommate turned out to be a Christian. Kevin Leaver had arrived on campus just before Bob and had unpacked first. When Bob arrived, there on the desk was a big black Bible. Bob almost panicked. Then Kevin walked in and introduced himself. Bob saw him as friendly but shy. They exchanged a few details about themselves, and Bob relaxed. Actually, he discovered, Kevin was a pretty nice guy. And what amazed Bob the most was that he seemed intelligent. He was **premed**, and Bob could see he was confident about going **all** the way through **med** school. Bob would find out later that Kevin was the valedictorian of his high school and there were six hundred in his graduating **class**.

Then there were the others on their floor: a couple of first-year women who hung around Kevin a lot because they too were Christians, a young man from Sri Lanka who was a Buddhist, several guys who were obviously Jewish but not so interested in intellectual pursuits as Michael, and an assortment of nondescript others whom Bob only gradually came to know. None of them were **atheists**.

Halfway through the semester, Bob, like Chris, was coming apart at the **seams**.

All these people in the **dormitory—all** these intelligent people: why

ened—yes, with a capital **E—twentieth** century. Einstein would have been their hero if he hadn't believed in some benign "mind" permeating the **universe**. No, the cosmos was just **there—no** reason for it. The only reason was human reason, and that was quite adequate for **all** we human beings need to be and do. Evolution brought us here, not for any purpose **but** just because that's the way it worked out when the impersonal forces of the universe did their thing.

Bob and Michael both played chess, Bob because he liked it and Michael because it was what young intellectuals were supposed to do and he wanted to fulfil his destiny. Besides, he liked it too.

Endless hours the two spent together, heads bent over a **chess-board**, minds battling out their philosophies as well as their strategies and **tactics**. Pawn to king four put their minds in gear. And though Bob proved the slightly better chess player, **Michael** thought circles around **Bob—at** least their first year together. By the time they graduated from high school, Bob could hold his own in a philosophic argument. Always, however, they argued about details. Both began as atheists and ended four years later as atheists.

Then **they** both went to college. Michael was ecstatic to get accepted **at Bertrand** College, an exclusive private school known for its academic rigor.

Bob had very different plans. His parents would have loved to have **him** join Michael at Bertrand. It had an excellent reputation for getting its graduates into the best professional schools. But Bob was not interested in law or medicine or even business. He wanted to pursue his own quest.

It had taken hours of negotiation with his parents over many **days**, but finally Bob had secured their reluctant permission to do what he really wanted.

Bob had been looking at college catalogs and a map. Hansom State **was**, he thought ideal. It was thousands of miles away, it was a good but undistinguished school (that is, there were many schools just as **prestigious**, and many more so); and it offered Bob what he wanted—

interested enough to learn, or to remember when he did learn. The Boxer Rebellion, the Long March, the Japanese occupation and the Cultural Revolution all swam vaguely together in his mind. Bob didn't **know** it but he had become a child of **America**, a child of Henry Ford: "History is **bunk**."

While Bob quickly abandoned the faith of his parents, he did not pick up the faith of the beat generation either. He was born too late for that and too early to be enticed by the growing interest in Americanized New Age spirituality. No, Bob vowed he would have nothing to do with religion whatsoever. It was a serious vow.

Bob became an atheist before he knew he was an atheist. He had rejected all the religiosity of his parents and had been totally unimpressed by anything he had heard from his friends who went to church. He himself had never been to church. There didn't seem to be much reason to go. His friends who did attend church were required to do **so** by their parents, and as far **as** Bob **knew** none of them had even a private faith, let alone a public one.

Except for **Hank**. Now he was different. He went to a small church a few miles up into the mountains. Hank was a Christian. Boy, was he! And an evangelist. He was always inviting the high-school kids to revival meetings. "You've got to be saved if you don't want to go to hell," he would tell **people—endlessly**. Hank didn't have many friends. A few younger students used to hang around with him, but that was about all. Bob tried to have nothing to do with him and succeeded.

Bob found out he was an atheist when he met Michael Stone. Michael had known he was an atheist for a long time, having grown up in a secular Jewish family with a long heritage of intellectual sophistication. And Michael was not rebelling. Michael was a young man with intellectual promise, as his father kept telling his mother, and found his **family's** secular "faith" attractive. In fact he was an evangelist for it. His family had **long** ago kicked over the benighted literalism of Orthodox Judaism. They had come into the Enlight-

American. He has largely **succeeded**. His parents wanted to come to the States but have felt comfortable retaining most of their Chinese cultural values, and they have tried to transmit these to their family. But Bob has **long** been a sadness to them. By third grade, Bob began to realize that even though he enjoyed exactly the same things as his friends, they treated him a bit differently. By fifth grade he knew why, and by seventh grade he was determined to erase from himself every vestige of his Chinese heritage. For the most part this was not difficult. All he had to do was be with his **friends**, do what they **did**, participate in their lives. And this he did with the determination of a high-school athlete training for the **Olympics**. Like a star **athlete**, Bob enjoyed every minute of his regimen.

One vestige of his heritage he was easily rid of. His parents were **Buddhists**, modestly practicing the faith of their forebears. They had a family altar with photographs of their ancestors, and there was fruit and burning incense, though his parents were more or less **perfunctory** in their worship.

Some people in Mendocino **and** the mountains above the town also claimed to be Buddhist but Bob's family soon saw that their Buddhism was a mixed bag of **Zen—not** the tradition from which they came (and if anything more Japanese than Buddhist as far as they could tell)—watered-down Hinduism and nondescript **aestheticism**. They were endlessly writing poetry and reading it to each other and anyone else who would **listen**. But there were no Buddhist **"churches"** in **Mendocino**, and his parents did not choose to travel often to San Francisco, where they could participate in authentic Buddhist **worship**. **Besides**, even in Taiwan they hadn't been particularly devout. They were lured by the West by the economic opportunity they saw in America, and they did not think of their religious roots as tying them to their homeland.

Bob's father and mother had both been children of families that **had fled** to Taiwan from mainland China **long** ago. Bob was not quite sure which set of violent events had triggered **that**; he just wasn't

3 BOB WONG GOES TO STATE

We believe that after death comes The Nothing
because when you ask the dead what happens
they say Nothing.
If death is not the end, if the dead have lied,
then it's compulsory heaven for all
excepting perhaps Hitler, Stalin and Genghis Khan.
(STEVE TURNER, "CREED")

Bob Wong began his university career at the same time as Chris
BChrisman. But though their paths crossed during the first semester,
neither one knew it

Bob came to State from out of state. In fact Bob was born in Taiwan
and moved with his parents to California when he was only three.
Sometimes in a recurring dream Bob sees a little boy in a strange
place running through a forest of legs, looking lost and beginning to
cry. The setting of the dream reminds him of Chinatown in San
Francisco. But Bob grew up in Mendocino, a beautiful tourist village
a hundred miles north of San Francisco. So Bob thinks his dream—
which more and more has taken on a nightmarish quality—shows his
deep link to his Chinese heritage.

That's why the dream is a nightmare. Bob would give anything to
be rid of his Chinese roots. He wants to be one hundred percent
American—dress American, think American, live American, look

Group movement associated with the National Training Laboratories, which he tried to integrate into his religious views. In the early 1970s, he joined a society for the study of paranormal phenomena, taught a class in parapsychology, and directed controlled research experiments with mung beans, Kirlian photography, biorhythm charts, pyramids, tarot cards, and the correlation of astrological predictions with the daily ups and downs of behavior.

It was only after *Roe v. Wade* that he came to his senses. "It was the **abortion-on-demand** movement **more** than anything else that brought me to movement revulsiveness." Oden experienced a conversion of sorts and returned to the roots of his faith, the Bible and its interpreters in the first thousand years of church history. He is now back among the **orthodox**, calling for a "postcritical" theology, one that knows the history of culture and thought and takes a muscular stance on the truth of God's revelation in Christ

Thomas Oden survived as a Christian. Will Chris Chrisman survive? What will happen as the semesters unfold and Chris approaches graduation and perhaps stays on for graduate school or professional school?

And what of those who come to the university with what they think of as no faith at all? Are they in better shape?

New Spiritualities

Others have not so much accommodated to the shifting permutations of **naturalist-oriented** thought as gone beyond it into New Age thinking.

In New Age thought the self of each person **is** seen to be the center of reality. All of reality is permeated by spirit and the central spirit of all is one's own self. On the popular **level, New** Agers include such celebrities as Shirley MacLaine and John Denver. Among spiritual leaders there is the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi with his Transcendental Meditation (TM for short).

Because the New Age majors in experience and tends to downgrade anything highly **intellectual**, it is somewhat surprising to see that it has gained a significant following even on university **campuses**. A prime example of New Age thought on campus can even be found among the academic **theologians**. Thomas C. Oden put aside traditional Christianity and went on a **long**, winding search for spiritual reality.⁵

Oden, in fact describes himself as a "movement **person**." "In his pursuit of **movements**, his overall pattern was diligently to learn from them, to throw himself into them, and eventually to baptize them as they showed any remote kinship with Christianity, and then to turn to another movement" At age sixteen he joined a movement to promote world government his interests then flowed **from** ecumenism and involvement with the NAACP (in 1953) on to pacifist activism during the Vietnam War. He was associated with the American Civil **Liberties** Union and the **pre-NOW** women's rights movement as an advocate of liberalized **abortion**. In **the** late 1950s he "became enamored with the existentialist movement immersing himself particularly in the demythologization movement writing his doctoral dissertation on its chief theorist" (**Bultmann**). In the early sixties he **took** up client-centered therapy and then moved on to Transactional Analysis and Gestalt therapy, "especially through Esalen [New Age] **connections**." He taught from these perspectives in theological **classrooms**.

This was supplemented by several years of involvement in the T-

of ideas, bask in the aesthetic beauty of their subjects and exult in the **many-splendored** multiplicity of **images, stories,** ideas, sights and sounds. Some, like Paul de Man and Jacques **Derrida, cleverly** deconstruct the very soul of **intelligence—the** language we use to apprehend meaning.

Only philosophy remains to ask the big questions: Is it true? Is it good? How can we know? Some naturalist philosophers have not abandoned reason. Moreover, some Christians have stood out—among them Nicholas Wolterstorff, **Alvin Plantinga,** William Alston, Keith Yandell, George **Mavrodes,** Arthur Holmes and C. Stephen **Evans.**

But even philosophy contains within its ranks those who have abandoned the search for truth. Richard Rorty, for example, believes the best society we can have is "one which is content to call '**true**' (or '**right**' or 'just') whatever the outcome **of** undistorted communication happens to be, whatever view wins in a free and open encounter."⁸ Rorty ends up commending the poets rather than the scientists and philosophers, not because they lead us to truth but because they give **us** a thrill:

If you want to be remembered by future **generations,** go in for poetry rather than for mathematics. If you want your books to be read rather than respectfully shrouded in tooled leather, you should try to produce tingles rather than truth. What we call common **sense—the** body of widely accepted **truths—is,** just as Heidegger and Nabokov thought a collection of dead **metaphors.** Truths are the skeletons which remain after the capacity to arouse the **senses—to** cause **tingles—has** been rubbed off by familiarity **and** long usage.⁴

With naturalism as the overwhelmingly dominant **worldview** in the secular university, Christians and religious people of every stamp are going to have difficulty keeping their faith.

Many over the past two centuries have not They have simply capitulated and become naturalists.

sequences: they shape and reshape lives. Chris was being reshaped by **naturalism**, still the reigning worldview on secular university campuses.

Except for Religious Options Around the World, every course Chris took was taught by a person who, like his biology instructor, either did not believe any God existed or, **like** his sociology instructor, never even hinted at what he or she personally **believed**. His **religion** prof, Professor Comprel, seemed to think that every religion was fine, regardless of whether it upheld faith in God

Moreover, and more important the courses themselves moved through their content without ever using God as a factor. Sociology never considered that God might be the source of the idea of God; rather, the idea of God came from such things as primitive longings for meaning, imaginative constructs of ingenious poets and ethical mechanisms for physical survival

"The cosmos is all there is or ever was or ever will be," said Carl Sagan.¹

This sentence is the briefest possible definition of **naturalism**. Naturalism holds that everything that exists is on its own and that all explanations are naturalistic explanations. All mystery is simply complexity we don't yet understand "We now know that we exist by evolutionary accident as one species among many, on a small and insignificant world in one little corner of the cosmos," says philosopher James Rachels.⁸

This presumption undergirds the primary theories and practices of every academic discipline, including (for the most part) the field of **religion**. The natural scientists assume that their theories are based on facts recognized as such by their competent peers.

Many human scientists try to imitate the procedures of the hard sciences, but with considerably less consensus even among themselves as to the results. Other human scientists build their theories on less stable data and view their results with much more skepticism. Those in the **humanities—except for philosophy—just** chart patterns

Of course, there are still many secular humanists, many Christians and many Muslims who take truth claims seriously. But they are out of step with the direction of modernity. They act **like** flavor centers in a great amorphous pudding, but they do not give a pervasive flavor to the pluralistic mix itself

Privatization

The fourth force of modernity is *privatization*. This is simply the tendency for social reality to be split into two sectors: the public and the private. In **the public** sector are matters of government **politics, business, economics, production,** technology, science This realm is governed by *fact* Facts are, of course, determined by reason as expressed primarily in the scientific method If you can prove it by the canons of science, it is **true—a** fact This is the orderly world of the public domain; there is little freedom of movement here. The business world determines whom it will **employ:** if you fit you're in; if you don't you're not

In the *private* sector are matters of religion, morality, leisure, consumption. You are not required to believe any particular doctrine, attend any particular church, go to any particular sporting event or buy any particular product There is much "personal" freedom here. So much so, in fact that one's ideas and preferences are matters of choice, perhaps just of "taste." Facts are not relevant *beliefs* are your own business, and there is no public check on them. You can believe anything you want There is no right or wrong.

These are only a few of the social forces acting on Chris and other Christians who attend secular universities. We could add profession-**alization,** bureaucratization, specialization, technologization. Combine these with shifts in **worldview** from theism to **naturalism,** pantheism and various versions of New Age thought and you have a sense of what any Christian is up against

Naturalism

Chris was also being besieged by intellectual forces. Ideas have **con-**

ing the cultural norms of society.

By the end of the nineteenth century Eastern thought was penetrating the West as Indian, Japanese and Chinese philosophy and religion became known and attractive to more and more people. By the **mid-twentieth** century, in most Western countries there was hardly a philosophy or religious practice that was not represented by a major spokesperson or religious group. Today Chris's college roommate could have been anything from an atheist to a pre-Vatican II **Catholic**, Zen Buddhist **Rastafarian**, neopagan or Hindu.

No religion is dominant in culture at large; none is authoritative; yet each of them is viable. To raise the question of which of them is true is to violate social mores. That brings us to the next social force.

Relativism

The third social force we experience is **relativism**. Faced by multiple options, the West has decided to make social peace by refusing to question the truth of each of its religious and philosophic perspectives. "It's true for you. Okay. But it isn't true for me and it doesn't have to be."

Ralph **Imokay**, Chris's roommate, said it well. "**Look**," he told Chris for the third time, "**I'm** okay. You're okay. And that's okay. Okay?" After **that it** was.

In Chris's religion class and in the dorm too, religious statements—whether historical ("On the third day Jesus rose from the dead") or theological ("God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself")—were considered **beliefs**, not claims to **truth**. They were neither true nor false.

Ethical values were treated in the same way. It's okay for you to believe that abortion is wrong, but it's also okay for me to believe it is not "It's okay for me to get drunk on Friday night and sleep it off Saturday. It's okay for you to be a teetotaler. It's not okay for you to bug me about what's my business only." That's the way one of Chris's dormmates put it

others who disagreed with him. Had he looked at his situation historically, he would have discovered that he was an heir **of** John Locke, Ben Franklin and **Walt** Whitman.

With John Locke, for example, the individual is the fundamental reality. Society is **secondary**. Society is formed by a social contract between its individual members. The idea is that each person's ego boundaries (who one essentially is) end with the skin. I am I. You are **you**. We are separate **beings**. We are not part of one another. I can and will pursue my own **interests**, and I will measure my success by my material **possessions**, my social power and my prestige. Moreover, I will express myself against all constraints, all **traditions**. "I gotta be me!"

Who are our heroes? John Wayne, Ernest Hemingway, Lee **Iacocca**, Sylvester Stallone (**Rambo**, Rocky), Horatio Alger, Sam Spade, Shane, Han Solo, Indiana Jones, Humphrey Bogart and Clint Eastwood. **Chris**, though not a Lutheran, had long thought Martin Luther a very great man. **Back** in his church youth group he'd seen a well-acted film on Luther's stand against the corruption of truth.

Pluralism

Pluralism is multiple-choice lifestyle. That was life at Hansom State University with a vengeance. With individualism at the helm of society, what else could emerge than a grab bag of values? Pluralism, in fact has become one of the central features of the Western world. With each turn of the earth, so it seems, a host of new forms of belief and practice are sown and take root virtually unhindered.

To the more or less unified Christian worldview of the Middle Ages was gradually added a wide variety of protesting Christian **faiths**—German **Lutheranism**, Genevan Calvinism, English via **media**, Anabaptist separatism, et cetera, ad infinitum. To the varieties of Protestantism were added the skepticism of intellectuals like Montaigne and the exaltation of Reason in the Enlightenment. Eventually belief in God was eroded, naturalism became dominant in Western universities, and Christianity took a gradually shrinking role in **shap-**

peak of a heated argument "but you can't prove he does either, and the whole God thing looks pretty unlikely to **me.**" Then he paused and said, "Maybe Comprel is right Maybe it doesn't make any difference what you believe. Maybe any belief, if you're serious about it is just as good as any other."

Modernity cuts both ways. It slays belief and unbelief alike—Christian faith and **atheism**, Buddhism and Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. If all of these could be true for some and not true for **others**, the ground shakes beneath us, opens up and pitches us into a sea of infinite possibility where no north star shines to tell us where we are.

So both Chris Chrisman and Bob Wong were at sea. Neither of them knew quite where they were. Misery may love company, but sometimes company salves misery. What would happen if Chris and Bob should meet?



4

CHRIS CHRISMAN BECOMES A STUDENT

We believe in Masters and Johnson.

What's selected is **average**.

What's average is normal

What's normal is **good**.

(STEVE TURNER. "CREED")

Chris Chrisman went through the last few weeks of his first semester in a fog. He went home for Thanksgiving and didn't have much to say to his parents about what was going on in his mind

"How are you getting along in school?" his mother asked.

"Oh, fine."

"Are you finding the courses difficult?"

"No. Not really. Well, I did at first but I caught on pretty soon. I think my grades **will** be okay."

"How do you like your roommate?"

"Oh, Ralph? He's okay. Yeah, we get along fine. We don't do a lot together, but we've worked out the rough spots. He's kind of meticulous, and I've had to keep my room a little neater than I had expected. **Gosh**, Mom, I think you'll like that little change in me."

"Have you met any nice girls?"

Now there was a loaded question. Chris pretty much knew what his mother meant by "nice." He was glad he could say he really hadn't met any college women he'd gotten to know much. There was only Susie, the attractive redhead across the **hall**, and he didn't want to get involved with a Mormon. So Chris said nothing.

"Have **you** been going to church?" she **asked**.

"Oh, yeah. There's a church a lot **like** ours here at home. I take a bus on Sunday mornings, and I've gone quite **a** few times."

Actually, Chris had gone almost every Sunday. What he didn't tell his mother, **though**, was that nothing at the church was helping him with his deteriorating Christian **conviction**. The sermons had been okay but irrelevant to his **questions**. The Sunday-school class was studying Moses; the teacher did most of the talking and Chris found his own mind wandering more than the Israelites in the desert

Chris talked with his father too, and the conversation went pretty much the same except that his **father** added a couple of questions: "**Have** you chosen a major yet?" and "What are you planning to do after you graduate?" His father was also interested in **how** much money Chris thought he would **need** for books and other expenses during **the** next term.

After Chris went back to State, he immersed himself in his studies and the semester closed out quickly. He didn't have much time to think about what was troubling his spirit. That didn't really occur again till **Christmas**.

And Christmas break did prove unsettling. Chris was not troubled by the usual frustration Christians express (but don't really have)—the commercialism and the distraction of visiting relatives. Chris was, rather, troubled by the "**real** meaning of **Christmas**."

Did God become a human being in a manger twelve thousand miles away and two thousand years ago? Did this birth signal a new age? **Did** Jesus really come to take away the sins of the world? Chris remembered the Scripture he had heard read in his college **church**. It was **Mary's** song:

He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
 he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
 He has brought down rulers from their thrones
 but has lifted up the humble. (Lk 1:51-52)

Has God really done this? Chris thought "Couldn't **all** this just be a product of imagination, the meandering invention of an overly **hopeful** clever religious writer?" his sociology teacher might say. "How do we **know what** Mary thought or said?" All those other religions he had learned **about—were** they wrong? They had to be if this Christmas thing was right But could they be? Why would so many people be so mistaken for so **long** a time? Jesus came so long ago that the whole world should be Christian by now. But it certainly wasn't The university itself was proof of that To Chris the whole Christian thing now seemed illogical, unreal.

As Christmas approached, the acids of modernity that had already eaten deeply into Chris's thought life ate all the way through his protective shield of **faith**.

Still, Chris went through the motions of Christian practice. He took Communion on Christmas Eve; he even believed **as he took** the bread and wine **that** what **he** was doing was exactly what he should be doing. And for a while he felt good But the **effects** of the ceremony soon wore off, and Chris's second state was worse than the first

After Christmas Chris went skiing up in the mountains with some of his old **high-school** buddies. Some had gone to different colleges; some had begun working. But they had a good time together. Chris especially, because the conversation never turned either to Christian stuff on the one hand or to anything thoughtful at all. "Girls" were high on the discussion **agenda**, and Chris just **listened—listened** with lots of attention, I might add, because he had begun *to* think that if he could just find a "girlfriend" that would take his mind off the troubling **stuff, maybe** forever. *You never know*, Chris **mused, this romance thing, this doing stuff 'together—it** might be the way to go.

So Chris headed back to college with a firm resolve to locate

a young **woman—Chris** had to revert back to the proper language in his mind now that he was back in **school—and** get into a "meaningful relationship." Chris wasn't after **sex**, not yet at least. But he was after something that would permanently take his mind off what his mind was always **on—intellectual** woolgathering, puzzling over his **faith**.

He **decided**, too, not to read his Bible anymore. It just kept his attention on his troubles. He'd continue to go to **church**. That would make his parents happy.

Chris **did** not think this would be **hard**, because he was taking **a** new set of courses and none of them directly involved religion. But as the semester began, Chris realized that he had chosen his new courses in the throes of his puzzling thoughts. His **second-semester** biology and World Civ courses were no problem, but the other two courses were Philosophy 101 and English 102.

Introduction to Philosophy plunged right in where Chris had left off the previous semester. What is the really real? How can anyone know anything at all? What is the good life? His English instructor, another grad student had chosen *Zen and **the** Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* as the literary text they would be reading and writing papers about for the whole semester.

Chris felt that he had leaped from tile frying pan into the fire. The moment he thought that **though**, he felt the pangs of his newly forming rhetorical conscience: *I'm thinking in **clichés**. Is there no **hope** for me? **I don't** know what I believe **anymore**. **I can't** form a coherent thought in my **head**. And now **I'm** thinking in clichés! It's enough to make my head spin.* When he reflected on *that **cliché***, Chris was sure he was lost. *This semester is going to be worse than **the** first*

But Chris couldn't have been more **mistaken**. The very first day in philosophy class, Professor Knock began talking about philosophy as the **love** of **truth, and** he read from one of Plato's **dialogues**. Chris had never heard such stuff before, **and** he was **fascinated**. In English class, the **grad-student** instructor turned out to be interested in philosophy

too. In fact he was doing his dissertation on philosophical themes in science fiction.

But most important, Chris met Bill Seipel the first day of his philosophy class. Bill came a couple of minutes after Chris, looked around the room, saw Chris, smiled, saw Chris smiling back and took the seat next to him. Bill was as fascinated by the first class session as Chris, and when the two left the room they headed for the student union for coffee and **donuts**.

Chris found out that Bill had just transferred to State after a semester at Cornton College, which Chris knew to be Christian with a capital C. Man, you couldn't even go to movies there until a couple of years ago. Bill had not come to State to escape the narrow confines of a fundamentalist school. Quite frankly, he just hadn't had the money to continue. So State looked like a good option and he took it. Bill was a first-year student too, and it wasn't long before he and Chris became great friends.

What capped off their friendship, however, was Bill's straightforward approach to his faith. Bill was not arrogant about his beliefs, nor was he defensive. He took them in stride and tried to make them work in relation to the courses he was taking. He had already had a course at Cornton that covered some of the same issues as the philosophy class he and Chris were now taking. That course, called Introduction to the Christian Faith, had been taught by Professor Nancy Bright, a young Ph.D. who had a philosophical bent and in fact had an undergraduate degree in philosophy from Princeton. So Bill had been introduced to a thoughtful kind of Christian faith. He'd had lots of heavy conversations with Bright especially after she found out that Bill was having to transfer to State.

Chris had finally found someone who was interested in the same questions he was. After the first week of classes Chris spelled out his frustrations as much as he could in words. Bill, exposed in the dormitory and classrooms to the same atmosphere as Chris, could see why Chris felt that way. Unlike Chris, though, he had been told about

the dominant **worldview** at State and had discussed with Professor Bright some of the problems he might have.

Those conversations, however, had been no match for the reality of the university. **Bill** now could see and feel the pressures to conform to lifestyles that at Cornton people talked about but never **lived—or** lived only in fantasy. **Bill** was taking the comparative religion course Chris had taken, and he was also studying psychology and chemistry as well as taking English **Comp.** But Bill's special text was different. He was **having** to read *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* and write papers on **postmodernity**, whatever in the world that **was—he** had not heard of it at **Cornton.**

His **grad-student** instructor, Mr. **Cod**, was interested in deconstruction, and though he promised not to bring his grad work into the **classroom**, the word *deconstruction* began to crop up more and more frequently in the **instructor's** sidelong **comments.** The word tended to pop up when something went wrong in the class or when Mr. Cod wanted to regain control by saying something no students could understand but felt that they had to or **flunk.** Bill finally came to see this as the instructor's way of intimidating his students. Bill suspected that Mr. Cod was not as sure of himself as he **pretended.**

In any case, Bill found himself in the same muddy waters as **Chris.** He had had a few instructions on land about what to do if he fell in the river while steering his frail canoe, and he had put on the life preserver of steady faith. But now his canoe had capsized and he was swimming. He was delighted to have someone to swim with, someone heading in the same direction, or at least trying to.

A couple of weeks into the semester, Chris and **Bill** had just about talked out their mutual frustrations. They were aware of the challenge to their Christian **faith.** Despite his earlier **resolution,** Chris had actually not stopped reading the Bible and having **devotions.** Bill and he decided to study the same book and compare notes as they went along. They chose the Gospel of **Mark.** They knew that the scholars cited in the religion department had dated Mark as the first and

maybe the most reliable of the Gospels (though, of course, it was a product of a church that wanted to justify its structure and power and couldn't really be taken at face value). Bill still believed the Bible, of course, and Chris was more than willing to give Scripture a chance to **re-prove** itself to him.

But soon Chris and Bill decided to do something else: to tackle head-on the problems both of them were facing. So at the end of that second **week**, they tried to identify as precisely as they could just what was bugging them about the university atmosphere. What was really eating away at their confidence in the Christian faith?

They made a list that looked something like this:

D No one cares whether anything is true or not (For the moment they had forgotten about Professor **Knock**.)

- Anything is okay as long as someone thinks it's okay.

D There are many ways to view reality, and each of them is as viable as any other.

□ We ought to open our minds to multiple **lifestyles**. Gay is **good**. **Nongay** is okay, but only if the nongay says gay is good. No one cares if we believe **that** Jesus is the only way to God; **we** just aren't supposed to **tell** anyone.

- There really isn't anything valuable to be learned in college except what's connected to good grades or a degree. The goal of education is to get a better job than we could have if we did not have a degree.

D What's really important is to develop our own potential

- We are responsible only to ourselves for what we do.

D We will improve the world by improving **ourselves**.

D What we do in private is our own concern and no one else's. We ought to **keep** our religious beliefs private.

To Chris and Bill it seemed that some of these *items* contradicted **others**. If everything really is okay, then nongay and even antigay should be just as good as progay. But on campus it wasn't. Likewise, if one believed in private that one's private views were universal, then they could no more be reasonably kept private.

As Chris and Bill contemplated this list they came to see that one of their problems was that they disagreed with almost every item on it. Their faith could not be kept private. Some things *were* right or wrong regardless of whether anyone thought so. **They** just were. The goal of education had to be more than a job. We are all responsible to **God**. What is really important is that what we do is approved by **God**. We might have to be like Jesus and give our life for our **beliefs**.

Christianity, as they understood it committed them to these views. It is one of those exclusive belief systems that Prof Comprel kept shoving to the margins in his **classes**. He called it "exclusivist" Chris and Bill concluded that on this matter, at least Comprel was right. Christianity *is* exclusive.

The point though, is not whether it is exclusive but whether it is true. But that brought them back to the list again. The first item said it all: No one cared whether anything was true or not.

They didn't know it but what they had done in making this list was to identify some of the characteristics **of modernity**: **relativism**, individualism, pluralism and privatization. **What** they did know was that they had to do something about the items on the list.

They knew they couldn't tackle all of them at once, but they also knew that the lead item seemed **all-embracing**. So they went after it. They decided to ask their philosophy professor if they could write their term papers on **relativism**. Chris would write his paper on Allan Bloom's views in *The Closing of the American Mind*, and Bill would take up the views of Lesslie Newbigin in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*.

Their professor was well aware of Bloom's views, but he had never heard of **Newbigin**. When Bill explained that he had heard about Newbigin from a professor last semester (he didn't say that this was a religion prof at a Christian college), the professor approved the topic.

When a classmate, till then unknown to them, overheard this request he introduced himself as Bob Wong, and all three headed to the union for a Coke and a three-way conversation on Chris and Bill's most puzzling question.¹

5 TRUTH: A MOBILE ARMY OF METAPHORS

We **believe** that all religions are basically the same
at least the one that we read **was**.

They all believe in love and **goodness**.

They only differ on matters of
creation sin heaven hell God and salvation.

(STEVE TURNER, "CREED")

What Chris Chrisman, Bob **Wong and** Bill Seipel had selected as
their target topic was both academic and personal, a happy but
infrequent coincidence in university education. Some stu-
dents never experience it which is to say that some students never
become students.

Let's leave them to their intellectual machinations for a moment
and look at the topic they have lit **on—or**, better, that has lit on them.
Relativism is one of the most pervasive social and intellectual forces
acting on university campuses today. The discussion in this and the
following chapter will, therefore, be somewhat more complex than in
other chapters in this **book**. The topic merits **it**; in **fact**, a less complex
treatment would be too superficial to be helpful¹

The Problem Posed

A few years ago I gave a lecture at Bates College in Maine on **Chris-**

tianity and the university. I referred to John Henry Cardinal Newman and argued that a genuinely Christian approach to university study should see everything as created by a reasonable, rational God. This would provide the basis for a unified **view** of the universe, of God and human **beings**. I did not say we would know everything **perfectly**; but I was optimistic about knowing at least some things **truly**.³

The following day a formal response was given by three people. One of the respondents was a professor of philosophy. Her remarks were sharp and to the point

"Well, I'm an academic I am not a Christian," she began. Then she went on to give openness the highest place in the university: "Everything is up for grabs; no ideas are beyond **question**. No one should ever believe that they have the truth. Those who think they do have the truth are surely wrong, for no one has the truth or can have it"

Later I debated the issue of ethical norms with residence-hall directors at the University of New Hampshire. When I posed the problem of conflicting or contradictory religious **claims**, some maintained that a religious statement could be "true for you but not for me." Others were willing to say **that** was not the case; about **six out** of thirty said that they did not believe God existed and that my belief in him did not change the situation. **Others—especially** a hall director from North Carolina, raised in a conservative **church—seemed** not to understand what was going on in the discussion.

The setting for this verbal clash is significant: a secular school where rapes were frequent and dormitory discipline a serious problem. Students were refusing to abide by common decency. After all, why should they have to heed the rules of others?

Before we look at specific ways relativism is **expressed**, it is important to elaborate on one distinction.

The Fact-Value Dichotomy

A major factor in relativism is a distinction our culture has been drawing between *facts* and *values*, a distinction that has been be-

queathed to us by the **Enlightenment**.³

Facts, as we understand them, are certain, scientific and public. They are determined by scientific **method—evidence** and reason. In the natural sciences there is great optimism about the possibility of finding out how the universe is put together. For example, much hope is held out for unlocking the structure of the human genetic system **and** for positive human engineering. This optimism is extended to the hope for technological solutions to human problems, perhaps all human problems.

The realm of science is largely considered to be the realm of fact. Facts of a scientific sort can be found. The category of **true-or-false** applies. But the realm of fact does not extend beyond the limited regions of natural **science—not**, for example, into the realm of religious belief, ethical norms and values. There is indeed a fact-value dichotomy, a split that expresses itself in the general silence of the university on values and **norms**.

Values—beliefs about **what** is worthy and unworthy, good and evil—reside, unlike facts, in the radical subjectivity of a believer. Value is private. It is not determined by reason but by choice, and since we live in a world where "God is **dead**," there is no limit on our choice. Everything is in principle **permitted**.

Perhaps most problematic is the tacit assumption in the humanities and social sciences that there are no **absolutes**, no ultimate values. Values are the creation of human beings and human culture; they are not found in any reality outside the human frame. They are subject solely to human consciousness, human choice. So in most academic disciplines students are left to develop their own philosophy of life, as if one outlook were as good as another and no one had a leg up in this **area**.

If values do not come from outside the human frame, where do they come from? After Nietzsche, the answer has primarily been *the individual self*. The self—"the mysterious, free, unlimited center of our **being**"—is seen to be the source of value. There is no repository of

value from which the self draws. The chief reason the self is seen as the repository of value is simple: Either God does not exist or his existence makes no practical difference.

Recent polls suggest that a very great majority of Americans believe in the existence of God.⁴ But both their actions and their words on other matters betray them. God is indeed dead or dying in our culture.

If the God of Abraham, Isaac **and** Jacob and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ does in fact exist then he is the source and determiner of the good. We do not then have "values" but "goodness" itself as a standard of righteousness. But our culture more and more ignores its stated belief in God. We are thoroughly **secularized**.

If God makes no difference, the only source of value is the self.

Types of Relativism

Relativism comes in many shapes and sizes. Some reserve it for a few matters like lifestyle and which style of clothes to wear. Others carry it to great lengths, relativizing everything to the point that like Nietzsche, they hold that truth is just "a mobile army of metaphors."⁵ Nothing is really true as such; all is a matter of social agreement.⁹ But what happens when a society agrees to accept a wide variety of "true" but logically contradictory views? In such a situation we have not only the social reality of pluralism (the side-by-side existence of people who hold different worldviews and values) but also the ideology of utter relativism (the value judgment that all values are equally valuable). The university is such a social **unit**: relativism reigns supreme and anarchy is a constant threat

In my experience lecturing on campuses both in North America and Europe, I think I can discern at least six distinct ways relativism is expressed. Each deserves to be analyzed separately. The first three will be examined in this chapter, the remaining three in the next

*I. **ML religions boil down** to the same thing.*

Our age is an age of religious ignorance. Many modern people have

grown up with very little religious education of any kind In the United States, religious education in public high schools is systematically avoided; some believe that it is actually illegal. In Britain it is present but given in a **watered-down** form so **that no** one of the many religious **communities—Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist Christian—is** offended. Moreover, churches are unsuccessful in educating parishioners beyond very basic matters; sometimes nothing more than vague moral precepts is **communicated**.

For whatever reason, however, one of the most common forms of relativism is simply based on a fiction: "All religions boil down to the same **thing**."

But all religions do *not* boil down to the same thing. Many claims of every religion are incompatible with claims of other **religions**.

Take the notion of fundamental reality. Every religion answers this basic question: *What is **prime reality**? That is, what is now, always was and always will be?* For Christians, Jews and Muslims the answer is the **infinite-personal** God who for his own good purposes created the universe. Hindus say it is the impersonal God (Brahman) from whom all transient reality emanates. Zen Buddhists do not believe in God at all but point to the **Void**, a fundamental indeterminate reality (a nothing-in-particular, neither personal or impersonal) **undergirding** all transient reality.

From each of these basic commitments come very different religions, each with its own center of meaning, rituals and ethical **teachings**. There is considerable overlap in ethics and in some **practices**, but there is no common center.

All one needs to do to see the contradictions between religions is examine what they teach. As we will see below, in answer to "What happens to a person after death?" Christians teach resurrection, Hindus reincarnation and naturalists extinction. What each teaches is a simple matter of information. Moreover, these differences are an **essential** part of the teachings of these **religions**. To remove the differences or marginalize them is to deny the religion its right to say what

is most important according to its teachings.

Still, many people continue to think that all religions boil down to the same thing. One **religion, Baha'i**, actually teaches this. And in the recent past Arnold Toynbee argued that we should develop a single **religion**, selecting the best insights of each of the major world **faiths**.

As I write this, the late Joseph Campbell remains popular as an exponent of this view. In his book and television series with Bill **Moyers, *The Power of Myth***, Campbell argued that **all** of the world's myths (with one major exception) tell much the same story, presume much the same notion of fundamental reality and differ (albeit widely) only in details. The main presupposition of all myth is this: the fundamental unity of all reality. That is, the world is an emanation from God (there **has** been no creation); human beings are essentially divine (they are **not** made in the image of **God**; they are God); through ignorance and forgetfulness people are alienated from their source (there has been no Fall in Eden; there is no such thing as **sin**); salvation is accomplished through grasping who we really are as **di**-vine beings (no redemption is needed). Campbell summarizes "myth's one great **story**" this way: "**That** we have come forth from the one ground of being as manifestations in the field of time. The field of time is **a** kind of shadow play over a timeless **ground**."⁸ Then he takes this basic mythic pattern and interprets it under the categories suggested to him by psychologist C. **G. Jung**, reducing both religion and myth to psychology. The myths tell the psychological truth about human beings in the world.⁹

But Campbell himself admits **that** the Christian notions of **creation**, Fall and redemption **will not** fit this **pattern**: "**Once** you reject the idea of the **Fall** in the **Garden**, man is not cut off from his **source**."¹⁰ And Campbell does reject the notion of the **Fall**. So even the most popular exponent of the notion that all **myths—all religions—are** basically one has to make a very major **concession**. Christianity cannot be reduced to the form of his master **myth**. But that may not be a problem, for, as Robert Segal **says**, "**Throughout** his writings Campbell

contends that traditional Western mythology, by which he means that of the Bible rather than that of Greece and Rome, is dead."¹¹ If that is so, then it still might be possible to say all **"live"** religions are basically the same. But the Christian faith is very much alive, not least in places like **Africa** where the myths of the primal religions are also most alive.

The upshot is that those who would try to justify their notion that all religions boil down to the same **thing**, or that the essence of every religion is the same, will not get much useful support from Joseph Campbell. The facts are just too plain: All religions *don't* boil down to the same thing.

2. *It's true for you, it's not true for me.*

The most common expression of relativism is this: "It's true for you but it's not true for me"

This is of course quite appropriate for matters of taste. Take the following **sentences**:

- "Strawberry ice cream tastes **good**."
- **"He's a hunk."**
- "She's **gorgeous**."

D **"That's a great shirt."**

The first sentence, for instance, is certainly true for me. But it just as certainly need not be true for anyone else. It is, of course, true for many people, but it needn't be. Our preference in **clothes**, music and food is to a large extent governed by taste. Of course, one can argue, and many do, that aesthetic **value—the** beauty of music, for example—**can** be shown to have a large measure of objective criteria associated with personal taste. **But it** is no offense against reason **for** one person to say "Dizzy Gillespie's jazz is the greatest" and another to say "No; it's really **not** up to the standard **of** Thelonius **Monk**." Both from their personal points of view can be true.

In short "It's true for you but not for **me**" is appropriate **for person-specific statements**. It is not however, appropriate for **objective-specific**

statements. Take the following statements.

D "After death each person will eventually be resurrected either to life with God and his people (heaven) or to an existence apart from God (hell)."

- "After death the body decays but the soul is eventually reincarnated in another body to become another person."
- "**After** death each person becomes extinct"

At Washington and Lee University I spoke with four students who claimed that all these sentences could be true. A person's belief in resurrection, reincarnation or extinction made **it** true for each person. That is, those who believe in resurrection will be **resurrected**; those who believe in reincarnation will be reincarnated; and those who believe in extinction will become extinct at death. The notion seemed so odd that it took several minutes of dialogue before I understood that this was what they were actually claiming.

To see why this kind of relativism cannot be true, consider the consequences if it were. First it would mean **that** each person controls ultimate reality simply by believing. It is tantamount to making each person a **god—at** least a god over his or her own destiny. There is no reason to think human beings have any such power over the forces that govern their **deaths**.

Still, some students seem to believe that they do have the power to make the world a meaningful place in which to live. Several students, for example, have responded in surveys to the question "Why should anyone believe in anything at all?" by saying this: "If I didn't **believe**, I (or anything else) would not exist" **Indeed**, the implicit notion that "**believing** makes it so" undergirds much relativism in the modern **world**.

Second, if all three sentences were true, it would mean that ultimate reality is fundamentally incoherent. Resurrection as it is understood in Christian terms is tied in with the notion of a God who created us and in Jesus Christ redeemed us. Resurrection occurs by the power and will of **God**, not of us. Moreover, in Christianity resurrection is

the guarantee that each of us is created in the image of God and each of us has individual dignity. I remain me, you remain you, after death as well as before. We do not become someone else. That makes each of us responsible for our own actions.

Reincarnation as it is understood in Eastern religions is linked with the notion that individuals are not **important**; they are expendable and do not have any existence beyond their bodily life; what is permanent is the "soul," and that is not tied to any specific individual form.

Extinction requires a universe that has only a material component. When the material that makes up any given person becomes sufficiently disorganized (dies), nothing is left **over**; the person **disappears**.

In other words, these **ideas—resurrection, reincarnation, extinction**—are tied to very complex conceptions of the universe. If one of them is true, the others cannot be true. Logically, all of them could be false and some other view could be true; but if one *is* true, the others are not.

Finally, the view that the universe is incoherent is incompatible with scientific study. If all of three views were true, normal science would not give us uniform results. But our science gives us uniform results. Therefore, the three views of what happens at death cannot all be true, not true even in the sense that each could be true for different sets of people.

3. All religious systems, if followed sincerely, lead to the same spiritual rea

I was once in a public dialogue with a professor of mathematics **education**. The topic was "Spirituality: New Age or Christian?" The professor defended a New Age position. In his opening statement he announced that he considered all of the following religious texts inspired: the Bible, the **Qur'an**, the Hindu scriptures and even some messages that come through **twentieth-century** channelers. He was asked by both the audience and me how he could find all of these texts inspired

"Each religious text is like a tube down which one **looks,**" he **replied.** "At the end of the tube is the same spiritual **reality.**"

He was not at all concerned with contradictions between the texts. He had no particular recommendations as to which "tube" one should choose to look down. His only advice was to choose one and follow it to the **end.**

This claim does not so much say that all religions are the same as that the differences are not finally significant. That is, the claims of one religion do not preclude the validity of the claims of another, even contradictory, **religion.** It means that the notion of exclusivity **itself—a claim made** by several religions—cannot be taken seriously.

True, Buddhism and Hinduism do not generally claim exclusivity. Zen teachers will often say that you do not have to abandon your Christian faith to pursue a **Zen path.** Hinduism often tries to absorb Christianity by saying that Jesus is one of the many avatars (incarnations) of the gods; Christians can be the "Hindus of the **West.**"¹²

In the West one of the early proponents of this view was Sri **Ramakrishna,** an Indian teacher whose philosophy began to penetrate Western consciousness in the late nineteenth century:

God has made different religions to suit different aspirants, **times,** and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. **Indeed,** one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with whole hearted **devotion.** . . . As one and the same **material,** water, is called by different names by different peoples, one calling it water, another **eau,** a third aqua, and another pan^t, so the one **Everlasting-Intelligent-Bliss** is invoked by some as **God,** by some as Allah, by some as **Jehovah,** and by others as Brahman. The devotee who has seen **God** in one aspect only knows him in that aspect alone. But he who has seen him in manifold aspects is alone in a position to say, "All these forms are of one God and God is multiform." He is formless and with form, **and** many are his forms which no one **knows.**¹³

We have already seen from the above discussion that each religion

sees different things at the end of its "tube." Christians see a personal encounter with a personal God and an existence forever with or without God; Hindus and New Agers see a future of reincarnations until there has been a realization of their own divinity and a **reab-**sorption into the divine essence; Zen Buddhists look toward a grasping of the essence of their existence in the Void.

The only way each of these could be the same final "spiritual reality" is if this "spiritual reality" were totally indeterminate. There are some who think that this is indeed the case.

But Christianity and the other religions of the Book (Judaism and Islam) proclaim themselves as exclusive. Each insists that its **teachings**, if true, are exclusively (though not necessarily exhaustively) true. That has to be the case, for each of these religions of the Book accepts the notion that utterly contradictory doctrines cannot both be true, and each of these religions has doctrines that contradict those of the other **religions**, including other religions of the **Book**.

For instance, Christians insist that Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Trinity, fully **God** and fully human. Muslims and **Orthodox** Jews both reject this, holding the strict monotheistic view that God alone is **God**. Orthodox Jews and Christians accept a personal God with some **characteristics—intimate** personal love, for **example—signifi-**cantly different from the Islamic concept of **God**. All of them proclaim that they alone are the true way.

Notice the claim to exclusivity in Jesus' words: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (**Jn 14:6**). The apostle Peter is just as clean "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Both Orthodox Judaism and Christianity likewise hold to the exclusivity of the God of the Hebrew Scriptures. Listen to God speaking in Isaiah:

I am the LORD, and there is no other;
apart from me there is no God

I will strengthen you,
 though you have not acknowledged me,
 so that from the rising of the sun
 to the place of its setting
 men may know there is none besides me.

I am the LORD, and there is no other. (Is 45:5-6)

Islam's one creed majors on exclusivity: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet"

Certainly the history of the people of the Book bears out one grim result of the doctrine of exclusivity: Muslims, Jews and Christians have gone to war for the differences among them. This is not to say that any of these religious groups *should* have taken their differences to these ends; religious war seems especially questionable for Christians, given the teachings of Jesus. But my point here is that all three of these religious groups agree that their central beliefs are essentially true *to the exclusion of those that clearly contradict these beliefs*.

In short, a relativism that proclaims that the "end" of all religions is the same is self-stultifying and self-contradictory. Exclusive claims cannot be negated or reduced to nonexclusive claims without violating the basic rule of relativism itself, which allows all claims to be equally valid.

There is, however, one way out of this trap. That is to say that the final "spiritual reality" is totally indeterminate. There are some who do just **that**.

Theologian Wilfred Cantwell Smith holds that all worship is valid, "since the reality to which it is directed is **unknowable**."¹⁴ Smith quotes as "one of the most discerning remarks that I know" the words of the Yogavasistha: "Thou art formless. Thy only form is our knowledge of **Thee**."¹⁵ Tom Driver makes the same point as Smith: "God has different '**natures**.' In pluralist perspective, it is not simply that God has one nature variously and inadequately expressed by different religious traditions. It is that there are real and genuine differences within the Godhead itself, owing to the manifold involvement that God has

undertaken with the great variety of human **communities.**"¹⁶

In both Smith's and **Driver's** views, God is not to be limited by the law of noncontradiction. He is so indeterminate in form as to be able to appear both personal and impersonal; he is and is not whatever human beings know of him. In his own transcendent essence he is unknowable.

This view has three inherent devastating flaws. First it requires those who hold the view to know something that the view itself **pre-**cludes them from holding. If God is unknowable, how can it be known that he or she or it is unknowable? Why should we believe anyone who says this?

If God were determinate enough to be personal and interested in revealing himself to us, he might **well tell** us that we are unable to know him exhaustively. The God of the Bible does indeed do that:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.
"As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Is 55:8-9)

But unless we are told by someone who **knows**, we cannot know what we cannot know. There is no reason to believe Smith and Driver.

Second, the view of God as formless gives no center at all to our religion or philosophy. If final reality is **formless**, everything is permitted. Such a view makes ultimate reality indeterminate and unknowable. If God or ultimate reality is indeterminate, then there is no final foundation on which to rest our distinctions between good and evil, truth and falsity, honor and dishonor. We have no basis for restraining anyone from doing any action at **all—not** just from walking on the grass but from beating a Me child or raping a college student walking home from a night class. It is the same as if God were **dead**, for he *is* dead as far as providing humanity with any standard by which to live.

Third, in the words of Lesslie Newbigin, "If ultimate reality is such

that he, she, or it behaves in mutually incoherent ways, what possible hope is there for human unity? The corollary of this intellectual collapse is the abandonment of hope for humanity."¹⁷

Why Relativism?

Why is the atmosphere of relativism so pervasive today? We have already seen that it is fueled at least in part by the "death of God" in our culture. The self alone is left to determine values.

But there is a social reason as well. When people determine their own values without recourse to an objective **standard**, social chaos is just around the corner. We know—because we have seen this in even the little bit of history we've **experienced—that** when people disagree on matters so fundamental as sexual ethics and religious doctrine, violent conflict is always a danger. So why don't we just agree to live and let live? Let's agree not only to disagree agreeably, let us remove the disagreement entirely by saying to each other, "Hey, it's okay. It's true for you. **It's** not true for me, and it doesn't have to be. Let's at least agree that peace and freedom are the prime values to be **pre-served**. You **and** I are free to believe as we want but we must not fight over any differences that emerge from exercising our **freedom**."

But relativism cannot provide a foundation for unity on the basis of freedom and peace. Freedom allows me to believe that I can choose my values, and I can choose to believe that these values are **universal, not** just limited to **me**. That means that I am free to believe that you should believe just like me and that if you don't I am free to try to force you to do so. Peace is not compatible with such radical **freedom**.

If we want to preserve peace, we **will** have to search elsewhere than relativism for a justification of the value of either peace or **freedom**.

6

CLOSING A MIND SO OPEN THAT EVERYTHING FALLS OUT

We believe that **truth** will only be found
in **the** next box we open.

When we open that **box**,
we believe that truth will only be found
in **the** next box we **open**.

We believe in a mind **so** open that everything **falls** out
(J. W. SIRE, "CREED II")

For the time being let's leave **Chris**, Bill and Bob to their **contin-**
uing ruminations. Their investigation into relativism does not
run the exact course plotted here. Investigating intellectual
and social forces that are as pervasive as relativism is always a long
process. Clarity and organization of one's conclusions may in fact
never come, or at least **not** come for months or years. That's why Chris
and Bob, though they do not yet realize this, are on a **long** quest
whose goal is still only on the horizon. In chapter seven we will return
to them and see how they are getting along.

Relativism comes in many **forms**. We examined three of them in the
previous chapter. Here we **look** at three **more**. The first has some merit
if accepted in a limited **form**. The other two are predicated on **presup-**
positions that are at odds with Christian faith, since they are based on
a prior commitment either to radical skepticism or to atheism.

There is, however, a sound reason Christians can be confident that at least limited human knowledge is not only theoretically possible but practically accessible.

4. *No religious or intellectual commitments can claim to be true; all are subject to revision.*

There is a partial truth in this statement if it is taken in a "soft" form. That is, it is clear that we finite human beings do not have a lock on the way the world is put together. Our **systems—whether** common-sense or philosophical or **theological—are** always subject to revision. Tennyson said it well:

Our little systems have their day.
 They have their day and cease to be.
 They are but broken lights of Thee,
 And Thou, O Lord, are more than they.¹

We would be much better off as human beings if we followed this counsel: "Keep an open mind on all your commitments so that you are always open to correction." But we also need the courage of our convictions. That means we must hold our commitments without any reservation that would keep us from fulfilling to the nth degree what we set our sights toward doing.

But the popular relativism that states, "No religious commitments can claim to be true; all are subject to revision at all times," means something other than this. Taken in its "hard" form it is radical **skepticism**—the denial that we can know anything at all with any assurance **that** we are right. Truth escapes us, because we are simply unable to justify our claims to truth.

Stated in its hard form this position is **self-contradictory**. If everything is subject to revision, so is the statement itself. Hard skepticism (nihilism) claims too much. One can know *that one does not know*, but one cannot know *that one cannot know*.

Skeptics who wish to remain merely skeptics should claim only that they *do not know* and should leave open the possibility that they *can*

know. Otherwise they become utter nihilists, and nihilism (because it claims that nothing can be known) is **self-referentially incoherent**.⁴

The assumption of traditional epistemology, on the other **hand**, is **that** our knowledge approaches the truth of various **matters, and** some of the things we think and believe are closer to the way things are than others. Claims to truth can be justified by past and present experience of oneself and others, by logical internal consistency and by conformity to what has been revealed in authoritative **texts—whether** those of science or those of religion. Of course, one's belief in those texts themselves can be justified by how **well** what they say passes the test of reason and experience. That does not mean that either reason or experience is the final arbiter of truth. For Christians the final arbiter is God alone. **But** it does mean **that** one can justify one's belief that God is the final arbiter of truth by appeal to reason and experience. It is not unreasonable, for example, to believe that the Bible is the revelation of a holy God to a sinful people.

Lesslie Newbigin has put it this way:

The faith is held with universal intent. It is held not as "my personal opinion," but as the truth which is true for all. It must therefore be publicly **affirmed**, and opened to public interrogation and debate. Specifically, as the command of Jesus tells us, it is to be made known to all the nations, to all human communities of whatever race or creed or culture. It is public truth. We commend it to all people in the hope that, by the witness of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of others, it will come to be seen by them for themselves as the truth.⁸

If we hold our faith with "universal intent" we will be acknowledging both our own fallibility and our faith in a God who wants us to know the truth. **It** is a delicate **balance—supreme** confidence in God's ability to speak clearly versus our own propensity to see things **only** as we wish to see them, or only as we always have, or only as we do without thinking. But this is the position we are in as **Christians—fallen** people, redeemed but **not** yet perfected in glory.

5. All claims **of all kinds** are claims within a structure of **language**. They, their **truth** from their conformity to this structure and the presupposition inform it

This is a difficult concept to **understand**, because **it is counterintuitive**. In Western culture we generally assume **that** we are seeing and talking about what's really there. In order to believe that we are not doing **this**, we have to think **hard** and long, usually at the instigation of some sage or philosopher **like** Chuang Chou or Descartes. So this form of relativism is so far largely confined to the world of academic philosophy, sociology and the **humanities**. I will present only one form of it here, the form it takes in the philosophy of Richard Rorty.

Essentially, this sort of relativism rejects any notion that there are any knowable essences in reality. It holds that there is nothing essential in the world outside ourselves **that** we access by either our rational mind or our senses. Our senses apprehend phenomena, but these phenomena do not transmit to us the essences of the objects we are apprehending. Moreover, these phenomena themselves are not solid **categories**. What we call a tree is different for each of us, because *tree* is a label for phenomena **that** are multiple and always in **flux**. Names are as insubstantial as phenomena.

Yet we human beings form languages that give us practical access to each other and **the** power to control our external environment⁴ **Indeed**, we form lots of **languages**. Some of **these—like French, English and Swahili—divide** us from each other nationally or **ethnically**. **Some—like** the language of physics and **chemistry—apply** to matters of what we call the physical **world**. Others apply to ethical **concerns**, still others to religious **matters**, those discourses in which we talk about the **ultimate—God**, spirit divinity, **soul**, eternal **life**.

As Charles Taylor, a strong critic of Rorty, **says**, "Rorty offers a great leap into non-realism: where there have hitherto been thought to be **facts- or truths-of-the-matter**, there turn **out** to be **only** rival languages, between which we end up plumping, if we do, because in some way one works better for us than the **others**."⁵

Each language is largely **self-contained**, and there is no way to choose rationally between them, for each has its own rationality, its own way of adjudicating claims to truth. Truth becomes what **"works"** to get what is wanted. If the locution "Please open the window" gets you what you want then it has served its purpose. If the Lord's Prayer performs a function that people want then it along with the **world-view** it **presupposes**, is **"true."** That there really is a God who is **"Father"** and who is being **"hallowed"** by the sincere performance of this prayer is neither true nor false in any shape that can be determined outside the language **system—the** language of Christian devotion.⁶

The same is true of the Hindu notion that **"Atman is Brahman."** That is a notion that when set in the matrix of the language system of Hinduism is as unimpeachable as "Hear **O** Israel: the **LORD** our **God**, the **LORD** is one" (Oeut 6:4) set in the language system of Judaism or Christianity. Both languages give shape to phenomena; neither puts **us** in touch in any sense with anything behind the language **itself**. Both languages are human products; they are not forced on **us** by any substantial or transcendent essence.

It is in such a context that we can understand Richard **Rorty**: "The world does not **speak**. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to **speak**. Only other human beings can do **that**. . . [*L*]languages are made rather than found, and . . . truth is a property of linguistic entities, of **sentences**."⁷ Truth thus becomes in Nietzsche's phrase "a mobile army of **metaphors**."⁸ Even science has no special status; it is merely "one genre of **literature—** or, put the other way around, literature and the arts are inquiries, on the same footing as scientific **inquiries**." Ethics is "neither more **'relative'** or 'subjective' than scientific **theory**."⁹

It is easy to see how this notion, when applied to religious claims or claims to value of any **kind**, sparks a radical relativism. It is not that **all** religions lead to the same **end—the** view we discussed **above**. It is that each religion makes its own claims in its own language. It can

succeed in gaining converts **only** by making those claims in such a way that it convinces other people to speak the same language. Objective truth has nothing to do with it. Objective truth is inaccessible. In the words of Jean-Paul **Sartre**, "Given that men are **free** and that tomorrow they **will** freely decide what man will be, I can not be sure that after my **death**, fellow-fighters will carry on my work to bring it to maximum perfection. Tomorrow, after my death, some men may decide to set up **Fascism**, and the others be cowardly and muddled enough to let them do it. Fascism will then be the human reality, so much the worse for us. Actually, things will be as man will have decided they are to **be**."¹⁰

Rorty quotes the above passage and then comments: "**This** hard saying brings out **what** ties Dewey and **Foucault**, James and Nietzsche, together—the sense that there is nothing deep down inside us except what we have put there ourselves, no criterion that we have not created in the course of creating a practice, no standard of rationality that is not an appeal to such a **criterion**, no rigorous argumentation that is not obedience to our own **conventions**."¹¹ **And** our own conventions are merely what we have done in the **past**; they are as malleable as the strength of our ability to get others to agree with us. A Rorty statement I quoted earlier is apropos here again: "A liberal society is one which is content to call 'true' (or '**right**' or '**just**') whatever the outcome **of** undistorted communication happens to be, whatever view wins in a free and open encounter."^{12*}

But in an open society like the university **campus**, there is seldom any single winning viewpoint on any major issue. There is either a constant contention between **alternate** views or an abandonment of the quest for any agreement at **all**. Then follows either of two results: a despair in which the quest for truth is abandoned or a rather easy acceptance of "It's true for **you**, but it's not true for me."

Rorty rejects the notion that he is a relativist. Only a few **freshmen**, he says, can be tricked into thinking that contradictory opinions are equally **good**. But it is difficult to know **what** else to call a person who

holds that we should be content to call "true" whatever is accepted by an open society in open conversation.

Even if agreement is reached and a given position thus 'justified' as true, we have not solved the problem of relativism. The **word justified** has to be put in quotation **marks**. There is no universal system of justification, **only** those that fit within particular language **systems**.

But if this is so, then the very statement that each language system provides its own system of justification is itself true only in terms of its own language system. We have here a sort of infinite regress that forever seals off one way of talking from another. There is no reason, for **example**, that anyone not already accommodated to **Rorty's** language system should agree with him. What he has said is "true" only for those who are already participating with him in a commitment to the human mind's inability to grasp what is really there.

But surely such an account of what language and reality are is itself either true or false, correct or incorrect Rorty refuses, and consistently so, to argue for the correctness of his view. He says that he is **only** putting his views out there in the realm of public discourse to be accepted or not for this is how such views are justified within his overall philosophy." But the truth question cannot be avoided: Is **Rorty** right? Even Rorty has to ask himself this **question**.¹⁴

If reality is actually a substantial affair, if it actually exists apart from but accessible to our minds, then what these sorts of linguistic relativists are saying is simply false. Christians **should**, I believe, deny the starting point itself.

Relativism based on the notion of language as the prime constituent of accessible reality is based on a prior rejection of **Logos**—a rejection of the notion that there is a God who is really real and who is characterized by rationality (Logos). If such a God **exists**, genuine knowledge of all levels of reality is possible to God. If this God has created people in his image, then at least a partial knowledge of reality is theoretically possible for them as well. Why this is so I will develop in the section below on the Logos as a Christian alternative to relativism.

We turn now to the final form that relativism takes, one that is neither mildly skeptical nor nihilistic, neither linguistic nor nonrealist. Its claims are absolute. In fact **the** relativism it proclaims is only partial.

*6. God does not exist. Naturalism is true. Religious claims are only metaphors that help people **live** in harmony. Any metaphor is as good as any other if it leads to harmony, for that **is the best** we can **hope** for. There is no life after **death**.*

This final form of limited relativism is, it seems to me, the one that undergirds most secular cultural anthropology and most sociology of religion. Sociologists and cultural anthropologists in general approach their study with the notion that God does not exist. What does exist are multiple ways of understanding the world and our place as humans in it. Every society has its own myths, its **self-justifications** of its patterns of belief and practice. All of these are literally false. But they nonetheless provide the social cohesion that gives people a sense of identity and purpose. As Joseph Campbell says, "You can have a whole mythology for polygamy, a whole mythology for monogamy. Either one's okay. It depends on where you are."¹⁴ The various religions of various **tribes**, societies and cultures are therefore each true to the culture itself and true for the culture itself.

People who hold this view take a dim **view** of any attempt to change people's beliefs. All (every individual or society) are entitled to their own views of the universe. We should live and let live. Changing people's minds introduces disharmony into a tribe, a society, a culture.

There is, of course, a serious flaw in this position. First it is self-contradictory: if it is true that there is no **God**, then many religions are simply false and it makes no sense to say that they are "true" for the people who believe them. To leave a people living a delusion is not only elitist but cruel as well.

Second, some religions claim to be true to the way things actually are. And, as we saw above, they make claims to being exclusively true.

They will not accede to the notion that God does not exist or that their beliefs are untrue and only serve to bring social cohesion to their society. They may well be evangelistic and refuse any attempt to be relativized and thus marginalized within the greater pluralistic culture. So this form of relativism cannot deal with a religion or society that simply disagrees with its relativistic thesis.

Third, the claims that this form of relativism makes are either true or false in themselves. Such relativism is not itself a metaphor, nor does it view itself this way. Therefore, it cannot simply be one of many **options—including its opposite—available** to be chosen.

Logos: A Christian Alternative to Relativism

What we need is a mind with a fine enough net to catch truth when it flies by. And we need a reason to believe that we indeed have such a mind. Is there any reason to think so?

In a previous **book, *Discipleship of the Mind***, I have developed a relatively detailed answer to this **question**.¹⁶ Here I will summarize some of what I said there about the implications of God as Logos (**Jn** 1:18).

The first notion on which our confidence in human knowledge rests is that God is alive; therefore there is an ultimate ground in being itself. God is really **there—infinite, personal**, good, omniscient (intelligent), omnipotent, omnipresent.

Second, God is Logos; therefore reason has an ultimate ground. As John writes in the opening verses of his Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word [Logos], and the Word was with **God**, and the **Word** was God" (**Jn** 1:1). If God is Logos (**reason**, intelligence, wisdom) itself, then at least one personal being knows everything perfectly. That is **what** John declares is true of **God**.

Third, the Logos has become flesh: the kingdom of God has come near. That means that the ultimate **ground**, God **himself**, is not alien to human beings. That God could become human without contradiction and without alienation from himself is a confirmation that **hu-**

man beings were themselves made in the image of **God**. It means that perfect wisdom and intelligence can become embodied in human form. Surely this is a major guarantor of confidence in the possibility of human knowledge.

Fourth, the Logos has created the universe, and thus the universe bears the stamp of God's own **rationality**: "**Through** him [the Logos] all things were made" (Jn 1:3). This means that everything in the universe has been made by the One who is intelligence and reason himself. Thus in realizing the intentions of the Logos, the world has an objective purposefulness and is capable of being known, first by God and then by those he made in his image.

Fifth, the Logos is the light of human beings: "In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (Jn 1:4). That **is**, God has enlightened all human beings so **that** they can know **something** of God's world and God himself. Moreover, the Logos has spoken directly to us and given us much specific guidance on the nature of **God**, the world and ourselves, and on ultimate values. This was true both before and after Logos became flesh. God has spoken to us in many ways through the Old Testament prophets and most fully through the teachings and example of Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1-2).

There is, therefore, a basis on which we can build a Christian alternative to the situation we face. We can challenge the open-ended mind of our culture. We can address the easy acceptance of relativism among students and many others today.

We have a **basis, therefore**, for closing a mind so open that everything falls out. We can respond to the relativists of the world with solid reasons for holding to the notion **that** a moral reality exists apart from us. We can be both Christians and academics. There is no dichotomy. All truth is God's truth. The purpose of an open mind is to be open to the truth and then to close on it when it is **found**.

Thinking gets its value from finding the truth and then not moving from it no matter how enticing the error. We want a mind closed off at one **end**. When truth enters it should not slip **through**.

7

THREE'S A COMPANY

We believe that everything's getting better
despite the evidence to the contrary.
The evidence **must** be **investigated**.
You can prove anything **with** evidence.
(STEVE TURNER, "CREED")

Chris Chrisman, Bill Seipel **and** Bob **Wong**: this trio soon became a minicommunity. Having come from very different places, they now found themselves in the same place at the same time with with the same **questions**. Each of them was **confused**, but oftentimes about different things.

Chris and Bill believed the Bible would have something important to say about what troubled them if they could just figure out where the relevant passages were and what they meant when they found them.

Bob would have nothing of **this**, but was no longer confident that his own unaided reason could solve all his problems. He had seen that various people whom he considered rational held such different opinions about the basic makeup of the world that all of them couldn't be right **but** he couldn't figure out how to choose among **them**. **Each** one required some sort of starting **point**—**some** sort of presupposition that had to be accepted on faith. The human mind, he realized, is

finite; it just can't know anything for **certain**, not when you set the mind reflecting back on itself. Everything could be doubted, except the doubting itself while one was doubting. But that kind of self-reflection led **nowhere**.

Bob had once thought it **did**, but even in high school he and Michael Stone had concluded that Descartes (who first proposed this technique for finding certain knowledge) had made some logical mistakes and that Descartes's proof of the existence of God based on his "I **think**, therefore I am" foundation was **invalid**. They **had** read about Descartes in the **work** of one of his **critics**. Bob couldn't remember the critic's name. In any case, he and Michael had been delighted that it confirmed them in the atheism they found so congenial and exhilarating as high-school students.

At first Bob's faith was naive, unreflective and unchallenged. But Professor **Comprel's** class changed that. Here was an "**intelligent**" person who did not think much of the laws of logic when it came to matters of the spirit. But Bob, Chris and Bill began to ask what happens when one abandons reason as a tool of thought or as a significant motivation to believe one thing rather than another. They could only conclude that what one believed might turn out to be unreasonable. Who wants to believe something unreasonable? Not Bob, not even Chris or Bill.

Of course, even if a belief was unreasonable it could still be desirable: emotionally satisfying, **energizing, exciting**, new, popular among their **friends—intellectual** or otherwise. That was attractive. But as the three argued with one another, impaling each other on various horns of various dilemmas, they gradually came to accept as **best—if** not strictly **provable—that** reason (by which they meant the laws of logic) had to play a major role in their **deliberations**.

When the three of **them** got together, as they did after almost every philosophy class, they homed in on their **problems**, sometimes with the stimulation of Professor Knock's class, sometimes without it. The chief issue they faced was **relativism**, and while they did not follow the exact

route I took in the previous chapter in this **book**, they did turn relativism back on itself to see if it accounted for what it pretended to.

Professor Knock was helpful because he reinforced Bob's "faith" in reason. Knock was familiar with freshman nihilists who challenged him by saying that they could not see why the laws of logic were true. Sometimes he would simply ignore the puzzlement of the great unwashed generation he was having to introduce to the art of thought. But when he took the challenge seriously, he called his students to prove that the laws of logic were false and then showed that all of their proofs assumed the truth of the position they were trying to refute. One cannot give reasons for rejecting reason without assuming reason in the process of rejection. "Self-stultification" or "self-contradiction," Professor Knock called it: any proposition that if true requires the proposition itself to be false must itself be false.

Here is **how** he put it: If "**A** is not not-A" (the second law of thought) is true, then any given thing is that thing and not its opposite.

His illustration was this: Let A = an edible mushroom; then let not-A = an inedible mushroom (a poisonous mushroom). If "A is not not-A" is true in general, then an edible mushroom is a not a poisonous mushroom. That makes sense.

But if "A is not not-A" is not true, then "A is not-A" is true. That means that anything can be both itself and its opposite. Or, as in the illustration, an edible mushroom is a poisonous mushroom.

Of course, common sense tells us this is untrue. If it were true, all thinking and communication would be meaningless nonsense. In **fact**, there would be no difference between true and false. And that just can't be the case if we are to trust our minds at all.

Bob, Chris and **Bill** tried to give this some relevance to their analysis of relativism. This is the way they argued: If God can be both **com-**pletely impersonal (Hindu view) and personal (Christian view) at the same time, then A can be both A and not-A at the same time. But something can't both be and not be. Hence relativism, at least in this **form**, is wrong.

But deciding that relativism is wrong did not solve all their **problems**. For one thing it did not help them decide between Bob's atheism and Chris and Bill's Christianity. There were endless conversations about that Bob found himself defending himself **not** just against Bill and Chris but against his roommate as **well**, for Bob had come to find in Kevin Leaver a good **friend** as well as roommate. He and Kevin did not have **the** same intellectual interests; Kevin just quietly proclaimed his faith in Jesus and urged Bob to read the Bible. It wasn't that Kevin was unintelligent. Quite the contrary. It **was** just that Kevin was unshaken in his confidence that the Bible told the truth about God and the world. Bob knew that Kevin and his other two friends would like each other if they ever met but he was almost afraid of what the combination might mean to his ability to hold his own proatheist position. So for several weeks he kept the knowledge of Kevin's existence to himself.

Meanwhile, Chris, Bill and Bob went in quest of something they found they could agree **on—the** reason or reasons that relativism was so characteristic of the university mind.

Relativism, they **concluded**, was based on the notion that each person has the authority to decide what is true. Their World Civ text had used a phrase that captured it well, they thought: "the autonomy of human reason." This phrase **was** used in connection with the Enlightenment the period of Western intellectual history beginning in the late seventeenth century. It immediately rang a bell with Bill when he first saw it.

When he told the others, Chris could hardly wait to take the ball and run with it. "Yes," he said, "but it's not just a general autonomy belonging to generic humanity. It should be **'the** autonomy of *each individual's* reason.' Every person gets to decide what's true. That's why we keep hearing our friends say, 'It's true for you, but it's not true for **me.**' It's *individualism* that's at the heart of **relativism.**"

Then Chris had another sudden revelation: *individualism* was one of the terms he had been introduced to in Introduction to Sociology.

That course had not meant much to him as he took it but here was a connection to life. He wished **now** he hadn't sold his text at the end of the first semester. At least he had his class **notes**, and they included just what he was looking **for—a** brief description of individualism as a force of modernity and a reference to the book his professor said was indispensable on this topic: Robert Bellah et **al.'s** *Habits of the Heart*. Chris remembered seeing a stack of used copies in the **book-**store, and he bought one. Its length was a little **overwhelming**, but Chris had learned to scan-read and in a couple of hours he had identified the chapters that seemed the most relevant. These he read with great **attention—and** the loss of lots of sleep. This **book** kept **him** awake at night¹

8 ONES ENOUGH

We believe that each man must find the truth
that is right for **him**.

Reality **will** adapt accordingly.

The universe will readjust History will alter.

We believe there **is** no absolute truth
excepting the truth that there is no **truth**.

(STEVE TURNER, "CREED")

What Chris Chrisman found as he read Robert **Bellah's** *Habits of the Heart* was an analysis of the American mind that went a F F long way toward explaining what he, Bob Wong and Bill Seipel were feeling.

As Chris passed on what he was **learning**, the three began to grasp what had been happening to them over the past few months. What then, is individualism, and why has it proven such a powerful social force?

Individualism Defined

Basically, individualism is a social force, an implicit attitude that permeates the fabric of society. Whether we in the West (especially in North America) know it or not we act as if each of us were entirely on our own, as if each of us were solely in control of our destiny.

When we find we are not we become upset **disoriented, confused, troubled—and** if we are troubled enough we **look** for a way out a way back to feeling that we are in control of our own lives.

Individualism proclaims, "**I** am self-sufficient" "I am who I **am,**" or "I am who I make myself to be." Long before any of us ever heard Frank Sinatra sing **them,** ringing in our hearts and the foundations of our minds and wills were the words "I gotta be me" and "**I** did it my **way.**" From high-school English on these lines have rung in my ears:

I am the master of my fate;

I am the captain of my **soul.**¹

Such ideas are **a part** of the cultural heritage of the modern American psyche. They are, of course, **lies.** But that doesn't keep them from being powerful molders of the modern soul

Robert Bellah distinguishes between four types of individualism. The first *ontological individualism*, is generic: the other three are **sub-species.**

Ontological individualism (a concept introduced **by** John Locke in the seventeenth century) is the basic notion. "**The** individual is prior to society, which comes into existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals trying to maximize their own **self-interest.**"² The idea is that each person is fundamentally alone. The ego boundaries end with the **skin.** I am I You are you. We are a collection of individuals. We are a group, a society, a culture only so long as we agree to be one. Society is not of our essence; it is what we choose **to make** it

Locke did not go so far as to say that each person is in control of who he or she is, but he turned the path of psychic history in this direction. Nor did he see that ontological individualism decays into nihilism. As a person takes total control over all reality and becomes the judge and jury for **all** others, the notion of a norm by which that person is judged disappears. As philosopher **Hans Jonas** **says,** "If the **good** is a mere creature of the **will,** it lacks the power **to** bind the **will.**"³ Thus nihilism. But these are later developments.

In any case, ontological individualism is the basis for republican, utilitarian and expressive individualism.

Republican individualism is epitomized by Thomas Jefferson. Here each individual acts rationally for the interests of others, the larger social whole, because it maximizes one's own freedom and benefit. When many individuals internalize such a notion, a democratic state can be built. A sense of justice and the rights of others teeters on the good will and intention of individuals who see their self-interest supported by good citizenship, but at least there is something on which the formation of a just society can rest.

Much of **what** I recall being taught about citizenship as a schoolboy rests on this notion. You should be a good citizen because it is really the best thing for you. It's the Boy Scout model.

Utilitarian individualism has its champion in Ben Franklin. Here each individual is seen to have the opportunity to get ahead on his or her own initiative. It produces "a society where each vigorously pursue[s] his own interest"⁴ This view "has an affinity to a basically economic understanding of human **existence.**"⁵ Success is measured by material acquisitions, social power and prestige.

Utilitarian individualism fuels the engine of Western **economy**. Horatio Alger, one of the heroes of my generation, wrote stories of office boys (never girls) who rose to be bank presidents and "captains of industry." Lee **Iacocca** takes on this mythic role today. Here is the individual who single-handedly saves a giant **company—all** its employees and all its stockholders. Never mind that he drew on the national treasury to do so. He was the ingenious financial engineer who pulled it off. So goes the myth.

Expressive individualism, however, has come to be the dominant form individualism takes today. The essence of expressive individualism is the notion that each individual is free to "cultivate and express the self and explore its vast **social** and cosmic identities."⁸ One is considered "free to express oneself, against all constraints and **conventions.**"⁷

Historically, Ralph Waldo Emerson with his famous essay "Self-Reliance" and **Walt** Whitman with his **once-popular** poetry may have set the stage, but the current individualistic hedonism of Hollywood and the energetic search for self-fulfillment and self-expression are the inevitable end of expressive individualism (or at least its current form of expression). One ought **not** run off to Japan **and put** oneself under the tutelage of a **guru**, said the late Joseph Campbell, scholar of mythology and popular pundit "Our spirituality is of the individual quest individual **realization—authenticity** in your life **out** of your own center. So you must take the message from the East assimilate it to your own dimension and to your own thrust of life, and **not** get pulled off the track."⁹

Many in the New Age movement take expressive individualism even further by saying that each of us is divine, the creator not just of our own meanings but of our own destinies as well.⁹ Shirley MacLaine proclaims that she created the evening **news**, the **Beatles**, **chocolate-chip cookies** **and** the Statue of Liberty.¹⁰ In such circumstances the self creates its own moral **values**. Whatever one wants is okay. Everything is **permitted**, because there is no one with authority to prohibit Individualism becomes apotheosis; each person becomes **God**.

East and West

Before we look at the historical roots of Western individualism, let's take a look at it in light of its **opposite—let's call it communalism—in** the East

In the West each person is seen as unique and alone. The ego boundaries are firm and end with the **skin**. Society **is** just whatever the individuals who make it up decide that it will be. Associations are voluntary. In America most people belong to a dozen different groups and think no more of joining them and leaving them than of throwing away one well-used pair of shoes for a new pair.

In the East who any given individual is depends on who he or she is in community. The ego boundaries are indeterminate and blend

into the ego boundaries of others, first within one's own family and then within the larger surrounding clan and society. It is the family, the clan, the society, whose boundaries are firm; they remain regardless of who the **individuals** are within the group.

One of the best illustrations of the social effect of these differences is engagement and marriage. In the West only two people have to agree in order to get **married**. Of course, most couples want to involve many more in the celebration, but not in the choice. In the East marriages traditionally are arranged by families after much consideration and bartering.

Where the difference becomes problematic is when American-raised Asians want to marry someone who has not **and** perhaps never **will**, receive the approval of parents and the extended family. The tension is not just between the children and their parents, but within the children themselves. Their own sense of who they are and what they ought to do is at stake; they feel the pull of both **cultures**.

If Bob Wong ever "falls in **love**" and decides to **marry** without his parents' consent he will feel this tension in a direct and personal way. Bob is as American as he can possibly be, given his past but he **is** not so Western that nothing of the East is left to tug at his soul.

We don't have to go **as** far east as China or Japan to see the remarkable difference between American individualism and its counterpart in other **countries**. Anthony **Ugolnik**, in a brilliant comparison of Russian and American **mindsets**, notes the way this difference is played out in hockey. "**The Russians feature precision, in-concert teamwork**, skating with blades flashing in synchrony on the ice, while the Americans try to set up scenarios within which an individual player, darting out into an opportunity, can flash forth to a **goal**."¹¹ He quotes a Russian woman's comments to a group **of his American** students: "**You** are such **individualists** . . . as if alone you could decide everything. We instinctively seek to express the mind of the community to which we belong."¹⁸ Ugolnik summarizes: "For the Russian Christian, consciousness is a communal product The self is not

owned; it is the product of interaction."^{1*}

This cultural difference is played out not just in secular terms but in religious ones as **well**. Moreover, there **is not just** a contrast between the Eastern religions of Hinduism and Buddhism and the Western religions of the Book (**Judaism**, Christianity and Islam). There is a difference in how Western religions are practiced in the East Eastern Orthodoxy, for example, preserves more of the corporate character of Judaism and first-century Christianity than either Catholicism or Protestantism does. This may, in fact **make** it more biblical to that extent

Historical Roots of Individualism

Western individualism ultimately has its roots in **the Judeo-Christian** concept of human nature. This we will see in chapter **ten**. But the peculiar form individualism has taken in Northern Europe and North America can be traced to the Renaissance and the **Reformation**. In the Renaissance of the sixteenth century in **Europe**, greatly increased attention was given to human beings as such. No longer did artists paint Jesus with a halo; they saw him as a man or as a typical human baby in the arms of a typical human mother. The feet of the apostles rested on the **ground**. Human reason was given greater scope in theology and biblical studies as scholars gave theologians more accurate Greek texts of the New Testament

But the key move was made by Martin Luther, not because he sought greater freedom for himself personally, not because he came by individualism through a biblical study of the topic, but because he found **that** the teachings of the church and the counsel of his spiritual advisers did not satisfy his pursuit of peace with **God**. Peace with God came when he grasped what Paul in his letter to the Romans meant by "the just shall live by faith" (Rom 3—5). What Luther thought the text meant was different enough from what the contemporary teachers of the church said it meant that he was charged with heresy.

Despite many attempts to reach agreement or compromise by both

Luther and the hierarchy of the church, Luther finally faced a **show-down**. Luther was told that he must accept the teaching of the **church**, but he could not do so. Here is what he said to his examiner at the Diet of Worms (April 18, 1521):

Since Your Majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each **other**—**my** conscience is captive to the Word of **God**, I cannot and will not recant **anything**, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. **Amen.**¹⁴

Then he added: "The pope is no judge of matters pertaining to God's word and faith. But the Christian man must examine and judge for himself."

"Here," Roland H. Bainton comments, "we have the epitome and the extent of Protestant **individualism**."¹⁵ Indeed, here is the "Protestant principle": Each person has both the right and duty to live by his or her own conscience. The conscience cannot be **forced**.

Notice that Luther did not imply that he was replacing God's **authority** with his own. He was not affirming the autonomy of human **reason**. No, quite the opposite. His conscience is "captive to the Word of God." He will believe and act on whatever the Word of God says. The issue is, rather, who is to say what the Word of God means. To whom is given the task of rightly interpreting Scripture? Luther did not complain that only he could interpret Scripture; he was happy to listen to the counsel of **others**. The problem was, who will take responsibility for making the final decision when interpreters disagree and become deadlocked over their disagreements? Luther said that at that point each individual has to make the determination on his or her own: "The Christian man must judge for himself."

It is nonetheless true that from this point in church history, the church has split and **divided**, split and divided, hundreds of times. Today's many denominations bear the marks of human divisions

along national, **racial**, ethnic, **economic**, **theological**, ecclesiological and intellectual lines. **We** can point to Luther as the origin of the basic principle on which these divisions occur.

Yet many of **us—both** Catholic and **Protestant—must** affirm **that**, given the **circumstances**, Luther was right He had to do what he did For not only did his action lead to the reformation of many churches and peoples, it triggered a response in the Catholic church to clarify its teachings and purify its church **life**.

The divisions between Christians now run deep. Many of these divisions are artificial and unbiblical; many are deeply personal and have little to do with doctrine or practice; many are purely geographical or national. A great healing among divided Christians has been taking place in the last forty years, but much more healing is necessary. **It** is no longer so odd to see Lutherans getting along with Baptists in common projects. And the divide between Catholic and Protestant is being examined with fresh insight **and** some hope of reconciliation.

But the spirit of individualism has so permeated the fabric of Western society that we are divided not only *between* denominations and congregations but also *within* denominations and **congregations**. Individuals want to do *their own thing*, believe whatever they choose regardless of the teaching of their **churches**. American Catholics are especially loath to accede to the teaching of their church when it disagrees with their desires. The issues of birth control, abortion and priesthood for women are cases in point

We do not need at this point to give a detailed history of the development of Western individualism. Suffice it to say that it expanded from its Protestant roots as Separatist Puritans left England for the New World and as the frontier mentality sent pioneers westward across the mountains and prairies and the American myth was born ("you can do anything you set your mind to; you can be president of **the** United States").

▣ The lure of America has been strong. My grandfather Paul Louis Eugene Sire followed his cousin Jules from Switzerland to the United

States in 1891. He sloughed off as much of the Old World as possible as he moved to Nebraska and began to make his way in the New World. Cheated out of **his life** investment in a herd of cattle, he found himself bankrupt His eldest son, my father, then dropped out of his first year of college to help keep the family afloat My dad began to build a new herd of purebred Hereford cattle and made a modest success of ranching. Though my father would work around the house in a **farmer's** cap, his **Sunday-go-to-meetin'** clothes were a Western shirt cowboy boots and a cowboy hat Even in his **eighties**, had you given him a horse and a **six-shooter** he would have ruled the range again.

My heritage is the heritage of American individualism. That's how the West was won. Highly individualistic people who trusted **themselves**, and sometimes God, moved into a hostile environment and subdued the **land**, conquered its few Native American inhabitants and built a new **society—a society of individuals**. My **father's** hero, though he would probably never say so, was John Wayne. His favorite president was Ronald Reagan. The myth lives on as I too tug against my roots in **individualism**.

The lure of freedom from oppression has brought many immigrants to the North America But political freedom in the United States **has** been tied to individualism, and many became disillusioned Polish expatriate Czeslaw Milosz describes some of them:

People decided to leave their villages and little towns in the same spirit as man considers suicide; they weighed **everything**, then went **off** into the unknown, but once there, they were seized by a despair unlike anything they had ever experienced in the old country. They were accustomed to earning their bread by the sweat of their brow, but their work had been incorporated into the rituals of a community with traditions, beliefs, and the blessings of neighbors. Death as a sanction, "He who doesn't **work**, doesn't eat" was a part of human fate, accepted in silence, but it was not inflicted on people as **individuals—the** yoke was borne by everyone together,

family, relatives, friends. Now each of them was assessed as an individual, and, isolated among the isolated, they earned their living for a few dollars a day.... Then they began to cling to one great **dream—to go back** At the same time pride would not allow them to admit their mistake, and they wrote lying letters home reporting that they were doing **splendidly**.¹⁶

Still, before we dismiss individualism as a total evil, we should look at the distinct value it has brought to some **cultures**.

The Values of Individualism

It is extremely important not to reject individualism in toto. It does have a biblical basis, and, properly conceived, it is liberating. Even secular Western individualism has some salutary effects. We will note two that are central to individual dignity and social **justice**.

First and most important individualism undergirds respect for all individuals no matter what their ethnic, social, intellectual or economic association. This is especially valuable in a pluralistic society like the United States. If our neighbors next door or in the nearby suburb or city are different from us or from those closest to us in social "status," that makes them no less valuable as persons.

Political scientist Glenn Tinder puts it clearly:

The Lord of all time and existence has taken a personal interest in every human being, an interest that is compassionate and unwearying. The Christian universe is peopled exclusively with royalty.... To speak cautiously, the concept of the exalted individual implies that **governments—indeed**, all persons who wield power—must treat individuals with **care**—[Care] always means that human beings are not to be treated like the tilings we use and discard or just leave lying **about**.¹⁷

Tinder further notes: "No one, then, belongs at the bottom, enslaved, irremediably poor, consigned to silence; this is equality. This points to another standard: that no one should be left outside, an alien and a barbarian."¹⁸

Second, **individualism** limits the exaltation of social, ethnic, racial, economic or intellectual identification to give **status**. The tendency of every group is to take for itself the power of giving status to individuals. It leads people to say to themselves, whether consciously or not "I have dignity *because* I am a Native American, or a Romanian, or a Hungarian, or a person of color or English."

There is certainly a great truth in genuine **multiculturalism**. True **multiculturalism** as an ideal, and as practiced by many Christians and Christian groups, acknowledges the unique contribution of every culture. It celebrates cultural diversity.

To take pride and pleasure in one's ethnic heritage is both natural and good. For me to **look back** on my roots in Switzerland, France and England is to know that who I am is very much dependent on who my forebears were. I owe my very existence to this heritage. To try to cut myself off from these roots would be to deny who I am. People do get much of their identity from their families, their immediate societies and the larger culture of which they are a part

Still, there is a limit to be put on this reflection. The moment it becomes the foundation for my dignity, the reason I have value, it becomes idolatrous. God is the judge over every culture, for each culture represents the machinations of fallen human beings creating for themselves patterns of behavior and belief that are at odds with the will of God and need reformation and redemption.

Moreover, we do not get our value from society, or from our connection to our families or our ethnic roots. We get our value from being made in the image of God for community with each other and ultimately for the glory of God. Western **individualism's** emphasis on the value of each person has had many good **effects**.

Recently, however, there has been a resurgence of **ethnicism** on university campuses. Often in response to overt acts of racial prejudice, students have retreated into supposedly safe enclaves of **their** own making. Take **Oberlin** College, once a leader in civil rights and an open society. "**Oberlin's** student groups undergo a perpetual proc-

ess akin to what biologists call **mitosis**. They keep dividing themselves into separate units. Amid charges of racism and **sexism**, the **Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Union** recently splintered into four narrow factions: Gay Men of Color, Zani (lesbians of color), Lesbians Be Loud (white lesbians), and the Gay Men's Rap Group (gay white men).¹⁹ At the same time the Asian-American Alliance split into several **groups**. Residential "**program houses**," intended to bring together students with Like study **interests**, have become like South African homelands. Students cordon themselves off within these living **units**, assume a group mentality and cease to operate with the **kind** of individual freedom that has been historically characteristic of this college.

Ironically, this new mentality is sometimes called "**multiculturalism**." In this **form**, however, it is an ideology that proclaims that "race is the determinant of a human being's mind, that the mind cannot and should not try to wrest itself from its biological or sociological **origins**."²⁰ And **further**: " 'Multiculturalism' holds that the traditional idea of free thought is an illusion propagated by the spoilers of **freedom**, by the relations of power that obtain in any given society. It **holds**, more specifically, **that** the old liberal notion of freedom is only a sentimental mask of a power structure that is definitionally **oppressive** of those who are not white Western **males**."²¹

Such a view is devastating to both individual dignity and social cohesion, especially in a pluralist society. Individualism curbs this tendency. Each person is seen to be valuable for being an individual person, not for being a member of a privileged class.

III Effects of Individualism

Western **individualism**, however, **also** has a host of ill effects. Those who would **look** to the West and especially to the United States as a model to emulate should look again.

First with individualism the values we live by tend to become strictly personal and **private**. Marriage is okay as long as it fulfills my needs. Sex of all kinds is okay as long as every partner consents and no one

is **hurt**. Whatever I feel right about doing is perfectly **satisfactory**; after all, who is there to deny me the right of living my life the way I choose?

Second, too few people **look** at the social consequences of their lifestyle or the actions of their company. The tragic **consequences** of divorce should be measured in part by the trauma to children. Children who should be raised in a stable family environment are pulled in two or three directions as parents vie for their custody and their affection.

Individuals seeking advancement in their careers ignore the just claims of their **supervisees**, the just claims of their company to receive the best from them for the company and the just claims of the social and physical environment. Communities are destroyed by managers who place their own advancement over the claims of the community.

Third, religious values are **privatized**, reined in from making any claims on the social order. As Os Guinness is fond of quoting from Theodore **Rozzak**, Christian faith in a Western individualistic society becomes "socially irrelevant even if privately engaging."⁸⁸

Fourth, individualism enhances the natural human bent toward selfishness, greed and pettiness. The more we concentrate on our own needs and **desires**, the more we reap the personal consequences of a warped character.

Finally, individualism leads to **loneliness**. If we are forever attending only to our own petty wants and wishes, we **will** be left alone to attend to them all by **ourselves**. Then we suffer from a loneliness brought on by our **selfishness**. Worse, we are not likely to know how we became lonely or recognize that the cure is not to continue desperately to try to fulfill our own **needs**, but simply and quietly to serve **others**.

Marks of Individualism in the Church Today

We have already noted the connection between individualism and denominational **divisions**, and **individualism's** tendency to trigger private theologies and new churches. But even where an individual

church or denomination is strong and healthy, individualism has made inroads with regrettable consequences.

Often in these churches, especially those of an evangelical or fundamentalist bent the gospel becomes oriented only to the individual. "Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me, **O Lord**, standing in the need of prayer." Salvation is seen solely as individual, and what is saved is called one's "soul." There is a loss of the sense of the whole **person**, let alone of the sense of community.

In some cases, a "gospel" of **self-esteem** and self-fulfillment **re-**places *the* good news of the kingdom of **God**. "Christ is the answer" as long as the questions are all personal. Just ask what Christ has to say about some economic problem or some problem larger than the **individual—such** as whether a nuclear waste dump should be built in the **county—and** icy stares will come from pastor and people alike.

"The church is okay as long as it fulfills my needs" is the basic attitude of many **churchgoers**. Americans especially find it easy to move from one church to another, even when they are not moving homes. Ecclesiastical vagabondism rather than long-term or deep **commitment—even** of Christians to **Christians—is** the result. Just try to get any individual to become immersed in a long-term project. **Pastors**, church **leaders**, leaders of college **groups—all** find it hard to form lasting communities of Christians who really **care** for each other.

With so little that Christian leaders can count on from laypeople in the congregation, "I can do it myself" becomes the way of Christian **"pros,"** Christian **leaders**. Pastors try to become **superstars**, and a few do, inspiring even more to try.

Roots and Fruit

We Westerners sink our roots deep into **individualism**. From this soil comes our nourishment. It is no wonder that the fruits of our lives are so dry and **tasteless**.

We need to be transplanted into soil that is rich in communal **nutrients**. But does such a field exist? Where do we find it?

9

FOUR'S A

COMMUNITY

We believe that man is essentially **good**.
It's only his behaviour that lets **him** down.
This is the fault of society.
Society is the fault of **conditions**.
Conditions are the **fault** of society.
(STEVE TURNER, "CREED")

The second semester was moving right along. Midterms had come. Chris and his friends had done well. In fact Chris's English teacher had become quite impressed with his **papers**. Most of the class was struggling along, writing **C-ish** and C+ish papers. A few with rhetorical skills were writing **B-ish** papers. But Chris and a couple of others were constantly in the **B-to-full-A** range.

Chris was enjoying writing about *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Here in one novel were the ruminations of a man who was a lot more confused than Chris and his **friends**, a lot more emotionally disturbed, but no more concerned to find the truth. While Chris did not understand all the permutations of the narrator's philosophic **meanderings—even** after his instructor had explained **them—still** he grasped the essence of the search and actually found it exhilarating to write papers about it.

There was a long section in the book in which the narrator, who

had taught English composition at Montana State University, reflected on how he tried to get his students to write for "Quality." One student try **as she would**, could think of nothing to write about. The instructor finally told her to write about a single brick in a single building in downtown **Bozeman. It** was the perfect cure, producing a paper that was sheer joy to read.

Chris tried this method on himself, though he did not have her writing block to remove. He wrote a paper about a single dirty spoon he found on an otherwise empty table in the **cafeteria**. It started as pure description, then shaded gradually into a meditation on the loneliness of the abandoned wretched of the earth, who themselves came to stand for all of humanity.

His instructor loved it. Chris had slipped orthodox Christian theology right past the nose of his **philosophy-minded**, literature-loving English teacher.

His instructor had already come to look forward to Chris's papers surfacing in his biweekly stack of student papers. For Chris was writing about **relativism**, individualism, the search for truth, and as he wrote he didn't mechanically summarize what he took to be **Pirsig's** views, but used those views and incidents in the novel to make his own observations. Sometimes he was more tentative than Pirsig, sometimes more **certain**. But his work was always honest often insightful and occasionally **profound**. By the time the class had reached the end of the novel and had to select term-paper **topics**, Chris was certain **of what** his would **be, if** the instructor would allow it.

What he suggested in a one-page proposal was this: The Theology **of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: Is Quality God?**" His instructor was a bit taken aback by the boldness of Chris's proposal. This was a mighty big topic, but he approved **it**, and Chris set **out** to do his first work in theology.

BUI Seipel was also having a good semester. **With** Chris's help he had settled into **life** in a secular university and was **beginning** to get **a** grip on **what** had troubled him the first few weeks. His contact with

Bob Wong provided an added stimulation to get his own intellectual house in order. He needed more than ever to *know* what he really believed and why. His weekly Bible studies with Chris on the Gospel of Mark were helping.

More and more, he and Chris were coming to understand who Jesus showed himself to be while he was on earth. More and more it became clear that Jesus was an amazing **enigma—a** unique blend of the human and the divine. He was a man. No question. **But** he was also God. He told ordinary **stories**, but they were exceptionally clever. They not only grabbed your attention, they trapped it and you. Jesus **just** had to be **real**, they concluded; his presence leaped from the page. He could not have been invented by anyone.

Bill and Chris prayed together, too. Not long prayers, but prayers expressing honest gratitude for what they were learning in Scripture and in their **classes**, and prayers for their **friends**, especially Bob Wong. They had come to admire **Bob—his** openness to their arguments, his honesty in saying when he could and could not answer their **contentions**, and his graciousness in accepting them even while he rejected their case for Christianity. And they had learned **a lot** from Bob, not the least of which was that they didn't know how to answer some of his objections to Christianity. That made them scramble for answers.

Bob, for his part was more and more in a quandary. There was his roommate's quiet Christian confidence, his **philosophy-class** partners' friendly attention to his own views, Professor Compters' fuzzy-minded religiosity, Professor Knock's rock-hard affirmation of the primary role of reason in determining truth, his parents' letters asking him how he was getting along, his own frustration at not being able to convince himself of much of anything.

Bob felt like Chuang Chou, an ancient Chinese philosopher whom Professor Knock had mentioned in one of his rare whimsical moments. Chuang Chou had dreamed he was a **butterfly**, and when he woke up he wondered whether he was Chuang Chou having dreamt

he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was now Chuang **Chou**. Chuang Chou could **not get out** of his dilemma, nor could Bob Wong.¹

The fact is that the three young men's study of relativism had left them with a renewed confidence in the use of logic and the value of human reason. But it had not given them a good way to summarize their conclusion. It was then that Bill's study of *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* **paid** off. Bill was preparing to write his term paper for Professor Knock when the solution the three were looking for suddenly appeared in the pages **of** Newbigin's **book**.

Bill had found that reading Newbigin was like reading precisely what he had already thought or was about to **think**, only much, much better, much, much clearer. Newbigin **confirmed**, for example, that "every kind of systematic thought has to begin from some starting point" This starting point has to be taken as **"given."** His philosophy professor had called this a **"presupposition"** or a **"pretheoretical commitment"** In other words, the atheist and the Christian are on the same epistemological grounds; both have to *assume* that something is true before they can *prove* that something **else** is true. Even a scientist has to assume the truth of two notions: that "the universe is rational and that it is contingent"

Second, Bill learned that the truth of Christianity cannot be confirmed if one accepts as a starting point the same grounds as the atheist An atheist has to assume a confidence in the finite human **mind**, a confidence that Christians believe is not **justified**. Because of the notion of creation and the Fall, a Christian assumes that the human mind is not adequate to find truth on its own. The issue is, **then**, which assumption is more likely to be true?

After Bill had read some fifty pages of Newbigin, the key idea hit **him**. Newbigin was discussing the views of Michael Polanyi:

The scientist who commits himself to the new vision [a change in **what had** been thought to be true before] does **so—as** Polanyi puts **it—with** universal intent He believes it to be objectively true, and he therefore causes it to be widely **published**, invites **discussion**,

and seeks to persuade his fellow scientists that it is a true account of reality.... It is his personal belief to which he commits himself and on which he risks his scientific reputation. But at no state is it merely a subjective opinion. It is held "**with** universal intent"—as being a true account of reality which all people ought to accept and which **will** prove itself true both by experimental verification and **also** by opening the way to fresh discovery. It is offered not as private opinion but as public **truth**.⁹

Universal intent that was it One did the best one could with the tools at one's **disposal—reason**, experience **and**, for Bill and Chris, revelation. One could take a problem like relativism, consider it from as many angles as one could, and then reach a conclusion that one **held** with "universal intent" Some matters, like the great conundrum of predestination and free **will** which had occupied some of Bill's time in high school, might have to be held at a distance. But other **matters**, like **whether** Jesus was a worthy teacher to believe and **a** proper Lord before whom to bow, could not be held at a distance. They demanded decision.

Chris and Bill did not have much doubt about Jesus, of course. They had been Christians long enough to have experienced new **life** for some time, but they could not prove their view to Bob **Wong—or** Ralph **Imokay**, for that matter. Still, they felt that they had good reasons for it and that their view was true. On the other **hand**, they **knew** that there was much to know about Jesus which they did not **know**; and some of this might change their current view of Jesus. But now they could see a way to hold their specific theology (or Christology) both with confidence and with humility. They would be willing to change their mind if that could be justified.

Bob Wong liked this notion as well. It solved the problem of relativism for him too. What he had a hard time accepting is that it **came** from a Christian theologian. Could any good **thing** come from there?

But universal intent only gave the three a label for their view of reason and its value. It did not tell them which views they should hold

with universal intent Should I hold with universal intent the notion that Jesus is the only way to God? Or should I hold that God does not exist at all?

All three of them needed some help here.

Up to this point Bob hadn't talked to Chris and **Bill** about his roommate, Kevin Leaver. But one day about **midsemester**, Chris came across campus to Bob's **dorm**, and there was **Kevin**. Since Bob was out the two quickly discovered each other to be Christians.

Both were **delighted**, especially since it meant that Bob had more than one set of Christian **friends**. Kevin had seen Bob becoming **a** bit more open to hearing about Kevin's **faith**, and he could now see why.

It was obvious to both Chris and Kevin that except for their specific Christian faith and their common interest in seeing Bob become a Christian, they had very different interests. Kevin was **single-mindedly** pursuing a degree in **premed** and had little interest in anything as esoteric as philosophy. For him English **Comp** was a hurdle he was willing to learn to leap but was unwilling to learn to love, or even like for that matter. His teacher had chosen **Chaim** Potok's *The Chosen* as the novel for the semester, and when Kevin found out that Chris was reading *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, his confidence in the providence of God was reaffirmed. His novel was almost pure story, **not much** of that heady **stuff**.

But Kevin did have two surprises for **Chris**. First he was involved with a whole group of Christians who met every week in Hansom Union for singing, Christian instruction and fellowship. They called themselves Hansom Christian Fellowship and were associated with a **national—Kevin** thought maybe **international—organization** whose name sounded like a college athletic association but really wasn't. Someone said it had begun in ancient England, maybe even as long as a century ago, had come to Canada and then had crossed the border into the U.S. somewhere in the misty midregions of fifty years ago. Kevin wasn't sure about that but he was sure that Chris should get **involved**.

But the second surprise was bigger. When Chris said where he **lived**, Kevin said he knew only one Christian who lived in that **dorm**, a redhead named Susie.

"I thought she was a Mormon," Chris **said**. "She carries a Book of Mormon with her textbooks!"

"No," Kevin **insisted**, "she's is a Christian, a very quiet one, but a Christian."

Chris suddenly remembered the vow he had made at **Christmas-time**—to find a female friend and bury himself in a meaningful relationship. But he didn't find himself interested in any of the women he had met in the dorm or in his **classes**, except for Susie. *How inept at human relations could I be!* he mused

He vowed never to be so inept again. This time he kept the vow.

Hansom Christian Fellowship had its regular main meetings on Friday night So Chris and Bill (who was happier to hear about the Fellowship than he was about Susie) attended **It** was rather a sacrifice, since both had planned to work on their term papers in philosophy. But Chris wanted to see if Susie was really there, and Bill wanted to broaden his Christian contacts. It was a good move **for both of them**:

There was singing, praying, information about summer training programs and mission **opportunities**, a skit promoting a **weekend retreat** and a good talk by Maria **Marquez**. Maria was sort of the **"campus pastor"** (Chris couldn't think what else to call her) of the Fellowship. Her topic was "Christian Community: A Response to Campus Chaos." Chris and Bill said afterward that the whole evening was like *being* "slain in the Spirit" not that either of them really understood what that phrase meant to their Pentecostal friends.

The gist of what Maria said we will see in the following chapter. For now we need to know that Chris met Susie for the first time, and it was for both of them infatuation at second sight Susie could hardly believe Chris was a Christian. She had heard him talk philosophy with the dorm meditators and had assumed he was an intellectual nerd And as Chris told her, "I thought you were a Mormon. What's with

the Book of Mormon you carry to class?"

"**What** are you talking about? I don't do that"

"**Well**, don't you remember when I bumped into you, you dropped it and I picked it up and gave it back to you?"

"Oh, that Good grief Two young guys in dark suits and narrow ties **had** just given it to me in the dorm lounge. I haven't even opened the **cover!**"

*Hasty **generalization**, Chris thought to himself. **Guilt by association**, he muttered under his breath. **Sheer stupidity**, he almost said aloud. **She's probably taken**. **She could have been mine**. **I will** live my life forever deprived **of the only helpmeet God will give me**. **I should have spoken to her before**. **I'm lost I will enter a monastery**. **No, I'm not a Catholic I will go to the Bongo Bongos as a missionary**. **I will tread the burning sands for Jesus**.*

"**Would** you like to go for Coke and **ice** cream?" Chris was quick to recover.

"Yes," she said simply.

And that was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

10

COMMUNITY AMID CHAOS

We believe in getting along with everybody,
so long as there is something in it for us.
Of course if it costs too much to love our neighbor,
well, economics is where it's at, really.
I **mean**, we can't be responsible for **everyone**.
(J. W. SIRE. "CREED 11")

Chris Chrisman didn't know it yet but by **going** to the meeting of Hansom Christian Fellowship he had found community. He had already experienced the beginnings of community in **his** friendship with Bill Seipel **and** Bob Wong. Already this friendship was beginning to make a difference in his attitude to the university. Hansom State no longer seemed so **alien**—or rather, he was learning to cope with his alienation by finding fellow aliens.

In Hansom Christian Fellowship he had found a whole **bunch** of aliens, and it felt good. It felt good **not** just because one of those aliens was Susie, though she was certainly the most interesting alien. Nor **did** it feel good solely because he had found an emotional home in a congenial group. It also felt good because it assured Chris that he and Bill and Kevin were not the only ones who **believed in God**—and **not** just the Mush God of some of his **dormmates**, a God one could manipulate into justifying one's lifestyle, but rather a God of justice as **well**

as mercy, a God who holds people responsible for their thoughts and **deeds**.

Chris didn't know this yet either, but he had found a *plausibility structure* strong enough to confirm and sustain what up to this point had been his private **beliefs—held**, except for Bill and Kevin, almost entirely in **isolation**. The concept of *plausibility structure* had been casually referred to in his sociology text the previous semester, but he had not grasped its significance, nor would he become fully aware of the notion for some time yet. But the effect of a congenial plausibility structure was now active in his life, and it was helping Chris without his knowing it.

For Maria Marquez, the staffworker for Hansom Christian Fellowship, the value of community **forplausibility** *structure* was far from her mind. She was interested in something else. Maria had been feeling rather glum about HCF. Though she had kept her feelings to herself, she had been disappointed in the group this year. Now she had the opportunity to do something about it. She had been asked by the leaders to speak on whatever she felt the group **needed**.

It didn't take Maria long to make **a list** for **herself**, a rather **long** one. But as she looked at all the **items—evangelism**, prayer, Bible study, **missions—one** kept rising to the top of her **consciousness**. She prayed about it and felt that it indeed was what she should talk on. So Maria plumbed her Bible and her library for what they could tell her about community.

The problems she saw were these: Christian students intent **on** only their own goals, committees that were not **functioning**, leaders who took over when committees **failed**, other leaders who did not even do what they had said they would do, let alone help take up the **slack**, students who rarely went to church on Sunday because the churches did not "meet their needs." **Granted**, there were bright spots in the group. The large group meetings were drawing seventy to eighty students week after **week**, and there were a **half-dozen** live and functioning small groups. But as a whole, Hansom Christian Fellowship was

not a community. It was a bunch of bunches with a bunch of stragglers. As she thought about it she concluded that HCF was suffering from the disease of Western individualism.

First she thought about launching into a diatribe. "The Lone Ranger Rides Again and Again and Again," she would call her talk. That was the title used by a special speaker she had heard at a staff conference of the national movement she belonged to. It fit him: his hair was gray. But for her students the title was too much from the past So she considered "Han Solo, Indiana Jones and the Death of Christian Fellowship." Then she realized she was being melodramatic, and, besides, to label disease is not to cure it. Why not go directly to the cure? So she did. She called her talk "Christian Community: A Biblical Perspective." Much of what follows parallels her presentation.

Community: An Old Testament Perspective

The biblical answer to our human longing for meaning and significance is neither archindividualism nor extreme communalism, nor is it a **blend—half** of one and half of the other. It is rather a third thing: it involves *community*.

The pattern is set at the very beginning of human history. Human beings are made "in the image of God":

God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (Gen 1:27)

From the beginning there is a unity and a diversity, both a oneness and a **twoness**, to the human frame. Each person is made in the image of **God**, but the image of God is corporate. No person is alone in the image of **God**. The very image itself is corporate. Genesis does not elaborate on the corporate character of God, but in the New Testament God is seen to be Father, Son and **Holy Spirit** a concept the early church developed into the doctrine of the Trinity.

But here it is already in essence in Genesis itself: human beings as male and female, each and both reflecting the nature of God.

To make this *community* more **obvious**, the Bible tells the creation story a second time: "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living **being**" (Gen 2:7). God then put the man in the Garden of Eden:

The LORD God **said**, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for **him**. . . .

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the **man**.

The man said,

This is **now** bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called '**woman**,'

for she was taken out of man."

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his **wife**, and they will become one flesh. (Gen **2:18, 21-24**)

In the boldness and beauty of this story, we **must not** miss the message for us: *it is not **good** for the man to be **alone***. Adam and Eve were a part of each other. Neither Adam nor Eve was meant to stand alone. They were meant to be together. The picture is **not** just a beautiful glimpse of what marriage is to be; it is a model for human society in general. Adam and Eve were given dominion over the world and were instructed to "**fill** the earth." A human community was to emerge that would involve, as would Adam and Eve, both the value of the individual and the value of the whole.

Tragically, as the story unfolds in Genesis 3, the serpent tempted **Eve**. She succumbed to the **temptation**, and then in corporate solidarity with her Adam succumbed as well. The whole human race fell into alienation from and rebellion against **God**. So, as Adam and Eve represent the solidarity of the human race in creation, they also represent the solidarity of the human race in their fall-

eness and need for redemption.

Throughout the Old Testament the corporate nature of humanity is **emphasized**. "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people," God says (Lev 26:12). God's plan for the redemption of humanity combines the individual and the corporate at every **turn**. God saves one man, Noah, and his family from the destruction of the flood (Gen 6—9) and replenishes the earth by his progeny. He calls one man, Abraham, out of **Ur** of the Chaldees to form the Hebrew people, by whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:1; 28:15). To lead the Hebrew people out of captivity in Egypt God selects one main **man**, **Moses**, and his brother Aaron. Later he chooses one woman, Esther, to save the children of Israel in captivity under Xerxes.

So it went throughout the history of Israel: individual men and women through whom God worked to bring about the development of his people. But never were the heroes of the Hebrew Scriptures the sole **focus**. As biblical scholar Walther Eichrodt says, "Old Testament faith knows nothing in any situation or at any time of a religious **individualism** which gives a man a private relationship with God unconnected with the community either in its roots, its realisation or its goal"¹

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this combination of individual and corporate is in Psalm 106 (vv. 4-5). The psalmist says,

Remember me, **O LORD**, when you show favor to your people;
come to my aid when you save them,
that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may share in **the** joy of your nation,
and join your inheritance in giving praise.

The psalmist does not seek salvation for himself apart from his people. What gives him joy is the joy of "your nation." It is only by being a part of the family of God that he is satisfied

Community: A New Testament Perspective

The New Testament continues the theme of community. Jesus gath-

ered around him many disciples. From them he selected twelve as **apostles**. Before his death Peter had emerged as a main figure, and after his resurrection Jesus singled out Peter for leadership (Jn 21:15-19). But the disciples were chastened when they argued about the pecking order in heaven (Mk 9:33-37). Theirs was to be a community of equals who when praying were to say, "**Our father . . .**" (Mt 6:9).

The *church* came into being after the resurrection. It was to be a model of diversity in unity. In unity it was a chosen **race**, a royal **priesthood**, a holy **nation**, God's own **people** (1 Pet 2:9). Jesus prays for this unity in powerful terms:

My prayer is not for them [the original apostles] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to **let** the world know that you sent me and have loved **them** even as you have loved me. (Jn 17:20-23)

In diversity it was to incorporate a very wide group of people with a wide diversity of spiritual gifts, all of which were to be used for the mutual benefit of all (1 Cor 12). In fact the church was to be like a physical body, with each part having its unique function and value but also working together for the health of the whole **organism**.

Biblical Realism

We have to be careful here. It is easy to find passages in the Old and New Testaments that either call for or depict what looks like an ideal community. **The** human heart longs for a home, a place of rest from outside **pressures**, a place to be what one is without pretense, a place to exercise one's talents and be appreciated for what one is and **does**.

How good and pleasant it is

when brothers live together in unity!

It is **like** precious oil poured on the **head**,

running down on the **beard,**
running down on Aaron's **beard,**
down the collar of his robes.
It is as if the dew of Mount **Hermon**
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his **blessing,**
even life **forevermore.** (Ps 133)

But there is no romanticism in Scripture. We are given no encouragement to expect that an ideal community will ever occur this side of glory. Only in heaven will all tears be wiped from our eyes (Rev 21:4).

On earth what we see over and over again is just the opposite. In the Old Testament the people of God were constantly straying from God's intentions for **them.** Even in Psalm 133, the psalmist seems to express amazement **at** the glorious oddity of unity under God. At times utter chaos reigned as "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (**Judg 21:25 NKJV.**)

In the New Testament the disciples quarreled over who would be the greatest in heaven, and in the churches that formed after **Jesus'** resurrection the apostles found that bitterness and rivalry were constant **problems.** The opening chapters of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, for **example,** pictures a church in dire straits because of a lack of mature community.

One event in the early church in Jerusalem has particular relevance for Christian groups today. The first church in Jerusalem was **com-**posed mostly of Jews, but these Jews were divided in their cultural background. Some were Hellenistic (that is, though they were Hebrew by heritage, they primarily spoke the Greek language and reflected the Greek culture), and some were Hebrew (raised in the more traditional form of Jewish culture). The Hellenistic Jews thought that their widows were not being treated equally in food distribution with the Hebrew Jews. The church solved this problem by selecting a group to oversee the distribution of food: seven people "full of the Spirit" representing varied cultural backgrounds (Acts 6:1-7). Here is

biblical multicultural community in action.

Not all such problems were solved so easily, as a full reading of Acts and the letters of the apostles shows.

An Alien Community in a Hostile Culture

God's people have in some sense always been an alien community in a hostile culture. Whether we look at the Hebrew people in Egypt or in a Canaan they did not clear of Canaanites, or the early church in a place like Corinth or Rome, we see the people of God surrounded by, even penetrated by, the ethos of what the New Testament calls "the **world.**" And this is the way it should be. Martin Luther put it **bluntly:** "The Kingdom is to be in the midst of your **enemies.** And he **who** will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of **Christ;** he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with **the bad** people **but** the devout people. **O** you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever **have** been spared?"*

The "community of the **king,**" as Howard Snyder terms the **church,** is to remain in the closest of contact with the "world" at large. Its task is to be salt and light (Mt 5:13-16), to act as a preservative of the vestiges of good in culture and shine as a beacon to guide men and women into the haven of God's rest

As such it is a community of the redeemed. There is no sense in which a Christian community can be or should consider itself to be a perfect society. All **utopianism,** all notion of creating a society in which men and women live in perfect realization of God's will, is to be shunned like the pestilence it truly is.

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by **God,** by **others,** and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his **demands,** sets up his **own** law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly. He stands adamant a living reproach to all others in the circle of

brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is **destroyed**, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of **God**, and finally the despairing accuser **himself**.³

As Christians we are united in our **fallenness** just as in our creation and redemption. God is not done with us yet Thank God! And let us never forget it As Bonhoeffer says, Christian community "is not an ideal, but a divine reality,... a spiritual and not a psychic reality."⁴ God sees us as redeemed, for he has redeemed us. But we are still *on* the mend. Our fallen natures still obtrude. So the community is a community of **hope—of** prayers of confession and **thanksgiving**, of struggle to understand God's will and to obey, of worship of a **God** whom we see only dimly and strain to see more clearly.

So the stance the community takes within the larger **hostile world** must never be one of arrogance: "**We've** made it Aren't we great? **But** you can't be as good as we are. **And**, by the way, stay away because we don't want to be contaminated"

Rather, the community takes the humble role of being honest with-i in the community and outside as well. It calls us men and women **of all stripes in the world—the** lame and halt the high and mighty, the students flunking out and the star professors winning Nobel prizes—**to** join them in honoring God It calls us to take up the *cross* of Christ to lose our lives for the sake of Jesus Christ and the good news of the kingdom. It calls each of us to repent and join the community of the redeemed, the community of suffering, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds and then to become agents of **transformation**, working to bring the values of the kingdom to bear more and more in the workaday life of all people everywhere.

Bonhoeffer again is worth quoting at length:

There is probably no Christian to whom God has not given the uplifting *experience* of genuine Christian community at least once in

his life. But in this world such experiences can be no more than a gracious extra beyond the daily bread of Christian community life. We have no claim upon such experiences, and we do not live with other Christians for the sake of acquiring them. It is not the experience of Christian **brotherhood**, but solid and certain faith in brotherhood that holds us together. **That** God has acted and **wants** to act upon us **all**, this we see in faith as God's greatest **gift**, this makes us glad and happy, but it also makes us ready to forgo all such experiences when God at times does not grant them. We are bound together by faith not by experience.⁵

Christian **Community on Campus**

Such a view of community is what Maria Marquez wanted HCF to understand and to strive toward embodying.

She wanted the Christians in HCF to realize that they were not just individuals. There's more to being a campus Christian than hanging around other Christians for some human companionship masquerading as Christian fellowship. Nor is being a disciple of Christ limited to getting to know and then doing God's will for "my life." God's will for each person's life includes God's will for community.

This would include bearing one **another's burdens**, Maria **thought**: suffering with the suffering, rejoicing with the rejoicing. It would mean **deliberate**, intentional, **full-orbed fellowship—worshiping** together, serving the outer community together, spreading the good news of Jesus Christ together, being a city set on a hill, one everyone could see by its conspicuousness and being one to which people would be drawn by the power of the presence of Christ in its midst. It would mean that those whom God had chosen to be leaders and serve on committees would do so with joy as well as a sense of duty.

Was this Utopian? Maria hoped not. She believed it was what Christ would have their student group be.

11

BOB WONG'S

SEARCH FOR JESUS

We believe...

Jesus was a good man just like Buddha
Mohammed and **ourselves**.

He **was** a good moral teacher **although** we think
his good morals were **bad**.

(STEVE TURNER, "CREED")

Chris, bonkers over Susie, still kept pretty much on an even **keel** with his friends. **Bill** reined him in when he waxed too eloquent over Ms. Wonderful. And Bob kept his mind alert with his continued probing about the Christian **faith**.

What to do about Bob? How could Chris and Bill make a case for the Christian **faith**? Bob's **faith** in atheism was clearly undermined. But how did one bring him from his doubts about atheism to **faith** in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? Chris and **Bill** decided to ask the speaker at the Hansom Christian Fellowship meeting. She lived near campus; so they set up a long lunch hour with her in the dorm **cafeteria**.

They began by telling Maria that they wanted to take her teaching about community to heart. Chris especially could already see that because of his friendship with Bill and Bob, life this semester was going much better than before. Now they wanted to know what they

could do to help Bob Wong become a **Christian**.

Maria's advice was simply "Introduce him to Jesus. Just get him to know who he claimed and showed himself to be."

"**How** do we do that? Preach **at** him? He'll never **go** for it He'll raise questions before we get to point one," Chris **retorted**.

"**No**, don't preach at him, with him, on him or about him. Don't preach at all. **Ask** if **he'd** be willing to study a Gospel with one or both of you, or maybe with a group of others some of whom, like him, have **lots** of doubts."

This was a new idea to both Chris and Bill. They thought only Christians would be willing to study the Bible and be able to understand it When they told Maria that the two of them were already studying the Bible, she encouraged them to invite Bob to join in. Maybe they could even go back to the beginning of Mark and start over. "Or use this study guide." Here Maria **dug** into her backpack for a guide containing questions on passages selected **mostly** from the Gospels of Mark and Luke. Its goal was to introduce Jesus to someone who knew little or nothing about Jesus or the basis of the Christian **faith**.

Chris took the guide, and he and Bill agreed to see if Bob would be willing to study with them. To the surprise of both of them, Bob **said** yes.

So Chris and Bill put up a notice in the entryway to Chris's dormitory, and they asked a few students, including some they hardly knew, to join them for a study called "Who Was Jesus?" They chose a time when Ralph **Imokay** said he'd be in the library studying. By **10:00 p.m.**, the time **announced**, five people including Chris, Bill and Bob had **arrived**; ten minutes later three more came. Chris and Bill were stunned

There they were. John of the **Jane-and-John** meditating dyad said Jane had to go home for the week and he was lonely. Betty Holden, **whom they** soon discovered was a member of Hansom State Fellowship and lived in a nearby dorm, wanted to encourage Chris and Bill;

she had led her first dorm Bible study two years ago. Debbie Dobie, who, like Bill, was new to the **campus**, thought the **idea** of a Bible study was just weird enough to be fun. Sandy **Sollas**, her roommate, tagged along. And Sylvester Lentz came because he was genuinely intrigued with the **question**.

Over the next few weeks other students, including Jane, dropped in and dropped out but those who had come the first night never missed

What happens when a **person—or** a group of **people—begins** to read the Gospels for what they really say? What happens when students open their eyes to the text and their minds to what they see?

One thing that happens is that their views of **Jesus—if** they have **any—are** radically altered. Jesus is just not the person most people think he is. Take the first section from the Gospel of Mark that the students in Chris's room **studied—Mark 1:1-34**.

Chris started the study by asking the **group**, "**If** you were to **tell** the story of Jesus, where would you begin?"

"**With** his **birth**," Debbie said "I like that story, the manger and all Mom used to tell it at Christmas."

"**With** his **parents**," Bob said "**I** bet he made them rather unhappy." Chris knew Bob was reflecting on his own parents and how disappointed they were with him.

"**Well**, let's see how Mark's Gospel begins the story." Bill **directed** the group to the Gospel and asked John to read it

"I guess we were both **wrong**," Debbie **said**. "**The** beginning of the **story** here is a quotation from a prophet Who's Isaiah? What's all **this** about a messenger?"

The conversation was off and running as Chris let various people who thought they knew what was going on make their comments. Often he had to pull the discussion back to the text itself **Bill would** sometimes help by asking, "**Where** does it say that?" Chris began **to** learn that this was a good way to get the conversation **refocused** on the issue **at** hand

What no one in the room had to do was pretend that they had all the answers. No one needed to be an "expert"; on most important issues the text spoke for itself. When questions no one could answer did **arise**, Chris jotted them down and tried to have a comment on **them** by the next meeting.

But no one could avoid the obvious: Jesus was someone very special. The first study pointed out his place in the history of the Jewish people, his special relationship as the "Son" of **God**, his authority to **call** disciples (who actually came when he called) to cast out demons and to heal the sick. The story in the Gospel of Mark proceeded so rapidly and yet was so rich in significance that it left the students **amazed**.

"**This** was great" Debbie **said**. "I came 'cause I thought it would be a gas to see **just** how weird this whole Jesus bit **was**. **And** yes it is **weird**, but not like **weird-stupid**, like I **imagined**, but weird-fascinating. I mean, wow! Jesus was really something!"

John, whom Chris had expected to bring up the problem of the sound of one hand **clapping**, had entered into the discussion quite rationally, Chris thought. Better, he thanked Chris for relieving his loneliness, **and** Sy who had said nothing all evening left with a curious smile.

But it was Bob whom Bill and Chris were interested in pursuing. What did he think? They were not long in finding out.

"**Well**, Jesus as Mark tells the story is much different than I thought he **was**, that's for sure. But I don't see **how** you can really believe that this story about him is true."

"**Just** bear with the story a **while**," Bill said. "**Why** don't you read on that the Gospel of Mark and see where the story goes?" And Bob did just that. In fact he went on to read the Gospel of Luke as well, and **after that** Matthew and **John**. He **didn't** know it **then**, but he was **hooked** on Jesus.

As the studies proceeded through the weeks **following**, the course of an **argument** began to **unfold**. The questions that Chris **asked**,

many of which were prompted by the guide he was using, kept coming **back to** one major issue: Who did Jesus think he was? And the answers became more and more extreme as the studies followed the life of **Jesus.**

Jesus thought he was the one predicted by the prophet Isaiah: the one upon whom rested the Spirit of the Lord, whose task was to **"preach** good news to the poor, . . . proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind" (Lk 4:17-19). He compared himself with Elijah **and** Elisha; he was so sure of his own message that he threatened to go to the hated Syrians and Lebanese if his own neighbors would not believe in him. He not only healed a paralytic brought to him on a cot let down through a ceiling so that the man folded up the cot and walked away, but he forgave the man's sins, thus claiming the prerogative of God himself. He accepted the outcast the prostitutes, the lunatic and **diseased,** healed them and sent them forth on a new life. He totally reinterpreted the celebration of the Passover feast and even claimed to be the one whose death would be a sacrifice for the sins of the world. There was the poignant death of a martyr for a cause, a cause all wrapped up in who he claimed to be, the one who gave his life a "ransom for many" (Mk 10:45).

Then there was what to Bob had been simply **incredible—the res-**urrection. That is, it had been incredible to him before he had read the Gospels in their entirety. By the middle of the semester, the **res-**urrection began to look more like the inevitable outcome of the life of a person like this.

At the end of every study Chris would **ask,** "Okay. Given what we've seen of Jesus tonight who could he be?" Each week Bob **got more** and more **puzzled.** If the claims Jesus was making for himself were not true, he must have been a fraud. Yet Jesus did not act like a fraud. He took no money for his **work.** He told extremely clever **stories.** His ethics were more profound than anything Bob had run **into in phi-**losophy.

He seemed to make the claims of a crazy **man—ability to forgive**

sins, special knowledge of **God**, so close a relationship to God he could call him "**Abba**," or "**Daddy**." But he was too stable, too healthy in general demeanor, too just plain normal to be crazy. "**If** this guy is nuts, then we all belong in the loony **bin**," Bob once replied when John, the only one in the group that Bob thought might himself be **insane**, had suggested this.

Yet in Jesus' ethics something odd was going on. In the Sermon on the Mount which Bob read **in** both texts (Matthew 5—7 and Luke 6), Jesus made extraordinary demands. "You mean," Bob blurted out in one study, "if **I'd** like to have sex with Sandy here, that makes me an adulterer?"

Sandy **bristled**, but said nothing. Debbie told him to cool it

Chris, wondering if the rest of the study was going to be a wash, responded, "**No**, I don't mean that but Jesus does."

John, who had been living with Jane for months now, snorted. It was too much for him. *Silly!* But for Bob it was different Bob had been caught by the **lure** of Jesus. He had begun to see that when Jesus said something **outrageous**, it somehow made sense if you thought about it long enough and could begin to see through Jesus' eyes.

He apologized to Sandy and then, as if to make amends to her, flew to **Jesus' defense**. Before he **knew** it Bob was trying to explain to John **that** in the kingdom of **God**, righteousness meant purity of thought singleness of eye, having **in** mind the very best for others, not for oneself Just as he got into the swing of his defense of Jesus and was waxing eloquent he suddenly **stopped**. The whole group, which had been bursting with energetic comment up to now, became strangely silent It was dawning on them, including Bob himself, that in his **passion** Bob had suddenly shifted from the quiet inquiring, puzzling, **ruminating**, doubting searcher to a defender of the **faith**. He couldn't **go on** He wasn't there yet

After that Bob's attitude to his quest for meaning **took on** a **new** cast **No**, he had not become a believer. He had not yielded his heart and **life to Jesus**. But his mind was there already. He knew that if he

continued gaining information about Jesus, it would simply reinforce what he already grasped just under the threshold of **his** consciousness. Jesus was the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the Lord of the universe. If he accepted the fact that this was who Jesus was, he would have to change the entire orientation of his life. It would not just be lustful thoughts he'd be forced to try to curb. He would have to repent of a lot more than that. Here thoughts of his parents came to mind

It made him not sad really, but subdued, and sometimes angry-angry with himself for searching for such a hard truth and finding it angry with his friends for being his **friends**. For several weeks he was in a mild depression.

Bob could see that the semester was drawing to a close; two more weeks and he would be free of middle America with its bland blend of religiosity and secularity. He would be back on the West Coast where he would have **a** job in a small law firm. His parents had found this job for him. It would be simple clerical **work**, but they thought it might give him a taste for a good **profession**.

This sounded good until he remembered two things. First his parents would be happy to see him lose his **atheism**, but would be unhappy with either his doubt or the possibility that he was going to turn Christian on them. And worse: Michael Stone, whose atheism had been hardened, if such a thing were possible, at Bertrand College, would be there to challenge him.

Late one evening, Bob was in his room. Kevin had his head buried in his biology text cramming for the crucial test of the semester. The whole hall was utterly quiet. Bob was down in the deepest depression of his life. Thinking to shake it off, he turned to look **again** at **Jesus**. "The hair of the dog that bit me," he muttered to himself.

He'd been reading the Gospel of Matthew lately, and so **he** flipped it open. Under a section headed "Rest for the Weary" he read: "Come to me, **all** you who are weary and burdened, and I will give **you** rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am **gentle and**

humble in **heart**, and you will find rest for you souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Mt 11:28-29).

It was too **much**. Without repentance, without a softening of his **heart**, without yielding to the gentle call of Jesus, Bob Wong wept silently. Then suddenly, he looked again at the Bible, took out his pocketknife **and**, with all the force he could muster, jammed it down into the Gospel In this Bible from that time on "you will find rest" would be severed from "for your soul."

Kevin, **startled**, looked up to see Bob stomping out of the room and slamming the door. Kevin looked at the Bible, saw the severed text and breathed a prayer. Then he phoned Chris and Bill¹

12

IN THE SPRING A YOUNG MAN'S FANCY

We believe that falling in love
is okay **so** long **as** you **don't** fell **too hard**.
We believe that if you fell too **hard**,
you can always get up and slip out the **back**.
(J. W. **SIRE**, "CREED II")

When Chris wrote his mother that^te had met the absolutest
coolest sweetest cutest smartest kindest lightest "girl," that
he was in fact madly in love with her, he expected his
mother to commend him for his great find She didn't

"Boy," she wrote, after a fairly warm greeting, "get your feet back
on the ground!"

The rest of the letter flowed from that Chris got the **message**, and
after that he rarely mentioned Susie in **his** rare letters home. In **phone**
conversations she never came up unless his mother asked **Chris** had
quickly concluded that mothers, at least **his**, were not capable of recognizing quality in "girlfriends."

Susie Sylvan was in fact almost everything Chris said she was. **She**
was not a philosopher; in fact she had little interest in **purely abstract**
thinking. Not that she couldn't do it **She** just was not **interested**.

But Susie was brilliant She loved people and she understood them.
Her vocational goal, as much as she had thought it through, was to

be a counselor or teacher. She read every book she could find that told the stories of children with special **problems—mental**, physical emotional parental. She was an excellent student just as she **had** been in high school

In addition to not being impressed with Chris's constant philosophic babbling, Susie had another barrier to overcome before she could really trust Chris enough to consider dating him. She had been living with Cynthia Sharp for five **months**, and, while Cynthia was easy to get along with, she had posed a challenge to Susie's attitude to men. Susie began to see that Cynthia was right about a lot of things: this is a **male-dominated** society, women have not had the same opportunities as men, men did consider women sex **objects—and** more.

"Don't trust men. Sure, some of them are okay. And marriage is certainly not out of the question. But go slow," was the advice she offered one evening after Susie had spent a marvelous time with Chris. Susie knew it wasn't bad advice, even if she could not go along **with all** of Cynthia's ideas. Cynthia was not a **Christian**, nor likely to be one in the near future, but she was basically a good person and had become **a good friend**.

Still, once Susie got over the shock of finding out that Chris was really a **Christian**, she began to understand him as **well—understand**, tike, more than **like . . . love**, well maybe. It just seemed much more than infatuation to her. She had been infatuated with a guy in high school It just didn't seem like that

One thing Susie did go slow **on**. She had deliberately not become involved in Chris's Bible study. **Yes**, it was just across the hall but both **of** them thought it would **be a** good idea for there to be no distractions when something like the fate of Bob Wong's spiritual life was at stake. And Susie was always a distraction to Chris, as he was to her.

But now Chris and Susie had something they could do together. **Distraction** was no **problem**.

As soon as Chris heard from Kevin what had happened to Bob, he knocked on Susie's door. She was bleary-eyed He was in a panic.

"**What** should we do?" he asked desperately.

"Let's get the Hansom Christian Fellowship mobilized to pray for Bob." Susie by now was wide awake. "In fact let me do that You go **and look** for Bob."

In fifteen minutes the emergency prayer network of HCF was accessed. The guys who set up the network were computer **majors—thus** the high-tech language. But the prayer was not high-tech. In five dorms and an apartment off campus, it mounted upward in a serious wave of compassion.

Many of the students in HCF knew Chris and Bill or at least knew about them. They had been a welcome addition to the group. And many knew about Bob, too, though Bob had never been to an HCF event So the prayers **ascended**. A battle was raging in Bob's **soul**. Unbeknown to him, people he had never met were fighting for his life.

Chris, Bill and Kevin each took part of the campus and went looking for Bob. They had nothing to go on. And they had no success.

Bob was angry and depressed But he was not going to end it all, as some of the HCFers thought he might He had simply reached **the** end of his ability to keep his mind from affecting his **will** or his emotions. Long ago Bob had given up the confident atheism of Bertrand Russell and the belligerent atheism of Madalyn Murray **O'Hair**. Now he could maintain neither the constantly questioning stance of Socrates nor the calm, stoic resignation of **Cicero—two** models Bob had often emulated once he became more agnostic. He had to admit that he was now more like Kierkegaard The phrases, titles of two of the great Dane's books, swirled together in his **mind—fear and trembling ... sickness unto death.** p

That he was simply an ordinary intelligent human **being facing** a dilemma common to many people as they wrestle with **God** never occurred to him. But that's what he was: just a young man **facing for** the first time the ultimate implications of the claims of Jesus. Hundreds have done it before him. Some, situated where Bob **was,**

have slipped quickly over the threshold into faith and never looked **back**. Some, having almost tasted the joy of commitment to Christ have drawn **back** in a sadness that has turned to **anger—an** anger that finally spurred them to bitterly attack all who call themselves Christian. Some just slip away, divert themselves with movies, studies, music, **sex, sport**, the eternal **Walkman**, and never **think** about Jesus again.

The noise of the slammed door disturbed a few students, who stuck their heads out to see what had happened. When they saw it was only Bob, they **went** back to their books or slipped into bed. The noise had startled Bob too. He could see that he had done something **dramatic**, probably too dramatic really. He couldn't go back and face Kevin, not now. So he headed for a corner in the library courtyard where the base supporting a reproduction of Rodin's statue *The Thinker* formed a niche just wide enough to slip into and narrow enough not to be easily seen in. There he spent the night falling asleep with his hand on his chin.

Some in the prayer network stayed up **all** night; others prayed by turns, catching sleep between their watch. By morning, the search party had not found Bob. As classes **began**, the network broke up, leaving only Message Central to handle any **information**.

"**Bob!**" Chris shouted when Bob walked into philosophy **class**. "**We've** been looking for you all over. Where have you been?"

Bob looked down and mumbled something Chris couldn't hear. Seeing that he was not going to say much, Chris slipped away and **reported** to Message Central "Bob's okay. I don't know what he did or where he was. But he's okay." Then he slipped back into the room as Prof. Knock called on him.

"**Mr. Chrisman**, explain Plato's concept of love in the *Symposium*. Is it consistent with Plato's metaphysics?" Chris was astounded by the question's irrelevance to what he had just experienced. For the first time in Knock's **class**, Chris had nothing to say.

That is, Chris had nothing to say to Prof. **Knock**. He had lots to ask Bob. And he had lots to say to Susie, who had initiated the prayer

network and spent the whole night on her **knees**.

Bob didn't say much to his friends. He didn't tell them where he had spent the night. He thought if things got worse, he might have to use this place again. Having sloughed off Kierkegaard he had returned to Cicero. All he would say to Chris was "I just don't get it. This Jesus thing has had me tied in knots. But I'm resolved now. **I'll** just keep my mind **open.**" Conversation with him after this was cool and detached.

Bob plunged into his studies and so far as Chris and Bill could tell, laid aside any personal search for truth. The prayer network **dis-**solved but Chris, Susie, Bill and Kevin kept up their prayers for **him** in private.

"In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love," Tennyson wrote. But Chris's fancy turned rather more heavily. In his bones Chris knew there was no turning back now.

Still, not much could be done with the fancy. All of them had to plunge into their studies. Only a couple of weeks remained before finals.

1911
The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various positions in the office of the Secretary of the Board of Education for the year 1911-1912.

Secretary: [Name]
Assistant Secretary: [Name]
Treasurer: [Name]
Members: [List of names]

The Board of Education is composed of the following members: [List of names]

The Board of Education is organized into the following committees: [List of committees]

The Board of Education is organized into the following departments: [List of departments]

The Board of Education is organized into the following divisions: [List of divisions]

The Board of Education is organized into the following sections: [List of sections]

The Board of Education is organized into the following bureaus: [List of bureaus]

The Board of Education is organized into the following offices: [List of offices]

The Board of Education is organized into the following divisions: [List of divisions]

The Board of Education is organized into the following sections: [List of sections]

The Board of Education is organized into the following bureaus: [List of bureaus]

The Board of Education is organized into the following offices: [List of offices]

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13

THE PUBLIC FACE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

We believe in putting our faith on the back burner when it gets too hot on the front one.
We believe in an **intense**, ecstatic devotion to God so **long** as we don't have to give up our stock in **Philip Morris**.
{J. W. **SIRE**, "CREED II"}

The end of Chris's second semester at Hansom State was in sight. Late one evening when he had finished his **studies**, he found himself unusually exhilarated. He had put the finishing touches on his paper on *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* and was excited. He wanted to read it to someone. Susie would be ideal, he thought. But when he looked across the hall, there was no light under the door. He figured that Susie wouldn't mind being **wakened**, **but** he was not in the mood for an encounter with her roommate, **Cynthia Sharp**.

Chris's own roommate had **long** been sleeping, and besides, **Ralph** had remained, as far as Chris could see, totally uninterested in **any**-thing Chris did or thought let alone wrote. So Chris **wandered down** to the lounge, deadly quiet at the end of the semester with **everyone** either sleeping or cramming to make intellectual amends before the final tribunal found them guilty of massive ignorance. Chris got a Coke from the vending machine and settled into an easy chair.

So this is the end of my first year of college. Chris cast his mind back over the past nine months. *Things are sure different from what I ikought they'd be, he mused And I'm different* Chris's faith was becoming more and more a matter of lifestyle to him, and he thought about the changes it had brought

One thing struck Chris in particular. Christianity was not just a matter of getting saved and then getting on with life as if nothing else had changed Everything changed The way one studied was different The questions one asked in class were often not asked by anyone else. The way one thought about life after college was different too.

Chris did often think about this, because summer was coming and **he'd be** back working **again—where** he didn't know. Still, he knew his attitude would be different from last summer. Then he thought about his roommate. Chris had felt awkward those first few months with **Ralph**. Now, having been as unobtrusive with bis faith as he could be, he was resigned to living with a roommate he couldn't interest in Jesus.

Then he thought about **Susie**. The way he related to Susie was different too. There was no question in his mind about sleeping with her. That was **out—not** that he hadn't thought about it not that it would have been difficult (Susie had thought about it too), not that it wasn't a common practice among the students in his dorm, **not** even that it was unheard of among his Christian friends. But without ever discussing the subject both were resolved the **act** of physical **consummation of love—that** was for after **marriage**. Chris actually began to think about that possibility.

But, now, looking beyond the upcoming finals, he faced the summer. Even the summer looked different to him, especially after **the talk** he'd heard at the large group meeting of Hansom Christian Fellowship a few weeks earlier.

What was now **beginning** to dawn on Chris is that being a Christian is a **full-time** affair. It affects every part of **life**. And the number of parts is almost beyond count

As a high-school student Chris had attended a church that stayed largely on the margins of society. It addressed the personal needs of the members, took good care of the church family and gave generously to foreign missions. A few members even worked in ministries to **the poor** in the community. But within the church itself, Chris never heard any talk about the social structures that lead to poverty, or mention of public affairs like the building of housing for low-income people. The fact is that Chris's church was typical of a major stream of Protestant **churches**, even some entire **denominations**.

Now Chris was seeing that there is something wrong with this seeming lack of concern. It was the **talk** by a guest lecturer at HCF that had gotten him thinking like this. The lecturer called his talk "*The Ships of Tarshish and the Public Face of Christianity*." What follows is the substance of that **talk**.

Privatization

A large percentage of Americans still attend church on Sunday; many more are church members. But most churches and some whole **de-**nominations shun any concern with large portions of American society.

For some segments of Protestant Christianity, this is deliberate. The church's **business**, says Bob Jones Jr. (whose father founded **Bob Jones University** in South Carolina), is solely with the message of salvation. **Christians**, whether laity or clergy, are all to be **evangelists**, but are to spend no time thinking and working toward the **orderly** running of society at large.

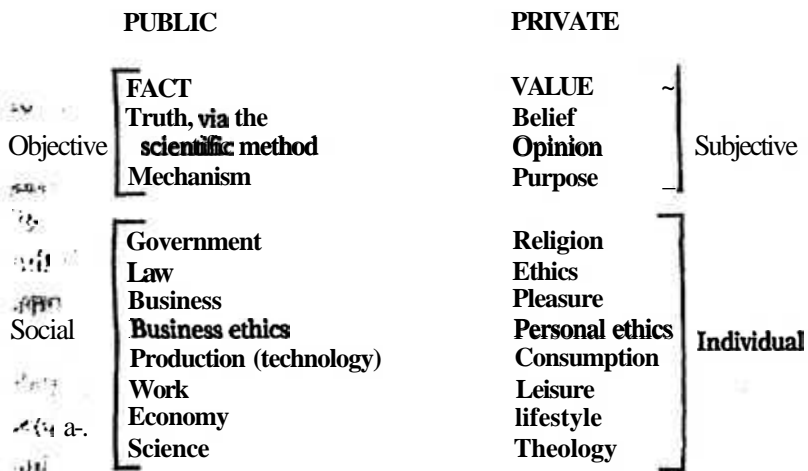
Other segments of Christianity emphasize these matters at a **de-**nomination level or from the pulpit but find few ordinary **parish-**ioners acting on their message. Some churches do become heavily engaged with social welfare programs, but their concern is **often lim-**ited to binding up the wounded and rescuing those cast out by the system. Little thought or effort is expended in promoting systematic social **justice—that** is, helping improve the system itself.

This picture is not without exception. Undergraduate institutions like Wheaton College and Calvin College have been on the forefront of combating Christianity's historic weakness at this point. Then too there are graduate institutions like the Institute for Christian Studies (Toronto), Regent College (Vancouver) and New College for Advanced Christian Studies in Berkeley that strongly emphasize the cultural role of the church. And one must note as well individual organizations like Evangelicals for Social Action and the Association for Public Justice and Trinity **Forum**. The Williamsburg Charter, the outgrowth of an attempt to forge a Christian public philosophy on the issue of religious **freedom**, is also an illustration.¹

But by and large in the Western world Christianity has become a private **matter**.² As Os Guinness puts it *privatization* is "the process by which . . . a cleavage develops between the public and private **spheres**."³

Perhaps this **can** be made clearer by a **diagram**.

Figure I. The Separation Between Public and Private



In the *public* arena mechanism, system and fact (truth determined by the scientific method) reign supreme. This is the realm of law, of

order determined by objective criteria or public agreement. If one is employed, for example, one is required to work at times controlled by the company. The manufacturing process is governed by the tractability or intractability of the raw **materials**. One can't make a carburetor out of **coal**, a stereo system out of steroids or a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

In the *private arena*, on the other hand, there is great freedom. "**Value**" (subject to the belief of each individual person) is the controlling (or better, *noncontrolling*) principle. Values are seen to be mutable, subject to the opinion of each person, whether arrived at through reflection, social conditioning or whim. In the **area** of leisure, for example, one can jog; dance, swim, play cards, join an oratorio society or become a couch potato. In Western countries one has almost an infinite choice of which foods to consume, which clothes to wear, which car to drive and which vacation to take.

Most significantly for our purposes here, **in** religion no one is required to believe anything in particular. Religion is not seen to be governed by immutable **truths**. Whatever one believes *is okay*. We have already seen the implications of this in chapter five.

But privatization does not affect religion only. It splits the work of people from the values they **hold**, whatever those values are.

The effect of this polarization is to segregate various **sectors** of Western society from each other. For example, take Barney **Smith**, a typical stockbroker living in a Chicago suburb. He gets up, has his private devotional time of Bible reading and prayer, jogs a couple of miles and then takes the nonstop train to his company's office in **the** Loop, reading *The Wall Stmt Journal* as the train hurtles along. Throughout the day he trades stock for his clients, looking to do so by buying low and selling **high**. **Barney's** concern is not for the **products** of the corporations whose stock he is trading (cigarettes, **toys**, weapons, telephone service, pharmaceuticals); his concern is for the potential long- and short-term profitability of these **shares**. Will they pay a high dividend over the long haul? Can he sell them for his

client at a significantly higher price later on? Can he make a good return for his brokerage firm, in whose profits on trading he participates?

His moral concerns are limited to the laws and ethics of buying and selling (he must not use insider information to turn a profit for his company, for example). The fact that any given corporation or conglomerate is mistreating its employees, polluting the environment or mismanaging its resources is outside his **concern**, except as it affects the future stock price and **dividend**. Barney is strongly in favor of getting handguns off the street but at **work** he finds **it** just as easy and legal and **business-wise** to buy and sell stock of a company manufacturing those handguns as of one providing excellent health care to the poor. Privatization allows, if not **encourages**, Barney to leave aside any personal scruples he may have about the companies whose stock he recommends to his clients.

If Barney Smith were to join Chris **Chrisman's** home church, he would never hear from the pulpit or in any church educational program anything that would support him in his desire for legislation to register handguns with the local **police**.

The handgun issue, one may say, is trivial. Yet former Surgeon General C Everett Koop has said that shooting is the **number-one cause** of death among teenagers. Koop, by the way, is one Christian **who has** integrated his Christian faith with his public life, though not **without** severe criticism from many in the Christian community.⁴

• It's not just the morality of a few issues, like brokering stocks of tobacco companies or of handgun manufacturers, that are seen to be **irrelevant** to Christian concern. Most public **issues—tax** laws, zoning, international relations, housing for the poor, unemployment education, subtle **racism—**are ignored by most Christians. The exceptions prove the rule: abortion, **euthanasia**, homosexuality and women's **issues**. These do attract the attention of what social activists there are in the church. But despite the public attention given groups like Operation **Rescue**, the fact is that only a very small percentage of Amer-

ican Christians are involved or have more than uninformed opinions on the matters at stake.

The Cosmic Lordship of Christ

Privatization has sapped the moral strength from our society. We receive very little encouragement to put together the private and public sectors of our **lives**. Job and home are split apart Our **identities**, molded by our double environments, split as **well**, so that we tend to be at least two people: Barney the **businessman/Barney the husband**, father, Christian.

But this situation is profoundly unbiblical. In simple terms, Jesus Christ is Lord of all Every area of life is under his reign. The apostle Paul has expressed this notion dramatically. Notice the inclusiveness of Christ's reign because of his role as **Creator**:

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him **all** things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all** things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:15-17)
All things were created by and for Christ To make it clear that the range of "all **things**" is exhaustive, **Paul** explicitly includes "things **in** heaven and on earth" and then lists "**things**" that are both "**visible**" and "invisible." He explicitly identifies some of the invisible **things**: *thrones, powers, rulers, authorities*. These are terms which in the first century identified social, political and spiritual forces. Christ is Lord over all **realms—public** and private.

Now notice the inclusiveness of Christ's reign because of his **role** as **Savior**:

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the **beginning** and the firstborn from among the **dead**, so that in everything **he** might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making

peace through his **blood**, shed on the **cross**. (Col 1:18-20)

Christ not only rules over the church but he *reconciles to himself all things*. Jesus Christ is bringing the whole of fallen creation back to himself.

The Ships of Tarshish

If we can get at least a dim picture of what that reconciliation might look like, it will help us see how the public and private sectors of our lives will be both integrated and redeemed¹¹

The Hebrew Scriptures tell the story of the creation, the Fall and the beginning of redemption. They even give a glimpse **of** glory. The texts about creation are short (Gen 1—2), but reflections on God as Creator and on the world as his creation abound. The psalmist exults:

The heavens declare the glory of **God**;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge. (Ps 19:1-2)

All the ancient prophets of Israel saw God as Creator and caretaker of the **earth**. But they also saw God's human creation as fallen and rebellious, and they looked at the earth as corrupted by human sin. In the very beginning of the human race, there was rebellion against God **And** so the earth was **cursed**, men and women would be at each other's **throats**, pain would accompany **childbirth** and the sweat of hard labor the growing of crops for food. Death would be the end of each person's sojourn on **earth**.

The Old Testament is brutally realistic about the evils and agonies of human existence. Men offer up their daughters to rowdies to save their own lives, and they chop up bodies and send them to their neighbors to incite vengeance. A woman drives a tent peg through the forehead of an enemy leader. Eight centuries before Christ **Isaiah**, one of the most famous of prophets, saw his time as an abomination:

Surely wickedness burns like a fire;
it consumes briars and **thorns**,

it sets the forest thickets ablaze,
so that it rolls upward in a column of smoke.
By the wrath of the LORD Almighty
the land will be scorched
and the people will be fuel for the fire;
no one will spare his brother.

On the right they will devour,
but still be **hungry**;
on the left they will eat
but not be satisfied

Each will feed on the flesh of his own **offspring**:
Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and **Ephraim** on Manasseh;
together they will turn against Judah.

Yet for all this, [God's] anger is not turned away,
his hand is still upraised (Is 9:18-21)

The judgment of God on the nation of Israel affected every level of society. There were no innocent **noncombatants**; men, women and children, cattle and sheep, land and sea were all affected.

Come, all you beasts of the field,
come and devour, **all** you beasts of the forest! ,
Israel's watchmen are blind, d
they all lack knowledge; e
they are all mute dogs, f
they cannot **bark**; g
they lie around and dream, h
they love to sleep. (Is 56:9-10) i

The only peace the righteous get in a society like the one Isaiah describes is the peace of death.

The righteous perish,
and no one ponders it in his **heart**;
devout men are taken away,
and no one understands
that the righteous are taken away

to be spared from evil.

Those who **walk** uprightly

enter into peace;

they find rest as they lie in **death**. (Is 57:1-2)

At the same time that Isaiah is picturing the agonies of his own day, he envisions the ecstasies of God's future **city—Zion** set on a hill and filled with the glory of God

Arise, shine, for your light has come,

and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.

See, darkness covers the earth

and thick darkness is over the **peoples**,

but the LORD rises upon you

and his glory appears over you.

Nations will come to your light

and kings to the brightness of your **dawn**. (Is 60:1-3)

Isaiah then sees the sons and daughters of Israel flooding back to Zion, and with them flocks of sheep from Kedar and herds of camels from Sheba, "bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD" (**vv. 4-7**). Then come the **ships of Tarshish**:

Who are these that fly along like **clouds**,

like doves to their nests?

Surely the islands look to me;

in the lead are the ships of Tarshish,

bringing your sons from afar,

• with their silver and gold

to the honor of the LORD your God

the Holy One of Israel,

for he has endowed you with splendor.

• Foreigners will rebuild your walls,

and their kings **will** serve you. (Is 60:8-10)

"What are the ships of Tarshish doing here?" theologian Richard Mouw asks. Why is the wealth of foreign nations being brought into Zion? Before we answer this **question**, we should look at the vision

of the Holy City in Revelation 21. Here the writer John describes what he saw "in the Spirit" (Rev 4:2): "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven" (Rev 21:1-2). An angel is seen measuring the city: fourteen hundred miles long, fourteen hundred miles wide and fourteen hundred miles high—a giant cube. "The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass" (v. 18). Here is a transcendent city fashioned in the heavens and let down toward earth.

John, the author of Revelation, has picked up the imagery of Isaiah. But instead of seeing Zion as a city on earth, as Isaiah seems to do, John sees the Holy City as transcendent something from the outside, let down "from above." "The glory of God gives it light and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it" (Rev 21:23-24).

So, then, what are the foreign ships and foreign kings doing in the Holy City? Mouw believes, and I agree, that these ships that come from afar and the kings who "serve" in the city represent "the gathering-in of human cultural filling.' Both Isaiah and John link the entrance of the kings to this transaction. The kings of the earth will bring 'the wealth of nations' into the Holy City."^a

There is much mystery here, much that is not clear, and I do not want to speculate unnecessarily. Nonetheless, the point is made: the wealth of nations belongs in the Heavenly City. Something of what is done and said in the cultural realm will be brought in as part of the furniture of heaven.

It is easy for many of us to think that Handel's *Messiah* will be sung in the heavenlies. Bach's Brandenburg Concertos will surely make it others may add. I'd like to think we will have some of the music of Thelonius Monk and Dave Brubeck. But there also will be vestiges of political order and the "little acts of kindness and of love" that Wordsworth speaks of.

Mouw refers us to Matthew 20:25-28, in which Jesus transforms "the patterns of human authority."⁷ "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with **you**. Instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your **slave—just** as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his **life** as a ransom for many."

Then Mouw comments:

[Jesus] calls us to cast our lot with the lowly ones, to identify with **the** poor and the oppressed of the **earth**. To live in this manner is to anticipate the coming political vindication, when '**the** least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty **nation**' (Isa. 60:22). . . . We can act politically in the full assurance that our political deeds will count toward the day of reckoning that will occur in the transformed City.... Since we are already citizens of God's commonwealth, we must find effective ways of living in political conformity to its norms and **patterns**—[And we can call today's political authorities] to perform that kind of ministry which God requires of all who administer human affairs.⁸

The Public Face of Christianity:

Being What We Should Be Where We Are

In our attempt to understand the full sweep of biblical history from creation and Fall to redemption and glory, we must not overlook redemption. That may appear to be what I have done by shifting from Isaiah to Revelation. But the way from the agony of human existence in a fallen world to the ecstasy of eternal life in the Holy City leads through the cross. And the cross is a reality not just for Jesus the Savior, it is a reality for the church.

Jesus came proclaiming, "The time has come.... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk 1:15). There is a sense in which with Jesus the kingdom of God is already beginning to be realized. His actions are the actions of a person living

totally within the framework of the kingdom of God the lifestyle of the Holy City lived out in the context of the fallen world. Living this lifestyle, totally motivated by the ethics of the kingdom, put Jesus on the cross.

This was thought to be the end of the affair. People could now go back to their own **ways**. Instead, this death was the eternal **once-for-all** sacrifice that would pave the way for all people (should they accept the conditions) to be reconciled to God to be transformed by the renewing of their minds and the sanctification of their lives and to be welcomed into the Holy City as full citizens of the kingdom of God.

First however, they must simply follow Jesus, and that means taking up his cross as their own. Jesus put **it** this way: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his **life** will lose it but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mk 8:34-35).

John Howard Yoder has said "Only at one point only on one **subject—but** then consistently, **universally—is** Jesus our example: in his cross.... The **believer's** cross must be, like his **Lord's**, the price of his social nonconformity;... It is the social reality of representing in an unwilling world the Order to come."⁹

The point is that while the mission of Jesus was to reconcile the world to himself (2 Cor 5:19), he showed us how a reconciled person should act. We should live as he did displaying by our lives the righteousness of the kingdom of **God—kingdom** values. The fullest single expression of these values is the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5—7), **but** Jesus' parables elaborate these **ideas**, showing them in action, and **the** closing section of each of Paul's letters gives much to guide us as well.

The public face of Christianity has not been seen much. **Christians** are, of course, everywhere. From the high reaches of public office to the boardrooms of major **corporations**, from the exalted sphere of star professors to the laboratories of top research **institutes**, from natural science to social science to the **humanities**, from the fields of wheat to the shop floors of automotive manufacturers: Christians have **per-**

meated every field But where is the evidence of their presence? As Guinness **says**, "It's not that [Christians] are not where they should **be, but that they aren't what they should be where they are.**"¹⁰

This then is the challenge of our age: to be what we should be where we are! To put a public face on Christianity, to be a light set on a bill, to be, as Lesslie Newbigin says, **a sign, an instrument and a foretaste** of God's sovereignty over all the **nations**, over every realm of **life.**¹¹

The Awesome Task

Chris Chrisman could only remember the outlines of the biblical picture we have just seen here. But he knew that to be a Christian meant some kind of engagement with the world around him. One couldn't be a serious Christian in college and not see that That was the problem facing him now.

Chris **had** come to the lounge with energy to **burn**. His ruminations had now not only drained all that energy but also raised the specter of discouragement The world was so bad off There were so many parts to life, so much to bring under the lordship of Christ Yes, he was ready to do **what** he could But there **was just** too much to da

Suddenly, something Maria Marquez had said struck him. She had spoken on community. "**You're** not alone," she said "**You** are in this together. Each of you has a spiritual gift Some of you have **several**. Each of you is responsible for the role to which God has called you a None of you is responsible for everything. **At the end** of the day, when you have done **what** God has called you to do, you can go to bed and sleep well"

Chris liked that **idea**. This evening he had done well, he thought His English paper was done on time. In it he had reached a conclusion that brought together the best of his knowledge of theology, philosophy and literature. He had more **questions**, but this paper had satisfied **him** even if it would not satisfy his professor. He was willing to take **his** lumps as well as the kudos he usually received

Then just as he was about to leave the lounge, he had what afterward he told his friends was perhaps a vision. He wasn't sure. What dawned on him in almost visual terms was that he, **Chris**, was just a part of God's plan for history. He saw, envisioned, **imagined—Chris** wasn't sure **which—the** whole history of earth spread out before him: creation, Fall, the thousands of years intervening, the call of Abraham, the exodus from Egypt the birth, life, death, resurrection of Jesus, the formation and growth of the church around the world the coming of **Jesus**, the judgment of humanity, the heavenly city let down on **earth**, the ships of Tarshish sailing to Zion, the kings bringing into the city the wealth of the nations.

At first Chris himself was standing outside the vision, looking in *on* it Then, wondering where he was in all of this, he focused his attention on one part that looked like now. There he **was**, standing in a room looking at a vision like the one he was just seeing. A vision within a vision. Chris was afraid to **look** for himself in the new vision. He knew he'd see another just like it

On the one hand he seemed so small. He saw himself as one tiny person in a vast countless company of men and women that spread themselves from past through present to future: the human dimension of the kingdom of God set first in the context of the earth and its history and then in the larger frame of what Chris took to be **the** cosmos.

On the other hand he could hardly believe he was there in that company. **It made him feel** both humble and proud **Here** he was, one *single* person, that's all. No, not all: one single person with links to the entire kingdom of God

With a heart swelling with worship, Chris crept off to bed This was enough for one night It was more than enough. Chris was mostly a left-brain person, largely characterized by rational thought It was the only such vision Chris would ever have. It was enough for a lifetime.

14

THE THINKER PRAYS

We believe in believing
so long as that's all we have to do
(J. W. SIRE, "CREED II")

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the
pretense of distancing himself from personal engagement had become a solid reality? The large group meeting took place first

The main task it had to accomplish was the election of officers for next year. There hadn't been enough time in the semester, Maria Marquez thought The Hansom Christian Fellowship would have to nominate and elect next year's leaders in the last meeting of the semester. She hated to think what her supervisor would think of that when she reported it

It wasn't that she hadn't tried to get the chapter to think about leaders for next term. But it was only after she spoke on community

that she was able to get the current leaders to appoint a nominating committee. Finally a slate of officers **had** been proposed

President: Walker F. Abraham

Vice **president:** Nancy B. Holden

Treasurer: Carol P. Adams

Large group coordinator Alice **K.** Bendey

Small group **coordinator:** Kevin B. Leaver

Prayer coordinator Susan **R.** Sylvan

Evangelism coordinator Graham **R.** Williams

Book table coordinator William D. Seipel

The meeting began with **lots** of singing. A week of exams remained but this was to be the **last** time the whole fellowship would be together till the fall. Then elections took place, and the slate of candidates was confirmed by the group.

Maria's friend Becky Baldwin, a piano major as an undergraduate and now a campus staff member at nearby Cabot College, spoke on "Making the Summer Count for Christ." She encouraged the new slate of officers to attend the "chapter camp" scheduled for late June in a beautiful retreat center on a lake in Michigan. She charged the whole group with the responsibility of being disciples of Christ wherever they were this summer. Graham and Alice were going on a mission **project to Minsk**, in the new **Belarus**. Some others were taking a four-week discipleship training program in Colorado, run by the national organization of which their group was **a part**. But most like Chris and Bill were going home to **work**. Becky had different suggestions for students in each group, but everyone was encouraged to read **Christian books**. She suggested one a week and handed out an annotated list

Afterward **Bill** and Chris headed for the book table at the back of the **room**. This was to be Bill's responsibility next term; everyone knew that he and Chris were the big readers in the group. Bill had **in fact** read some of the recommended books while he was a student **at Cornton**. Both chose five books they hadn't yet read

The excitement of the final meeting of HCF cooled when Chris contemplated the final meeting of his dorm Bible study. Every study that semester had been different and most of them had left Chris somewhat puzzled. In addition to the regulars who had come to the first study, various others had dropped in and out. At each session there **had** been someone new.

One was Abraham Knox, the student whose aggressive evangelism at the beginning of the year had so turned off Chris and everyone else in the **dorm**. "Ob," **as** in "Ob **Noxious**," the name **that** Phil Corper had pinned on Abraham one day in the lounge, flopped down on Chris's bed and throughout the study made snide remarks. He had lost his faith by the end of the first semester, when he came to be the laughingstock of the **dorm**, but now he was more obnoxious than ever. Chris was anguished over the apparent effect of Ob's intrusions. What he didn't know is that Ob's comments were so outrageous that they actually **lent** credibility to the Gospels. The other study members were more impressed with Jesus than ever.

Another interloper was Jane, John's other half. She had wondered **why** John kept attending the study after she had returned to **campus**. The **only** thing that attracted her was **Jesus'** prayer life. She investigated this a bit on her own, but couldn't make much of it. What did Jesus do when he went off alone early in the morning to pray? **The** one prayer she knew he prayed was the one in the Garden **of Gethsemane**, and this didn't attract her at **all**. What was he doing wrestling with God? Why didn't **he** just meditate **and** find himself absorbed into the divine One?

Then there was the Lord's Prayer. That she thought at first might have some promise. But when she **and** John actually tried meditating on this prayer, chanting it over and over like a **mantra**, she **got** the funny feeling that this was not right to do. There was far too much content to this prayer, far too much recognition of a God beyond a Father in heaven, one whom the prayer acknowledged as special, holy, separate from her **and** John. It spoke of God's kingdom **and** his

getting what he wanted. It spoke of "debts" in one version and "trespasses" in another. It just wasn't like "Om mane padme hum," a set of untranslatable Sanskrit words which even if translated were only an image—"the jewel in the center of the lotus," some translations read. She soon gave it up.

John had continued chanting the Lord's Prayer on his **own**. To him there was something real about it. He was beginning to think that maybe Jesus had a better way of getting through to God than he and Jane did.¹ He had not yet tumbled to the fact that the Lord's Prayer was actually not Jesus' own prayer but the prayer he taught his **disciples**. That would come later.

Debbie Dobie and Sandra Sollas had both become interested in Jesus, and Chris was happy to note, had also become friends with Susie. They even attended a couple of HCF meetings before the semester was over. **Still**, they seemed to Chris and Bill some distance from coming to new life in Christ.

Sy **Lentz—well**, he was a special puzzle. He just never said a thing. His enigmatic smile seemed glued **on**. **Yet** he was always there.

Even Chris's roommate, Ralph Imokay, appeared one **week**, not needing to spend that evening in the library. He found himself contributing despite his plan just to **listen**. But always after that he stayed away. When Chris asked him about **this**, he got a quick answer: "Remember? Leave your Bible **on** your side of the **room**. Okay?"

"**Yeah**, okay," Chris said with as little dejection as he could muster.

Finally there was Bob Wong, the reason for the Bible study in the first place. Bob had kept to himself since the incident with the pocketknife. After philosophy class he would talk seriously to neither Chris or Bill. Everything was academic or disengaged from himself. He had come to one more Bible study after his evening at the feet of *The Thinker*, but he had only made **observations**, astute ones to be **sure**, about the text and not said a word about **implications**.

So there was great anxiety as Chris prepared the final Bible study **and** prayed with Bill and Susie about it. When 10:00 p.m. came and

Bob wasn't there, Chris decided to begin without him. This would be the saddest study of the year.

The room was all but full. One chair was left vacant for Bob. But the tone of the discussion was subdued. Only Chris and **Bill** were really missing Bob, only they were concerned. But their worry had translated into a gloom that spread to the corners of the room. It was as if a thick wool blanket had settled a few feet above everyone's heads.

Then Bob burst in and filled the room with light. He was trying to control himself, but he couldn't conceal his excitement. He was smiling, smiling so broad a smile that if it hadn't been sparked by so much joy it would have hurt.

"Wow!" said Debbie. "What happened to you?"

Chris guessed to himself. He was right.

"**I've** just realized who Jesus **is**," Bob began. "I mean, I have known for some time, but **I've** just been willing to accept it for what it really means."

"**You** mean **you—the** doubter, the **skeptic**, the **spittin'** image of old Berty **Russell—have** become like these guys here?" John exploded waving his arms toward Chris and Bill.

"I guess so," Bob said somewhat sheepishly, still with a smile so big he **could** hardly form the words.

"**When** did all this happen? Did you **get** your libido under **control**?" Sandra asked remembering Bob's near admission of lust for her earlier on.

"It had nothing to do with that really. That whole **thing—seeing** Jesus' demands as almost impossible to live **by—that's** not the point. At least it's not the first point. The first point is that I saw that Jesus had me **pegged**. He knew me better than I knew myself. I mean he *knows* me better than I know myself. He's alive, you know!" Bob was beginning to spit it all out.

In the next twenty minutes Bob recounted to his friends what had happened. He told **all** of them about the evening he'd **stabbed** the

Bible with his knife. He told them where he'd spent that night (Chris and Bill hadn't heard about this before.) He recounted his attempt to play it **cool**, to pretend **that** he could treat Jesus as he treated Socrates, as a sage worth learning from. Then he told them about the **break-through**.

On the outside Bob had returned to the stoic model of Cicero; inside, he had been more Kierkegaardian than ever. "Sickness unto death" and "fear and trembling" were no longer exaggerated phrases. There was nothing more Bob needed to know about Jesus or God or the Bible. He only needed to submit to what he knew was the **truth**.

Bob had seen both the value and the limitations of human reason in making a case for the Christian faith. Through his philosophic dialogues with Chris **and** Bill he had seen how reason helps to clarify problems and even leads to a recognition of its own limitations. Human reason itself rests on faith in the mind's capacity to discern the difference between truth and falsity when the issues were clear. It even takes faith in one's own judgment to conclude that "A is A" is true and "A is not-A" not true.

Even formal logic requires **faith**. But even if formal logic is a tool for **all** useful thought it doesn't fill the A with content What *is* A? ... and B and C and D, ad infinitum? Formal logic does not supply that. Nor does reason more broadly conceived seem to supply any certain propositions from which to argue. Experience seems to supply some, but experience, when it comes to matters of value and general rules for life, varies so much from person to person, culture to culture, that it seems to give Utile help. Everyone's ideas of God and their religious experiences or **lack of them are** just too disparate to be of much help.

Bob was illustrating a principle he couldn't yet articulate: reason's most important function in apologetics and evangelism today is to clear away the objections to Christian **faith**, so that a person becomes willing to look at the positive evidence that comes through clearly **from revelation**. And what comes through most convincingly is Jesus. Jesus himself is the best reason for believing in Jesus.

The truth is seen only by those who come to the Gospels with open eyes, open ears, open minds and open **hearts**. Without this the Bible remains a closed book even when it is open before us. But we do not have to have perfect vision to begin to glimpse the majesty and mystery of Jesus. Often just a peek at him will so startle us that our eyes spring open, our ears perk up, our minds turn on and our hearts begin **to melt**

Bob recounted **how** that melting occurred in him. It had happened **that** very evening. Long before darkness had settled in, now **that it** was the end of May, he had decided to return to *The Thinker*. Again he wedged himself into the narrow niche at the base of the statue. Again he placed his hand on his chin and traced in his mind the contours of his search for truth. Again he saw where it all led

When he had done this, there seemed to him nothing left to **do** but admit it was all so. And that's **what** he did. He removed his right hand from his chin and placed it with his left in what he had seen was the traditional way Christians pray. Then he poured out to God the anguish of his **heart**: the sorrow for his sin, the rebellion against his parents, the arrogance of his philosophic mind the **lust** for Sandy **and** lots of other women students as well (this had been a private matter only hinted at in his outburst in the Bible study), his desire to **run his** own life. He yielded his mind and heart to Jesus the Truth and **the** Life. Then he prayed the Lord's Prayer as best as he could remember it. It had fascinated him as much as it had John. **us**

"Come to me," Jesus said "and I will give you rest" Bob **believed** that would happen. And it did. And more **too**. Joy. His eyes were **moist** when he left *The Thinker*. His heart was overflowing as he almost ran to the Bible study.

Bob's story put all notion of a Bible study out of everyone's mind. Chris and Bill were ecstatic. John was astounded. *There really is something behind this Lord's Prayer after all*, he concluded. Debbie and Sandy were pleased but puzzled. *Is this what becoming a **Christian** is like?* Sandy thought to herself. As Chris said to Bill later, "**Did** you

notice? Even Sy wiped the silly grin off his face."

That night turned into morning before, one by one, the group members slipped off to bed where inner dialogues kept **most** of them awake for **hours**. Bob and Bill stayed for a long time with Chris. Rejoicing turned to prayers of thanks and prayers for Bob as he faced the summer.

The three would now be split up. **Bill** would work in McDonald's, where he had spent his summers in high school. Bob would return to Mendocino.

There, he knew, he would face his **parents**. And what to do? What to say? He knew he had to somehow begin to see them as *his* **parents**, to "honor" them, to show this in a way they with their Chinese and Buddhist heritage would recognize. How was he to do this? He didn't know. He was hoping that the law office he would work in would provide relief. He didn't yet know that one of the law partners would **be** a believer.

And what was he to say to Michael Stone? He couldn't just pick up the conversation where it had left off nine months earlier. He had radically changed. What had happened to Michael? After the first couple of months they had not written to each other. But he expected (that in Michael he would face a rock of resistance to anything religious).

And Chris? Well, Chris would **look** for **a** job of some kind. He didn't know what it would be yet. He would spend some of his evenings—**well**, every evening he **could—with** Susie. Her family lived only thirty minutes' drive **from** his.

Finals week drew to a **close**. Soon Susie would be off to the HCF chapter camp for **a week** of planning for next year. At least she hadn't gone on a foreign **mission—not** this summer, maybe next. Susie's parents had already come to campus, loaded their station wagon with **her things**, stuffed Susie herself into a **corner** of the rear seat and left for **home**.

Chris, who had his last exam on the last day of finals **week**, turned

to give the campus one last **look** as his mother eased her car into the traffic headed for Central City.

His mother broke his reverie: "So, tell me about this Susie you're so smitten by."

Though Chris had quit mentioning his **love** life in his letters and calls home, his mom had remembered all along about his thing for Susie. This was going to be a long summer.

1. The first part of the document is a letter from the Secretary of the State to the Governor, dated 18th March 1877. It contains a report on the progress of the work done during the year, and a list of the names of the members of the Council of the State, and of the members of the Executive Council, who have since the commencement of the year been appointed to the various offices of the Government.

2. The second part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the Council of the State, and of the members of the Executive Council, who have since the commencement of the year been appointed to the various offices of the Government.

3. The third part of the document is a list of the names of the members of the Council of the State, and of the members of the Executive Council, who have since the commencement of the year been appointed to the various offices of the Government.

1877

Afterword

"And let the gentle-hearted reader be under no apprehension whatsoever," Anthony Trollope says part way into *Barchester Towers*. "It is not destined that Eleanor shall marry Mr. Slope or Bertie **Stanhope.**"

Many times in this book I have wanted to say the same kind of thing. "Dear Reader, don't worry. Chris Chrisman is not going to lose his faith for good Bob Wong is not going to remain forever on the outside looking in. Cynthia Sharp is not just a sword to cut away Chris's view of women."

"There are eight million stories in the naked city," one TV voice-over used to say each **week**. **"This** has been one of them."

Chris Chrisman is one story, a story I chose to tell largely from the point of view of Chris Chrisman and Bob **Wong**. Even with the running commentary, I haven't been able to say all I have wanted to say.

Missing is the perspective of Kevin Leaver, the Christian student whose bent toward medicine is not so single-minded as it looks. Missing is Cynthia Sharp's keen insight into the way traditional social structures and language not only unwittingly shape character but also empower some parts of society and oppress others. Missing as **well** is a critique of overblown Political Correctness. Neither do we see Susie Sylvan's struggle to be a fully Christian woman in the immediate context of Cynthia's **anti-Christian** version of feminism.

There are no tales of Hansom Christian Fellowship's corporate struggle with community or with the world outside its own bounds. Though Maria Marquez has spoken about community and broached the subject of privatization and the cosmic lordship of Christ we do not see these issues worked out in action.

Dear Reader, there are many stories in Hansom State University that remain untold. The summer produced many changes in the characters we have met. The fall produced even more. The Knights of Jesus, minus Abe Knox, who remained out of fellowship with them, sponsored an antigay rally. Graham Williams, the evangelism coordinator of Hansom Christian Fellowship, revealed to the group that he **had** been a practicing homosexual. Cynthia Sharp, though not herself a lesbian, became a spokesperson for the gay-lesbian cause and attacked the Knights of Jesus **for** its antigay bias **and** **HCF** for its removal of Graham from a leadership position.

Just imagine the stories that could be unfolded by the right **story-teller**.

Notes

Chapter 1: Chris Chrisman Goes to State

¹**Harlan** Hatcher says in introducing Anthony Trollope's *The Warden* and *Barchester Towers*, "The spirit of Trollope's **fiction** is generally one of gentle **comedy**. There is no sharp or vitriolic satire as in Thackeray, no **deep-dyed** villain as in **Dickens**. For **Trollope** is a **friendly** man. **Like** his **contemporaries**, he invented tag names to identify the dominant characteristics of many of his people, but they sound the comic rather than the satiric note: **Mrs. Lookalot**, **Mrs. Quiverful**, **Dr. Anticant**, **Mr. Sentiment**, even **Mrs. Proudie**" ([New York: Modern Library, 1950], p. xi.) There is much in the university today that merits the vitriol of Thackeray and the unmasking of villainy of **Dickens**. No **lie**, **Dean Bent** was the real name of the dean of one of the graduate schools I attended (and graduated from). Only Thackeray and Dickens could **do him** justice.

But consider the story in this book rather in the vein of Trollope. With **regard to** matters other than **tone**, make no further **comparisons**.

Chapter 2: The Vortex of Modernity

¹**Carl** Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), p. 4.

"James **Rachels**, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1986), p. 140.

***Richard Rorty**, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 67.

**Ibid.*, pp. 151-52.

***Oden** tells parts of his story in the third person in *After Modernity . . . What?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 26-29, from which the quotations in this and following paragraph have been drawn.

Chapter 4: **Chris** Chrisman **Becomes** a Student

At this point in **his** academic life, Chris has become a true student. Very few college "students" ever do. True students are interested in learning **not** just to pass a course, or get a degree, or train for a job. Rather, they see their academic work as giving them insight into the way the world really is, or at least the way those who have thought about it and studied it think it **is**. They are interested in integrating the way they think about one thing with the way they think about another and **connecting** the way they live with the way they **think**. True students make no **distinction** between formal academic study and personal study. They remain students throughout their **lives**.

Chapter 5: **Truth**: A Mobile Army of Metaphors

Indeed, a much *more* sophisticated analysis **is** merited. Fortunately, an **excellent**, sophisticated but eminently readable book on relativism was published in the early **nineties**, the best to date: Harold **A. Netland**, *Dissonant Votes* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991). There would be many more references to Netland's work in what follows if I had not been so far along in my own analysis before I read **his** book. See also Lesslie **Newbigin's** superb treatment of the same topic from a **different**, more sociological and theological angle: *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989); Gavin **D'Costa, ed.**, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 1990), especially essays by **Wolfhart Pannenburg** (pp. 96-106) and Lesslie **Newbigin** (pp. 135-48); and S. Mark **Heim**, "Pluralism and the Otherness of World Religions," first **Things**, August-September 1992, pp. 29-35.

***John Henry Cardinal Newman**, "The Idea of a University," in *English Prose of the Victorian Era*, ed. Charles Frederick **Harrold** and William D. **Templeman** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 575 and 593-94.

*See **Alasdair MacIntyre's** dear analysis in *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 56-61.

*See, for example, **George Barna**, *What Americans Believe* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1991), pp. 200-203.

***Friedrich Nietzsche**, "On Truth and Lie in an **Extra-Moral** Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter **Kaufmann** (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 46. Also quoted by **Richard Rorty** in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 17.

***Richard Rorty** has abandoned any notion that one can know the truth of anything. Truth is a property of linguistic **entities**, of sentences"; it conveys no knowledge of

objective reality. Truth is rather whatever we can get away with saying: "A liberal society is one which is content to call 'true' or 'right' or 'just' whatever the outcome of **undistorted** communication happens to **be**, whatever view wins out in a free and open **encounter**" (ibid, p. 67).

⁷**Barna**, for example, says that over 50 percent of Americans believe that "**Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists** and others all pray to the same **God**, even though they use different names for **God**" (*What Americans Believe*, pp. 210-12).

⁸**Joseph Campbell** with **Bin Moyers**, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 54-55; **Robert Segal**, *Joseph Campbell: An Introduction*, rev. ed. (New York: Mentor, 1990), pp. 66-70.

⁹**Joseph Campbell** with **Michael Toms**, *An Open Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 50; **Segal**, *Joseph Campbell*, pp. 27, 30-53, 245-63.

¹⁰**Campbell** and **Moyers**, *The Power of Myth*, p. 25; see also pp. 21, 31, 47, 56, 99, 188 and 190. **Segal**, *Joseph Campbell*, pp. 85, 116-18. **Segal**, in addition, notes that **Campbell** held "an embittered hostility toward his boyhood Roman Catholicism, which he damns for stymying his true, individualistic rather than institutionalized nature of **spirituality**; an even more unsettling hostility toward **Judaism**, which in almost antisemitic fashion he caricatures as chauvinistic and literalistic; and . . . a later disdain for the **East**, which he similarly caricatures as totalitarian and barbaric" (ibid, pp. 23-24).

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 166; see also p. 199.

¹²**Stanley J. Samartha** is a contemporary exponent of the attempt to circumvent the exclusive claims for each religion. See his essay "The Cross and the Rainbow" in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed. **John Hick** and **Paul F. Knitter** (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), pp. 69-4a

¹³**Sri Ramakrishna**, *The Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, ed. **Swami Abhedananda** (New York: Vedanta Society, 1903), as quoted by **Huston Smith**, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), pp. 115-16. **John Hick** in the Gifford Lectures gives a similar picture in Western, Kantian terms (**noumena** and **phenomena**):

Each of these two basic **categories**, **God** and the **Absolute**, is schematised or made concrete within actual religious experience as a range of particular gods or **absolutes**. These are, respectively, the *personae* and the *impersonae* in terms of which the **Real** is humanly **known**. And the particularising **factor** . . . is the range of human **cultures**, actualising different though overlapping aspects of our immensely complex human potentiality for awareness of the transcendent. It is in relation to different ways of being human, developed within the civilizations and cultures of the earth, that the **Real** apprehended through the concept of **God** is **experienced** specifically as the **God of Israel**, or as the **Holy Trinity**, or as **Shiva**, or as **Allah**, or as **Vishnu** . . . And it is in relation to yet other forms of life that the **Real**, apprehended through the concept of the **Absolute**, is **experienced** as **Brahma**, or as **Nirvana**, or as **Being**, or as **Sunyata** . . . **On this view** our various religious languages—**Buddhist**, **Christian**, **Muslim**, **Hindu** . . . each refer to a **divine phenomenon** or configuration of **divine phenomena**. When we **speak** of a **personal God** with moral attributes and **purposes**, or when we **speak** of the **non-personal Absolute**, **Brahman**, or the **Dharmakaya**, we are speaking of the **Real** as humanly

experienced: that is, as **phenomenon**. (An *Interpretation of Religion* [London: **Macmillan, 1989**], pp. 245-46)

Harold **Netland**, who studied **under** John Hick at **Claremont** School of Religion, has made a profound analysis and critique of Hick's peculiar form of relativism (see **Netland**, *Dissonant Voices*, esp. pp. 198-233).

¹⁰See Newbigin's critique in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 161.

¹¹**Wilfred Cantwell Smith**, "Idolatry in Comparative Perspective," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, ed John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), p. 55.

¹²**Tom Driver**, "The Case for **Pluralism**," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, p. 212.

¹³**Newbigin**, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 162.

Chapter 6: **Closing a Mind So Open That Everything Falls** Out

¹**Alfred**, Lord Tennyson, "Prologue," in *In Memoriam A. H. H.*

I have discussed this at some length in a chapter on nihilism in *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, **Ill.**: **InterVarsity Press**, 1988), pp. 85-106.

²Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 50.

³See Richard Rorty, "Introduction: Pragmatism and Philosophy," in *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), pp. xii-xlvii, for a presentation of this view by a **proponent**.

⁴**Charles** Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological **Tradition**," in *Reading Rorty* (Oxford U.K.: Blackwell, 1990), p. 258.

⁵**Many**, if not **most**, of those philosophers who hold such views are nontheists or **atheists**, at least in the sense that they do not believe that there is a God "**out there**" who has created the universe and us, or who is actively communicating to us or engaged in undergirding our communication with each other.

⁶**Richard** Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (**Cambridge, U.K.**: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 6-7.

⁷**Nietzsche**, p. 46; also quoted in Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p. 17.

⁸**Rorty**, *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. xliii.

⁹**Jean-Paul** Sartre, *Existentialism* (New York Philosophical Library, 1947), pp. 36-47.

¹⁰**Rorty**, *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, p. xlii.

¹¹**Rorty**, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, p. 67.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹³**Charles** Taylor points up the dilemma facing Rorty (*Reading Rorty*, pp. 257-75), as does **Bernard** Williams, "Auto-da-Fé: Consequences of **Pragmatism**," in *Reading Rorty*, pp. 26-37.

¹⁴**Campbell** and **Moyers**, *The Power of Myth*, p. 21.

¹⁵**James W.** Sire, *The Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove, **Ill.**: **InterVarsity Press**, 1990), chaps. 5-6, pp. 79-113.

Chapter 7: **There's a** Company

¹The book Chris's sociology professor had recommended Robert Bellah et al., *Habits*

of the Heart (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), is an excellent illustration of how a Christian **sociologist**, along with his **colleagues**, can do sociology. Although their work is a major contribution to human knowledge in general, it also represents a distinctive contribution from a Christian **perspective**.

Chapter 8: One's Enough

¹William Ernest Henley (1849-1903), "Invictus."

²Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 143.

³Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 84.

⁴Bellah et al., *Habits*, p. 33.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 336.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸Joseph Campbell with Michael Toms, *An Open Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989) p. 90.

⁹I have analyzed the New Age movement in more detail in *The Universe Next Door*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), pp. 156-208; and *Shirley MacLaine and the New Age Movement* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

¹⁰Shirley MacLaine, *It's All in the Playing* (New York: Bantam, 1987), p. 174.

¹¹Anthony Ugochnik, *The Illuminating Icon* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 99-100.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁴Quoted by Roland H. Bainton, *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (Boston: Beacon, 1952), p. 61.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Czeslaw Milosz, *Visions of San Francisco Bay*, trans. Richard Lourie (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1982), pp. 424-3.

¹⁷Glenn Tinder, "Can We Be Good Without God?" *The Atlantic* December 1989, p. 72; see also his *The Political Meaning of Christianity: An Interpretation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹Jacob Weisberg, "Thin Skins," *The New Republic*, February 18, 1991, p. 22.

²⁰"The Derisory Tower," *The New Republic*, February 18, 1991, p. 5.

²¹*Ibid.*

Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 449, quoted in Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), p. 79.

Chapter 9: Four's a Community

¹For a source for the story of Chuang Chou (who lived between 390 and 295 B.C.), see A *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 190.

¹**Leslie Newbigin**, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 8, 21, 47-48.

Chapter 10: Community amid Chaos

¹**Walther Eichrodt**, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (London: SCM, 1967), 2:265, as quoted in Bruce Milne, *We Belong Together* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1978), p. 18.

²Quoted by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (London: SCM, 1954), pp. 74.

³**Bonhoeffer**, *Life Together*, pp. 17-18.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 29.

Chapter 11: Bob Wong's Search for Jesus

¹Many Bible study guides are useful for investigative Bible studies. I especially recommend those that focus on one of the Gospels or material from several of them. My own *Meeting Jesus* (Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw, 1988) is explicitly designed for a situation like that faced by Chris and Bill. Others can be selected from InterVarsity Press's series of **LifeGuide** Bible Studies or the Fisherman Bible Studies published by Harold Shaw.

For general help in leading Bible studies see Ada Lum, *How to Begin an Evangelistic Bible Study* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1971); James F. Nyquist, *Leading Bible Discussions*, 2nd ed (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1985); and Peter Scazzero, *Introducing Jesus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

The form of apologetic argument that this chapter illustrates is the liar-lunatic-Lord trilemma made famous by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 5546. Other developments of this argument, very useful to people wanting to polish their skills in dialogue with non-Christian friends, include Peter Kreeft, *Between Heaven and Hell* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1982), and Josh McDowell, *More than a Carpenter* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1980).

Chapter 13: The Public Face of Christianity

¹**James Davison Hunter** and Os Guinness, *Articles of Faith, Articles of Peace* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1990); and *The Journal of Law and Religion* 8, no. 1-2 (1990). Both contain the text of and commentary on the Williamsburg Charter. **Evangelicals for Social Action** (10 Lancaster Ave., Wynnewood PA 19096) publishes a newsletter, as does the Center for Public Justice (806 Fifteenth St. NW, Suite 440, Washington, DC 20005). Trinity Forum can be contacted at 9587 Bronte Drive, Burke, VA 22015.

²For much of this discussion of privatization and the diagram (figure 1) I am indebted to my colleagues on InterVarsity staff, especially James Paternoster.

³**Os Guinness**, *The Gravedigger File* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), p. 74.

⁴See the profile and interview of **C. Everett Koop** by Philip Yancey, "The Embattled Career of Dr. Koop," *Christianity Today*, October 20, 1989, pp. 3044; and "Surgeon

General's **Warning**: An Interview with **C. Everett Koop**," *Christianity Today*, November 3, 1989), pp. 16-19.

I am indebted to Richard Mouw, *When the Kings Come Marching In* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: **Eerdmans**, 1983), for much of what follows here.

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

⁹John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: **Eerdmans**, 1972), pp. 97.

¹⁰Guinness, *The Gravedigger File*, pp. 7940.

¹¹Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: **Eerdmans**, 1986), p. 124.

Chapter 14: The Thinker Prays

John has begun to realize a bit of what Tatiana Goricheva experienced Goricheva, a brilliant philosophy student in St Petersburg (formerly Leningrad), recounts her trek from Marxist-Leninist ideology on into **existentialism**, nihilism and then **yoga**. While yoga provided a breakthrough into an understanding that there was a spiritual realm, it did not satisfy. "But in a yoga book a Christian prayer, the 'Our Father', was suggested as an exercise.... I began to say it as a **mantra**, automatically and without expression. I said it about six times, and then I was suddenly turned inside out I **understood**—not with my ridiculous **understanding**, but with my whole **being**—that he **exists**. He, the living personal God who lives in me and all **creatures**, who has created the world who became a human being out of **love**, the crucified and risen **God**. At that moment I understood and grasped the '**mystery**' of Christianity, the new, true life. That was real, genuine **deliverance**. At this moment everything in me changed The old me died I gave up not only my earlier values and **ideals**, but also my old habits" (Tatiana Goricheva, *Talking About God Is Dangerous: The Diary of a Russian Dissident*, trans. John Bowden [New York **Crossroads**, 1986], pp. 17-18).